

Sermon: Being on Mission with Jesus

Passage: Matthew 9:35-38

Introduction: Harvest time in Malawi [Slide]

My family and I love harvest time in Malawi!

We have a small plot of land at the house we rent and we let our gardener Dickson to use it to grow maize.

My kids and Dickson's kids get every excited going into the corn field and picking the corn off the stalks.

After we pick the corn, our friend Dickson will cook some of the best ones by boiling it for a very long time before we can eat them.

The corn is very different to the sweet corn that we buy here in Australia. It is more starchy and hard and not as sweet.

Harvest time is a time of celebration and also hard work!

It's a time of celebration because people can eat again after enduring a few months of hunger leading up to harvest time when the food runs out from the previous harvest.

It's also a time of hard work as people need to pick the corn before they ripen too much and begin to rot.

In our Bible passage today, we also read about a harvest.

Not about harvesting corn, but about harvesting people into God's Kingdom.

So, let's take a closer look at the passage and see what we can learn from Jesus about being on his mission.

Body:

The first thing that we can learn about Missions from Jesus is that "Missions is about proclaiming and demonstrating the good news of God's Kingdom." [Slide]

Matthew tells us in verse 35 that "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness."

Today's passage is the end of a one big section in Matthew's gospel.

Think of this section as located between a set of bookends. One bookend starts at Chapter 4 verse 23 and the other bookend ends at Chapter 9 verse 35.

The two verses are almost identical and they summarise for us what Jesus did and taught this section.

Matthew's concern in his Gospel was to show to his Jewish readers that Jesus is the promised Messiah from the Old Testament.

Between these two bookends, Matthew paints for us a picture of Jesus as the Messiah with authority in both word and deed.

In **chapters 5-7**, Matthew portrays Jesus as the Messiah who taught with authority in his famous 'Sermon on the Mount.'

And Matthew makes it very clear to us at the end of chapter 7 the amazement of the crowd at Jesus' teaching.

They said that "he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." (vv28-29).

If you compare Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount with the other gospels, you find that Matthew's account is by far the longest.

Matthew wanted his readers to know that Jesus was the Messiah who taught with authority.

In **chapters 8-9**, Matthew portrays Jesus as the Messiah who healed and worked miracles with authority.

In these two chapters alone, Matthew recounts for us about 10 miracles that Jesus did.

So if do a quick scan through Matthew 8-9, you'll come across...

8:1-4	healing of the Leper
8:5-13	healing of the Centurion's servant
8:14-17	healing of Peter's mother in law
8:23-27	calming the storm
8:28-32	healing of 2 demon-possessed men
9:1-8	healing of a paralytic
9:18-26	healing of a ruler's daughter and a woman who had been bleeding
9:27-34	healing of a blind man and a mute man.

So again, Matthew wants his readers to know that Jesus was not just the Messiah who taught with authority, BUT he had authority over demons, disease and death.

So the opening verse of our passage today gives us a good summary of all that Jesus did and taught up to this point in Matthew's gospel.

We can learn a lot from Jesus about how to do mission by the way he went about his mission.

Jesus' mission was both proclaiming and demonstrating God's rule wherever he went.

But what did Jesus proclaim?

Jesus proclaimed the "good news of the Kingdom."

Why is the "good news of the kingdom" good news?

You see, ever since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, sin has been at work in turning God's good creation upside down.

God has been on mission since the Fall to reverse the curse of sin, to crush Satan as he promised in Genesis 3:15; and to put everything back again the right side up.

God ultimately does this through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus.

Through His death on the cross, Jesus reversed the curse of sin by taking on the punishment that was due to us.

Through his resurrection from the dead, Jesus ushers in the new creation.

God is on a mission to make everything right again by bringing everything under the reign of his Son, Jesus, as Ephesians 1:10 tells us.

This is the Good News! God will fix the brokenness of our world, and he will do this through Jesus.

In our mission today, we must also proclaim the good news!

We must proclaim that “Jesus rules.”

We must proclaim that Jesus is ruling even in the midst of the chaos in our world (with all the refugee crisis, wars, and environmental disasters) and even in the chaos of our own lives.

And as Psalm 96 also reminds us that we are to “proclaim his salvation day after day” (v2) and to “declare his glory among the nations” (v3).

The Kingdom of God has come in Jesus and it will ultimately be consummated when He comes back again.

This is the good news we must proclaim.

However, Jesus didn’t just proclaim the good news of the kingdom; he also demonstrated the good news through his healings.

Healing the sick was a demonstration of his rule.

The kingdom of God was breaking into this world of suffering and pain.

As we read in Revelation, under Christ’ rule in the new heavens and earth, there would be no more pain or suffering.

The stories in Matthew’s gospel of Jesus’ healings were little glimpses of the glorious future that is to come.

In our mission in the world today, we must also care for the physical needs of others and walk alongside those who are suffering.

We may never eradicate poverty or suffering until the day Jesus comes back again, but we can respond to suffering and pain with the love of Christ, showing others glimpses of the glorious future that is to come.

This is the good news that we are demonstrating to our broken world, which is in so desperate need of God’s love and hope right now.

Through Jesus’ example we learn that being on mission with him involves both proclaiming and demonstrating the good news of the Kingdom of God.

Illustration: Youth camp outreach in a predominantly Muslim area

One of the things that Pastor Bridge and I do is run youth camps throughout Malawi.

Last year, we organised a youth camp in a predominant Muslim area.

We taught the youth how to share the Gospel, and how to do outreach to meet the needs of people in the community.

One grandmother was overwhelmed by the love shown to her by the youth who visited her.

She said that no one has ever come to see her not even her own family.

She also told the youth that she did not have a blanket to keep her warm, so the youth responded the next day by putting together the money they had and bought a blanket for her.

The youth proclaimed and demonstrated the good news of the Kingdom that day.

You know what? 5 Muslim youth came to Christ that day!

What would the Kingdom of God look like in your everyday context – in your workplace, your school or university, in your neighbourhood?

How can you live as “little glimpses” or “foretastes” of the glorious future that is to come in Jesus?

Paul reminds us in 2 Cor 5:17 that if anyone is in Christ, “new creation” – you are a new creation... part of the new creation that is yet to come.

You and I are “entrees” before the main course.

How would you go about proclaiming and demonstrating the good news of God’s kingdom in your everyday situation that makes people long for the new creation?

The second thing that we can learn about being on mission with Jesus is that ‘we need to see people the way Jesus sees people and respond with compassion.’

Matthew tells us in verse 36 that when Jesus saw the crowds, “he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

When you read the whole of Matthew’s gospel, you will see that “the crowd” is a big character in Matthew’s story about Jesus.

Wherever Jesus went, the crowds followed.

And Matthew pays great attention to how the crowds respond to Jesus, and also how Jesus responds to the crowds.

In verse 36, Matthew tells us that when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them.

I’m no Greek scholar, but I’m led to believe that in the original Greek, “Compassion” means “to be moved in the insides.”

If I was to ask you, “where do our feelings come from?” or “where do we feel our feelings?” Most people would probably say “our hearts”. But in Jesus’ day, the seat or centre of our feelings was our stomach. If you were sick, you felt it in your stomach. If you were nervous or in love, you would feel it in your stomach.

Having compassion is about identifying with the situation of others so much that you are prepared to act for their good.

That’s what Jesus felt about the “harassed and helpless” crowds.

In fact, in Matthew's gospel, Matthew recounts for us 3 other occasions where Jesus was moved with compassion and acted for their good. See 14:14, 15:32, and 20:34.

Jesus goes further and described the crowds as "Sheep without a shepherd."

Perhaps, there are allusions to Ezekiel 34 here, where God talks about his people as "lost sheep" and his judgment on Israel's leaders who were failing to do their jobs as shepherds of God's people.

You see, the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law in Jesus' day were supposed to be Israel's shepherd. They were supposed to guide, protect and attend to the needs of God's people.

But instead they only served to look after themselves and their own reputations.

That's why Jesus referred to the crowds as "sheep without a shepherd."

Today, in our cities, in our work places and even in churches, there are sheep without a shepherd.

When was the last time you opened your eyes and looked at the crowds?

Who are the harassed and helpless sheep that you encounter with every day?

Have we been moved enough on the inside to act for their good?

Illustration: [Slide] Church in the middle of the relief camp during the floods.

In January this year, Malawi experienced severe floods which affected many people.

It was one of the worst floods that have ever hit Malawi.

SIM in partnership with the local churches served to provide much needed food and blankets to flood victims living in temporary camps. In the southern region of Malawi, there were over 25 of these camps. Some camps accommodated for up to 3000 people.

On one visit to one of these camps, we spoke to Pastor Blessings whose church was right in the middle of this relief camp.

He shared with me how his church saw the spiritual and physical needs of the flood victims and responded with compassion.

They acted as the hands and feet of Jesus serving the harassed and helpless victims of the floods.

This reminded me that we as the church need to open our spiritual eyes and see the needs in the communities that God has placed us in.

We need to ask ourselves 'what are the needs of this city?' How can we act as the hands and feet of Jesus to the people living around us?

We are to be like that church in the middle of the relief camp offering hope to a broken world.

There are people in your lives who are harassed, helpless and without a shepherd today. They need Jesus as their shepherd, and our mission is to point others to him.

Our last point is this. Jesus is in charge of his mission (he is the Lord of the Harvest), and he wants us to ask him to send out more workers into his harvest field.’ [Slide]

Matthew tells us in verse 37 that: *“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

Jesus quickly turns the metaphor from “lost helpless and harassed sheep” to a “plentiful harvest” among the crowds.

Jesus had every good reason to be optimistic about the crowds.

Yes, they were “helpless and harassed sheep without a shepherd”, but now there would be a plentiful harvest among the crowds because Jesus, the true shepherd of Israel is now among them.

Jesus can be optimistic because Jesus is in charge, and he has a solution to the spiritual needs of the crowds.

When the global church is faced with the very big task of making disciples of all nations, we can easily feel overwhelmed by just how much is left to do.

According to a missions research organisation, The **Joshua Project**, they estimate that more than 6,600 people groups are still to be reached with the Gospel... mostly in the areas marked in the red **[Slide-map]**.

So each day, billions and billions of people are living and dying without ever hearing about Jesus.

Illustration: Chinese believer in Malawi without a shepherd/pastor. [Slide]

Earlier this year, I had the privilege of having dinner with Rev. Ting, who is the Head of the Chinese Diaspora ministry in SIM.

He came to visit Malawi from Malaysia to see if he could help set up a ministry among the Chinese in Malawi.

So during dinner, I asked him “Have you found any Chinese believers in Malawi?”

And he told me “Yes, I have found a lady and her family, who are believers...”

And he proceeded to tell me more of her situation.

He told me that this lady had invited him to go to her church that she had been going to for some time.

When he pulled up to her church that Sunday, he saw the sign on the outside gate which read “Kingdom Hall.”

It was a Jehovah Witness church!

This lady had come to know Christ in China.

But when she moved to Malawi, she met a Zimbabwean lady from the Jehovah Witness church who spoke fluent Mandarin and started discipling her into her church.

The Chinese lady did not know the difference between what the Jehovah Witnesses believed and what evangelical Christians believed until Rev. Ting explained it to her.

So she called her church back in China and she was advised by her pastor there not to go to the Jehovah Witness church anymore.

The sad part of the story is that there is no one discipling her now.

She does not have an alternative church to be part of.

She and her family are without a spiritual shepherd.

And so, there is a need for missionaries to work among the Diaspora Chinese in Malawi and throughout Africa right now.

Can you pray and ask Jesus to send out workers to minister among the diaspora Chinese?

Can you pray and ask Jesus to send out workers to minister to the rest of the unreached groups in the world?

But coming back to our passage... isn't it interesting that Jesus doesn't say straight away to his disciples "Go!" Instead he says to them "ASK... Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers..."

Jesus was pointing his disciples to the solution to the problem. Himself!

He is Lord of His Harvest. He is in charge of His Mission.

He is the one who sends out workers into His harvest field. Not mission agencies. Not even churches.

Jesus is the one who sends!

Up to this point in Matthew's gospel, Jesus is portrayed as the Messiah with authority in teaching, and in healing.

Now he is the Messiah with authority in sending his disciples to go and be on his mission.

And so we read in Chapter 10 that Jesus called his twelve disciples and gave them his authority to heal and preach about the Kingdom of Heaven.

The disciples were to essentially do what Jesus had been doing.

However, Jesus firstly gives perspective to his disciples about who is in charge of the harvest, before sending them out.

Illustration: Story of Willy's conversion.

God reminded me of this truth many years ago when I was in 2nd Year university studying engineering.

I had a Buddhist friend who was a Chinese Indonesian. He wasn't a Christian.

He called me one night during exam period when I was busy studying for my exams.

And he asked me over the phone "how do I become a Christian?"

I had not previously shared the gospel with him, but he knew I was a Christian and that I went to church.

After my initial shock, I was able to share with him the Gospel over the phone and lead him to Christ.

But you know what?

It was Jesus who had led him to me in the first place to share the Gospel with.

Jesus was in charge of this situation.

After he became a Christian, he also led his mum and dad, and his two sisters to Christ. Today, he is still a Christian and serving the Lord in an Indonesian church.

My friend's conversion taught me that Jesus is in charge of His mission of calling people back to Himself. And he wants us to ask him to send us out to the people in our lives who are ready to receive Christ as their Lord.

God will give us such opportunities when we ask Him. We need to be prepared to be used by Him.

If Jesus is in charge of his mission, shouldn't that impact the way we pray.

Imagine if we prayed everyday ***"Lord, who do you want me to talk to or share your love with today? Bring them into my path today."*** Will that not bring the mission perspective into our day?

Can you try praying that this week, before you head out the door of your house to go to work or school or whatever you plan to do? Pray this dangerous prayer. I believe God will put people into your path to minister to.

Conclusion:

Our passage this morning has taught us three things about being on mission with Jesus.

Being on mission with Jesus is about proclaiming and demonstrating the good news of God's Kingdom.

Secondly, being on mission with Jesus is about seeing people through his eyes and responding with compassion.

Thirdly, being on mission with Jesus is recognising that He is in charge, and praying that he will send out more workers including us to harvest people for the kingdom.

How are you going being on mission with Jesus?

Maybe some of you have yet to begin your journey with Jesus. To be on mission with Jesus, we need to be in relationship with Jesus first. Maybe some of you need to take that step today, by putting your trust in Him.

Maybe some of you have begun that journey with Jesus, but have not let him lead and direct your life. Maybe you need to take steps today to align your plans with his plans.

Maybe some of you are walking faithfully with Jesus, and but not sure how to be on mission with him. Then pray. Ask him to show you.

Whatever stage of your journey with Jesus, engage with him. Pray and be ready to respond to what he calls you to do.