

Follow Him!

Jesus' Vision for Ministry

Matthew 9:35-10:4

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35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

10 And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. 2 The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him (Matt 9:35-10:4)

Do you remember what this means: WWJD? It means "What would Jesus do?", and in the 1990's there were millions of bracelets sold with those letters on them. Do you know where the bracelet idea started? Holland, Michigan. A youth group leader named Jamie Tinklenberg was teaching through the book "In His Steps" by Charles Sheldon to 35 students, and she wanted students to think about every decision through the lens of Jesus. She came up with idea of wearing bracelets with the letters WWJD.¹

What would Jesus do? It is an important question, one that we should not only ask personally, but also as an entire ministry. What would Jesus do if he were in Carmel, Indiana? How would Jesus minister? What would be his priorities? How would he meet the needs of people? This is an important question because the church is, after all, his body (Colossians 1:18) and his bride (Ephesians 5:25-28), and he is the Great Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). It is also important because there are so many things that the church could be doing. Our challenge is not to find what we could do; our real challenge is finding what we should do. As a friend of mine says, "The power of "no" is in a stronger "yes."

This is where Matthew 9:35-10:4 is helpful. It is an important bridge between Christ's Word and Work, and his Mission. We've seen the beginnings of Jesus' ministry (chapters 1-4), we've heard his teaching (chapters 5-7), and we've seen his work (chapters 8-9). Now it is time to learn about his mission as he commissions his disciples to do his work.

Our text highlights four key commitments that are central to Jesus' vision for ministry. And today I'd like to identify them and try to apply them to us at College Park.

Commitment #1: The Word

Now that Jesus has finished 10 miracles, Matthew records that he begins a broader ministry: "...he went throughout all the cities and villages" (v 35). Jesus is now expanding his ministry, moving into a more itinerant role as a traveling rabbi. This is almost an identical statement as

to what Matthew said in 4:23 except that here the statement serves as a bridge to the empowerment of his disciples.

Jesus travels to different cities and villages was for the purpose of “teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (v 35). Jesus has a two-fold ministry of teaching and proclaiming.

He located his ministry in the synagogue, which was the local assembly of Jews who met for worship on the Sabbath. Teaching was a part of every Sabbath observance. The worship service involved the recitation of the Shema (Deut 6:4-9), prayer, readings from the Law and Prophets, and a discourse or sermon.² Any qualified Jewish man was permitted to give the discourse, and this is the opportunity that Jesus took in various synagogues. It is in this context that Jesus teaches about his ethics and his ministry.³

His ministry also involved “proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.” This should be taken differently than teaching. The word for “proclaim” is the Greek word *kerusso* which means to herald, to be a crier, and to preach. The word is used throughout the New Testament to describe the proclamation of the Word about Jesus (see 1 Thess. 2:9, Gal. 2:2, 1 Cor. 1:23, Rom. 10:15). The nuance of the word is distinct from teaching in its sense of urgency, passion, and appeal. Proclaim is an authoritative declaration of a message with important news or information. It is an urgent and important message where the hearers should be left asking “what has taken place?” or “what is going to happen?” Jesus is preaching; his message is important. Namely that Christ is bringing the reign of God to earth, restoring what was broken. Preaching or heralding the Word is in an interesting position these days. There are at least four different perspectives:

- 1) **Preaching has no value** – it’s just your opinion anyway;
- 2) **Preaching should never change** – it doesn’t matter if people are bored as long as they hear the truth;
- 3) **Preaching is truth in community** – the group’s interpretation of truth, not the Bible itself, is the only real authority (this is the view espoused by many in the emergent church);
- 4) **Christ-Centered Preaching** – “preach Christ from every text, laying out and analyzing the human condition through Scriptures and experience, and exposing the radical, shocking grace of God that enters our situation, transforms us, and empowers us to live differently”.⁴

One of our core values at College Park is **The Authority of the Word**. Here’s how we say it: The Bible is the foundation of who we are, what we believe and everything we do. We are committed to preaching, teaching, counseling, sharing and living by the sufficiency of the whole counsel of God, because it contains everything we need for life and godliness. Real life change is found in the Spirit empowered Word not our ideas, thoughts, or opinions. God’s Word is written in ink while our plans and theologies are in pencil.

What did Jesus do? He went to where the people were; he entered their world and he boldly proclaimed the truth of God’s Word to them. Christ preached Christ to them with authority. And that is what we are called to do.

Do you believe in the authority of God's Word? Do you believe that it is the authoritative message from God to man? Do you believe that the Word is powerful? Do you submit to its authority? Do you point people to its teaching? Do you boldly declare it as if it were "Breaking News?"

Kevin DeYoung summarized so well the balance that we need to reach our own generation: Grab them with passion. Win them with love. Hold them with holiness. Challenge them with truth. Amaze them with God.⁵ None of that will work without the Word.

Commitment #2: Compassion

The second commitment that we see in Jesus' ministry is compassion. He has a heart for people. We see this in two ways. First, Jesus not only preaches and teaches, but he also relieves suffering. The text says that he healed every disease and every affliction. Jesus' ministry was based upon teaching, but it extended into meeting the real needs of hurting people. The message of the kingdom makes no sense without compassion. In fact, there is no real message of the kingdom without compassion. Faith without works is dead (James 2:17).

Secondly, notice the way that Jesus saw people. Verse 36 says that "when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." This is quite a statement! Harassed and helpless is also translated as distressed and downcast (NASB), and it is meant to create a word picture in your mind of wounded sheep, torn up by hostile animals or difficult elements who are unable to help themselves.⁶ Jesus saw people as worn out, torn up, and beat down. They were barely making it, and Jesus sees them in this condition. He sees them and he has compassion on them. Why?

Because the cause of their distress is that they are like sheep without a shepherd. Sheep are very vulnerable and foolish animals. Without a shepherd to lead them, they will fall prey to any number of predators or ailments. Jesus sees their spiritual condition and their physical condition as a symptom of the absence of a shepherd. What is interesting here is the fact that Israel had spiritual leaders but they didn't have true shepherds.

Listen to what Ezekiel 34 says directly to the shepherds:

The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. 5 So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. 6 My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them (Ezek 34:4-6).

And notice what God is going to do:

11 "For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. 13 And I will

bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. 15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. 16 I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice (Ezek 34:11-16).

You hear another text, don't you? Now you know the significance of Psalm 23:1-3 - "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. 3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Jesus is going to be their true shepherd. He will solve their helpless and harassed state by being everything that they need. So that leads me to two questions:

1. Do you know this Great Shepherd who is able to meet the needs of the harassed and helpless, the downcast and the depressed, the sinful and the sick?
2. Do you see people through the lens of compassion like Jesus does? Jesus doesn't see people through a lens of disgust or frustration. He sees people as they are, but he loves them. And here is my question: Do you love helpless and harassed people?

What do you see when you look at hurting or sinful people? Honestly! Do think that you are better? Do you feel disgust, frustration, or pride? Do you feel anything at all? One of the casualties of ministering to sinful people is that you grow accustomed to the pain, the sin, and the consequences. Your heart can become calloused. Another casualty is a tendency to want to "beat the sheep" because they don't listen.

But Jesus is so different. He sees them through a lens of love. If I've said this once, I've said it a thousand times: "We have to love people more than we hate where they are at."

Commitment #3: Prayer

The next key commitment that Jesus talks about is prayer. Jesus wants his disciples to realize that before them is a great harvest, a feast of ministry that is perpetually growing by sovereign design. He says that "the harvest is plentiful." In other words, there is no lack for what God wants, is able, and is doing. God is making a bounty of ministry harvest. The lack is for workers – "the laborers are few."

So what is remedy for this shortage of workers? Jesus' words were counter-culture then as much as they are now. Leon Morris says, "In an age like ours we would expect a call to more vigorous and effective action ourselves. But Jesus points to prayer as the really effective thing."⁷ Earnest prayer appeals to the Lord of the harvest because he is the one who will "send out (literally – thrust out) laborers into his harvest."

Jesus wants to create an image in your mind of vast field of golden wheat that is ripe for the harvest. God has planted it, grown it, and now it is ready. The only thing lacking are common

laborers. Notice that he doesn't appeal for only for the upper class, education, or specialized. The fields need common workers, people whose singular mission is to simply be a part of the Lord's harvest.

Jesus warns us to beware of the tendency to be busy at so many other things and neglect the effective deployment strategy of praying to the Lord of the harvest. That is why corporate prayer at College Park is so vital to our mission. Listen to the sober warning from Dale Bruner: "A creeping death sweeps over the mission of many churches in our time because, quite simply, prayer meetings have ceased. And beneath the death of prayer, at a deeper level, lies the death of real belief..."⁸ Prayerlessness whether in my life or in my church is my declaration of independency from God. So we must pray or we will lose our heart and our mission.

Over the last number of years, God has been good to "thrust out" a number of people. We've also had many short-terms "thrust out" from us.

That's quite an amazing list! And it should motivate us to pray even more earnestly not only for laborers on this foreign field but for laborers here at College Park. Pray with holy earnestness that God would thrust forth people into his ministry.

Commitment #4: Gifts

Chapter 10 marks a monumental moment in Jesus' ministry: he commissions 12 ordinary men to the ministry by gifting them. Here is something very unique and powerful to understand! Jesus takes normal and sub-par men, gifts them for ministry, and sends them out to do his work. Their ministry mirrors his.

Notice three things about their ministry. First, it was a derivative of him. He was the one who **gave** them authority. Their power did not come from themselves; it was something Jesus did through them. Second, there was power over demons. According to 10:1, they had authority over unclean spirits even to cast them out. And finally, they had power to heal every disease and every affliction. They had power to conquer the devil and cure the world.⁹ This is always how Jesus has operated: giving gifts to those who serve on his behalf. Jesus never calls us to service without providing the gifts needed. The church began this way. He told his disciples just before the Ascension to wait in Jerusalem because he was going to provide what they needed in his absence.

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8)

Ephesians 4:8 tells us that spiritual gifts are the spoils of Christ's victory, and 1 Corinthians 12:11 tells us that every believer has been given gifts. Do you understand what that means? You have been supernaturally gifted by the Spirit of Christ for some area of ministry. Jesus gave the gift to you, and the question that we all must ask is: "Am I using my gift?" Without the use of your gift the body of Christ suffers.

We received the results from our survey on Vision Sunday, and it yielded some interesting data. It told us that 91% of you feel like you are growing spiritually. 66% were involved in some

form of community, and 60% were involved in some kind of ministry. Now I don't want to motivate you by guilt, but I want you to know that the church of Jesus Christ needs your gift to be used. You need to embrace the calling of God upon your life. The harvest is plentiful and the workers are few.

The Word, compassion, prayer, and gifts. Do you see the importance of these four commitments? Without the Word there no authority for change. Without compassion our words aren't believable. Without prayer we have no power. And without gifts being used the church is a shell of what she could be.

The church needs all four to fulfill Jesus' ministry, and I am happy to tell you that all four are thriving at College Park Church. At least they are thriving right now. However, I keep a piece of driftwood in my office to constantly remind me about the possibility of drift. Oh, let us be warned about the possibility of personal and corporate drift.

Let us renew our personal and corporate commitment today to the Word, Compassion, Prayer, and Gifts. Let us strive to have a church that fits with what Jesus would do.

¹ <http://archive.salon.com/business/feature/2000/10/25/wwjd/print.html>

² Merrill Unger, "Synagogue"- The New Unger's Dictionary, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 1957).

³ See Luke 4:16-30 for a great example of this.

⁴ <http://www.crosswalk.com/pastors/11616416/page4/>

⁵ <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2009/10/19/reaching-the-next-generation-is-harder-and-easier-than-you-think-grab-them-with-passion/print/>

⁶ Leon Morris, The Gospel According to Matthew, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 239.

⁷ Morris, 240.

⁸ F. Dale Bruner, The Christbook – Matthew 1-12, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), 450.

⁹ Bruner, 452.

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