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Matthew 9:35-10:42

Participating in Christ's Compassion, Mission, and Persecution

In 1812, Adoniram and Ann Judson - the first American Christian Missionaries to go to unreached peoples overseas - left the shores of Massachusetts, headed for India, and eventually, Burma. They were Congregationalists when they left America, but while aboard their ship, they became convinced of believer's baptism from the Bible, and so became Baptists. When they landed in India, they wrote back home to tell their sending church of their drastic theological change - meaning they lost their financial support immediately, and strained relationships with friends and family back home. And while on the field, in India and later Burma, they endured countless hardships, suffering, and persecution. They suffered much physically just from the difficulty of living in Burma during that time. But they also endured *persecution*. The penalty for leaving Buddhism and becoming a Christian was *death* at that time; therefore, they endured a long, difficult ministry, only seeing 18 people converted, baptized, and joining their small church plant in the first 12 years. The Lord used their ministry *greatly*, leading to many believers and churches springing up throughout Burma and elsewhere; but their ministry included much suffering, and they received many more *hostile responses* to the gospel than professions of faith.

Yet they knew full well that such suffering and persecution would likely be their journey beforehand. The couple got married soon before they left America; and when Adoniram asked Anne's father for permission to marry her, he included this in his letter:

"I have now to ask... whether you can consent to her departure, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of missionary life... to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you; and for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake Zion, and the glory of God?"¹

Imagine asking your future father-in-law *that* while trying to get him to say yes, right? Praise God, he did say yes. But we can ask: why would he support her having such a dangerous life? In fact, why would Adoniram and Ann willingly go into such suffering and persecution? ***Because of their firm belief in the gospel and the compassionate love of Christ, both for themselves, and for the lost and damned all over the world!*** But also for another reason:

¹ Anderson, *To the Golden Shore*, 83.

*because they knew that such **hardship and persecution** was to be **expected** as part of the gospel mission.*

These are the foundational truths that must guide, fuel, and sustain the Christian mission of the gospel. And these are the truths that Christ teaches us here, in **Matthew 9:35 -10:42**. Christ begins teaching his disciples that part of what it means to *follow Christ* is to be sent out *by Christ* to go and call others to *follow Him as well*. Such a life on gospel mission is not just for ministers and missionaries - it is the gospel mission Christ has given to each of us, to every Christian! But he also warns us that as we live out a life on mission we must *expect to suffer and endure persecution for His name's sake*. And all of this is built upon the glorious assurance of salvation displayed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So first, let us see the *foundation our mission is built upon*:

I. We Must Desire and Pray for the Salvation and Discipleship of Others with Christ-like Compassion (9:35-38)

In **Matt. 9:35**, we see another summary description of Jesus's ministry in action: he went about "proclaiming the gospel," the good news of the Kingdom of God and salvation He came to bring for God's people - those who believe in Him; and he *demonstrated that the Kingdom was coming* by "healing" sickness and casting out demons - all that we have seen Christ doing throughout the book of Matthew. But then, in **v.36**, we catch a glimpse of the heart of Christ - the *compassionate love* that drives Christ and His ministry - not only back then, but towards us, towards **you**, this morning. Listen to **v.36**: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." He sees the people of Israel, not walking in confident faith and righteousness, but "*harassed and helpless,*" wandering **lost and aimless**, like sheep without a shepherd. No doubt this implies examples of their sin and rebellion, of their misunderstanding, even outright disobedience and disregard, of God's Word, the Old Testament. Yet how does Christ respond as he sees them? ***With incredible compassion!*** Christ came not for the righteous, not for those who always did the right thing or for the right reasons, but for *helpless, harassed sinners; lost and led astray sheep - broken, messed up, rebellious, wicked, helpless people; just like us! Just like me and you!* This is as basic as knowing the ABC's is to learning how to read - if you want to know God, what He's like, and how you can have a relationship with Him, then you have to understand that the heart of Christ

towards you is *driven by His compassionate, merciful, gracious love!* Such compassion is why Christ came in the first place! Such compassion is what drives Jesus not only in His life and ministry, but even to the Cross and the grave - *to die and be raised in order to save and redeem lost sheep - sinners who deserve judgment - in order to draw us to Himself as our caring Shepherd and Savior; to be His sheep, His people!*

But it doesn't stop there: we who *receive and experience His compassion* are called to *have the same heart of compassion towards others that Christ has towards us!* We saw over and over again in the Sermon on the Mount that a person who has experienced the grace and forgiveness of God *necessarily* has a transformed heart that *increasingly abounds with Christlike grace and forgiveness towards others.* And so we see the same principle here: a mark of a true believer - a true sheep called by the True Shepherd - is a *sincere, compassionate desire to see others become sheep, to become disciples of Christ, as well!* If we believe and have been saved, then the grace we receive grabs our hearts and compels us to *eagerly desire, pray, and work towards other lost sinners receiving the same compassion and salvation in Christ that we have received so freely!*

This is what Christ calls us to in **vv.37-38**: “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’” As we see our family members, our friends, neighbors, other human beings *trapped and dead in their sins, on their way to the Judgement of God and eternity in Hell - the very judgment we deserve and yet are saved from in Christ!* - How can we not be moved to have compassion for them, as Christ who is blameless has compassion on us? And so, such compassion compels us to “*pray earnestly*” to God, the “Lord of the Harvest,” that He would bring salvation and discipleship to the lost, the hurt and helpless all around us - just as he has done for us!

This is a reminder to us that God loves to show mercy and grace; he loves to save sinners! The entire premise of “gospel missions” is possible because we truly believe that *God saves people!* Yet we must also **pray** to this end. And specifically, we’re told to pray that he would “*send out laborers into his harvest.*” We should be regularly praying that God would equip, raise up, and send out believers for the work of missions: sharing the gospel, making disciples, and building healthy churches. We should be praying for God to raise up healthy bible teachers, qualified pastors, and missionaries and church planters. But this also applies to how we

pray for ourselves and each other - for every Christian! ***We should be regularly praying that God would equip each of us for the work of ministry - to go out into the specific “harvest field” that God has put you in: your family, friends, and communities - that God would equip and use each of us to share the gospel and make disciples in our daily lives! And that God would, indeed, bring about a bountiful harvest as many respond to the gospel in saving faith, all by His grace!*** He is the Lord of the Harvest - let us pray that He will save many as we proclaim the gospel! And let us pray that He would equip and use each of us for this great work!

Which leads us to point number 2...

II. Therefore, Our Mission is to Share the Gospel and Make Disciples (10:1-15)

In **chapter 10, vv.1-15**, Jesus calls forth the Twelve Disciples, distinct from many others who followed him, to give them a particular mission - a ministry unique to the Twelve Disciples at this particular time. This is made clear by the fact that Christ specifically “gave them authority” in **v.1**, followed by an official list of the names of the Twelve. This that the commission he gives in **vv.5-15** is *unique to the Apostles*. This was a special mission for the Twelve, meaning we aren’t supposed to follow all of the instructions given here. However, this is a *precursor, a foreshadowing* of the “Great Commission” to come later. In this passage, Christ is showing us that part of what it means to be a disciple - a follower of Christ - is to go out and *live on mission*, calling and teaching others to be followers of Christ as well. This story is pointing us towards the “Great Commission” at the end of the book, in **Matt. 28** - where Christ gives the instructions for the “gospel mission” that he has given to each one of us, to each Christian and local church. Therefore, this passage gives us principles that I think we’re meant to apply to the Great Commission Christ has given us.

First, in **vv.5-6**, we see Jesus tell them where to go and *where not to go*. Jesus tells them here not to go to the *Gentiles* (non-Jewish, Pagan peoples) or even to the Samaritans (who were seen as half-Jewish, half-Gentile), but *only to go to the Jews*; “go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (v.6). This is because this particular “mission” took place in a different part of the biblical storyline of redemptive history than we are currently in today. Jesus came to usher in the “Kingdom of Heaven,” just as the Disciples are told here to go and proclaim (v.7). Christ was fulfilling God’s promises to Israel given in the Old Testament, under the Old Covenant - Christ came to fulfill these prophecies as God’s promised Savior and King - *the Messiah*. And so,

Jesus's ministry was first among the Jews, announcing that these promises were being fulfilled in him! This is what he declared as he proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom, and what he demonstrated by his miraculous, authoritative power, as we saw last week. As the narrative of Jesus's life and ministry continues to play out throughout the Gospel of Matthew, we'll see a continued shift *towards the Samaritans and Gentiles*; as the Jews hear the good news but many of them *reject* Jesus Christ, so this gospel - *the good news that Jesus is the God-Man who came to usher in salvation, the very Kingdom of Heaven, for all who trust in his life, death, and resurrection* - this gospel becomes open to *all people in all places*, even non-Jews! After all, that's what we're going to be told in the Mission given to all Christians, in Matt. 28. As Paul put in **Romans. 1:16**, the gospel is "for everyone who believes, to the *Jew first* and *also to the [Gentile]*". That's what we're seeing take place here: they're going to the "Jew first." And for us today, we have been given the mission to take the gospel to everyone in every place, to make disciples of all nations!

Next, in **vv. 7-8** Jesus tells them *what they are to say and do on this mission*. They are to proclaim: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." They are also to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons" (**v.8**). In short, they are supposed to *say and do the exact same things* that Jesus has been doing! As verse 1 tells us, Jesus gave them authority to participate in this ministry as a part of *bringing about* His Kingdom. Likewise, in **Matt. 28**, when Jesus gives us our mission as Christians *after the Kingdom has begun in the resurrection*, he begins by speaking of *His authority* under which he sends us: he says in **28:18-19**: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." If you are a Christian, then you, just like me, have been given a **mission** by Jesus: we must share the gospel, **making disciples** by *baptizing those who believe and teaching one another and together obeying all that Christ commanded*. This is the mission we are under, by Christ's authority, and must strive to live out, day by day!

In **vv.11-15** Jesus tells the Twelve Disciples, and us, that as we proclaim the *gospel of Jesus Christ*, we will receive **different responses**: some will receive it gladly! These are those Jesus calls "*worthy*" in **vv.11-12**. The disciples are told to stay with, teach, and minister to those who respond to the message of Christ, the good news of His Kingdom, with *faith*. If they accept Christ's messengers and message - the gospel - then they accept **Christ himself, and salvation**; Jesus circles back and makes this point at the end of the passage as well, in **vv.40-42**. On the

other hand, some will “not be worthy,” and will not be willing to listen or respond to the gospel message and the teachings of Christ. And Jesus tells us that whoever rejects Christ’s messengers rejects *the gospel message itself; and ultimately, Jesus Christ*. They are rejecting God, Christ’s authority, and the salvation offered in Him by grace. Christ tells us clearly what’s at stake in **v.15**: “Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.” Eternal judgment, life, and salvation is at stake! And that is exactly what is at stake in our mission today: our mission, the mission has given each of us as his disciples, is to *proclaim the good news of salvation of Jesus Christ*, in all the world, to *whoever will repent and believe in Him!* We must proclaim this message widely and indiscriminately - to anyone and everyone we can, in all places! Each one of us is sent out by Christ, under His authority, to share the gospel and make disciples in our own contexts: in our local church, in our homes and neighborhood, at work, with our family and friends, throughout Plattsburgh or your specific town; and we also want to work towards this call in all the North Country, New York State, America, and all the world! We can give money and resources, and pray to send the gospel elsewhere. But we **must also be personally involved** in sharing the gospel and making disciples *here*, in the situations God has placed each of us in.

And We must carry out this mission with a sense of urgency; there are many good things we could do for people, but the **most important, most essential most urgent thing** that we can do - what we absolutely *must* do - is **tell everyone that we can that everyone is under the wrath of God because of our sin, that God sent the Lord and savior Jesus Christ to save us, that Christ lived, died, and was raised in the place of hopeless sinners, and that anyone, no matter how sinful, will be forgiven and saved, raised to eternal life, if we will turn from sin and trust in Christ alone!** *That* is our gospel message - that is the non-negotiable message that *we must proclaim*; this is the mission Christ gives us, to each Christian and each church! So let us all proclaim it to everyone, hoping and praying they will believe, and striving to make disciples of all who do!

And yet, Christ tells us plainly here, that not everyone will respond positively, even peacefully, to the good news we proclaim on our mission. Some will respond with *hostility*. This leads us to point number 3...

III. As We Live on Mission, We Should Expect Persecution, but Must Fear God, Not Man (10:16-42)

We're called to live our lives on a mission: to share the gospel widely, with whoever we can, and as people respond in faith, to see them baptized and brought into the fellowship of the church, and to teach them to follow Christ as disciples, to obey all that he commanded. But as we go forth and do this, Christ warns us to **expect opposition, hostility to the gospel, and even outright persecution**. He says in **v.16**: "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." We must not be naive; the message we proclaim is *offensive* to the non-believing world. After all, before we proclaim a word of life, we must first deliver a *word of death*; the sobering declaration of God's Wrath against our sin! And as we teach people to *repent and turn away* from sinful lifestyles, to live righteous lives like Christ, *there will be many that oppose, hate, and even attack us* for doing so - whether politically, verbally, or even physically! This is what Christ is saying in **vv.24-25**: if we're truly His followers, and if the world hated, persecuted, and even killed Jesus, then we should expect to receive the same response, if we're truly following and obeying Him.

He warns us of *political, cultural, and physical persecution* in **vv.17-18**, calling us to persevere in the faith even though we are dragged into "courts" before kings or "flogged" and beaten physically. There are many places in the world where our brothers and sisters suffer intense physical, political, and cultural persecution. Even today, many are put to death for the name of Christ. I myself have known friends who have been arrested, had property seized, or even been kicked out of countries because they refused to stop preaching Christ. Thankfully, we have been spared many such terrible persecutions here in our home country! Nevertheless, we must be "wise as serpents," as Christ calls us to be, and not be fooled: even here, there is hostility to the gospel; and this is becoming increasingly more apparent in recent years. Churches are being targeted with laws and restrictions in ways others are not; Christians are being sued, mocked, and slandered for teaching and obeying what the Bible says about human morality, gender, marriage, the sanctity of life, and many other issues. The culture is increasingly becoming not just "non-Christian" but "anti-Christian." We shouldn't panic, much less fight back in anger; we don't like it or look for it, but we are told to *expect such hostility and opposition*.

And Jesus doesn't just warn about abstract governmental authorities, but even hostility from *those we know and love*. In **vv.21-22**, He even warns us that sharing the gospel and living

on mission will bring *hostility and persecution* in our relationships with loved ones, even family members; “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake.” He warns us again of these painful, but all too possible, circumstances in **vv.34-39**: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” He’s using slightly exaggerated language, but the point that follows is clear: proclaiming the gospel will, at times, bring not peace but *hostility and animosity* into our relationships, even very close ones. Thankfully, this is not always true! But sometimes, if our family members and loved ones are not believers, sharing the gospel and calling them to repent, believe, and follow Christ brings not peace, but a sword: it can “*set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother,*” so that “a person’s enemies will be those of his own household.” There are many of you here this morning who know this reality all too well, even to a *painful degree*. I’ve heard some of your stories, of how your families are filled with non-believers who are hostile to the gospel you share with them out of loving compassion. Some of you may have even thought before that it does more harm than good to share Christ with those you love.

If that’s the case for you this morning, I want to *encourage you* to not give up, to press on in faith! Hear Christ’s words as He encourages us to remember that, no matter what persecution the mission of the gospel brings us, it is ***infinitely worth it!*** He tells us: “*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*” No matter how painful your relationships with loved ones, friends, and family have become, or could become, because of your faith and obedience in Christ, know that every bit of it is *glorifying to God and evidence of your true faith and the salvation that awaits you in Christ Jesus!* Cling to the gospel promise of hope - that you are declaring to your family that you love and value Christ more than anything else in life; ***and that is the most loving thing you can tell and show them! For that is their only hope, too!***

No matter what our particular persecutions and sufferings in the course of our mission may look like, Christ *encourages all of us*, in **vv.26-33**, to persevere by **having no fear** of this world or any persecution that mankind can throw at us. He calls us to **fear God, not man!** Hear **v.28**: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can

destroy both soul and body in hell.” When we remember that eternal life and death are at stake, it puts everything else into perspective, doesn’t it? Eternal hell is not worth comfort and a long life now; eternal life *is worth* suffering, affliction, and even death now! Fake peace with family, friends, the culture, and society at large **is not worth being an enemy of God!** But entering His eternal Kingdom, being cared for and loved by God and His own child, and receiving eternal life and peace - this is worth whatever sorrows and sufferings we must walk through before we get there!

So let us press on, brothers and sisters! Let us persevere in the gospel mission, both *living out* the gospel and *sharing it with others, calling them to do the same by faith!* No matter what the cost - *it is worth it!* Every hardship and suffering we endure in the meantime demonstrates this truth to those we share it with. Let us press on, firmly believing that God is with us in this mission, and will supply the strength and words we need along the way; that it is by His sovereign grace when people respond in faith or hostility; and that He is using even us to display His wondrous compassionate love for the lost.

If you’re not a believer this morning, I want to plead with you to turn away from sin and turn to Christ, trusting in Him alone for salvation, and follow Him - no matter what the cost! For salvation from your sin and eternal life will truly be worth it! If you have any questions about this, or about baptism or church membership, I would love to speak with you. You can come now or find me after the service. Let us pray.