

The Mission of the Kingdom
 Matthew 9:35-38
 Tampa Covenant Church
 06 February 2026

Proposition: The mission of the Kingdom is witnessed in word and deed, shaped by the compassion of Christ and is sustained through prayer to the Lord of the Harvest.

FCF: Failure to reflect the compassion of our king in a broken world.

RHF: Through his sacrificial death, burial and resurrection from the dead; Jesus draws us into the mission of the Kingdom to serve as his faithful witnesses.

(#1) Introduction:

We're continuing our study entitled, the Way of the King, focusing on Jesus' public ministry (the bit in the middle). Because the middle of the story is where we witness Jesus' Kingship become visible. He's the one who fulfills Israel's calling as the faithful Israelite through whom God's redeeming purposes finally break into the world. And if that's true, we as his disciples are called to follow him by living lives shaped by his character, mission and priorities.

In today's text we get a snapshot of the King in action. He's teaching, preaching, and healing and the mission of the kingdom is advancing through the work of the king himself. So, this morning we'll pay close attention to what moves Jesus and what he asks of his faithful followers. In so doing, we'll ask what ought to move us, and how we're called to respond. My prayer is that our eyes would be opened anew to the kind of King we serve and the kind of people we're called to be as his kingdom witnesses.

Mission of the Kingdom: *Witnessed in Word and Deed (v.35)*

(#2 Blank) When we open to chap 9 of Matthew's gospel, I'm not too sure of the timeline but it reads like one day and if that's the case; I'd like to call it a busy day in the life of Jesus: It begins with the healing of a paralytic and the forgiveness of his sins. As Jesus passed on from there, he calls Matthew to follow him. Soon after, he's accused of eating with tax collectors and sinners. Then John's disciples approach him with questions concerning fasting. *While he's responding to them*, Jairus, a synagogue ruler, interrupts with devastating news about his daughter's death. *On the way* to Jairus's house, Jesus stops and heals a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years. Finally, he arrives at Jairus's home and raises his daughter from the dead. *And as he passed on from there*, he heals two blind men; *as they were going away*, he casts out a demon from an oppressed man. And after all of **(#3) that, Matthew** tells us in v.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.*"

This isn't a random, one-off verse, if we go back to chap 4:23, Matthew sums up the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the **(#4) same fashion**, "*And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.*" These verses are functioning as bookends in highlighting Jesus' words as well as his deeds.¹ This is important because Jesus' words and deeds both reflect the values and power of the Kingdom of Heaven.² Jesus was the prophet who Moses said would come and speak in God's authority. He proclaimed the good

news; that God was acting to fulfill his covenant promises to Israel.³ And he backed these words with his divine healing power. His teaching, preaching and healing all testified to the fact that the kingdom had indeed broken into history to accomplish the Father's plan of salvation. And the proper response, then and now is faith and repentance, followed by wholehearted allegiance to Jesus as the promised king.

(#5 Blank) This should grant us a perspective on the importance of word and deed ministry in witnessing the mission of the kingdom. Oftentimes, they're seen as antithetical to each other rather than how they effectively work together. Now, a good question to ask ourselves is which camp do we most gravitate toward? Some of us may gravitate toward the camp that insists on the primacy of the preached word. We sorta pit one against the other in seeing acts of mercy and justice as a threat to gospel proclamation (*no need for a soup kitchen; just preach the word*). On the other hand, some of us may say, I gravitate toward deeds of mercy and justice; it's just as effective (*no need for the word; just serve the soup*). The better route is to see that both contribute distinctively to effective gospel witness.

So, it's not "either/or" rather it's "both/and with differing emphases." The word declares what God has planned; what Christ has accomplished, and the proper response to the good news. The deed provides evidence for that declaration; it gives the gospel visible credibility.⁴ So good deeds, really set the stage for gospel proclamation and gospel proclamation is always confirmed by good deeds; therefore, we serve the soup and we give a message of hope. And this is not some clever ministry strategy we employ rather there's a real motivation behind all of this. And in v.36, Matthew reveals this motivation.

Mission of the Kingdom: *Motivated by Compassion (v.36)*

(#6) He writes,³⁶ *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.* There's a lot to ponder here. Jesus sees the crowd; he doesn't just glance at them. That should get our attention because we know the awkwardness associated with seeing someone in need or making eye contact with someone who's panhandling or flying a sign on the street corner. Our instinct may cause us to glance the other way but Jesus doesn't shift his gaze and what he sees, moves him. He's filled with compassion because the crowds resemble sheep who have been torn apart and thrown down. Imagine the state of a flock in the aftermath of a predatorial strike. This is what Jesus saw, hordes of people in desperate need of loving, unselfish protection and care. Something Israel's leaders failed to provide for the lost sheep in Israel. And unless rescue comes, these harassed and helpless people are headed for sure destruction.⁵

The word used for compassion is not some polite concern; it points to a physical visceral reaction in our bodies. In the ancient world, the bowels were understood to be the seat of the emotions. Thus, compassion was something you felt in your gut; not just a thought in your head. When we react to wicked and dreadful things in our world, we say something like, *"it sickened me to my stomach;"* meaning, we not only felt it emotionally; we somehow felt it physically. And in his humanity, that's what Jesus felt when he looked at the crowd. And as his faithful followers, our compassion is meant to be shaped by his. Meaning, there's a gut response to the suffering and misery we witness in this world. You see, compassion isn't grounded in personality or temperament. It's not reserved for those we naturally empathize with. Rather it's that pain we all acknowledge when we witness the suffering of another person because of our shared humanity.⁶ It's not pity from a distance; *"I feel sorry for you."* It's shared

suffering; understanding that regardless of status, background, or circumstance, every human being is bound together by the sorrow and pain we all experience in a broken world.

(#7) In 1813, a woman by the name of Elizabeth Fry visited London's Newgate Prison and was horrified by what she saw. Female prisoners were confined with their children, living in filth, violence and despair. Rather than turning away, she was moved with compassion and visited just about every day. She brought clothing, medicine, taught basic hygiene and job skills to the inmates. She read scripture to the them, distributed and comforted those who were facing execution. In 1816, she founded the Association for the Improvement of the Female (#8) Prisoners of Newgate; in her words: "*To provide for the clothing, instruction, and employment of the women, to introduce them to a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and to form them habits of sobriety, order, and industry.*" Fry's work inspired subsequent generations to combine social work and gospel proclamation and reshaped how prisoners have been treated in England (#9 Blank) and beyond.⁷ Moved by compassion...

Now imagine a father, it's the middle of the night and he's standing in his kitchen while his family remains fast asleep in their rooms. And he's holding in his hand a deportation letter and it's only a matter of time before his wife wakes up and they'll have to come to grips with their present reality. Now, we can quickly react and say, that's the law. But that's not the point I'm making. I just wonder what it would be like to live with one of these families for a day. And witness the fear, anxiety and unrest they'll have to endure at the thought of being split up and resettled to who knows where and for how long. In light of Jesus' response to the crowd, how can our response to situations like these be shaped by his? In other words, how can we see and be moved to compassion for these people? Because no matter our political affiliations, the gospel must be the lens through which everything filters into our hearts. Jesus saw a crowd made up of real people; men, women and children and he was moved with compassion. And it's with that visceral, gut response; he turned to his disciples and tells (#10) them to pray.

Mission of the Kingdom: *Begins with prayer for laborers (vv.37-38)*

Here in vv.37-38, Jesus says, "*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.*" In the OT, the harvest grants us a picture of the LORD's relationship with his people. When Israel lived faithfully within the covenant, they experienced abundance as a sign of God's blessing and provision. And they celebrated through festivals; in giving thanks to the LORD. And built into these celebrations was God's concern for the vulnerable:⁸ In Leviticus 23, the Lord (#11) says to his people,²² "*And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.*"

Now, that command could be obeyed without compassion. In other words, outward obedience was possible without an inward transformation of heart. Like a child who obeys on the surface while inwardly protesting every step of the way. (#12 Blank) When Jesus looked at the crowds and felt compassion, it pointed to something deeper than static rule keeping. It served as a marker for his disciples and us to see what he saw and to feel what he felt toward the helpless and harassed. And when that reality makes its way into our hearts; we'll not only develop a burden for the harvest; we'll continually entreat the Lord to send out laborers into his harvest. Simply because his compassion has awakened the law of love, written

on our hearts. Thus, if our hearts are filled with sinful outrage or dulled by indifference to suffering of the vulnerable in our country; we don't respond by doubling down rather we go to the Lord in prayer. Asking him to grant us hearts moved by compassion that sees the suffering of fellow image bearers and enters into that suffering with gospel hope and gospel love. This is our calling and this is how we effectively witness the mission of the kingdom.

We remain faithful in gathering together in community because this is where we're equipped as Christ's disciples. Then we scatter to our individual homes, neighborhoods, workplaces where we witness the mission of the kingdom with hearts of compassion, sustained by prayer. We may not be called to something along the lines of Elizabeth Fry's story but we remain sensitive to that same visceral, gut reaction experienced by Jesus and pray for God to send laborers to those mission fields. And it's understanding the proximity of our own mission fields and asking, what are the needs in our neighborhoods, work places our communities and, in our city, calling for compassionate kingdom laborers? And we won't have to look far because there are real issues taking place all around us every day. And the Lord is calling all of us to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send us out because the harvest is truly plentiful and the laborers are few. And as we go; we minister in word and deed to the glory of God. If you don't know where to get involved...ask the Lord and let the Holy Spirit lead, guide and direct you.

Conclusion:

The point is this, it's coming to the realization every single day of our lives that at some point in our lives, we were in the crowd. We were the ones who were helpless and harassed, living without hope in this world and in desperate need of a savior. We read together in our meditation text, *"as a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him."* And Jesus, acting in perfect obedience to the Father's will; looked upon our helpless estate with compassion. He didn't just glance at us, rather he entered into our emotional pain and suffering and bore it physically in his body on the cross. And in so doing, he willingly laid down his life for ours. He suffered the pangs of death in order that we might be forgiven of sin and freed from living under the tyranny of guilt and shame in this broken world.

And through his glorious resurrection from the dead; he's not only our Savior, he's our good Shepherd, our King and he's the Lord of the harvest. And that changes everything: The way we see the world, the way we engage with others and our outlook for the future. And with hearts transformed by his grace, we've been given the utmost privilege to witness the mission of his kingdom by serving as gospel laborers for his harvest. And so may the suffering, and brokenness we witness and endure in this world fill our hearts with compassion and drive us to our knees in prayer to the Lord of the harvest to send us into his harvest. And may we labor with the sure hope of knowing that the harvest doesn't depend on us; rather it depends on him and him alone. And may we trust in him toward that end.

¹ David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 138.

² *Ibid*, 145.

³ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 28.

⁴ <https://www.9marks.org/article/word-ministry-and-deed-ministry-1-of-3/?utm> (accessed 04 Feb 2026)

⁵ Moisés Silva, ed., in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 136.

⁶ Brené Brown, *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience* (New York: Random House, 2021), 116-120.

⁷ Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, "Introduction," in *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 287.

⁸ T. D. Gledhill, "Harvest," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 534.