

The Gospel According to Matthew

By

G. Campbell Morgan, D.D.

Copyright © 1929

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

MATTHEW 9:35-38

IN reading this passage we notice that it chronicles no definite acts in the work of Jesus. The verses form rather a statement of general facts and general effects. This statement deals with the passing of the King from place to place; with what He saw as He thus passed through cities and villages; with what He felt in the presence of the things He saw; and with the result of that consciousness.

The general statement is that “**Jesus went about all the cities and the villages,**” and, by way of introduction, the one matter to be recognized is that, in so doing, He came into contact with all sorts and conditions of people. The problem of the city, and the problem of the village existed in those days as it does to-day. Jesus went to cities and villages; to the people who lived in crowds, and at the heart of the movements of the day; and to the people far away in the hamlets on the hillside, and in the valley, whose little world was the vineyard and the cornfield. As He went He had a threefold method: that of teaching, preaching, and healing. Thus He prosecuted His Kingly work.

His teaching of the people consisted of interpretations of their own Scriptures and economy. That was the first method of the King; emphasizing the truth taught by immediate application. We have no detailed account of this teaching of the general multitudes, but occasional illustrations by the record of what happened at some particular place.

Once we are told He went, as His custom was, to the Synagogue, and, finding the book of the Prophet, He read old and perfectly familiar words, giving them new life and meaning, teaching their deepest intention.

His preaching consisted of the proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom of God; or, to put that into other words, the good tidings of His own work in establishing that Kingdom. He was preaching that prophetically only. He waited for the Cross ere that great evangel could be sent forth in all its fulness; but He went through the cities and the villages preaching the Kingdom of God; saying to men, God is on the Throne; affirming the fact of the Kingship of God.

The ministry of healing was the manifestation of His power to work as well as to preach; and such manifestation was, moreover, a revelation of the order of the Divine government. God is King, and everything that limits the sphere of His control must be subdued to His purpose; and, therefore, He healed disease.

We have already seen that the miracles of Jesus were not interferences with law, but restorations of law; and that disease is lawlessness. Therefore to heal is not to interfere with law, but to restore the operation of law. In all the miracles of Jesus, miracles of physical healing, there was a symbolic value, and a spiritual intention. Whenever Jesus healed a sick person, He said in effect to that person, All suffering results from failure to yield to the control of our Father; all these limitations of life, and this destruction of life, result from rebellion against the Kingship of God. Thus, doing this threefold work, He went about all the cities, and all the villages.

But now the time had come in the mission of the King, when it was necessary to appoint fellow-laborers, laborers together with Himself. This passage reveals the reason for such appointment. The work was one in which He needed helpers of a very definite type laborers; and the need for the work was created by compassion in the heart of Jesus, which is the deepest thing in the heart of God; and it is that which this passage reveals to us.

Let us state that again in other words.

The time had come in the work of Jesus when He was constrained to appoint other laborers who should help Him. Humanly speaking, He could not overtake His work. He had been preaching, teaching, healing; but there were so many places He could not reach in His human and localized and straitened circumstances; and He must have men to help Him, for the work must be done. Must, because Jesus saw the multitudes distressed, scattered as sheep without a shepherd.

O Man of Nazareth, majestic, with eyes all love-lit; strange King of men, enunciating such an ethic that one's soul has been ashamed in its flaming glory, what matter about these people, why not leave them alone? Why must they be cared for? And the answer is, "**He was moved with compassion.**"

The necessity for the salvation of men is revealed in that statement. There is no reason in man that God should save; the need is born of His own compassion. No man has any claim upon God. Why, then, should men be cared for? Why should they not become the prey of the ravaging wolf, having wandered from the fold?

It has been said that the great work of redemption was the outcome of a passion for the righteousness and holiness of God; that Jesus must come and teach and live and suffer and die because God is righteous and holy.

I do not so read the story.

God could have met every demand of His righteousness and holiness by handing men over to the doom they had brought upon themselves. But deepest in the being of God, holding in its great energizing might, both holiness and righteousness, is love and compassion. God said, according to Hosea, "**How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?**"

It is out of the love which inspired that wail of the Divine heart, that salvation has been provided, and our evangel has come.

“He was moved with compassion.” That is just a simple lattice-window made up of crossing human words. Look through it, and you will see the flaming glory of the infinite love of the infinite God. You will see the birthplace of everything that makes for the uplifting of man.

The thoughts of paramount importance in this passage are such as are suggested by two pronouns. **“He”** and **“they.”** **“He saw . . . he was moved with compassion.”** **“They fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”**

Let us look, then:

- First at the King as here revealed;
- Secondly, at the Kingdom as He saw it waiting to be redeemed and realized;
- Finally, at His purpose and His method.

The King of Whom we have already said so much, was moved with compassion. The word *compassion* has come into our language from the Latin. It is, no doubt, the correct word at this point, spiritually; and yet the Greek word here translated compassion is a very remarkable one. It is a word of the kind which is largely passing out of use to-day, and the passing would not appear to be a loss, but rather a gain.

The Greek word is one of those in which emotion is suggested by a physical figure. Very literally the declaration is that *“His bowels were moved within Him.”* By the Greek, the bowels were regarded *as the seat of violent passion*, such as anger or love. By the Hebrew, they were regarded *as the seat of the tender affections*.

Isaac Watts sang a hymn bearing on this verse, which we have changed in most of our hymn-books, and yet he was but translating from his Greek Testament,

“With joy we meditate the grace
Of our High Priest above;
His heart is made of tenderness,
His bowels yearn with love.”

If Isaac Watts is a little out of date, he is quite accurate. He translated literally, definitely, and positively, from this very word here rendered compassion. Then knowing that the translation was insufficient, Isaac Watts moved on, and took another word:

“Touched with a sympathy within,
He knows our feeble frame;
He knows what sore temptations mean,
For He hath felt the same.”

Thus on the human level, this picture of God is that of a Man Who went into the cities, and into the villages, and looked at the people; and what He saw made His whole inner physical life, as the sacramental symbol of the spiritual, move and burn.

We all know some little of this; how in certain circumstances, in some great overwhelming fear, in some sudden sorrow, our very physical life, acting in harmony with the mental, is filled with pain.

“He was moved with compassion.” He was moved to the agony of the physical by the pain of the spiritual.

But that was only sacramental and symbolic. What lay behind it all?

Let us go back to our translation **“He was moved with compassion.”**

What is compassion?

- Feeling with, pain with, comradeship in sorrow,
- Fellowship in agony;
- An at-one-ment between this King and those upon whom He looked, culminating in the Cross as to outward expression.

It existed in the heart of God long before the material Cross was uplifted; and it expressed itself in the suffering of the Son of God through all the years of His sympathy with man before He went to that actual Cross.

He could not see a woman who had suffered twelve years of pain but that He felt her feebleness. He came so intimately into comradeship and sympathy with human life that its pain was His pain. Do not ever think of this word compassion as though it meant pity merely. You can pity people and see them die in misery; but He bare with them; He identified Himself with the very issue of their pain; the very issue of their sin. That is compassion.

Then look at the King again. He wanted to shepherd these distressed ones. That was His main desire. **“They fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd,”** and He wanted to shepherd them. Perhaps we cannot quite understand this desire; yet every mother appreciates it in some measure; the mothers who, seeing the neglected children of the slum, yearn to mother them all, understand. That is God’s heart. That is how Jesus felt. He wanted to shepherd these people, He wanted to take care of them. He wanted to fold them; He wanted to feed them.

These are the two functions of the King.

The real King is always folding and feeding the sheep.

- In spiritual things the one who folds the sheep is the priest,
- The one who feeds the sheep is the prophet.

So that in true Kingship there are included the functions of the priest and the prophet; and these were the passions stirred in the heart of Jesus by His vision of the multitudes.

But let us turn our eyes from this wonderful King, moved with compassion, a shepherd by nature, desiring the folding and feeding of all sheep, and look at the Kingdom as He saw it.

The people at whom He had been looking were not all of one class. It cannot too often be stated that His view was of Humanity, Jesus did not pay special attention to the rulers, neither did He pay special attention to the people of the submerged classes as they came to Him, and appealed to Him. He saw all sorts and conditions of people. He saw the multitudes as sheep, not as goats and sheep.

The Scriptures never speak of men as goats except once, and it is a very great question as to whether it is not wrong to look upon that as a picture of the judgment of individuals. It is the picture of a national judgment, and the figure applies not to men, but to nations.

Jesus saw men as sheep out in the highways. Every man is in God's image. Every human being has, if we can but see it, the hall-mark of the likeness of God, and He saw in the multitudes their natural possibility of realizing a Divine purpose.

If a man is lost, if a child shall so wander from the pathway as eventually to be lost, it will be by not realizing the possibility of their own lives, and so being lost by degeneration and degradation. He saw the multitudes as sheep.

Yes, but He clearly saw their actual condition.

Here again the Greek words are graphic words. They were distressed, fleeced, lacerated by the fleecing, scattered, flung, tossed by violence. In these words we have the picture of sheep departed from the fold, into the midst of wolves; they are seen with their fleece torn, half-dead, bleeding from wounds, and fainting. This is how He saw men and women, because they had no shepherd.

There is a dread and awe-inspiring passage in Ezekiel about shepherds who fed themselves instead of the sheep, shepherds who came with no healing to the wounded sheep, shepherds who never went to seek lost sheep. That is Ezekiel's picture. That is how the King saw the people; and He had come to do what the shepherds had failed to do. He had come to fold and feed them. He had come to heal them. He had come to seek and save that which was lost. He was the "**Good Shepherd,**" and "**The Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep.**"

Finally, let us notice His purpose and His method.

His purpose is to be the Shepherd, to fold the sheep and to feed the sheep. In order to fold the sheep He must come into conflict with the foe, and He accomplished His victory by the purity of His life, and by the infinite passion of His dying. He had also come to feed the sheep, that is to give sustenance to their neglected life.

Now the moment had come when the King, Who is the Shepherd, was about to gather a few more around Himself; when He would avail Himself of the help of others.

What did He do with them?

He first gave them His vision of the multitudes, and then He said, “**Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He send forth laborers.**”

If we are going to do anything that is worth doing we must see as He sees. Let us say: O Shepherd true, open our eyes that we may see as Thou seest. And if we see as He sees we shall hear Him say to us, “**Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He send forth laborers into His harvest.**”

In this brief paragraph Jesus makes use of two figures, and here again, as on other occasions, it looks as though He almost inadvertently confused figures, and mixed metaphors. But He never really did so.

First it is the figure of the shepherd and the sheep; and then it is the figure of the harvest and the laborers. But in these two you have the perfect unfolding of two sides of the great question.

- In the sheep and the shepherd you see man's need met by God.
- In the harvest and the laborers you see God's need met by man.

Our Gospel is, “**The Lord is my Shepherd.**” But the Master says to us, If that is the Gospel, and if My compassion has given you the Gospel; now look, the fields are white unto harvest. That is God's harvest. All those sheaves ought to be garnered for Him.

They are sheaves of harvest which God would have gathered and garnered, but He needs laborers to gather His white harvest.

~ end of chapter 22 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
