

The Mission of Jesus

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Preacher: Graham Daniels

[0 : 00] Let's read our passage from page 814, and it's Matthew chapter 9, verse 35 is where I'll start.

So page 814, Matthew 9, and we're on verse 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.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 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. 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 affliction.

The name 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. Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew the tax collector.

[1 : 16] James the son of Alphaeus and Thaddeus. Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. When you see a massive group of people, if you're a Christian, I'm not assuming you're a Christian, of course.

But often these days when Christians see a massive group of people, they can lack confidence because we do live in a culture where it's not particularly normal to know Christ.

So, you know, the typical scene is a huge group of people. It could be, I don't know, like a sports stadium. Perhaps the Millennium Stadium or something like that.

You know, just a big place with lots of people for a game of sport. You see this group of people and you wonder if you're the odd one out.

When you're in church, and if you're thinking about Christ tonight but not sure of where you stand, you come amongst the majority will be followers of Jesus. And perhaps we have more confidence when we're gathered together like this.

[2 : 26] And that's a good thing and an encouraging thing. But day by day, at home, at school, in your street, at work, what does it really look like to say that Jesus is King?

King of everything. Lord of the world. Well, I want to encourage you tonight because we'll see that when Jesus looks at the crowds around us, when he sees thousands of people who don't know him, he is never, ever depressed about it.

We'll see that in the passage tonight. It's a marvellous passage. I've no chance of doing justice to it. But have a go with me. Because if we believe it, if we're a Christian, it is marvellous.

And if you're not a Christian tonight, you'll think, well, I need to be on Jesus' side here because he's in charge of the whole thing. Let's jump into the passage at verse 35.

I've got some headings if they're useful to you. Verse 35, I've called a man with a mission. 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.

[3 : 45] In the four gospels, you tend to come to a point partway through where there is a summary verse or two of what Jesus has been doing. So what we have here is Matthew writing for us, a summary of what's going on.

People have no idea. We know if we're looking backwards and we've read the whole book. But for the people who are alive at the time, they just see this bloke doing amazing things, claiming outrageous claims, mobilizing thousands of people to follow him when he's not trained as a religious leader.

And for the enemies that he is building, a potential threat to their safety and their status quo. So when we read a verse like this, we're meant to be in awe to some extent of what this guy's been up to.

Now, of course, at the time, nobody knew what he was up to. If you know the end of the story, you know he was clear what he was up to. Despite his brilliance, he was actually heading very soon to a filthy, disgusting death, smashed to bits on a Roman cross.

Jesus killed before the prime of life. We now know that he was a man with a mission. They didn't at the time.

[5 : 10] But what they could see when they watched him was his motive for mission. So let's look at a second heading and really dig in now. Have a look at verse 36. Here we see something spectacular.

Jesus is motive for mission. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. If you read the Gospels carefully, you don't actually read an awful lot about how Jesus felt.

There are some standout verses when he weeps when his friend Lazarus dies. Standout verses when he's on the night before his death and he's sweating.

Why have you left me alone here, Lord, my father? But actually, when you do read the Gospels through, there's very little about his emotions. And so when you do see something about how he felt, it's really worth paying attention.

And this word compassion is a very strong word. His heart broke for the crowds. When Jesus sees the crowds at the university, at Glasgow University for next week.

[6 : 23] When he sees the people that you live amongst and work with. When he sees friends at school. We've got to learn to see each other as Jesus sees us.

Because it's so non-intuitive for us to do it. His heart breaks for us, for all of us. Tremendous compassion. Look at the words. He saw them as harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

He's plucking an image from the Old Testament. God is the shepherd of Israel. He is the great leader of his people. And when the people stray from him, they are leaderless.

They don't know where they're going. They think they do, but they have no clue. They're crying out for a leader, but they won't even acknowledge it. And it leaves them like a wolf does to a sheep when the shepherd's not around.

Ripped, ruined, mangled, smashed in. That's what harassed and helpless means. Now, when I think of my pals, I have to say to you, I cannot think intuitively of my pals as people who are leaderless.

[7 : 34] Not sure where they're really going. Ruined, wrecked, mangled souls. I don't see that at all. I see good lads who love a laugh, who have a great crack, who are actually doing pretty well in life and enjoying it and getting on with it and have ambitions and goals and dreams.

And they don't look at anything like that. More tragically, I don't think of myself like that either.

But the Lord Jesus is absolutely playing to us. When he looks at us, his heart breaks in two.

And he's crying out, I want to be your leader. I don't care how young or old you are, he says. I don't care what you've done wrong this week. I don't care what your history is.

I don't care how good or bad you've been for years. Hear me loud and clear. I have such compassion. The creator of the universe loves us so much that he yearns to lead us.

[8 : 47] He yearns to be in charge. He yearns that we submit everything to him. Because he has our best interests in mind. And behind the front door of our lives, and you know what I mean, don't you?

You don't need a Welsh bloke to tell you this. Behind the front door. Not where everybody can see me. Not where everybody's watching. In private. Where those who know you best see you.

And more. When they're not there. You don't have to live long for life to go like that, do you? Up and down. High and low. And the Bible's starting point is magnificent.

There is somebody in this universe who made it. He came in his own son as a man. And he loves you so much. That he yearns to lead you.

As the psalmist says, by still waters. He yearns to restore our soul. He is fantastic. That's what he is.

[9 : 53] And he hurts. That the world is so broken. And I hope you're encouraged tonight. Even as you hear that. Because if we want to understand the motive Jesus has for his mission to the world. It's never changed from this. It's gorgeous, isn't it? That somebody could love us this much. And I'm not just talking to regular church goers.

I'm talking to you. I'm talking to myself. And I'm talking to all of us. That this is his motive. Now go back to your crowds, you see.

Because you might think if you lived in my city today. I play for my village football team. Just outside Cambridge. I'm the manager.

There are three teams. Adult teams and seven junior teams. Because I'm the manager. I play every week. Because I pick myself. And I say to the boys.

[10 : 56] You know. Well you need a bit of experience in the team. That's how it works best. Like that. But you know what? I look at them in the clubhouse on a Saturday after a game. And all the teams come back and have a bite to eat. When everybody's in there and it's full of 200 people.

I look around and I think. How many of my pals in here know the great leader of the universe. Who cherishes their soul. And will do anything to save them.

And loves to lead them in the way they should go. And it feels quite low sometimes. And I wonder why I can't make more of a dent. I wonder why it's easier to speak to a crowd of people like this.

Than to make a dent in my football club. And I don't know if that shocks you. Or makes you relieved. But I know with the Lord Jesus. He never despairs.

Never. And I'll show you why. Here it is. Let's have a look down. Let's look at verses 37 to 38. So if we've seen his motive for mission in 36.

[11 : 57] Let's unpack now. Jesus' theology of mission. What's his God world view of mission? Let's read 37 to 38.

He said to his disciples. The harvest is plentiful. But the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly for the Lord.

To the Lord of the harvest. To send out laborers. Into his harvest field. Jesus is amazing. He only sees all the time.

A harvest. Do you see it there? He's not triumphalistic. It's what the Bible tells us. Jesus can always see the harvest.

So he looks across the city. And he says. I can see my church. I can see it being built. Nothing will stop it. It's unstoppable. I will call people. I will build a church. And whatever the authorities.

[12 : 54] Or religious authorities. Or secular authorities say. Nothing will stop my church. It never has. And it never will. That's how he views the world. And he should know. Because he made it.

So he's got a pretty good inkling. How it's going to pan out. But he always sees the harvest. It is marvelous. It's his harvest field.

Do you see those words? To send out laborers. Into. See those precious little words. His harvest field. It's not mine.

Or yours. It's his. He owns it. He's in charge of it. And now we're at the heart. Of our understanding. Of what the mission of God is. And if we take our eyes off. Those three little words. I put it to you.

That there are two consequences. That are inevitable.

[13 : 53] And have shown themselves. In the history of the church. Lose sight of the fact. That the Lord Jesus Christ. Breaks his heart. Over our world. Is entirely committed.

To becoming the leader. To ruin souls. Lose sight of the fact. That he knows what he's doing. And he will pull it off. And you're left with two things.

That will follow. Here's number one. Pride. Well. I mean a number of my friends. Actually.

Over time. Have come to know Christ. Oh yes. Oh yes. All my family. Every one of them is saved. Absolutely. Yes. Oh yes.

Generations. And. Yeah. Going really well. Actually. Thank you very much. Now please don't get me wrong. Every Christian yearns.

[14 : 51] That there'll be generations. And generations. Of people who know Christ. Every Christian parent. Yearns that. Right. Of course.

And it's a. Marvellous. Beautiful thing. We all yearn. That we might make a difference. In our own neighbourhood. And workplace. And family. But it's his harvest field.

Not yours. Now this is such a thin line. Isn't it? How thin is this line now? Of vanity. You don't even know. You slipped into it. So hard to unpack.

Am I in charge? Is it my doing? Is it my ability? Did I get people saved? Is it because I'm so good? Is it because we're so capable? Oh. You're on such dangerous soil.

At this point. A few years ago. I had a little bit of money. For training. At work. And because you do things. Like Christianity Explored. Which. Of course.

[15:50] Christians will know. Is a course. To invite friends. To understand the Christian faith. Because in Cambridge. Where I work. I'll often lead a course like that. I thought. I'm going to spend my money. Going to something.

Where it's nothing to do with Christianity. But it's about having a better life. And I want to see what it felt like. To be in the minority. When somebody's going to tell you how to live. So I went to this thing in London.

And I didn't fit. There were three criteria. Young London professional. Professional. And I was an old Welshian professional. Right. But I went along anyway. And I was older than everyone.

By yonks. And I sat in it. And it was three days. Friday to Sunday. Eight in the morning. Till ten at night. And it really was about. You know. How to have purpose in life. And meaning.

And how to achieve things. And if London firms were paying a lot of money. For people to go. You know. So I'm in it. Anyway. And I put in a small group. For part of my time. At this thing. And my leader was Wendy.

[16:47] I could tell. Because I was that big. Oh. It was about that big. Wendy. Wendy was in charge of my group. And she went around the group. You know. And she said. I was last. She said.

So John. Have you done this course before? And he said. Yes. I have Wendy. I did it two years ago. So round we go. We go around. Seven people. Until we get to me. And everybody's done it before. And everybody loves the course.

And they rave about it. And they're all about. Well. The oldest is 15 years. 20 years younger than me. So she comes to me. You see. And she says. So Graham. Because obviously I've got a badge on. So Graham.

She says. Have you done this course before? And I said. I haven't Wendy. Actually. First time I'd ever talked to her. First conversation. We've ever had. No. I haven't actually. Wendy.

Done it before. She said. Oh. What a shame. She was very posh.

[17:40] She was much posher than that. Eh. What a shame. You know. More like that. Shame. I said. Really? Do you think so? And she said. Well. Yes. She said.

Goodness. She said. I did this course. When I was 28 years of age. She said. When I went home on Sunday. I phoned all my family. I told all my friends. I told everybody I knew in the next week. They must do this course. If only they do this course. They would find the answer. To all life's issues. She said. Graham. If you'd have come earlier. Imagine how much more could have been possible.

Now you obviously. You know. Your parents bring you up to be polite. Don't they? And smile and all that. But inside.

I was like. I was going. But inside. I was going. I could kill you. No. And I was. I'm sorry to say it. I'm sorry to say it. I'm sorry. But I was. I was. You know. Do you know why?

[18:35] Because she didn't know me. She didn't know me. She never met me. She didn't know what I'm frightened of. She didn't know what I'm hoping for. Can you see it? I say the story.

Because it's. She wasn't trying to be rude mind. She wasn't trying. She just was. Ah. But you see. You see. And I don't know if you'd say.

I'm not a Christian tonight. I don't know whether you've been on the receiving end of this. You see.

Do you know what I thought? I thought. She felt. That if I was slightly brighter. Slightly higher IQ.

Slight more emotional intelligence. I might just get. That I've got to be one of them. But I was probably too thick. No. No. That's how I felt. Right. I wonder what people feel when they hear us.

If we're a Christian. Talk about Jesus. You have no intention. Do you? If you're a Christian tonight. To be. Looking down your nose at somebody. Or judging them. Or making them feel a bit dim.

Nobody sets out to do that.

[19:35] But I do ask myself. What do I sound like? Do I sound rather proud. That I'm a Christian? Well of course. I've met Christ. Yes. I know Christ. Oh yes. I've known him a long time. Oh really.

Let me tell you about him. Because you really should come to know him too. If you lose sight of the fact. That he is the Lord of the harvest. We are leaderless. Our souls are ruined. My soul is smashed to bits.

There's only one hope in the universe. It's this incredible compassion. Of the God who made me. He says I know what you're like Graham. And I know what you're like 30 years after I came to know you. And I still love you despite it all.

And you should be so thrilled that I stay with you. But I'm never going away. This is marvelous. It's outrageous. It's proper grace. But to guard our motives against the criterion that he is the Lord of the harvest.

And it's his harvest. And if you know him tonight. He saved you. And if anyone you knew. Anyone you know. Has trusted in him.

[20 : 37] Who saved them? He saved them. And the flip side if you get this wrong. Isn't pride. It's total despair. Despair. Here's the second thing that follows.

If you get God's sovereignty. In mission wrong. Despair. I'm old enough to have a family. How many people in a room like this will say.

Well I don't say too much about my middle child. Or my eldest. Because I better not. Because they're a bit off the rails really. And I just keep my head down. Because more surely it's my fault. More surely I got it wrong. I got it wrong. And the only people we should ever talk about. Are the ones who are going on well. Just think about that for a minute now.

Because I'm old enough. I speak to many parents in despair. In my own church. But it must be us who's getting wrong. Yes it was you who got things wrong. We all get things wrong. We all fail all the time.

[21 : 39] But who opens blind eyes? Who's the Lord of the harvest? Who's the only one. Who can breathe life into dead people. The Lord Jesus does.

It is amazing if you've had your eyes opened. It's amazing if your heart has responded to the gospel. It is amazing that he's done it. But he did it. And we don't understand who, when, why or how.

So we have a mission week. And we'll have hopes and dreams as students. We'll be dreaming of people that we'd like to come to Christ. And we pray. And I hope you'll pray with us. That people will see him as the saviour and Lord that they need.

But here's the mystery and the bonus of just getting a little bit older. Meeting people five years later. Three years. Six years. Twelve years. Somebody who says, I was at Aberdeen in 1992.

And I came to a couple of talks. And then three years later I met another friend when I had a job. And I gave my life to Christ when I went to church in Aberdeen. And you just see God's amazing weaving pattern. And you think, what do I know?

[22 : 44] But he won't fail. Because he has a purpose and a plan. And he'll build his church. And hell will not stop it. If we understand mission properly, we will never be proud.

And we will never despair. Now there's a battle, isn't it? Never proud. Never despairing. But saying to the Lord, it's yours.

And you can have joy. Or you can be sad in it. But trusting him is our only security. It's our great strength.

So when Rupert says, what should we learn about our mission? Do you see why I answered like I did? Learn this. Because when it's hard and you don't feel like you're getting anywhere.

You've got the guts to go on because you know he's in charge. And when it's going unbelievably brilliant. Which is a bit less frequent, I find. He's just a bit humble.

[23 : 52] And you go, Lord, you're amazing. Well, let's look at our last little heading. The strategy for mission.

I think we'll just stick with verse 1. But let me read verses 1 to 4. The strategy for mission. Chapter 10. And he called to him his 12 disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits.

To cast them out and to heal every disease and every affliction. The names of the 12 apostles are these. And he lists the 12. Now these 12, let's just say one thing at the beginning.

These 12 aren't us. These are the apostles. They were handpicked by Jesus. One of them betrays him. Judas. But he chose them. They witnessed everything.

They are the ones called by him. So that we have the New Testament in front of us now. From eyewitness accounts. And they're not us. So look at verse 5. He told them only to go to Israel.

[24 : 51] They weren't to go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans. They were to do the kind of miracles he could do. So they're not us. Nevertheless.

By the end of his gospel in Matthew chapter 28. He's instructing a much wider group. To go and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father.

And of the Son. And of the Holy Spirit. And here's his strategy. See those first few words of chapter 10. He called his 12 disciples.

How did he do it? How did Jesus build a church? Was it a multi-million pound budget? Well there's nothing wrong with spending money. If you've got it to spend on mission. What is it?

A brilliant advertising campaign? Was it unbelievably capable people? Who were brilliant geniuses at sharing the good news. And persuading people to believe it?

[25 : 53] No. No. He chose this lot. One was a traitor. And we saw their failures on the way through. And if you don't know Jesus as your saviour this evening.

If you haven't trusted that he died on your behalf. Out of sheer love that the price may be paid. For your ignoring of him so far. Do you see what will happen here?

If you come to know him. He makes you a missionary. And if you've known him 60 years tonight. Do you understand his plan is still the same?

It's this. Very simple. Very unsophisticated. It doesn't cost any money. He just sends people and says go on. Off you go.

Pray for your friends. Trust in me. Rest in my power. Be part of my church. Get under my word.

[26 : 57] Filled with my spirit. Go and live. And pass the message on. And here's the biggest thing.

Should we close with this? Here's the question. Has such a simple strategy worked? Look. We're in church.

Isn't it? Here we are. We're in a building. In the middle of this great city. 2,000 years later.

And for some in this room. You're saying. Christ lives in me. And a grandma told you. Or a mom. Or a teacher. Or a youth leader. Or a pal at work.

Somebody passed it on. Somebody always passes it on. Right? Could you nod to that? Somebody passes it on. And the Lord opens your eyes at some point.

[27 : 54] And you see him for who he is. And then the funny thing that happens is. The older you live. The longer it goes. You think. Gosh. I'm getting worse here. Did you find that? You think I'm getting worse.

As I get older. I'm supposed to get better. But that's when you realize. He loves you more. He's not actually getting worse. He's just pointing out. All the stuff that's not so good.

And then the right reaction is. You still love me despite it. How remarkable. This whole thing is. Or he'll build his church. The gates of hell will never stop it. Until he comes back. And he gathers all his church together.

And you could all in this room. And I want to be there myself. And he says. Hello. Home we go. It's over. And nothing will stop him. Nothing will stop him. Nobody will stop him.

And it's a simple and grand strategy. Which is humbled. Under the great master. Who saves souls. So that is the mission of Jesus. Let me close by saying.

[28 : 54] If you wouldn't say. You've trusted in Christ yet. If you do turn to him. As the one who pays the penalty. For rebellion. If you believe.

That he has died for you. You will enter a life of mission. Like it or not. You will be my witnesses. Not you might just be. If Christ is in you.

You're a witness. I know it's hard to believe. Because you don't feel up to it. I know. I know. Don't pretend. Right? You are. You are. And if you are a Christian tonight.

Please be encouraged. That's why we meet. Isn't it? Around the scriptures. To be encouraged. For what Christ has done for us. He's got a hold of you. He'll never let you go. You're his. He's yours. And he's on the job. And it's grand. It's truly grand. And get into this week in courage. So you deserve nothing. You've got everything. And you'll never disappear.

[29 : 56] Ever. And for those you love. Just keep asking the Lord of the harvest. That he might reap. For his harvest field. It's his business. Joy or war. It's his business.

Shall I pray for us? Thank you. Heavenly Father. That you are the Lord of the harvest. How we pray. That in a more formal time of mission.

At the university here. And as a church. That we might rejoice. That you know exactly what you're doing. And we might bring great confidence.

From the fact that you are the Lord of the harvest. Save us Lord from despair. And save us from vanity. We pray these things. That we might know your great leadership.

And the great joy of being yours. In Jesus name. Amen.