

## **People Matter** **Matthew 9:35-10:8**

### **Introduction**

One day as the class period was coming to a close, the professor gave his students a pop quiz. Annie was a good student. She had been paying attention during that day's lecture, so she wasn't worried at all when the quizzes were distributed.

There were 10 questions on the quiz. As she expected, she breezed through the first nine with no hesitation at all. But the 10<sup>th</sup> question stumped her. It read:

*What is the first name of the woman who cleans the restrooms in this building?*

"This must be some kind of joke," Annie thought. Sure, Annie had seen this woman many times. She was tall, slender, dark haired and in her 50s. She was always dressed in the school's custodial uniform, grey with white trim. But the uniform wasn't embroidered with a name and the print on the woman's college ID was too small to read from any distance. How in the world would Annie be expected to know this woman's name?

After thinking about it for several minutes – with no success – Annie gathered her things and carried her quiz to the front where she handed it to the professor. As she did, she asked him:

*Will that last question count toward our quiz grade?*

"Oh, yes, absolutely," said the professor. "In the course of your life and career you will meet many people. Every one of them is significant. Every one of them deserves your attention and care, EVEN if all they do is clean your restrooms."

Reflecting on that experience a few years later, Annie wrote:

*"I have never forgotten the lesson I learned that day. It has made a major difference in how I treat the people around me. And," Annie added, "the woman's name was Dorothy."*

One of the most amazing truths of the Scriptures is that our God knows us and cares for us individually. Every one of us. Each person listening to the sound of my voice: Knew this clearly! You matter to Jesus. Remember these words?

*Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (Luke 12:6-7)*

This is the God we see in action in today's Gospel. Jesus, God Incarnate – God in the flesh – moves about from town to town, encountering people everywhere He goes. And each one of them matters to Him. The text tells us about two specific groups who matter: the crowds and the disciples.

## #1: BECAUSE THE CROWDS MATTER, JESUS IS FILLED WITH COMPASSION WHEN HE SEES THEM

Verse 36:

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)*

These people He encountered had many needs. Without getting specific about any of them, the writer of the Gospel simply says Jesus went about:

*... healing every disease and sickness. (Matthew 9:35)*

But notice this: What broke the heart of Jesus was NOT the amount of sickness He saw. No, He was filled with compassion for the crowds because:

*... they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)*

This fall my granddaughter Allie will be four, and she will be playing in the youth soccer program in her hometown of Greenwood, IN. Have you ever watched four-year-olds play soccer? Like sheep without a shepherd, they run wherever the rest of the flock goes. Or at least most of them do. When my younger daughter Alyssa was that age, one little boy had no interest in the path of the soccer ball. He preferred to dance and pick dandelions whenever the coach put him in the game. But the rest of the players on the field just ran together in one big clump. There was nothing intentional about their movements. There was no strategy deployed, despite the urging of the parents and coaches.

The heart of Jesus was broken because He saw crowds running around aimlessly, living life in one big clump, with no direction, no purpose, no meaning. One writer says:

*Anyone who has seen sheep in person knows that without a shepherd, sheep move about aimlessly, wandering here and there, getting lost, and generally paying little heed to the dangers around them. Without the proper guidance and care of a shepherd, these sheep will become malnourished and will get lost. This is the spiritual need of the people in today's passage. The care they need most of all is guidance in the truth of offered by the Son of God. (Ligonier.org)*

Did Jesus care about the physical needs of the crowds? Of course He did! The text says He healed every disease and sickness. No one was left out! But what broke His heart – what filled his heart with compassion – was how disconnected from God these people were. Apart from God, their lives had no purpose, no direction, no meaning.

Sometimes we as Christians get so caught up in the physical needs of the people we see that we lose sight of their spiritual needs.

- Pay attention the next time you offer your daily prayers. Are the needs mostly physical or spiritual?
- I'm all in favor of outreach ministries that provide food for the hungry, and housing for the homeless and health care for the ill. But caring for those needs, as important as they are, can never replace sharing the good news about Jesus with them. That's the greatest need of all.

One Christian leader wrote:

"We as individual Christians and collective churches need to recalibrate our sights on the target God has given us: spiritually lost people. If people matter to God, then they'd better matter to us, too. (Becoming a Contagious Christian by Bill Hybels).

The numbers of people and the needs of these people were massive! So much so that Jesus issued a plea:

*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. (Matthew 9:37b-38)*

That prayer request led Him to call His first disciples.

## **#2: BECAUSE THE DISCIPLES MATTER, JESUS CALLED THEM TO BE WITH HIM**

Verse 1:

*Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. (Matthew 10:1)*

The prayer request for workers in the harvest field was presented to all those who were following Jesus – a much larger group of disciples than the 12 identified here. Some in this larger group would be among the 70 sent out two-by-two. Others of them would be among the disciples who stopped following when the teachings of Jesus offended them.

Out of that larger group, Jesus chose the 12 men named in this passage. They were chosen from among the rest. Why them? We don't really know. We can speculate. But the truth is there was nothing spectacular about any of them. They were not leaders in society; rather they were incredibly flawed human beings. But despite that Jesus called them.

When He called them, it was not simply a call to "go" but was a call to "be with Him and then go." Don't miss that distinction!

Our ability to go flows out of the time we are with Him.

It is in the “with Him” moments that we learn His heart, and capture His vision, and receive His direction and power. “Going” without “being with” is a guaranteed path to failure.

What does “being with” look like? It:

- Includes our times of corporate worship (whether here or online), where we gather with other disciples in the community of faith for mutual support and accountability.
- Includes our times of private devotions where we read the Scriptures and meditate on them, pray and listen specifically for God's message for us individually.

It is in these times we grow deep in our faith and are fed spiritually by the Lord Himself. In our discipleship settings we often talk about those times as our “daily bread” and how we seek to receive fresh bread from God every day.

Do you remember how the children of Israel needed to go out every morning to gather the manna they needed for the day? Do you remember what happened if they tried to get by on yesterday's manna? They found it to be filled with maggots, and they learned the importance of daily dose of God's provision. So too with us. We cannot go and minister well on yesterday's manna, so each day Jesus calls us to be with Him.

## **APPLICATION**

So, let me wrap this up. Here's what we see in today's text:

- Because the crowds matter to Jesus, His compassion leads Him to call workers for the harvest field – people we would come to know as disciples. These disciples would be call for the specific purpose of helping the crowds who are aimlessly drifting find purpose and meaning in a personal relationship with Jesus.
- Because those disciples matter to Jesus, He calls them to be with Him, to be fed by His Word, to learn from His example, to catch the passion of His heart.

We all fit into one of those descriptive categories. Until we come to faith in Christ, we are part of the crowd. We might think we have our lives all together, but the truth is we are like sheep without a shepherd or four-year-old soccer players. We have not found our ultimate purpose.

As we come to faith and grow into that faith, we are called to be with Jesus so that we can join Him on His mission. Don't say you can't do it. Look what He did with those 12 disciples! He can work with you too.

Earlier this week I saw a Facebook post which has become my all-time favorite post. It brings a smile to my face, and hope to my heart, and best of all it fits perfectly in this sermon. The post read:

*When God calls you, He has already factored in your level of stupidity.*

I read that and thought "Thank You Jesus!" When God called me, He knew my flaws.

We are emerging from these past days of isolation with a renewed awareness of the spiritual needs of our world. The prayer of Jesus is no less important today than it was when Jesus was walking from town to town.

*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. (Matthew 9:37-38)*

Because people matter.

Amen.