Being on Mission
Matthew 9: 35 - 10:15
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Introduction and the Definition of Mission

Good evening everyone. Well, this evening we are in Matthew chapter 9, and starting here at verse 35 in the passage that Stephen read here a few moments ago. And it's a passage that speaks to us about mission, about being sent on mission, about participating together with God on mission.

And for the rest of this message, what I want to ask you to do is substitute every time I say the word mission. I want you to think about the last three weeks of the messages that we've talked about about the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity exists in perfect love and the Holy Trinity invites us into a relationship with God. And God's love is constantly being poured out into the world. And he's constantly offering an invitation that people would know him, that people would receive his love, that people would know his mercy. And we get to participate with this constant invitation that God has for the entire world. So shorthand for all of that is mission. So think about that as we talk about mission.

The Two Ditches: Campaign vs. Comatose

And when we think about the word mission in our own context, depending on the kind of church or environment that you've grown up in, it's easy for us to again use that word mission. It's easy for us to go and develop sort of a ditch-to-ditch mentality, where on one side we have what this passage sounds like which is the campaign version of mission where we get energized and we're sent and we go out and we get fired up and we tell everybody around us and we're knocking on doors and we're sharing on planes and we're going out into the public to constantly share God's love and his mercy.

And again, if we remember what mission is, it's something worth sharing. It's God's goodness. It's his mercy. It's his invitation. It's his joy that he wants people to enter. Why would we not want to share that with all people? It's easy for us though to think that that's all mission is and sort of go into that one ditch on this far side.

If you've ever done this though, if you've ever lived on this sort of campaign version of mission, if you've ever embraced it and done it, you know that doing this over a long period of time, however, is actually very very hard. It's high energy. It's high friction. It's hard to maintain a long-term commitment. It's easy to burn out. And there are very few people that are actually called and wired and built in a way to live in this campaign version of mission most of the time. Maybe someone here who to whom what I just described sounds absolutely awful, cringey, even something like, "Do we actually have to go there? I'm going to get uncomfortable. Is Jesse going to tell me to go out and knock on doors?" Maybe, maybe the spirit is calling you to do that. Are we Jehovah's Witnesses? No.

So, the reaction that often takes place in our lives as we settle into our lives and we realize that the campaign version of mission is hard is that we can accidentally move over into the other ditch on the road, which is what I want to call the comatose version of mission. That's the other side of the road. This is where we sort of just write it off or maybe we just want to give money to somebody who does the campaign version of mission and we fall into a pattern where mission is sort of this vague out there thing. Maybe God brings it into my life sometimes, but it's not really on the forefront of my mind. I'm just trying to survive and to live. And so, we don't think about the mission if we live in that other ditch.

The Mean of Virtue

Now, like many things in the Christian life, the real road that God calls us to live on is what Thomas Aquinas would call the mean of virtue, which is this life in between the two ditches. It's something that's sustainable. It's something where we can live into and have a commitment into for a long period of time. And it's where God calls most of us to live most of the time, which is to have a missional heart for the world around us to live outside of just our own needs and our own comfort zone, but one that is set, one that is patient, one that is rooted, and one that is filled with life.

Now, see if you can follow me on this tongue twister. “Some of us are called to live in the campaign version most of the time. Most of us are called to live in this middle version most of the time. Most of us are called to live in the campaign version some of the time. But none of us are called to live in the comatose version any of the time.” I don't know if I could do that again. For most of us, most of the time, God calls us to live in this mean of virtue. This virtue to live a sustainable, loving, outpouring life of love that God has for the world and to join him together with that.

Three Movements of Mission

Well, as we explore Matthew , we're going to look at a campaign version of mission, but we're also going to see in it that there are universal principles for all of mission that we can find that meet us both if we're in the campaign mode but also meet us where we are every single day that draw us into God's heart for the lost and they help us to focus our lives together and I want to look at it in three main movements which are the eyes of mission, having the eyes of mission, having the hands of mission, and then the pace of mission that God calls us into.

So let me pray for us and then we'll move here into the passage. *Lord open our hearts for your love. Let us first of all, receive the deep mercy and love that you have for us. Let that ground us in our lives. May we be so surrounded by your love and your grace that it overflows into our lives, into our relationships, into everyone that we meet, into the way we work, into the way we move in the world. Lord, let your love and your mercy guide us and enliven us as we walk with you. Would you open our eyes and our hearts to see what you have for us, Lord? Send us out from this place filled with your desire to see those who don't know you know you in your great and holy name we pray. Amen.*

The Eyes of Mission: Seeing with Spiritual Sight

So we are in Matthew chapter and starting here in verse 35. Jesus brings together the disciples and he sends them out on mission. And I want to start here in verse 35 and verse 36 gives us the foundation of the mission that God calls us to have in our lives which is to see the world with spiritual eyes. So this passage starts talking about the ministry of Jesus. How Jesus is moving and dynamic and he's going through the country and he's teaching and healing and people are being drawn to him. And then in verse 36 there sort of like it goes from this dynamic movement to this deep pause. And it says here in verse 36, when he saw the crowds he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. And that word compassion there isn't sort of like a "I feel bad for them" like you feel bad for a bunny or something. But that word in the Greek compassion is—feel bad for the bunnies in my yard cause I chase them out. Anyways, that word for compassion literally is translated “moved as into one's innards”. So moved into your gut … as Jesus had a gut punch feel as he looked out among the people. And the reason that he felt this way, so he didn't just see it and objectively observe that these people had a need to know God, but he deeply felt a real gut level compassion for all the people that were surrounding him. And the reason he felt that way was because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

Now again, what we can draw from this is that true mission, the kind of mission that is sustainable, that carries us through our lives, that doesn't just go in spurts where we're highly energized and then we give up. But the mission that carries us through life is a mission that is grounded in us seeing the world as Jesus sees the world around us. Now, in verse 36, it's interesting that Matthew includes this very obvious detail at the beginning of the verse; it says that Jesus saw the crowds. Now, Jesus was not visually impaired. Of course, he saw the crowds. Of course, it's obvious that Jesus saw the people around it. But so, why was it that Matthew brought this word in? Jesus saw the crowds. He was walking through the world and seeing everybody, of course. Well, I think it's to help us pause here and to take note and more specifically see that Jesus saw and reflected here with spiritual eyes.

Challenges to Spiritual Vision

And what Jesus sees again as he reflects spiritually is that they are sheep without a shepherd. Now, one of the challenges that we all have when it comes to mission, whether you're in this ditch or that ditch or wherever on the spectrum you are, is that sometimes we stop seeing the world as Jesus sees the world. If we're comatose, if we're in this far ditch here, we're not really seeing anyone. We're just sort of not reflecting on the states of other people's souls. We're just sort of living our lives. We're seeing the world through the lens of need or maybe even the lens of competition or maybe even the lens of tribalism. But if we're in this ditch over here, we're not seeing the world as God sees it. We're really not seeing spiritually at all.

Sometimes if we get too much into campaign mode, it's easy to not see as well. It's easy to sort of see people as numbers or projects or to see that somehow our mission is a constant reflection of our own spirituality where we go on mission to feel good about our own spirituality

or we only feel good about our relationship with God if we see results and things happening around us but if we're doing that we're not really seeing at that point either if we're always in campaign mode that's easy to think that way. And so the reason that, excuse me, Matthew uses this word compassion is he wants us to draw our attention to this idea that Jesus felt the need of the world deeply in his gut even and that he saw them again with spiritual eyes harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

Now Martin Lloyd Jones, he was a preacher in Wales in the 1960's, and he preached on this very verse and his point was simply this: that the diagnosis that Jesus saw for the world around him has not changed to this day, and that was in the 1960's. See if any of this sounds familiar to you. For all of our progress, all of our technology, all of our sophistication, men and women are still underneath it all, sheep without a shepherd, bewildered and wandering in the desert. And no politician, no philosopher, and if he were alive today, he might say, no influencer, no professor, no cultural movement can give rest to their souls that they so deeply long for. He said that there are many out there who want a shepherd but find none.

And I would add to that that there are many out there who want to shepherd people. They want to use people for their own means. They want to draw people into their own cultural movements and use people as part of their own economy that they're trying to create. But there are very few shepherds out there who truly and deeply care for the lost, who truly and deeply feel compassion the way Jesus felt this compassion to not see the world as a project or a set of numbers. To actually see the world for who they are in need with all sorts of shepherds clamoring for their attention and their hearts and their souls to see the world for who they are.

Seeing Souls, Not NPCs

So, first question for us this evening, when you look out on the world, what is it that you see? Do you see a bunch of NPCs, non-player characters for those who play video games? Sort of the people in the background. People just sort of go about their lives, ships passing in the night, people that you don't really notice, people that you don't really ascribe value to, people that you don't see the weight of their soul. Do you just see a bunch of NPCs? When you look out in the world, do you just see a bunch of people that you either agree with or disagree with? People who are in your tribe or not in your tribe? People that are opposed to you or with you? What is it that you see when you look out at the world?

I think the calling of the scriptures and the calling of Jesus is that we see the world with his eyes. That we see the world with compassion. And just an asterisk here, calling people sheep is not a compliment. Sheep are often stubborn, dumb, annoying animals to deal with. If you ever watch Clarkson's farm, it's hilarious to see him learning what it's like to deal with sheep. Sheep are stubborn. They're not easy to love a lot of the time. And yet Jesus looks upon them and feels compassion for them and the world around us. So I think there's a lot of people out there that are not easy to love, that are stubborn, that might be opposed to your views, but Christ would see them with compassion as people who need a shepherd. And he calls us to see the world in the same way. So living on mission, and I'm spending most of our time on this point, living on mission means we see the world with spiritual eyes. And I ask that you leave

here and pray for you this week as you drive and you interact that you would ask the Lord to give you eyes to see as he sees the world around you.

The Hands of Mission: Given Authority

So that's the eyes for mission. As we continue in the passage, we see that Jesus appoints the hands of mission and it's really encouraging to see who makes up the hands of mission. So again, we're here in chapter 10 . So Jesus sends them out and he says, "All authority I give to you." And he called to him his 12 disciples. And then for the first time here in Matthew, it actually names the 12 disciples. And says that Jesus gives them authority to cast out demons and to heal. And then he lists the names of those 12.

And the encouragement we have here is that the authority that they were given was given and not earned. The authority wasn't something that they conjured up. So in this list of the disciples that Jesus sends out, none were senators, none were captains of industry or captains of livestock. None were influential. In fact, John called Peter an unlearned and rough fellow. We mentioned last week that as part of this group of 12, you have Matthew the tax collector who was a collaborator with the Roman oppressors, the empire, and you have Simon the Zealot who was the anti-Roman zealot who was like the activist going against them. And yet the love and mercy of God draws them into the same group and sent out on the same mission.

In this group, you had fishermen, you had other people that were not the types of people that you would build a nonprofit board with. They were not the influencers in the world. They were not people that had major gravitas as they stepped into a room. They were not the type of people that you would put to lead a movement to change the world. And yet Christ chose to delegate his authority to them. They did not earn his authority. They didn't live up to it. They didn't study into it. They were given the authority by Christ himself.

Augustine and the Fishermen

St. Augustine, he reflected on this phenomena. He asked that same question as he was reading through it. He said, "Why did Jesus choose this group of fellows? Tax collector, Roman Zealot, fishermen. Why would Jesus choose these people?" And in his answer, he says, if Jesus had chosen an orator, the orator could say, "I was picked for my eloquence." If he had chosen a senator, he would say, "I was picked for my rank." If he had chosen an emperor, he could say, "I was chosen for my power." But fishermen—the fisherman can glory in nothing except in Christ alone. So Augustine says it this way: he says God didn't win fishermen by sending an orator. He won an emperor by sending fishermen. This is God's great joy that he uses the foolish things in the world to confound the wise. So he gives power to his people regardless of what they deserve or what they have earned.

Now I've seen this in my own life. I've had the privilege of living in places like Cambodia where the poorest and most uneducated people by the world standards have had some of the greatest impact in the world around them. I've seen it in this church. I've seen it in many settings where those you would least expect, those who get no fanfare, those who are least celebrated, just

simple people living in compassion for the world, desiring to show God's mercy to the world, have these deep eternal impacts on the world around them. Whether it's connecting with a neighbor or picking someone up and driving them somewhere or just being open to sharing your faith, oftentimes people will listen to you more than they'll listen to me because it's my job of course to fight for this team. People will assume of course I do it. But God uses the normal, the ordinary, those who are not set up on a pedestal to often achieve his goals.

People embracing the mean of virtue within their lives having an eternal impact. Now, for us, what this means is that we don't have to worry so much about our status or our learning or our gifts even. But we do need to focus on receiving what God has for us, his love, knowing his deep love for us, and then obeying him, trusting him, not forcing the results, but going out and doing what he asks us to do, and living in a way that shares his love and his mercy to the world. And that's what the disciples did in this passage, that he didn't force the outcomes. They just trusted and they lived. Each one of us here can be missional, embracing God's calling in your life just by being who you are and responding to God's goodness.

The Pace of Mission: Patient Ferment

Last point here. So, we have a mission that comes from God's deep love. It's poured out to the world continuously in and through worship at the table, in this church, and out into the world through us. It begins by us seeing the world as God sees the world. It continues by us acting by being God's regular hands and feet in the world who are obedient. And lastly, I just want to consider with you the pace of mission, especially as we look at the ancient church.

Now, there were times of great movements in the faith. If you look back through history, there are some amazing times to celebrate God pouring out his spirit in a special way on the world to draw people to himself. In fact, there are times that look like this campaign here where it's very specific and God is on the move, but even if you look at this campaign, it was for a very specific amount of time to a specific group of people that was to set up the rest of his campaigns and the rest of his mission for the world. In fact, if you look in here, Jesus says, "Go only to the sheep of Israel, the lost ones of Israel. Don't go to anybody else." So, this was a contained mission that Jesus had. And there were other missions that God has done throughout history. But most of the time, for most people throughout history, God works through a patient movement of his spirit in and through his patient and obedient people.

Now, there's a book that we've recommended here before, probably about four years ago, and it's entitled *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*. It's by a guy named Alan Krider, and he studied the early church. And in this first century, it's from the book of Acts down through the year about 300. The church had no buildings. They had no power. They had no platform. They were often illegal. They were often hunted. And yet, the church grew at roughly 40% a decade, which actually isn't that fast if you think in terms of our time. 40% a decade. But if you do that over 30 years, compound that out. 40% a decade over 300 years. That's 24,000x, 24,000 times they grew their original size over the course of time.

Strategy and Discipleship in the Early Church

And when you look back on history, we don't know everything that they said or they did, but we can sort of reconstruct how the early church lived by different letters that went back and forth and by treatises that were written, essays that were written by different church leaders. And there were lots of letters about baptism and fasting and living a holy life. There were treatises about what a church service should look like, but there were no treatises directed towards a campaign strategy by itself. Now, this doesn't say they didn't do it or we should never do it. Quite the opposite, I think they did live their faith out and they shared their faith all of the time.

But what Krider found was interesting, that the strategy of the early church wasn't necessarily campaigns, but it was patience and discipleship that they lived a life that was so different and so compelling to the world around them that it's why he calls it ferment, that it fermented outwards. In fact, they were so anti-seeker sensitive that they would have sort of the early service where they would sing and they would read from scriptures and hear somebody speak. And then when it came for communion, they would literally say, "Anybody that has not been baptized, you may now leave." And the first job of deacons—we've said this here before—the first job of the deacon in the church was to be a bouncer. Was to say, "You're not baptized. You have to leave." Now, this wasn't because they were mean. It was because they knew what it meant to take communion. And they knew what it meant to live a life together with God.

And somehow, somehow, it was in and through that that God grew the church from a small fledgling group to what it became in just 300 years to taking over an entire empire. God did that through that kind of church. A church that was patient. A church that was discipled. A church filled with regular people that heard the call of God to just be present and loving and to see the world with the eyes of Jesus Christ. To see their neighbors as those who need him, to have compassion on the world. This is how God worked and works through most of history. This mean of virtue draws us into a mission that is not pressuring, but it's not absent either. It's a mission that is filled with patience. It's rooted. It's fermenting God's mercy out into the world, and it's lived again by us as normal and obedient people.

Conclusion and Sending

Now, this is how we are to live on mission. Again, most of us, most of the time, if you're one of those some people who are called like the apostle Paul to live on this mission most of the time—let's talk. But for most of us, most of the time, this is how God calls us to live. To have spiritual eyes to see the world, to be obedient, regular hands of him, and to live into a patient, loving, expectant pace, walking with him in his love for the world.

So these words that we say at the end of our service, on many of our services, we say, "Go in peace to love and serve the world." At the end of our prayer for communion prayers, we'll say it together—send us out into the world. We are sent from here after receiving from his goodness, agents of his mercy and his love. Let's be a church that lives on this patient, fermenting mission together here in Denver. Amen.

Let me pray for us. *Lord, we thank you that your love and your mercy and your grace is always being poured out into the world. And we thank you that it is by your grace and your good pleasure that for whatever reason you would choose regular people like us to be the agents and the hands of that mission. Give us supernatural eyes to see by the power of your Holy Spirit the world around us with your compassion. Give us courage to be brave and to be obedient to you, to trust you for all things. And Lord, give us a sustainable, patient, long-term pace to be able to walk with you every day of our lives, seeking your good for the world around us. Let us be people that point in all ways to you and to your glory. So we bless you Lord with our lives. Be glorified now in the rest of this service. In your name we pray. Amen.*