

“The Andrew Challenge: From Compassion to Outreach”—Matthew 9:35-10:8

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take your Bible and meet me in Matthew 9...

We are pausing our sermon series through the first half of the Old Testament book of Exodus for the month of January so that we can explore what I am calling “The Andrew Challenge.” Last week we looked a couple scenes from the life of Andrew, one of Jesus’ disciples, and discovered that, despite his flaws and failures, he displayed a propensity to see value in things that God values. Specifically, we saw how he evidenced an ability to see the value of “individual people,” “insignificant gifts,” and “inconspicuous service” (to borrow the language of John MacArthur).¹ I argued last week that he valued these things because he valued Jesus and I asked a series of questions to help us see the relationship of these value judgments:

- Do We Value Jesus Enough to Bring Others to Him?
- Do We Value Jesus Enough to Withhold Nothing from Him?
- Do We Value Jesus Enough to Do Without the Spotlight?

And with this we launched into “The Andrew Challenge,” where I am challenging you all to make progress in your outreach, your willingness to offer all you are and have for the glory of God, and your willingness to pursue His glory by embracing obscurity. Outreach, offerings, and obscurity. These are the topics that will occupy our time, Lord willing, through the month of January. The first of those—outreach—will be our focus this week and next, though, as you’ll see, they’re all intertwined.

Do we value Jesus enough to bring others to Him? That question is easy enough to answer. If we are trying to bring other people to Jesus, then perhaps we do (at least to some degree). If we are not, then we certainly don’t. And if we don’t, it is almost certainly because we have forgotten how His love compelled Him to bring us to God. He had compassion on us. He saw us as lost and helpless, wandering aimlessly closer and closer to destruction. But He came to us. He made a way for us to be forgiven and made right with His Father through the cross and resurrection. He took our sin upon Himself and took its penalty to the grave. He valued us enough to save us, not because we have anything valuable to offer Him (that’s important!) but rather because He created us and loves us. That’s grace. We are valuable to God not because He needs us, but because He made us. He loves His creation and moves to redeem His creation.

The more you ponder this Gospel, the more you value Jesus. And the more you value Jesus, the more you will see the things that Jesus values and pursues and begin to value and pursue them for His glory. In fact, our calling in life is an extension of what Jesus values. He calls us to a life that seeks that which He values. And our text this morning is an illustration of this. It helps us to see that the mission of God’s people is the mission of God. He invites us to join Him in pursuing what He values. That’s the foundation of missions. Our text helps us to see how missions and outreach flow from the heart of God to the hearts of God’s people.

So let me set the stage. We’ve looked at this text many months ago, but it’s worth a refresher. Matthew has just relayed a series of stories that communicate the authority of Jesus. He first demonstrates Christ’s authority through His *teaching* (particularly in the Sermon on the Mount). He then shows that Jesus has authority over the *physical* realm (through various healings), over the *natural* world (through the calming of the storm), over the *supernatural* (through his casting out of demons), and even over the *unnatural* (seen in his forgiving of sin

and his power over death, which is quite unnatural from the Bible's point of view). And now, as we come to the end of chapter 9, Jesus is about to exert his authority over the twelve disciples by sending them out...

There is so much that we could see in this section, but what we will focus on today is an interesting progression that relates to the sending activity of God. In order to see this, we must start by reading the text. Let's pick things up in Matthew 9:35...focus your minds. The most important things I will say today I'm about to say as I read God's Word...

*“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.”³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.³⁷ Then he said to His disciples, ‘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.’ **10** 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 every affliction.² The names 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; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ And proclaim as you go, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.’ (Matthew 9:35-10:8)*

These verses (and the ones that follow) are tricky and frequently misunderstood. We have to remember that these verses concern a particular group of men, Jesus' closest twelve disciples. Therefore, much of what He says to them here, and throughout chapter 10, applied uniquely to them. So there are a couple of mistakes I want us to avoid today.

First, it would be a mistake for us to ignore the context and try to apply everything in this passage directly to us in an exact, one-to-one, sort of way. For example, I've seen people argue that the verses that come immediately after what we just read are meant to forbid contemporary missionaries from taking supplies or raising any sort of funds for their journey. “You just have to trust the Lord,” they argue. But that's ridiculous. What Jesus will say in verses 9 and following applied to that particular trip Jesus was sending those twelve disciples on. It doesn't apply in the same way to every trip that every missionary goes on. It didn't even apply to every trip Jesus sent the Twelve on. So folks that argue that these commands apply to every missionary God sends have overlooked the situational nature of this text. By trying to apply it universally to every situation, they are mishandling God's Word.ⁱⁱ We want to try to avoid that along the way.

But second, we also don't want to make the mistake at the opposite end of the spectrum. We don't want to see the situational nature of this text and then conclude that everything about this text only applies to these twelve men and, therefore, there is nothing in it for us, so we can just move on quickly. No. That would be a mistake as well. “*All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*”, Paul wrote (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Therefore, we need to take time to see the principles in this text that do apply to us.

So if along the way we need to avoid these two extremes and the errors they embody, how then shall we proceed? Well, today I want us to just notice how the text plays out and what it meant for the original audience and the twelve disciples in particular. To see this we will identify the progression we can observe in the text. Then we will circle back and ask the “so what?” question to see what we can learn about God and what relevance this story has for how we operate as Christians. The goal is to see the heart of God in this text because that will help us value Him more and, by extension, value what He values. To be sure, today we can only scratch the surface of these matters.

With that in mind, here is the first stage in the progression...

The Condition of the Lost Moves Jesus to Compassion

The root of verb translated here as “*he had compassion*” actually comes from a word that means “intestines” or “bowels.” That’s appropriate. You know how strong emotions affect you physically? That’s what’s happening in Jesus. One commentator put it this way: “Jesus was physically moved by a stomach-wrenching empathy for the plight of his flock. He was literally sickened...”ⁱⁱⁱ

Why was Jesus moved to compassion? Verse 36 tells us it was because when He saw the crowds He saw that they were a people “*harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*” Sheep don’t do well without a shepherd. They get lost. The quality of their life suffers. They don’t know where to turn for food. They are vulnerable to the elements and to predators. They wander directionless. In short, they’re vulnerable, helpless, and inevitably harassed. In fact, the English translations hide the extent of the metaphor a bit. The word usually translated “harassed,” originally meant “to flay” or “to skin.”^{iv} That fits with sheep imagery. That’s how helpless and at risk they are. That’s what Jesus sees when He looks at the crowds. “It is to our own hurt when we do not serve the Lord (Jer 2:13; Hos 7:1, 13; 13:9), and it hurts him because it hurts us.”^v

But here is the thing about shepherdless sheep: they don’t know that they are this vulnerable. And that is true of the crowds. They went along their business, day in and day out, by all appearances living the “normal” life, not feeling helpless and harassed at most moments, not aware of how vulnerable they had become. When Jesus looks at the lost world that is what He sees. I think that is so important for us to pick up on. If we had more time we could observe how shepherding imagery is used in the Old and New Testament of God, the Messiah, and even the leaders God appoints for his people. Suffice it to say, it is very potent imagery.

But then Jesus shifts the metaphor from sheep to harvesting. Harvesting imagery is very often used in the context of God’s judgment throughout the Bible. So taken together, those images of shepherdless sheep and harvesting create a sense of urgency. Lost sheep can’t cut it on their own. They inevitably perish. They need a shepherd to lead them. And when Jesus sees the crowd He sees a people whose leaders (under-shepherds) have failed them and who therefore are left harassed and helpless. Jesus understood what this meant. He understood what the stakes were for the lost world. That is why He came to the world in the first place. So when He sees the crowd around him, He is moved to this great compassion because of their condition.

But I want you to notice what Jesus’ compassion leads to... Look at verse 37 and 38: “*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.’*”

The Compassion of Jesus Compels Disciples to Petition

Jesus sees the condition of the lost. He feels compassion. So He tells His disciples to pray. And what are they to pray? That God would send workers into the harvest. That God would send people to those shepherdless sheep before they perish. Do you pray like that?

Do you think God answers that sort of prayer? Yeah! How do we know? Because Jesus has said that when we see Him, we see the Father. So when we see this compassion swelling up in Jesus, we know that the Father, the Lord of the Harvest, has the same compassion for the lost. He wants people to be gathered from the harvest field. We can bank on that. So He will answer that prayer. In fact, you and I are here because the Lord answered this prayer! Jesus called His disciples to pray for workers. The disciples prayed. The workers came. And over the course of many years the Gospel came to Tyler. If you are a Christian, it came to you. And why? Because God answers this prayer! You Christians here are proof positive that the Lord of the Harvest answers this prayer.

In fact, did you notice what happens immediately after Jesus tells His disciples to pray for more workers? He turns to twelve of the same folks He just told to pray and He calls, equips, and sets them aside to be part of the answer to their own prayers. The disciples become the very workers they have prayed for. Isn't that funny? The Lord says, "pray for more workers." His followers pray, "Lord, send more workers." God responds, "Great, I will. Go. I'm sending you." I love that. Look at 10:1—"[Jesus] *called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.*"

The Petition of Disciples Is Answered with Commission

Now, to be sure these twelve men^{vi} were commissioned for a special purpose, something that was unique to them. Matthew hints at this in verse 2, where for the first and only time in his book he calls these men "*apostles.*" Apostle just means "one who is sent." But it becomes a technical term for several New Testament writers to refer to specific men who personally had encountered Christ and had been set aside by Christ to basically lay the foundation for the Church and communicate authoritatively the Word of God without error. That calling is unique to them. We are not "apostles" in that technical sense. I don't believe in apostolic succession the way it is popularly conceived in the Catholic Church, for instance. God stills send people (the verb is *apostello*) and His people are still sent ones (*apostolos*). But "apostle" in this technical sense, which describes the Twelve here (spoiler alert: one of these guys doesn't quite cut it in the end) and men like Matthias and Paul (in Acts), is not something that we can relate to. It's a specific calling. None of us are called to be apostles in the same sense.

Nevertheless, He commissions these twelve disciples to be apostles. He gives them "*authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness*" (Matt. 10:1). In other words, the same authority that Jesus has been exercising in His preaching (cf. 7:28-29) and in His miracle working throughout the last several chapters, He delegates to these men so that they can do the same.

And then what does Jesus do? He sends them out. Look at verse 5 and following: "*These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay*" (10:5-8).

The Commission of God Sends Disciples on Mission

"Mission" or "missions" are terms that get thrown around a lot in churches. They can be a bit tricky to define. I'll spare you all the debate. I like, however, Chris Wright's definition of "mission":

"...our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation."^{vii}

I like that this is a God-centered definition. And I think the elements of that definition are what we see here in this text—God's people, being invited by God in the flesh, to participate in God's own mission (*missio dei*... "the Mission of God") to go after God's creation (in this case the shepherdless sheep) with redemptive intentions. And since it is God's mission, God initiates, empowers, directs, and blesses it (which the rest of chapter 10 bears out).^{viii}

The mission that Jesus sends them on involves specific activities. They were to announce to the people "the kingdom of heaven has come near" (10:7), which is the same "good news [literally, "gospel"] of the kingdom" that they had heard Jesus proclaim (9:35). And they were to carry out the same miracle-working ministry that Jesus had, which gave credence to their message.

But I think we can make one other point from this passage, a point that will play out in the rest of the chapter and the rest of the book. But I want to at least mention it here...

The Mission by God's Power Is Brought to Fruition

Remember these twelve men have been following Jesus for some time. They didn't just show up at this point of the story. They've been around. It is important, then, for us to see that Jesus is calling them to do the same things He had been doing among them. He is calling them to proclaim the same message He had been proclaiming among them. And the same authority/power that He had exercised and modeled in preaching and miracle working, He now gives them. In other words, God gives them the example they needed, the message they needed, the method they needed, the authority/power they needed, and everything else they needed to accomplish the task.

And because accomplishing the mission is done in the power of God, then there is nothing that can thwart its ultimate completion. It's going to get done. One way or another, it's going to get done because it is God that gets it done. It's His power, His authority, that is needed, not their skill, education, ingenuity, or resources. He will use them to accomplish His goals, but it will always be God's power that accomplishes them. Thus the ultimate outcome is sure. And God gets all the glory. Amen, Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Our condition moved Jesus to compassion...Jesus' compassion leads us to pray/petition the Lord for more workers...Those petitions are answered by God commissioning workers...Those commissioned workers are sent on mission...And God's mission is brought to fruition because of His power.

So What?

What difference does this biblical text make for us? After all, we are not these Apostles. So does this text have any relevance today? The answer is a resounding "YES!" And I think we can see it by working our way back through that list.

Has the condition of the lost changed? No. When you go into a public place and look out into the crowd you are almost always watching people who are "*harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*" Their condition has not changed.

But neither has the compassion of Jesus. So we ought to pray as He instructed His disciples here. Pray that God would raise up workers to send into the harvest to gather from among it the wheat, those people who will turn from their sins and trust in and follow Christ. Do we pray for that?

Let me insert a word of caution here...when you pray for this, learn from this text, and pray that God would raise up people from among you, not simply from outside of the church. So when you pray, you ought to pray knowing that we ourselves will be among those whom God commissions to be sent out on mission. How do we know that? Because at the end of Matthew Jesus commands His followers to make disciples of all nations. Are we among His followers? So, if you are a follower of Christ, your life will be characterized making disciples. Let me repeat that. If you are following Christ, your life will involve making disciples. That's where He will lead us.

That doesn't necessarily mean we will become foreign missionaries and find ourselves ministering in some remote place we have not even heard of today. But it will mean that God wants us to see the people He has placed around us like He does (shepherdless, lost, helpless, in danger), and feel for them what He feels for them (compassion), and He will send us among them with a message of "good news" that comes from Jesus himself. This Sending God we follow is going to send us...into our homes, into our work places, into our markets, into our schools...into the harvest.

Friends, the harvest is still plentiful, much more plentiful than the number of dedicated workers would suggest. Maybe this will help put things into perspective. When Jesus says make disciples of all “*nations*,” that word he uses for nations is the Greek word *ethne*, from which we get the English words for “ethnic” and “ethnicity.” Don’t think geo-political nation. The word simply means “people group.” Missiologists (i.e., people who study global missions movements, trends, and strategies) estimate that there are over eleven thousand people groups scattered across the world right now. Those same experts classify over six thousand of those people groups as “unreached” with the gospel. Six thousand!

You may wonder, “Well, what do they mean by ‘unreached’?” For a people group to be considered “unreached” it means that the particular people group contains Evangelical Christians that amount to less than 2% of the total population. “To live in an ‘unreached’ people group practically means that you have little to no access to the gospel, and you will likely be born, live, and die without ever hearing about how you can be saved from your sins through Christ.”^x That’s true of six thousand people groups around the world! More than half of the people groups in this world! Nearly two billion people will never hear the Gospel their whole life if someone doesn’t go to them!

So in light of what our text teaches us about Jesus, what do you think He feels when He looks at the crowd of two billion people who have never even heard His name or never have heard that He died on the cross to save sinners (not to mention those billions who have heard, but have rejected Christ as Savior)? Don’t you think those numbers move Him to compassion? These aren’t just statistics. These are real people. Lost people. Helpless and harassed people. Soon to perish people. I guarantee you He has compassion on them! The question is—Do we?

God wants us to pray for more workers. He wants us to give for His mission. . . But He also wants us to go. God is going to send us into the harvest field too. It’s going to happen. If we are following Christ, that is where He’s going to lead. He has commissioned us (collectively and individually) to make disciples among the nations, so our life is going involve missions. It’s that simple. It’s not a question of *if* God wants to send us to make disciples. . . it’s a question of *where* He wants to send us to make disciples?

If God wants you to go to some foreign country to do this, I’m convinced He will make it known to you if you seek Him. It’s not like He wants it to be a secret. But wherever He places you, even if that is exactly where you are (in your school, in your home, in your workplace, among your friends and colleagues), I can say with confidence that He wants you to seek first the kingdom there. Wherever He places you, make disciples there. Live like Jesus there. Teach people about Jesus there. Explain to people what Jesus has done for them on the cross there. Tell them how their sins separate them from God, but they can have their sins removed if they would turn from their sins and their selves and turn to Jesus. If they trust in Jesus and His work, they will be saved. Tell them what Christ has done for you. Tell them the grace He has shown a sinner like you. Tell them about the salvation that God offers, which can only be found through faith in Christ. You can do that anywhere. Wherever God has placed you, you can do that. You don’t have to wonder if God is calling you to do that. He is! That’s your calling in this life. Mystery solved! So go to them and proclaim “the good news of the kingdom.”

So who are you bringing to Jesus these days? (That’s what we are thinking about in this Andrew Challenge). If the answer is no one, then consider it a grace that God has you here today to remember what your life should be about. The Gospel came to you because it was heading to someone else so don’t clog up the pipe. Ask yourself, who can you reach out to? Who might God use you to bring to Jesus?

You can answer that by thinking about the church that God has put you in (this one) and the neighborhood and vocation that God has put you in. Both of those things we are going to explore in the next couple of weeks. We need you to join with this church to help us reach out to the lost world (i.e., to “go” with your church). And we need you to take seriously the sovereignty hand of God that has placed you around certain people in your

home, neighborhood, workplace, and various other circles for the purpose of reaching out to them with the Gospel (i.e., you “go” where God has placed you).

So join us next week as we consider a bit more about what a Great Commission church should look like and how you can be a part of our participation in God’s mission. But being a Great Commission church starts with seeing the heart of God and seeing people the way He sees people. That’s the point to catch today.

Let’s pray...

ⁱ John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2002), 61-76.

ⁱⁱ Another example of this would concern the issue of whether or not God gives the same authority to perform miracles to his followers today.

ⁱⁱⁱ S. K. Weber, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers), 130.

^{iv} BDAG (2000), 933.

^v Keener, C. S. (1997). *Vol. 1: Matthew*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Mt 9:36). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. (as cited by Logos Bible Software).

^{vi} The number 12 is significant as you might imagine. Just as God chose 12 brothers to lay the foundation for his people in the Old Testament, now he appoints 12 men through whom he will lay the foundation of his people, the Church. Spoiler alert: I know Judas throws a wrench in all this later, but there’s an Acts 1 for that. The point we need to see here is immediately after he tells them to pray for workers, he commissions the 12 to be workers.

^{vii} Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 22-23.

^{viii} For these twelve men, in this instance, they are sent on a very specific mission. They are only to go to Israelites. That may strike us as odd. Why only Israel? Well, the text doesn’t say. But I think there are at least two reasons—one theological and one practical (isn’t it nice that those two go together?). The theological reason has to do with the covenant that God had made with Abraham and his descendants, the people of Israel. So for the sake of his covenant and his great love for his people, Israel, God sends out these apostles to the Jews first (this “to the Jew first” theme is picked up elsewhere in the New Testament, e.g. Romans). But there is also a practical reason for going to the Israelites first. We learn in the New Testament (especially in Luke) that many of the godly people of Israel were waiting for the Messiah to come. If you have ever heard of Simeon and Anna, those are good examples. So yes, the church will spread to the Gentiles and yes it will include representatives from every people group in time, but what better place to start than with the people who knew and embraced the Old Testament and, in many cases, were actually waiting for the Messiah to come? So Jesus sends them first to their own people. J. Ligon Duncan makes a similar point in a sermon called “Go and Preach,” which can be found here:

http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/matthew/matthew_vol_3-4/21bMatt.htm.

^{ix} David Platt, *Follow Me* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012), 194.