

XLII. Matthew in Biblical Perspective
A Royal Manifesto of the Kingdom from the King
“Saving Faith, Caring Faith, and Praying Faith”

Matthew 9:18–38

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Matthew 9:18–35 says [18] *While he (Christ) was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” [19] And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. [20] And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, [21] for she said to herself, “If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.” [22] Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well. [23] And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, [24] he said, “Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. [25] But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. [26] And the report of this went through all that district.*

[27] And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, “Have mercy on us, Son of David.” [28] When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to him, “Yes, Lord.” [29] Then he touched their eyes, saying, “According to your faith be it done to you.” [30] And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, “See that no one knows about it.” [31] But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.

[32] As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him. [33] And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, “Never was anything like this seen in Israel.” [34] But the Pharisees said, “He casts out demons by the prince of demons.”

[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.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you.

We will walk through this lengthy text pretty rapidly and now I’ll warn you that I’ll give you an opportunity for a very specific commitment at the conclusion of our study at the end of Matthew 9. Are you fully convinced that we are in need of a Gospel harvest in our city, in our nation? I hope and pray you are, because we are. Here is a second question. What if I were to tell you that I know the one thing missing for the harvest to be brought? I didn’t come up with it, God told me. What if I told you that I know the one thing necessary to obtain the one thing needed for a Gospel harvest in our city, in our nation, would you consider out of your conviction that we need a Gospel harvest that you would do the one thing that would secure the one needed thing for that Gospel harvest? At the end of this study I’m going to give you a chance to do it, at least initially.

Let's start our study and go back to Matthew 9 where we're coming to a conclusion or a benchmark in the life and ministry of Jesus. Matthew, with a flurry of miracles, is bringing us to the conclusion of the initial year of the public life and ministry of Jesus. He had a three public ministry after His baptism. We are coming to the conclusion of that initial year with Matthew recording a flurry of selected miracles and bringing us to a Christ articulated summation of that year. Here is the big picture of Matthew. The Gospel of Matthew is an evangelistic biography declaring that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Christ of Scripture, who was sent by the Father, verified by the Holy Spirit, and now proclaimed as King and Savior to all the nations until He returns in glory. That is what is on Matthew's heart. He wants to affirm that to the Jewish people initially and then through them to all the nations of the world and that this Jesus is to be exalted until He comes again.

So Matthew does this in five books and we're in the third book. We are coming to the conclusion of the third book which ends up with the sending out of the twelve Apostles and giving us a definition of what it means to be a missionary and ambassador for Jesus Christ in Matthew 10. Before we get there Matthew 9:35 says [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.* It wasn't that everyone was healed but He was healing every kind of affliction. He made it clear that no healing was beyond His power and no adversity is beyond His sovereign light and mercy. He has manifested that throughout the region of Galilee, from village to village. Then when those signs, wonders, and miracles are done He then begins to teach and preach.

We have seen that in both Matthew 8 and 9 where Jesus has informed us where He came the Old Covenant has become obsolete. The old wineskin has been done away with, not because it was irrelevant or inappropriate but because He fulfilled it. He is the Temple, the Priesthood, the Sacrifice, the Prophet. It has become obsolete because He has fulfilled. It's not the Old Covenant anticipation, promises, prophecies, types, shadows and symbols but now it's the New Covenant where the Savior has come. He has saved His people from their sins. Get up on the mountain and preach the Good News of the Kingdom to all the world. Also the old covenant wineskin has been done away with. Not only do we have new wine but we have a new wineskin. We are not a national, ceremonial people but we are a people in a new wineskin, the church of Jesus Christ which is flexible, on the move, to every nation, every culture, every people and every place throughout the whole world.

In our last study, Jesus said "I've done away with the Old Covenant fasting." It was a fasting of mourning. You don't fast in mourning, any longer in the New Covenant, but you do fast though. Jesus said "When I'm taken away, you will fast." The prophecy is that we will fast but it's not the Old Covenant fasting of mourning. It's the New Covenant fasting of humbling ourselves, of affirmation that God's grace has come to us and we have tasted and there is nothing we're more hungry for than more of Him. We also do it in anticipation. God what yet are You going to do to me, in me and through me? What are You going to do to us as a church, in us and through us as a church? Lord, we're willing to walk away from meals to close with You in prayer and the Word through fasting. There is the New Covenant fasting that is to be here until the Lord comes again.

Now Matthew moves to the conclusion of His first year of ministry and he does so with four selected miracles. These four miracles give us four facts. Each miracle deserves its own sermon but I won't have time in this study. The first miracle is the resurrection of a ruler's dead daughter. This ruler is very likely a ruler of the synagogue at Capernaum. His daughter has died and he comes to Jesus. In reverence he kneels and by faith declares "Lord, my daughter has died." We are days into this because he has left the funeral event to come to Jesus, back where his daughter's corpse is. They have already hired the flutists and mourners to come and do their part. He leaves that funeral event, goes to kneel before the Lord and says "Lord, all You have to do is touch her and she'll live." Jesus follows him and they are on their way to the funeral event where her corpse is laying.

On the way a woman who has been afflicted with an issue of blood, hemorrhaging for twelve years and Matthew knows because of this she would have been unclean and untouchable. She would probably be a marked out woman. This woman reaches out to touch Jesus and says "If I can just touch His garment He is able to make me well." Jesus realizing her presence declares to her "This one who has come by faith, you are well." So embedded in the first miracle/event is a second miracle but then Jesus moves onto the place where the girl's corpse is found. When He sees the professional mourners and flutists that are there He tells them to leave. It's interesting that they were paid to cry but when Jesus came to raise the girl they laughed. Jesus then wanted them to go outside for He said she was sleeping. That doesn't mean they had a false death because this clearly shows there is a period of time that had passed by. This means that Jesus is applying the word that Paul will later use to talk about the death of a believer. He uses the euphemism that they have fallen asleep and He says that she merely sleeps. Then He touches her, the unclean corpse and she rises up.

That leads to a third miracle where two blind men receive their sight. These two blind men come because they believe that Jesus is able to heal them. Jesus says "Do you believe?" They say "Yes, Lord we believe, not that You have to and not that our faith heals us but You are able to heal us." So they are set free from their sightlessness and then they go about declaring the One who has made them now with the ability to see.

That leads to a fourth miracle of a demon possessed or oppressed man who is a mute or is speechless and Jesus both delivers him from the demonic presence and his loosened tongue is now employed, his speechlessness is turned to speech, in the praise of Christ, telling all who has set him free. Those are the four miracles.

What are the four facts that we learn from those miracles that Matthew uses to punctuate the conclusion of Jesus' initial year of ministry? Fact number one is that these miracles do what every other miracle is designed to do and that is that they affirm the deity of Christ. Only God can deal with this or those whom God gives the power to deal with it as He will give to His Apostles which we will see in our next study on Matthew, but only God can raise the dead or overcome these things with immediate miraculous power. We're not talking about providential or special providence or the use of God ordained means such as medicine. This is Jesus – His hand, His word, His touch – and they are set free, so we are affirming the deity of Christ again with signs, wonders, and miracles.

The second fact is that we are verifying again that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. He is doing the works of the Messiah. When John the Baptist is about to die he

says “I have said that this Jesus is the Lamb of God, the Messiah” and he sends word to Jesus saying “Before I die, are You the Messiah?” Jesus sends word back to Him, “If you do not believe the words that I have said, look at the works that I have done.” He has fulfilled the Messianic prophecy of coming and healing every kind of affliction and disease so this is a continued verification of Jesus as the Messiah.

The third fact is unmistakably faith is being highlighted in these miracles so the clear focus is upon personal faith. In contrast Jesus is not dependent upon our faith to do miracles. The disciples questioned whether He loved them much less faith and Jesus stilled the waves and wind. The Gadarene demoniacs were not believers but Jesus set them free and they became believers. So the miracle working power of Christ is not dependent upon faith but Christ does highlight and affirm the presence of faith and He does so for a reason. Here all four miracles clearly highlight that the person had a personal faith in Christ. The point is not to elevate faith. The point is where and to whom was their faith focused. You are able, you touch, you speak. It was the resting place of their faith. It was in Christ. Now Christ is showing us that while He can do miracles at any time by His sovereign grace and mercy, a relationship with Him personally is by faith and He is using the physical to affirm the spiritual which brings me to fact four.

He is doing all kinds of miracles but why are these four selected? I think they are physical selections to affirm the Spiritual promises of deliverance that come when you are joined to Christ by faith. The fourth fact of these miracles is the physical affirmation of Spiritual promises. He takes a dead girl and raises her. When you have come to Christ by faith you have been raised from a spiritual boneyard to life. You have been born again. He is able to raise the physical dead declaring that He is able to raise the spiritually dead so they might believe in Him.

Secondly, He touches the one who is dead so what is forbidden is overridden because Christ is not contaminated by the unclean. He swallows up the uncleanness of death and declares victory over it. Then there is the unclean woman with the continual hemorrhage and He swallows up her uncleanness. Here is the Savior who will hemorrhage blood from the cross so that we will be set free from all our uncleanness. He picks the blind men. We who are blind for once we were blind and He is able to give us the eyes of faith so that we might believe in Him and trust in Him. He is able to free us from the demonic influence of Satan through the snares and schemes of Satan just as He did the demon oppressed man and to loosen our tongues that we might speak of the majesty and glory of Christ. I believe these are very selected miracles of what Christ is able to do that we might be joined to Him by faith and be delivered from our sins and its effects, to be delivered into His presence. That’s why these miracles bring this to a summation.

As Jesus is about to leave Galilee He is going to make a statement. It is an astounding statement and that will possibly change your life and mine this day, I’m praying. Let’s pick up where we left off in the text. Matthew 9:36–38 says [36] *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, (then He gives a word picture) like sheep without a shepherd.* (That’s what He did when He saw the crowds, but then He turns to His disciples and changes illustration and metaphors) [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.***”

In this place where sin is doing its destructive work, we are told when He saw the people, the brokenness of sin, its power to destroy, the physical, spiritual, emotional wages of sin, death, destruction that Jesus felt compassion literally. The word compassion comes from this concept – anguish in the bowels. When I say compassion you think heart. If you’re thinking Biblically you’re thinking gut. Jesus felt compassion. He had a pain in His gut. He had anguish in His bowels when He looked upon them. There is a phrase we use since the Clintonian years and I know what we mean by it but I hope and pray you never use it and that is “I feel your pain.” No, you don’t. Here is what you’re trying to say, “I feel pain because of your pain.”

That’s like the old parent statement before, after or during the use of the rod or in my case the belt when I was a child. I’m so glad my dad never said to me “This hurts me more than it hurts you.” That does not make your child feel better. By the way, that is not true at least not at that moment. You may not believe me because you really do think it hurts you more than them but I probably would have been stupid enough to say to my dad if he had said that to me “Okay Dad let’s trade places. I don’t want you to hurt worse than me so give me the belt and let me use it.” I don’t think I would have ever said that but you’re not feeling one’s pain. I know what we’re trying to say with the best possible motive but you want to feel pain in their pain – your pain for their pain.

Jesus felt compassion. They were like sheep without a shepherd. See them and pray for the wolves. See them, they don’t even know where to get to the nourishment and the real grass. They are on their way to their death. They are helpless and harassed. Then He turns to His disciples and switches metaphors. Jesus says “See this field. The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Do you want to do something for these helpless people? I will do something. I will secure the harvest, now you start praying for laborers. Don’t just pray but pray earnestly. Join your prayer with fasting.” Pray earnestly for the Lord of the harvest, who has promised a plentiful harvest, to send laborers through you to the harvest.

So He gives to us in His summation statement what I have called the harvest roadmap. One is the heart of the Lord of the harvest, as He looks upon the sheep who are prey for the wolves and the hirelings. He sees them as helpless and harassed. He feels anguish in His gut for them. He feels compassion for them. Secondly, he then assures us that the Lord of the harvest has secured a harvest. There is a plentiful harvest from among this field. Then he tells us the need is for the Lord of the harvest to provide laborers and that’s the third thing. What is the need? The need is not a harvest because that is assured. The need is laborers for the harvest. So what should I do? Fourthly in this roadmap, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest that He would send laborers into the harvest.

Before I give you the takeaway I want to share with you two questions that penetrated deep in my soul as I was going through this. I’m going to share with you what I preached to myself because I think it may be applicable to you for sure because it certainly was for me. The first question is this. What farmer who owns a field, would send his son to secure the harvest, would not have already secured the laborers for the harvest? Here is another question. If I believe that we need a Gospel harvest and if Jesus says to get the Gospel harvest which has already been assured and secured and you need

laborers and the way to get laborers for the harvest is to go to the Lord of the harvest and pray earnestly for the laborers, then why am I not praying earnestly for laborers? That's what kind of fell upon me like an avalanche. Why am I not prioritizing consistently prayer to the Lord of the harvest for laborers to be sent into the harvest that He has already secured?

That's what leads me to my single takeaway for you. Remember the harvest roadmap – He felt compassion, He has promised a harvest, He told us the need is laborers and the command He has given to us is to pray earnestly for them. So here is the takeaway. Even though we know the harvest is assured and secured and laborers are needed for the harvest, why are we not praying for the laborers? All you have to do is go back to the Bible. Jesus ascends. He sends His people to pray in the Upper Room. What happens after they pray? The harvest is what happens. 3,000 come to Him and then every day after that more are being added. The 3,000 are just counting the men so that's 3,000 households. Then 5,000 more, then Antioch, then they go to Asia Minor and they are turning the world upside down. Then they go to North Africa. There in the 3rd, 4th and 5th century is the greatest Christian library that has ever existed. Great Christian preachers like Augustine would come from there. It is amazing what the Lord did in North Africa. Then it went up into Europe and the light began to flicker. Then the Lord brought the harvest to the Reformation, then to the Great Awakening. Now the Lord has a harvest going in Africa, Asia and South America.

We have seen the harvest move from time to time to time to place to place to place to nation to nation to nation and every time it went laborers went before it. So we have seen this not only declared in God's Word but we've seen it in history – Bible history, church history. Most of us think there are not enough people coming to Christ. Last year 47 percent of the new members that came to Briarwood Presbyterian Church either from covenant children, youth or adults were by profession of faith. I praise the Lord for that but here's what I'm thinking. There are 4,300 members so is it beyond the possibility that we might be laborers and each one of us might win one or two people to Christ? Then what would we do with 8,000 people? I know there are a lot of people we are reaching through our various ministries that don't end up here and praise the Lord for that, but what would happen if we personally were engaged in personal evangelism and laboring for Christ?

You might be thinking "Pastor, that harvest that is on your heart, where does that happen?" It is through laborers. Where do the laborers come from? We start praying earnestly. Prayer is not all we do but it's the first earnest, persistent, prioritized thing that we do. We need to be engaged in it. My daughter has a responsibility in a real estate company in Alaska and I said to her "What's the biggest need you have with this responsibility that you carry? I would guess it's your listings." She said "Oh no Dad, there will always be people wanting to sell and people wanting to buy. That's not my problem. My problem is that I need realtors. If I get realtors, there will be a market but I need realtors." There is a harvest. Jesus is saving sinners and He is saving them through laborers. The laborers are coming where churches and Christians mean business to earnestly seek Him for the laborers. The Lord of the harvest sends laborers for the harvest through a people who are earnestly praying for it.

So why am I not praying for it? This is the avalanche that fell on me. I believe I'm not praying for harvest laborers with intensity, priority and persistence because I

don't have the heart of the Lord of the harvest. When I see sinners out here and what they do to our society, my tendency is to probably get mad at them. Could Jesus not have looked out over the Galilean region and had every right to say "Do you know how many prophets I sent you? Did you know I gave you the law of God? Did you know I did this and this and this and this is what you did so you are getting what you deserve." He didn't do that even though He had the right to but He looked, knowing they were embracing sin, He knows their responsibility and there is a Day of righteous judgment but when He saw them He felt an anguish in His soul.

It will even go all the way to Jerusalem three years later when Jesus says [37] "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*" (Matthew 23:37, Luke 19:41–44) Then Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. He felt it in His bowels. It gave Him anguish to see these people helpless and harassed. They are helpless, spiritually dead. They are harassed, broken and embracing sin. That means they are prey for the wolves. That means they are harassed by religious charlatans who are looking at them in their brokenness and giving them false religious promises. There are political charlatans, political hucksters, religious charlatans, religious hucksters, cultural charlatans and cultural hucksters. People are in a broken world and wanting meaning, dignity and hope. They keep going after sin and the charlatans are there to harass, manipulate and use them as they are blinded in the depth of their depravity sin – helpless and harassed.

You and I know the Helper for the helpless. It's Christ the Savior and the Holy Spirit who brings them to life. You and I know not a charlatan and a huckster but the Good Shepherd who will lay down His life that the sheep will have life. Therefore if we saw these people helpless and harassed with the heart, eyes and bowels of Jesus then I would pray. There are two big steps when you grow in grace. The first step is when God's grace takes hold of you, you begin to confess what you used to cover up which is sin. You begin to hate what you used to love which is sin. Then comes this great step of God's grace when God gives you the ability to know that you've been saved by grace so when you see other people, you know that used to be you, helpless and harassed. Then you feel compassion, the same anguish that somebody felt for you and they prayed and the Lord of the harvest sent a laborer to win you to Christ.

My second question in light of this takeaway is if the Owner of the field, the Living God, sends His Son as the Lord of the harvest to secure a harvest, don't you know you need laborers? When I was going through East Carolina University, Mr. Hardy would plant his tobacco, wheat and corn and he would come about three weeks later to all us young college guys and say "Want a job?" He didn't wonder if he would have any laborers. So if He is the Lord of the harvest and He has secured it, why has He put laborers in the context of the means of us praying? Why doesn't He secure that? Why does He say pray to Me for it?

As I was working through this I think there are three reasons why He does it. The first one is when the harvest comes we will know that both the harvest and the laborers were a gift of God's grace, as we prayed and the One who secured the harvest then sent the laborers. This brings me to the second reason. That means that the Lord will get all the glory in the harvest. It won't be the preacher who gets the glory or our evangelism training classes won't get the glory or the evangelism events we came up with. I'm all

for events, preachers and training programs for evangelism but what the Lord has said to me in this text and what He is saying to all of us is that what we are praying for is laborers so that when He gives the laborers to secure the harvest that I have already assured, then He receives all the glory and we will give it to Him. The third reason is this. When you start praying for laborers in the harvest, you start laboring in the harvest. Some of us will sow. Some of us will cultivate. Some of us will reap. When you start praying for laborers, the Lord knows that it's at that moment that usually you and I begin to become harvest laborers in and for the Lord.

I want to be very practical here. I want to ask you to pray about something. Some of you have been coming to me and saying "I'm grateful to know that fasting is still in the New Covenant and I want to get engaged." Maybe today you have said that you want a harvest for the glory of the Lord here in Birmingham therefore you know we need laborers so you want to earnestly pray. I want to give you a way to get started. This isn't the final resting place in this or the final point. I don't know where it will lead to but starting next Sunday we want to open up our chapel three times every week – Sunday night at 7:30pm, Monday morning at 6:30am, and Wednesday at noon. By no means do I want to bind your conscience for this is between you and the Lord but would you start in this matter of praying and fasting, fasting and praying for this one hour? One your way read some Bible verses, sing some songs and when you get there we'll move right into praying. It isn't a service it's just a prayer time. When you're done you're done and you move on out but for four weeks we'll provide that in our chapel.

You may say "Lord, I'm going to put my toe in the water on this fasting. I'm going to give up a supper on Sunday night and after that evening service I'll go to the chapel and pray." We will pray for a number of things but we'll pray specifically for laborers for the harvest. Or you may give up a Monday morning breakfast and start with your fast right there. Many of us have not been engaged in fasting at all. Perhaps you want to start by giving up your lunch on Wednesday to come and pray for laborers of the harvest. I want to give you that opportunity for the next four weeks.

Join me in prayer. "Lord, would You have me for the sake of the harvest, embrace the opportunity of learning this means of grace through fasting, prayer and the Word, with a focus upon laborers for the harvest?" This is between you and the Lord. We're not going to be taking any names. Some of you may decide to do this a different way but this is a way we can encourage one another. We will start next Sunday and we'll get the information out, but right now what is the Lord leading you to do? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we have a city, a state and a nation that is filled with the helpless and the harassed, even as we were until the Helper came as our Savior and the Holy Spirit, the other Helper. We were harassed until we came to know the Great Shepherd because You sent a laborer to us, so we want to pray for laborers knowing that will make us a laborer but we want to pray for laborers. God we need a Gospel harvest. We need You and that means we need the heart and bowels of Christ. Grant it O God. Please help us say 'no' to the arrogance of self-righteousness and to see people helpless and harassed for we were there. Please help us to say 'no' to the self-indulgence of personal satisfaction with no concern for the lost. Please God, do that for me, do that in me and through me, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.