



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 9:18-38

Topic

Jesus encourages us to pray that laborers would be sent out into the spiritual harvest

Title

"How to Induce Laborers"

Introduction

When James Cameron shot *Avatar* in native 3D it changed the way Hollywood made movies. Since then almost every major blockbuster has been produced with a 3D viewing option.

A South Korean company wants to bring 4D movies into North American theaters, giving audiences more than 1,000 sensations as they watch the big screen.

Outside the theater we don't need glasses to experience the real world in 3D and 4D on our own. If we are Christians, we can see even more if we are looking through the eyes of Jesus.

I want to suggest that Jesus looked at the world not in 3D or 4D **but in 12D.**

Here is what I mean: Looking out upon humanity Jesus saw it as a field ripe for harvest. Then, in the very next chapter, He chooses 12 of His disciples - 12D - to be special apostles to go out into the field as laborers.

Our text gives us the opportunity to talk about how Jesus sees people as He looks upon them. We are also going to talk about how people see Jesus.

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 What Do You See When You Look To Jesus?, and #2 What Does Jesus See When He Looks Upon You?

#1 What Do You See When You Look To Jesus?

(v18-34)

In these verses a series of people look to Jesus to solve what they consider to be their deepest needs:

- One man's twelve year old daughter had died.
- A woman had been suffering for twelve years with an incurable malady.
- Two men were blind.
- Another man was a demon-possessed mute.

Individually, their faith was all over the map. For example, the two blind men will hail Jesus as the Messiah, while the woman approaches Him somewhat superstitiously.

The demon-possessed mute had no faith, really, of his own, but is brought to Jesus by those who did have some measure of faith.

All of them understood their plight and looked to Jesus as their last, best resort.

Apart from having running water and air conditioning, our modern world is not so different than the world of Jesus. Daughters (and sons) die; women (and men) suffer from maladies; there are blind men (and women), as well as those both demon oppressed and demon possessed.

Let's look at the cast of characters Jesus encountered and draw some parallels.

Mat 9:18 While He spoke these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped Him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her and she will live."

Mat 9:19 So Jesus arose and followed him, and so did His disciples.

"Ruler" means that he was an official in the local synagogue. He was a highly respected Jew.

Jesus was at a feast at Matthew's house attended by tax collectors and sinners. None of them set foot in the local synagogue. They couldn't set foot in it even if they had wanted to because their careers and conduct rendered them ceremonially unclean.

How interesting that the ruler must set foot in Matthew's house in order to plead with Jesus. His religious rituals and the religious officials were of no possible help to him. His need drove him from religion to a relationship with The Lord.

Since by definition religion is something you do, in your own strength, to try to please God, it ultimately fails its practitioners. We need God to help us - not the other way around.

Mat 9:20 And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment.

Mat 9:21 For she said to herself, "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well."

No use speculating about this "flow of blood." Whatever it was, it rendered her ceremonially unclean. For at least twelve years she could not worship with other Jews and, in fact, had to stay away from people.

She had a superstitious attitude. It's no wonder when you read about some of the suggested 'cures' for her malady.

- In the Jewish Talmud one cure was to carry ostrich eggs.
- Another was to carry barley corn that was obtained from the dung of a white donkey.

You laugh - but how many weird 'cures' have folks suggested to you over the years? I can't even give you an example because it will offend somebody who swears by it!

Mat 9:22 But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, "Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well." And the woman was made well from that hour.

Think of the incredible grace of The Lord. This woman approached Him all wrong. Not just in the Jewish sense of being unclean and such. She approached Him with superstition - thinking His garment was somehow juiced with power.

He met her at her need and healed her despite her errors. Jesus was careful to clarify that it wasn't the garment that healed her, but rather her faith in God - confused though it was.

Today it's not the hem of His garment, but maybe the Shroud of Turin. Or the Holy Grail. Or the spear that pierced Jesus' side. Or some other supposedly powerful relic that people make pilgrimages to in order to find healing. Or the place where the Virgin Mary is supposed to have appeared.

It's my understanding that the altar in every Catholic Church has a relic - something a saint has worn or touched, or even a fragment of bone from the saint. Say what you will, it's superstition.

Mat 9:23 When Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd wailing,

While I'm sure funeral customs varied in the first century even as they do today, every funeral had "flute players" striking their discordant notes, and lots of "wailing." You could even hire professional wailing women.

Hey, it's no weirder than some of our funeral practices.

Mat 9:24 He said to them, "Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping." And they ridiculed Him.

By "sleeping" Jesus meant she was definitely dead but not permanently dead. She was dead but would momentarily be raised by Him from death.

"They ridiculed Him." Maybe if Jesus had gotten there on time. Maybe if He hadn't stopped to heal the woman with the issue of blood, He could have healed the little girl. But with her death, all hope was gone.

Mat 9:25 But when the crowd was put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose.

Mat 9:26 And the report of this went out into all that land.

In His three and one-half year ministry, Jesus raised three people from the dead - this little girl, the widow's son at Nain, and His friend, Lazarus.

I don't want to minimize the miracle of raising the dead, but it was not widespread even with Jesus on the earth.

For one thing, all those whom Jesus raised would die again - and that's gotta be traumatic, to die twice.

We are literally surrounded by, and overwhelmed by, death. It seems an indiscriminate enemy, killing young and old alike, from all walks of life.

Apart from the blessed hope of the rapture, everyone you see or ever will see is going to die.

It is in the presence of death that the question, What do you see when you look to Jesus?, takes on its most serious meaning.

If you are a Christian you see hope knowing your loved one is absent from their body but present, in Heaven, with The Lord, and that one day you will be reunited with him or her.

Mat 9:27 When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!"

Mat 9:28 And when He had come into 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."

Mat 9:29 Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you."

Mat 9:30 And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, "See that no one knows it."

Mat 9:31 But when they had departed, they spread the news about Him in all that country.

"Son of David" was a title for the Messiah. It's been noted that these blind men saw more than most people when it came to Jesus.

For His part, The Lord waited, letting these guys follow Him back to Matthew's house, before engaging in a dialog with them. It reminds us of the patience of faith. They believed The Lord would show them mercy and they waited upon Him until He did.

Mercy can sometimes be severe. We need patience to wait and see all that God intends to accomplish in and through us.

There is all manner of speculation as to why The Lord wanted these two to keep quiet. The point the text makes is that they disobeyed Him. While we can sympathize, it doesn't excuse their disobedience.

You can do a right thing in the wrong way, or at the wrong time. Timing is important in your walk and in your witness. Listen to The Lord and do what He asks, when and how He asks.

Mat 9:32 As they went out, behold, they brought to Him a man, mute and demon-possessed.

Mat 9:33 And when the demon was cast out, the mute spoke. And the multitudes marveled, saying, "It was never seen like this in Israel!"

The Gospels are careful to distinguish between disease and demon possession, and between diseases that have what we would deem natural causes and those supernaturally caused by the devil.

This man's muteness seemed to be connected with his demon possession. Jesus dealt with the root of the problem and the symptoms were alleviated.

People in need often want only to deal with symptoms. The real root is usually spiritual. Heal them spiritually and everything else will fall into place.

For example often, in marriage counseling, a couple will cite, let's say, communication, as their big issue. Usually the real issue is selfishness and the need for one or both of them to repent of sin. Until they do, no amount of communication tips are going to heal their marriage.

Mat 9:34 But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons."

You gotta say something. I remember my dad, right after I got saved, saying that if you read the Bible too much you'd go crazy. It made no sense but it kept him from thinking any further about the Bible or the God of the Bible.

Running water... air-conditioning... I'd add sliced bread and the iPhone. Apart from these, the world is the same as it was when Jesus walked upon it. We might beat a few medical maladies here and there, but we are all suffering and dying.

It's the same in another very important way. Jesus is still here in the lives of His followers.

As we walk through life, we ought to do it believing that at any given moment, someone we are encountering is in need - in great need - of Jesus. We ought to meet them where they are at and let God touch them through us.

#2 What Does Jesus See When He Looks Upon You?

(v35-38)

It's common for both believers and nonbelievers to wonder what God is thinking about them, or even if He thinks about them at all. It's tough to walk by faith anytime but especially in those times when Heaven seems silent and God a spectator rather than a participant.

In times like those you need to remember a passage like these next few verses. It establishes exactly how God looks upon you at all times.

Mat 9:35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

Jesus was God in human flesh. What He went about doing is what God delights to do. He revealed God as a healer and a helper.

Yes, there is plenty of sickness and disease among us, but He is not to be blamed for it. He offers the cure - salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. And though for reasons we may never fathom we might suffer now, we will be raised or raptured to a perfect body in a perfect environment where there are no more tears unless they are tears of joy.

Mat 9:36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.

The people did have shepherds. They had the Pharisees and the scribes and the priests. But these were all wrong in their teaching about God. They distorted the character of God. In their self-righteousness they portrayed God as angry and judgmental and distant. Their teachings heaped burdens upon the people and they, the so-called shepherds, refused to lift a finger to help them.

Having a bad shepherd, therefore, was equivalent to not having one at all.

"Moved with compassion" is a word coined by the writers of the Bible because there was not a strong enough word to describe the overwhelming sense of compassion Jesus felt for the whole of humanity He came to save. Every part of Him - spiritually, emotionally, and physically - was affected as He looked out upon people and desired to respond to their deepest needs; and to do so throughout their entire lives - not just in a moment of help or healing.

Let me expand on that for just a moment. It's not uncommon for a person to cry out to God for help in a crisis. They want God to alleviate the crisis and return them to their 'normal' life.

God wants to turn them to Himself and give them eternal life. He wants to begin in them a good work that He will go on accomplishing every day of their life. He wants to give their life purpose and meaning. He wants to make them like Jesus.

Often the worst thing He could do is simply alleviate their suffering. If He did, they'd miss all the rest He has planned for them, past the few decades we are here on earth and into eternity.

Jesus is the Great Shepherd and sees everyone as potentially part of His flock. He wants all men everywhere to be able to recite and claim Psalm twenty-three.

Mat 9:37 Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

Mat 9:38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

We sometimes ask people if they see things as a glass half full or half empty. **Jesus saw the world as a glass overflowing.** He saw the human race in terms of a "plentiful" harvest of souls waiting to be reaped.

Let's continue to think big when it comes to what God wants to do and what He can do in our own corner of the world.

A harvest requires laborers or the fruit will go to waste. A spiritual harvest requires that The Lord "send out laborers." And Jesus connected The Lord sending out laborers to the prayers of His followers.

In the very next chapter Jesus will choose the twelve from out of the larger group of disciples following Him. He does it after pulling an all-nighter in prayer. He modeled for us what He taught us.

Concerning prayer: Do we believe too little in the power of prayer because we see so few results? Or do we see so few results because we pray so little?

It's a question each of us must answer for ourselves, but I will say this. As a group, as a church, we need to pray more.

Jesus' prayer was motivated by His compassion. He looked upon people and saw their greatest need - to hear the voice of the Great Shepherd, to come in to His flock, to find rest for their weary souls.

I can't help but wonder if we might lack compassion because the needs of the people we look out upon are masked by our culture and its comforts?

For example when you travel to the third world and see how billions of people live, it's not hard to be moved with compassion and want to do something to help them. They live pretty much just like people lived in the first century - pretty much like the people in this chapter.

In our own corner of the world, the comforts of living tend to mask the real needs people have to be forgiven their sins and receive eternal life. It's as if they don't understand how wretched, poor, and naked they are. When some crisis does come upon them, there are so many resources apart from faith in God that they ignore His efforts to reveal Himself to them in their suffering.

In fact, often times folks who are used to comfort blame God for their suffering - as if they deserve to be left alone by Him to perish in their sins.

I don't think we lack compassion in the sense we are calloused or uncaring. I think our compassion gets dulled by the creature comforts of our culture. As Christians we can fall in to thinking that the people around us are not really all that needy, when spiritually they are miserable, poor, wretched, naked and blind.

Jesus specifically instructed us to pray for laborers to be sent out into the Lord's harvest.

We can do that, can't we?

Let's do it - both personally and publicly - and see who among us gets sent.

The glass is overflowing.

