

Kingdom Prayer

Matthew 9:35-38

Introduction

Experience vs. Punditry: In many ways we are a nation led by **pundits** and **celebrities**. Even our politicians are frequently chosen by popularity rather than expertise (e.g., CDC vs. politicians/facebook regarding coronavirus). I love when sports pundits (e.g., basketball, MMA, etc.) give all the reasons why an athlete should just try x, y, or z. Then an athlete says, “nah, not really.” We all love to be an “armchair quarterback” but God does want discipleship theorists or pundits. He wants **disciples**. To accomplish the mission of God we have “get in the game,” to see and experience and feel the problem of lostness. The theoretical won’t do.

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. 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.”¹

If we are going to witness a movement of God (in our lives and community) then we need to see people as Jesus sees them. We align our vision to God’s through heartfelt prayer.

1. The Presence of the Kingdom (v. 35)

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.

Already and Not Yet: Remember, his disciples didn’t fast because the “groom” was there (i.e., at the wedding). Eventually the time will come when he will leave (*a la* deployment). The point is this, when Jesus comes as king, the kingdom comes with him (e.g., Robin Hood living by the precepts of and allegiance to King Richard even in his absence).

- From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17)
- And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people (Matt 4:23)
- Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10)

¹ ³⁵ Καὶ περιῆγεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὰς πόλεις πάσας καὶ τὰς κώμας διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ θεραπεύων πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν. ³⁶ Ἴδὼν δὲ τοὺς ὄχλους ἐσπλαγχνίσθη περὶ αὐτῶν, ὅτι ἦσαν ἐσκυλμένοι καὶ ἐρριμμένοι ὡσεὶ πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα. ³⁷ τότε λέγει τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ, Ὁ μὲν θερισμὸς πολὺς, οἱ δὲ ἐργάται ὀλίγοι· ³⁸ δεήθητε οὖν τοῦ κυρίου τοῦ θερισμοῦ ὅπως ἐκβάλῃ ἐργάτας εἰς τὸν θερισμὸν αὐτοῦ.

- But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matt 6:33)

Bookends: This section of Matthew (e.g., start of his ministry, Sermon on the Mount, and miracles) is bookended by virtually the same sentence. In that time he saw *it all* (lit. every city and village).

What's So Good About the Gospel?: He was proclaiming gospel (i.e., good news) of the kingdom. What is good about the “good news,” it’s the truth of the kingdom of God. It’s the truth that the “king” has come to save us. And what is the kingdom of God? It is the place where God reigns as king. In Jesus the kingdom is here. The king makes the kingdom. Wherever the king is, the kingdom comes. The kingdom is wherever the king reigns. The kingdom exists because Jesus is the King. To proclaim the good news of the kingdom is to announce the beauty of the reign of Jesus, it is to proclaim the power of King Jesus.

- Jesus comes **teaching** that he is the promised king.
- He demonstrates his **power** and **authority** as king (e.g., diseases, nature, sin, death).
- All of the sudden this place where sin reigned, Jesus arrives and banishes it. He is light in the darkness. Disease and affliction is everywhere, until he shows up and then he heals every disease and every affliction.
- When Jesus shows up it changes everything (e.g., grandparents enters the room, the whole mood changes).

Word and Deed: He sets the priorities and purposes of the kingdom. Jesus has two components to his ministry: **word** and **deed**. He has a teaching and proclamation side of the ministry and a healing side of the ministry. If we are to walk the path of Jesus, then we should demonstrate the kingdom of God in both word and deed.

- The message takes priority (e.g., teaching... and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom) because it is the foundational announcement of the reign of God *but* the message can never be separated from method.
 - “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:14-17).
- It’s not either/or it’s both/and. We are called to preach and demonstrate the good news of the kingdom of God.
 - As followers of Jesus we should take his method seriously. We must proclaim the reign and rule of Jesus passionately and clearly, that there is only one name that saves — Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords. But, we must also tangibly demonstrate the impact of the reign of Jesus in the real world. In some small way, our church can be a demonstration of the kingdom reign of Jesus by the way we care for people (i.e., “on earth as it is in heaven”).

King Jesus: For Jesus to be king means that he rules and reigns over our lives. He has control and power to direct our actions.

- It is sad and frustrating when the church becomes a place that doesn't look like it is under the rule and reign of Jesus (e.g., "Jesus is the Senior Pastor"). Churches should strive to live under the rule and reign of Christ and be marked by grace, joy, forgiveness, kindness, etc.
- "The church today must remember that unlike every other institution and organization on this earth, it will transcend this world... The church is a foretaste of heaven. It is to model an unearthly way of life... that may seem quite strange to the lost" (Strachan).
- Are we an alternative community or just trying to do "worldly" things with a godly spin with more or less quality (e.g., Church of the Glades, "Victorious Secret," Billie Eilish song covers, etc.). We're not gonna out entertain people compared to Hollywood. We have to give them something that they can't get elsewhere (i.e., gospel community, purpose, etc.).

2. The Compassion of the King (v. 36)

³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus Sees: When he saw the crowds I can't stress enough that Jesus sees your problems. He understands your situation. He is not too busy or distracted to notice your concerns. He understands your fears, worries, and anxieties. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminded us that God invites us to bring our requests to him. He is good and that he cares for us. Jesus uses two illustrations to make his point: birds and flowers. If God cares for birds, how much more will he care for you. If God cares for flowers, how much more will he care for you. Why does he uses two illustrations? Is he being redundant? No! Anxiety dies hard and some of us need to hear this twice! Human beings are the pinnacle of creation. Human beings are made in the image of God. The lowest human being is still more valuable than the most magnificent animal. When was the last time you saw a bird grocery shopping or meal planning or farming? Yet God has made a way for them to eat. Do you think he loves the birds more than you? When was the last time you saw a flower putting on makeup or buying fresh clothes from the mall? Yet the flower is adorned in beauty. Do you think God loves the flowers more than you?

Compassion: He had compassion for them Jesus was always sensitive to the plight of others. On another occasion, Jesus observed a widow about to bury her only son. Seeing her pain and tears, his heart was moved to compassion (e.g., Luke 7:11-16). He approached the funeral procession and resurrected the young man and gave him back to his mother.

- The type of compassion (e.g., σπλαγχνίζομαι) Jesus exhibits is deep (hence "passion" in compassion). The sense here is that he is moved, he feels it, it has an emotional force. We know that Jesus is a high priest that "sympathize(s) with our weakness" (Heb 4:15). Have you ever hurt with someone else (e.g., Tyler Fago, Dale and Melissa)?

- God knows us and cares about us. The Psalmist tells us that he knows every part of us, he knit us together in the womb (Ps 139). He also keeps track of every tear we cry (Ps 56). He doesn't ignore our concerns.
- **What prompted Jesus to have compassion?**

a. Size crowds The problem was significant. There wasn't one or two hurting people but *everyone everywhere* (not less than the diseased and demon-possessed but more, i.e., sin).

- We have a big problem in our city. With 1.6 million people in Philadelphia (6th largest city in America) and more than 6 million people in the Philly metro region, we have hundreds of thousands of people within just a few miles of us. Yet tonight, there are thousands of people who are homeless in our city. More than 25% of our neighbors live in poverty (37% of children under 18).
- The spiritual problem is worse. Despite churches in storefronts and on every corner, 25% of people say they don't belong to any faith and probably only 10% (generous estimate) would have what we would consider a healthy, vibrant understanding of the gospel and discipleship (e.g., evangelical).

b. Suffering harassed and helpless Politicians, developers, preachers, etc. use and abuse our community. People are **harrassed** (e.g., bullied, oppressed, etc.). It seems a day doesn't go by that I don't hear a story of a developer conning residents out of housing, a politicians "misappropriating" funds, a preacher living a lavish lifestyle while his flock goes home to beans and rice (though there's nothing wrong with beans and rice). I read recently of a state politician who stole \$500,000 from their nonprofit to fund fancy clothing, expensive vacations, and real estate deals. Imagine what \$500,000 could do for children in our city? We've seen the abuses of the Catholic Church, cults and false religions are prominent in our communities. They are also **helpless**, unable to rescue themselves (e.g., dead in our trespasses and sins). Our city has tried everything. No political party has come up with the solution. We've dumped money into education to no avail. People pursue pleasure, leisure, vocational success, and no self-effort provides the joy they seek. Every pleasure apart from God leaves them unsatisfied. Despite being told that everything we need is "inside of us" and we can follow "our truth," the demonstrable evidence is that we need help from *outside of us*, we need a **Savior**.

c. Separation like sheep without a shepherd The problem is they are following all sorts of false shepherds but, what they really need, is the true and faithful shepherd. They have no connection to the true shepherd.

- This is the story of Israel as well. ¹ The word of the LORD came to me [Ezekiel]: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³ You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. ⁴ The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. ⁵ So they were scattered, because there

was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; ⁶ they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them (Ezek 34:1-6).

- We live in a **disconnected age**. We have more surface level connections but our deepest needs for community are left unmet. The Israelites are described as injured, scattered, and lost. Why? Because they did not have their shepherd. No matter how much success you have, how many friends you have, **you were made by God and for God** and without him you will be lost. We are distracted, giving only partial attention to our neighbors and ourselves. The result is increasing levels of despair, loneliness, fear, and anxiety.

Jesus Our Shepherd: Jesus, the good shepherd, pursues his lost sheep. This is one of the themes of Matthew. Jesus will shepherd his people (cf. Matt 2:6, Micah 5:1; 2 Sam 5:2).

- ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice... ²² I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³ And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd (Ezek 34:15-16, 22-23).
 - How can David be the one shepherd over God's people if David is dead and gone by the time Ezekiel prophecies this word from the Lord? The son of David, the greater David, the true and better shepherd is here and his name is Jesus.
 - What is the need in our community? They need to know their shepherd, the perfect shepherd who will lead, feed, and protect them.

Risk-Taking Discipleship: If we are going to pursue the radical call of Jesus, "the kind of risk-taking discipleship that Scripture calls," it won't happen until we really believe that Jesus is the answer and start to "see the lost as Jesus sees them" (Platt).

3. The Command to Pray (vv. 37-38)

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."

Problem: The people are harassed and helpless, they are lost. They are missing out on the kingdom of God and a relationship with the king.

Potential: There is a huge harvest of joyous kingdom living that awaits these lost sheep. The absence of this harvest is not a lack of crops. There is an **abundant harvest**. The problem is too few laborers. Jesus is on a mission to seek and to save the lost, to redeem a people to himself. And Jesus wants to use us to reach these lost (i.e., ambassadors). **If we are going to**

witness a movement of God (in our lives and community) then we need to see people as Jesus sees them. But the only way we'll be able to align our vision to God's is through prayer. If I'm going to see people as Jesus sees them and respond with compassion then I must **pray with urgency**.

Call to Prayer: Think about it, Jesus finds this problem that moves him to compassion. He knows there is a great harvest that awaits and he tells us to **pray** (?!). To pray! Think about how strange this seems. "It is strange that the farm hands should be told to beg the owner of the farm to send out more workers into his harvest. Surely Jesus doesn't mean to imply that God doesn't know there is a shortage of reapers! And surely he doesn't mean that God doesn't care whether the harvest comes in! Why, then, are the farm hands told to beg the farmer to get more help?" (Piper).

- (1) "God has willed that his miraculous work of harvesting be preceded by prayer. He loves to bless the world [and] he loves to bless the world in answer to prayer" (Piper).
- (2) God wants his people to know and feel the need by aligning their hearts to his. He wants us to have the same compassion for the lost as he does. And he does this transformation in our hearts through prayer.

Jermiah Lanphier: More than 160 years ago, America was agitated and uneasy. Early religious awakenings had faded. People were disillusioned by spiritual things. Civil War was on the horizon and a great financial panic had swept the comfort of wealth away. Financial institutions failed and industries were bankrupted. Factories shut down and unemployment reached record numbers. It was there, in 1857, as hunger and desperation stared New York City in the face, a quiet but passionated businessman named **Jeremiah Lanphier** went to New York City as a missionary. Burdened by the need but with no idea where to begin, he invited anyone who would listen to join him for prayer on Wednesdays once a week from noon to 1 o'clock. The goal was simply to give people the opportunity to stop and call upon God amid the difficulties of life. If someone could come for five minutes or the whole matter, it didn't matter. So, at noon on September 23, 1857, the door opened and Lanphier took a seat awaiting for others to join. Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed and he was alone. Twenty, twenty-five, and finally thirty minutes came and went before he heard a few steps. One person appeared, then two. Eventually six people showed up to pray. And so they prayed. The following Wednesday, forty people showed up to pray. They then moved prayer from weekly to daily. Within six months, 10,000 New York businessmen were meeting **daily** to pray. It is estimated, that within two years, a million people came to faith in Christ in the United States. It was the greatest revival in New York City's history. There was no fanaticism or hysteria or hype, simply an incredible movement of prayer.

Pray is the Precursor: When I read this passage and hear the command of Christ, it makes me think the sign that God is going to bring in the harvest here at **Redemption Heights** will be a movement of prayer among us. If, in response to this message, to this command of Christ, there is no new movement to pray, then I will not be encouraged to expect 2020 to be the year of harvest. I will continue to study and preach the word, share the gospel, and pastor in the strength of God and hope that after another year of humbling and purifying me, God might

answer my prayer. But if, in his kindness, he gives us compassion and a heart of prayer, then I will begin to count the days until the harvest begins.

- There is a great need in our city of people without faith in Christ who are like sheep without a shepherd. Whether they realize or not, no matter how much money and confidence they do or do not have, they need Jesus. We must see this lostness and be moved to deep compassion knowing that with God it is possible that many come to him.

One Command: And Jesus gave us **one command** in this passage – **pray**. So I am calling each of us to commit to **pray daily** from now until Easter that God would send out laborers and save the lost. Will you commit to urgent, desperate, compassionate prayer?

- If you will commit, by God's grace, to pray each day until Easter would you join me up front during this time of invitation to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest.