

Matthew 9:35-10:4
The Call of the King to Pray

Before the sermon this morning
I want to show a one-minute video clip from Lord of the Rings.
There's no violence in the clip
But it is a clip about preparing for battle
If you don't want your really young kids to watch it
It might be a good opportunity to take them to another room
To start on their activity sheets

Having looked at Daniel chapters 1-7
We will now be returning to the gospel of Matthew in the morning services until October
And over the next 4 weeks
I will be preaching a series on Matthew chapter 10
That I have titled: The Call of the King
If you would like to download an outline or a copy of the talk
You can do so at the website
Please keep your bibles open to Matthew 9
As I will be referring to the passage during the talk.

Let's watch the video clip now

That clip I showed you is from the final battle in the Lord of the Rings trilogy
The battle of the black gate at the entrance to Mordor
Where the host of the west - an army of men
Take on the orcs of the evil Sauron
And it's a crucial moment
Because the enemy is on the backfoot
Frodo the Hobbit is carrying the ring to destroy Sauron's power once and for all
But the army of men must hold out to give Frodo the chance to deal the final blow
Against their enemy

And you can see the men are terrified by the opposition that awaits them
And then Aragorn, the King of Gondor
Sensing the fear of his men, comes riding in
He calls the men to stand firm
He calls them not to lose their courage in their important task ahead
The Call of the King is exactly what they need

Here in Matthew's gospel
Jesus is about to send his twelve disciples on a mission throughout Israel
And like Aragorn's men, the disciples will face serious opposition
As we heard in the bible reading
And what the disciples need more than anything else
Is the call of their King Jesus
They need to cling to His words as they step out on His mission

We like the disciples, also need the Call of the King
For Jesus has also called us to go on his mission in a hostile world
And there is much at stake in this mission

The eternal lives of men, women and children
We need His words as much as ever
Over this next four weeks as we look at chapter 10 of Matthew's gospel
We'll be looking at the Call of the King

The Call of the King to pray
The Call of the King to proclaim
The Call of the King to persevere

Let me pray for us.

Today we are going to focus on **chapter 9 verse 35 to chapter 10 verse 4.**

Jesus uses three images to help us understand
Kingdom, Sheep and Harvest and we're going to unpack each of these as we go.

Firstly we're going to look at the King's Kingdom

[Verse 35](#)

[³⁵ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.](#)

It's clear right from the outset of Matthew's gospel
That Matthew is telling his predominantly Jewish readers that Jesus is King

[Verse Chapter 1 verse 1](#)

[This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David,](#)

The Messiah, or Christ, is the title of God's anointed King

He is in the royal line of King David

In chapter 2

We see the Magi come from a distant land to worship Jesus as God's King

With gifts fit for a King

In chapter 4, Jesus begins his public ministry in Galilee

And we see a verse almost identical to the one we see in chapter 9

[²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.](#)

[Jesus the King is advancing His Kingdom.](#)

And as we read Matthew's gospel

Matthew has been establishing Jesus' credentials as God's King.

Jesus heals the sick

He calms storms

He drives out demons from people

He teaches with authority

He even raises the dead

Jesus is God's King

And the King's Kingdom is breaking into this world throughout Matthew's gospel

And in Chapter 10

The King is now sending out his disciples to advance His Kingdom.
Not just in Galilee but right throughout Israel.
And by the end of Matthew's gospel
Jesus commands future generations of disciples
To make more disciples in all the nations of the world
Why? Because the King cares about His Kingdom.
And the King wants His followers to care about His kingdom
If you love the King
You will long for His kingdom to come

It's so easy for our gaze to be fixed on the minutiae of daily living.

Study

Work

Paying the bills

Reducing the mortgage

Servicing the car

Shopping, Cooking, Cleaning

None of these things are wrong in and of themselves

But Jesus is calling us to more than this

To live for Jesus is more than this

In the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6

Why do you think Jesus taught his disciples to pray

"Your kingdom come"

Before "Give us today our daily bread"

Jesus is telling us to lift our gaze about the earthly horizon

And to see the glory of God's Kingdom.

God's Kingdom takes priority

Paying off my mortgage will be meaningless one day

Compared to the awesome return of Jesus

And the glory of His kingdom.

In verse 36 we see the King's compassion

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

Compassion in New Testament Greek is literally gut-wrenching

Moved to your very bowels

And we see numerous times in the gospels,

What drives Jesus to respond to needs of those around him

Is this gut-wrenching compassion

In Matthew 14

Before Jesus feeds the five thousand

He had *compassion* on the large crowd and healed their sick

When Jesus encounters two blind men crying out to him in Matthew 20

The crowd's response is to rebuke these men who mean nothing to them

But it is Jesus' *compassion* that drives him to respond to their need and heal them.

You see this King

Is not driven by an insatiable thirst for power
Power that uses and abuses people for selfish gain.
This is a King who responds with tender *compassion* for those in need.

I'm sure for many watching today
That is one of the things that drew you to Jesus
A compassion that you have never seen from anyone else
Someone who is there for you when everyone else fails
Someone who doesn't condemn or reject you
Someone who is willing to pay the ultimate price for your greatest need.

Jesus' compassion in verse 36 tells us what he thinks is our greatest need.
[v.36 Because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd](#)

Jesus uses a rather unflattering image to describe what people are like
Sheep without a Shepherd
Sheep without a Shepherd are lost
Directionless
Prone to wander aimlessly looking for something
Prone to fall into danger
Vulnerable to predators

Sheep without a shepherd
Is how Old Testament writers like Ezekiel described the people of Israel
Neglected by their leaders
Brutally exploited by them
Rather than being cared for as God's precious flock
In the end, the sheep are dangerously lost
Desperate for direction and leadership

And the bible is clear that sheep who are lost
Are lost in sin.

Isaiah 53 verse 6
[Says we all like sheep have gone astray](#)
[Each of us has turned to our own way.](#)
We are sheep who have been sinned against by others
And we are sheep who have sinned against God and others.

These words of Jesus have been an incredible help to me in assessing people's great need
Harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.
These words have taught me to be more understanding of people
Because all of us have been harassed by the sin of others
And all of us, without Jesus, are helpless to our own sin against others

When I see the fierce anger of the husband who bullies his wife and children
Because he was bullied by his parents.
He is a sheep without a shepherd
When I see the desperate woman piling toilet paper into her trolley
Otherwise she will see herself as a terrible mother
She is a sheep without a shepherd

When I see the Instagram influencer
who needs to photoshop every imperfection from her photos
She is a sheep without a shepherd.
When I see people self-medicating to escape from guilt and shame
They are sheep without a shepherd

Now don't get me wrong.
I'm not saying that there's no need for accountability
Or for psychological help
Or appropriate medication
But ultimately, sin underlies all our problems

That is us isn't it?
Harassed and helpless
Not just during lockdown
But all the time.
Without Jesus
We are Sheep without a Shepherd
Lost in our own sin and the sin of others
Our great need is not to win at life
Our great need is not for a strong leader who knows how to run a vaccination program
Our great need is for a Shepherd who can deal with our sin.

In Matthew 18
Jesus tells a parable to describe what kind of Shepherd He is
For every sheep lost in sin
Jesus is willing to pursue them until He finds them.
Ridiculously leaving behind 99
Because he is not willing to lose even 1
That's the kind of crazy, compassionate, Shepherd you and I need.

And that is why our Shepherd walked the path of the cross
Where the sin of the lost sheep was laid on the Shepherd.
Who paid the ultimate price.

When we know the Shepherd
We can know real forgiveness for our guilt
When we know the Shepherd
We can enjoy real peace with God
And not be weighed down by our shame
When we know the Shepherd
We can bask in security of God our Father's love
And not the shallow reward of other people's approval.

Jesus our compassionate King is our Good Shepherd

Jesus mixes his metaphors again in the next verse
This time from Lost sheep to a Ripe harvest.

Verse 37

Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Instead of talking about people as sheep
Jesus now talks about people as ripe for the picking
A harvest of people who are ready to respond to His gospel message
Most of the time I struggle to believe this verse
When I look at Christianity in Australia
It seems that there is not much fruit for the picking
Our churches are shutting
And there is increasing hostility to the message of Jesus
Yet God reminds me again that he is Lord of the harvest
And I have little faith
I thought for sure COVID would stop the gospel in its tracks
I thought it would be very hard for anyone to follow Jesus if they couldn't meet a Christian
And yet recently I heard a testimony of someone here in our church
Coming to faith in Jesus last year
Simply by reading the Bible
And watching Youtube videos
Long before he walked through the doors of a church and met a Christian
The harvest is plentiful

In recent years, the fastest growing church in the world is in Iran
We ourselves have seen some of this harvest in our Iranian congregation

This from a Gospel Coalition article written in April this year.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 established a hard-line Islamic regime. Over the next two decades, Christians faced increasing opposition and persecution: all missionaries were kicked out, evangelism was outlawed, Bibles in Persian were banned and soon became scarce, and several pastors were killed. The church came under tremendous pressure, and many feared it would soon wither away and die. But the exact opposite has happened. In the last 20 years, more Iranians have become Christians than in the previous 13 centuries—since Islam came to Iran. In 1979, there were an estimated 500 Christians from a Muslim background in Iran.

Today, there are hundreds of thousands—some estimate more than 1 million. According to the research organization Operation World, Iran has the fastest-growing evangelical movement in the world. The second-fastest-growing church is in Afghanistan—where Afghans are being reached in large part by Iranians.

Friends, the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

Which leads us to Call of the King to pray

Verse 38

³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

If the harvest is ripe what is needed is workers
People who will go and share the gospel message with others
Workers who will disciple others
by teaching them to follow Jesus wholeheartedly in all of life

Note here that Jesus could have commanded his disciples
To pray for God himself to do the work
Ask the Lord of the harvest to reap the harvest himself
No he says, ask *God to raise workers*
Who will then reap the harvest.
Of course, God can do the work of drawing people to Jesus as we have heard
But God normally works through *His means*
And His means are the men and women He has gifted and empowered by His Spirit
Men and women who will lead others to Jesus through sharing the message of the gospel.

So our first response to the need of the harvest must be to pray for God to raise workers.

A few months ago Emma noticed some signs of burnout in my life
I spoke to Neil about it
And Neil kindly told me that I should take 4 weeks leave
And thanks to our staff team I was able to take that leave

One of the mental pictures I developed in my head about my ministry
Was all the needs of people
Pressing in on me like water on a dam wall
And me standing at the wall of a dam with leaks continually appearing in the dam wall
And me desperately trying to plug all those leaks
COVID has made it harder
Because it seems like there is more need than ever,
less freedom to see people to plug the leaks,
and less energy on my part to plug the leaks.

During my leave, I was walking with a friend one afternoon, and he said this to me
You take your job too seriously.

It took me a while to understand what he was saying.
He wasn't saying that the work of Jesus is not serious and important work.
Out of love, he was saying something about me

You take *your job* too seriously
You see the dam wall picture is completely wrong
Because it seems like I am the most important person in my ministry
It seems like I am capable of holding everyone up.
There is no place for Jesus
Who is the Lord of the harvest?
It's not me is it, it's Jesus
Who is the Shepherd of the Sheep,
It's not me, it's Jesus

You see one of my struggles is I do before I pray
And I think that is one contributor to my burnout
I need to pray before I do.
Because there are far stronger and more capable hands at work than mine.

In his book on the sermon of the mount

Don Carson writes:

I am convinced that the really great issues before us will be settled on our knees. This does not mean that we should do nothing but pray; it does mean that we should do nothing without praying. If it is true that God customarily uses means, it is no less true that we so often focus on the means that we forget that the really significant work must be God's or the whole is to little avail.

We must pray before we do.

At the start of chapter 10.

We see a shift from Jesus telling his disciples to pray

To Jesus preparing them to do

Verse 1

Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

The disciples are about to become the apostles

The followers of Jesus will now become the ones He sends out

Apostle just means one who is sent

Sent with the authority of the sender

Jesus gives the twelve the authority to advance His kingdom.

And they will now do the same as Jesus has done

Driving out evil spirits

Healing disease as signs of God's kingdom

Proclaiming the good news of Jesus' kingdom.

And you would think that if you were going to entrust such great responsibility

To people on the front line of your kingdom

You would choose the best of the best

Elite special forces

Perhaps the most clever students of the Old Testament

The most gifted public speakers

The most extraordinary miracle workers

Instead who does Jesus choose

Verse 2

² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Jesus doesn't choose special forces.

He chooses Dad's army

The first four – Simon, Andrew, James, John, we met back in chapter 4

Uneducated fisherman from a Galilean backwater.

Matthew the author of this gospel

Is not ashamed to remind us of his previous life as a tax collector

Someone loathed by his Jewish community as a Roman collaborator and exploiter of others

Simon whose denial of Jesus shows that his zeal is not matched by his performance

Judas, the thief whose love for money sells out his Lord for a bag of silver.

These are the ones Jesus sends out on the first mission in Christian history.
Not a breakfast of champions is it?
And that should be an encouragement to you.
Because the advancement of the King's kingdom
Doesn't depend on the ability of the ones He sends
But on the power of the King

There is a lesson of humility for those who are gifted and capable
Perhaps a bit too confident in their own abilities.
The power to save people from sin
The power to change people from pursuing self to following Jesus
Is not your power it's His
So you need to humble yourself

But there's also lesson of courage for those who are timid and scared
You must not underestimate the power of Jesus to work through the weak
Jesus built his kingdom on twelve weak men
Who abandoned him at his crucifixion
And he will advance His kingdom through your weakness as well

There is more to be said about the King's Kingdom
As we look at chapter 10 of Matthew's gospel
But what is the application of today's passage.

I'm going to make it clear as I can on the PowerPoint slide.
PRAY

The King's Kingdom is important so pray
People are like sheep without a Shepherd so pray
The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few so pray.

Before we do we pray
Before we bring God to people
We must bring people to God in prayer
Before we get on our feet and go
We must get on our knees and pray

What should we pray for?
Pray for God's Kingdom to come as Jesus taught us to pray
Pray for God to raise workers for His harvest

Why should we pray?
Because we are utterly weak aren't we?
As weak as the disciples
Less compassionate than our Shepherd
Not nearly as strong as our King
This is not our harvest but His
So we pray

Pray for our missionaries those God has raised from our church as missionaries

to go into other parts of the world
To share the gospel
That God would provide everything they need to serve Jesus in His harvest
Next time you are at church
Pick up their prayer cards as a reminder for your household to pray for them
Kat Thu will be visiting us next month
To speak about the work of the gospel in Nepal amidst COVID
And it would be good to attend her mission minded event so you know how to pray

For good reasons, The Short Family are returning from the West African nation
Where they have been serving as missionaries for more than 10 years
You know what they would love more than anything else?
Is if you prayed for God to raise ten times as many gospel workers to replace them
In that West African nation

Pray for our Iranian congregation
That God would raise men and women to disciple young believers
and model the faith of Jesus to others
That God would raise people to teach children and young people
Who face the challenge of growing up between two cultures here in Australia

We have a thriving youth group here at this church
But keep praying for the youth
That God might raise courageous young men and women
Who will speak openly about their faith in Jesus in their schools
To work for the harvest even in the face of hostility

We have ministry trainees here in our church
Trying to work out whether God is raising them to teach the bible as their gospel ministry
Or whether to serve Him in other ways
Pray for them, that God would give them wisdom and conviction about their futures.

There are AFES workers in our congregation who labour in the harvest at universities
And it has been hard work for them because of COVID
Not being able to gather on campus very easily and see students face to face
Has made a challenging ministry even harder
And yet God is adding to their numbers
Pray for future generations of student leaders to be raised for the harvest
Not only to share the gospel at uni but beyond uni as well

Pray for our own church
COVID has sapped our energy and our momentum
But we need more people to disciple young believers by reading the bible with them
We need people to follow up others
who have heard the gospel through Christianity Explored
We need workers for various ministries in the church
And only God can raise them

One of the helpful things you can do to help your prayer
Is to go to our website and request to receive the daily prayer and devotion emails
Written by one of our pastors

Each day you will receive a bible reading and reflection on the passage
But you will also receive a few names from your congregation to pray for
And you will also receive prayer requests from our missionaries and AFES staff workers

Let me add one caveat before I finish
When Jesus told his disciples to pray for God to raise workers
The disciples were going to be part of the answer to that prayer
Because Jesus then sent them to do the Kingdom work they prayed for
If you ask God to raise workers for the harvest.
You must be willing to be part of God's answer to that prayer
For God might be raising you to carry out His work somewhere in the harvest.
That might be about sharing Jesus in your own family
Or your workplace
That might be you leaving behind comfort and safety to go somewhere else in the harvest
That might be you making choices that mean you leave financial security behind
Or giving time and money more generously than you ever thought before.
Praying and doing go hand in hand.
More of that next week.

We need the Call of the King don't we.
And today, He calls us to pray.

Let me do that now for us.