

Title: What do you see?
Text: Matthew 9.35-38
Theme: Looking at people the way Jesus does
Series: Matthew #56
Prop Stmtnt: Jesus looks at people fundamentally different than anyone else.

Read Text:

These four verses function as a summary and transition. Matthew is summarizing chapters 5-9 which included the Sermon on the Mount and the series of miracles (8-9) and is setting the stage for the next phase of the ministry of Christ, which included the formal identification of and sending of the 12 disciples. Verse 35 is almost identical to 4.23, and helps us see that Matthew wrote this as a section. Note the 3 things that characterized the ministry of Jesus. He taught. He announced the gospel of the Kingdom and he healed. He healed every disease he encountered. Nothing could withstand his authority. And one of the things that we noticed in chapters 8-9 was the truly amazing combination of the power of Christ and the mercy of Christ. It is really overwhelming. It is overwhelming because the mercy of Christ makes him vulnerable. He heals people because he cares, but he cares deeper than their physical needs.

Matthew sees this. Matthew is now one of the disciples, perhaps the last to be added to the twelve, but he clearly is one now (10.3). Matthew saw the compassion of Jesus. Jesus did not pretend to care because it would make people feel good. He did not put on a concerned posture for the camera that would make an effective 30-second promo spot for the campaign or pledge drive. Christ was instinctively compassionate. This was his default response. He saw the crowds and he had compassion for them. Wow!

I. How do people see people (crowds)?

A. Politicians

Politicians and campaign consultants see people as voting blocs in order to get or keep power. You are a statistic, a demographic. You are a question for a focus group to discuss so the politician can figure out how to say something that will make you feel heard and will resonate with you. He wants to get elected. He needs your vote to get elected. You hold the power that he needs and wants. You are a means to his/her end. This is not the case with all. There are some in politics who truly care about the people they represent. But we are used to politicians who hire people to create events that generate large crowds so the politician can get energized and excited and his campaign can get momentum from them. The people give to the politician. They have what he needs.

B. Rulers

Rulers, on the other hand, do not need the power of the people to put them into power, though they tend to fear an uprising. The history of this world is the story of rulers who

see people as subjects to conquer, subdue, rule, control, tax and use. People are resources. They provide revenue for the ruler's bank, food for his table, women for his pleasure, and men for his army. The people give to the ruler. They have what he wants.

C. Entertainers

How do entertainers and athletes look at crowds? Entertainers want approval. They see a crowd and feel the pressure to perform for the crowd's applause. Applause means approval. Approval means good reviews. Good reviews means ticket sales. Ticket sales means revenue. Revenue means success. Success means approval. But, the crowd is a double-edged sword. The fans who cheered your name being announced in the starting line-up can easily boo you when you strike out with bases loaded. They want something from you even as you want something from them. The people give to the entertainer because they have what he/she wants.

D. Business

How do business people look at crowds? I heard a business owner say one time that he trained the people in his business to realize that every person who walked into his business had money in their pocket. They needed to view the money that was in those pockets as belonging to the business. His staff was trained to get the money from your pocket into their pocket. So, how do they get money from your pocket into their pocket? They would make you feel important. They would make you feel cared for. They would make you feel sophisticated or discriminating, or savvy. Crowds are market opportunities. And granted, there are plenty of businesses who really love to help people and do a good job of it. There are also plenty who will do anything they can to manipulate people because the people have something the business wants.

E. People

Some people just want to get away from people. In fact, most of us are like that. People in urban areas buy cabins in the woods. We fantasize about sitting on a back porch with a fire in the pit, looking at the stars without competition from streetlights, and without road noise or obnoxious neighbors. Speaking in front of people is consistently ranked as one of the top phobias that people have. But, let's intensify this a bit.

II. How do people see needy people?

Imagine that you are a doctor and there is nothing that you can do to help your patient survive, but your patient is demanding that you fix them. How do you respond when you realize that they have an appointment with you today? Imagine that you have a "friend" who will keep you on the phone for hours doing nothing but talk about themselves and complain. How do you respond when your phone tells you that they are calling? Imagine that you have a "friend" who is perpetually broke and every time he sees you he is asking for money. How do you respond when you see him approaching?

We tend to see needy people as draining, as endless, even hopeless. They take and take and take and take and never seem to stop and we only have so much that we can give, right? Needy people can be overwhelming. Many years ago I went to India to teach in a Bible College. My flight landed in the middle of the night and I had to get a ride from the international airport to the national airport. I walked out of the airport and was confronted with people shouting, children begging, and young men grabbing at my luggage. The noise, the aromas, the intensity of no personal space was so much I simply turned around and went back into the airport. I was way out of my comfort zone. But, there was no other way and I couldn't get back on the plane and fly home. I had a job to do and I had to figure out how to get it done, even if it meant running the gauntlet.

Is that how Jesus saw crowds? Did he steel himself for the confrontation? Did he sigh at the sight of the hordes of people demanding to be healed? Did he make fun of the people behind their backs? Did he feel pressure to perform, to come through, and be all that they wanted? Did he go into "performance" mode – ever?

III. How does Jesus see needy people?

In order to understand the crowds a little bit more let me remind you of a few things. Soap had not yet been invented. Shampoo was not known. Deodorant was non-existent. Neither was running water, sewage systems, toothbrushes, toothpaste, Band-Aids or showers. There was no electricity. 1st Century life was very dirty, diseased and (by our standards) often disgusting. If you were looking for reasons to stay away, there were plenty, yet Jesus did not stay away. He went to the crowds. He "saw the crowds" and what he saw was not people who would give him something that he craved, or people who would drain him. He saw them for what they were. They were...

A. Harassed

Picture a community of 150 people in a defenseless village who are living off the land. And now, picture an army of 1,000 marauding, pillaging soldiers descending upon the village. That is the idea of the word harassed. Jesus saw people who were vulnerable and were incapable of doing anything to rescue themselves.

B. Exploited

Jesus saw people as sheep who were exploited instead of cared for. Sheep not only have no natural defenses, sheep can't even find food on their own. They need a shepherd who will lead them to pastures, and who will protect them from predators. That is why sheep are so easily exploited. Jesus sees the crowds for what they are. They are like sheep who are so easily taken advantage of by those in power. And instead of being repulsed by their weakness and disgusted by their brokenness and neediness, Jesus is moved with compassion.

C. With compassion

The word that Matthew uses here speaks of a gut-level compassion. Jesus feels the needs of the crowds as if they were his own. This one statement about Christ is so compelling, so gripping because it is so unusual. Kings see themselves as over their subjects. Entertainers and athletes have to have bodyguards and handlers. We are used to categories and divisions of us vs. them even though we are all simply human. Jesus, who is God who became man, is, in one sense, the most human of us all. He feels his humanity because he feels our humanity. People who try to close themselves off from caring about others become less human than the ones who give of themselves in caring.

How many of you have buried a spouse who suffered from an incurable disease? Their death was still a grief to you. Yes you were tired from caring for them, but the caring was not a burden, the caring was a joy. The burden you felt was in their dying and in their suffering. The burden that you felt was the burden of their demise, not the burden of your inconvenience. You were more alive in caring for them than with them gone. When they died, a part of you died, it seems.

But compassion comes with a price. When you chose to care, you chose to be vulnerable. You chose to get hurt. You chose to experience misunderstanding, loss, even rejection. What is the alternative? Are you going to crawl into a hole and live all by yourself? Are you going to put up walls, lock the doors, close the windows and not let anyone inside? What are you afraid of? If you don't think that you can live with the possibility of someone hurting you, what are you going to do when you realize that you hurt others? This world is a mess because people like you and me are in it. We are the problem. Jesus came to rescue us from ourselves.

Look at this text again. What is going on here? Matthew is not only giving us a summary of the ministry of Jesus, but he is setting the stage for what the followers of Jesus are called to do. Jesus was moved with compassion for the crowds. So, what does he call his disciples to do? Be moved with compassion and go to the crowds. Look for the needs around you. They are everywhere.

The other day I was in a business and I noticed that the one man seemed to be really stiff and sore. I overheard him a couple of years ago mention that he had back problems so I asked him if his back was hurting him. Then he told me that he had just had a kidney removed because it was cancerous and that he was starting chemo the next day. I told him that I would be praying for him and will be following up. Do you know why the harvest is plentiful? It is because there are needy people everywhere.

IV. Why does Jesus see needy people that way?

A. He became a needy person.

When the Son of God came to this earth and took upon himself a human nature and robed himself with a human body, he became a needy person. He needed food. He needed rest. He needed water. He was not needy in the sense of being sinful or being broken, but in

becoming one of us, he identified with us in such a way that he knows our needs. But there is even more. He not only became needy, but

B. He chose to.

He chose to see needy people as people and as people that needed compassion and as people that needed his compassion. How will you choose to look at people? Let me tell you what one man chose to do.

Jerry Umanos went on a medical missions trip to Afghanistan seven years ago. It was a short trip so he could volunteer at the Cure clinic in Kabul. CURE international is a Christian medical organization based out of PA that is focused on providing medical care to children in deeply impoverished countries. The Afghan government invited CURE back in 2005 to come and run a clinic in Kabul. It has since become one of the leading hospitals in the country thanks to personnel like Jerry. Jerry was a pediatrician at the Lawndale Clinic in Chicago. You could say that Jerry was already doing medical missions. You see the Lawndale Clinic is actually the Lawndale Christian Health Center that was started in 1984 and provides affordable health services to people who cannot get good medical care in inner city Chicago. Lawndale's mission to help people is driven by the gospel. When Jerry joined the Lawndale Clinic, he knew that he would never make good money. In fact, his salary would never be more than a resident. But that did not matter to him. He wanted to help people know about Christ. So, when the opportunity came for Jerry to go to Afghanistan, he went and while he was there, he was overwhelmed with the need and the opportunity for the gospel. Working at the CURE clinic just gave Jerry a larger audience. So, for the past 7 years, Dr. Jerry Umanos has been spending as much time in Afghanistan as he could.

Colleagues said that he would come back to Chicago where he would work long enough to get enough money to go back to Afghanistan. There in Kabul, Jerry was not only treating thousands of patients, but he was training Afghan doctors. Art Jones, one of the founders of Lawndale, visited Jerry in Kabul. He said, the house that Jerry lived in during the winter was so cold, that they did not need nor have a refrigerator. They would just leave the food out on the table. But that really did not bother Jerry. His wife said, "Jerry always wanted to serve under-served populations. Afghanistan was just one of them. He always had a desire to be the hands and feet of Christ. He had a love and commitment that he expressed for the Afghan people because of that love for Christ."

Six weeks ago, Jerry was walking out of the hospital along with John and Gary (father and son) who were visiting the hospital in Kabul from Chicago, when an Afghan police officer, working as a security guard, for some unknown reason, shot them and killed them. Gary was a member of a church whose pastor I deeply respect and had just seen two weeks before at T4G. The man who came to heal them was killed by them and the men who came to see how they could help were executed as well. Jerry wanted to be like Christ, in that way, he was.

Some of you are tempted to think, what a waste! What a tragedy! What a grief! Why did Jerry ever go in the first place? Why don't we just let Afghanistan alone? They seem hell-bent on destroying themselves anyway, don't they? In fact, Afghanistan is simply one of many nations where you can be executed for professing faith in Christ. (map) If you are going to say that the people of Afghanistan are not worth it, then you have to first think that about yourself and the world because the issue is not why did Jerry go to Afghanistan. The issue is why did Jesus come to this earth when he knew that we, the very ones whom he came to save would turn on him and reject him. Yes, they seem hell-bent on destroying themselves. But do not be deluded into thinking that we are morally superior in this country. Do I need to mention Columbine, Virginia Tech, Ft. Hood, Aurora, Sandy Hook and now Santa Barbara, CA? Since Columbine there have been 46 mass shootings in our country. We are used to it. Do we not champion the murder of unborn children as some sign of progress? We kill our own. This much is different. We do not risk execution from the government because our faith in Christ. Does the fact that you can be killed for believing the gospel in these countries discount our mission and calling to take the gospel there anyway?

So, how is the gospel ever going to get into these countries? Listen again to this text. Do you hear what Jesus is saying? Most of the people in these countries are sheep without a shepherd. Yes, the official position of the government is to outlaw Christianity. But what do these leaders have to offer their own people? What do they give their people that is better than what Christianity can offer? They have nothing! Look at these countries and you see example after example of abuse, neglect, starvation (in some cases), poor medical care, and disease while the leaders live in splendor. The people are vulnerable. They are part of the harvest that is plentiful. The harvest is plentiful, the issue is, will there be enough laborers to gather the harvest. So, Jesus says to pray. Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Why must we pray? Because our inclination would be to play it safe and waste our lives.

But if I go, or if my children go, we might be killed. Yes and that is the point. Jesus was killed because his compassion cost him his life. Compassion will cost you. It will cost you time. It will cost you convenience. It will cost you money. It will cost you disappointment. It may cost you your life. Is my life, or your life, or the life of our children more valuable than the life of Jesus? Why is it okay for Jesus to lay down his life but not okay for us to lay down ours? Are we more important than Him? Compassion will cost you, but it will also open up doors for the gospel that will change people's lives forever.

What we did not know is that our rejection of Christ became the means by which we were rescued. God uses people like Jim Elliot, Roger Yoderian and now Jerry Umanos as a means to bring his sheep into his fold. Jerry loved people and the gospel more than his life because Jerry loved Jesus. This is who we are because this is who Jesus is. He lived beyond himself and calls us to do the same.