

Key idea: Jesus' compassion for the lost sheep drives the mission of introducing lost sheep to the shepherd who will make them whole.

PRAY

1. For the whole world...

Matthew might be a Jewish tax collector, stuck in a small Middle Eastern province of the vast Roman Empire. He may have been a Capernaum kid his whole life. But Matthew has a global perspective as he writes about the good news of Jesus Christ – **listen again to Matthew 1:1... READ.**

For Matthew, this is the 'genesis' of a significant moment in the world, a moment akin to a new creation. For Matthew, this is the moment – in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – when God's commitment to roll back sin and bring his approval to the whole world has come to fulfilment. As you scan through the genealogy that Matthew has constructed, you cannot help but notice that this man, Jesus, is for the benefit of all kinds of people.

For Matthew, this is good news for the whole world: the promise of God to deal with the broken state of this world, by dealing with its root cause – sin – is for all people.

But whilst this concern is clear in this opening section, we have been limited in scope – Jesus has worked within a small area of a small Middle Eastern province of the Roman Empire, close to where all his current close friends have also grown up and lived their whole lives. How is this concern going for 'all the peoples on

earth' going to come to fruiting from this little triangle centred on Capernaum?

As I begin, let me make one thing very clear. The organisation of what I am about to say has come pretty much from a bloke called Frederick Dale Bruner, in his commentary on Matthew 1-12, 'The Christbook'. It is a brilliant exposition of Matthew – I highly recommend it.

2. The foundation... (9:35-38)

Matthew wants to remind us again of Jesus' work – **look at verse 35... READ.**

We are familiar with this threefold description of the public ministry of Jesus. He was peripatetic in his work, moving 'all' – and do you notice the emphasis on 'all' and 'every' in this verse? – over the region around Capernaum. He taught in synagogues, presumably showing how the promise of God to deal with the sin of the world through Abraham's family was now being fulfilled. He preached the good news of the kingdom of heaven – remember his first public proclamation in Matthew 4:17? He proclaimed to all and sundry that the rule of God has come, in himself. And he displayed the physical reality of this teaching and preaching in healing the people brought to him of the sharp reminders of the broken world they lived in.

Matthew has shown us this public ministry of Jesus. And in it, Matthew has helped us grasp Jesus' identity and Jesus' authority. He has shown his identity as Healer, Preacher/Teacher, Saviour, Lord, God-in-the-flesh, the doctor come to heal the sickness of sin in people. Jesus has been shown to have authority over the natural,

the supernatural, the authority to set whole people right, to bring in the outsider, to deal with those no one else in this world can. Constantly, as we have seen the work of Jesus, we have been pushed to think about our reaction to him. This is the work of Jesus.

This work is not that of an automaton, a man so single-minded that he was never willing to display his emotion or his affection – **look at verse 36... READ.**

It is such a heart-warming and wonderful picture of Jesus. The man is compassionate – and it is the ‘deep-in-your-bowels-and-guts’ kind of compassion. It is a deep-seated compassion at the sight of the people in front of him.

Wherever he looks, he sees people ‘weary and worn out’. Does that sound familiar?

Wherever he looks he sees people who are like ‘sheep without a shepherd’. That is such a resonant image. It resonates with us, just because of our rural setting, and even more so with how we might feel some days. It resonated even more with the people reading Matthew the first time, or might have been privy to this description in the day. It resonated with them because it returned their minds to places like Ezekiel 34 and Numbers 27:17 and Zechariah 10:2, places where the people of God (Abraham’s family) were described in the same way. It was a description that captured the state of a people who had forgotten the commitment of God, the vibrancy of the promises of God, who had been misled and mistaught. It described a people who couldn’t even manage to

assess themselves rightly, and needed Jesus to step in with compassion.

The compassion of Jesus at this point seems to drive him. The compassion of Jesus at this point seems to reveal the desperate need of these people: they need to meet their shepherd. The compassionate description of Jesus returns our minds back to Matthew 2:5-6 where this baby born in Bethlehem was clearly identified as the promised one to shepherd God's people. The compassion of Jesus drives his desire for these lost sheep to meet him, the one who can shepherd them to wholeness.

This leads to the very clear command of Jesus – **look there in verses 37-38... READ.**

Jesus turns to his closest student-followers, and he makes an observation that leads to a command.

The observation is clear – there is a great harvest, and there are not many workers. We know that image, don't we! The harvest refers to the people in front of Jesus, the people he has been preparing by his public work. And it has only been he working up until now, hasn't it? Even Jesus knows that this is not enough!

The command emerges from that observation. And the command is very clear. It is NOT to do a course, nor is it to just get out and do something. The command is to pray. Did you hear that? It is to turn to the one who already owns the harvest and to ask him to put on more staff, more workers. It is to depend upon the one who has

already organised the harvest. It is not to be active in anything but dependence.

I think that Matthew has set this section here to establish the foundation for how the good news will get out into 'all the peoples'. Put simply, Jesus has set the template in his work. Jesus displays the compassion that drives this work. And Jesus is the one who commands how this work needs to be carried out – first, in prayer. Here is the foundation for mission – the activity of getting the good news of Jesus out: the work of Jesus, the compassion of Jesus, the command of Jesus.

3. The 'manual'... (10:1-15)

And then, I think, Matthew shows how this foundation is translated into practical work by Jesus, into a type of 'manual' for mission embodied by his closest followers.

Jesus immediately delegates his authority to a community – **look at verses 1-4... READ.**

Jesus summons twelve disciples, apostles. This is something new. The number is significant – these men are to be eyewitnesses (they already have been!) of Jesus, his identity, authority and work, so that they can be sent out to represent him, so that others may meet him. These men are to take on the job that God's mob were to always have – to represent God to the world so that the world might know him. It is the job only Jesus has done perfectly – and, as eyewitnesses of him, these men are to represent Jesus. That is why there are twelve of them, just like the original twelve tribes that emerged from Abraham's family...

As Jesus summons them – and we will meet them more closely in a moment – he delegates authority to them. It is not any authority – the wording of part of verse 1 ('heal every disease and sickness') is word-for-word from Matthew 9:35. This so important to grasp – the work of mission (of going out to tell people about this good news) starts with Jesus' delegating authority. There is no other authority – or message, as we will see in a moment – that empowers or legitimises mission.

And it is authority delegated to individuals who make up a community. The number is significant – we are to remember the family of Abraham and the nation that came from him, Israel. We are to notice the diversity and distinct 'unworthy' nature of this group of men – fishermen, tax collector, revolutionary, trouble-makers. And the discussion about their work is discussed always in plural – they are individuals in community.

In essence, then, Jesus has just actually answered the prayer that he just commanded to be prayed. It is a revealing moment – the Lord of the harvest is none other than Jesus! And the workers of the harvest are those who follow Jesus – as he has just demonstrated. And, as we have seen again and again, as Lord, Jesus defines what it means to follow him – in this case, representing the shepherd to the sheep.

And so, Jesus lays out very clear commands for these men:

(i) the audience... Jesus establishes the audience – **look at verse 5-7... READ.** There is all sorts of debate that could be had here, and now is not the time. But this much is clear – Jesus sets the

audience for mission. Here it is a particular focus – Abraham’s family who is broken and lost. These people need to meet the shepherd that they were promised and who they so desperately need.

This is not to say that there is no global scope – Jesus has already shown that in the way he spoke of the centurion, and Matthew has already shown that in the genealogy, and the work of Jesus is emphasised as ‘all-encompassing’, and the Gospel finishes with the global picture. But Jesus defines the audience.

(ii) the proclamation... as he sends them out, their role is primarily activity (displaying the power and authority of the doctor, the shepherd, the king). But there is a proclamation that goes with it – **look at verse 7... READ.** Whatever else is going on here, the apostles are being sent to make people aware of the new state of affairs in the world. Moreover, this must involve introducing people to Jesus – to the shepherd, to the one who we have just seen has authority to deal with the very cause of brokenness in this world. Put simply, the proclamation of the apostles in this mission is, ‘Here is Jesus, who has brought in the world-righting kingdom of God’.

(iii) the concern... as the apostles introduce people to the kingdom and the shepherd, they display the same concern that he has – **look at verse 8a... READ.** There is proclamation and practice here that go hand-in-hand. To proclaim the kingdom is to practice the kingdom. To proclaim the shepherd is to show how he leads to whole life. To proclaim the doctor is to demonstrate the goodness of life under the doctor. The combination of proclamation and

practice that Jesus displayed has been delegated to these men – to represent the shepherd is to have both, hand-in-hand.

(iv) the motivation... the motivation for this work is very clear – **look at verse 8b... READ.** The compassion that Jesus felt for these ‘lost sheep’, ‘weary and worn out’, overflows into grace – giving the sheep what they do not deserve and what they cannot possibly afford. In this sense, the same motivation, the same flavour, must permeate the work of these apostles. They have received freely the restoration that only Jesus can bring – remember Matthew? They are to extend with all grace all of the goodness of the Lord who is now speaking to them.

(v) the dependence... Just as these apostles received their transformation, their wholeness, through Jesus doing it all, so their work now is to be a time of active dependence upon their Father and Lord – **look at verses 9-10... READ.** I do not think Jesus is establishing the clothing or luggage limits of mission work around the world, across all ages (though perhaps he is reminding his disciples that mission is not to be a time of material comfort or accrual!). I do think he is emphasising the dependence that is central to mission – just as Matthew was brought in by being dependent upon Jesus, so too as Matthew goes out, he is to know that his Father and his Lord will provide all he needs.

(vi) the protocol... Jesus even gives these workers a plan for dealing with acceptance and rejection – **look at verses 11-15... READ.** In essence, Jesus is reminding them that they are his agents, his representatives, bearing his delegated authority and message. To enter a town and be accepted – that is to be bearers

of his peace. To enter a town and be rejected – that is a rejection of Jesus and his peace, and their conduct must display the gravity of such a situation. In the big scheme of things, to reject the representatives of Jesus is to reject Jesus, the one who sets all things right, who brings the removal of the curse of sin and the approval of God – to reject that is... well, it would be worse than the charred remains of Sodom and Gomorrah!

Jesus sets out the manual, for this the first of his apostles' mission trips. He delegates his authority to them as a community of individuals, as his representatives. They are the works to go out into the harvest which is full of broken sheep, to introduce these sheep to the shepherd who can set them right, make them whole, deal with their sin.

4. The whole world?

As we think about applying this section of Matthew, we must be aware that there are limits – we are not the twelve apostles in the presence of Jesus, with the job of going to the 'lost sheep of Israel'. We stand after Matthew has finished his Gospel, in the full fruit of what Jesus observed with the centurion and which Matthew made clear in the opening verses of his Gospel – this is about the whole world. But let me suggest that there are three principles that emerge from what Matthew has written here, three principles for how we think about following Jesus, being part of Jesus' mission, even in how we do life as God's mob.

(i) All mission is because of Jesus

It is so important to see that this mission trip of the Twelve emerges only because of Jesus and his work. Without Jesus, there is no

mission, because there is no shepherd and we all remain broken and weary and worn out. Mission – the very being of God’s people, as people forgiven, as people restored, as people with a proclamation and practice worth taking to the whole world – is only because of Jesus.

(ii) All mission is about Jesus

As Jesus lays out the mission before the twelve, it is unavoidably clear that this work is about Jesus – it is about introducing, in proclamation and practice, people to Jesus as he is (isn’t that what Matthew has been doing with us over the last few chapters?). The delegated authority, the message, the emphasis on grace and dependence upon the Father – all these are the hallmarks of proclaiming and practicing Jesus.

Now, it is worth pausing there and asking ourselves a number of questions from these two principles...

- Do we see mission as the proclamation and practice of Jesus?
- Is how we do life as God’s mob – and I think this is a reasonable extrapolation from what we read here – about the proclamation and practice of Jesus?
- As we slowly move back into whatever normalcy is in the future, is our mission as God’s mob here in Narrabri – our ministries – about putting Jesus in front of people in what we proclaim and practice?
- Are we a community that seeks to bring people to know Jesus alone, and to be followers of Jesus alone, in how we do mission and ministry?

(iii) All mission is defined by Jesus

It is so important to see that the mission of these twelve men is defined completely by Jesus – they represent him, he is their Lord, and so he defines what it means to represent him. His work defines their work. His compassion drives their compassion. His message is their message. His movement – ‘all’ – is their movement. His motivation of grace is their motivation of grace. His dependence is their dependence. Jesus defines what it means to follow him. His work defines our work as his mob.

And, again, this leads to certain obvious questions for us as God’s mob here in Narrabri...

- Is our mission, our ministry, defined by Jesus?
- Is our compassion driven by his compassion?
- Is our view of the mass of people around us the same as his?
- Is our movement the same as his movement?

And, I could go on...