

Care, Pray, Go...Because Jesus is Worthy

Matthew 9:35-39

Faith Evangelical Free Church (Manhattan, KS)

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About a month ago our church (that's all of you) sent me on a 2-week trip to South Asia. While I was there I got to meet with, check in on, and learn from some of our missionaries who we have sent out from this congregation to serve and share the Gospel with people in that part of the world.

It was an absolutely amazing trip. I had the opportunity to learn about what church planting and disciple making are like in cultures where the Christian church is persecuted. I got to meet and hear the testimonies of people who grew up believing in Hinduism or Islam but are now following Jesus and worshiping the one true God alone. And I got a much better perspective for the difficulties and challenges of being a missionary in a culture and context that's a lot different than the you call (or used to call) home.

(I also ate so, so much chicken and rice. Never ending amounts of chicken and rice. :P)

I'm really excited to share some of my stories and experiences with you this morning. But I want to do so in a way that not only informs you, but also edifies you, challenges you, and leads you to consider your own role in the mission of God to reach people with the redeeming Gospel of Jesus Christ both here in Manhattan and around the world.

So instead of a play-by-play of what happened on my trip or a slideshow of me hanging out at this temple or chatting with that South Asian fellow, what I want to do this morning is look at a passage of Scripture that, because of this trip, means more to me than it ever has before and consider a truth that changes everything.

The passage is Matthew 9:35-39. We're going to take a look at those few verses and consider three critical elements of what it means to follow Christ and participate in the work He's called us to do. That's the passage.

The truth that connects to these three critical elements that is both the foundation and fuel for life as a follower of Christ -- the truth that changes everything is this: Jesus is worthy. (x2)

He is worthy of our worship, and our devotion, our admiration, our surrender, and our obedience to the commands found in Scripture, including the ones found in Matthew 9:35-39.

Now, some of you might be thinking: "Hey, 'Jesus is worthy' - isn't that the same idea Pastor Steve preached on last week?!" And you're right -- he did indeed wrap up the series on the Drama of Scripture (creation, fall, redemption, reconciliation) by taking a look at the Book of Revelation and seeing there that Jesus is declared as the only one in all the universe that is worthy to open the scroll and move redemptive history forward. To call on all people, from every tribe tongue and nation, to fall to their knees and worship in recognition of His Lordship -- of His Worthiness.

But here's the thing -- I actually decided 2 weeks ago, during my 13 hour flight from Abu Dhabi to Chicago, to preach on this idea, this truth, that "Jesus is worthy." (So I had it first) And my reason for deciding to do so was because the missionary from our church that I went to go see and learn from at this church planting training, on the last day of the training, said this to everyone in attendance: "If you get

nothing else, remember nothing else from this training, please remember this: Jesus is worthy. He is worthy of giving up everything to pursue wholeheartedly and share with everyone.”

What jumps out to me is this: It seems that over the past few weeks God has been making it a priority to be sure that each and every one of you hears and considers the truth that Jesus is worthy. He put it on the heart of one of our missionaries, of our senior pastor, of the outreach pastor, and the worship pastor too! I'll be honest, I don't know what God is up to or what He wants us to do in light of this repeated message...but it seems awfully important to pay attention and give it some thought.

So with all that in mind...let's take a look at our passage for this morning, Matthew 9:35-38.

Matthew 9:35–38 (ESV)

[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.”

Before my trip to South Asia this passage had always been one of those heartwarming and inspirational-sounding pieces of Scripture that I could eagerly affirm while at the same time comfortably keep at arm's distance.

Intellectually I understand that there are millions and millions of people -- in fact there are BILLIONS of people, perhaps as many as 3 or 4 BILLION -- people in this world that not only have no faith in Jesus Christ, but have also never heard about Him or His Gospel.

So factually I understand this, and that's how I often keep it in my mind and (sort of) in my heart -- as a troubling and problematic number, held out before me (and away from me) as a puzzle that I might one day figure out how to solve.

But in South Asia God took me and put me down right in the middle of that number. Up close and personal. And then he replaced the number with people, faces, and stories. God gave me a glimpse, just a glimpse, of what it is really like to be overwhelmed and surrounded by a harassed and helpless people, who He sees as sheep without a shepherd, a harvest wilting and dying while waiting for more workers to decide to show up.

One of the hardest things for me to process while I was there, and even now after being home, was this admiration that I have for beauty of the religions I saw and the amazing devotion of the people...all wrapped up and ensnared by lies, and idol worship, and lifeless false gods.

I spoke to a young man named Aneil who kindly and enthusiastically explained how he had spent six days in prayer to gods of strength and wealth, and how he'd devote the next three days to petitioning a third god for success in his studies. I walked through a room full of several hundred Sikh worshipers who were bowing down and beating their breasts in supplication before a shroud-covered book containing the collected wisdom of their gurus. I watched as dozens and dozens of men, women, and children waited in

line just for a chance to see and pray next to a footprint of the prophet Mohammed. I marveled at the color and artistry found throughout Hinduism...and yet while seeing all of this I was always heartbroken as well.

Because I know that 9 days spent in prayer before 3 wood-carved idols will not bring Aneil strength, or wealth, or wisdom. I believe the Sikhs are looking for truth in the wrong book and worshiping the wrong god. I am not afraid of Islam, but I am afraid for the people who follow it; they are so close to the name of Jesus yet so far from embracing His saving grace.

Sheep without a shepherd. A harvest, desperately in need of workers. What might look like to become a worker the world needs and Jesus tells us to pray for? How would we know if we already are one? And what about the lost and hurting right here in Manhattan?

Three critical lessons from Matthew 9:35-39 give us at least a place to start and a place to grow.

In this passage we can see that: We need to care...we need to pray...and we need to go.

*Care about the people around us,
Pray for the people among us,
And go to people both near and far.*

We Need to Care About the People Around Us

Looking again at the passage, it says as Jesus was traveling in the region of Galilee, great crowds of broken, hurting, and lost people began to seek him out. Villagers and townsfolk by the hundreds, maybe thousands, headed for their local synagogues hoping for a chance to see the amazing teacher and miracle worker. Perhaps they needed to be healed. Perhaps they needed his message of hope. Matthew doesn't tell us much about these people, but he does tell us very clearly how Jesus responded and received them:

*[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.*

Jesus had compassion for the people as they came to him with their needs -- he cared about the people around him, always. As followers of Jesus, that aspect of his character and behavior must be something we aspire to and emulate. If you want to be like Jesus...you have to care about and have compassion for the people around you. You've got to put your love -- or, if you want to get really deep, you've got to put Christ's love for you -- into action.

You know you're being compassionate when you feel a little bit of someone else's sorrow or pain and try to engage them in a meaningful way. That might mean helping them grieve, or providing some sort of assistance, or listening to their story and offering to pray with them.

When you read the Gospels you can barely turn the page without encountering a story in which Jesus felt compassion for people and responded by healing the sick, encouraging the broken, and forgiving those who were ashamed of their past. As followers of Christ we inherit His ministry -- we must be kindhearted,

we must be compassionate, and we must respond to the needs of others in considerate, meaningful, and often sacrificial ways.

We need to see people the way God sees them and do something to help out. (x2)

When we do this, when we connect and care for people in this way, we take our first steps in participating in the mission of God.

Now I could illustrate this point with a story from my travels, but I'd rather share about something much closer to home. You see, last week I went with a group of people from our church to volunteer at a community meal called "Common Table". We were volunteering as part of our serve experience in Rooted, which is a new small-group focused discipleship program you're going to be hearing a lot about in the coming weeks and in 2019.

(I don't have time to explain it to you this morning, but take my word for it: when we offer sign-ups, you should very seriously consider signing up. It has been an awesome way for my group members and myself to grow in our walk with God over the past 10 weeks)

Anyway, Common Table is a network of churches and organizations all over Manhattan that provide a free dinner (and sometimes breakfast and lunch, too) every night of the week. Every night in this city anywhere between 20 to 60 people are fed, free of charge.

When we got there we threw on some aprons, got our instructions for the evening from a guy named Ryan, and...just started hanging out with the people that showed up. Eventually we helped serve dinner, then grabbed some plates for ourselves and spread out throughout the room, sharing a meal and friendly conversation with the Common Table community.

And I'll be honest with you: I'm an introvert, so going to a place full of people I don't, who have a very different experience of life than I do, and then trying to engage them in conversation is...very daunting, and a little anxiety-inducing. I worry about screwing up, saying the wrong thing, or not being able to think of anything to say at all and just sitting there in the dreaded awkward silence (the mere thought of which is often enough to make me and my fellow introverts stay home with a good book or netflix show).

But here's the thing...you really can't see people the way God sees them unless you go meet them. And hear their stories. And share a little bit of life together. It's in that life-on-life moment that your eyes open and your heart fills with love for the people around you. You learn to care about people...by being with people. Compassion isn't going to grow in your heart by reading one more book or blog. You've got to go out and spend an evening talking with John, who loves to walk the trails around Manhattan and watch the birds. Or Tim, who hopes to start up a youtube channel with his wife where they ask people funny questions and post the most outrageous answers.

After the dinner, while we were cleaning up, I was chatting with the meal coordinator and he said something that was beautiful and profound. We were talking about the importance of serving our city and how it could help our faith grow and mature, when he said:

"I hope people realize they don't have to go across the world to find God's mission. In Manhattan, "missions" can be the dinner table. It's right here."

I'm not saying everyone has to go volunteer with Common Table. But Ryan was right -- God's mission can most certainly be found and engaged right here in Manhattan. And caring for the people around you is how you get started. Missions can be the dinner table. It can be knocking on your neighbor's door and inviting them over for coffee. It can be raking leaves or shoveling snow. It can be listening to someone's story and offering to pray for their struggles or pain.

Missions begins with caring for the people around you. It starts when you see the people around you the way God sees them, and you decide to help out.

So we need to care and be compassionate...but, if we look back to our text, we see that we also need to *pray for the people among us*. In v. 37 it says,

We Need to Pray for the People Among Us

[37] Then [Jesus] 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."

I probably met somewhere between 20-30 missionaries while I was in South Asia. I asked as many of them as I could, "What is one thing you wish the people from your church back home knew or would do to better support you?"

Not a single one of them asked for more money. None of them asked for resources, for Bibles, or studies, or sabbaticals.

Every single missionary said nearly the same exact thing: "We want people to know how desperately we need their prayers. Get people to pray for us, and pray for people to come join us."

The work of missions and of missionaries is so overwhelming that without prayer it is impossible. At the church planting training we spent around 2 hours studying the relationship between mission and prayer. You know what we found? Every single occurrence of sending someone to preach the Gospel or going somewhere to serve was preceded or supported by prayer.

Followers of Christ must be people who dedicate time and energy and effort to prayer. We need it, the people we send need it, and those waiting to hear the Gospel for the first time desperately need prayer-powered missions.

And the American church -- with our freedoms and legal protections -- is so blessedly positioned to be the battery or engine of prayer for the Global Church. From Faith E Free alone we've got 20 missionaries sent around the world, and 16 campus ministers sent to share the Gospel with students, and we've got all of you, who are sent from this place of worship into your homes, your families, your neighborhoods, your workplaces, your coffeeshops, your bars, your grocery stores -- everywhere you go has the potential to be a place where the mission of God can be found, and we should be specifically and intentionally praying for all these people and opportunities.

And here is where I will make a confession to you and seek your forgiveness. I've been the Outreach Pastor at this church for almost 3 years now. I have not done enough to lead you or equip you to pray for

our missionaries or to pray for your local missions opportunities. I hope to change this in the coming year. I'm working on some plans that will hopefully give our missionaries greater exposure to our congregation and put their prayer requests more readily in your hands and in your hearts. I want to lead this church in praying for new missionaries to be sent out from our body. And I want to know how we can be praying for all of you as you seek to share your faith with the lost right here in Manhattan.

The harvest is plentiful all over the world and all over our community. We need to pray to our Savior for more workers, more missionaries, more boldness, and more opportunities. If you'd like more information about who our missionaries are, how to pray for them, or how to receive their updates, please take the connection card from the seatback, fill it out, and then write "Praying for missionaries" somewhere on the back. I'll get you some information in the week to come.

The world needs more missionaries. The harvest needs more workers. We need to be praying for the people among us and the people sent out from us to be bold in sharing Gospel.

And, of course...we need more people go.

We Need to Go to People Both Near and Far

In Matthew 9, Jesus tells his disciples to pray for followers of Christ to be sent into the world to preach the Gospel to the lost...and then, in Matthew 10:5-15, he sends his twelve closest disciples to do just that.

They are told to "go" -- go to the diseased, the dying, the despised, the those suffering from demonic affliction. They are to go into areas of great danger and speak with people who might do them harm. They will have to humbly rely on the hospitality of others and the provision of God. There will be abundant times and lean times, there will be acceptance and persecution, there will be great movements of faith and terribly slow moments where they are tempted to doubt their calling...and all of this is done for the glory of God, for the proclamation of His Gospel, because Jesus is worthy.

Christians are people who go. We go to people who are near, and when called by God we go to people who are far away. Our challenge really isn't to figure out *if we should go*, but rather, *who we should go to*.

Are you living out your faith with your family and in your workplace? Do you know how to share your testimony with someone if they ever asked, "hey, what do you think about God?" Do you love your actual, physical neighbors? Know their names? Pray for them? Look for ways to serve them? Those are just some examples of we can "go" right here, right now, in our own town.

What about going a little further? Next year we hope to have some opportunities to join a short-term mission project. Maybe you'll be called to that. Or maybe you've been trying to discern if God's calling you to long-term missions in another country and culture. I know of at least two of our supported missionary families who would LOVE to talk to you about coming to visit them, see their work, and pray about joining them. The Perspectives on World Missions course will be coming back to Manhattan in a few months. Perhaps you should consider attending. We've had people from this church go through that course and have their callings and lives radically altered and changed forever.

Whether it is "here" or "there", local or global, domestic or foreign, Christians need to be people who go into the world and share the Gospel. It's just what we do. And I hope today and this week you'll consider

how it is you go, or how you might need to change some things in your life so that you can go wherever God is calling and sending you.

We Do It All Because Jesus Is Worthy

But as you consider these things you MUST remember that we care, pray, and go not for what might be gained, not to be perfect, not to be great rule followers, and not for our own glory. We do these things because Jesus is worthy.

Jesus is worthy because...

- He was there at the beginning, and before the beginning of all creation.
- By him all things have been made.
- He is the author, sustainer, creator of all life, of salvation, and of our faith.
- He is the fulfillment of all God's promises.
- All dominion has been given over to him.
- God Himself commanded us to listen to Jesus.
- He is glorious, wonderful, powerful, beautiful.
- Prince of peace, Wonderful counselor, mighty God.
- He is all this, and so much more.

It was the worthiness of Christ, the overwhelming joy and value of knowing him personally that led the Apostle Paul to boldly declare,

Philippians 3:7–8 (ESV)

[7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

Jesus is also worthy of honor and praise and devotion because of what he has done in your life. You all, every single follower of Jesus who has been saved by his death and resurrection -- each of you has a testimony, a story to tell that contributes to the overall grand story of the worthiness of Christ. Share that with the world! Share that with the people around you. Jesus is worthy of everything we can give and more...so follow Him and commit your life to caring for the people around you, praying for the people among you, and going to people both near and far in the name of Jesus with the Gospel of salvation.

We care, pray, and go because Jesus is worthy.

Application: (Pick one...or three!)

At the bottom of the bulletin there a little space for considering how to apply these lessons, the commands. You can pick one, you can try all three...but I really do challenge you to consider and commit to caring for someone, praying for someone, and seeking people and places to go in the name and with the love of Christ. You have to fill in the blank -- I can't do it for you. Between you and God, you've got to figure out how to finish the statements:

- I will care for _____
- I will pray for _____

- I will go to _____
- *And I will do it because Jesus is worthy