

## Explore the Bible Adult Leader Commentary

### Session 10

#### In His Service

#### Matthew 9:35-38; 10:1-8

**Context:** Matthew 9:35–10:42

**Memory Verse:** Matthew 9:38

**Main Idea:** Jesus invites His followers to be a part of His work.

#### FIRST THOUGHTS

A father is on the ground reaching under the car. He is straining with all his might to loosen a bolt. His young son draws up next to him with an offer: “I wanna help.” A mother is mixing ingredients for a cake when her young daughter says, “I wanna help.” Such is a child’s desire to help grown-ups, without regard for whether he or she can perform a grown-up’s task. God’s work in the world is not child’s play. However, He is looking for believers who possess a childlike attitude of desiring to help with the work.

*(In PSG, p. 102) What tasks beyond their ability have you observed children wanting to help complete? What kind of response befits a caring adult?*

Jesus wanted the 12 disciples to be His helpers, but the task would be beyond their natural abilities. So He told them that divine help would be available to them. When needed, the heavenly Father would help them know what to say. Not only that, but Jesus also told them they could help by praying for additional workers to join the task. On top of this, the Twelve had watched Jesus model the kind of work they would do. As was true of the Twelve, we also are commissioned by Jesus to join Him in His work. What is the level of our willingness to join Him in ministry to those around us?

#### UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

##### Matthew 9:35–10:42

Matthew alternates between extended teaching discourses and segments devoted to Jesus’ miraculous deeds. Matthew 8:1–9:34 highlighted a series of Jesus’ miracles, each emphasizing Jesus’ power and authority over disease, demons, and death. After such breathtaking action, Matthew now pauses to provide another extended teaching section in 9:35–10:42.

Jesus would expand His preaching, teaching, and healing ministry by delegating His authority to the Twelve. The size and readiness of the harvest required more workers (9:35-38). Jesus provided detailed instructions about how the Twelve would carry out their mission (10:1-16). He also warned them that the response to their ministry would not always be favorable. They would suffer threats and persecution (10:17-36). The section concluded with the promise that those who minister faithfully in His name will find heavenly reward (10:37-42). As those called to carry forward Jesus’ mission in our own time, this text has much to teach us about God’s call, our responsibility, and God’s provision for the task.

#### EXPLORE THE TEXT

##### MOTIVATED BY COMPASSION (Matt. 9:35-36)

*<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus went to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. <sup>36</sup> When He saw the crowds, He felt compassion for them, because they were weary and worn out, like sheep without a shepherd.*

##### VERSE 35

For the second time in his Gospel, Matthew paused to provide a brief summary of Jesus’ ministry. (Compare v. 35 to 4:23.) Verse 35 provides a more general summary of the location of Jesus’ ministry (*all the towns and villages* as opposed to “all over Galilee” in 4:23), but otherwise it is a near verbatim summary.

The Jewish focus of Jesus' work remained unchanged: *teaching in their synagogues*. The gospel focus of His preaching, *the good news of the kingdom*, likewise remained consistent. The focus was the announcement that the Kingdom had arrived in His ministry. The sin of Adam and Eve opened the door for sin to corrupt and enslave God's creation. The announcement that the Kingdom had arrived in Jesus' ministry meant that God was beginning the process of restoring His creation.

The connection between the good news of the Kingdom and *healing every disease and every sickness* is unbreakable. In fact, the announcement that the Kingdom had come is simultaneously the announcement of the defeat of disease, death, and every other curse that has fallen on human beings as a result of the presence of sin in God's good creation. Any doctrine of the gospel that does not draw deeply from Jesus' preaching and teaching is certain to be defective and unworthy of the designation "good news."

### VERSE 36

Verse 35 summarized Jesus' ministry of preaching and healing. Verse 36 provides His motivation: *When He saw the crowds, He felt compassion for them*. The term that Matthew used to describe Jesus' compassion is a word that first meant "inner parts," the "entrails," or in our own day, "guts." The word came to mean the seat or center of a person's emotions, much like we use the term *heart*. In almost every use inside and outside the New Testament, it had to do with mercy or compassion. The word speaks of an emotion that wells up deep within a person's gut. Emotions this deep demand a response. Thus, Jesus' compassion caused Him to so identify with the ones in need that He took action on their behalf. (See also Matt. 14:14; 15:32; and 20:34.)

What aroused such strong emotion when Jesus looked out over the crowds? His heart went out to them because *they were weary and worn out*. These terms indicate harassment, confusion, and lack of direction. Matthew then employs the first of two crucial images to depict the crowd's condition. The first is that they were *like sheep without a shepherd*.

In John 10:11, Jesus contrasted Himself with Israel's corrupt spiritual guides: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." This imagery draws heavily from the Old Testament. When God informed Moses that he would not lead the people into the land, He commanded Moses to anoint Joshua as successor "so that the Lord's community won't be like sheep without a shepherd" (Num. 27:17). Among the prophets, Ezekiel and Jeremiah highlight the failure of Israel's spiritual guides most profoundly. According to Ezekiel 34:1-7, Israel's kings, its shepherds, were selfish and corrupt. Similarly, in Jeremiah 23, God was grieved by the pitiful state of Judah's kings and other leaders. As a result, the prophet promised that God would remove these despicable leaders and replace them with righteous guides who would shepherd them and protect them from harm (Jer. 23:1-4). Specifically, God promised a king like David who would "reign wisely as king and administer justice and righteousness in the land" (Jer. 23:5)—a clear reference to Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Thus, Jesus was moved to compassion when He looked out at the people of Israel and saw their desperate situation as a result of their lack of leadership. In Him, the promised Shepherd had arrived, and Israel's so-called shepherds were resisting Him and leading the people to do the same. Jesus was so moved that He commissioned the Twelve to go to the lost sheep and provide them guidance and protection.

*When was the last time you identified so deeply with the suffering of another person that you were moved to act in order to meet his or her need or alleviate suffering?*

### CHALLENGED TO PRAY (Matt. 9:37-38)

*<sup>37</sup> Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few." <sup>38</sup> Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."*

### VERSES 37-38

Jesus' compassion was also stirred by the realization that "*The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few.*" When Jesus spoke of a harvest it always had to do with gathering people into the kingdom (Matt. 13:37-41; John 4:35-38). Up to this point in Jesus' ministry, He alone was gathering the harvest. But now, the readiness of the harvest meant the time had come for the Twelve to share in the labor. In fact, the harvest was so abundant that many more laborers would be needed. To be Jesus' disciple and follow Him demands participation with Jesus in bringing in the harvest. Jesus did not call His disciples to be spectators but rather to be participants in the mission.

In light of the need, Jesus' first command was not to go out and harvest but rather to *pray* for workers. Perhaps Jesus wanted His followers to learn an important lesson of the harvest: without prayer, the laborers will be insufficient in number and inadequate in power.

*What is your church doing to encourage preparing and sending workers out into His harvest?*

## COMMISSIONED TO GO (Matt. 10:1-8)

<sup>1</sup> *Summoning His 12 disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to drive them out and to heal every disease and sickness.* <sup>2</sup> *These are the names of the 12 apostles: First, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;* <sup>3</sup> *Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;* <sup>4</sup> *Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.* <sup>5</sup> *Jesus sent out these 12 after giving them instructions: “Don’t take the road leading to other nations, and don’t enter any Samaritan town.* <sup>6</sup> *Instead, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* <sup>7</sup> *As you go, announce this: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’* <sup>8</sup> *Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, drive out demons. You have received free of charge; give free of charge.”*

### VERSE 1

The most prominent aspect of Jesus’ ministry up to this point has been His authority. We see His authority in His teaching, in His healing, and over sin and death. The mission to which Jesus called the Twelve would require at least a share of Jesus’ authority. So He gave them *authority over unclean spirits, to drive them out and to heal every disease and sickness.*

Not only did Jesus have authority, He had authority over authority. That is, Jesus had the right to delegate His authority as He saw fit. The mission to which Jesus was calling the Twelve would require more than preaching about the Kingdom; it would require making it visible. The arrival of the Kingdom would ultimately mean the end of demons, disease, and death. Giving the people a glimpse of what the world would look like when God’s kingdom had fully come was as much a part of the mission as words about the Kingdom. The casting out of unclean spirits and healing diseases would offer that visible display. Thus, as they went out preaching, healing, and casting out demons, their ministry mirrored Jesus’ ministry.

### VERSES 2-4

Matthew provided the names of the Twelve. There is purpose in the number *twelve*. It is worth noting that following Judas’ betrayal and suicide, the Book of Acts begins with Peter insisting that a replacement be selected (Acts 1:15-26). Obviously, twelve works well for going out in pairs. More significantly, however, is that Jesus was establishing a renewed Israel, one consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. This restored Israel would be built on the foundation of twelve apostles, recalling the building of the nation Israel on the twelve tribes.

They are called *apostles* only here in Matthew’s Gospel. The noun *apostolos* means “delegate, envoy, or messenger.” The verbal form of the word, *apostellō*, means “to send.” In the New Testament, the term designated a small group of uniquely commissioned disciples that included but was not limited to the Twelve. These men were called and sent by Jesus to proclaim and demonstrate that, in Jesus, the kingdom of God had arrived.

The list of the Twelve appears four times in the New Testament (see also Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:13-16; and Acts 1:13). Interestingly, each list presents the names in the same groups of four, with the same name headlining each of the three groups. *Peter* is the first name in the first group, *Philip* is the first name in the second group, and *James the son of Alphaeus* headlines the third group. The three groups seem to flow in order of prominence, with Peter, Andrew, James, and John, the inner circle, comprising the first group. It is also plausible that Jesus grouped them into smaller units with a unit leader for administrative purposes.

Also, the diversity among the men who make up the list is striking. There are two pairs of brothers: Simon Peter and Andrew, and James and John. They were uneducated fishermen. Matthew likely had more education since he formerly served as tax collector. The other Simon was a zealot, indicating his political affiliation. It is remarkable that a Jewish zealot, who would have used violence against Jews that conspired with the Romans, could form a brotherhood with a Roman sympathizer like Matthew. What a testimony of the power of Jesus to transform people’s lives.

### VERSES 5-6

Jesus’ charge to the Twelve included four elements: (1) where to carry out the mission (vv. 5-6); (2) what to preach on the mission (v. 7); (3) what to do on the mission (v. 8a); and (4) how they are to live while on mission (v. 8b). To begin, Jesus instructed them where to carry out the mission. They should avoid the areas associated with Gentiles and Samaritans. Jesus did not restrict ministry to Gentiles or Samaritans, but He did offer geographical restrictions. In this initial stage of Jesus sending out these Jewish disciples, He made the focus Jewish territory. In some ways, this is less theological and more practical. These were Jewish disciples not well-prepared to cross the cultural barriers necessary to reach Gentiles. There was also, however, a theological component. God’s plan for making His name known among all the nations would begin with Israel. This was the ultimate purpose of His election of Israel: to use Israel as a light to make His name known among the Gentiles (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 60:1-3). God’s plan was to reach Israel first, and then

the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10). In the final words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, He commanded His followers to make disciples of all nations. The initial focus, however, would be *the lost sheep of the house of Israel*.

*Is Jesus always specific when He gives one of His followers an assignment? How can His assignments be both specific and general?*

## **VERSE 7**

Jesus then instructed the Twelve concerning what they were to preach: *'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'* This message would mimic precisely Jesus' proclamation from the very beginning of His public ministry (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14-15). Prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus, the gospel presentation focused on the need to repent in light of the fact that the King had arrived and God was acting in Him to bring about His redemptive purpose. This continues to be the church's message, with only a slight addition. Following the resurrection, the call is to repent in light of the fact that the King has arrived, died, was buried, and was raised from the dead (Acts 8:12; 28:31).

## **VERSE 8**

In verse 8a, Jesus instructed the Twelve concerning what they were to do on the mission: *Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, drive out demons*. Once again, this echoes precisely the ministry of Jesus. Not only would these deeds reveal what kind of kingdom they proclaimed, but they would also authenticate the message they preached. Although the Gospels do not record any examples of the Twelve raising the dead during this period, Peter did raise Tabitha from the dead after Jesus' ascension (Acts 9:36-42). Thus, in their own ministry, the Twelve would preach what Jesus preached and perform the miraculous deeds Jesus performed. They were commissioned by Jesus to act as His envoys under His authority, proclaiming His message and performing His miracles.

In verses 8b-10, Jesus instructed the Twelve how they were to live while on mission. They were to live simply, accepting the hospitality of the people to whom they were ministering. They did not pay for the gospel they received, and they should share it without charge.

But Jesus' instruction went beyond merely not charging for their ministry. They could have taken along what they needed to live above poverty, although that might have slowed them down. The instructions in verses 9-10 do not seem to be about allowing them to travel more swiftly, or Jesus would not have forbidden them to take sandals. Jesus' instructions were aimed at reinforcing the nature of their mission. If they followed Jesus' instructions and went with no currency, no bag for carrying food, and no extra shirt or walking stick, then they would conduct their ministry in poverty. In so doing, they would be able to identify with the people in Israel to whom they would preach and minister. Furthermore, by leaving money and food behind, they would be forced to depend on God to meet their needs every step of the way.

The challenge of this passage is how to apply it to the contemporary setting. It is critical to note that many of these instructions were limited to this particular mission. This would include the geographical limits He placed as well as the instructions about what they could not take with them. The geographical limit of staying within the borders of Israel was rescinded by the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19. Jesus rescinded the limits on what to take along on mission in His instructions to the Twelve during the Last Supper in Luke 22:35-36. He asked them: "When I sent you out without money-bag, traveling bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?" Then He added the following: "But now, whoever has a money-bag should take it, and also a traveling bag." In fact, by the time we get to Paul's letters, it is clear that every minister has the right to expect that his congregation will adequately care for his needs so that he can devote himself to the needs of the people (1 Cor. 9:6-12).

The nature of ministry has not changed. Ministers should seek to live in such a way that they can identify with the people to whom they are called to minister. A minister who lives lavishly amidst a people in poverty will surely destroy his moral authority. Also, ministers today must be cautious about losing a sense of dependence on God, even when they have sufficient means to meet their monthly needs. It is not, however, the responsibility of the congregation to keep their minister dependent on God by limiting his income. On the contrary, God will keep him humble; the congregation should care for his needs.

## **KEY DOCTRINE**

### *Evangelism and Missions*

Missionary effort on the part of all rests upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ.

## **BIBLE SKILL**

*Use other Scripture passages to help understand a Bible passage.*

We should avoid reading Matthew 10:1-8 as a “once and for all time” instruction for how missionaries on the field should be supported. The instruction here must be interpreted in light of the later instruction in Luke 22:35-36 and other passages such as 1 Corinthians 9:1-14. We also must avoid reading Jesus’ instruction about going to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:6) as evidence that Jesus had no concern for Gentiles. Read Matthew 8:5-13 and 28:19. How do those passages add to your understanding of Matthew 10:6?

### **BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR**

For additional context, read “The ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ in Matthew,” available digitally in *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible* at [lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator](http://lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator).