



THE CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE

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By Mitchell Maloney

Matthew 9:35-38

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

The scripture tells us that the Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “*Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit and she will bring forth a Son and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins* (Matthew 1:20-21). Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin.

Jesus grew up just like every other human being. However, He was God incarnate in the flesh (John 1:14). Jesus declared that His mission in life was “to seek and save the lost.” (Luke 19:10).

As we look at our text, Jesus is fully engaged in meeting, seeking, and ministering to the lost sheep in Capernaum. He was on mission to find as many misled and lost people as He could gather to hear His words.

He healed a lame man that had been lowered down into the room where Jesus was speaking. He delivered two demon possessed men and a woman who had been hemorrhaging for the past twelve years. No doctor could heal her, but Jesus declared, “Woman, your faith has made you whole.” She was healed instantly. He called Matthew the tax collector to follow him, too.

As Jesus ministered to the people, He went to every city, village, and place where He could minister to people who were abused and oppressed by life. He went to large, wealthy cities and to the poor and obscure villages. The Gospel was for every person regardless of their status in life.

Definition of “In the Middle”

To be engaged with someone, a group or project; to be involved, in the thick of it; to be concerned about and committed enough to a cause, project or group to do something about it.

Jesus went about all the cities and villages teaching and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and healing every sickness and disease among them. When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them.

Definition of Compassion

Pity, sympathy, empathy; concern for the suffering or misfortunes of others; sensitivity, love, warmth, tenderness, mercy, lenience, tolerance, kindness.

Compassion is all these things and more. You can exhibit all these qualities and still miss the intent of compassion. Compassion is a “pain of love” that compels you to do something about it.

Jesus was moved with compassion for them because they were weary and scattered like sheep with no shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)

Jesus put Himself “in the middle” of where the hurting people were. They were physically, mentally, and emotionally drained by life. Life was difficult. They were unfocused. Their lives were helter-skelter.

He said to His disciples, *“The harvest is truly plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the Harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”* (Matthew 9:38)

The laborers are in the harvest that we reap. Those that you have won to Christ are the closest to the harvest to be reaped.

Christ came to seek and to save the lost. He placed Himself “in the middle” of people’s hurting and hopeless lives. He has called us to pray for them. He has called us to go to them. We must have compassion for them. We are the called out ones.

Psalm 126:5-6

Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

The Church has been placed “in the middle.”

II Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

I Timothy 2:3-7

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle - I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying - a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

God desires for all men to be saved. People today have isolated themselves. The result is loneliness, depression, and despair. According to Fox News, “Loneliness is such a great problem in Great Britain that the Parliament has appointed a Minister of Loneliness to train people to call and go to them.”

Jesus went to them and healed them. He has called us to go to them! We are ekklesia, the called out ones. We are ekkballos, the sent ones. We are like the dragnet that is cast out in the deep to catch all kinds of creatures. We must do it with compassion.

What can we do to be the “Church in the Middle?”

Revisit your calling from God. Reestablish your core values that include

- Concentrated prayer
- Caring connections
- Committed discipleship
- Contagious mission
- Celebratory worship.

Acts 2:42-47

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Acts chapter two describes the first century church as they were filled with the Holy Spirit and fire. They went out into the streets of Jerusalem to proclaim the wonderful works of God. Three thousand people were saved that day.

Reconnect the church to the culture around us in relevant ways. We are not called to be isolationists. We are called to be salt and light.

- Reengage with the next generation.
- Return to your first love for Jesus. If you love Him you will love others.
- Reclaim the mind and passion of Christ.
- Refire and don't drop out.

God broke in Abram's comfort zone and called him to follow the God of Heaven. He broke into the life of a woman at the well in Samaria to save her and a whole city. He went all the way to the cross to be “in the middle” of two thieves. He was suspended on the cross “in the middle” of heaven and earth.

He has placed us “in the middle” of a hurting and dysfunctional world. We have been desensitized to violence and depravity, but He is calling us back to compassion that causes us to be “The Church in the Middle.”

Colossians 3:12

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

In conclusion: In Matthew Chapter Nine, the man with palsy who had to be lowered down from the roof into the room where Jesus was teaching represents the helpless and hopeless who can't

help themselves. They have been crippled by life and need someone to come and help them get to Christ.

The blind men who were healed represent those who are physically and spiritually blind. Jesus was moved with compassion for them.

The woman with an issue of blood who had depleted her finances by going to doctors who could not heal her represents those who are considered unclean and untouchable. She had no strength or resources, but Jesus became her strength and resource for life.

We, as the church, are Ekklesia, called out ones, and also Ekkballos, the sent ones. Christ in us will move us with compassion to win the hurting and hopeless of our day!

We are the “Church in the Middle.”