

JESUS HAD COMPASSION ON THEM

Matthew 9:35-38

Key verse: 9:36

When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

In the last year I had an opportunity to visit to Venezuela in order to encourage our leaders who were in great distress because of the socio-economic and political crisis of the country. I planned to visit chapters in other provinces and had to take planes from Margarita to Caracas, and then from Caracas to Merida. In the plane from Margarita to Caracas a young lady with a small baby sat next to me. She looked humble and stressed. I thought it was for the baby who was crying. I helped her a little, but we barely talked. In the next plane from Caracas to Merida, she sat next to me again and we talked a little more, but not much. I guessed that she was going back to her home or visiting to her mother's house. After the plane landed, I saw her again at the baggage claim area and helped her to pick up her baggage. Then, she asked me if I knew an express bus terminal to go to Colombia. She was not going back to her home or visiting to her mother's house. She was trying to cross the border from Venezuela to Colombia. I had heard that many Venezuelans were crossing the border to go to other countries finding job and new life. She was one of them. I felt very sorry about her and the situation of the country. I asked Shep. Jaime, the director of Merida UBF, to give her a ride to the express bus terminal. Meanwhile, we talked with her. She would take a bus there for around 9 hours to get to the border and then wait there several days more in order to be admitted to cross the border. She did not have any close relatives or friends in Colombia. She did not have any specific places to settle in. She was having an adventure holding her little baby in her arms and carrying a big baggage. What we could do for her was to pray to cross the border safely with the protection of God. I gave her my phone number to text me when she was in Colombia. Several days later, she texted me saying, "Mr. John, we are in Colombia. Thank you for your prayer and help!" I felt very thankful to God for her, but at the same time I felt very sad for the sufferings of the people of Venezuela. Then, how much more our Lord Jesus has compassion on this people! I ask you to pray for Venezuelan people with the compassion of Jesus so that they may accept the good news of the kingdom and be freed from the oppression of sins.

Today's passage is the conclusion of chapter 9 illustrating the compassion of Jesus on the people who were harassed and helpless for not having a shepherd. At the same time, it is the introduction to chapter 10 that is about calling the twelve disciples and sending them out to

proclaim the kingdom message. In chapter 9, we can observe a clear contrast between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, whereas the Pharisees did not have any interest in the people and blamed Jesus for eating with sinners (9:11). Jesus was very frustrated by the religious leaders and looked for shepherds for God's flock who had compassion on the harassed and helpless people saying, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (37-38). I pray that we may learn the heart of Jesus who had compassion on the sheep without a shepherd and looked for workers for God's harvest field.

Please look at v. 35. "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness." This verse shows us the main activities of the early ministry of Jesus in Galilee. Jesus was very active in doing God's mission going through all the towns and villages. According to Josephus, a prominent Jewish historian of the first century, there were 204 cities and villages with above 15,000 inhabitants in Galilee in Jesus' time. Wow, Jesus went through all these cities and villages teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness!

To go is the first step to do God's work of salvation. Hence, Jesus himself went through all the towns and villages. Furthermore, he gave us a great commission saying, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20a). If we do not go, we cannot make disciples of all nations. Apostle Paul also clarifies it saying, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (Rom 10:14-15)

We, our UBF ministry, have been obeying this great commission of Jesus and became one of the largest cross-cultural missionary sending agencies in the world with more than 1,500 missionaries working at the frontlines of world mission in around 90 countries. Our missionaries here also came to America obeying the great commission of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has been doing an amazing work of salvation among us using our missionaries, native leaders, and pastors. However, currently we are facing a big challenge for the global pandemic. Even when we go to colleges to preach the gospel, we hardly can meet students due to social distancing. Thus, many campus ministers are embarrassed for not knowing how to do the ministry of evangelism and discipleship in this challenging time. It seems that we are seriously limited to

carry out the great commission of Jesus. However, we believe that our God is working in the midst of the pandemic as well. If we see what is happening from the perspective of God, we can realize that there are many ways to reach out college students. I think that we need to widen our perspectives to interpret the word “go” not only to the real world, but also to the virtual world. If college students are not at their campuses now, where are they? They are on social medias such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and so on. Therefore, to go in this specific period means to go to social medias in order to meet college students and preach them the gospel. This does not mean that we will abandon our real world. On the contrary, our online relationship with our Bible students must be complemented by our in-person relationship with them. Around one month ago a website Campus Ministry Today published an article titled, “How to Reach Freshmen through Social Media.” The article points out that social media is the top medium to reach out college students in this time and suggests good ways to bolster your social media to become an effective outreach tool. UBF HQ IT Department is also providing helpful resources to use social medias for evangelism. I have been lazy to use social medias thinking that I do not have enough time for that. But I learned that I must be diligent to reach out college students through social medias as well as going to campuses. Some of us may feel difficult to use social medias, especially our senior members. But I pray that God may give us wisdom to employ all useful methods for campus evangelism and disciple making ministry.

Then, what did Jesus do when he went through all the towns and villages? We can find three main activities of the ministry of Jesus in v. 35b, “teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.”

First, Jesus taught in their synagogues. The synagogues were the places where the Jews gathered to listen the word of God. Teaching is didasko in Greek, which is the act of instructing someone in matters of faith. Jesus was an excellent teacher, thus the crowds were amazed at his teaching because Jesus taught with authority (Mt 7:28-29).

Second, Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom. Proclaiming is kerysso in Greek that is to act as a herald in order to announce and declare the good news of the kingdom. What is the good news of the kingdom? The first message that Jesus announced was: “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk 1:15) The good news is clear, which is “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). The good news is that Jesus died for our sins and resurrected from the dead in order to makes us be the people of God’s kingdom. The good news is that we moved from darkness to light through the power of the precious blood of Jesus, so now we can live in love, peace, and justice in the kingdom of God.

Teaching and proclaiming are interdependent for the ministry of the word of God. When we read the book of Nehemiah chapter 8, we can realize that a spiritual awakening occurred when preaching was delivered powerfully and teaching was given clearly. While Ezra stood on a high wooden platform and read the Law of God aloud in the presence of the people of Israel, the Levites instructed the people making them understand clearly what was being read. Teaching can help Bible students to understand the word of God deeply meanwhile proclaiming can make them be persuaded to accept the good news of the kingdom through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we need to pray for deep Bible studies and powerful messages in order to evangelize college students and make them faithful disciples of Jesus with the power of God. I encourage all our members to have deep Bible studies about the passage of Sunday Worship Service message in order to understand it clearly and prepare their hearts to accept the message from God. Then, we can expect the work of the Holy Spirit who will awaken each of us and raise a spiritual revival among us in our generation.

Third, Jesus healed every disease and sickness. Healing is therapeuo in Greek that is to bring health to sick persons physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The ministry of Jesus is full of healing stories. Jesus healed a man with leprosy. Jesus healed a paralyzed servant of the centurion. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law from a fever. Jesus healed many demon-possessed people. Jesus healed a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus from death. Jesus healed the blind and the mute. Jesus healed every disease and every sickness. Healing is a part of the messianic ministry of Jesus depicted in Luke 4:18-19, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." The messianic ministry is a holistic ministry that includes proclaiming of good news, freedom and healing. There are many people who are suffering from diseases and sicknesses, even among us. I pray that the power of healing of Jesus be with each of us so that we may be healthy physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Please look at v. 36. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." In the story of Jesus, we can find that Jesus had compassion in many occasions, especially when he saw people suffering for sicknesses (Mt 9:36, 14:14, 20:34; Mk 1:41), hunger (Mt 15:32), and death (Lk 7:13). What is compassion? The Greek word *splagchnizomai* means literally "to be moved in one's bowels." Compassion is a quality of showing kindness or favor, of being gracious, or of having pity or mercy. God is a compassionate Father and Jesus Christ exemplified God's compassion in his preaching and healing (Mt 9:36; 14:14). Jesus told us the parables of the Good Samaritan who

had compassion on a wounded traveler (Lk 10:33), and the prodigal son, whose father had compassion on him when he returned home (Lk 15:20). Therefore, the church is to demonstrate the compassion of Jesus to neighbor and the people of the world.

Then, how can we have compassion on others?

Firstly, we need to know our compassionate Father and Son Jesus Christ personally. Compassion, in other word love, comes from God (1Jn 4:7). Therefore, if we do not experience the compassion of God on us and are not transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, we cannot have genuine compassion on others.

Secondly, we need to have interest in others. Jesus saw the crowds, which means that Jesus saw them carefully with the interest of helping them. If we do not have interest in others, we cannot see them carefully with compassion. One day a young man came to me and told me that we had met before in a meeting. But I could not remember him and felt very sorry about it. Why I could not remember him while he remembered me? It was because I did not have interest in him. If we do not have interest in young college students, we cannot have compassion on them even if we see them every day.

Thirdly, we need to understand the condition of others. When Jesus saw the crowds, he understood that they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus did not know them superficially, but personally living together with them. Because Jesus was connected with the people who were suffering due to the oppression of the religious leaders, Jesus understood very well that they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ‘Harassed’ is feeling or looking strained through having too many demands made on one. Its synonyms are worried, annoyed, and tired. ‘Helpless’ is a condition of lacking protection or support. The crowds who came to Jesus had a lot of burdens of life such as poverty, sicknesses, anxieties, agonies, sorrows, and so on. However, they did not have anyone who could help them, protect them, and support them. It was because the religious and political leaders were not their shepherds, but robbers who took advantage of the people for their own interests. They were like sheep without a shepherd. The condition of sheep without a shepherd is very vulnerable. They are exposed to danger of death and suffering. Therefore, when the people heard about Jesus who is a good shepherd, they rushed to meet Jesus to get help, healed, and freed from their burdens. Jesus understood perfectly why the crowds came to him and what were their needs. Hence, Jesus could have compassion on them from his heart.

If we do not have compassion on college students in Chicago area, we cannot help them. Do you see them carefully with the interest of helping them? Do you understand their agonies,

anxieties, and sorrows? Regretfully, I do not understand them well because I have not met them yet. If we are not connected with them, we cannot understand them. I can understand a little more than you about how Venezuelans are living now in the midst of this pandemic because I am connected with them more than you. However, I cannot understand them perfectly because I am not living in Venezuela, but in America now. This is why Jesus had to be incarnated into human body and came to the world. I pray that we may be connected with college students, understand them, and help them with the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What did Jesus do when he saw the crowds and had compassion on them? Please look at vv. 37-38. “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’” Jesus saw the crowds as a plentiful harvest to reap. It was true because the people were thirsty spiritually and ready to accept the gospel of the kingdom. However, there were not enough workers who could help them. Hence, Jesus ordered his disciples to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field. The Lord of the harvest is God the Father. The harvest belongs to God who is the subject of sending out workers into his harvest field. Here we can learn that God is the main actor of the redemptive history of salvation. God is the one who calls his workers, prepares them, and sends them out to reap the harvest. God is working actively for the work of salvation. Therefore, what we have to do is to obey God’s order preaching the gospel of the kingdom and making disciples of all nations. Also as the co-workers of God’s mission, we can ask God to send out workers into his harvest fields, which means to discover God’s workers with spiritual discernment. Then, we will be able to carry out God’s mission in this world working together with them.

Through this passage, we can feel how urgently Jesus was looking for workers for God’s harvest field. We are God’s workers called to reap the harvest. However, sometimes we do not think that the harvest is plentiful. On the contrary, we think that it is not time to reap the harvest because we cannot see many people who are ready to accept the gospel of the kingdom. But, is it true? Maybe we have not met yet those who are harassed and helpless suffering in their rooms. Maybe we have not met yet those who are ready to work for the harvest field of God. But I believe that God has prepared his workers for his harvest field. You and I are those workers that God called and prepared. “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field” is an expression of Jesus to awaken us to work for God’s redemptive history, especially for evangelism and disciple making ministry among college students in Chicago area, in the US, and in the world. I pray that we may respond to this calling of Jesus and participate actively in God’s work of salvation. Amen.