

# People Are the Plan

So good to see everybody this morning. If you have a bible, go ahead and turn with me to the end of **Matthew 9**. If you're new to City Church, first off, welcome. Glad you're here. For you to know, we are in a **series** where we're walking, passage-by-passage through the gospel of Matthew. Now specifically right now, we're in a portion of *Matthew* that focuses a lot on the *people* that Jesus interacts with during his life and ministry.

And today is a fairly significant moment in the story. Because **in today's passage, Jesus starts unpacking his plan for making himself known to the outside world.** *Thus far* in the story, Jesus has been flying *fairly* under-the-radar (or at least as under-the-radar as a God-in-the-flesh miracle worker and healer can be). Still, not a lot of people know about him. On a number of occasions, we've actually seen Jesus tell people that he heals **not to tell anyone** about *being* healed. He's at least got some *relative* obscurity about him. But in the passage we're going to look at today, that does start to change. Because in this passage, Jesus is going to lay out at least a *part* of his plan for making his movement known to the world.

And considering that *making Jesus known to the world* is **also something we are very interested in** doing *today* as followers of Jesus, I think there's plenty we can learn from this particular passage. So let's take a look and see what it is. Starting where we left off last week, in chapter 9, v. 35:

*[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.*

So at this point, Jesus at this is continuing what he's been doing all along: teaching, preaching, and healing. But as he does all of that, something happens. At this moment in the story, we read that Jesus looked across the crowds, and he has "compassion" for them. Now the English translation here almost softens the text a little. The word in the Greek for "**compassion**" is the root word **splagchnon**, where we get our word *spleen*. It means to be moved in your *guts*—your stomach—in a deeply emotional sort of way. **So have you ever been watching a movie, and there's a moment in the story where something emotional happens and you literally feel it down in your stomach? If you're watching an episode of *This is Us*, it's the feeling that you get every five minutes? Do you guys know what I'm talking about? You know that feeling in the pit of your stomach? It says *that's* what Jesus feels when he sees the crowds. His stomach *turns* with compassion for them.**

So here's **what he does about** that compassion—v. 37:

*[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.”*

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” In other words, Jesus says **there is more work to be done out there than there are workers to do the work**. So Jesus calls all of his disciples to himself (likely more than just the twelve, it could've been as many as a couple hundred people), and he asks them to *pray*. Now I think it's worth pointing out **how different that is than our typical response** to there being too much work to do. If we have a task before us, if we're overwhelmed by the amount of things we have to get done, do we typically *pray* first, or *get to work* first? We usually get to *work*! Even sometimes within the *church*, right? We get overwhelmed by the amount of people that need to know Jesus, so we have an evangelistic event or we do some kind of outreach initiative. And those can be great things to do. But evidently, especially when it comes to *kingdom* work—Jesus thinks *prayer* should come *first*. **We ask God to move, and then we move**. So here, Jesus tells his disciples to *pray* that God would send out more laborers into the harvest. And then we hit v. 1 of chapter 10. It says right after he asked them all to pray, he...

*[10:1] And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction* (notice Jesus gives them authority to do pretty much the exact same things *he* has been doing so far). *[2] The names of the twelve apostles* (or “sent out ones”) *are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; [3] Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; [4] Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*

*[5] These twelve Jesus sent out—*

We'll pause there for a second. Now first let's just acknowledge: this is a **sneaky genius move** by Jesus. In the *last* part of the passage, he told all of his disciples to “*pray* for more laborers,” they *do*, and then starting here in v. 1 he says, “*surprise!* You are the *laborers!* The good news is that your prayers have been answered. The even better news is that *you* are the answer. Congratulations on having such *effective* prayers.” I almost titled this teaching *Be Careful What You Pray For*. ~~Jesus asks the disciples to pray, and then makes them the answer to their own prayer.~~

Now for clarity, it **wasn't everyone who prayed** who got sent out—it looks like it was just a *subset* of that group. But still, I think I'm going to start using this method more. **The next time y'all hear me say "I just want us to take some time together and pray that God would raise up thirty people from somewhere to be a part of a new church plant," if you're smart, you should be like 'wait a second—is he doing the Jesus thing here? He's about to ask thirty of us to be those thirty people, isn't he?'"** And the answer to that is **yes. Yes he is.** But that's what happens in the story. **After Jesus asks them to pray for laborers to go out into the 'harvest,' he sends them out as the laborers.**

So here's **the big idea.** I told you earlier that today's passage is about discovering what Jesus' *plan* is for making himself known to the world, so **here we have it. People are the plan. God's plan to bring his kingdom to bear on earth as it is in heaven is to entrust his power, his authority, his mission...to his people.** That's how he's going about it. And that's *it.* That's the *whole* plan. No marketing strategies, no church growth paradigms, no tweetable catchphrases (#GoGetTheHarvest). Just God's people, making God *known* to the world. That's God's method, it always *has* been, and *we* get to be a part of it.

About a month ago, we had **lunch with Tyler & Brooke Martin.** A lot of you know them—they are the ministers at a campus organization known as *Chi Alpha* at UT; they've actually been meeting here at our building on Sunday evenings this past year. I know a lot of you here are actually a part of that ministry. Tyler & Brooke are two incredible, smart, kingdom-loving people. And we were talking to them about *discipleship.* And while we were having lunch, they asked us a question that has been *haunting* me ever since they asked it. They said "if City Church had no website and no social media presence, would anybody *new* ever come around?" So then I said, "I don't *like* that question—ask a *different* one please."

But **have you ever thought about** that? If there was no way for people to search Google or Instagram for churches in Knoxville, and the only way people found out about what we are up to were *you guys*—people who are already a part of City Church—would any new people ever come check things out? Or to be honest, forget about *City Church*—if all the churches in the *U.S.* had no online presence, no social media—would anybody in the *U.S.* ever come to know *Jesus*? Because we do realize that's how people came to know Jesus in the *first century,* right? People back then weren't scrolling through their Instagram feeds and going "that church seems like it's got a cool vibe—maybe I'll try it out." **What was happening then was that the Spirit of God, through God's people, was making God known to the world. God's people were, and always will be, God's plan. Not websites. Not social media. Not even church services. People.**

So the question for us is **are we participating** in that plan? Do we see that task as *our* task? That's at least one thing I think this passage is getting at. So for the rest of our passage and the rest of our time, here's what I want to do. **Now that we know what God's plan is, and our part in it, I want to talk more about how we go about that plan.** How do we go about being *sent out* as God's people, as his representatives? **As we seek to make him known in our workplaces, and our classes, and our friend groups, our neighborhoods, what postures should we take?** What should it look like in practice? At least in my experience, **the problem for most followers of Jesus isn't that they don't know that they should be making Jesus known.** It's that they struggle to know *how* exactly to do it.

And *that* I think are what the **instructions Jesus gives** in verses 5-15 can help us with. Now, we do need to acknowledge that these instructions weren't written to apply *directly* into our context today. They were written to a very different group of people, at a very different time in history. So in order to figure out how they all apply, we **have to do a little work.** **We have to look at these specific instructions, try to peel the context back and look at the reasons behind them, and then situate those reasons into our context today.** Does that make sense?

But when we do that, I think we find at least **four postures** to guide how we go about making Jesus known to our world. So with each of them, I'll give you the *idea*, I'll show you how I *got there* from the passage, and then we'll talk about what that posture looks like in practice. Make sense? Okay, here's the first one...

## Go to who you know

So first, I think we're instructed to **consider taking the good news of the kingdom to the people we already know and interact with.** I get this posture from v. 5-6. Take a look with me there. It says...

*[5, cont'd] These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, [6] but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

So in this particular mission, Jesus wants the disciples to **prioritize reaching Jewish people**, *rather* than Gentiles and Samaritans. Now what's interesting about that is that it doesn't seem like Jesus views *his* mission as exclusively to Israel—he's been interacting with, healing and including plenty of non-Jewish people even so far in *Matthew*. So why does he limit the disciples' mission here? Some of it probably just has to do with how

God had always done things; his plan was always to reach Israel, and use Israel to reach the rest of the world.

But most commentators say there was **probably another, slightly more practical reason** at play. Think about it for a second: the twelve disciples were *themselves*, Jewish. And so it's highly likely that at this point in the story and in their training, these twelve men were not yet *equipped* to cross significant cultural boundary lines. They likely weren't ready to proclaim who Jesus was to a very different group of people, with very different cultural backgrounds and beliefs. So **it's likely that Jesus is sending the disciples first to Israel, because Israel is who they're currently equipped and positioned to reach. He is in essence, getting them to prioritize existing relationships over forming brand new ones that they may or may not know how to navigate.**

So I think it's worth *us* asking: **who are we most equipped to reach with the good news of Jesus?** Chances are, it has a lot to do with the types of people you interact with and see on a regular basis, right? So if you're a college *student*, chances are you're at least fairly well equipped to reach other college *students*. If you're a *parent* of young kids, chances are you're fairly well equipped to reach *parents* of young kids. If you work a blue collar job, you're probably well equipped to reach other people working blue collar jobs. Or perhaps you could even think about your *story*: if Jesus rescued you out of a lifestyle of *addiction*, there's a good chance you're well equipped to reach other people who are currently battling addiction. If Jesus rescued you out of an unhealthy, *hyper-religious* background into an understanding of his grace and mercy, chances are you're well equipped to reach others in that setting. Do you see how this works? Often, those relationships are already primed and ready for making Jesus known, because there's familiarity, there's a common foundation between you and the other person. And it probably makes a lot of sense to at least *start* there when it comes to who you are equipped to reach.

Now obviously, this **isn't to say that you're limited** to just reaching those people. God may use you to reach absolutely anyone, even those who are nothing like you at all. But I do think there is a lot of wisdom in at least asking who God has especially *equipped* and *positioned* you to reach. And I think this is helpful because **sometimes when we think about telling people about Jesus, the sheer volume of it all can create paralysis. We think, "so what do I do—just walk up to everyone I see and start telling them about Jesus?" Maybe.** But sometimes it helps to narrow the playing field a little to start with: *who do I feel like God has equipped and positioned me to reach, and how can I start there?* Go to who you know. Okay, next posture...

## Proclaim & Display the Message

Second, I think **followers of Jesus are called to both *proclaim* and *display* the good news of the gospel.** This one I get from v. 7, through the first half of v. 8:

[7] *And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'* (And, v. 8) [8] *Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.*

So notice, in those two verses, there are **two types of actions described**. First, the disciples are told to *proclaim* the gospel of the kingdom: to *announce* that God has arrived on the scene through Jesus, and that he is restoring things to how they were meant to be. They're told to *proclaim* that message. But *second*, they are also told to do things that *display* the *power* of the gospel—to *embody* that message. Specifically here, he calls them to display it by healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, and casting out demons. By displaying *signs* of the kingdom of God being “at hand.” They're called to *proclaim*, but also to *display*.

So there are **some Christians who would say** what really matters is **proclaiming** the gospel. Let's preach a lot of sermons, let's get those sermons online and on the radio and TV, let's go door-to-door, let's hand out thousands of tracts, let's have movies and TV shows *made* about the gospel marketed to as many people as possible—let's just *present* the gospel *message* to as many people as possible. That's the goal: *proclaiming*. And then there are **others** who would say “no, what *really* matters is **displaying** the gospel. So it's not so much about getting a *message* out, as it is about just loving people and *demonstrating* God's love to them. It's about “preaching the gospel, and only when *necessary*, using words.” Let's just love people and hope that somehow, some way, that leads them to discovering Jesus as a result. And to be honest, a lot of times these two camps like to throw rocks at the other one say that the other one is being unhelpful or unfaithful.

But here in the passage, it would seem that the **solution is not *either/or***, it's actually *both/and*. **We shouldn't *just proclaim* the gospel, and we also shouldn't *just display* the gospel. We're called to *proclaim and display* the gospel. *Both* are needed. **A message about Jesus without *actions* that demonstrate its *power* is lacking. But *actions* that *demonstrate* the gospel, without ever *communicating* the gospel itself is *also* lacking.** It turns out we need *both*.**

**So *proclaim*** the gospel—yes. **Tell people about Jesus and who he is and what he does. But while you do that, actually *show* them how it works.** Let them get a close-up glimpse into your life. Let them observe how you view *friendships* differently,

how you approach sexuality and sexual *expression* differently, money and possessions differently. Don't be afraid to let them see precisely *how* you do approach each of those things *differently, because of* the message of the gospel. Because that's going to show them that Christianity isn't just a set of ideas, but a *way of life*.

And, at the same time, **please, display** to people the power of the gospel—yes. Live *differently*. *Be* different. *Love* people. But don't let it stop *there*; take the time to *explain* to them that the *reason* you live differently is because Jesus has rescued you out of your sin and into his kingdom. *Proclaim* to them how it's not just that you happen to be a nicer-than-average person—it's that Jesus has made you an altogether *new* person. Because that's going to help people see that following Jesus isn't just about being a pleasant person—it's about a man and a message that changes the very fabric of people's lives. **We need both**. We need *proclaiming*, and we need *displaying*. Does that make sense? Okay third, we're called to...

## Own the Task

Third, I think we're called to *own* the task of sharing Jesus with people, **rather than outsourcing** it to others or **talking ourselves out** of it. This one comes from the second half of v. 8 through the end of v. 10:

*You received without paying; give without pay. [9] Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, [10] no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food.*

So what's going on here? Well, at the time, it **wasn't uncommon for teachers** and preachers and philosophers to travel from town to town, house to house, and make a living doing all of that. They would go to people's homes or public places in the city, they would wax eloquent about some type of philosophy or some ethical principles—and then they would ask for *payment* from the people listening to them. So think *street performers*, but a little more high brow.

But Jesus in these instructions is **basically telling his disciples**: “that's not what *this* is. That's not what I'm calling *you* to do. You're not going and proclaiming my kingdom in order to make a *living* doing it.” He says, ‘you *received* this message without *paying* for it, so I want you to relay the message to others without *demanding* payment *for* it.’ **In other words, the kingdom is not something that is primarily spread and proclaimed by professionals. It's spread by everyday people encountering the kingdom, and seeing it as their responsibility to tell other people about it.**

Now here's why I think that matters for *us*. **Telling people about Jesus**—what some have called *evangelism*—**is not a job for professional Christians to do**. It's not a job for me or Jeff or Eric or Sara to do here on Sundays. It's not that *your* job is to “invite people to church” so that *we*, the professionals, can tell them about Jesus. **We've used this analogy before, but I think it's a helpful one. If church is a sport**, some people treat Sunday services like they're the “game.” They bring their friends to the “game” to watch the professionals do their thing up *here*, in hopes that that person might like what the *professionals* do *enough* to become a “fan” of that team, and join the Church, or become a Christian, or whatever. That's how some people operate. But biblically, that's not what this is. Biblically, *you guys* are the players on the team. You're the ones out there in the game, Monday through Saturday, around the clock. If anything, the people up here on Sundays are just the coaches giving you a pep talk before you go out and do what matters.

**Church services are not the plan. Cool church programs and initiatives and events are not the plan. People are the plan. You are the plan.** *Our* job here is simply to give *you* the *tools you need* to go about all of it. Do you see the *difference*? Here's the reality: most of *you* get to interact with more non-Christians in a *day* than I do in a *week*. So **if the kingdom of God has any shot at transforming the people in our city, it's going to have to happen outside of who happens to show up for an hour and a half here on Sundays to hear me talk.** It's going to happen through *you*. *You* have access to all kinds of people's lives that I will likely *never* have access to; and it's through *those* relationships that the kingdom of God takes root in our world.

And on that note: **you don't have to be a professional** at talking about Jesus to share Jesus with people. I know some people feel like “I wouldn't even know where to start when it comes to telling someone about Jesus.” But here's the thing: I can almost assure you, if you're a follower of Jesus, you actually *do*. Start with your *story*. Simply put, what was your life like *before* you met Jesus, how did you come to *know* Jesus, and in what ways is your life *different* now that you know him? If you know how to talk about those three things, you know how to share Jesus with people. No “professionalism” needed. Okay, one more. Lastly, we're called to...

## Trust God for the Outcome

This one **comes from** v. 11-15:

*[11] And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy (in context, Jesus essentially means “receptive.” Find out who is receptive...) in it and stay there until you depart. [12] As you enter the house, greet it. [13] And if the*



*house is worthy, receptive, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. [14] And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town* (a symbolic way of being done there—kind of like you and I might use an expression like “wash your hands of that”). *[15] Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.* In case you’re unfamiliar with that reference, it did not in fact go well for Sodom and Gomorrah in the end.

Okay, so there’s **a lot in** what we just read. But essentially, Jesus is encouraging his disciples to *trust God* with the results of their labors, when it comes to telling people about him. We might read it and think “man—this sounds kind of cruel or unloving: just *be done* with anybody who doesn’t receive the message of the kingdom?” But **seen rightly, this should actually be incredibly freeing. Jesus is saying “you are not personally responsible for other people’s hardened hearts.”** You are not required to *force people to see* what they do not want to see.

You are **called to faithfully offer** the kingdom and peace of Jesus to them in whatever way you can. **Proclaim and display the gospel however you can, share with them in whatever ways you can. But at the end of the day, how they respond is between them and God.** *When you see Jesus face-to-face one day, he is not going to ask you why you weren’t convincing enough or clever enough or intelligent enough to coerce more people into his kingdom. He’s going to ask you whether or not you were faithful in telling people about him, regardless of how people responded to you.* You are just called to be *faithful*.

And really, this **takes us all the way back** to the word picture Jesus started off with. Because what did he say right before sending the disciples out? He said “the *what* is plentiful”? The *harvest*. **Now I know probably not many of us in the room are farmers, so let me just make sure we’re following Jesus’ metaphor here. A harvest refers to crops of some sort that are already ripe. Currently ready to reap and gather. They’re finished—you just need to gather and bring them in.** Are you following that?

Now here’s **why I mention that**. I think some of us are convinced that when it comes to displaying and proclaiming the gospel, we have to *create* the harvest. I think some of us are convinced that it’s *our job* to make people *want* the good news of the kingdom of God. But according to Jesus in this passage, that’s not our job at all. Our job is to go and *gather*. There are people in the world right now, in your circles of influence right now, who *are already* hungry for the good news of Jesus. Now, they might *know* that’s what they’re hungry for, or they might just know they’re hungry for *something* other than what

they currently have. But the *harvest* is there. It's *ready*. What God wants is *laborers* to *work* the harvest.

So I'll just leave you with the **one necessary ingredient** in all of this that you cannot neglect to consider: and that's the work of the Spirit. The Spirit is who makes every one of those four postures effective. He's the one that prepares the hearts of every person you are going to interact with who will come to know Jesus. He's the one that prepares your heart and mind for who it is you need to pursue and how it is you need to pursue them. So often, when I hear sermons and seminars and classes about evangelism, they're about methods and tips and tricks and best practices—and there's space for that. But often there is one massive, *glaring* omission: the work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives. But at the end of the day, **this entire thing—people coming to know and experience the kingdom of God—is *his job*, way before it's ours.**

**So here's what I want us to do** as we close. If you've got a bulletin, or a journal, or even just a bible with margins in it, and something to write with, if you haven't already, I want you to take it out. If you don't have something to write with, just pull up the Notes app on your phone where you can type something in. Once you've done that, here's what I want you to do. I want you to write down the names of three people you see on a regular basis—so let's say once a week or more—who you're at least pretty sure don't follow Jesus. **Maybe you don't even know their name yet—maybe it's "that barista" who's always at the coffee shop I go to on Tuesdays. Maybe it's "that other parent" that drops their kid off at the same time as me at daycare.** But whether you know their names or not, just take a second and jot those down, type them in. *I'll give you a moment.*

Now, **with those names written down**, just like Jesus modeled for us, I **want us to pray** for God to send out laborers to reach those people and others in our city. *Pray.*

"Congratulations, your prayers have been answered." Let's stand and sing.