



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for the Feast of the Holy Trinity
June 18, 2023

The Compassionate Authority of Jesus

Matthew 9:35—10:20

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.”*

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.* ² *The names of the twelve apostles 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, 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. ⁷ And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. 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. ¹¹ And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. ¹² As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³ And if the house is worthy, 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. 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.*

¹⁶ *“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹ When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰ For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”*



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As we travel through the Gospels with Jesus, what is it we see Him doing? Teaching, preaching, and healing. Teaching in their synagogues, teaching on the mountainside, teaching His growing number of followers what it means to be His disciples. Preaching the gospel of the kingdom, announcing its arrival, summed up in His words, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Healing every disease, every affliction. We’ve seen many examples, have we not? A leper; a centurion’s servant; Peter’s mother-in-law; two demon-possessed men; a paralytic; a woman with a discharge of blood; a girl raised from the dead; two blind men; another demon-oppressed man, and so it goes.

Teaching, preaching, and healing. And while He’s done these things, we’ve witnessed the unique authority of Jesus. As He teaches – about righteousness and the kingdom and discipleship – He stresses repeatedly, “You have heard that it was said. . . . But I say to you. . . .” And at the end of that long teaching section, which Matthew records in chapters 5-7, it says, “And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”

As Jesus preaches, His proclamation is full of authority, the authority of the mighty One prophesied of old. God’s end-time judgment and salvation are now here, and Jesus has the authority to announce it and to call men to act accordingly: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

As Jesus heals, His authority is also on display: authority over disease, authority over demons, authority over death. Jesus’ word and touch carry great power, power to restore fallen creation.

Yes, Jesus’ teaching, preaching, and healing demonstrate His unique authority, that He is in fact the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of David, whose rule and reign was promised long ago, the One who would usher in the kingdom of heaven here on earth. But notice how this kingdom comes – not just with a show of power, for the raw power of God can be terrifying, but Jesus exercises His authority for our good.

Contrast this to King Herod, who held his kingdom under his control by ruthless ambition, manipulation, and treachery. How very much like our modern rulers he is! Jesus, however, established and maintains His kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, not with ruthless ambition, but with selfless humility. Instead of manipulation, He manifests His mercy. Instead of treachery, He consistently proclaims the truth. Jesus is not a typical human ruler and His kingdom is truly not of this world.

You see, it’s a different kind of authority that Jesus wields. We might call it compassionate authority. Compassion is a key word here. Note what our text says: “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 crowds. That tells us something about Him.

The term that’s translated here, “he had compassion,” could be translated, “his inner parts were moved within him.” That’s the imagery behind the expression. It conveys deep



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emotion, deep feeling. We might say, “his heart was deeply moved.” See the compassionate heart of your Savior here! How deeply He loves these people who need Him so!

But this also tells us something about ourselves. Apart from Christ, we’re like those crowds: “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Harassed and helpless – torn up and beaten down, bruised and buffeted by all the assaults and afflictions of life in this vale of tears. Like sheep without a shepherd – weak, vulnerable, straying, lost. That’s us, apart from Christ. And that’s whom Christ, the Good Shepherd, came to help.

But how can He reach them all? So many to help, so little time! So Jesus tells His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Field workers – that’s who Jesus wants to help Him bring in the harvest. The harvest season is short, and it’s labor-intensive. The workers have got to get out into the field and get to work. So Jesus enjoins His church to pray. Pray to the Lord of the harvest, your Father in heaven, who oversees the work. Pray for more workers. Jesus extends His compassionate authority by having men join Him in the work.

There were twelve in particular whom He first called to be those harvest laborers. He gave them authority to do what He Himself had been doing. He authorized them and sent them out. That’s why they were called “apostles,” sent ones, authorized and sent out with a commission. Twelve apostles: Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, and so on.

Twelve apostles, to match the twelve tribes of Israel. For it’s to them that Jesus sends these apostles: to Israel, and nowhere else. The scope of this first mission is limited: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

These were the ones to whom they were sent. And this is what He sent them to do: “Proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.” Proclaim, heal, raise, cleanse, cast out. . . . That sounds a lot like Jesus’ own ministry, doesn’t it? And that’s the point. Jesus was extending His compassionate authority through the ministry of the apostles.

Well, that’s great, you say. Great for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Great for those people back in the first century. But what about us, here in the twenty-first century? What about the lost sheep of the house of Germany or Sweden or Kenya or America? Doesn’t Jesus have compassion for the lost sheep of Wisconsin? In fact, He does!

Jesus’ compassion is without bounds. So great is His compassion that it moved this Good Shepherd to lay down His life for the sheep. Christ’s compassion took Him all the way to the cross. Ruthless ambition, manipulation, treachery? That’s what Jesus was willing to suffer at the hands of wicked men. For by His rejection, betrayal, suffering, and death on the cross, the compassionate Christ would give His life for your redemption. Clothed now with Christ’s righteousness, you are spared God’s end-time judgment and you



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receive instead eternal salvation. The compassionate authority of Jesus has defeated your enemies for you, delivering you from the domain of demons, disease, and death.

Jesus' compassion is indeed boundless. For the One who first sent out His apostles only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel would later extend that commission to all nations. Having risen, victorious over death, Jesus called together His apostles again and commissioned them anew: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

And so, the compassionate authority of Jesus is extended even now to you. You see, Christ's apostles would eventually ordain other workers to extend the ministry even further, which is how I came to you 15 years ago and how I come before you again today – it's really Jesus doing it, He's just using my voice, for I come to you again proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, the good news of God's reign, calling you to repent of your sins and turn to Him, to receive the salvation accomplished for you by Christ. As we open up God's Word together, we continue to learn together about righteousness and the kingdom and what it means to be Christ's disciples living in this world. Again, it's Jesus who's doing it – in and through me, your pastor.

But does He not also extend His kingdom of grace through you? When you call one another to repentance and then forgive another's wrongs committed against you, this is an act of grace. When you share the message of Christ's redemption through the cross and resurrection, this is an act of grace. When you fathers and mothers teach your children of God's love for them in Jesus, raising them to be not only your children, but God's children, this is not only an act of grace toward them, but toward their future neighbors, with whom they will share the kingdom of God.

Beloved, this is how the kingdom of God is spread: God sent His Son to us, Jesus sent His disciples to you, and now He sends you to be His disciples to the world in which you live.

In a few moments, I will distribute to you the very body and blood of Christ, given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins, thus guaranteeing you ultimate and eternal healing for body and soul in the resurrection of the dead and empowering you to be God's conduit of grace to others.

Yes, beloved, the compassionate authority of Jesus is being extended today, even to you! To God alone be the glory. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen