

Touching the harassed and the helpless

Living in South Africa we are often confronted by a sense of helplessness, which has been brought on by the exceptionally high unemployment rate and lack of jobs. We see people standing begging at robots, we get requests from far and wide for food parcels. People are harassed by unscrupulous employers who underpay them while overworking them. The government harass people by stealing rightfully belongs to them. Overall, people are harassed by sinfulness making them helpless slaves to sin and their situations. How do we, the people of God look at such people? How does Jesus look at them?

Matthew 9:35-38

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

1) Going to uncomfortable places

- Previously we looked at the approachability of Jesus – the fact that Jesus is approachable
 - He can be trusted
 - He cares
 - He is able to meet needs
- In the same way He expects us to be approachable
- However, now we don't see people coming to Jesus to have their needs met; we see Jesus going to the people
- Although we are grateful when people approach us for help, prayer, counsel, the Gospel itself, or attending church, most people won't do that.
 - Jesus also knew that He had to go to where the people were to minister to them
 - He knew that most people of the world are quite content where they are spiritually and in life and aren't concerned about eternal matters.
 - He knew that most had never heard of Him and wouldn't come to Him to be given life purely because they'd never been told
- Jesus left the comforts of His home in Nazareth to go to the towns and villages of Galilee
- The uncomfortable places that God might be calling us to:
 - An unbelieving family member or neighbour who you don't get on with
 - People of another race who you are prejudiced against
 - People of another religion that you're uncomfortable with
 - The poor and the needy who might be demanding on us materially
 - The emotionally oppressed who would put you at risk of being dragged down emotionally
 - A place that you'd hate to go to
- What are the hindrances to us going to uncomfortable places?
 - We are happy and comfortable where we are and our routine
 - Our family and friends
 - It's difficult to go somewhere else
 - It's not my job or concern
 - I'm plain unwilling to go anywhere else and do anything else.
- Pastor Steven Lee states four reasons why we don't share the Gospel with others
 - We lack Gospel knowledge
 - Apathy
 - Fear
 - Lack of compassion

2) Touching the harassed and the helpless

- Jesus touches the harassed and helpless because he had compassion on them
 - Matthew 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.
- A compassionless Christianity is a Christless Christianity
 - Compassion is one of the fundamental traits of Jesus, and he expects us to be compassionate as he was compassionate
 - 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.
- Jesus' ministry was holistic i.e., it incorporated the spiritual and the physical (material).
- He ministered in three ways:
 - Taught in the synagogues
 - Teaching someone who isn't a believer but already has a Biblical foundation to build on
 - Proclaimed the good news of the kingdom
 - Preaching the Gospel to unbelievers who haven't heard or received it yet
 - Healed every disease and sickness
 - Ministering to the person's physical and emotional wellbeing

3) The need for more workers

- Matthew 9:37-38 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."
 - Note that Jesus didn't talk about young crops. He spoke about the harvest. That means the crops that are ripe for picking otherwise they'll be lost
 - This generation needs to reach this generation with the Gospel. People will die without Christ if we expect the next generation to reach this generation.
- The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.
 - 1.8 billion Muslims in the world
 - 1.2 billion Hindus
 - 500 million Buddhists
 - > 1 billion communists
- Even if we don't go to other countries with these majority religions, we have plenty of work on our own doorstep as many are coming to us
- Jesus told His disciples to pray for the Lord of the harvest for workers to be sent into the harvest field
 - He was speaking to those who were already following Him to become fishers of men
 - He didn't intend that prayer for workers would replace being a worker in the harvest
- What about you?
 - Are you willing to leave your comfort zone to go where it's uncomfortable that others may be ministered to with the Word of Life?
 - Are you a compassionate Christian reaching out to others in the compassion of Christ?
 - Are you willing to be a worker in the harvest that this generation won't be lost?