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Matthew 9:35 - 9:38



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this passage from Matthew 9:35-9:38, Steve Gregg discusses the teachings of Jesus Christ and how they relate to preaching the gospel kingdom. He emphasizes the importance of repentance and belief in the gospel, as well as following the lordship of Jesus as the means to experience the kingdom of God. Gregg also reflects on the nature of preaching and teaching within the church, noting the importance of both evangelism and discipleship in the Great Commission. Ultimately, Gregg suggests that prayers and actions must align with the priorities of the gospel message.

Transcript

In Matthew 9 and verse 35, we continue our studies in the life of Jesus Christ, and we do so by reading a summary statement, as it were, of the things he did. It says Jesus went about all the cities and villages, this would be in the region of Galilee where he was ministering, 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. And then, of course, in chapter 10, the very next verses, he actually commissions his disciples to go out into that harvest and to do some harvesting themselves.

Now, let's look at these verses a little more closely. Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. Now, how are we to understand the distinctions in these various things? He taught in their synagogues, and he preached the gospel of the kingdom.

What is the difference between teaching and preaching? Well, the Sermon on the Mount we might consider to be preaching, because we think of sermons as something to preach. Although, actually, the Bible doesn't call the Sermon on the Mount a sermon, we

just call it that. Much of the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus teaching.

Jesus was teaching about the law, he was teaching about what God wanted from people, and he was teaching what was really important, and so forth. It was not so much preaching. In fact, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, we read this, these concluding remarks, back in Matthew 7, 28, and 29.

It says, And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, these sayings, or the Sermon on the Mount, that the people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. So, teaching, not preaching. The Sermon on the Mount was not really a sermon, it was a teaching.

It was an instruction. Now, when it says here in Matthew chapter 9, Jesus went about to all the synagogues, he was teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Let's consider that a moment.

What is the gospel of the kingdom that it is preached, and what is the subject matter of what Jesus taught, and what is the difference between teaching and preaching? Well, I would just say that from the usage of the words in Scripture, teaching appears to be merely the bringing of clarity, of understanding, of instruction, to people who are presumably interested in being instructed. Whereas preaching is much more like, a little more like nagging, you know, I don't mean it negatively, but it is when you're trying to persuade someone to take a step that they are not particularly eager to make, necessarily, or that they have not made previously, and need to be given some encouragement, some exhortation. They need to be given some incentive.

Now, there is no doubt some of what we could call preaching in the Sermon on the Mount, and all good teaching is going to have a little preachiness to it, I think. In other words, I'm not a preacher. I'm a Bible teacher.

But from time to time, as we are trying to clarify what the Bible says and so forth, I get a little preachy. I don't mind saying so. There are times when I recognize that not only do we need to understand something, we need to have it driven through our skulls.

We need to have it get beyond the guardian of our self-defensiveness into the realm where we will take action on it. And that's what preaching, I think, essentially is. Preaching is where you're trying to persuade someone.

I think that would be probably the main difference between teaching and preaching, no doubt, that teaching is the conveying of information to people who presumably want the information. Preaching is really trying to persuade someone to accept a course of action or to accept something as true. In the case of this passage, it says he was preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and he was teaching also in the synagogues.

Now, where was he preaching? He was apparently preaching primarily on the hillsides

and outdoors, though in the synagogues he was primarily teaching. Why? Well, the synagogue meeting where all the Jews went on Saturdays was a teaching meeting for the most part. Generally speaking, the scribes would read the scripture and comment on them and try to bring some understanding of the scriptures.

And when Jesus was invited to speak in the synagogues, it was in the capacity of a scribe or a teacher that he was asked to come so he could give clarity about the meaning of the passages of scripture. And apparently that's what he did in the synagogues. Now, on the other hand, when he was out in the hillsides and so forth, he was there preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

Now, what is that? The gospel is the good news, and the gospel of the kingdom is the good news about the kingdom of God. Namely, that Jesus was the king, and he had come to establish his kingdom as the prophets had predicted that the Messiah would do, and that this was the time for that. We read this, for example, over in Mark, in chapter one of Mark, which actually gives us the earliest specimen of Jesus' teaching in the gospels.

In Mark chapter, well, not really, I guess in his Galilean ministry at least, in Mark chapter one, verses fourteen and fifteen, this is now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and saying, now here's what the gospel was, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel. Now notice, this is preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

What is the good news of the kingdom? Well, first of all, the time was at hand. The time was fulfilled. That means that Israel would not have to wait any longer.

There was a time designated that Israel had to wait for many centuries, waiting for the Messiah to appear and establish his kingdom. But Jesus said that time had now run its course. It was fulfilled.

It was now time for that to happen. And he said, and the kingdom of God is at hand. That was truly good news.

Jesus was come as the Messiah to bring in the kingdom of God. And that was a message that was accepted by his disciples. And he did bring in the kingdom of God to his disciples.

It was rejected by some. But you see, the kingdom message had with it some moral imperatives. Repent and believe the gospel, he says.

So the time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, therefore, and believe the gospel.

That is a specimen of Jesus preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. The good news is that one needs wait no longer. One can experience and come into the kingdom of God

right now, can come under the lordship of the king, Jesus, and follow him as a subject and be in his kingdom.

That's available right this minute to anyone. But his message also is that you must repent and believe this good news, believe this message. Well, that's what Jesus apparently taught all over town and all over the villages and so forth.

It's interesting that this preaching of the gospel included an urge to do something, repent and believe. Teaching isn't necessarily that way. Teaching, generally speaking, is for people who are already believers and need only instruction, need to be taught.

They need understanding. Now, it's interesting because we sometimes speak of the man who's in the pulpit in the church as the preacher. And, indeed, some people in pulpits are preachers.

But we never read in the New Testament that the pastor of the church or the elders of the church preached in church. They did teach. The elder, according to Paul in 1 Timothy 3, had to be apt to teach.

He did not have to be able to preach. And the reason is because preaching is a word in Scripture that is reserved for preaching the gospel principally to unbelievers. You don't need to preach the gospel to people who have already embraced it.

Preaching the gospel is evangelism. And an evangelist is something other than a pastor. God gave some apostles and some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers.

Notice there's a person who is an evangelist and there's a person who is a pastor and a teacher. The persons who pastor the churches should be teaching, not preaching the gospel. Why? Because the church has already received the gospel.

The church is not the place of evangelism. The world is the place of evangelism. When Jesus was in the synagogues, he was teaching.

When he went out on the hillsides, he was preaching. The preaching of the gospel takes place outside the church building. The teaching is for the faithful.

Now, one thing you'll find interesting if you read the book of Acts carefully is there was preaching and teaching. But the preaching was always directed to the unbeliever. The gospel was preached to the unbelievers.

When the apostles or others spoke to the church, they were teaching. So that on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, we find that those that Peter had preached the gospel to, who responded and were baptized, they came into the church and it says, and they sat daily under the apostles' teaching. They didn't sit under the apostles' preaching.

They didn't need to. They had already received the gospel. They didn't have to have the gospel preach them repeatedly.

They didn't need to have the same foundation laid over and over again. But they did need to be taught because Jesus told the disciples two things. There's two commands in the Great Commission.

One is go and preach the gospel to every creature. That's how the Great Commission reads in Mark 16. Preach the gospel to every creature.

That means, of course, every unbeliever. Preach it. Give them the gospel so they can be saved.

But in Matthew's version, there's also additional instructions. Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 28, go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all things that I've commanded you. So the Great Commission involves two steps.

One is preaching the gospel to the unbeliever. And the second step is making disciples out of those who become believers. And you do that by teaching them to observe everything Jesus said.

That's what we see done in the book of Acts. They preach the gospel in public to the unbelievers. And when the believers gathered together, they were taught in the word.

And they were taught how to live to please God. This is perhaps one of the reasons that so many of our Christians in today's world are so anemic spiritually. They go to churches that either don't teach or preach the Bible because they're too liberal or too psychological or too something.

Or else they may go to an evangelical church that really believes and preaches the Bible, but there they only hear the preaching of the gospel again and again, although they've already received the gospel and are saved. Many, many people live their Christian lives going to churches that never teach. And even churches that do teach often do not teach what Jesus said to teach.

He said, teach the disciples to do all things I have commanded. It certainly sounds like that means going back to the teachings of Jesus, seeing what he commanded the disciples to do and teaching people to do that and how to do that. Well, Jesus did both those things.

He preached the gospel and he taught in the synagogues. And along with this, it says he healed every sickness and every disease among the people. Now, Jesus healed every sickness and he healed every disease.

Does that mean he healed every sick person? I mean, in other words, Matthew might be

saying that even if Jesus didn't heal every person he encountered who was sick, he nonetheless, there was no disease that he was shown to be incapable of healing. He healed all kinds of disease, all diseases. Now, I don't have any problem with the idea that Jesus healed all the sicknesses of all the people who were sick, although in some parts of Scripture that wouldn't be the case.

In this particular instance, perhaps he healed every sick person in each village that he went to. That's fine. We know that on later occasions, Jesus encountered sick people that he didn't heal.

Lazarus, for example, who was sick, and his sisters sent a message to Jesus, desiring him to come and heal him, and Jesus chose not to do that. He didn't heal him. He let him die.

Later, he raised him from the dead. But here was a sick man that Jesus refused to heal. Instead, he raised him from the dead after he had died of his sickness.

Also, we have a case of the blind man that the apostles encountered at the gate beautiful in the temple in Acts chapter 3. The very same gate Jesus had gone through several times just a few weeks earlier. This man is said to have been laid there daily at the gate. Jesus would have encountered him there, but Jesus hadn't healed him.

There are cases of Jesus not healing people. But on this occasion, we read of him healing all diseases and all sicknesses. Now, what is the reason for Jesus' healing? You know, we could answer that quite simply by saying, Jesus healed people because he felt sorry for them, and he wanted them to be well.

But if that's the whole answer, then we'd have another question. Why didn't he heal everybody? Since Jesus could heal anyone he wanted to, why didn't he heal just everybody? You see, if the reason that Jesus healed some people is simply that he cared about them being well, then we must assume that he would have healed everybody who was ever sick because he'd care about them being well. And yet the Bible does not indicate that Jesus healed everybody, not even every faithful person.

Paul had a thorn in the flesh that Christ refused to heal. He left his partner, Trophimus, sick in Miletum, according to what Paul said in 2 Timothy chapter 4. And Paul's friend, Epaphras, almost died and was sick for a prolonged period. He said to the Philippians in chapter 2 of Philippians.

And there are a number of cases. Timothy was not healed of his stomach infirmities, at least not immediately, and he was told to use wine to treat them. Now, what we can see here is that God did not heal everybody.

He didn't even heal his own apostles and his own men sometimes. But he did heal, on occasion, every kind of sickness, which shows that there were no sicknesses that Jesus could not heal if he wanted to. The question, then, is why does he sometimes heal and

sometimes not? And the answer has got to be he has his own reasons.

And they may not be indiscernible to us, but they might be indiscernible to us. It's possible that on some occasions we can see, oh, it is good for me that I've been afflicted, that I might learn my laws, as the psalmist said. Other times we might say, I have no idea why I was afflicted, like Job.

Job never knew why he was afflicted. Sometimes God's reasons may be told us. Sometimes they may not be told us.

But nonetheless, we know that God allows us to be sick if he wills and allows us to be healed if he wills. There's nothing in the Scripture that says that God always chooses to heal instantaneously everyone who has faith, because there are many people who had faith in the Scriptures who were not healed, including Paul himself and Timothy with his often infirmities and other things. Now, what then was the purpose of the healing? If it was not just a manifestation of Jesus' compassion on people who were sick because he wanted them well, what other purposes would there be for it? Well, I believe that there is some very clear indication of the answer to that question in the Gospel of Mark.

Because it says in the very last verse of the Gospel of Mark, in Mark 16, 20, it says, the disciples went out and preached everywhere, as they preached the gospel everywhere. The Lord working with them and confirming the word through signs following. Now, by this he refers to the signs and wonders and healings done by the apostles.

Notice, the apostles preached the gospel and Jesus worked with them, confirming the words, that is, confirming the gospel to the unbeliever, by showing signs and wonders. Now, this would indicate that God did these signs in order to confirm the message of his messenger, to show that God was divinely empowering him, would be a way of showing that God had sent him. Likewise, in Hebrews 2, it says, in Hebrews 2, verses 3 and 4, How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard him, God also bearing witness, both with signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will.

Now, once again, the writer of Hebrews tells us that God confirms the word with signs and wonders and miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit. I believe God still does that. I believe in miracles, I believe in the gifts of the Spirit, I believe in signs and wonders, I believe in healing.

But I believe it the way the Bible says it. I believe that God does it to confirm the word. Now, it's interesting that the miracles Jesus did, often, not only were acts of benevolence, but were opportunities to confirm something he was preaching.

In John chapter 8, Jesus said, I am the light of the world. In the next chapter, we find him

healing a man of blindness and giving literal, physical light to that man's eyes for the first time. And showing that he is able to be the light of the world in more than one sense.

In John chapter 15, Jesus said, I am the true vine. And in the Gospel of John, we find Jesus turning water into wine, which is what vines do. He does what a vine does, he takes water and turns it into wine.

And so, we find miracles being done that resemble what he is saying. He says in John chapter 6, I am the bread of life. Right after he has broken the loaves and fed the people with real bread.

In the case of raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus first said, I am the resurrection of the life. He that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

Now, he's not talking about raising them physically from the dead in the sense that he did Lazarus. He's talking about giving eternal life to all people who believe. And raising them on the last day.

But in order to show that this was true, he confirmed it with the sign of raising Lazarus from the dead. Now notice, by turning water into wine, Jesus confirmed the word that he was the true vine. By opening the eyes of the blind, he confirmed the word that he was the light of the world.

By feeding the multitudes, he confirmed the word that he is the bread of life. By raising Lazarus from the dead, he confirmed the word that he is the resurrection of the life. And so forth.

That is, Jesus did miracles that were very helpful miracles. There is no doubt that they were compassionate miracles. But not only were they acts of compassion, they were confirmations of his message.

They were confirmations of the word. Alright? And then Jesus looked at the multitudes. And he saw that they were like sheep having no shepherd, it says in Matthew 9, 36.

And he said to his disciples, The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out laborers into his harvest. I dare say that the harvest is still plentiful.

There are still many who have never heard the gospel throughout the world. And the laborers are still relatively few. Although, of course, the numbers are much larger now on the mission field than they were when Jesus uttered these words.

But I think it is wise for us to take these instructions to heart. Jesus did command his

disciples to pray that the Lord of harvest would send more laborers. Do you pray for that? Do you pray that God would send more missionaries? That God would send the gospel out? That it would go out with power and with anointing and the Holy Spirit so that people would be saved? Jesus said to pray for such things.

But not only did he tell his disciples to pray for it, he turned around in the very next verses in chapter 10 and says, Okay, now I'm sending you out to preach the gospel. And he actually sent them out on a short-term outreach mission to the villages of Israel. It's interesting.

Jesus was moved with compassion when he saw how shepherdless the multitudes were. And he commented on it, saying, Boy, this is a big harvest. There's a big job here to harvest all of God's people, to bring them in.

And we're going to need a lot more workers. You guys pray that God will send more workers. And he said, And go yourselves.

Now, not everyone is called to go on the mission field. But it's interesting that he expected his disciples to put action to their prayers, that they were not only to pray for a thing, but they were supposed to act on the same interests that they were praying for. And if he says, Pray for the lost, he then wants you not only to pray for them, but also to do something about it.

If he wants you to pray for the poor, he may want you also to help the poor, not only pray for them. Our prayers and our actions should be in agreement. If something is worth praying for, it's worth doing something about.

If it's not worth praying for, it's not worth doing something about. But our prayers and our actions should agree in terms of their priorities. What we believe God wants us to pray for are the same things we should believe that God wants us to be doing something about.

And even if we don't go on the mission field ourselves, we need to be doing something toward the support of missionaries who do. We'll see more on that when we get to Matthew 10, which is going to be the next time. So I hope you'll be able to join us here on the Great Commission School of the Air at that time.