

St. Matthew 9:35-38

Dear Friends in Christ,

Alvin Toffler was an American writer and *futurist*. He died in 2016. I wouldn't advocate his thinking, but I've always appreciated this observation he made over 30 years ago:

There is a harassed, knife-edge quality to daily life. Nerves are ragged and, as the scuffles and shootings...suggest, tempers are barely under hair-trigger control. Millions of people are terminally fed up.

That was over 30 years ago. I find it impossible to exaggerate how that insight has intensified. It's impossible for Christ's people to ignore His ever so familiar words: "And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold." (Matt. 24:12) Lawlessness covers a lot of ground. Everything from scam to scandal artists; those who murder the unborn to terrorists; 24/7 hate mongering slanderous news to professional lying; immeasurable vulgarity to vilification of family, decency and moral values - and, most of all, vilification of God!

In the Scriptures, Jesus not only addressed the condition of fallen man, but as well, the consequences. He is the only true "futurist", if you don't mind me using that term. What He gives is . . .

FOR THE HELPLESS AND HARASSED

I. Once Again, Jesus Is God.

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. (v. 35)

Again, our text for this morning is from the ninth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel. If we back up to the beginning of the chapter we read of the healing of the paralytic. In that text we're told: "(Jesus) said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.'" (v. 2) Next, this happens: "...some of the scribes said to themselves, 'This man is blaspheming.'" (v. 3) You might ask, "How?" What's the blasphemy? The answer: His statement, "...your sins are forgiven." And the reality hits: Regardless of what Jesus did, those who opposed Him would find something wrong; something that could be used against Him. And the charge was easy: Only God can forgive sins. Blasphemy!

But there was another problem here. Only God can miraculously heal. In fact, you might remember that Jesus posed the question, "For which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?" (Matt. 9:5) Well, neither is easier. They're God's business. The miracles underscore the reality: Jesus is God Who can and does forgive sins.

And this issue: As you work through the Gospels' accounts of the healing of the paralytic, the blind, the lame, the deaths of Lazarus and a child who were brought to life, the casting out of demons - these and all maladies Jesus healed are not a promise that Jesus will miraculously heal every physical malady down to this moment. They do, however, direct us to what human sin brought upon this earth and the fact that the first and foremost healing we have is the forgiveness of sin. This is the greatest miracle.

II. Once Again, He Comes for the Sinful.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (v. 36)

Some time ago, I was handed a copy of an article written by Albert Mohler entitled "The Osteen Predicament - Mere Happiness Cannot Bear the Weight of the Gospel." I ask you to bear with me because it will address the verse I just read to you. In the article, Mohler wrote:

“The evangelical world, joined by no shortage of secular observers, has been abuzz about the latest soundbite of note from the Pastors Osteen - this time offered by Victoria Osteen as her husband Joel beamed in the background...

“...Victoria Osteen tells their massive congregation... ‘I just want to encourage every one of us to realize when we obey God, we’re not doing it for God - I mean, that’s one way to look at it - we’re doing it for ourselves, because God takes pleasure when we are happy....that’s the thing that gives him the greatest joy.... So I want you to know this morning - Just do good for your own self. Do Good because God wants you to be happy...”

(Mohler goes on to observe) “Judged in theological terms, the Osteen message is the latest and slickest version of Prosperity Theology.”

Indeed! It’s *Americanity*. It blinds the average church goer to what God really expects from His people: “The Sacrifices of God are (not what we do to make us happy with this world, but) a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (Ps. 51:17) Try telling that to the Americanized church.

Paul writes, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” (Rom. 7:19,20) And the Osteen answer is “Just do good for your own self. Do Good because God wants you to be happy...”?? As we have said before: It is no surprise that the liberal, contemporary church avoids Scripture. There’s just enough - just enough Scripture! - to lure and cage the helpless and harassed!

The American Church is harassed and turned helpless by people with ulterior motives. Liars and deceivers, we call them. People driving sheep to their doom. And the world, itself, is filled with helpless and harassed people; people filled with guilt and shame, sorrow and fierce regrets, and fears of tomorrow. And, quite frankly, that’s probably a lot of us here. Maybe everyone of us to one degree or another.

Again, our text says, “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them...they were like sheep without a shepherd.” And those most comforting words of Jesus embrace us: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (Jn. 10:11) And these words: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” (Jn. 11:27,28)

Over and over again, we are reminded that **the issue** of our faith life is not a delusion of this world’s prosperity and unending happiness. The first issue is what God does for us and gives us in the life, suffering, death and resurrection of our Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. He grants us forgiveness and eternal life - *period and exclamation point!*

Again, worship is not about what we do for God, but what God does for us through the Means He has chosen: The written and spoken Word and the visible Word of Baptism and His Supper. The other part is our response to that with sacrificial service, praise and thanksgiving. Somehow, the concept of being worldly happy never entered into the minds of the Apostles and Martyrs who suffered and died for the faith and the multitude of Martyrs of the present. And that brings us to our final thought this morning . . .

III. Once Again, We Have An Assignment.

Then he said to 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.” (vv. 37-38)

Do you remember the account of Jesus and the woman of Samaria? We're told, "...Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well." (Jn. 4:6) And then this: "A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.'" (Jn. 4:7)

There ensued a discussion about the fact that she was a Samaritan, as reported in Scripture, "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." (Jn. 4:9b) And from that point the discussion turned to Jesus as the Living Water, and Christ ultimately revealed His knowledge that she had lived a difficult and sordid life - full of harassment and helplessness. And do you remember that moment when she said, "I know that Messiah is come (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am he.'"? (Jn. 4:25-26)

And, then, do you remember what ultimately happened? We're told, "Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me all that I ever did.'" (Jn. 4:39) And, finally, this: "So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word." (Jn. 4:40,41)

It's not that difficult, is it? This Samaritan woman - a sinful, helpless and harassed individual - was loved and drawn to Christ's mercy and forgiveness. She was harvested for eternal life. And look at this: She didn't read the latest "how to" book. Didn't attend the latest outreach program. Didn't advertise a catchy program to attract anyone. Simply put: She witnessed to Christ! You know.....as we should..

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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II. Once Again, He Comes for the Sinful.

III. Once Again, We Have An Assignment.

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