

Good News

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Now, we're going to go back together to the passage. If you have a Bible at home with you, it would be great if you could open it at Matthew's Gospel. It's the first of the Gospels in the New Testament, and it's chapter 9 from verse 18. And sometimes it's quite difficult to look at a passage because although we're reading a section and it's coming to the end of a chapter and it's got verses and paragraphs, none of that was in the original, and in many ways you would just normally have read it all in one. But nonetheless, we're taking this section as we work through Matthew's Gospel. And if you were to take this section on its own, I wonder what you would choose to be the main message from this section, verse 18. It's connected with some of the previous healings and the section of Matthew.

But what would, I wonder what you would pick out as the really important teaching and the message from what is God's living word to us? As you listened to the reading, or as you think about the reading again, what is it that you think that God wants you to learn about Himself? What is He saying to you, or what's He saying to me? We always need to, when we preach certainly, we always need to think about that, and we know that God can speak in many different ways to people through our reading in ways that we haven't even thought about. But, and because the Bible is the Bible, it's, we can look at it from all kinds of different angles and learn lots of different things. But there's one thing that I want to focus on today, and in doing so there'll be many things I don't focus on. But it's really I want to focus today on good news, okay? Because in verse 36, we're told, well in verse 35 and 36, and Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel, or proclaiming the gospel is just another word for good news, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. Now that phrase is used earlier in Matthew, and I'll mention that later. But this good news, this, because that's just what gospel means, it means good news.

And I think if ever we needed good news, it's just now, we need good news, and it's important to remember that. So today I want us to celebrate, because it's good news. And when we get good news, we celebrate and we enjoy hearing great things and good things. It's wonderful. And the good news is something very special and very powerful. And as Christians, we remind ourselves that in Jesus we are new creations. We are new creations. And it's a reason for celebrating. Now, as you watched earlier, the brief video by Rav Zechariah, he died this last week. And his daughter wrote something online about him and said, he perpetually marveled that God took a 17-year-old skeptic, defeated in helplessness and unbelief, and called him into a life of glorious hope and belief in the truth of Scripture. And then she goes on later to quote that famous Billy Graham quote, that he is more alive now than he ever was. And the gospel for Rav Zechariah was great news, was good news. It transformed his life and he spent his life telling other people about the good news. And I hope that we can focus on that and listen to what God is saying to me and to you through Matthew's gospel in this passage. So we're going to look at the good news and different aspects of it from this passage. And the first thing I want to say about the good news is that

Jesus is always at the center of it. That's very important for us to remember in our Christian lives today that Jesus is at the center of the good news. And Matthew is driving home this truth and this reality right throughout the gospel. It's all about Jesus. And you'll have heard that many times from this pulpit when any of us are preaching. The focus of God's word is on the person of Jesus who is God in the flesh, a God that we can see and understand and realize about his love. And so this section that Thomas looked at last week and I'm looking at today or the section before it that Thomas looked at last week and what we're looking at speaks so much about the person of Jesus. Nobody, nobody acts like Jesus Christ. Nobody has ever acted like Jesus Christ. Nobody has the power to heal and to seal that healing by forgiving sins. No one has that authority. No one has unlimited power over creation, over the waves and over the sea, over sickness, over demon possession and even over death as we see in this passage with the healings that happen. He's unique in history. Nobody acts like him. And we see that in this section. And also we've recognized over the weeks and months that we looked at the Sermon on the Mount, nobody teaches like him. It's so refreshing. It's so new. And yet it's so simple and also profound. He always was using pictures in his teaching and what he was saying both here and in the Sermon on the Mount and in other places. Pictures that would resonate with ordinary people.

He wasn't a highfalutin teacher that used big long words that nobody knew or sometimes would have even made up. He wasn't like that. He talked about weddings and clothes and wine and shepherds and sheep and harvests. And he wove into these everyday illustrations new truth and new ways of thinking. He expressed the radical love of God for other people.

[6 : 49] And he recognized that he was expressing truth that was authoritative and exciting and drew many people. It was sharp and it was challenging and it was sometimes included a brutal diagnosis of our need of him. Nobody teaches like him. Nobody sees like him. Jesus is the center of all this kingdom good news that he talks about here. He in verse 36 towards the end of this passage in the verse we read earlier, just beyond it, when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

When he saw the crowds, he saw them with a particular view and emotion from himself and he saw what they were like as he saw and looked with the eyes of God. He had this, the word for compassion was so deep into his being, he was moved in his being by people and by what he saw. And when he saw it, if we saw great crowds coming to church, we'd be excited and we'd be delighted and it would be wonderful to see that. But Jesus is delighted, I'm sure, to see them, but he sees them spiritually and he sees their need and he sees them as harassed and helpless. These are very powerful words, harassed or weird. It's a very unusual word. It actually literally means to be skinned alive. And it's as if he sees people distressed, drained of protection, ultimately living in a self-destructive way. It's a difficult word to truly get to the bottom of, but he saw them as harassed and helpless. And again, this word comes from a word that means to be thrown away or cast aside, to just be scattered.

And I remember I was telling someone this recently, I did an assembly many years ago up in Roskeen when I was doing the story of Judas and I used to have visual aids with me to do it. And this day I decided I had a whole lot of one-pence coins in the house and I put them in a bag and I was going to use them as the silver that was used to betray Jesus and how Judas threw them away. And as I was doing the story, I threw the bag away, the bag split and the coins went everywhere. It wasn't meant to happen, but that's what happened and of course it was a great delight for the children who were watching, but they were scattered everywhere. And that's really the same root word, the same kind of word that's used here. That's how he sees it. He sees us as wearied and harassed and isolated, helpless, all over the place. And that's the spiritual vision that he has of us. And as he sees us in that condition and the crowds in that condition, he has great compassion over them. So we see Jesus being the center of good news and we know as Christians when we can associate with the gospel as good news, it's because Jesus is the center of it. It's not a philosophy, it's not a set of rules, it's the person of Jesus Christ. And he must today for us, and he must today for you remain at the center of all the good news that you know to be true of him. And he's the center of your life and he's the center of your heart and he's the center of your change. It's a relationship with Jesus Christ. It's letting him transform. It's letting his compassion touches and his diagnosis of our need expose us and throw us towards him in salvation. So Jesus is the center. And as this verse says, he came and taught and proclaimed the gospel, the good news of the kingdom. So the kingdom is a kingdom of good news and he declares that good news. And interestingly, this verse that we have here is the same if you go back to Matthew chapter 4 and verse 23, it's almost exactly the same verse that's used, the same phrase. He went through it all, Gally, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and affliction among the people. And that's because both these verses are introducing a new section of Matthew, a section about teaching, a section where he's speaking to and giving guidance. The one in chapter 4 is just before the sermon in the mount. And now we come to this verse, which is just before a section of more teaching where Jesus teaches the disciples about the mission, the mission they're on in the kingdom.

So the kingdom declares good news. What does that mean? What does it mean to be part of the kingdom of God? Well, we're reminded that Jesus is inviting through the good news, inviting us into a different reality. He's reminding us that this world, the kingdom of this world, is it where, is not all that there is. And he's saying we are made for something more than just this kingdom. He reminds us in his teaching that sin has distorted everything and separated us from the king of kings, from the most important person in the universe, our Creator, who alone can give us full life. We're alive today, but we're living in shadow.

And it's an ever-darkening and deepening shadow leading towards death. And that, he says, that that is us under God's judgment because of our sinful hearts and our rebellion against Him. And His kingdom has come. And the good news of His kingdom is that when we come to Jesus Christ, we become new creations, we become different. And we enter into a, become citizens of a different kingdom where He is king, and it's a spiritual kingdom.

[13 : 50] And He's reminding us that His work is transformational, both in our hearts and indeed in this world. And He has come as the king, and He has broken into this world to save this world. And He has come into this world and defeated the power and the curse and the judgment of death that is upon us all. And as we put our trust in Him, He will come into our hearts, will renew us, and ultimately will renew this universe. And that is the work of His kingdom. And as Christians, we belong to His kingdom. We follow Him. He is our king. We associate with Him as our boss, as our leader, as our guide. We have entered an everlasting kingdom that is beyond just the flesh and blood of this life. That means that even when we do grow old and die, yet we will live in Christ's presence and look forward to the renewal of all things when He returns, and we are resurrected bodily as well. And Him being our king is embedded into our understanding of the kingdom. And that is good news. But we recognize it's not good news for everyone. There's always two reactions to Jesus. Thomas looked at that last week. And also we see it continuing in this passage here in the different reactions when among those who are healed and those who are watching the healing and the religious leaders of the day who are adamant in their response to Jesus and not seeing Jesus and the inauguration of His kingdom as good news. And there's always these two reactions to

Jesus still right through history. He is marmite to people. And you need to think about that today. What's your reaction to Jesus Christ? And the interesting thing is that although there is two reactions to Jesus, by nature, naturally everyone reacts badly to Jesus because of our sinful hearts. See, it's not a case of, oh, well, that works for you and that's good, it's not for me. And I would love to believe, but I can't. Or it's just cultural. It's not like that at all. It's not that some can believe and some can't believe. And it's just a matter of choice. By nature, none of us believe. By nature, we are rebels. By nature and ordinarily we are sinners and the wages of sin is death.

And we don't naturally, we're natural rebels against Jesus. And we see that here in at least some of the people. You would expect when Jesus is healing the woman and He's healing two blind men and then He goes on to heal a demon-possessed person and lots of other people, you would think everyone would be happy. You would think everyone would rejoice. Why wouldn't you? Why wouldn't everyone rejoice? And yet we find in the story when Jesus goes to heal the little girl who, the daughter of the ruler who comes and asks Jesus to heal his little daughter and Jesus goes to the house and Jesus says to the crowd who are mourning and wailing, He says, look, the girl's not dead, she's just sleeping.

And they just laughed at Him. And He sent them out. So their response was just laughable. They just laughed at Him and what He said. We know that the crowds very often misunderstood Him. And I think that's why Jesus in verse 30, when He heals these blind men, He says, look, don't say anything about it to anyone because He knows it draws crowds and it draws crowds who love His miracles and they think He's a good and amazing guy and He'll make their life better for them. But in the end, they don't like His teaching and they don't like His authority. And in the end, they crucify Him that same crowd. And so the crowds misunderstand Him and the religious leaders attribute His miracles and His goodness to Satan. They've got nothing good to say. In verse 34, the Pharisees said, He casts out demons by the prince of demons. So they regard Him as evil, that they think He's controlling and manipulative.

And that's unbelievable. So clearly Jesus wasn't good news even when He walked on this earth. And so again, you need to ask it, as I often have to ask as well, when I think of some of the rebellion in my own heart, is Jesus good news today for you as you listen?

[19 : 01] Is He good news for me? Are we battling with the wrong ideas? Maybe you're not a Christian and you're battling with the wrong ideas of Jesus. Or you're afraid. Or you like bits of Him on your own terms. But all that stuff about Him being first at His Lordship, the stuff about sin and disease and judgment and death and hell, you reject that. And that isn't the kind of good news or what would lead to good news that you want to hear. And so the message of the gospel isn't good news to you, and you reject Jesus Christ and His Lordship. And even as Christians, I think we do continue to battle sometimes with grumbling and complaining and not embracing the magnitude of the good news of Jesus Christ and belonging to the kingdom of God. But can I just say one thing about that? It's not like Marmite at all. And He's not like Marmite. You know, who cares whether you like or dislike Marmite, you can just stick it in a cupboard and never look at it again with the other five spices that are there. But it matters. It absolutely matters whether you think Jesus is good news or not, whether you love Him or ultimately hate Him for the claims He makes in your life.

It matters eternally. So what then makes the difference? What makes the person and the message and the truth of Jesus really good news? Well, I think again in this story, we see it again and again in Matthew's teaching us by repetition, it's faith. It's faith. It's key to all these healing accounts that we've read about. The ruler who comes to see his daughter, ask for his daughter to be raised from the dead, he believed that Jesus could do it. The two blind men who come to Jesus, Jesus says, do you believe that I'm able to? Yes, they say I am. And the demon oppressed man who was brought to him and he and those around him, they believed that Jesus could do it. And people came to him because they believed in him. Now there's undoubtedly varying degrees of understanding and faith. And there's all kinds of different people here, a grieving ruler, a sick woman, blind men, demon possessed people. But all of them saw their great need. All of them understood that they were harassed and helpless, that they were vulnerable and weary and broken. And they all saw that the one hope, the one answer was Jesus Christ. And as they come to him in faith, it is remarkably good news for them. And they recognize the glory and beauty and the healing and the hope and the love and the joy that Jesus brings into their lives. And faith is what changes everything for us. And there's a verse in Hebrews 11.6 which says, without faith, it is impossible to please God. And we recognize the importance and the significance of that. And we recognize that as a gift of God. And you can read Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 and 10 that we recognize that He asks us to see what He says, to believe what He says, and to entrust ourselves to

Him as our Lord and Savior. We go to Jesus because we believe His diagnosis and we ask Him to save us. We trust in Him and we follow Him. And that involves action. As we go towards Him, He promises He never turns anyone away. And He promises that gift of faith that we need. And we are, from our point of view, we are simply to go. Like all these people in the, you know, if the ruler had stayed in this house or if the blind men had not cried out or if the crowds had not come to Jesus, He couldn't have done anything. He did what He did because people were moved towards Him in salvation, in need for salvation.

And as they did so, and as we do so, then we see the newness and the good news of belonging to Him. We have a new worth, you know. In verse 35, He speaks about the kingdom of God and He is speaking about the message of the kingdom and the work of the kingdom that's going to involve, and you'll see that in the next chapter, the sending out of the twelve disciples. And He is reminding us that when we come to Him, He gives us great worth, a new sense of worth, you know. What is your life worth without Jesus Christ? You know, why do you get up every day who ultimately cares? What significance is there in our lives?

If there is no greater being behind this world and no greater hope beyond this life, what will make you stand out among the millions of people, billions of people in this world?

[24 : 58] It's very difficult to find worth without recognizing an ultimate being like God who loves you and who died for you and who makes you a partner with Him. You've got a new worth in Jesus Christ, a tremendous value, no greater love as anyone than He lays down His life with His friends. You've got a new worth. You've also got a new way of looking at the world that mimics, not in a insincere way, but in a transformational way that our lives are changed, and we look at the world and we look at people much more like the way Jesus looked at people with compassion. You know, He was moved to the core of His being with love and with longing, and in Christ we receive that compassion in salvation when we come to Him in faith and we receive His love, and it's beyond imagination. It's beyond anything that we could ever dream of, both now and eternally. But we begin also to start seeing other people that way, the way Jesus sees people. So we begin to see people, spiritually, lovely people, great people, people we're friends with, people that we're attracted to, people that are in this world. We see them differently, and we see people we don't like and people that we think are ugly in the way they live. We see them differently too, broken, searching, all people broken, searching, weary and lost, needing the great love of God to rescue them from self-destruction. And that changes, doesn't it? It changes the way we live. It changes the way we look at the world. It begins to deal with sometimes the selfishness or the bitterness or the judgmental spirit or the shortness or the short temperedness or the indifference or the way we're so selective about who we pour out our energies and love into. And that is what we're looking for in our testimony, in our testimony of Jesus Christ and the good news of the gospel that He's changing us from the inside. He's changing the perspective we have and the life we have in the life we live. So it's a new worth we're given in Him, a new way of looking at the world and also a new work He gives us to do. You know that's linked in with our compassion and it's linked in with our worth. He gives us a new work. He said, He saw the crowds, this is towards the end of the passage here.

They were compassionate, they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to the disciples, the harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few, therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. So that's great. That's the pinnacle of this whole section for me is that we find that He gives us the great privilege of being involved in His kingdom and in His kingdom work. He chooses in His sovereign power, God chooses to ask for our help. He chooses our cooperation.

He chooses to give us a role to play in the ushering in of His kingdom, in spreading the good news, in reaping a harvest of souls for the gospel. He could have just snapped His fingers and made His people, but He chooses to use us as part of this great mission. He chooses to partner with us. He gives us a new work and it involves praying fundamentally, praying earnestly, praying missionally, praying for the kingdom to come, for the harvest to be reaped, for souls to be saved, for the people who will believe to believe. It's ready.

It's His harvest. He's guaranteed it. It's there. His kingdom is coming. He is Lord over this harvest. There is fruit to be had. There are people to be found. There are people to be saved in this city of Edinburgh that we love. I have many people in this city. We need to start believing that again and praying that earnestly, because that's what He asks of us. You know, when we have these prayer times and the engine, and yeah, praying individually is hugely significant, but also praying together is hugely significant. We're not kidding when we do that. It's not a ritual. It's this vital declaration that as God's people, we are obeying His command to pray earnestly, because we are the local church that is part of His kingdom, and it's our foundational work. But just in case you think, and I think that, okay, all we need to do is pray, that's easy. I can do that either with my Christian friends or just on my own. You know, the great thing is, He says, pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out labours. He's not sending out angels. He's sending out UNI. So the prayer is answered. The prayer we offer is answered by us. We're the answer to the prayer we make to the living God. That's the new work He gives us. He gives us work to pray earnestly and then to be the answer ourselves to that prayer. Yes, it means, we talk about labourers,

He's talking about preachers, full-time workers, evangelists, church leaders, but He's also talking about disciples. Yes, it's to the twelve He originally gives us. Yes, it's to the law sheep of Israel initially, but yes, it's the great commission He gives at the beginning of Acts. And we know it's a call to have more full-time or dain shepherds of the sheep, but yes, it's to every person having a reason for the hope that's within them, being light and sharing their faith and being a witness and being an example and being workers for Jesus Christ. Great picture in 1 Corinthians 3 verse 6 that Paul is the one who sows, Paul is the one who waters, but it's God who gives the increase. That's the partnership that we are asked to remind ourselves of in St. Columbus in our calling to plant churches and to reach out to the city of Edinburgh, that we love so much and that we see as being a people that are wearied and harassed and helpless, a sheep without a shepherd who desperately need to be led and who desperately need a king. So there's work to do. It doesn't finish on our knees. We are co-workers with Jesus Christ. So to be in Christ, to be part of the kingdom, to recognize the good news is to recognize that we're new creations, we have new worth and new way of looking and new work. It's great news and it's great news, maybe even especially in lockdown. And so I just ask, is it great news for you? What will it take to make you grasp this good news and grasp the core of this good news, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, to accept His diagnosis of your need of being harassed and helpless and lost and dying and separated from Him. I'm guilty and yet

[33 : 39] Him expressing His outstanding love by dying for you in the cross. Go to Him, put your trust in Him, receive the good news and live in the kingdom as we almost do. Pray and serve.

Amen. Pray, Lord God, we ask and pray that you would teach us from your word today, not in a kind of academic or school, teachery kind of way, but in a powerfully spiritual way that you would take your truth, maybe even nothing that was said in preaching but something that was read that has really weighed heavily on someone who has listened today as being a living word piercing sharp into our hearts and conscience. So speak to us, we pray, work through your word and through your Holy Spirit and help us to go from this day remembering the amazing good news that is ours in Jesus Christ and the remarkable glorious Savior who is at the center of all, even in the darkness and the doubt and the fear and the trembling that we experience in this time of crisis. Amen.