

## Sermon Series: **Hands & Feet: Advancing the Gospel Here & Now**

### Sermon Title: **In the Gut**

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Scripture Text: **Matthew 9: 35-38**

### Introduction

Stephen Covey, author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* tells a story that illustrates how discerning where people are at really makes a difference in how we view them.

He was seated in a New York subway train when a man entered his car with noisy children. The father sat down and closed his eyes and ignored the children who had turned the quiet subway into utter chaos. Finally, when he could take it no more, Covey confronted the father about his lack of discipline of his children:

“Sir,” he said, “*Don’t you know that your children have turned this car into complete chaos?*”

The father opened his eyes and said, “*Oh, you’re right. I guess I should do something about it. But we just came from the hospital, where their mother died about an hour ago. I don’t know what to think, and I guess they don’t know how to handle it either.*”

What’s the moral of that story? *Compassion begins when we begin to understand and feel the hurts of others deep in our own hearts.* It is so easy to judge people without feeling what they are feeling and knowing what they are dealing with. We are in the final installment of a series entitled **Hands and Feet: Advancing the Kingdom Here and Now.** Today’s sermon is called “*In the Gut*”.

If you know Matthew’s Gospel and how it is arranged, this is the second time Matthew makes a statement summarizing the Galilean ministry of Jesus (did it previously in 4:23-25 just before the Sermon on the Mount). But here in chapter nine, Matthew goes further than he did previously in that he not only tells us *what* Jesus did, but *why* He did what He did. He tells us Jesus went around healing and casting out demons and forgiving people because of this powerful force he felt in his gut—*compassion.*

This powerful love of God in action (for that is what compassion is) explains all that he said and did. And it is only when that is what is motivating us will we be able to be involved in doing what Jesus did. Notice that Matthew tells us three things about Jesus’ ministry in this passage: he first tells us *what* He did, then he tells us *why* He did what He did, and finally, he tells us *how* He intended his ministry to continue. We could say it this way; **Matthew tells us his *method*, his *motive* and his *means* to accomplishing his goal of spreading the gospel to the entire earth.**

## **I. What He did (*his method*) vs. 35**

Simply stated, Jesus went where people were. He didn't wait for them to come to him but He went to them. He went to small hamlets, to towns and large cities. His ministry could simply be summarized as being "*people-centered*". He didn't come to uphold a program or a religious system, but to bring life to people. And in going to people he didn't segment them into rich, poor, ethnic groupings, social status. He simply dealt with each person as they really were—made in the image and likeness of God. Jesus, who would one day tell his disciples to "go into all the world," himself went into all the world.

## **II. Why He did what He did (motive).**

Matthew now tells us what Jesus felt as he went about his mission (it helps us to understand what motivated our Lord to do what He did). The entire reason for salvation is found in that statement. There is no need that God should save anyone except that he has chosen to have compassion on them. Notice that it says that he "*saw*" and then was moved with compassion. It is how he *saw* the crowds that allowed him to feel the way he did about them. He saw them as *harassed* and *helpless*, like sheep without a shepherd. The Greek words are graphic—he saw them as distressed, fleeced, scattered, flung, tossed by violence. These are all terms of "*lostness*", the condition of our "*fallenness*". Is that the way we see people when we are out in the marketplace or at work? Is that the way we look at our neighbors? Theology should inform us.

So easy in a culture like ours where everyone has food, a house and a nice car to see people from an economic standpoint or a political or social viewpoint. Jesus didn't see men and women that way; He saw them in *relation to God*. And because he saw them that way it produced a certain feeling; the most powerful feeling in the universe—*compassion*.

Compassion: What exactly is it? It is often described as feeling another person's hurt in your heart. Actually, that is not the best description of this word compassion. In the Greek language of the New Testament the word for compassion is "*splanchna*". It's literally the word for "*bowels*". The bowels is the stomach area—the guts! We in the West when we talk about loving someone we say we love you from the heart (it sounds much nicer). Could you imagine receiving a Hallmark card that said, "I love you with all my bowels". But according to the Bible, that is where the seat of emotion is, in the stomach area.

We all know that's true; we talk about something hitting us in the gut. In the Bible, it is both the place of pain and love. In fact, we could define the term "*splanchna*" as "*the pain of love*". Matthew says Jesus felt the hurt of others in the gut and it was this which motivated him to go throughout Israel proclaiming the kingdom and healing the sick. Guess what? *It is only when we begin to feel this pain for others in our gut that we are apt to go to them and bring them news of a Shepherd who loves them*. We can try all kinds of evangelistic techniques and gimmicks but they won't work until we are willing to feel what God feels for lost souls. *Splanchna* is what is needed more than anything else in this hour.

## **III. How He Intended for his Ministry to Continue (means)**

He now turns to the disciples and describes their part in this. He has a specific plan for how He intends for his mission to continue—*through the Church*. This verse makes a sad but very important statement: *“harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few.”* We’ve been praying amiss for years (we’ve been praying for harvest instead of workers). What was Jesus’ plan for the continuance of his ministry into the future? *People who love people and are gripped with compassion being sent on mission.* We should ask the question here, *“Why are the laborers so few?”* Let me ask it in such a way to make it more meaningful: *“Why do so many believers lose their zeal to share the Gospel after so many years?”* *Why do we stop caring?”* I believe there is one main reason. *Is it possible that after many years, we lose our hold on the wonder of the Gospel so as to cease being motivated to share it with others?* Laborers are not people who have been “guilted” (made to feel guilty) into mission or people who carry a low-grade fever about doing it. Rather, they are people who are so overwhelmed by the mercy they have received; they now, as a kind of inherent law of their soul, want to share it with others.

Jesus said as much in Luke 7. Remember the sinful woman who came to him at the house of the Pharisee named Simon. Simon and his friends judged Jesus because he was allowing this sinful woman to touch his feet (can’t be a prophet because he would know who had touched him). Jesus knows what Simon is thinking and presents to him a parable: The Parable of the Two Debtors. A certain moneylender had two debtors: one who owed him five hundred denarii and one who owed him fifty. When they could not pay he forgave both. Jesus asked this question: *“Which one loved him more?”* Simon rightly answered, *“The one who had the larger debt.”* Jesus concluded with this statement: *“Her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”* If you don’t see yourself as a sinner you will love little, but if you see yourself as the worst sinner so that you marvel in how much you have been forgiven, you will love much.

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The questions below are for House Church Group Discussions.

1. What is compassion? How is this seen through the ministry of Jesus?
2. How would you define your compassion quotient right now?
3. How did Jesus see the people he met? How did that influence his response?
4. Why does it seem easier to judge a person based on their outward appearance rather than by what their true condition is?
5. What does the Greek word “splanchna” literally mean? What are some examples of times when you felt things in the gut?
6. Why do we pray amiss when we only ask God for the harvest?
7. When we desire God’s kingdom to expand, how should we pray?
8. Why do believers lose their zeal to share the Gospel after many years?