

HE HAD COMPASSION ON THEM

Matthew 9:18-38

Key verse: 9:36

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

Happy Thanksgiving! In the 1500's, settlers traveled by boat from Europe to Canada. The journey was long and hard and many people died. In 1578, Martin Frobisher from England held a formal ceremony in Newfoundland to give thanks to God for surviving the long journey. Around the same time, French settlers came with Samuel de Champlain and also held huge feasts of thanks. They also gladly shared their food with the native Canadians. The tradition of giving thanks continued for many years and finally on January 31st, 1957, Parliament proclaimed “A Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed.”

Of course, giving thanks to God isn't only a Canadian thing. In Japan we also have many things to be thankful for such as a peaceful country, mountains, the ocean, delicious food, hot springs, family, children, massage chairs, and high technology. Personally, we also receive many great blessings from God. Tomorrow is a holiday to remember sports and health in Japan. I hope we may also use it to give thanks to God for all the blessings we received this year.

In Matthew 9:18-38, Jesus did many great things which people were thankful for. He healed many diseases. He taught about the Kingdom. He asked the disciples to pray for the Lord to send out harvest workers. Especially, Jesus was full of compassion. Jesus didn't care about his own schedule. Jesus didn't live for himself. Jesus only cared for others with his full attention and affection. When we think about Jesus' compassion, I believe we can be really thankful.

Look at verse 18. “While he was saying this, a ruler came and knelt before him and said, 'My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.’” “While he was saying this,” refers to Jesus' teaching about new wineskins. John's disciples had asked about fasting and Jesus taught that being Christian isn't

about following a set of rules legalistically. The Christian life is a very fresh and exciting life as we live by faith in God Almighty. Every day we should study the Bible with the excitement and enthusiasm of our two sons who are eager to do sumo wrestling in the morning. Those who have learning minds and are always willing to grow and be challenged will discover the real power that is in the gospel.

While Jesus taught about this, a ruler came to him regarding his daughter who had died. We guess this man loved his daughter very much. Maybe he played with her every day after school. Then one day, she became sick. He took her to the doctor but she didn't get better. He began giving her more and more medicine but nothing worked. He traveled to Fukuoka, Osaka, and Tokyo to find the best hospitals but nobody knew what was wrong. Maybe he stayed up late every night by her bedside, praying to God that she would get better. But in the end he was powerless and his daughter died. As parents, we can guess the pain he felt to see one of his children die before himself. In desperation, he ran to Jesus with faith that if Jesus touched her she would be brought back to life. The life of his daughter depended totally on Jesus. This man was a ruler, but he humbly bowed down before Jesus' authority. Being humble before Jesus is the right attitude we should have.

Jesus got up and went with him and the disciples to his home. But along the way something else happened. A woman who had been suffering from a discharge of blood for twelve years came to Jesus. Twelve years is a long time. Twelve years ago, the winter Olympics were held in Nagano, Google was founded as a company, and President Bill Clinton was accused of sexual relations. For twelve years, this woman suffered from cramps and bleeding. She couldn't go in hot springs or sit comfortably. According to Moses' law she was unclean (Lev. 15:25) and should be isolated from society. Most people didn't want to go near her. But Jesus said, "Take heart, daughter... your faith has healed you." Jesus loved her like a father. Jesus saw her faith and agony and had mercy on her. While nobody else could fix this problem, with only a few words, Jesus healed her completely. Jesus has the power and compassion of God.

By the way, what happened to the ruler's daughter? Look at verses 23-24. "When Jesus entered the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd, he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him." In Jewish culture, it was common to hire people to play instruments and wail loudly at funerals

to help others go through the mourning process. But to Jesus, this wasn't necessary. Although this woman had died, from Jesus' point of view, she was only sleeping. Sometimes we think of death as a scary thing. But to Jesus it is the same as sleeping. When we wake up we will be totally refreshed and believers will be welcomed into the Kingdom.

Look at verse 25. "After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up." Jesus performed a great miracle. If Jesus raised someone from the dead today, I guess there would be videos of it all over Youtube and everyone would hear about it. Jesus had the power to infuse life into a woman who was dead. In John 11:25, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Jesus' power to do such work depends on our faith. If we look closely at the events in this chapter we see that Jesus' work was often in response to somebody's faith in Jesus. Having this kind of faith isn't easy. Even for Christians who have some faith, it is not easy to grow our faith more. But the level of our faith is directly related to our intimacy and relationship with God. Hebrews 11:6 says that it is impossible to please God without faith. Faith is believing that God exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Sometimes we have troubles in our lives such as job, ministry, or children. We may wonder how God will work. The problem is not God's power or love. It is a question about our faith. So how can we have more faith? Romans 10:17 says, "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." We can have faith when we read and study the Bible.

In verses 27-34, Jesus heals two blind men and one man who was possessed by demons. When the crowds saw it, they were amazed and said that nothing like this had ever been seen in Israel. Jesus never studied medicine. Yet he did way more than any doctor today could do. It is because Jesus is the incarnation of God.

Look at verse 35. "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness." In addition to performing many healings, Jesus went through all the towns and villages preaching the good news of the kingdom. Jesus didn't stay in only one spot. He always followed the leading of the Holy Spirit and taught the word of God boldly.

Look at verse 36. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." As Jesus went from town to town, he saw many sick and needy people. He healed not because he wanted to show off his power, but because he had genuine compassion for the people. As we know, sheep are not so smart. They have bad eyesight, short legs, and easily go astray. Sometimes they see a green pasture which looks delicious, but without a shepherd they may not know there is also a wolf waiting for them. Sheep get lost without a shepherd. Sheep don't know what to do without a shepherd. Without a shepherd, sheep are powerless, helpless, and doomed for destruction.

Jesus saw the people and he saw they were like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus came as the Good Shepherd. He came to help lead people away from their sinful lives and turn their eyes to God. Jesus came to protect, provide, and care for people. He worked hard and woke up early to make sure all the sheep were safe. Jesus had great compassion for the sheep.

When we think about our own lives, we can see that Jesus had much compassion on us. While we lived in darkness and sought the meaning of life, Jesus sent us Bible teachers. When we sinned and failed to live a holy life, Jesus 100% embraced without any condition. When we needed money, Jesus gave us a job. When we prayed for students, Jesus sent faithful ones and grew them. When we prayed for children, Jesus kept them healthy. When we think about what we've done for Jesus, we see that it is almost nothing. Yet Jesus did everything for us. Jesus is the God of compassion. Jesus gives endlessly without expecting anything in return. In the end, Jesus even gave up his life for us on the cross so that we could be set free and have full life which extends into all eternity.

When I think about this past year, I see that Jesus did many things for me. Although I sometimes complain about my job, Jesus was very merciful to me in a bad economy. Although the pay seems low, Jesus is using it to grow me as a good manager and leader in Japan. He is helping me to understand the hearts of Japanese people and live among them. Sometimes our sons Nobuto and Hikaru can be tiring, but they bring me much joy. Even though I am very selfish, my wife Tsukasa sacrifices many things to care for me and the family. Last night, while I was

walking back from the gym, I noticed there was a black fall sky with many stars. It is amazing that God created this whole universe. Especially, there was one big star which reminded me of the Magi who travelled many kilometers to go see Jesus who was born around 2000 years ago. God's history is really fantastic, and I am so thankful that I am able to be a part of it.

Look at verses 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.'" Jesus had set the good example for the disciples to be compassionate toward others. He also understood the spiritual condition of the disciples. So he didn't tell them directly to be compassionate. Otherwise, they might run away. Instead, he encouraged them to pray. When they prayed, Jesus knew that God would speak to them and give them a personal calling. By praying for God to send out harvest workers, they would eventually understand that God was first calling them to go out and preach the good news of the gospel, heal others in the name of Jesus, and be compassionate to each other.

The world is full of needy people. Especially, people need help to solve their sin problem and be saved. There are people in Oita. There are people in China. There are people in Afghanistan. There are people in North Korea. There are people everywhere who are in desperate need of the gospel. The problem is most urgent. Jesus said, the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. May God help us to remember Jesus' teaching and example and go out as harvest workers.

In today's passage, we learned more about Jesus' ministry. When we think about this ministry, we are very thankful to Jesus. I believe this is the real meaning of Thanksgiving. Even if we don't have traditional food and few people gather, we can have a most joyful Thanksgiving when we think about the grace of Christ. Amen!