

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

GETTING WHAT YOU DON'T DESERVE

Matthew 9:35–10:8

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Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

35Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. 36When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

10Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. 2These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

5These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, 6but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ 8Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. 9Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, 10no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or

a staff; for laborers deserve their food. 11Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. 12As you enter the house, greet it. 13If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. 15Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

16"See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. 17Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; 18and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. 19When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; 20for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. 21Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; 22and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 23When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

DIAGNOSIS: GETTING WHAT YOU DESERVE

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *The Harvest Is Plentiful*

There were many people who were diseased and sick (9:35). There were others who were dead, had leprosy, or possessed by demons. There was a great crop of the sick and crippled and deaf and

blind to harvest with healing. If a village had one person who was sick, the problem was more than that one person needed healing. The whole village was without the kingdom of God. The one sick person was a sign to the village that everyone was not in the kingdom of God. They were without God's protection.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Harassed and Helpless*

Without God's protection, people are harassed, not only by sickness and every disease and demons and death, but they are harassed by the idea that they had to earn God's love. That's because they were also harassed by the idea that "you get what you deserve." When you have to earn love or get what you deserve, you trust, not the person, but the "system." You trust the way of just desserts, of getting what you deserve instead of trusting God to keep God's promise of mercy. People are helpless in that they cannot think any other way than the way of earning.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *The Sheep Have No Shepherd*

Since all people can only think in the way of earning, there is no one who can shepherd the sheep in the way of mercy. People will betray each other, even family members betraying one another, turning on each other, trying to earn a better reward from someone other than God (10:21). What is earned is a fair judgment from the God who is impartial and gives what we say we earned. We have earned death, for the judgment shows that we have not loved God or trusted God or feared God's warning (sickness, disease, leprosy, demons) that we had turned away from God's protection.

PROGNOSIS: JESUS GIVES THE GIFT OF HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Sheep Are*

Given the Good Shepherd

The kingdom of God's mercy and forgiveness and eternal life have come near in Jesus, the Good Shepherd (John 10:11f), who died and rose from the dead, and for his sake, all people are given the kingdom of God. Those who are harassed by having to earn God's mercy and given mercy. Those who are helpless (9:36), stuck with getting what they deserve, are kindly helped by Jesus dying and rising for them. He is their help and the help is given with no need to do anything to earn it. The impetus for help comes from Jesus.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) : *Trust the Good Shepherd*

The Good Shepherd gives life that overcomes death, gives mercy that trumps judgment, and gives love that replaces getting what you deserve; all are offered like a drink to a thirsty person, "Here, take and drink." And the thirsty person trusts the offer and drinks. In that trust, God's kingdom in Jesus protects people from God's judgment and from death. To trust Jesus is to have God's mercy protecting you. To trust Jesus is to have his death and resurrection protecting you. Thus, when disciples of Jesus are sent, they do not need the protection of "gold, silver, or copper in their belts" (10:9). They did not need the protection of a bag, two tunics, sandals or a staff (10:10). Instead, they have Jesus with them always (28:20). [Note that Matthew never mentions that the disciples went out after Jesus had instructed them; and Matthew does not mention them returning. The disciples are simply with Jesus, as usual, in 12:1. All of chapter 10 is an interruption between all the things the Messiah was doing, and John the Baptist hearing all that the Messiah was doing, and John asking if Jesus was the one who is to come.]

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *The Harvest Is Plentiful*

Matthew again has Jesus tell his disciples to go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Jesus has all authority (authority over death, judgment, getting what you deserve, sickness, disease, and demons) and he gives his disciples his authority over death, judgment, getting what you deserve, and unbelief, by telling them to give God's kingdom of mercy and forgiveness by putting people into Jesus and his Father and the Holy Spirit by baptizing them into the kingdom—the kingdom named Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (28:19). Jesus also commissions the disciples to teach everyone to “obey everything that I have commanded you” (28:20). The disciples are to teach people to trust (obey) Jesus' teaching about his dying and rising to forgive them, love them, and give them eternal life. Those who offer the kingdom of Jesus to others will be hated by those who trust in getting what they deserve. The latter do not trust a gift. Their trust is curved in on themselves. Those whom Jesus sends, because they live by mercy and forgiveness, however, are like sheep among the wolves. The wolves' standards are always about power and strength and being better—the world of getting what is deserved on a grand scale. But there are many who need mercy and forgiveness, who need to be under God's protection, who fear (and so trust in) getting what they deserve. The harvest is plentiful, that is, there are many in need of Jesus' forgiveness, which is his death and resurrection. All who trust Jesus have a share in his mercy and forgiveness with others, and so need (not gold or silver or copper in their belts, but) the spiritual gifts of faith in Jesus; to forgive in Jesus' name; to discern when people need to hear about Jesus' forgiveness; to distinguish law (getting what you deserve or earn) from Gospel (the giving of Jesus' forgiveness); to talk and mutually support and console one another in Jesus' name; and to love with Jesus' love.