

## THE THREEFOLD MINISTRY OF CHRIST

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on September 11, 1966 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

The text for our study is found in the final paragraph of the ninth chapter of the gospel according to Matthew, however, I should like to begin by asking you to look back through the entire chapter for a moment. I believe the entire sweep of the chapter will reveal something very significant concerning our Lord. The first eight verses tell the story of Christ's healing a man who was sick of the palsy. Verses 10 through 12 tell of his eating with publicans and sinners. Verse 10 reads, "And it came to pass, as he sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples." The fact is then registered that the Pharisees who saw it were critical of his association with publicans and sinners. Verse 12 then reads, "But when he heard it, he said, They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick."

Verses 18 through 26 tell the story of Christ's sympathetic response to the request of a ruler of a synagogue, who came to plead for his daughter who had just died. In another of the gospels we learn that this man was Jairus. Jesus responded by going with the man, but even before he came to the house he had paused to heal a woman who for twelve years had suffered from a special issue of blood. As he arrived at the home of the ruler of the synagogue he found the mourners already lamenting the death of the child. Jesus raised her from the dead and went on his way.

Verses 27 through 31 tell of Christ restoring sight to the eyes of two blind men. Verses 32 through 34 tell of Christ casting out a demon from a man who was dumb, so that the man was again able to speak and to live normally. In all of these incidents we see Christ's great concern for people who were in need.

Fittingly, we now read, as our text, "And Jesus went about all the cities and the villages teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest." (Matt. 9:35-38). This concludes the chapter and as we read on into chapter 10, we find Jesus calling unto him his twelve disciples and giving them authority to go out and to do certain special works. It is at this point that Matthew first names the twelve apostles, who are to help Jesus in carrying out his work.

### Three Key Words

In looking at our text, we notice in verse 35 that Jesus traveled about the little country of Palestine doing three things: "teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness." Here we have a kind of summary of the work which Jesus did during his ministry--teaching, preaching, and healing. There is a value in analyzing and dividing Christ's work into its parts. When we tell someone to go "Live as Christ lived" it is too much for him. Christ's life was such a monumental life that the average person feels utterly incapable of living as Christ did. It is therefore, of value to break down the life that our Lord lived into its component parts. Then, a man can begin to do at least something like what Christ did.

This perhaps can be seen by a comparison. If we tell a young boy to go out and "play football," he finds it difficult to do because the game of football is a rather complicated game. Instead of beginning with the general command to "play football" we teach him first how to block, how to tackle, how to carry the ball, how to pass, how to catch a pass, how to kick, and the other specific acts of playing the game. When he has at least some mastery of these various component parts he can put them together and "play football." By analyzing the life of Christ as to its various activities, we likewise can discover more of the how of living like our Lord lived.

We might well draw a parallel between the work that Jesus did while here on the earth and the work that the church must do today. Actually, when we speak of the work of the church we really mean the work of individual Christians, for the church is simply a group of individuals working together under the headship of Christ. This work falls into three classifications: First, there is edification, by which we mean teaching, and otherwise nurturing the young and immature to grow into full-grown men and women in Christ. Then comes evangelism, by which we mean carrying of the good news of Christ and salvation to those who have not yet come to Christ. This is preaching the gospel of the kingdom to the lost. Finally, there is benevolence, by which we mean caring for those in need.

### Our Threefold Task

During Jesus' life on the earth he taught, preached, and healed. If we are to follow his steps, we Christians of a later time must reach our children in our homes, must teach as we have opportunity in classes, must provide worship experiences by which all of us grow spiritually, and must teach by the examples of our lives. We must also follow the Lord's example of proclaiming salvation in the kingdom in every way that we can. This means by the printed page, by radio and television preaching, in personal work sessions, and in every other way that it is possible for us to do it. Still further, we must care for those who are sick and in need of every kind. While

it is true that we cannot miraculously heal the sick or give sight to blind eyes or raise the dead, it is also true that we can assist the sick by providing the care that will enable them to be healed, and that we can assist others in need in the normal human way as we face the various crises of life. All of this we are doing in this congregation, for the activities of the church and the expenditure of the regular contributions of the church are done under the headings of edification, evangelism, and benevolence. However, we would insist that we need to make sure that we as individuals are doing all three of these things which our Lord did. Each of us needs to be concerned that he help in the teaching program, that he be active in the evangelistic efforts, and that he be ready and willing in the area of benevolence.

### Compassion

Just here we return to our text, which reads, "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them ..." Perhaps the central word in this entire study is the word compassion. It is the motivation that led Christ to do all of the things which he did. We are impressed with the number of times that we read in the accounts of his life the expression "he had compassion on them" or "he was moved with compassion." These expressions occur often in the accounts of the life of Jesus. What does compassion mean? It means sympathy for those in need. It means pity. It means a deep concern for others. It means a feeling with others in their adversity. Essentially, then, it means love--unselfish concern for others. This, of course, is the Lord's second commandment, for in Mark 12:23-30, after he had named the love of God as the first commandment, he named this as the second, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

We see this demonstrated in the life of our Lord. In Luke 10 we read his story of the good Samaritan, in which a man had compassion on one of his fellowmen when he found him beaten, robbed, and left dying at the side of the road. We find it in Matt. 15 when Christ paused to feed the four thousand people who were following him, when they were tired and weary from several days of following the Lord and listening to his words. In Matt. 20 we find it again in his healing of two blind men on the road to Jericho. In Luke 7 we find it in the story of his raising the widow's son at Nain. Over and over again throughout his life we see his compassion manifest.

### Multitudes

In our text we note that it says, "But when he saw the multitudes ..." How does a crowd affect you? For many it means excitement; for some a kind of joyous feeling, for others it means fear, and even a withdrawal to still others. What did it mean to Christ? He felt compassion for the multitude when he was surrounded by people. Our text describes them by saying, "They were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd." "Distressed" means that they were harassed by cares, doubts, fears and tensions. "Scattered" means that some of them were far from home and far from any ground of security. "As sheep not having a shepherd" means that they needed a guide, a protector, a leader.

Do you notice how perfectly this description fits our modern world? How could we better describe the restless young people all over the world? How could we better describe the teeming millions of southeast Asia as they are battered about in a war? How could we better describe even many of the intellectuals of our own and other enlightened lands? In a very real sense modern man is scattered, and like sheep not having a shepherd.

We read again from our text, "Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few." From an estimated two hundred ten million people who lived in the entire world in Jesus' day the population of the world has now reached to the three and one-quarter billion mark. To say it another way, in Jesus' time the population of the entire world was about what the population of the United States is today. In these nineteen centuries the level of population existing at one time has grown by three billions of people. True then, but much truer now is the fact that the harvest indeed is plenteous. The teeming millions have become billions and the urgency is all the greater. The only hope of helping these multitudes is for every Christian to be a laborer. Each Christian has a share in the three-fold work of Christ.

### Prayer

The urgency of the work might seem to demand that each worker run into the field and begin the harvest. However, we are impressed by the fact that Jesus closed this passage by saying "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest ..." This verse hints "the criticalness of prayer." Prayer is not a substitute for reaping, but a companion activity. The workers are urged to pray and then to go work. In our day let us pray earnestly that there may be more workers to help harvest the billions of souls who need to know Christ. The task can only be accomplished if every Christian takes seriously his daily, personal responsibility to teach, to preach concerning the kingdom, and to help all manner of people in need.

All of us want to be as much like our Lord as possible. We want to think like he thought, to speak like he spoke, and to live like he lived. If we will work as he worked, we can make great strides toward becoming like him. Let each of us prepare himself to teach, privately or publicly or both. Let each of us prepare himself to speak in some appropriate way concerning the kingdom and salvation. Let each of us set out daily to help those who are in need and who may cross our paths.