

Let's Be Honest: Open Eyes pt1

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Open Eyes / Matthew 9:35–38

We are at an interesting inflection point in American history. For the first time in our history, a generation has more people in it who profess to be nones- either atheists or no religion in particular- than are Christians. And it's not close. In fact, 36% of Gen Z are professing Christians compared with 48% who are nones.

(<https://religioninpublic.blog/2022/06/15/gen-z-and-religion-in-2021/#:~:text=Taken%20together%2C%2036%25%20of%20Gen,nones%20clearly%20outnumber%20the%20Christians.>)

I want you to sit with that for a minute. These are our kids and grandkids. If your first reaction is anything other than being heartbroken and devastated, I am worried about you.

And here's the thing church, they aren't coming back, at least not in the way previous generations did. Used to, you could rely on people leaving the church after HS and then making their way back post college- with kids and spouses in tow- to make the return to the religion of their parents, or something close to it. And we relied on that social paradigm and truthfully the social pressure, and as a result we never really asked if they were coming back because of a faith that was theirs, or one that belonged to someone else.

That's not only no longer a guarantee, it is an actual falsehood. It is not happening, and the pattern that is emerging should make us ask some hard questions...and open our eyes.

Over the last 7 weeks we have looked at 7 churches and how they faced various trials and either handled them well for the sake of the Kingdom, or compromised their position when they faced cultural issues.

We are facing a similar situation today, in Oklahoma.

For about 2 decades we have been able to sit happily in the middle of the country and decry the growing secularization of the coasts. In the same way that people in America once decried the secularization of Europe. And sadly, in the same way that many Christians in America thought about what happened to Europe, we thought the same about the changes on the coasts. "It could never happen here."

My friends, that wasn't true then and it is not true now. And as a result, in some ways, we are playing from behind as a result.

The good news is that while we may be surprised God is not...and He has provided us, in His Word and through His people, tools and truths to meet these changes. If we are willing to learn. And if we are willing to work.

The challenge we are facing is not from the questions of our secular neighbors, it is from internal pressures that claim if we just return to the old days (not happening) or stay true to the old methods, and do them harder, things will return to an idealized normal. And neither of these are going to answer the questions posed by the many young adults leaving the church, much less address the questions our culture at large is asking about our faith.

In the meantime, our neighbors are going to hell and more and more doing so unwarned and uncared for by people who say they belong to Jesus.

So for the next few months, we are going to go on a journey together...one whose end date I am not sure of yet. At least thru August, and possibly longer than that, we are going to look deeply into

how Jesus sees people, how the disciples engaged with their culture, how that provides a guidebook for us, and how we can share our story, the story of Jesus, in comprehensible ways to people who are hearing His story for the first time.

I tell you all this for a couple of reasons. **One**, as a church we are convinced this is important. We exist to reach people. And when are not reaching people, we need to ask hard questions of ourselves b/c God is not failing to call people and people who need Jesus need someone to tell them about Him ([Romans 10:14-15](#))

Two, you are going to want to keep up. These Sundays are going to inter connect and build on one another, so if you are out a Sunday, be sure to watch the service before the next week. And if you have questions, please ask.

Finally, in August we are going to offer some trainings on Sunday afternoons- 3 of them- so be on the look out for those and plan to attend. They are building blocks for where we need to go.

To start this season, we need to do something that in our day and time is hard to do. We need to see...not just look, but see. We look a lot in our world. We rarely see, or perceive, in the moment. So this morning, I want to take you to a moment when Jesus opened His disciples eyes.

Turn with me to [Matthew 9:35-38](#).

First thing to notice- Jesus went to people. He did not stay at home.

One of the biggest temptations we have in our day and time is the temptation for comfort. We want to be in our bubbles. The season we just left- the pandemic- made this even worse. So many of us are hesitant to leave the perceived safe confines of our homes, or to even have people into our homes. That's antithetical to the call of Jesus, much less to His example.

We are not, as Christians, able to live in a comfortable bubble. We have to go- remember the Great Commission- “as you are going...” So the option of remaining in safety and seclusion isn’t for us.

Matthew 2. Resurrection! (28:1–20)

To “make disciples of all nations” does require many people to leave their homelands, but Jesus’ main focus remains on the task of all believers to duplicate themselves wherever they may be

And as we see an opposition to the Gospel growing, we need to be more out of our bubbles, not less. We cannot make our churches into defensive fortresses any more than we can take refuge in our homes. Our churches have to be places of sending, not securing. We gather to heal and strengthen and be encouraged, then disperse to the field to do the work we are called to.

Second, notice what Jesus did when He was out.

Matthew 1. Introduction (4:17–25)

As Jesus’ public ministry gets underway, he travels throughout Galilee, preaching spontaneously to open-air crowds and making guest appearances in local synagogues (cf. Luke 4:16–17 for details). The message he preaches (v. 17) is “good news.”

He taught in the synagogues

He preached the Gospel

He met physical needs

In the synagogues, He met the religious people of the day. The ones who needed to know more about God who they already believed in. They needed to know that God was fulfilling His promises.

We need some of that in our day as well. For many people in our day and time, the burden of “religion” has outstripped the joy of salvation. So part of our ministry has to be encouraging the equipping other believers so they know God better and obey Him more readily.

He also met people who needed to know the good news. We need good news today as much as in the first century. People need to know that God loves them, wants them to know Him, wants to save them, and wants to give them the best life possible and more than they could imagine.

We need to start there. God convicts. We proclaim. To do anything else, creates hoops that Jesus never intended for people to jump thru.

The pushback against this is always “people need to repent!” but do you think your words about a sin you particularly dislike are more powerful than the conviction of the Spirit of God? Not even close. So focus on the full Gospel- know who God is, know who we are, know what Jesus did, and how do we respond to that and trust that God will bring conviction and repentance.

Third, He met physical needs. Why did He do this? I think part of this healing was to show people God was near and real hope was at hand. Meeting physical needs has always been a part of expanding the Kingdom. Sometimes it is the action that breaks down the barrier someone needs to hear the Gospel. Sometimes it is a witness to someone who sees the need being met. And sometimes, it is just God giving a good gift to His kids- people who He loves.

We get to be a part of that- His hands and feet. We may be a part of a miracle of healing, or we may simply offer a glass of cold water to a thirsty homeless friend...but in each of these actions we are being like Jesus.

Notice this- the next verse gives the why. We get the why AFTER we see the actions. The Gospel, Christianity, Kingdom advancement- ALL active...never passive.

Matthew 1. Introduction (4:17–25)

Jesus' miracle working understandably attracts crowds, but those in the crowds will need to be instructed on what true discipleship involves if they are to become genuine followers.

What did Jesus see?

Verse 36- crowds of people in desperate situations:

harassed- they have been injured- these are people who have a lot of baggage and a lot to overcome- they have deep wounds- the actual picture of this word is "lacerations"

helpless- they have been cast down- fallen and struggling to rise- they have been set upon by enemies and restrained

Matthew 1. Opposition Predicted for the Disciples' Mission (9:36–10:42) "Harassed and helpless" literally means torn and thrown down (cf. Berkeley, "mangled and thrown to the ground"). Predators, and possibly even unscrupulous shepherds (Zech 10:2–3; 11:16) have ravaged the sheep.

leaderless and unprotected- and this has happened because they do not have a shepherd- the people who have led them have been unscrupulous...they have taken advantage of the people or they have been inept...or they have had their own agenda...contrast that to a shepherd- "who lays down his life for the sheep"- shepherds knew they had responsibility for the flock...they put the needs of the sheep over their own needs and well being

Matthew 1. Opposition Predicted for the Disciples' Mission (9:36–10:42)

As in the days of the prophets, the rightful leadership of Israel had abdicated its responsibility, as demonstrated by its inability or unwillingness to recognize God's true spokesmen

How does that compare to our day. Think about the interactions you have with people.

How many are carrying around wounds or burdens?

How many are immobilized by fear or seemingly insurmountable burdens?

How many have been taken advantage of by leaders who used them for their own ends?

But we would not see them if we were not among them. Jesus saw what they were carrying (“he saw the crowds”) and He responded with compassion.

He was moved.

Matthew 1. Opposition Predicted for the Disciples’ Mission (9:36–10:42)

Jesus’ human emotions reflect a deep, gut-level “compassion” (a reasonable, idiomatic English equivalent for a term [from Greek *splanchnos*] that could refer to bowels and kidneys) for this sea of humanity

When was the last time you were moved by the plight of another person?

Let me make it even more specific. When is the last time you were moved by someone’s spiritual condition?

When we begin to see people in light of their eternity, they become harder to keep at arm’s length. They become harder to hate. They become harder to keep out of our lives.

It makes sense that Jesus, given His heart, would see these people in this condition and be moved. It would also make sense that as His people, with His Spirit dwelling in us, that we couldn't remain unmoved as well.

So why aren't we? (sit with this for a moment...)

The answer to that question in your life is really important. Let me caution you not to shrug it off or dismiss it, especially if it makes you uncomfortable or mournful. That's vital to coming to grips with where we need to GO with this information. We need to start with why we are so unmoved with the plight of so many people.

Finally, look at Jesus response to what He sees.

Pray

Go

Why do we pray? Because God is our source. He is where we draw our strength and purpose and vision. He sends people.

When we are confronted with a situation like we are in today, our first instinct should be to pray and pray and pray some more. God's intervention is the only hope we have.

And our prayer is specific- God move your people's heart to go to the crowds, moved by compassion, to do the work.

We are pleading for a missionary impulse.

And then we go- we are part of the answer to this prayer. That God would kindle in US a missionary impulse. To see ourselves in that way.

Matthew 1. Opposition Predicted for the Disciples' Mission (9:36–10:42)

“Send out” (from ekballō—recall under 9:25) could also be translated thrust out, and it could even refer to workers already in the field who “need to have a fire lit under them to thrust them out of their comforts into the world of need

To make us uncomfortable in our comfort.

Uncontended in our contentment.

Restless in our rest.

To release us from apathy and spur us to action.

In short, to bring us to a posture where we cannot help but teach and proclaim, and serve so that the Kingdom can advance and men and women can be saved.

We need open eyes to see as Jesus sees to shake us from our slumber.