

## Matthew 9:36-38

*Matthew 9:36* Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.  
<sup>37</sup> Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”

This passage records the motivational dynamic that characterized Jesus’ life and public ministry. Namely, what Jesus *saw* about people’s condition affected what He *felt* concerning them, which motivated Him to *act* in certain ways.

Jesus *saw* that the people were “distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.” In other words, Jesus saw the people’s true condition as one of spiritual lostness. The previous two chapters (Matthew 8,9) record many encounters between Jesus and people who were afflicted with various problems, including physical sickness and demonic possession. Jesus saw these conditions as symptoms of what happens to people when they live apart from God’s loving leadership. But He also saw these same people as a “harvest” – people who could be gathered into God’s kingdom.

What Jesus *saw* ignited what He *felt* about what He saw. Jesus was not cold or detached or dispassionate; He felt deep compassion for the people’s plight. “Compassion” is the Greek word *splagchnizomai*, which literally means “to be moved as to one’s bowels.” When we experience intense emotions, they usually affect our physical bodies. This is why we speak of a deep disappointment as “heartbreaking.” Jesus was profoundly moved by what He observed.

What Jesus *saw* and *felt* motivated Him to *act* in certain intentional and constructive ways. Here, He acted by urging His disciples to pray



earnestly for God to send out more workers to gather these people into His kingdom. In the next chapter, He acted by sending His disciples to various villages to invite people to into God’s kingdom through faith in Jesus.

*Saw . . . felt . . . acted.* This pattern characterized Jesus throughout His public ministry.<sup>1</sup> When a rich man asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life, Mark records His reaction: “**Looking** at him, Jesus **felt** a love for him and **said** to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” Others may have seen a secure and confident man, but Jesus saw a man who lacked assurance concerning life’s most important issue – where he would spend eternity. What Jesus saw as He interacted with this man moved Him – not to anger or despair, but to feel a deep love for Him. And this deep love motivated Jesus to speak certain words to this man. True, these words were painful because they exposed the man’s trust in his riches. But they were ultimately an invitation to become truly rich by following Jesus.

What does this “see . . . feel . . . act” pattern mean for you and me? It means, first of all, that we can be confident that this is how Jesus relates to each of us. He sees our true condition, even if we do not always see it ourselves. He sees that we are like sheep without a shepherd – lost and unable to make our lives work without His leadership. He feels real compassion for us – a deep concern for our plight and an intense desire to rescue and heal us. And He has done something about what He sees and feels. He has gone voluntarily to the cross, to pay the penalty for our sins so that we can have eternal life if only we will entrust ourselves to Him.

This “see . . . feel . . . act” pattern is also the way Jesus teaches us to live once we receive Him as our Messiah. When the apostle Paul was in Athens, he didn’t just see a city full of culture and wealth. He also

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<sup>1</sup> This pattern of *see . . . feel . . . act* is also a key element in Jesus’ two most famous parables – the Good Samaritan (see Luke 10:33,34) and the Prodigal Son (see Luke 15:20).



“beheld the city full of idols” (Acts 17:16) – full of false gods that could never meet the Athenians’ deepest needs. And what he *saw* affected how he *felt* – “his spirit was being provoked within him.” “Provoked” is the Greek word from which we get the English word “paroxysm” – a powerful negative reaction. Paul felt deep anger over what these idols were doing to the Athenians. And what Paul *saw* and *felt* motivated him to *act* in a redemptive way – “he was reasoning (about God and Jesus) in the synagogue . . . and in the market place with those who happened to be present” (Acts 17:17).

No matter where you live, no matter what stage of life you are in, no matter how limited you may think you are, God is bringing people into your life. What do you *see*? People who seem different from you, people who seem unconcerned for you? Or do you see people who are like sheep without a shepherd? What do you *feel*? Disappointment? Annoyance? Or do you feel compassion for them and anger over how false gods are injuring them? How do you *act*? By politely dismissing them? By withdrawing from them? Or by showing them God’s love and by speaking about His love to them? This is how Jesus saw you and felt about you and acted toward you. And He lives within you to enable you to see and feel and act this same way toward others.

*Lord Jesus, thank You for seeing my true spiritual condition. Thank You for feeling compassion toward me. And thank You most of all that died on the cross to rescue me. Open my eyes today to see others like sheep without a shepherd. Move my heart today to feel true compassion for them. Guide me today how to communicate Your love to them through all that I do and say.*

