

Once there was an elderly woman who had a small house on the seashore of Ireland at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who was quite wealthy but also quite frugal. Those who lived around her were surprised, then, when she decided to be among the first to have electricity in her home. But several weeks after the installation, the meter reader appeared at her door. He asked if her electricity was working well, and she assured him it was. "I'm wondering if you can explain something to me," he said. "Your meter shows scarcely any usage. Are you using your power?" "Certainly," she answered. "Each evening when the sun sets, I turn on my lights just long enough to light my candles; and then I turn them off." The woman had been given the blessing of having power connected to her home that would transform her life, but she didn't use it. The same could be said for those of us in the body of Christ, the church. God has given us a power to transform the hearts and lives of many people, but we just are not using it.

We see what power God has given us through Jesus Christ in verse 35 in our text for today: *“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.”* This is a description of what Jesus' disciples are to be doing. In Matthew 16:24 Jesus told his disciples, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”* In John 12:26 Jesus told his disciples, *“If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also.”* In Mark 16:15-16 Jesus told his disciples, *“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”* In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus told his disciples, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* In Matthew 10:7-8 Jesus told his disciples, *“proclaim as you GO, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.”* This is what Jesus disciples are called to do.

In Matthew 4:23-25 - in the context of Jesus calling Peter, Andrew, James and John to be his first disciples - Matthew wrote that Jesus *“went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.”* Today - in Matthew 9:35, in the context of Jesus calling Matthew, a tax-collector, to be his disciple - Matthew wrote, *“Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.”* This morning - in Matthew 9:36-38, in the context of Jesus revealing his power and authority to us through miracles - Matthew wrote that when Jesus *“saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’”*

Why did “crowds” of people follow Jesus? Because Jesus compassionately exercised the authority of his power in manner that brought hope and healing and life to those who encountered him. The power and authority of Jesus' miracles demonstrated the depth of Jesus compassion toward those who were spiritually, physically, morally, emotionally, culturally and socially *“harassed and helpless.”* In Matthew 8-9 we saw the unexpected nature of Jesus messianic mission amazed crowds and provoked opposition from the religious establishment. In his first cycle of miracles Jesus demonstrated that he had not come to cater to the religious or social elite but instead to heal those who were marginalized. In his second cycle of miracles Jesus revealed that in being the Sovereign King of the Kingdom of God, the authority of his messianic kingdom was not military or political might, but rather spiritual might to overpower Satan's strongholds in nature, the demonic world, and in illnesses and diseases that are caused by sin.

In our text for today we see Jesus' final cycle of miracles where he demonstrated the extraordinary power of his deep compassion towards those who confess their desperate need for him - as he performs powerful miracles of bringing the dead back to life (9:18– 26), giving sight to the blind (9: 27– 31), and giving voices to those who are mute (9: 32– 34) – revealing that power of Jesus as Sovereign King and Promised Savior, who rules and reigns and possesses power over death and over darkness and over evil. In all of this Jesus is also modeling for all of his disciples – which includes all of us - how compassion for the “*harassed and helpless*” in life should compel us to teach and preach and heal all of the unsaved “*crowds*” around us, with the good news of the gospel, by the power of the kingdom of God.

The immediate contest of our text for today is that Jesus had just invited Matthew to join him in his Kingdom ministry on earth. This caused the Jewish religious leaders to question the legitimacy of Jesus' claim to be the messiah/savior sent by God - as they saw Matthew, who was a tax- collector, to be one of the most despised outcasts of society. Jesus responded to their questioning by exposing the warped premise of the standard of their judgement by telling them that *God only forgives and heals and blesses those who recognise that they are sinners - because they see and acknowledge their desperate need for God.* This didn't sit well with the scribes and Pharisees, who were so spiritually sick they could not see beyond their own personal self-righteousness, and thus they stood in judgement of not only the outcasts of society like Matthew, but also over Jesus – who was God, the Sovereign King, Savior of the World.

We saw this pushback continue last week, when the disciples of John the Baptist joined the Jewish leaders in questioning Jesus - by asking why he was not following along with the established standards and expectations and practices of the Jewish faith. Jesus told them that since God had sent him to be the fulfillment of the long-promised messiah/savior to bring them a new life, he was introducing new things for God's people. Jesus spoke of this in terms of new and old wine and wineskins. Jesus told us that we cannot pour the new wine message of the Gospel into the old wineskin container of Jewish religious law. Mixing law and grace causes chaos and destroys both. The new wine life in Christ must poured into new forms of wineskins. Mixing the Old and New Covenant leads to religious confusion and division. Jesus came to us to pour the power of his new wine of compassion into the new wineskins of the gospel.

*While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. Matthew 9:18–19*

In this event we will see that the power of God in the compassion of Jesus *is his power over death.* We also see this event in Mark and Luke. In Mark 5:21-24 Mark tells us: “*When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet and implored him earnestly, saying, ‘My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.’ And he went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him.*”

The man who came to Jesus – “*Jairus*” - was not just any synagogue official, but he was one of the rulers of the synagogue in Capernaum. This means he was one of the men who were responsible for the total administration and operation of the synagogue including supervision of the worship services and teaching, arbitrating disputes and other leadership duties. This is important to keep in mind because there was already a movement against Jesus by most of the religious leaders. Jairus would have known about, if not personally been present at, some of the teachings of Jesus. He may have seen some of the miracles Jesus had done in Capernaum where Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and others and had cast out demons. From a distance, Jesus had also healed the son of the royal official and the Centurion's servant. It is logical to assume these things may have prompted Jairus to come and beg Jesus to heal his daughter. His coming to Jesus and falling down before him reveals that he had some faith in Jesus and he was desperate, especially so since Luke tells us that the twelve-year old child was his only daughter.

But for Jairus to come to Jesus would mean he would do so at the risk of inviting the scorn if not rejection of the other Jewish religious leaders – and possibly the rejection of the community as a whole. Yet even though Jairus would have been a deeply committed religious man and he would have been faithfully obedient to the law of God - when death came into his life, into his home, into his family - his religion and his obedience to the law was powerless to help. He was desperate; his position, his place in life, his possessions, his opinions, his beliefs, his gifting, his skills, his experience, and his will were nothing in the face of death. And so he turned to Jesus: *“My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.”* Here we see the greatest hindrance in people coming to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior is not a lack of a belief in Jesus but rather a failure to see their need for Jesus. The barrier we all face in putting our faith in the crucified and risen Christ for the salvation our souls from sin the leads to death is that we are just not desperate enough. Jairus was desperate enough.

*And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, for she said to herself, “If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.” Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well.”* Matthew 9:20-22

As Jesus begins to make his way to Jairus’ home to heal his daughter, a large crowd follows along and presses in on Jesus. Mark 5:25-34 gives us more details: *And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, ‘If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.’ And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my garments?’ And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’ And he looked around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. And he said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’”*

In order to fully understand all of this, we need to know a little about a Jewish ceremonial law in order to grasp the true nature of the suffering this woman had endured for twelve years and why she had become so desperate. Leviticus 15 declared a woman to be unclean during her menstrual flow and to remain unclean until seven days after her flow had stopped at which time she was to give a sacrifice before she could be declared to be clean again. In addition, everything she touched was considered to be unclean, and as an unclean person she could not go to the temple or to the synagogue and attend the public worship of God. And because anyone who touched her or touched something she had touched would also be unclean, she was essentially shut out from most normal social activities. This woman had endured *constant bleeding for 12 continuous years* and she was really, really desperate to be cured.

And so when this woman heard about Jesus, she believed it would be worth the effort to see if Jesus would heal her. While her hemorrhaging made it difficult to go out in public, she saw an opportunity to do so as crowd following Jesus came by. And we also read that she believed that since Jesus had shown that he was so powerful to heal others, he clearly could heal her, even by just touching his clothes. And so that Jesus would not know he had been touched by an unclean woman, she came up from behind him and *“touched the fringe of his garment.”* Well, what she didn’t know, which is something I hope we all do know, is that you cannot sneak up on God and not be noticed. But she tried to, and when she did, she received the power of more compassion and mercy and grace than she could have ever imagined. Mark 5:29 tells us that Jesus said, *“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease”* and Matthew 9:22 tells us that, *“instantly the woman was made well.”* In midst of her physical affliction this woman saw her desperate need for God and she put her faith in Jesus Christ. In this event we the power of God in the compassion of Jesus *is his power over our physical and spiritual health.*

*And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And the report of this went through all that district. Matthew 9:23–26*

After the afflicted woman was instantly healed, Jesus' attention is turned back to Jairus and his daughter. And of this, Mark 5:35–43 gives us again a much more detailed account: *"While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?' But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, 'Do not fear, only believe.' And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. And when he had entered, he said to them, 'Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her, 'Talitha cumi,' which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise.' And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat."*

Here we see a demonstration of the power of God in the compassion of Jesus *is his power over death*. Jesus is still talking to the healed woman when people arrive from Jairus' home and tell him that his daughter has died so there was no need to trouble Jesus. Jairus must have been absolutely crushed. His daughter was dead. He was too late. But Jesus intervenes to give hope again. He told Jairus, *"Do not fear, only believe."* And so Jesus touched and he spoke to Jairus' daughter - and she came back to life! Death is final for humans unless God intervenes. This is direct reflection of the reality of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. God sent Jesus Christ into our fallen world - so he would live for God and die for us on a cross in our place for our sins - and then rise from the dead, defeating sin, evil and death - so we might be forgiven, redeemed and restored back to God and live with God in the glory of heaven forever and ever. This is our hope and our promise and our assurance when *"believe"* in Jesus, put our trust in Jesus, put our *"faith"* in Jesus - as the Lord and Savior of our hearts and lives. The power of God in the compassion of Jesus *is his power over death for those who put their faith/trust in Jesus*.

Two words of warning before we leave this event. *First*, know that some have tried to discount this miracle by saying that the girl was not really dead, but in a coma. They point out that Jesus said that the girl was not dead, but *"asleep."* The Bible doesn't use the word in the same way we think about sleep, as the word *"sleep"* is generally used as a euphemism for death. But what is most significant is that Jesus went even farther - in that he used the term *"asleep"* for someone who was not *permanently dead*. Lazarus was dead (for four days!) and so was this little girl, but neither was *permanently dead* because *Jesus was going to raise them up from the dead*. *Secondly*, take note that this passage does not teach, as some do, that we can *"claim"* faith healing from God. The gospel accounts record multitudes of people being healed by Jesus completely apart from any faith on their part. The centurion's servant was healed without having any contact with Jesus and without even being aware that he might be healed. Jesus healed by His sovereign will, often in response to faith, but never dependent on it. The same is still true today. No human has the right to demand or claim physical healing from God. We can only pray and request it and then wait for Him to reveal His will. These two events reflect the power of God in the compassion of Jesus - *is his power over health and death for those who put their faith in Jesus*.

*And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, "See that no one knows about it." But they went away and spread his fame through all that district. Matthew 9:27–31*

Here we see the power of God in the compassion of Jesus is his power over darkness. Jesus had just raised Jairus' daughter from the dead and he was going to his own home in Capernaum, when two blind men became aware that Jesus was passing by and they start following Him. The text does not say why they were blind – but regardless of the cause, these men are without sight. Jesus walks by and together they start following him hoping that he will help. As they are going, they were *“crying aloud, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David.’”* This *“crying aloud”* would have been a brash, unpleasant sound because the Greek word here means to *“croak or cry with a loud and raucous voice.”* They continued to persistently follow Jesus and *“croaked and cried”* until Jesus spoke with them after he reached his home.

It's highly significant that they first cried for *“mercy.”* They wanted Jesus to show kindness toward their great need – in that *the mercy of God is God not giving to us what we do deserve.* Clearly the blind men's request revealed that they knew *they did not deserve what they were requesting.* Since the common understanding in that culture was that something as debilitating as blindness was a judgment of God for sin, they were probably very keenly aware of their unworthiness. In Matthew 5:3 Jesus said: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* The poor in spirit enter the kingdom of God, because the poor in spirit confess and cry out for God's mercy in their desperate need for God.

*“Have mercy on us, Son of David.”* Their request also demonstrated that they believed that Jesus was truly able to do something for them. It is also highly significant that they specifically call Jesus, *“Son of David.”* This cry was a demonstration of their faith - in that during Jesus' ministry on earth, the terms *“Son of David”* and *“Messiah”* had become synonyms. These men did not just believe that Jesus was a miracle worker like one of the prophets. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah himself and they addressed him with terminology that signified that fact. Since these blind men were in Capernaum, it is reasonable to assume that they had heard the stories about Jesus miracles and that would certainly give them a reason to put their *“faith”* in Jesus. And so, they cried out *“Have mercy on us, Son of David.”* And they professed their faith in Jesus and then Jesus *“touched their eyes, saying, ‘According to your faith be it done to you.’ And their eyes were opened.”* In John 1:1-5 we read, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”* In this event we see the power of God in the compassion of Jesus - *is his power over physical and spiritual darkness.*

*As they were going away, behold, a demon-possessed man who was mute was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, “Never was anything like this seen in Israel.” But the Pharisees said, “He casts out demons by the prince of demons.”* Matt 9:32–34

Here we see that power of God in the compassion of Jesus is his power over evil. Just as the two blind men who had been healed by Jesus leave, *“a demon-possessed man who was mute was brought to him.”* And without a word, Jesus casts the demon out and releases the man from the bondage he had been in and immediately he was able to speak. And we read that a large crowd that was there *“marveled, saying, ‘Nothing like this was ever seen in Israel.’”* Matthew includes this story in his gospel to show several notable contrasts between this man and the two men who had been blind. *First*, the two blind men were the focus of the passage in which their story is told – but the mute man is nearly incidental to what occurs. The focus is actually on the response of the people to the miracle. *Second*, the blind men actively pursue Jesus, while the demon-possessed mute man was brought to him. He was either indifferent or somewhat resistant to Jesus. This man represents God's general goodness to all humanity including those who do not seek after God. *Third*, the blind men demonstrated and stated their beliefs and their faith in Jesus, but nothing is said about the belief or the faith of the man who had been a demon-possessed mute. *Fourth*, the two previous blind men spread the news about Jesus throughout the land even though they were not supposed to do so - but nothing is recorded regarding about what the previously mute man said after being healed.

The main focus of this story is the response of the crowd and their response is understandable - in that they are amazed and marveled at this miracle. Demons caused a lot of problems and until the coming of Jesus, and it was rare that they were cast out. What is *not understandable* here is that the crowd said: *"Never was anything like this seen in Israel."* Jesus had already cast demons out of people right where they stood in Capernaum. And Jesus had already done many similar things in many of miracles, and Jewish history included many miracles, including those performed by the prophets Elijah and Elisha. And so why would they say, *"Never was anything like this seen in Israel"*? Well, because the crowds that followed Jesus around were pretty *fickle*. They were erratic in their beliefs and their affections changed according to what caught their attention or benefitted them personally. Their amazement did not turn into personal faith in Jesus. Several times Jesus rebuked crowds for seeking the miracles and not Him. In John 6:26 Jesus told one crowd: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."* Most followed Jesus for the food and entertainment of the miracles. We still see that often in the church of today. Food, fun and entertainment can attract a crowd, but don't expect that to produce faith in Christ. That only happens as the Holy Spirit convicts people of their sin and of their desperate need for a Savior through the proclamation of God's word.

*"But the Pharisees said, 'He casts out demons by the prince of demons.'" The Pharisees and scribes and Jewish religious leaders were part of that fickle crowd. But they came not to be fed or entertained; their purpose was to discredit, slander, attack and put to death that which was of God. Since they could not refute what had happened, they denied the means by which it occurred. This was the second time they have openly blasphemed, reviled, and cursed - against what Jesus did in His sovereign, divine holiness in casting out a demon a work that was in league with Satan. They proclaimed the divine good that Jesus performed to be an evil. A committed unbeliever will not profess faith or belief in Jesus Christ regardless of any facts or reason no matter how obvious and convincing. You cannot debate someone into the kingdom - simply because a person who has dedicated themselves to darkness refuses to see the light of Christ regardless of the intensity of the light. The only hope of such a person is that their spiritual blindness would be lifted, and that they would see their sin and their desperate need for God and repent and turn to Jesus. Otherwise, they are doomed for a dark eternity by their own choice.*

We must always remember that the devil, while his power may excel ours, is not a second god in the world - and in no way does his power match that of sovereign omnipotent power God that we know through the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Savior and Sovereign God. We need not fear any evil or demons who serve as extensions of the devil's power or influence *because* their power and influence is nothing in comparison to the power and influence available to us through Jesus Christ. Jesus' death on a cross for our sins in our place and his resultant glorious resurrection from the dead, are the means by which God defeated evil and death, so we might know the fullness of the life with God. In this event we see the power of God in the compassion of Jesus - *is his power over sin and evil.*

*And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Matthew 9:35-38*

By God's grace I read these words with a burden on my heart, a burden which became greater and heavier as God led me through writing this sermon. And that great, heavy burden is that are not seeing people in Port Alberni come to faith in Jesus Christ. People are not being saved and brought into the family of God. Many Christians today think that our task is to open the church doors and have events that invite sinners to attend - but Jesus instructs us to *"go"* to those who are lost with the message of the Gospel. Events have their place in building the body of Christ - but when we focus on ourselves and our comfort and our happiness too much, we face the danger of *"separation"* becoming *"isolation."*

A story is told of a member of a church finding his newly hired pastor standing at his study window in the church weeping as he looked over the community's tragic conditions. In an effort to console his new pastor, the man said: "Don't worry Pastor. After you've been here a while, you'll get used to it." To which the minister responded, "Yes, I know. That's why I am crying." Another story is told of a time during the Iranian Hostage Crisis from 1979 to 1981 when a pastor was asked to share a mission update regarding the crises at a large evangelical church. Since he had only one minute to speak, he decided to ask them only two questions. The first one was, "How many of you are praying for the 52 hostages being held in Iran?" 4000 hands went straight up. And then he said, "Praise the Lord! Now, put your hands down and let me ask you another question...How many of you are praying for the 42 million Iranians being held hostage to Islam?" Only four hands went up.

I share my thoughts and these stories with you not chastise or rebuke but to enlighten and encourage you. The greatest hindrance in people coming to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior is not a lack of a belief in Jesus but rather a failure to see their need for Jesus. And in the same way the greatest hindrance *in helping people* to come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior is not a lack of a belief in Jesus but rather *a failure to be as compassionate as we should be*. Just as followers of Jesus Christ need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, so too do we need to be filled with the compassion of Jesus. When we are truly filled up with compassion like Jesus we will focus first and foremost on others before ourselves. Frederick Buechner wrote: "Compassion is the sometimes fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too."

People without Christ are like sheep without a shepherd. They will soon run out of pasture and starve, or they will get lost or caught in some thicket and die. And in the meantime they are harassed, wearied, and helpless. Now the unbelievers we know may not seem to fit that description. But if we see them with the eyes of Jesus and are not misled by the shell of our own self-assurance, we will recognize they are like sheep who desperately need a shepherd. When Jesus saw *"the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."* The word *"compassion"* here literally means, "to be moved in one's stomach with pity." When is the last time you felt that kind of pity for someone's soul? I think that is our need. *Our* need is to feel compassion because of *their* need. Our need is to care and love like Jesus did. He was so much of a man of compassion for others! So much so he sacrificed his life. We need to be honest and admit that kind of compassion does not come natural to us. It is a work of grace in our hearts and, for that reason, the product not of works, but of prayer. *"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."* Let us pray that God would anoint us to be His *"laborers in his harvest."*

On Tuesday morning I spent two hours in hospital with a man named Bob. In the midst of recent severe affliction in the backdrop of a troubled, broken life - Bob saw his desperate need for God and he put his faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. He is constantly stunned to tears over his new relationship with Jesus. He is full of joy and full of questions because he is now full of God. Bob is the perfect picture of Jesus' words: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied"* (Matthew 5:3, 6). When I was with Bob, I welcomed him into the family of God. Through smiling tears he said: "I can't wait to meet them!"

In Acts 1:8 Jesus told us: *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses."* God's Word today is calling us to be his witnesses to the power of God in the compassion of Jesus - which is his power over physical and spiritual health and death for those who put their faith in Jesus; his power over physical and spiritual darkness; and his power over sin and evil. Jesus came to pour the power of his new wine of compassion into the new wineskins of the gospel. May God use us as his instruments of mercy, grace and love to share the gospel with everyone in the crowd around us!

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