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# The Writer's Inkhorn

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Continuing Reflections on the Word for Your Personal Growth in Christ

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## Help Wanted!

Scripture Text: Matthew 9



As I have been thinking about what to share with you at the start of this New Year, I was impressed to share some thoughts from the broader context of Matthew's gospel, and particularly, the whole of chapter 9. This full chapter has long fascinated me because it gives so much *action* from Jesus' standpoint, while pointing the way to the *opportunities* that await us as we enter into *partnership*, if you will, *with* Jesus. We are called to be co-workers together *with* Him (I Corinthians 3:9), and there is *still* much work to be done. In fact, at the end of Chapter 9, Jesus instructs His disciples to "pray to the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers *into* His harvest" (Matthew 9:38).

It was soon after Jesus began His public ministry that He called some of His disciples, performed a few miracles, and He began to teach His disciples and the multitudes, even as He continued to call more disciples. He began to teach. Underscore this point. One of the greatest needs we have is to be taught. Yet, at times, it seems as though the older men and women no longer want to teach the younger ones. The younger men and women don't seem to think they need to *be* taught. The children are telling *parents* what to do, rather than listening to what parents are telling *them* to do, and everything seems to be in disarray. But we need teachers who are willing to enter into that fray and teach others God's way.

By way of background, Matthew's gospel is designed so as to portray Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, and so he carefully selected a series of Old Testament quotations which

document that claim. In fact, some scholars feel that the book's location at the beginning of the New Testament canon is appropriate because of its emphasis, more than any of the other gospels, on Jesus' *relation to* the Old Testament. The book, then, serves as a useful bridge, linking the two testaments as *promise* and *fulfillment*.

How Matthew chose to lay out his gospel is also to be considered. As you read and study, pay careful attention to the overall picture the writer seems to be trying to paint. Try to determine what it is about *his* message that is different from the other records. What was the particular revelation God gave to *him*?

The structure of this gospel is not at all complex. First you have stories about the *person* of Jesus the Messiah, then about the *proclamation* of Jesus the Messiah, in word (His teachings) and in deed (His actions), and finally the *passion* of Jesus the Messiah (His death, burial, and resurrection). *Our* focus, for this issue of *The Inkhorn*, comes from the section of Matthew's gospel that deals with the **proclamation** of Jesus in deed.

As I read and re-read this particular chapter in Matthew, I am struck by how concise and direct the writing is. To put this in today's context, Matthew would probably have been a business major, so-to-speak, and as a trained IRS agent (taxman) for the Roman government, he was undoubtedly accustomed to taking notes and keeping concise records of what went on around him, as well as an accurate accounting of his tax records. So you have in his gospel, collections of stories greatly condensed and clustered in groups, without some of the elaborations given in the other gospels. It is as if the expression, "Just the facts, Ma'am," may have originated there.

To summarize all 38 verses of the chapter in a unique way, here is a series of eight headlines that could have appeared in the *Daily Capernaum Times*, if there had been one back then. See if you can follow the stories:

- Friends seek relief for paralysis victim
- Carpenter turned preacher/Messiah angers scribes when He announces man's sins forgiven
- Jesus defends His and disciples' rights to fraternize with sinners
- Woman's faith, determination lead to relief from 12-year chronic blood disorder
- Daughter of ruler raised to life amidst tears and jeers
- "I see!" exclaims blind pair after touch by 'Son of David'
- Mute speaks, multitude marvels, Pharisees deny authenticity of the power
- Comprehensive approach, compassion become hallmarks of Jesus' ministry.

At your next opportunity, read this chapter in its entirety. A lot has been going on, *and* there is more to come. In fact, in the very next chapter you have the biblical text used for this classified ad that could have come from the *Daily Galilee Sun*, again, if there had been such a publication back then:

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**Help wanted! Adventure travel.**

Now hiring 12 guys free to travel: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, other parts of the world. Three years all-expense-paid training and mentorship; return transportation included. No experience needed. Must be enthusiastic, able-bodied, and willing to start today. Serious inquiries only.

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Could you, and/or *would* you have answered that ad? Help is *still* wanted. This is the heart of our mission – a call to true discipleship that gets walked out, lived out, actualized in the marketplaces, and in the cities and streets and villages of our world. Service *and* ministry to the masses ought to be our primary goal, *and not just* ministering to and appreciating one another. That's just one part. Always let this verse be your heart's cry that you may feel the kind of compassion that our Savior felt:

*But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)*

Use your imagination to overlay the news and events and needs expressed in Matthew 9 with the news and events and needs of today. Can you not see clearly that help is still wanted *and* needed? The Lord of the harvest has need of you:

*When He saw the crowds He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."*

The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Perhaps you are or know of someone who is presently out of work, and you are wondering, "Will I ever find a job?" Hear the Lord's words again, and know that a lack of work is *never* the issue. For as long as the earth remains, seedtime and harvest will continue. There is always a new harvest. The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. A lack of *work* is never the issue. A lack of *workers* is. Qualified workers, that is. If you don't believe me, search the Scriptures for yourself.

Also, check the classifieds in any newspaper. **This** was an *actual* ad in the classifieds a while back in the Chicago Sun-Times:



**Assistant Managers.** Wanted: 12 hard workers to replace 12 who wouldn't. Will train. Call 630-NOT-LAZY. That's 630-668-5299.

Could you answer this ad? *Okay, so I* changed the original phone number to be a little creative, but the ad was real. From education to electronics, from technology to transportation, it was all there. There is something for everyone in God's vast world. And, there *is* much work to be done in the kingdom of God. Are you looking in the right places, for things that fit your training, your skill set, and your God-given talents and gifts?

Don't be confused as some were in Jesus' day. Some people, like the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were looking for *positions* in the kingdom since the thought was that the Messiah would come and restore the physical kingdom of King David. You may recall the words of Cleopas as he talked to others walking along the road to Emmaus: "*But we were hoping it was He who was going to redeem Israel.*" He was speaking to Jesus, and didn't know it. Jesus was the One to redeem Israel, but not in the way they were expecting. God has His *own* way, and redemption came through the cruel and heart-wrenching work of the cross. The work of the kingdom, the harvest of which Jesus spoke, is not pretty; it is grunt work, often grueling.

Jesus did not come to deliver the Jews from Roman rule. He simply helped them determine how they would live out their discipleship in the midst of their historical circumstances, their own socio-political realities. When and if and because I become a disciple of Christ, I am not exempt from the vicissitudes of life. However, the beauty of the power of the gospel of Jesus is its ability to change, to transform us where we are, even as we work to change, to transform that part of God's kingdom where we will find ourselves as co-laborers *with* Christ.

There is a conversation between Jesus and Philip which John records in chapter 14: 9-14, that bears mentioning here. Jesus had been comforting His disciples as He neared the time of His death, because He was preparing them for taking over and carrying out the work after His return to His Father in heaven. At this point Philip asks Jesus to show to them the Father. Pay close attention to Jesus' response:

*Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me has seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?*

*Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: **but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works.***

[Note: "*The Father that dwelleth in me, **HE** doeth the works.*" ]

*Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works' sakes. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, **the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father.***

*And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **If ye ask anything in My name, I will do it.***

[Note: And whatsoever I shall ask in **His** name, that will He do, that **God** may be glorified, that **GOD** may be glorified. If I ask **anything** in Jesus name, He will do it.]

Do you understand here that if we pray within the divine will, and believe, we can have access to all that we need to accomplish whatever tasks God assigns to our hands? Surely, God can do His work without us, but He **chooses** to use us. Help is *still* wanted and needed. The multitudes are harassed. Men, women, and children are hurting, in distress, destitute, lonely, needy, and even dying in the streets. What can you do to help them? What do you *really* believe that God can do through you to help alleviate the suffering of many, or even any? Have you even *asked* God to give you a burden for the harvest of souls that is surely coming in this end-time? What kinds of things are on your agenda for this upcoming year, as it relates to helping others?

When will you start to enlarge your vision of the kingdom and your place in it? What goals, vision for your life, and dreams have God given you, and when will you begin to pursue them with the sense of urgency they deserve? When will you follow after your dreams, that for which God has destined you?

Most of us have settled it in our hearts and minds long ago that God **can** do anything. Jeremiah asked and answered his own question: "Is there anything too hard for God?" And we answer with a resounding, "NO! There is **nothing** too hard for God." In Matthew 9:5, Jesus declares, Himself, that it is just as easy for Him to forgive sin as it is to heal a lame man. I have not forgotten the sermon Elder (now Bishop) Oliver Haney preached from this text many years ago in our United National Auxiliaries Convention (UNAC), "It's Just as Easy." The raising of the ruler's daughter from the dead was just as easy as healing the woman that had been plagued by a blood disorder for 12 years.

To just stop at God can do anything too easily lets *you* off the hook. We **all** believe that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, and that is a good thing. The issue is never with God's ability or lack thereof, but with our *faith* or lack thereof, as evident in our unwillingness to yield ourselves to the Lord of the harvest, and trust that He can do **through us** exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. I need to ask you what do you believe that *you* can do? What do *you* believe that God is able to do **through** you? The work of the harvest is not about position and prestige. It is laboring night and day for the souls and the well-being of mankind.

Check the classifieds -- in the Scripture **and** in the marketplace. Help is **still** wanted, **and** needed. Hear John's cry in his gospel:

*Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, **lift up your eyes and look at the fields**, for they are already white for harvest!* (John 4:35)

Do you sense the urgency in his tone? The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Let us pray the Lord of the harvest, that as we prepare ourselves, He will send **us** as laborers into His harvest.



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