

**Introduction:**

- A. *Illus.*: We all watched the story of those 12 Thai boys and their coach. We saw those first pictures of those dirty, wide-eyed kids in that dimly lit cave almost beyond the reach of help and then finally we see them all rescued and safe in the bright lights of the hospital. I’m sure those lights were *beautiful* to those boys. All over the world people watched the story and rejoiced to see the rescue. Seeing the boys in that bright hospital room was medicine to us, too.
- B. The prophet Isaiah promised that the Messiah would first make his appearance in the region around the Sea of Galilee. Isaiah said, “*The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.*” Like that cave that seemed to be a deathtrap, and then the miracle rescue. Matthew quotes that verse near the beginning of his gospel. The next verse, **Matt 4:17**, says, “*From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’*” Matthew’s book tells us what the first days of light were like for the people who’d been living in deadly darkness. As we read, we are witnesses of a second creation; of the second time the mighty God said, “*Let there be light.*”
- C. Turn to **Matt 9**. This morning we’re going to take a brisk walk through this entire chapter—about half which we’ve already covered. We’re doing this so you can see that the sweep of Matthew’s stories is intended to show us that Jesus ushered in the bright new era of the Kingdom of Heaven. That very phrase—the Kingdom of heaven—when brought to earth speaks of an invasion of light to rescue those in darkness.

## I. WE'RE INVITED TO WITNESS THE DAWN OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

- A. Jesus began his ministry preaching, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" That's unexpected. The poor in spirit are people whose hearts are heavy, whose spiritual pockets are empty, who don't have two good deeds to rub together. But Jesus says they are *God-blessed* people. How can that be? Because spiritual poverty is the passport to the kingdom of heaven now and forever. No one else was teaching this to the people despite the fact that it was in their Scriptures. *A great light!*
- B. The first miracle Matthew describes in **ch 8**, is when Jesus cleanses the leper, a miracle that had never happened before in Israel, so far as we know. Jesus told him to go show himself to the priest, who, if he had his wits about him, would say, "*This has never happened before! Who did this?*" *A great light!*
- C. Later, after an evening when Jesus "*healed all the sick*" who were brought to him, and drove out evil spirits with a word, Matthew says *This was Isaiah's 700 year old prophecy coming true! "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases."* The Messiah is here! "*A great light.*"
- D. Then in Matt 9, when a paralyzed man is brought to Jesus, he doesn't say, "*Be healed.*" He says, "*Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.*" And establishes that he, the Son of Man, has authority on earth to forgive sin.
- E. To put that in bold-face, Jesus went to the tax booth of Matthew and told Matthew to follow him. Matthew wasn't just your run-of-the-mill sinner. He was one of the worst of sinners, a corrupt tax collector, and yet Jesus told Matthew to follow him. What kind of teacher—what kind of *Messiah*—would want such a man as a disciple? There is

no case in the whole Old Testament where a scoundrel the likes of Matthew was welcomed as a representative of God. God expressly looked for *righteous* people. *Unrighteous* people had been the cause of all of Israel's troubles!

- F. And if *that* wasn't bad enough Jesus welcomed Matthew's invitation to dine with a whole banquet-full of such sinners. That was **a brain blaster!** The *Messiah* eating with the worst of sinners?! And when he was questioned, he said, "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'* For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." It had certainly *seemed* to the Jews that God *did* desire sacrifice—lots of them—all those animal sacrifices, year after year, plus the sacrifices of fasting and Sabbath keeping. And they certainly thought that when the Messiah finally did come he *would* call the righteous, *not* sinners. Otherwise, why were those Pharisees trying so hard to prove their righteousness?

But now, there in the company of all those sinners, Jesus the Messiah says that God desires mercy for such people, and he's come to distribute it, like bread to the hungry. God's prophets had come again and again calling people to repent of their sin but precious few did. **There had never been a banquet for sinners seeking God!** No one had ever seen anything like it in Israel! "*A great light.*"

- G. Then John the Baptist's disciples came and posed the question, "*How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?*" Fasting was a necessary part of being God's people. Regular fasting was a diet of mourning for what bad people they'd been in the past. Fasting was as humbling as poverty, a kind of recurring

repentance. But Jesus' followers feasted with sinners when all the others fasted over sin.

As we saw last week, Jesus replied, *"How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?"* As Tyler put it last week, who'd come wearing ash-covered burlap to a wedding? All that fasting was sort of like a national plea to God, *"Don't give up on us. Please take us back!"* And Jesus is saying, *"You've been invited to your own wedding, and I'm the Bridegroom. So let's celebrate and eat! Why go hungry now?!"*

Then Jesus said in **v.16**, *"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse."* Jesus is saying, *You can't take the things I'm doing and sew them on your favorite Old Covenant sweatshirt because what I bring will tear up your old shirt worse than it already is. You need a new garment. You need a wedding dress!*

Then there's one more picture: *"Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."* Wine is such a wonderful picture of the gospel because it refreshes and delights. **Imagine** trying to pour, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved,"* into the story of Israel standing, trembling, before God at Mt. Sinai when they said to God, *"We will do everything you've commanded us to do."* As soon as that gospel freedom began to expand, the old means of righteousness would explode.

**Imagine** someone who has been saved by the blood of Christ now going to the fiery altar of the Old Testament and offering a slain lamb. The old can't contain the new!

**Imagine** someone who rigorously observes the Sabbath day regulations being told that Jesus himself is our Sabbath. Try pouring that into your old covenant righteousness! Try to pour the new wine of the gospel back into the Old Covenant wineskin and they'd both be ruined.

- H. **V.18** begins, “*While he was saying this...*” **Just** as Jesus finished his sentence about new wine, two miracle stories were set in motion. **Vv.18-26...** Two striking examples of faith in Jesus. The woman had faith that if she only touched Jesus’ robe—even if he didn’t realize it—she’d be healed by his power. Jesus noticed because it isn’t Jesus’ robe that held healing power. It is Jesus himself.

And the synagogue ruler defied the mourners at his house to come to Jesus not merely to *heal* his daughter, but to raise her back to life. I don’t think Jesus had ever yet raised someone from the dead yet this man had the faith to ask him to do just that. **Those are examples of new wine, and the Old Covenant simply didn’t accommodate stories like that.** God had generated—given birth to—a new faith in Israel, faith in Jesus their Messiah.

- I. Now there is another story that apparently happened in quick succession. **Vv.27-31...** Did you catch what the blind men cried out, “*Son of David* [that is synonymous with *Messiah*], *have mercy on us.*” God said, “*I desire mercy,*” and Jesus was about to give it. Again, it is their faith that we’re supposed to notice: “*Do you believe that I am able to do this?*” “*Yes, Lord.*” This is a new day when faith alone in Jesus becomes the currency of the kingdom. It wasn’t like that in the dark days.
- J. One more story comes quickly: **v.32-34...** This man, whom demons had tongue-tied, came by the faith of others. You can be sure that the first words this man spoke were praise

to God. *Hallelujah!!* He'd been walking in darkness and now he saw a great light.

- K. Then the headline over all these stories: “*The crowd was amazed and said, ‘Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.’*” That is the point of all these things! **Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!** The Pharisees could protest but the people walking in the dark shadow of death had seen a great light. Their wedding day had dawned. The bright Kingdom of Heaven has lodged on earth because the King is among us and there's no going back.

## II. SINCE JESUS HAS BROUGHT THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN TO US, WE MUST BE ALL ABOUT THE HARVEST (9:35-38)

The last verses of Matt 9 are a kind of gathering up of what's come before: **vv.35-38**... Next week we'll see that Jesus focused at this point almost exclusively on the Jews—“*the lost sheep of Israel.*” It was God's intention that they be the vanguard, the firstfruits, of the Kingdom. But what Jesus did, as described here, became the pattern for the spread of the gospel throughout all the earth. Remember Matthew is moving us toward the final great commission which Jesus gave his disciples: “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*”

- A. **V.35**... I assume that as he went from town to town Jesus reiterated again and again the things he taught in the Sermon on the Mount about the ways the Kingdom of Heaven functions and what it means for us to be its citizens. And always, always, there was the good news.

*“Be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven.”* The miracles of healing not only relieved suffering but they convinced many people that indeed God’s Kingdom had come to them, and that Jesus was their Messiah.

B. **V.36...** I love this verse! *“He had compassion on them”*—his heart went out to them. Why? Because so many people were sick? No, because *“they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.”* They’d been thrown to the wolves by their feckless shepherds. They had no rest because no shepherd taught them how to rest in the Lord. They were *helpless* because they had no defenses against legalism and no remedy for their sin. **Jesus’ compassion meant that he would be their Shepherd.** *A great light!*

C. **V.38...** The harvest was plentiful among the towns and villages Jesus visited in Israel. Many people were ready for Jesus. But it isn’t necessarily true that everywhere we go the harvest is plentiful. There were places Paul went where there were not many responses. There are many fields where the harvest is not yet ready. Ask pastors in New England or missionaries in many Muslim countries. Or, I think, even here where we live.

But the point is that we are all about the harvest. As Paul wrote, some plant seeds, some water, some reap. But all who follow Jesus must have the harvest at heart. The way farmers do. Their success or failure is all on the harvest. The harvest, to switch the metaphor back, is when harassed and helpless people are found by the Good Shepherd.

*“Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”* Workers are dispatched into the world’s harvest by God and God responds to prayers for workers. The word ‘send’ misses some of the muscle of the

Greek word. It means ‘thrust, push, **shove.**’ We all know our own spiritual inertia and lethargy. So that we freely do what we are otherwise reluctant to do, Jesus tells us to pray that God would shove us out. *Illus.:* Years ago, there was a guy in our church in Pennsylvania who nagged me about evangelism. He became a nuisance. Frankly, I resented it and wondered just what he was doing about evangelism. But then he told me he started praying for me. And that’s when I felt God’s nudge to start hanging out at coffee places many mornings, there and here.

*Illus.:* This week, a good friend got tears in her eyes as she told me about some tensions she was facing. She won’t talk about religion but when I asked, “Would you mind if I pray for you today?” she welcomed that. And the next day she told me that two specific things had gone better than expected. My smile said, *That’s what happens when we pray.* And her smile says, *I knew you were going to say that.*

*Illus.:* I also noticed a guy sitting near me outside who was working the phone for his business. I heard him say to a friend, “This is going to be a horrible day.” I tried to screw up my courage to go over and talk to him, but I didn’t. The next day, he was out there again, so this time I walked over and he greeted me. I said, “Yesterday I overheard you saying that it was going to be a horrible day. I thought about you off and on throughout the day. I like to pray for people. How’d it go?” He smiled and thanked me and said, “The day went pretty well and it ended great. That was really nice of you.” Now we’re friends on a first-name basis. That’s one of my little harvest field corners.

## **Conclusion**

We are privileged beyond words to live in the bright light of the Kingdom of Heaven right now on earth. Jesus has made everything new. We're in the week of his wedding. We're drinking the wine of the gospel. We are harvest field workers, bringing good news and the compassion of Christ to the harassed and helpless because we can draw them to the Good Shepherd.