

Ministry Launch

DAVE BAST

After the stories of Jesus' birth, the Bible doesn't say much about his early life. In fact, we skip about 30 years, until suddenly Jesus bursts on the scene with his baptism and temptation. Immediately he begins to draw huge attention and crowds; but why and how, and what did he do? Stay tuned.

BOB HEERSPINK

From ReFrame Media and Words of Hope, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and it really is, Bob, surprising to me as I read the Gospels – and we are looking at the Gospel of Matthew, kind of working our way through the early chapters in this series of programs; but Jesus really bursts on the scene like some kind of comet or phenomenon, you know. He is nobody for 30 years, and then all of a sudden, he is the biggest celebrity in the area.

BOB HEERSPINK

We have a tendency to think often that Jesus' ministry kind of builds over the course of three years; but Matthew really says right from the start he has just made this huge splash, not just up in Galilee, but throughout the countryside.

DAVE BAST

The way my mind works, I wonder what happened. What triggered that? What told him it was time? Presumably, he was just laboring away as a carpenter, you know, in Joseph's shop. He is a working man – working with his hands – and now he turns into a rabbi and healer and teacher. What happened?

BOB HEERSPINK

If you go back in his life, already at the age of 12 he says he has to be about his Fathers' business in the Temple, so there is this growing awareness – this growing sense of call that is, I believe, operating in his life; and I think what we see here is someone being matured and prepared for his ministry. Even the Son of God incarnate has to be prepared for what is going to lie before him.

DAVE BAST

I think that is a good point that you bring up; it is a good reminder; and obviously he is being steeped in the scriptures all this time, because in last week's program we looked at the temptations, and Jesus, you know, he knew the Bible backwards and forwards. He just bang, bang, bang, brings out these quotes to repel Satan's temptations. So, he is studying, he is conscious, he is preparing; and surely his baptism must have been a significant... How could it not have been, you know, when you hear the voice of God calling you his Son?

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; because in those opening verses that describe his ministry, so much goes on. He goes through his baptism, there is the temptation, and then we get into the calling of the first disciples. Jesus begins to build this group around himself that really is like the Church in embryo; but then there is this wonderful summary

of Jesus' ministry. You know, Matthew doesn't tell us everything we want to know. The focus of Matthew is actually on the last week of Jesus' life; but there is a wonder...

DAVE BAST

That is true of all of the Gospels.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; they are not biographies. They are really stories of Christ's passion with extended introductions; but there is this great description of Jesus' ministry, and you find it in Matthew 4, beginning at verse 23: Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. ²⁴News about him spread all over Syria; and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon possessed, those having seizures and the paralyzed, and he healed them. ²⁵Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him.

DAVE BAST

So as I hear that passage, really, I see three characteristic activities that define Jesus' ministry right from the beginning, and that would carry on all the way through to the end. The first one is preaching. In fact, it says earlier in Matthew 4, in verse 17:

From that time on (from the time when John was put into prison) Jesus began to preach; and his message was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come." So, preaching is first.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, that really is an amazing thing, especially today. If you said: You know, I am going to gather the world to myself, and I am going to do it as a preacher, people would say: That's not going to work.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is not quite the admired profession that it maybe was in earlier centuries.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, people say: Don't preach to me. I think a lot of preachers would like to do something else in their ministries than focus on preaching; but sometimes I think it is because we have missed the point of what preaching is supposed to be.

DAVE BAST

Well, let's be honest. When people reject preaching, or say: Don't preach at me; they often have a point. What they are rejecting is kind of that tone of superiority that says: I am going to tell you how to live your life.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; yes, I think a lot of preachers have made sermons into laying down the rules. You know, these are the things you have to do to be good; and if you look at the preaching of Jesus, it is centered in the announcement of the kingdom. It is not, first of all, about telling people how to live; it is about sharing this incredible Good News that God is doing something in the world – something that human beings cannot accomplish, God is doing.

DAVE BAST

Yes; Matthew says that Jesus proclaimed the arrival of the kingdom of God. I wonder how much of our preaching is doing that? And the reason he could say, "The kingdom of God has come near," is because he was there. He is the King. So it is really centering on Christ. It is the announcement – it is the Good News. It is not moralism, it is not rules for how to be a good do-be and how to get to heaven; it is this shattering message that God has come in the person of Jesus.

BOB HEERSPINK

But now there is more, because it also says he taught in the synagogues. Now, okay...

DAVE BAST

Sure, yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

Is that the same as preaching, or is it different?

DAVE BAST

No, I think... well, it could be; but yes, there are implications if you come to Christ and accept Christ; we are going to look at the Sermon on the Mount as the essence of his teaching, and that is for disciples; so those who have come to Christ and experienced his salvation, yes, then there are some rules for living, and we need to listen to that teaching, too.

BOB HEERSPINK

And that flows out of the proclamation of the kingdom. It is not as if those are separate. Who we are in Jesus Christ as citizens of the kingdom makes it possible for Jesus now to share this ethical teaching with us; that is the way I would say it.

DAVE BAST

Yes, sure; because everybody loves Jesus' teaching: Christians, non-Christians, wherever you go in the world people are attracted to Jesus the Teacher; but that is not going to save you because nobody has the power to live out that teaching. It needs to be put in the context of the person of Jesus, who is the King, who is the Lord, who is the Savior.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; I was reading one theologian a while back, and he said: You know, the problem is we tend to go from justification to sanctification and leave justification behind. You know, okay, I am saved by faith in Christ; I am saved by grace; now let me get in there and live a good life; and unless we see that the grace of justification just keeps pursuing us and just soaks through our whole lives, we are going to fail. Our lives need to be steeped in the grace that forgives, but also the grace that empowers obedience.

DAVE BAST

So the ministry of Jesus: Preaching, teaching; and then there is this third thing: His healing; and that is the thing that also really drew the crowds. Matthew says from all around that region; not just from Galilee, but from Syria, from the outlying... from Judea in the south... Jews, Gentiles, all alike came because there was something amazing happening in the ministry of Jesus, and that included physical power, casting out demons, overcoming illness; wow, mind boggling!

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, and what that meant then and what that means for today... that is what we have to explore when we come back from our break.

Segment 2

BOB HEERSPINK

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

Dave, right before the break we were talking about the summary of Jesus' ministry. We talked about Jesus' preaching, his teaching, but then this incredible statement that he went about healing, and it is such an all-encompassing healing. People were bringing all kinds of sick to him, the demon possessed even, and he is healing them all.

DAVE BAST

And from all over; not just for Jews, but for Gentiles in that region. Galilee was a kind of crossroads. There was a lot of Gentile/Jewish interaction in and around Galilee, and that is where Jesus' ministry began – that really was the initial focus. He also moved into Judea later in the south; but just think of the stories later on; in fact, in Matthew 8 and 9 I think very intentionally tells ten dramatic stories of healing; that is part of his structure. He starts with the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount in Chapters 5, 6, and 7; and then in 8 and 9 it is all of these healing miracles to illustrate what Jesus did.

BOB HEERSPINK

But if you had been living through that, just think, those ten would have just been a small fraction of what Jesus was doing; and I really think it ties in with his preaching, Dave. You know, he is preaching the kingdom, and it would be fair to say: Okay, this announcement that God's reign is dawning in the world... is this the real deal? You know, anyone can say that. There were other messiahs running around saying: The kingdom is here and I am your savior; I am your king. Okay, prove it. Where is the power? I think you have to understand the healings in that connection.

DAVE BAST

Well, I remember one of my teachers once saying that they were signs of the kingdom; in fact, John uses that word in his Gospel for the miracles of Jesus. He calls them signs; and so, they are not just miraculous; they are not just stunts, but they are... A sign is something that points to a reality beyond itself. Every sign does that. Of course, the great signs that God has given us for our faith are the baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are pointing to the reality of grace beyond ourselves; and I think in the same way Jesus' miracles do that. He didn't heal everybody. I mean, that is what drew the crowds, obviously. We still see it throughout the world today. In fact, one of our good friends for both of us, Stephen Paul, who directs our joint ministry in India, told me recently that in India any time an evangelist shows up they offer a healing crusade, and throngs come because there are many desperate needs.

BOB HEERSPINK

And yet, I also still believe that while there are people out there falsely offering healing, saying: I can heal everyone. Where the Gospel comes for the first time, or where it is on the cutting edge, I believe we still see miraculous signs. You know, the word in Matthew for miracles is *dunamis* – it is dynamite; and the Gospel really does break forth with this incredible power wherever it is proclaimed; but not everyone is healed. They are signs of the kingdom. The full kingdom with all its power and might and glory is not yet here. We live in that reality. It is present, but there is more to come. These signs are given so that we may believe.

DAVE BAST

And I think also there is something really interesting that Matthew tells us about what was motivating Jesus in all three of these actions, his preaching and teaching, as well as his healing. There is a very interesting passage from Chapter 9. Here we read from Chapter 4; well, skip ahead five chapters and it is almost a bookend – almost word for word as a description. It is as though Matthew is bracketing this section of a comprehensive account of the things that Jesus did in public. Just listen to these verses from Chapter 9: ³⁵Jesus went through all the towns and villages teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness. That is almost a literal quote.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; it is the same three activities.

DAVE BAST

But then Matthew goes on and adds this:

³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd; ³⁷and he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few; so pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers.”

BOB HEERSPINK

So the motivator for Jesus was compassion.

DAVE BAST

That is a great Bible word.

BOB HEERSPINK

Jesus is doing these healings, not simply to say: Hey, look at me. Look at how great I am as the king of the kingdom. He is looking at people a different way. He is really seeing their inner need. He sees their weakness. He sees them as wandering sheep, lost, without a shepherd that need what he has to bring.

DAVE BAST

Well, that word that Matthew uses is a metaphor and it refers to a bodily function. A good equivalent in our culture would be to say: His heart went out to them.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; that is the seat of emotions for us.

DAVE BAST

Yes, for us; and I just love to reflect on the fact that the first thing God feels for us – for lost people – for wandering sheep – isn’t anger or wrath; it is compassion – it is pity. His heart goes out to us; and frankly, I think our whole salvation is... not just Jesus’ ministry, but everything that God does for us is rooted in that primary response of compassion for the lost.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; sometimes we think of God as distant. We think of him as the transcendent God – the God who judges; but to understand that the Father shares this heart of compassion that Christ shares. You know, Jesus is the image of God. We have a compassionate Father who sent his Son into the world because he loves us so much.

DAVE BAST

And there is another thing that I cannot let go of in this passage. The reason for his compassion, Matthew says explicitly, is because people were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Now, it wasn’t just the physical needs; those must have been overwhelming; imagine a world with no hospitals, no real doctors or nurses, no ambulances, no EMTs, no therapy. Obviously people were hurting physically, and the blind and the lame and the deaf and the dumb and the sick; the leprous, the demon possessed, the oppressed of various kinds; yes, Jesus’ heart went out to them, but the primary need that he felt compassion for was their spiritual lostness – their brokenness as people.

BOB HEERSPINK

I just got back from spending a week in Haiti doing some ministry planning, and you know, I think of this text a lot when I am in countries like that. You see this sea of people on the streets, and it really is life on the streets in a place like Haiti. There are over a million people in camps right now. They are living outside as much as they can, and I think to myself: What are these people thinking? Do they really have any center to their life? Is their life touched with any kind of hope, or is it all despair? You know, this sense of lostness that I see around me is what Jesus experienced in his ministry.

DAVE BAST

Well, that word “harassed,” you know; here is Satan earlier in the chapter tempting Jesus, and you just think about all the lies that people have bought into – that *we* buy into, you know...

BOB HEERSPINK

Sure.

DAVE BAST

We are broken; we are lonely; we fail and fumble at relationships; we do things we don’t want to do; that is the harassment. The enemy has so many people in his grip, and do we have good news for them? Do we feel compassion for those needs? Sure, most of us feel compassion for the homeless or the hungry or people who don’t have clean water, and we need to do something about that; but what about the lostness of the world? I wish that everyone could have that same experience of seeing those crowds of people who don’t know God.

BOB HEERSPINK

And what this text is saying is this isn’t just about Jesus’ response. There is a part of this text that really puts it right to us as to what we are going to do, and we are going to have to talk about that when we come back.
Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Hi; this is *Groundwork*. Welcome back; I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

Bob, as we are exploring the theme of Jesus’ public ministry, which consisted really of three great activities. He preached about the kingdom, he announced the coming of God into the world in his own person, he taught about what that meant – the implications for his followers’ lives – and he healed every kind of physical and emotional and mental affliction, spiritual as well; and those were the three great activities of the ministry of Jesus.

BOB HEERSPINK

But he didn’t heal everybody.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I don’t know if it is just me or the way my mind works, but I wonder about that. You know, if God had... This is the old question, isn’t it?

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; why doesn’t God empty out the hospitals?

DAVE BAST

If he has the power and if he has the compassion... We focused on the heart of Jesus; that great feeling inside him of pity.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, you know, it is interesting, in Matthew 9 after Matthew tells us about the compassion of Christ that motivates him, then Jesus immediately presses on to really focus in on what his Church is supposed to do. Let me just read those verses; 37 and 38:

³⁷Then Jesus said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. ³⁸Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Jesus is really saying: The worker is not just me. There are other people who are going to be working with me.

DAVE BAST

Yes; there are a lot of things that we could say in answer to that question: Why? Why doesn't God do this or that or the other thing? But one thing, I think, that we have to come back to again and again is the fact that he doesn't do everything quickly and immediately and easily, as he could, in part because he wants *us* to take a stab at it. If we are wondering: Why doesn't God heal the sick? One of the ways he responds is: Well, you know, that is something I want *you* to do.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; his last words were: Go into all the world and preach the Gospel. Okay, Christ has not preached to all the world. *You* have a task to do. Christ has not healed everyone. You have healing to bring in my name to the nations.

DAVE BAST

So those same three activities of the ministry of Christ are also the definition of the ministry of the Church. The Church is called to preach, to teach, and to heal; and that is what we are all in some way of another supposed to be involved in as the body of Christ.

BOB HEERSPINK

But you know, Dave, I don't think it is enough just to hear the commands. I think we have to get back to what motivates Jesus, because if compassion doesn't motivate us, we will just hear what Jesus asks us to do, but we are just not going to do it.

DAVE BAST

Well, and even compassion isn't enough. Let's face it. You know, we talk about compassion fatigue nowadays: Oh, you know, I care but I get tired of caring; and you and I both know, being involved in ministry, that it is hard over the long haul. There are days when you feel like doing something else. So, what is the answer to that, too? What do we look for? Where is the motivation?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, certainly to keep ourselves connected with Jesus. It is going to be his strength and it is going to be his Spirit working in us that allows us even to begin this journey of compassion; but I do think we need Jesus to give us eyes to see people his way, because as I look around at people, I find I don't tend to think of people on a day-to-day basis the way Jesus does. You know, I look at people: Well, are they educated or non-educated? How much money do they have? Those are the things that I evaluate people on, and Jesus really says: Put on Gospel glasses and see people the way *I* see them.

DAVE BAST

Well, let me just read Matthew again: ^{36a}When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them. I think that is looking with those eyes; yes, the eyes of Jesus that we would like to ask him to give us, too; but I have another question for you here...

BOB HEERSPINK

Sure.

DAVE BAST

Just near the end... We are running out of time, but this command that Jesus gives to his followers in Matthew 9: ³⁷The harvest is plentiful; the workers are few. ³⁸Therefore, he says, give... go... do... heal... preach? No; he says: Pray. Why does he start with that? Why is prayer the first thing?

BOB HEERSPINK

I think prayer is the first thing because without God calling us into ministry, it is not going to happen. You know, I was reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer and *The Cost of Discipleship*, and he talks about the importance of being called to ministry. He tells us there is this one story in scripture where someone said: Hey, I am going to follow you, Jesus; and Jesus says: You know, foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. He is saying: Without a call, you don't have what it takes. Only if we are called by God to do this are we going to possibly be able to carry through.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I think that is right. It is that inner working of the Spirit of God more than just our human compassion that is going to keep us going. I read a wonderful line once by an old divine – an old New England theologian – who said: When you pray for the hungry to be fed, or for the unbelieving to hear the Gospel, how do you think God will answer that prayer? Will he turn the stones into bread or rain down Bibles from heaven on their heads? No; he will put it into *your* heart to do what *you* can to feed the hungry and bring the Gospel to the world. I think that is why Jesus says: Pray.

BOB HEERSPINK

We are the hands and feet of Jesus. Thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation, and don't forget it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keeps our topics relevant for your life. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest topics for future programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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