

The Thankful Church – Matthew 9:35-38

Introduction: In Mt. 16:18, Jesus promised *“I will build My church.”* All you have to do is look at the history of Sonoraville Baptist Church to understand a little of the meaning of that promise. It was the Lord’s direction that prompted W.E. Ferguson to give the land upon which this church campus sits. It was the Lord’s provision that the old sanctuary was built in 1944, and later additional Sunday School rooms and a fellowship hall was built. Because of the grace of God, the church was able to expand the ministry of the church into full-time status in 1954. Under God’s leadership, many missionaries have been sent and supported down through the years. And by the divine hand of God, a new sanctuary was built and dedicated in 1997.

Quoting from “The History of Sonoraville Baptist Church” as printed in its “Centennial Celebration” booklet: *“As the community grows from a small farm community toward urban sprawl with long time family farms becoming housing developments, the church continues to work hard to continue its mission focus in spreading the word of Jesus Christ.*

The church only needs to look to the future with a respect for its past and focus in continuing its heritage of winning and nurturing hearts of all ages for Jesus Christ. We acknowledge that this can only be done through the constant seeking of Christ will for our ministry in this place.”

For you long time members; you have invested your lives and resources and have experienced times of both struggle and growth and for your faithfulness and sacrifice, we are truly thankful. For our more recent members, you are learning about Sonoraville and its rich history, and as you do, you bring your own experiences into the mix. You too have chosen to invest your lives and resources in this church to help us all reach our potential in Christ. For you we are truly thankful. For those who are seeking the Lord’s will for your church home, we are truly thankful that God has led you this way, because you are an answer to prayers as we have *“worked the fields”* in the kingdom of God.

Jesus loves His church. And because of that we should all have a desire for the church to grow, its ministries expand. We want the Lord’s blessings. We want to see people’s lives changed.

As we prepare this week for the celebration of Thanksgiving, we truly have so much to be thankful for – our history, our heritage, our present, and our future. We are so blessed. And as I thought about the ministry

and mission Jesus has given us, this passage of Scripture we have come to today in our study of the Gospel of Matthew is so very appropriate. Let's see what some characteristics of a thankful church should be. **Read Matthew 9:35-38.** First, the thankful church should have:

1. The Heart of Jesus (READ 36)

A thankful church realizes that this describes all of us at one time or another. We were wandering along in our sin. We were lost and weary and worn out. Sin had beaten us down, and many had tried and tried to clean up our act, but nothing was working. It was not until we met the good shepherd that we found rest and guidance and forgiveness and hope. And know this, we wouldn't have found Jesus unless He first had been looking for us. Jesus was looking for us because He loved us. His heart was bent toward us. The Bible says He seeks the lost. He longs to give forgiveness and eternal life to those who are lost.

And I submit to you today that if the church is going to make a difference in this world; if we are going to have an impact in this culture, then we must have the same vision and heart of Jesus.

As Jesus looked at the people that day, He saw them in a unique way. He didn't just see ole Slick Bar Sam the local camel trader and say, "*There goes that no good crook.*" He didn't see Linda Loveless the town prostitute and turn His head. No, when Jesus looked at people, He saw them as people with needs. He saw them as people without a Shepherd. He saw them as people, beaten and bruised and hurting. He saw people looking for help.

What do you see when you see people of different faiths falling on their faces praying to statues and mosques? What do you see when you see people whose marriages have been destroyed by immorality and adultery? What do you see when you see a teenage girl headed for an abortion clinic? What do you see when you see someone who is caught in the grips of drug or alcohol addiction? What do you see when you see people who work 80 hours a week so they say they can give their children what they never had, but won't bring them to church?

Too often, we tend to see these folks as people we don't want to associate with - people who are reaping what they've sown.

When Jesus looked at these people, He didn't see prostitutes or drunks or abusers. He saw hurting people - people in need, searching where the world had told them to search, looking for help. He saw sheep without a Shepherd. He saw people who were dragging around the chains of sin, looking for hope and help.

That's why Jesus stopped to help the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. That's why Jesus reached out and touched the leper, the blind, and the paralyzed. That's why Jesus sailed through a raging storm to help a couple of men who were being tormented by demons. That's why Jesus stopped and invited a Tax Collector to come and follow Him.

The Bible tells us that people who do not know Jesus Christ are blind, and paralyzed, and condemned. They are slaves to sin, and spiritually dead. Jesus saw the people as they really were and that vision moved Him to compassion. It made His heart hurt to see the condition of people in need.

A thankful church will realize that *"there goes us if not for the grace of God."* And if we are going to be an effective church, we must have the vision and heart of Jesus. We must begin to see people the way Jesus sees them, and we must care for them the way that Jesus does. As the poem says:

*Let me look on the crowd as my Savior did
Till my eyes with tears grow dim,
Let me view with pity the wandering sheep,
And love them for the love of Him.* (Author unknown)

Secondly, a thankful church will also recognize:

2. A Dependence on God (READ 38)

When Jesus saw the people and their real need, what did He tell the disciples to do? He didn't tell them, first to fix the problems, or start a new program. He didn't tell them to begin advertising or to list all of the things the people were doing wrong. Jesus said, *"Ask the Lord of the harvest."* In other words, *"Pray."* Why? Because we are dependent on God for a harvest.

Jesus said in **John 6:44** (NIV) says *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...."*

And also in **John 15:5** (NIV) says, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

A thankful church recognizes its dependence on God, and that will help make us a more effective church. A thankful church is a praying church. When a need arises, you pray about it. When a crisis develops, prayer is your first action, not the last resort. When souls are not being saved, praying people flood the altars weeping over the lost. When answered prayers come down from heaven, prayers of thanksgiving go up. A thankful church is a praying church because we realize that we are utterly and completely dependent on God for everything – our direction, our provision, our protection, and our vision. Finally, a thankful church will have:

3. A Sense of Urgency About Its Mission (READ 38)

The word translated “*send out*” means to “*cast out*” or to “*thrust out*.” In other words, Jesus tells us to pray that God will light a fire under His people. That we will develop a sense of urgency about the mission God has given us.

Do you realize that in the 1990’s, Christianity in America declined by 8.5%, while the number of Buddhists increased by over 169%, and the number of Muslims grew by over 109%, and Hindus by 237%. (AMF, from *The Present Future* by Reggie McNeal, and the U.S. Census Bureau). And did you realize that according to a recent Barna Group study in Georgia, that almost 70% of Georgians are now considered to be unchurched? And that if current trends continue, by the time the millennial generation reaches middle age; only 4% of Americans will be Christian?

If that doesn’t give us a sense of urgency, we’re beyond hope! Folks, Jesus has given us a mission, and we need to get serious about fulfilling it!

I guarantee you, if our budget dropped down to just a few dollars, we’d get a sense of urgency about it. If the heat or AC went out in this building, we’d have a sense of urgency about getting to fixed or replaced. If we wind up with hardly any food at tonight’s Thanksgiving dinner, some of you would have a sense of urgency about making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

Well, when we get more concerned about buildings and air conditioners and creature comforts than we are about seeing folks saved, we might as well lock the doors and start a social club because our priorities are in the wrong place.

How many of you are thankful for your salvation? Really - I want to know, are you truly thankful that you are not lost and wandering around in your sin with no hope of eternal life. Are you truly thankful that Jesus has forgiven you and given you the promise of a home in heaven?

If you are, then you know how it feels to be lost. You know the fear, the desperation, and confusion. You know the helplessness that 70% of Georgians are feeling right now. And you have the answer to their desperation. You have the cure for their sin sickness. Are you using it to lead people into a saving knowledge of Christ?

The psalmist describes those folks when we wrote in **Psalms 142:4 (NIV)** *“Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.”*

We must realize the importance and urgency of the mission Jesus gave us. Through out the world, statistics tell us that 155,000 people die every day. That means that during this service, over 270 people have died in the United States. The majority of them died without knowing Jesus.

Listen, the people on the Titanic realized that after the ship struck the iceberg was not the time to arrange the chairs on the deck. We must realize the urgency of the mission Jesus has given us. We must work the work while there is still daylight. Jesus said that the night was coming when no man can work.

Conclusion: After Jesus taught spent all this time teaching His disciples and showing them how to do ministry; after He demonstrated a compassionate heart, after He had them pray, He sent them out.

Are you willing to be sent? A thankful church will be willing to go. Because they too were once in the same shape, they will have the vision and heart of Jesus and see the need of the people around them. They realize they can't change the world themselves, so they pray. They realize the importance and urgency of their mission, so they are willing to go. It's not enough to say, *“Something needs to be done.”* It's not enough to say, *“Someone needs to tell them about Jesus.”* We need to stand up and say as Isaiah said in **Is. 6:8 (NIV)**, when the Lord asked *“Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”* Isaiah said, *“Here am I. Send me!”*

Will you say that today? Will you be that truly thankful one who will continue to work hard to continue Sonorville's mission focus in spreading the word of Jesus Christ?