

Pray for workers

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Matthew chapter 9, and we'll read again from verse 25 to 38. And Jesus went about to all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep, having no shepherds.

Then said he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

Living as we do in the north here, we don't often see great crowds of people. We're never frequently part of a vast number of people gathered.

I remember in a time in Edinburgh, on a Saturday afternoon in Prince's Street, it was quite... Well, I certainly did not enjoy being amongst hordes of people doing their Saturday afternoon shopping.

[1 : 18] But there are still occasions, even up here in the north, where we do come across large numbers of people. Whether it's Saturday afternoon in Wick or Thurso, roughly around the way at Christmas time.

Even there, there were lots of people doing their shopping. Or whether we see them on the television at the Winter Olympics recently. Huge crowds of people watching the events there.

We see it's on the news, gatherings of people for demonstrations or for this or that. When you see such things, when you see crowds, when you see lots of people, do you ever think of their spiritual needs?

Are you ever struck with the thought that here are lots of people who need to hear the gospel? Or do you never give it to another thoughts? Do they just go on their way and you never think about their spiritual needs at all?

Well, here in this record we have Jesus, very busy, going about in Galilee, preaching and teaching. Going through their cities and their towns, preaching in their synagogues, preaching in the open air where necessary.

[2 : 29] And it was the sight of the crowds there. And the sight of all the people he came across in the towns as well, no doubt. That had a real effect on our lives.

And it led him to speak these words in verse 37 and 38. About the harvest being plentiful, but the labourers few. In these words, we can identify three things.

First of all, the problem that exists. There's a problem. Verse 37. The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.

It doesn't quite come across in the English translation as it does in the Greek. He's really saying, on the one hand, the harvest is plenteous. But on the other hand, there are very few labourers.

Jesus, as he saw all these people, he saw people who needed to hear the gospel. They needed to hear about the kingdom of God. But there simply weren't enough people to do it.

[3 : 35] That was his work at this point, in proclaiming the gospel. In bringing the kingdom of heaven nearer to these people. But he recognised his own inadequacy.

He was, in one sense, he was a mere man. He could do no more than one man could do to evangelise the whole of Israel. He was very busy in his work.

But he simply was unable, physically unable, to proclaim the gospel to these crowds of people. As a consequence, as we read in the next chapter, he commissions his disciples, his apostles, to go out with the gospel.

He began, in one sense, to answer his own prayer. He said, pray the Lord of the harvest, send their ravers. And that's precisely what he does. He sends out some mavers into the harvest field.

If men are to be converted, if men are to enter the kingdom of heaven, they have to hear the good news. Conversion, belief in Jesus Christ, comes through hearing.

[4 : 42] Therefore, people must go and speak it. People must tell others of the good news of Jesus Christ. That was the problem then, and that is the problem today.

There are still countless millions of people in this world who do not know Jesus Christ as their saviour. There are still not enough workers. There are just not enough people to tell the good news of Jesus Christ.

We can bring it then to a local level. In our own village here. Two ministers, a number of elders, and a handful of believers. We are not enough to communicate the gospel to everyone in this village. We don't have contact with everyone who lives here. There's a bountiful harvest here. There's lots of work to do. But there simply are not enough of us to do that work.

We have no problem in finding people who need to hear the gospel. We see them every day. We pass them in the streets. We speak to them. We come into contact with them. Many people who do not know their own spiritual needs.

[5 : 51] Who do not know that Jesus is offering to be their saviour. There simply are not enough workers to go around. We're not just thinking of our own denomination.

But the church at large, the Christ church in the world, is not large enough. There are not enough workers to take the gospel to every creature in this world. The idea of a harvest carries the connotation of hard work.

The harvest time was, and still is for farmers, is a very busy time of year. There was lots to be done. It had to be done quickly. There's a sense of urgency in the word here as well.

The harvest was ready. It's got to be brought in. Christ is saying, this is an urgent message. The work has got to be done. There's so much to be done.

And it has to be done. Quickly. So the very urgency of the situation makes the problem even worse. It's even more serious.

[6 : 58] There are so few workers to work in this harvest. Men and women we see day by day. They are on the brink of hell.

They need to hear the gospel and they need to hear it now. People are known to us in the community. They are dying. And they are not ready to die.

They do not know of the dreadful eternity that lies beyond this world. They do not know that Jesus Christ is the only way to avoid that eternity. The harvest is plenteous.

It's a huge harvest. So much work to be done. And there are so few workers to go on with that work. You can imagine perhaps some of the vast prairies out in the States or in Canada.

Huge areas of corn. And just think of half a dozen men working away in the corner. Trying to bring that harvest in. There's the picture Jesus is painting here. A huge harvest.

[8 : 07] There's millions of souls that need to be contacted with the gospel. And relatively, there's a handful of people working to bring that gospel to them. We apply it locally.

But we have to extend it to the world as well. But there simply aren't enough men and women to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I was looking at the book, Operation World, which is a book of statistics regarding the Christian church throughout the world.

So that we would be more informed in our prayers. And some of the statistics there make frightening reading. In our own society, we are relatively well off from ministers and evangelists and such like.

There are many Christians in our lands who could work in this way. But some of the statistics there, as I say, are exciting reading. Brazil, a land of 160 million people.

[9 : 15] They reckon they have one missionary for every 450,000 people. One man for 450,000. In India, a land of 900 million people.

There's one missionary for every million people. In Iran, 60 million people there. There are no known missionaries in the land of Iran.

A huge harvest there. So much work to be done in these countries. And so few workers. So few harvesters. We live in a global village.

In one sense, we see the rest of the world in our own front rooms. We know what goes on in other places in the world through modern communications. We know so much more than our predecessors knew of the world.

And we see so much more of the need of these places. Millions of people just going to a lost eternity because they do not hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[10:19] That then is the problem that Jesus faced here. And is reminding us all. There's a huge harvest. It's plenteous. But there simply aren't enough workers to bring it in.

But then there's a solution. Jesus gives the solution. He doesn't simply leave us with a problem and say, Oh, isn't that rightful? We can't do anything about it. No, he says, there is a solution.

He says, verse 38, Pray therefore. Therefore, because of this problem, pray. Pray ye the Lord of the harvest. That he will send forth laborers into his harvest fields.

Because the situation is so bad. Pray therefore. There is a means of resolving this problem.

Seems almost unresolvable. But Jesus is saying, no it's not. There is something you can do about it. You can pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers.

[11:19] Our Lord here is not giving us an option. He's not suggesting that sometimes we could include this in our prayers. This statement, as far as I look at the Gospels, it's unique in telling us something we should actually pray for.

That apart from the Lord's Prayer, here is the only instance where the Lord gives the command to pray for something specific. To pray that the Lord would send out harvesters.

So he's not giving us an option. This should be frequently in our prayers. This should be something that we are very concerned with and frequently asking the Lord to do.

We need workers now. The harvest is there now. It needs workers now. We need to be praying now. You must pray daily. Pray frequently.

That the Lord would do this. And send out more men and women to serve him in this way. God, in his wisdom, has left the extension of his kingdom in the hands of men.

[12:24] If he'd wanted to, God could have convinced all the minds of every man in this world of the truth of the Gospel without any human influence at all. But that is not the way he does it.

He does it through men and women going and telling others of Jesus Christ and what Christ has done. It is left in the hands of men to tell the good news.

Of course, we are dependent on the Holy Spirit to enlighten men. But the Spirit only uses what other men communicate. It is only as you speak to your neighbour that the Spirit can apply that word to their heart.

If you never say anything, if I never preach, then the Spirit would have nothing to use to apply that to those who hear. More labourers are needed.

More harvest must be brought in. Therefore, we need to pray. And God, He works, He works out the history of this world in response to His people's prayers.

[13:31] God gives the desire for something to pray for something. And as you and I pray for that thing, then God responds in answer to that prayer. That is how the history of this world has been worked out.

Because God is responding to the prayers of His people. And you and I can have confidence if we pray this prayer. If we ask God to send out labourers into His harvest field, we are doing what God tells us.

We are praying according to His will. That is God's will. That we should pray. And if we do so, we can be absolutely confident that God will respond to this prayer.

I remember two summers ago, I was leading one of the church camps. And I simply didn't have enough leaders for the number of boys we were expecting.

And it had been my prayer that the Lord would supply someone to help there. Would supply a labourer, a worker in the camp. The camp was due to start on the Tuesday.

[14:37] The previous Saturday, I had a phone call from a young man who had been at one of the other camps and had been encouraged by one of his colleagues there to come along this next camp as well. The Lord answered that prayer.

He supplied the labourer, the helper, and needed us. We are specifically told to pray for this thing. You can expect God to answer that prayer.

We have to note here as well that we are not being told to ask men to be labourers. The Lord isn't saying, you go out there and tell men they have to be labourers.

No, he says, you go to the top. You go to the Lord of the harvest and get him to send out workers. Not men who are going out on their own initiative.

Not men who have appointed themselves as God's representatives in this world. But he says, you go to God and you get God to send out his own workers, his own labourers into the harvest field. [15:40] Sadly, I fear that many people who claim to speak for God today in their own land, many who are ministers and the likes, they are self-appointed.

God has not sent them. They do not speak God's words. So they cannot come from him. That is not the sort of person we want. We want those who have been appointed by God.

Who have been equipped for God. who have been sent by God. Who have been directed to that part of his harvest that he would have them to be in. We need, the church of Christ needs men who recognise the problem.

Who see the great need of all those kind of beasts and who are willing to work for Christ. I am not saying that that excludes our own responsibility as a church, as a denomination to recognise those men who have gifts and to encourage them to go out and to serve the Lord in this way.

But ultimately we must ask God to do it. That he would lead me, he would direct me, he would raise up me to preach the gospel. Christ here, no doubt, he prayed this prayer.

[17:02] He asked his father to send out the verse. But then he took the step of appointing men and setting them to the work. There was prayer and there was action.

That's the key of the church today. You must pray this prayer. That way you must be active as well in seeing men who have the gifts, in training them up and in appointing them to the work.

I think it's the duty of every Christian male to ask whether the Lord would have him to serve in the work of the gospel.

Whether in the ministry, full-time ministry or whether in missions. It is, if we have to pray this prayer honestly, we can't say, well, Lord, send out workers into the harvest field.

But not me. If we have to pray this prayer honestly, we must be ready to work ourselves. I'm not excluding the ladies.

[18:05] they have work to do as well. They have, they do a tremendous lot for our own missions for instance. In the third mission of the world, men and women are being sent out by the Lord of the harvest.

Every believing person has a duty to ask themselves, can I pray this prayer sincerely? Am I ready to go myself? Well, do you pray this prayer?

Do you ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers? Do you see the same needs that Christ saw? Do you have the same love for souls that our Savior had here?

It's very clear from Scripture that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. If people are to be saved, they need someone to tell, to tell them the word of God.

If the people of Castleton are to be saved, they need to hear the word of God. They're not going to come to church unless the Spirit should work in them.

[19:13] But very rarely does that happen. Rather, the Lord uses his own people to tell the good news to other strangers about us. If Castleton is to be saved, if Cateness is to be transformed by the gospel, if the world is to be changed, then the Lord has to send out workers with the message of Jesus Christ.

So as you pray your prayers, ask that the Lord would raise up workers in our own denomination, that he would provide men to preach the gospel throughout our lands, not simply just to fill the spaces we have.

We need to have a good vision. There are millions of people out there in Scotland who have never heard the gospel, who have no contact with the Christian church at all. We need to be asking the Lord to send out men to take the gospel to these.

Our prayer should not be simply for the bare minimum, just enough to keep the church going, so to speak. We need to be able to have great ideas, great vision of what God can do in this world if there are enough workers.

We don't need to limit ourselves to our own particular touch, to our own denomination, to our own country. Think of the world out there. Think of the great need that there is for workers.

[20:39] Whatever denomination they may be, whatever their missionary society, the world needs people to take the gospel. Do you want to see the kingdom of Christ advanced?

Is that a concern to you, that people would be brought to know Jesus Christ? Well, then you must pray the Lord of the harvest that he would send eight workers with the good news.

It's easy to think, well, what can we do for the rest of the world? just one little individual in a vast mass of people.

What can we do? Well, here is the Lord saying, you can do something very positive. You can have a reflect on the rest of this universe by praying the Lord of the harvest that he would send eight those with good news.

You and I, then, as we pray this prayer, we must be prepared to answer that prayer ourselves. The Lord should put it in your heart to serve him in some particular way.

[21 : 53] You do not know, as you pray that prayer, what the answer may be. It doesn't have to be simply a minister or a missionary or an elder. Essentially, a minister or an elder is no different from any other Christian.

He knows Jesus Christ. You know Jesus Christ, if you are a believer this morning, you have the same message that I have, that a missionary has, that anyone has who is proclaiming the gospel. You know it. You can tell others. That is the duty of every one of God's people. If we are to pray this prayer, we must be prepared to work ourselves.

It's a massive problem, but God has given us a solution. We must pray. But then finally, what about the motivation?

What was Christ's motivation in giving this command? Well, in verse 36 we read, when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherds.

[23 : 07] Jesus had been traveling about, preaching the gospel, healing, and driving out demons. He'd seen people in all their needs, in all their sorrows, in all their troubles, including their sickness, and their poverty, and their diseases.

But the greatest need that these people had was the spiritual needs. Our Lord saw past all the troubles of this world to see that they all stemmed from a spiritual problem, from sin itself.

The greatest need of these people was the spiritual needs. They, as described as years, they fainted, that is, they were completely exhausted that's what the word means.

They were completely warnings. Scattered abroad we might translate as helpless or forsaken. They were scattered. They were sheep without a shepherd. No one could take care of them.

No one could look after their spiritual needs. Just helpless people wandering aimlessly in this world. Just like a sheep without a shepherd.

[24 : 16] Open to all kinds of dangers, all kinds of problems, and difficulties. Tired with life, worn out with chasing vain dreams.

No one to give them their guidance or direction or protection. That's what Jesus saw these people like, as people with great needs. They had shepherds, they had the Pharisees and the Sadducees, but they were worse than useless.

They simply brought the people their own ideas that they should try and keep all kinds of laws. That made life worse for them, as they struggled to find life that way.

Jesus saw them, fatigue and forlorn, harassed and helpless, and he moved with compassion for them. He really felt the dreadful state that they were in.

surely it was Jesus' love for the lost that brought him into this world. It was a longing to see people with a shepherd, with a spiritual shepherd, that brought him from heaven into this world to lay down his life.

[25 : 31] Because he loves me, because he has a compassion for them. It was that sympathy that drove our Lord to the cross. That is why he died, because he had love and compassion for you and for me and for the rest of this world in all their helplessness.

And spiritual exhaustion, chasing things that cannot satisfy. Our Lord himself describes himself as the good shepherds.

Here are all these people like sheep without a shepherd. He wants to be their shepherds, but they need to hear the good news and to be brought into his fold. as you see people around you, is that how you view them?

As people who are helpless? People who are worn out? People who are like sheep without their shepherd, no one to care for them, no one to protect them, no one to guide them?

Or do you see your friends and neighbours as quite self-sufficient, quite content people? People who really have no needs, they're quite well off, they don't need anything at all.

[26 : 45] That's what they look like superficially. But spiritually they are sheep without their shepherds. They have no meaning to life, no help from God drifting through this world to a dreadful end.

You recognise that these people around about you need to come to Jesus Christ as the good shepherd. Are you ever moved with compassion when you see the troubles of those round about you?

Jesus was. Are you like Christ in that respect? Am I like Christ in that way? It's easy for us to get used to the godless masses round about us. Oh, that's just the way society is.

That's the way it's become. We can't help it. Jesus was never became calloused for the needs round about us. He was never hardened against the troubles and problems of those who came to him.

Because of Jesus' compassion and love, he was moved to instruct his disciples to pray, to instruct you and me to pray that the needs of these people might be met.

[27 : 58] This then should be our motivation to pray. it should bring real sorrow to our hearts, real pain to us, that there are so many who have no care for Jesus Christ.

So many who are hopeless in this world. Those who are so well off, so comfortable in material things, they have no hope.

I was speaking to someone recently who spoke of a district nurse who said she could recognise when she went into a home where there was terminal illness, whether it was a Christian home or not.

She said in those homes where there was no Christian hope, it was precisely that, it was hopeless. There was no sense of any hope at all. This woman said how different a Christian home was. No one had to say anything about their belief in Christ. It was no evidence. People had hope for the future. Those roundabouts have no hope in this world whatsoever.

[29 : 03] No confidence for the future. Here we have a way of offering them that hope. Those roundabouts are not ready to die.

They are completely ignorant of God. They are ignorant of the peril that they are in. That should surely stir us up to pray this prayer that the Lord would send out labourers into this harvest field. For those of us who are saved, it's all too easy for us to get complacent in our own salvation. The Lord has been good to us. He has saved us. We can forget other people.

That is quite contrary to the feeling of our Lord here, to the attitude of Christ himself. He was moved with compassion for those who were lost.

you and I may need to ask the Lord's forgiveness in this, that we do not pray this prayer, that we are not concerned with the lost as we should be.

[30 : 10] We need to repent of that sin. It is wrong for us not to have the compassion that Christ has. We need to ask the Lord to give us a real concern and burden for the lost.

And then we will readily and frequently be wanting to pray this prayer that the Lord would send out more men and women to serve and to communicate the gospel.

You and I then we have a duty to pray as the Lord has instructed us. As I say this is no option. It was addressed to the disciples first of all but it was addressed to the whole of his church.

Pray the Lord in the harvest that he will send out labourers. You can pray that with confidence. God will answer the prayer that he has told you to pray.

And as you do so you will be doing a good work in this world. In extending the kingdom of Christ. In restraining evil. In bringing men salvation.

[31 : 13] As you pray. you will be for you. But then perhaps there are some here this morning, you for whom this description fits, that you are still a sheep without a shepherd.

You're still hopeless and helpless. You're still not ready to die. You don't know Christ as the good shepherd. You do not have a personal relationship with him. You have no meaning and direction to life.

You live each day as it comes. You have various plans for the future. But you have no hope for the world beyond this world. Well Christ in his love and compassion is calling you today to take him as your good shepherds.

He promises help. He promises love. He promises care of the care of the shepherds to all those who will admit their sin and turn from it.

Here's the man who laid down his life for his sheep. He was willing to sacrifice everything that his people might have like. And he is offering that life to you this morning.

[32 : 28] You may not have your presence, do not have any protection from evil. You have no guidance in life. You have no hope for the future. Christ is offering you all of that if you will turn from your sins.

You have been given the privilege that is denied to many people. There are millions in this world who live and die and have never heard the name of Jesus Christ. Christ. You have heard, you have heard the gospel, perhaps all your days you've heard the gospel preached.

It demands a response. It demands that you believe it. And as you believe it, and as you put your trust in Christ, then you will no longer be a sheep like a sheep that is scattered, a sheep that has no shepherd.

shepherd. You will have Jesus Christ as your own shepherd, the good shepherd. He will care for you in this world and he will bring you to a world yet to come.

Then you too will have the opportunity to labour in the harvest field. You too will have the opportunity to pray this prayer. You too will want others to know the gospel of Jesus Christ that has changed your life.

[33 : 44] Jesus said to his disciples, the harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

Amen. May the Lord bless these thoughts to our hearts. Let's join in prayer. Lord God, we have to confess our own sin before you that we do not have a concern for the lost that we should have. That we are all too easily taken up with our own lives and do not think of those who are perishing round about us. Forgive us for that and help us to have the same mind that Christ had who was so moved by those he saw.

Those who had no knowledge of the joy of salvation who did not know him as their own shepherd and saviour. May we be moved with compassion with those in our family and our friends, our colleagues, all those we come across who have this great need of salvation.

We pray therefore that you would send indeed more labourers into the harvest field here in Castletown and throughout the world that the glory would come to Jesus Christ and that his kingdom might be extended.

[35 : 16] We pray this in his name. Amen.