

The harvest and labourers

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[0 : 00] Let us now consider us when we are enabled words that we have in the gospel according to Matthew chapter 9 and reading at verse 36.

Matthew chapter 9 reading at verse 36. But when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd.

Then says he unto his disciples, the harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest. These words.

In this chapter, Matthew is covering quite a range of the activities of Jesus during his ministry.

[1 : 08] And it is remarkable how many kinds of persons we come across, even within the scope of this one chapter.

Of course, it is always true that the gospel never leaves people as it finds them.

And we notice that at that particular time, it was just the same. Those who needed the Lord Jesus Christ approached him in order that he might help them.

And at the same time, those who had no awareness of their own special needs. Not only did they not seek Jesus or his mercy, but they were offended by the attitude of Christ to the poor and the needy.

They were saying, among other things, why eat of your master with publicans and sinners?

[2 : 23] And I believe that the Lord people can sometimes measure their own relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ by this very fact, if they pause to consider it.

The very things that offended the enemies of Jesus are the sweetest parts of the gospel to those who are the Lord's people.

For example, it was not a friend, and they were not friends of the Lord or of the gospel, who said, this man receive a sinner and eateth it.

It was said by way of accusation. It was true, of course, an offensive truth to them, but a precious truth to those who need such a gospel.

And we notice that just as early as the Pharisees found fault with him, the disciples of John found fault with him, and said, why do not your disciples ask?

[3 : 34] And he defends them as he always defends his own people. And we notice also that while he was approached by a ruler who said, my daughter is even now dead, but come and lay hands upon her that she shall live.

Jesus followed him. And behold, a woman who was deceased with an issue with blood came behind him and touched the hem of his garment.

But even that could not be done unknown to the Lord Jesus. He does not matter how we approach him.

He is always aware, very keenly aware of the approach of the poor and the needy sinner. But when we read that they found fault with him for casting out devils.

And though they found fault with him, Jesus went about 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.

[5 : 02] He did not say to himself or to them, right, I shall not help you anymore. Because those people are criticizing and opposing and finding fault.

Therefore, I will desist. I will do nothing more. No, in the face of opposition, Jesus works and continues to work.

Now, in spite of all that he had done by way of teaching and preaching in synagogues and cities, healing, sicknesses and diseases, we read that when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them.

But when he saw the multitude, or now when he saw the multitude, and this seems to emphasize to us the compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As if the thought should have come to him when he saw the multitude, though much has been done, though I have been busy among them all the time, when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion.

[6 : 21] Or again, we might feel that he speaks, these words are spoken by Matthew, to show the contrast between the mind of Jesus Christ and the mind of the Pharisees.

For they said, he is casting out devils by the prince of the devils. He is doing this under the influence of the poet of darkness.

But think of the difference between him and them. When he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion. We do not read that there was any compassion at all, any sympathy in the heart of those Pharisees for the poor and the needy.

And, on the other hand, when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd.

Now, we might take these three thoughts and consider them briefly, as we have it in each of the three verses. In verse 36, we have his reaction to the plight of the multitude.

[7 : 41] He was moved with compassion. And then, in verse 37, we have his observation to the disciples. He said unto his disciples, the harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

And in the last verse, pray ye therefore the lord of the harvest, we have his exhortation to the disciples. The reaction then, the observation, and thirdly, the exhortation.

when he saw the multitude. And we believe that just as surely as we mentioned a minute ago that the Pharisees obviously had little sympathy for the plight of the crowd.

We know that Jesus Christ saw them as no other eye could see them. we are sometimes aware of the presence of the crowd, but we are not, the best of us is not as much concerned with the plight of the crowd, with the misery of their condition as Jesus Christ.

Not only did he see, but he took in, you see, the whole compassion of the Godhead, the whole sympathy and mercy of the divinity is in the heart and in the eye of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 16] It is through the eye and normally that we take in, that we usually take in the condition of those who are around us or before us.

That is why scripture says, not while there was no person to pity, but when there was no eye to pity. well, the eye of Jesus Christ took in the situation in a way in which no other eye could take it in.

And it was always so. Jesus never saw a human being in the same light as we see, as we see a human being. that was very obvious when the disciples at one time came across a person who was blind and of course their question was so different from the answer of Jesus Christ because their attitude was so different.

They said, who sinned, this man or his parents? Or in other words, how did it come about? Whose falsehood? With whom lies the blame of this man condition?

And Jesus said, neither this man nor his parents sinned. That is to say, they did not sin any more than others. but that the glory of God might be revealed in him.

[10 : 48] He was more, they were concerned about how he came about to be blind. He was more concerned about the manner in which he could be relieved of his blindness.

And it is always so. It was for this very reason that he came into the world. He came into the world to seek and to save.

not merely to assess why we were lost or the extent of our lostness, but in order to seek the lost and to save the lost.

And he was moved with compassion. You feel that the heart of Jesus Christ was so much moved with the plight of the crowd around him and moved with compassion.

Surely we cannot read these words or think of them without thinking of the 102nd Psalm where we read that he looks down from the height of his holiness, from his sanctuary to hear the prisoner's mourning groan and free them that are doomed to die.

[12 : 19] Now, he saw the people there, the common herd of humanity, because they sinned and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd.

do we see the crowds that hang, that throng our streets or that are around us every day of our lives in our towns and villages, do we see them as those who are tainted or fatigued with the burdens they are called upon to carry and at the same time the greatest burden of all is the burden that they are least willing, that they are utterly unwilling to lay down and they are utterly unwilling to come to the only place where that burden can be cast down or lay down that is the throne of grace.

The word of God bids us to come with boldness to the throne of grace to find mercy and yet we are so blinded by sin the sin that weakens us that destroys us and destroys our peace and yet we look in every direction except this one direction and Jesus saw them and pity them.

Yes you feel here that you can draw the inference of which we read explicitly in another part of the Bible deep calling unto deep here we have the depth of human wretchedness calling and being answered by the depth of the sympathy and the compassion of the heart of Jesus Christ he was moved with compassion and there is so much of this faintness so much of this fatigue so much of this weakness around us in the world today and while it is so much health it is never or at least hardly ever realized for what it is we are so foolish because of sin that we look in other directions for what we ought to receive if we were willing to receive it from Jesus

Christ we look for material things we look for this or that and promise ourselves if we find it that all shall be well with us not believing the word of God or even having recourse to the word of God to find out what the disease is we do not believe that the grace of God alone can give satisfaction to the human heart there is such a void within the human soul that only the fullness that is in Jesus Christ can fill it in a satisfying degree well they he saw them as the Lord in the words of the Old Testament had seen his Israel O Israel thou hast destroyed thyself thou hast fallen by thine iniquities the burden of sin is too heavy for each one of us to carry and we notice that its symptoms its effects come to us in one way or another but every discomfort every triumph every trouble and tribulation they all come to us because of sin sin is at the root of every trouble every decease every trial that we have to undergo every distress that we see around us among mankind but they were faintly fatigued and scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherds now there is no animal more ready to fall afraid to its enemies than a sheep a sheep is utterly defenseless by itself and at the same time not only is it utterly defenseless against those who are ready to pray upon it but it is so prone to go astray and once it leaves notice it is very significant there it says they were scattered abroad or forlorn they were scattered or they had left the pasture where someone might well have cared for them yes and that is exactly what happened because of sin you have forsaken me says

[17 : 58] God the fountain of living water and have tuned out for yourself cisterns broken cisterns that can hold no water those sheep they were away from their home pasture they were scattered and that is what sin always does and that is why so many around us in the world and we see so much of it in our own days people care so little about the troubles of others they can be so unselfish there can be so there can be so much indiscipline because of sin and it is around us today in practically every walk of life and in every realm we need mention only one of the distressing and prevalent factors that we see around us the person in industry who is seeking more than 200 pounds a week perhaps cares not for the elderly and the we whose cost of living will go up if he gets what he wants but he has no time to think of these things there is no sympathy or compassion sin disrupts in such a way that we are scattered as far as our caring for one another is concerned we could not care less and this is always the attitude of sin and it shall continue to be the attitude of sin to the very end remember how the betrayer of our

Lord came to those who had been his accomplices in the crime and said to them I have betrayed in that I have I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood see thou to that see thou to that we could not care less ah but think there is one who sees it all he takes the situation in with a compassionate eye and a compassionate heart and surely this of to afford a comfort and peace to all who love the Lord in sincerity we mourn over the hardness of our heart our own hearts as well as the hearts of others our lack of compassion our lack of interest our lack of concern but how blessed it is that there is one who has compassion when he saw the multitude he was moved with compassion yes so moved with compassion that he came down from the bosom of the heart took bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh he was tabernacled among others and then not only did he become man but having become man he was obedient and to death even the death of the cross for their sake

I sanctify myself yes and I sacrifice myself mercy and compassion led him to do this and led him to do it willingly they were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd oh my friends ought we not to hear the voice of one who alone can say I am the good shepherd I lay down my life for the sheep but let us go on to notice his observation to the disciples because of what he saw among suffering mankind then says he unto his disciples and it is significant and suppose that it is not said he said unto the disciples as if what he said mastered only long ago or in the distant past no he says unto the disciples he says unto the disciples now this word is for all time it is not the past or the imperfect it is the present he says no unto his disciples he said it there he says it here he said it then he says it now you see the word of

Jesus is in heaven settled fast it shall not come to an end it never loses its relevance or its significance for any one of us so he said unto his disciples the harvest truly is plenty but the laborers are few now the harvest is plenteous in any as scripture says in another place the fields are white unto harvest they are ripe and surely if the fields were ever ripe unto harvest and they always were and they are everywhere in every generation but surely if they were ever ripe unto harvest they are ripe unto harvest in our own day certainly they are ripe in this respect we believe that people while they do not perhaps understand or pause to consider the emptiness of their life yet there is a health emptiness and this is why people go in this direction and in that direction and this is why people are foolish enough and stupid enough to fall victims to every false teaching that comes their way we are so ready to listen to anyone who holds out a promise it does not matter how shadowy or flimsy the promise is or how insignificant is a blessing that is held out in a promise this is why so many false religions make their way easily among us today the fields are white and to harvest there were never more around us in our land who are longing for something but at the same time who are going in the wrong direction to find what they need and it cannot be otherwise he has made us for himself and we cannot find satisfaction until we find satisfaction in him and if we do not find it in him we shall never find it either on this side of eternity and not on the other side so and you know in the natural realm it does not matter how much any field produce you can see a field white unto harvest with lovely ripening corn in the full ear but that has nothing to do with the usefulness of it ultimately what has that the thing is this even if it grows and yields a hundred falls and ripens until it is ready for cutting if it is left there on the field the frost and the snow the wind and the rain will render it all useless and not only will the crop become useless but the crop will come unsightly it comes to the ground there is

nothing more unsightly than a barley field or a wheat field over which the flood and the wind have passed or the frost and the snow after there has been no end gathering it's useless waste waste of labor because a field cannot produce to the stage of rightness it cannot give a yield without some worth being bestowed upon it well imagine how many there are how many promising lives are about us in the world how many men of culture and intellectual refinement and perhaps moral uprightness to a certain degree and circumspectness and at the same time if that life be not ingathered by the gospel if that life does not is not influenced by the gospel or brought to surrender to the

[28 : 18] Lord Jesus Christ it will be worse than useless worse than useless it matters not how much we have and it matters not what we are if we have not Christ and if we are not believers we shall be but a ruined harvest and think of the labour bestowed upon us under the gospel think of the labour bestowed upon us in the good providence of God day after day we receive tokens of his favour what do we give him in return we oppose his will at every turn we refuse to take the yoke of Christ upon us or to surrender to the claim of his word in the words of scripture we set him at naught we despise him and spurn the overture of his grace how do we see those who live about us every day of our lives do we take in their condition as

Peter and John took in the condition of that lame man at the beautiful gate of the temple they themselves were very much under the influence of the spirit of Pentecost and this poor man wanted nothing more than a coin he was lame from birth he could not earn so he was merely a beggar there expecting something in his hand and they said Peter said silver and gold have I none but they had something better than silver or gold ■ nice majestic name the name the power of the holy spirit had possessed their own lives and in that name they called upon him to stand up and he was able to stand up do we see the lives around us as those who are needy and destitute do we face up to the truth that we may see a young promising life or a man who a person who is in the prime of his manhood or the frail old person who is tottering on the brink of the grave and if that person has not Christ as his portion do we say there goes a poor soul into eternal perdition if he has not Christ does it awaken the compassion of our hearts does it knock at our door as it were remember how Peter again after the Joppa vision he had that rooftop vision whereby the Lord showed him that the

Gentiles were to be brought into the kingdom of God a huge sheath let down in which there were all kinds of creatures and the Lord said arise Peter till and eat and he he objected that he had never partaken of anything common or unclean and the Lord said to him that what he had considered as unclean hitherto was not at all unclean in the sight of God he was made to realise that there was a gospel for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews but this is the point that we ought to make and that we ought to take to heart no sooner had Peter descended from the housetop than he was told that three men stood at the door knocking for him is the world need knocking at the door of your heart you who have something that the world has not got you to him the Lord has given a vision of the gospel as being a gospel for lost sinner does the plight of poor suffering humanity the wretchedness of the world is it knocking at your door and saying to you in effect three men stand outside seeking you the church has a lot to answer for because the church has a lot to give by way of blessing as God's instrument in the world well then the harvest truly is plent and it must be ingathered or it will perish it will merely be a blight on the surface of the field well what did

Jesus say to them after he had made this observation the harvest truly is plentiful but the laborers are few well he went on to give them this exhortation pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers into his harvest well there are two words there that ought to bring home to us on the one hand that the situation is not without promise that it is not hopeless altogether and that is that the Lord is the Lord of the harvest and also the duty laid upon us pray ye pray ye now it is easy for us if we close our eyes to go off the road either on the right or on the left that is in the very literal sense but it is also just as free just as true in the spiritual sense if we close our eyes to the injunction of the word of God either we shall say oh well the Lord is sovereign the Lord alone can give the increase true but do we make the wrong deduction from that truth because the

Lord alone can give the increase do you go on to say therefore I can fold my arms and sit back and do nothing that is not the exhortation to us at all but pray ye and and remember this does not mean the mere use of words before the Lord or at stated times my friends this ought to be a burden upon our hearts a burden that we could never lay down except where alone it can be laid down at the throne of grace the love of Christ should constrain us to bear the burdens of others before the mercy seat remember the the the prayer that

[36 : 19] Jesus himself taught his disciples and it was this hallowed or sanctified or glorified be thy name thy kingdom come do you pray for the coming of the kingdom before you pray for your daily bread that is not the petition that comes first in the Lord's prayer give us this day or daily bread we do not usually forget that or neglect that petition if we are praying at all but oh how often the primary thing takes second place or perhaps further down the list than second thy kingdom come and what a blessing we would derive our shells from it if we were in the right place doing the right thing performing the right service asking the the right petitions offering up the right petitions thy kingdom come if our hearts were burdened by the wretchedness of those who are around us in the world and notice what they are to pray for pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers there was never perhaps more need for them why because there are plenty who go forth under the name and in the guise of labourers there are plenty of time errors but when the

Lord sends forth labourers two or three things are true of those who are sent first of all we remember what Paul says to the church in Corinth he says now then we are ambassadors for Christ and I believe that something that happened some two centuries before Christ was born gives point and foot to the words of Paul some two centuries before the coming of Christ the imperial court in Rome sent two legates to the city of Corinth the city of Corinth was that time a part of the empire and the papal legates went to Corinth to tell the Corinthian governors that their taxes were increased by order of the emperor and of course this did not go down well with the people of Corinth so they caught the messengers of the emperor and they molested them and humiliated them they almost put them to death well of course

Rome would not suffer this sort of thing gladly so as soon as the legates arrived back in Rome they told the imperial court that they had been abused by the Corinthians in a terrible way so without delay an army was mobilized and under the council mummies that army was dispatched to Corinth and Corinth was laid waste practically every building in the city was destroyed the men were put to death while the women and the young children were taken to the slave markets in Rome and sold there as slaves now this was simply because they had molested and refused and rejected the ambassador of the empire Corinth was built and then Paul comes but he comes not as the ambassador of the empire but he says to the

Corinthian now then we are ambassadors for Christ as though God did besiege you by us not any emperor but as though God did besiege you by us and we do not want to lay a heavier burden upon you we have come to you with a blessing from the mouth of God himself be reconciled to God and as ambassadors of Christ they could only give what had been given to them so that the laborers sent by God are careful not to give any message that the message that God has intended them to deliver nothing else is worse than worthless it is only a waste of time on the part of the hearer and on the part of the speaker but oh how careful the laborer in the Lord's vineyard ought to be that he reverences what

God has said this is why under the Old Testament dispensation when a priest was consecrated the blood of the sacrifice of consecration was placed on the tip of the right ear and on the thumb of the right hand and on the big toe of the right foot why it was a symbol of this fact that the ear was consecrated to the heavens in other words his attitude henceforth was to be I'll hear what God the Lord will speak and what the God Lord will speak he was to obey his hand was to do whatever the Lord wanted him to do and his foot which was also consecrated by the blood of the sacrifice had to walk in the way of the commandments and it must always be so with those whom the

[42 : 39] Lord will send they cannot but say I'll hear what God the Lord will speak to his hope he'll speak peace and to his saints but let them not return to foolishness now how blessed it is that the Lord of the harvest is the Lord of glory that he will send forth labourers and the labourers that he sends first of all derive benefit and derive gladness and joy from seeing sinners repenting but above and beyond that there is also this they thirst for the glory of God this should be the great aim of every believing soul and certainly those who go out to win souls have a desire that

God should be glorified in the conversion of sinners I suppose those of you who go as I hope you will go to the Chalmers exhibition in Glasgow here will learn something and know something about the history of that man and the sincerity of his desire for the conversion of sinners the plight of sinners was a burden upon the heart of Thomas Chalmers we have really lost sight of how much we owe to him under God but this was one remarkable factor about the man's life he and McChane and William Chalmers Burns and people like that they had the glory of God in view and the conversion of sinners like a burden upon their souls and because they had they delighted in seeking the glory of

God the misery and wretchedness of sinners lay heavily upon their hearts and upon their conscience and was there ever a greater need and surely there cannot be any greater encouragement either to pray than that the Lord himself has asked us has exhorted us in these words to pray and to pray to himself as the Lord of the harvest sometimes we tend to lose confidence