Praying for the Harvest
Scripture Text: Matthew 9:35-38

Introduction

Two weeks ago, we looked at the Lord’s Prayer as an example for how we should pray. Last week, we looked at one of Jesus’ parables that explained how fervently we ought to pray, never giving up. Today, we look at a very specific prayer request that Jesus instructed the Church to pray. It is an issue we have heard before but which we forget to pray. It is one farmers probably know well. What do you do when you have a plentiful crop but few laborers? Let’s say you are a farmer and you had a really good year. There has been plenty of rain. Your crops are growing. You are going to have a bountiful harvest. What happens when this abundant harvest is ready but there are not enough people to reap it? What do you do if you have this great crop ready to be harvested but you cannot find enough people to help you? That is the situation with churches today. There are many people in our communities who are ready to hear the Gospel and ready to respond to Jesus Christ, but there are few disciples in the field to reap the harvest. The Church is sitting in the pews waiting for the crop to come to them. Is that us?

In this passage, Jesus described a similar situation and charged His disciples to pray about it. This was not just any prayer, though. This was not a prayer for people to come to church. This was not a prayer for God to send people to us. Jesus did not say to pray to the Father that He would bring people to church on Sunday. Jesus said to pray for God to send workers into His harvest. This is a prayer to God that He would send His people, the Church, into the world to reach lost people in the world. It is a prayer for the Church to get busy with the task of reaching the world for Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus gave this command to pray for the harvest right before He commissioned His twelve apostles and sent them out to the harvest (Matthew 10:1-15). There are four things we see in this passage as it relates to our praying for reaching people for Jesus Christ: 1) we need to first care for people who are lost, 2) we need to realize how great the number of lost people is, 3) we need to pray to God that He sends more workers into the world to reach lost people, and 4) we need to rely upon God to do His work.

Care for Other People

The first thing we see in this passage is the compassion of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. Jesus was motivated by compassion to go to people and to help them.

Matthew 9:35–36

35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Notice the compassion Jesus had. He cared for other people. He was concerned about them. Notice what His compassion moved Him to do. He went throughout the country, proclaiming the good news and healing people. He ministered to them. He met their

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needs. He proclaimed the truth of God’s Word to them. Why did Jesus have compassion on them? Because, they were lost. They were distressed. They were helpless, like a hurt animal that cannot move off of the ground. Have you ever seen an animal like this? I once came across a deer on the side of the road that had been hit by a car. The animal could not move. It was hurt and helpless, and it was scared. The crowds that Jesus saw were like that, and He had compassion for them.

Jesus said the people were like sheep without a shepherd. What is it like for sheep to be without a shepherd? Shepherds were to care for their flock and to protect it from predators. The language Jesus used describes a predator injuring the sheep and throwing them to the ground. Predators, and possibly even unscrupulous leaders, have ravaged God’s sheep. This sounds like many passages in the Old Testament that speak of Israel as God’s flock and Israel’s leaders as their bad shepherds. Look at one passage from the prophet Ezekiel that speaks about the lost sheep of Israel.

Ezekiel 34:5–6  

So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

So, Jesus was concerned for the people. He cared for them. Do we have that same concern? Do we care as much? I have wanted a garden for sometime. I think the idea of having fresh vegetables is a wonderful thing, but I obviously have not cared enough about it or we would have a garden. The same is true for a church. We all want growth and more people here but what are we doing about it? How much do we care about it? I think many in the church today have heard so many sermons and so many lessons about reaching people for Christ that they have grown cold to it. The Gospel loses its meaning or the church become less motivated because they care less for the lost. Do we have compassion for the lost? Do we care for those who are hurt, helpless, and without the Shepherd? Who will care enough to seek those lost sheep? Will it be you?

Realize the Greatness of the Harvest

Jesus’ compassion for the hurt and helpless people motivated Him to help the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus not only referred to the lost people of Israel as sheep without a shepherd, but He also described them as a harvest. We see this description in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. He called the church in Corinth God’s field. (1 Corinthians 3:9) God’s people are His harvest. The harvest Jesus was mentioning here in Matthew was no ordinary harvest, though. It was a very big one. Imagine a garden that is so large it would not only feed you or your family but your entire neighborhood. Maybe it would even feed the entire town. I guess we would not call that a garden, but a field or a plantation, or maybe many plantations. Jesus points out to His disciples that the situation with the lost people of Israel was like one huge, bountiful harvest.

Matthew 9:37  

Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;”

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There are a lot of people who need to know Jesus Christ and who need to become a part of a church community. The harvest is great. It is plentiful. There are about twenty-five thousand people within five miles of this church. About two-thirds of those people are most likely not believers in Jesus Christ or not involved in a local church. That means there are thousands of people in our general area who are not reached. The harvest is indeed plentiful. There are many people near us who need to know Jesus Christ. There are many people who are right now lost and without hope. Every church building in our area could be full to capacity and there would still be thousands of people not in church on Sunday morning. The harvest is great, but where are the workers?

If the church’s mission is to reach lost people for Christ and to disciple them to become followers of Jesus Christ, how likely are we going to do that by sitting on the pews? How likely are we going to reap this great harvest by waiting for them to come to us? It is like expecting to be fed by waiting for the food to come into your mouth. I do not know about you, but that ended for me before the age of two. I now feed myself, as I am sure most adults do. You have to work for it, and the same is true for the Church. How likely are we going to fulfill the mission of reaching others for Christ by waiting for them to come to us? How likely are we going to reach others with only a few people doing the work? Not likely at all! The harvest is plentiful, but, as Jesus indicated in this passage, the workers are few. What shall we do? This brings me to the next point in the passage.

**Pray for More Workers of the Harvest**

The harvest is great. It is plentiful, but there is a problem. It involves the workers of the harvest. Imagine you had a great crop. Imagine you had acres and acres of food to harvest, but you had no one to help you reap the harvest. You had an abundant crop, you had the necessary equipment to work the fields, but you had no workers to operate the equipment. What would happen to your crop? Would a lot of it go to waste? There are many people in our communities who are ready to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ and ready to respond to it, but there are no disciples in the field working the harvest. Because the harvest is great, there needs to be workers in the field. If the harvest is great, as Jesus told us, what shall we do? What does Jesus tell us to do?

*Matthew 9:38*  
“therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

What does Jesus tell us to do? Pray! In this whole passage, there is only one command that Jesus gives us. It is “pray”. Pray to God that He will send more workers into the field to reap the harvest. I think of Jesus’ parable of the laborers in the vineyard. He said, “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.” (Matthew 20:1) The harvest is great, but the workers are few. The Master of the field is calling for more workers into the field. Jesus commissioned His disciples to help Him in His work. This work was motivated by a great compassion for a great number of people who are lost and without a Shepherd. Thus, Jesus tells us, His Church, to pray earnestly for God to send more people into the field.

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Now, I have heard it said that churches do not grow or do not reach their communities because the preacher is not doing his job. There are certainly pastors who are not doing what they were called to do and that hinders the ministry and growth of the church. But, there is some confusion today about who should be doing the ministry of the church. The ministers in the church do not stand behind a pulpit. Talking about what pastors are called to do, the preacher Adrian Rogers once said, “It’s not your job to fill the pew, it’s your job to fill the pulpit.” While I agree with that statement, I would like to restate what Adrian Rogers said. I would say, “It is not your job to fill the pulpit; it is your job to fill the pews.” If pastors and teachers are doing their jobs, then they are equipping the rest of the church to minister to the lost. Brandon Ware calls the Church to “get back to every member, a minister.” That concept is what Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians.

**Ephesians 4:11–12**  
11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

God gives to the church leaders such as pastors and teachers to equip the rest of the church to do the ministry of the church. The ministers of the church are those sharing Jesus Christ with others, those inviting others to worship with them on Sunday, those calling and visiting others at home or in the hospital. The pastor and teachers in the church ought to be teaching and discipling the rest of the church so that they can minister and reach people for Christ. The main point here is not to talk about our roles, but to say that there is a great work to be done. This work will not get done if the workers are not in the field reaping the harvest. For the most part, the Church is comfortably sitting in the pews of a building waiting for the crop to just come in while God is saying, “Go into the field and reap the harvest.” God is calling workers to work in His field. Are you listening to Him? Are you working in His field. The harvest is plentiful. We need workers, therefore, pray that God sends more workers to reap the harvest.

**Rely Upon the Lord of the Harvest**

The last point in this passage is to realize whose work it is to harvest the field. Notice that the command that Jesus gave to His disciples was for them to pray for more workers. What exactly is the prayer, though? Let us look again at what Jesus said.

**Matthew 9:38**  
38 “therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

This is a prayer to God. This is prayer for Him to send more workers. This is a prayer for His workers to work in His field. What does this all mean? This means we have to ultimately rely upon God. This is God’s work, and we are co-workers in His field. We are working with God to reap His great harvest. We cannot ever say that it is our harvest or our church. Are we like the wicked tenants of the vineyard who do not want the Owner to take control of His own vineyard? Would we rather keep it for ourselves? May it never be! We cannot take credit for what God is doing, but we can and must obey what He tells us to do. We must get out there into His field and work for the great harvest that is
there. We must do this by relying upon the Lord of the harvest. Does God need us? No! Does He want us to work with Him to reap His harvest? Yes! Do we need Him? Always!

**Conclusion**

So, what have we learned about prayer so far? We ought to do it. Jesus gave us an example of prayer and He expects us to pray. We ought to pray with persistence like the widow who pleaded for justice. And this passage tells us that one of our prayers ought to be for God to send more workers to reach those who have not heard about Christ. The growth of the church will begin with our earnest prayer to God that we obediently serve Him and work faithfully in His field. What can we take away from this passage?

1) We should care for the lost people of our community. If you do not care about the lost, then it may indicate that you are lost yourself. Pray that God will give you a compassionate spirit for those who do not know Jesus Christ.

2) Pray for the lost people in our community, that they will come to know Jesus Christ. Pray that they will hear the good news of Jesus Christ and respond to it in faith.

3) Pray for more disciples of Jesus Christ to go out into this community and reach more people for Him. We need workers in the field. Pray God will send us workers.

4) Pray for God’s work to be done and for His help to do it. God is the one working His field. It is His harvest. It is His work. Pray for His help to work the fields.

5) Trust God to do His work. Trust Him to empower us to work with Him. Trust Him to provide every thing we need, including people, to accomplish the great work He has called us to do.

Pray for these things. The growth of the church depends upon our faithful prayers. Will you commit to praying to the Lord of the harvest this week for more workers of the harvest? May it be so! Amen!