

The Harvest Is Plentiful; The Workers Are Few

Matthew 9:35-10:4

Key Verse: 9:37-38

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

Today’s Bible passage is short. But it is deep and wide. It reveals so much about the heart and mind of Jesus. How does Jesus see the world? What was Jesus’ plan to help and change the world? At the start of this new school year, it is a good chance for us to review and consider what Jesus taught and did thus far. May the Lord Jesus, our Good Shepherd work in each one of us to know and to have the mind and heart of Christ.

I. The Heart of Jesus is Compassion (9:35-38)

First, the ministry of Jesus (35). Look at Mt 9:35. **“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.”** Jesus’ ministry is summarized with 3 key words: teaching, proclaiming and healing. 4:23 gives the same 3-fold ministry of Jesus: **“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.”**

Jesus’ ministry was one of teaching. What did Jesus teach? We heard Jesus’ teaching from the Sermon on the Mount (Ch.5-7). After hearing this sermon, Jesus’ listeners were amazed, for he taught them as one who had authority. Jesus’ teaching was not a dry, academic lecture. Jesus’ teaching was relevant, powerful, and life-giving. Jesus’ teaching pierced their hearts for he spoke with absolute faith in and love for God the Father. Jesus’ teaching set people free from their guilt, meaninglessness, hopelessness and helplessness. Jesus’ teaching was light shining in the dark to give hope, to show the way, to give meaning and joy and direction to life. Jesus’ teaching brought dead hearts and minds to life.

In addition to teaching, Jesus’ ministry was also one of proclaiming. Here the word ‘proclaim’ means to preach, to herald or to announce. When a king was coming to town or giving a message to the people, he would send a herald to announce his message and his arrival. Jesus was the herald of God. Not only that, Jesus is himself the king who came proclaiming, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”** (4:17) Jesus announced the arrival of God’s kingdom, the

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kingdom of heaven, to earth. This announcement is called the good news of the kingdom.

Why is the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven good news? We can understand this better, when we consider the state and condition of the world. The world is flooded with bad news: war, poverty, disasters. Whenever we watch or hear the news, it is mostly about death, destruction and scandals. On a more personal level, we all struggle in the dark, under the power of sin and death. Mt 4:16 quotes Isaiah the prophet, but it also describes our world today: **“people living in darkness and in the shadow of death.”** All people suffer under the power of sin and death, guilt and meaninglessness, frustration and failure. One theologian (Cornelius Plantinga) said it this way: “Things are not the way they are supposed to be.” The kingdom of heaven is indeed good news for those in darkness and in the shadow of death. Jesus proclaimed the dawning of the great light. Jesus brought the kingdom of heaven to earth. How did he do this?

Jesus proclaimed the forgiveness of sins saying, **“Your sins are forgiven.”** The forgiveness of sins continues to be proclaimed in the name of Jesus. Jesus proclaimed the defeat of the devil by driving out demons. Jesus continues to deliver us from the devil’s power and accusations. Jesus proclaimed the conquest of disease by healing the sick. Jesus continues to restore wounded minds and hearts by the power and love of God. Jesus proclaimed life for the dead. Jesus’ living word and Holy Spirit continue to make alive in Christ those who are dead in sin. In these ways and more Jesus proclaims the good news of the kingdom of heaven.

In addition to teaching and proclaiming, Jesus’ ministry was also one of healing. We have heard how Jesus healed so many diseases and sicknesses: a man with leprosy, the bleeding woman, the blind, the lame, the mute. These healings gave them new life. Jesus can still heal the sick, both physically and spiritually. Jesus is the Sin-Doctor. Jesus’ life-giving ministry was teaching, healing and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. This was and still is the ministry of Jesus.

Second, the compassion of Jesus (36). Now look at verse 36. **“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”** Jesus worked hard teaching, preaching and healing. Still, there was so much work to be done. In fact, the need was endless. There were just too many people who needed healing, who needed teaching and who needed good news. Then why didn’t Jesus just raise his hand and pronounce,

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“You are all healed. Have a nice day”? This was not Jesus’ way of working. Jesus’ way was the way of compassion.

Then what is compassion? Compassion is to share in one's suffering out of love. For example, when a mother sees her sick child, her heart goes out to her child. Not only that, she does whatever she can do to help her child: holding, caressing, giving medicine, getting help from friends, doctors and the internet. When Jesus saw the crowds, he did not see them as a bothersome nuisance. Jesus saw that they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Sheep have little common sense and strength. Without a shepherd, sheep cannot survive. They need a shepherd to feed them, guide them out to pasture, lead them back home, and protect them from wild animals. Some sheep cannot even get back up when they fall down. They need a shepherd to help them get back up. Jesus saw the crowds as harassed and helpless. Other translations for harassed and helpless are: vulnerable, troubled, confused, lost, faint, weary, scattered. The people were harassed by the Roman authorities. They were harassed by their own religious leaders. They were harassed by the worries and problems of life. They were harassed by sin, the devil, disease and death.

When Jesus saw the suffering crowds, his heart went out to them. Jesus could not feel content or at peace as long as he saw others in pain and suffering. Jesus shared their pain and suffering. This is the heart of Jesus. I read that when Mother Theresa looked at the poor and dying in India she was overwhelmed by the need. But she decided to help one needy person. In compassion, she committed her life to help the poor and suffering in India.

We saw Jesus’ compassion in chapters 8-9. Out of compassion, Jesus healed the sick and drove out demons. Jesus showed love and mercy to outcasts like a man with leprosy, and to despised people like a tax collector and a Roman centurion. In great contrast, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees didn’t care about their suffering people. They did not have mercy and compassion in their hearts. They only fed their own stomachs and their own egos. Jesus said that they put heavy loads on people and did not lift one finger to help them (23:4).

Here we have to ask ourselves: “Do I have the compassion of Jesus or am I selfish and stingy-hearted?” Sometimes we do not have compassion even for our own family members, who are closest to us. If we are honest, we find in ourselves a compassion-deficiency. Don’t you wish we could take a compassion vitamin or injection into your blood stream? But compassion does not and can not come to us that way.

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Then where does compassion come from and how can we obtain it? Compassion comes from seeing people as God sees them. The Bible says, **“God is love”** (1Jn 4:16). It also says that the Lord our God is **“gracious and compassionate”** (Ex 34:6; 2Ch 30:9; Ps 103:8; Joel 2:13; Jnh 4:2). At the same time, the Bible commands us to love and be compassionate. Ephesians 4:32 gives us a clue how we can obtain the compassion of God. It says, **“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”** What we need to ask ourselves then is: “How has Christ had compassion on me? How has he shared my suffering, rather than condemning or despising me?” **Actually, in love and compassion, Jesus gave his life on the cross for you and for me to forgive all our sins, to free us from the condemnation and judgment of the holy God, and to make us heirs of his kingdom. In view of his great compassion and mercy, we can respond with thanks and devotion. We can repent of our sins, selfishness and rebellion, and pray and obey Jesus in love. Then he will give us his love and compassion for suffering, needy souls.**

Third, the vision and prayer of Jesus (37-38). Now look at verse 37. Jesus said to his disciples, **“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.”** Jesus saw the crowds as sheep without a shepherd. Using another metaphor, Jesus saw the world as a plentiful harvest ready to be reaped. Jesus saw that there was much work to be done: the harvest is plentiful, and it needed to get done immediately. As any farmer knows, when the harvest comes it is time to reap. Otherwise, the crop will spoil, rot and be lost forever.

Is the harvest still plentiful? Are many people ready to accept the good news of the kingdom of heaven? One year ago there was a gospel event in Chicago called “Chicago Harvest.” 48,000 people attended and 4000 dedicated their lives to Christ, including 60 from our church. Still, the need in Chicago is great. There are 5 million people in the Chicago area. Some of them attend churches as committed Christians. Others have no Christian fellowship connection. Some have never heard the gospel clearly presented to them personally. Northwestern University has about 16,000 students. About 4% of them are active, committed Christians who attend weekly Christian fellowship. That means 96% or over 15,000 of them are unevangelized or undisciplined. The harvest is plentiful at NU and throughout Chicagoland.

Jesus also said, **“...but the workers are few.”** There are few committed Christians, and many more nominal Christians or non-Christians. Nominal

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Christians might attend church, but they are not contributing to the gospel harvest. They do not talk to others about Jesus or invite others to church or Bible study. Their only concern is for themselves and their families. Jesus says, “**...the workers are few.**”

Now look at verses 37-38 together. Jesus said, “**The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.**” Jesus didn’t see just the need and the problem: the vast harvest and the few workers. Jesus also saw the solution and how to get there. Ask the Lord. This means to pray. Jesus wants us to pray earnestly for God to fill the need. What need? The need for workers for the harvest. It is the need for shepherds of Jesus’ sheep, for sound Bible teachers, faithful prayer servants, and dedicated missionaries of Christ.

Jesus said, “**Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.**” This is the prayer topic that Jesus gave to his disciples, to us. When we pray this, God will raise up and send out workers. As we pray this, our own hearts will be moved to support missions, even to go out ourselves in Jesus’ name.

How are you involved in the gospel harvest? There is need of Jesus everywhere, even in the churches. Jesus wants to send you in his name to work for the gospel harvest beginning right where you are: at home, work, school, the grocery store, the post office, the park, the YMCA, etc.

Jesus also wants us to pray and labor for gospel-needy areas in our community, nation, and the world. Many of us pray that God may raise and send 100,000 missionaries to all nations by 2041, especially to difficult places that seem most closed to and in need of the gospel. We also recently began praying for our ministry to send out 50 American missionaries within a year. Has God placed a particular burden on your heart to go to a certain place or people? Perhaps you or I will be an answer to the prayer to send out harvest workers. In Nigeria UBF, they were praying to send out one missionary. Barnabas Kojo Kumi from Ghana was studying in Nigeria at that time. He joined in this prayer. He never imagined that he would be the missionary. But he was! He became a missionary to his own country, Ghana. He has since gone home to be with the Lord and his wife has continued his ministry.

Dr. Jerry Root recently spoke at our church and challenged us to consider whether we’ve prayed for anyone in the past week to know Jesus. Active workers

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in the gospel harvest pray for others who need Jesus. I want to challenge myself and you to remember to pray for at least one unbeliever per day that you know. It may help to write down the names of as many people you can think of who need to hear and believe the gospel - especially those you are in direct contact with by mail, email, facebook, phone or in person. Let's pray for lost souls to be found in Christ and for harvest workers to be sent out into his harvest field.

II. The Plan of Jesus (10:1-4)

Jesus saw the world in need of harvesters and shepherds. He exhorted his followers to pray for workers to be sent out by the Lord of the harvest. But Jesus did not just know and pray for this. He also did something practically: he called twelve disciples and sent them out as apostles. This was Jesus' strategy to reach the world. It looks too small and inefficient, even silly. But it worked, as we see Christians and churches all over the world today. Then how did Jesus equip them and who did he choose?

First, Jesus gave them his authority (1). Look at 10:1, "**Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.**" Jesus gave his authority to his disciples. Jesus had authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal the sick. We have already seen ample evidence for this. Here are two quotes in review. 8:16 says, "**When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.**" 4:24 says, "**News 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.**"

We know that we cannot drive out demons or heal the sick by our own power or authority. It is Jesus' power and authority alone that can do this. Only when Jesus gives this authority to us can we do this. This means we must be completely reliant on Jesus to do life-giving work in his name. We can only do as much as Jesus empowers and enables us to do.

Then to whom did Jesus give this power and authority? Here he gave it to his twelve disciples. In Luke 10, he gave it to 72 others. His authority was given to those whom Jesus wanted to give it to. They were those who were following Jesus. They each had made personal decisions to follow Jesus. Their decision was not made casually, or part time according to their convenience, or on a trial basis. They each gave up their own human dreams and plans and committed themselves to

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following Jesus full time. We are also called to follow Jesus 24/7, not part time. They were people with humble hearts and learning minds. They were like new wineskins. Of course, one was a traitor. He was later replaced.

Second, Jesus chose twelve apostles (2-4). Verses 2-4 introduce us to the twelve apostles. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Jesus raised these 12 men in answer to his own vision and prayer to reach and minister to lost souls. At least four of them were fishermen, one was a tax collector, and one was a revolutionary. It is amazing that a tax collector and a revolutionary could even sit at the same table, much less work together for the same cause. But Jesus brought together Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot. Jesus made them brothers in his name, who could work side by side for the kingdom. Jesus called these men from various walks of life. How about today? Jesus still calls people from all walks of life to know and serve him: policemen, bankers, factory workers, office workers, company CEOs, drivers, couriers, secretaries, carpenters, electricians, doctors, lawyers, ambassadors, housewives, pastors. Jesus still calls and uses common, ordinary people who have faith in Jesus and a life committed to him.

D. L. Moody had a dream to make \$1 million by selling shoes. But he went out evangelizing with his pastor and experienced the joy of leading someone to Christ. After that, his dream to make money selling shoes fell away and it was replaced by the desire to win souls for Christ as an evangelist. Moody became one of the most famous Christian evangelists in the English-speaking world.

When we look at the world, there are many needs and problems: hunger, unemployment, pollution, disease, broken families, etc. And it's good that we have people working on these problems. But to Jesus, none of these problems are the real problem. Jesus sees that there are so many needy souls all around us. We need only to open our eyes and hearts. Many college students look fine outwardly but inwardly they suffer from guilt, meaninglessness, fatalism, and fear under the power of sin, death and darkness. Jesus wants to reach and heal them. Jesus wants to send compassionate gospel workers who can teach them the word of God, proclaim God's arrival, and heal the sick and broken-hearted. Jesus wants to raise shepherds who take care of the suffering and needy. Jesus wants to send out

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workers into his harvest field. Let's pray for this. Let's pray to be compassionate workers in his plentiful harvest field and shepherds for those who are harassed and helpless. Let's pray to help even one person this fall with the mind and heart of Christ.