

# THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL

Matthew 9:35-10:15

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.’”**

In Matthew chapters 8-9, we have learned about Jesus’ powerful healing ministry, which showed Jesus’ authority over disease, demons and even death. We learned that Jesus touched and healed unexpected people—a leper, a Gentile’s servant, a bleeding woman, a dead girl. Jesus showed his divine authority to forgive sins and his compassion and hope to call sinners.

Now we are moving into Matthew chapter 10, which contains Jesus’ second major discourse in this gospel. It is Jesus’ fieldwork instructions to his twelve apostles. We will study these instructions in two parts, beginning with part 1 today.

Especially we want to learn how Jesus saw the world. How do you see the world? How do you look at people? Many people have a very pessimistic, negative view of the world, like it is going to destruction, with no hope. Others see the world as a playground, that is, a place to enjoy themselves. Still others see the world as a place of random chance happenings. What was Jesus’ worldview? Let’s learn from Jesus and listen to his instructions.

## **I. Jesus’ View Of His World (9:35-38)**

Look at 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.”**

Matthew summarizes again Jesus’ ministry in three words: teaching, proclaiming and healing. Jesus taught the truth of God in regular Jewish gatherings. Jesus proclaimed the message and advent of the kingdom of heaven as good news. And Jesus healed those who were sick from diseases and evil spirits. Jesus did these three things continually in all the towns and villages in Galilee.

Huge crowds came to Jesus to hear him teach and preach and to beg his healing touch. Jesus kept giving to the needy, giving to the helpless and hopeless, giving to the oppressed and afflicted. It was too much for any one person to

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minister to them all. Yet Jesus did not feel burdened or frustrated or hope that they would go away. How did Jesus see these crowds?

Verse 36 says, **“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”** I don’t know much about sheep, but I’ve heard that they are not very smart or fast or strong. They are quite vulnerable to wild animals and to straying and getting lost. In our neighborhood, I once saw the police trying to help some children find their home. They had wandered out of their backyard gate and were too young to know their address or full names. To any parent, it is a nightmare to lose children. Imagine the fear in the child who is lost. Children are helpless by themselves. They need parents to protect them from danger, to provide for their needs and to teach them what is good and right.

Jesus saw the crowds as harassed and helpless, desperately seeking peace, protection and guidance. Jesus had great compassion on them. The Greek word for compassion has the meaning of a strong feeling in the bowels. Compassion is quite contrary to indifference or selfishness. This weekend at Northwestern we reviewed the story of the Good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan had compassion on a wounded, dying man. He nursed the man’s wounds, took him to a safe place and paid for his recovery. And he was a complete stranger to the wounded man. Compassion is the opposite of greed or self-seeking. If our minds and hearts are occupied with money or pleasures or worries, we will not have compassion for others who are hurting and in need.

Jesus saw the crowds in another way, besides sheep without a shepherd. He changed the metaphor in verse 37 saying, **“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.”** Jesus saw the crowds as a vast harvest field. To a farmer, harvest time is very exciting. It is the time the farmer has been eagerly waiting for many months. It’s the time that crops from all the farmer’s labor can now be harvested. The farmer’s joy is to see ripe harvest fields, ready for reaping.

At the same time, the farmer has an urgent burden to reap all the harvest. He knows he cannot do it alone. He needs workers. In high school, I removed tassel from corn. Farmers hire people to remove tassel for this important step in harvesting corn. One time, our supervisors fired for the day those who left 5 or more tassels on stalks in their row. I carefully worked my row, but my supervisor said that I left 5 tassels. I was fired for the day and went back to the bus. However, too many workers were fired that day. They gave us the chance to work again for the day. I went back to work the next day.

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Jesus said, **“The harvest is plentiful...”** Jesus used this same analogy after talking with the Samaritan woman in John 4:34-35, which says: **“‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.’”**

This is how Jesus saw one Samaritan village. This is how Jesus also saw Jewish towns, and by extrapolation, the whole world. **“The harvest is plentiful...”** Sometimes we look at our mission field as a desolate place, like a desert or a wasteland. We can call it the unbelieving, complaining view of the world. We may think, “My place of ministry is too difficult. It must be much better and easier in some other place. Perhaps I should go somewhere else.” Of course, that’s possible, and we might want to consider going elsewhere. But we must not use this as an excuse to sit down and do nothing or to envy other people groups.

According to Jesus, the problem is not with the harvest, for it is plentiful. The problem is with the workers that are so few. Here, **“the workers”** needed are, by implication, **“shepherds”** for the harassed and helpless sheep. Jesus saw the vast need for more shepherds for lost sheep, and for more workers for the plentiful harvest.

Jesus did not just mention the happy problem of a vast harvest. He also proposed a prayerful solution through a prayer topic to his listening disciples. He said, **“Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”** Jesus wants us to pray to the Lord of the harvest, that the Lord may send out workers into his vast harvest field. As we know, what we pray for shows our utmost concerns. It’s easy to pray for our personal problems or the struggles of those closest to us. But it is not easy or natural to pray from our hearts big prayers outside of our spheres of experience and influence. Of course, we could do so out of a sense of obligation or to look or sound good to others. But what is our true passion and concern?

Shamefully, for some people, their excited concern is for their favorite sports team to win the championship. But God is not excited about who wins the Super Bowl, the World Series or the World Cup. Many in the business world, have a passion to make a profit. That’s good if they plan on giving the proceeds to the poor. Many young people have a passion to become famous or popular, and they are avid fans of a movie star or singer or athlete or “successful” person. But God is not impressed or moved by those who win talent shows. God is not moved by single people praying for a beautiful wife or a rich husband. God is excited and

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moved about people preaching the gospel of the kingdom and reaching the lost with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not say, “The picking is slim and they are too many workers.” He said the harvest is abundant. Where is this vast harvest? Where do you see it? Jesus said to ask God to send workers. Are you praying to God for laborers in the vast harvest fields? Are you praying for shepherds of lost sheep? And here’s another important advanced question: Are you doing anything practically about it?

Some years ago, Barnabas Kojo Kumi went from his native country of Ghana to study in Nigeria. He met UBF workers in Nigeria and accepted the gospel. At that time they were praying to send out missionaries. Barnabas began also to pray for this. Little did he know, that he would become one of those missionaries to his own country, Ghana. He went there with his wife. He died at a Bible conference and went to meet the Lord who sent him into the harvest. That’s not a bad place to die by the way: at a Bible conference. My point is: he not only prayed for missionaries; he became one. And he served the Lord as a worker in God’s harvest field until his last breath.

## **II. Jesus calls, equips and sends his twelve apostles (10:1-15)**

As we know, Jesus was good at praying. He was also good at doing. So, in answer to his own prayer topic that he just gave his disciples, Jesus did something. 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 had many disciples, perhaps in the hundreds. But he chose to focus on twelve of them regarding training and instruction. This verse is Matthew’s first mention that Jesus chose twelve men to train as leaders. These men were called to be new history-makers, world-changers, light-shiners and salt-dispensers for the world.

Jesus called these twelve men. We do not determine by our own inspiration or decide by our own willpower to follow and serve Jesus. Jesus calls us. Jesus’ calling is his grace to us. Jesus did not only call them. He also equipped them for service. He gave them his authority over demons and diseases. No person can obtain this authority by their own effort, will or determination. This is authority from God, given through Jesus Christ. We do not have authority to heal diseases or power to drive out demons. That authority and power belongs to Jesus Christ and only those to whom he gives it. It was the very same power and authority that Jesus himself had.

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So who were the twelve apostles? They were Simon Peter, his brother Andrew, James and his brother John, Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew the tax collector, James son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot who later betrayed Jesus. These men were not impressive by human standards. They were not great thinkers or soldiers or strategists. They were not royalty or men of standing in their towns. They were common fishermen, a tax collector, a political revolutionary. They were very different. Before following Jesus, Matthew would not like to meet Simon the Zealot in a dark alley, since Zealots hated tax collectors and anyone pro-Roman. But Jesus made them close brothers in God's kingdom work.

What instructions did Jesus give these twelve men before sending them out, and what principles can we learn from these instructions? It's good to note that verses 1-15 concern the immediate short-term mission that Jesus was sending them on, perhaps for only a week or two, or even less. Verses 16-42, which we'll consider next time, concern long term missions in the future, including much persecution. Let's consider six principles.

**First, start where you are.** Look at verses 5-6. **“These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.’”** Jesus was not a racist. In fact, later Jesus sent his disciples into all the world to make disciples of all nations (Mk 16:15; Mt 28:18-20). Then why did he limit this short term mission to the Jews? There could be many reasons: perhaps they were too young, or they didn't know other languages and cultures, or Jesus didn't want them to go far, or the gospel was meant to be offered to the Jews first. These could all be good reasons. Perhaps the most obvious reason is that Jesus wants us to start right where we are with people close to us, whom we know and understand the best. If we can't minister to the people near us, what makes us think that we can minister to those far away in another culture?

One young man said he wants to go to a Spanish-speaking country one day as a missionary. But when he was asked, “Are you doing anything to prepare, like learning Spanish, or reaching out to Spanish-speaking people near you?” he said, “No, I didn't even think about that.” Mission begins small and near, right where we are now. If we open our eyes and our hearts there is plenty to do for Christ all around us, right where we are.

**Second, proclaim the kingdom.** Verse 7 says, **“As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’”** Our primary message is

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not, “You’re a good person,” nor, “You’re a bad person.” The primary Christian message is not, “There’s too much poverty or war or global-warming.” Though there are many important issues we might be concerned about and might want or like to talk about, the main thing Jesus said to proclaim is the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven has come near in Jesus Christ, who is King of all kings and Lord of all lords. Jesus brought the kingdom of God to this world. Jesus’ main message was the kingdom of heaven. St. Paul understood this. The last verse of Acts says of Paul, **“He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance”** (Ac 28:31). How are you doing in proclaiming the kingdom of heaven in Jesus Christ?

**Third, lead people to new life in Jesus.** Look at verse 8. **“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.”** We cannot heal the sick or drive out demons. But Jesus can and did. This was how Jesus gave new life to people. Jesus can still transform lives by his power and grace. We who believe in Jesus Christ have all freely received his grace and Holy Spirit. We can freely share and offer this gospel of God’s grace in Jesus Christ to others. It didn’t cost us anything, so we can’t charge others anything for it. We received it for free. We offer it for free. One needs only to turn from sin and accept his free gift of grace in Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Fourth, depend on God, not money, but also work hard.** Jesus said in verses 9-10, **“Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep.”** On a local mission journey Jesus told them not to bring a suitcase or credit card. This was not a long journey. They were not going to settle down. To bring no money meant they had to trust God day by day and depend on the mercy and help of those they were going to minister to.

Jesus said, **“for the worker is worth his keep.”** Paul quoted this saying to teach that a gospel worker has the right to make a living from the gospel (1Co 9:14; 1Ti 5:17-18), that is, by the support of fellow believers. But it also means that God’s servant must work hard, and be worthy of his pay. Receiving support gives no servant of God or Christian any right to be lazy.

**Fifth, find supporters and bless them.** Look at verses 11-13. **“Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you.”** Here a “worthy person” represents someone of noble character who accepts

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the gospel message and wants to support the gospel work. The gospel worker should bring peace and blessing to such a person and their home. But Jesus also knew that not everyone would accept the gospel. If people don't accept our message of peace, that doesn't give us the right to be nasty or mean. Rather, we must take the peace and keep it in ourselves. Our peace must not depend on how people receive us. Rather, our peace comes from Jesus, the Prince of peace, who sent us and is with us.

**Sixth, give those who reject the gospel a clear warning.** Look at verses 14-15. "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town." Jesus foretold that some would reject the gospel and those who represent it. Gospel servants must not take rejection personally. They are not rejecting the servant but the gospel, if the servant has faithfully represented it. Those who reject Christ and his gospel have to give an accounting themselves to God on the day of judgment. We do not wish judgment on anyone. Rather we must plead with them earnestly to accept God's salvation and escape God's righteous judgment.

Let's remember how Jesus sees the world: as sheep in need of shepherds, and as a harvest field in need of workers. Recently, I went to Seattle for a staff conference. I looked forward to this trip for many months since my wife and twin children came along. I had a pretty good time with them visiting Mt. Rainier, the Seattle worship service, the Space Needle, the Glass Museum and a harbor boat ride. But I felt something was missing. I realized I didn't have a heart and mouth prepared to share the gospel wherever I went with whomever I met. For example, I saw many people from India at Mt. Rainier. I was wondering why so many people from India were there. I could've easily asked any one of them kindly. On our boat ride, the tour guide had her own strong agenda she wanted to push on others. I was prompted to say something to her, but I didn't. In retrospect, I had a tourist spirit rather than a gospel spirit. So I wasn't prepared to work for the gospel harvest, even by mentioning the name of Jesus Christ to anyone, such as a woman panhandler I gave a few dollars to or the man at Mt. Rainier changing a flat tire on his motorcycle.

May God give us the heart of Christ through the Holy Spirit to see the world with the compassion and vision of Jesus. May we pray for and participate in the vast harvest work, beginning right where we are and to wherever God leads and sends us. **"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of**

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**the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”** May this be our prayer and our labor in Jesus Christ our Lord.