

Helpers for the Harvest Field

Jesus Christ's Only Prayer Request

Text: Matthew 9:35-38; Luke 10:1-2; John 4:27-42

Introduction:

1. There are three times recorded in the Gospels where Christ speaks of the need of the Harvest field:
 - To the 12 disciples before He sends them out two by two on their first official Evangelistic tour (Matt. 9:35-10:1; Mark 6:7-13).
 - To the 70 disciples as He sent them out to preach the Gospel (Luke 10:1-2).
 - To the 12 disciples after leading the woman of Samaria to salvation (John 4:35).
2. Christ taught much on the subject of prayer (e.g., Luke 11) but the only specific prayer request He made was in relation to the need of the Gospel Harvest (Matt. 9:37-38; Lk. 10:1-2). This gives us a window into the heart of the Saviour for missions.
3. There are **3 heart attitudes** we need to adopt in relation to the Harvest field.

I. A COMPASSION FOR THE HARVEST (VS. 35-36)

Christ is our perfect example in these verses. We see Christ's compassion demonstrated by:

A. His Labours among the Lost (Vs. 35)

1. Christ went to the lost (Vs. 35a)

Christ went to both the cities and villages with the Gospel. He went to the large population centres as well as the smaller towns. Christ was concerned to reach every soul, regardless of their locality. The first two letter word of the Great Commission is 'GO'!

- a. Matt. 28:19-20 "**Go** ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."
- b. Mark 16:15 "And he said unto them, **Go** ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."
- c. John 15:16 "**Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.**"
- d. Note: Some believers are good at being a reactive witness; that is, they are prepared to share Christ if a door opens in their day

to day lives. While commendable, that is not enough. We are commanded to actively seek opportunities by going with the Gospel. Every Christian needs to be involved in praying, giving and going.

2. Christ preached to the lost (Vs. 35b)
 - a. The preaching of the Gospel for the winning of the souls of men was the central focus of Christ's earthly ministry. Christ faithfully preached the Gospel in the cities and villages (Matt. 9:35)
 - b. Christ was a preacher of the Gospel before he was a healer of the sick and a feeder of the hungry.
 - c. Sadly, much that passes under the banner of "missions" today is humanitarian only. It ministers to people's bodies but does not address the need of their eternal souls.
3. Christ transformed the lost (Vs. 35c)
 - a. The emphasis on 'every' in the verse is touching. There was no sickness or disease that Christ could not heal. We see this truth demonstrated in the previous verses where Christ heals two blind men (Vs. 27-31) and a dumb man possessed with a devil (Vs. 32-33).
 - b. Christ can still heal sin sick souls, no matter what the case may be. There is no sin Christ's power can't cure in your life if you will let Him.

B. His Love for the People (Vs. 36)

Christ was moved by...

1. The Sight of the People (36a)
 - a. The word 'saw' means to perceive or discern with the eyes. The Greek word is most frequently translated 'know' in the N.T. (282 times according to Strong's concordance). So, it refers to more than just a casual glance. This was a knowing, discerning, loving look. Jeremiah wrote in Lamentations 3:51 "Mine eye affecteth mine heart..."
 - b. Remember, this seeing of the multitudes is in the context of Christ being actively involved in seeking to reach the multitudes (Vs. 35). The best way to get a burden for the lost is to involve yourself in soul-winning efforts.
 - c. Christ exhorted the disciples, "**Lift up your eyes and look** on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." (Jn. 4:35) We need to open our eyes and look!
 - d. The phrase "moved with compassion" means to feel pity or sympathy. It is a very strong word in the Greek language. The root word referred to the intestines (heart, lungs, liver etc...). and is translated 'bowels' elsewhere. The reference is to the seat of the affections. It means that Christ felt pity and sorrow for the multitudes in His heart, He yearned inside.

- e. Christ's example of compassion for sinners: Matt. 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34; Mark 1:41, 5:19, 6:34, 8:2; Luke 7:13 (9 references in Gospels).
 - f. 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, **not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.**"
 - g. 1 Timothy 2:4 "Who will have **all men to be saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."
 - h. 1 John 2:2 "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and **not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.**"
 - i. 2 Corinthians 5:14 "**For the love of Christ constraineth us;** because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:"
 - j. Illustrations:
 - i. Moses (O.T.): Exodus 32:31-32 "And Moses returned unto the LORD and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them idols of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin –; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."
 - ii. The Apostle Paul (N.T.): Romans 9:1-3 "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:"
2. The Plight of the People (36b)
 It was the spiritual plight and misery of the people that so powerfully moved our Lord's heart with compassion.
- a. They were **Weak** – "because they fainted". Sin weakens rather than strengthens. Romans 5:6 "For when we were **yet without strength**, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Do you see the lost weighed down and fainting under the terrible load of their sin?
 - b. They were **Wounded** – "and were scattered abroad". The Greek word means "to cast, throw, thrown down to the ground". Sin brings sorrow, scarring and senselessness to the life. As sheep, they had been mishandled and were lying helpless.
 - c. They were **Wandering** – "sheep having no Shepherd". The picture is that of lost sheep (Is. 54:6; Lk. 19:10). It's not that there weren't people in Israel who claimed to be shepherds. The religious leaders claimed to be the shepherds of the people but they were false shepherds and "blind leaders of the blind" (Matt. 15:14). The picture of wandering sheep conveys:

- i. No Direction – The bulk of humanity go through life not really knowing the answer to the questions, “Why am I here?” or “Where am I going?” or “What is the purpose of life?”
- ii. No Protection – Sheep are some of the most vulnerable creatures, especially in the absence of a Shepherd. Those who claimed to be Shepherds of Israel were actually imposters, corrupt men who laid heavy burdens upon the people. With no true Shepherd to care for them, they would make easy pickings for Satan the destroyer.
- d. Song: Let me see this world dear Lord as though I were looking through your eyes...for if once I could see this world the way you see I just know I'd serve you more faithfully.

II. A VISION OF THE HARVEST (VS. 37; JOHN 4:35)

We need to get a vision for:

A. The Vastness of the Harvest Field (37a)

1. The Description of its Size
 - a. It is ‘**plenteous**’ (Matt. 9:37).
 - b. It is ‘**great**’ (Luke 10:2).
 - c. It is “**the world**”. Jesus said, “The field is **the world**...” In John 4:35 Christ exhorted his disciples to lift up their eyes and “look on the **fields**” (Note ‘fields’ plural).
 - i. We need to get a vision for the local field where God has placed our church. Remember. Missions begins at home – “beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk. 24:47). Adelaide needs the Gospel! South Australia needs the Gospel! Our nation of Australia needs the Gospel!¹
 - ii. We need to get a vision for the mission fields of the world and pray, give and even go as God calls.
2. The Demonstration of its Size
 - a. China – 1.3 billion
 - b. India – 1.2 billion
 - c. Africa – 1.2 billion
 - d. North America – 579 million.
 - e. South America – 422 million
 - f. Middle East – 411 million.
 - g. Russia – 143.4 million
 - h. The current population of the world is over 8 billion and the church has been commanded to preach the Gospel to “every creature”. We haven’t even come close to fulfilling that command!

¹ Australia has a current population of over 26 million.

- i. Someone estimated that if you put every lost person in a single line, it would circle the globe 6 times.
- 3. The Deaths illustrating its Size (approx. figures)
According to the world death clock, on average there are:
 - a. 56 million deaths per year.
 - b. 4.6 million deaths per month.
 - c. 153, 424 deaths per day.
 - d. 6, 392 deaths per hour.
 - e. 106 deaths per minute.
 - f. 1.8 deaths per second.
 - g. Hundreds pass into eternity in our country of Australia each day.

B. The Ripeness of the Harvest Field (John 4:35-36)

- 1. Jesus Christ said the harvest fields are “white already to harvest” (John 4:35). There are souls ready to be harvested for Christ right now in the mission fields of the world!
- 2. There are eternal rewards for being a part of this ministry of sowing and reaping – “And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.” (Jn. 4:36)

C. The Scarceness in the Harvest Field (37b)

- 1. The problem is not a harvest problem but a labour problem – “the labourers are few”! There is a heart-breaking labour shortage for the work of the Gospel. Matthew Henry said, we have “**loiterers many, but labourers few.**”
- 2. Simple mathematics! If 4 teams go soul-winning on a Sat and speak to 5 people for the Gospel, that’s 20 people impacted with the Gospel message. If 8 teams went, that would be 40. If 3 people letterbox approx. 100 tracts each, that’s 300 tracts. If 10 people go that’s 1,000! The lack is not in the harvest field!
- 3. Romans 10:14 “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? **and how shall they hear without a preacher?**”
- 4. Much of the mission work that does exist in our day is humanitarian in nature and leaves the Gospel out! Many Christian mission organizations go to great lengths to care for the bodies of the poor but do little to nothing for their eternal souls.

III. A SUPPLICATION FOR THE HARVEST (VS. 38)

A. The Problem motivating Prayer (38a)

- 1. ‘pray’ = comes from the Greek word ‘deomia’ meaning “to beg, make petition”. It is in the aorist tense which gives the command a sense of urgency. Our prayers for the harvest field need to be earnest and passionate.

2. 'therefore' = The ripeness of the harvest field and the heart-breaking lack of reapers should drive us to fervent prayer!
3. No doubt the lack of laborers for the harvest field is connected to the prayerlessness of the churches. The lack of laborers shouldn't surprise us considering the prevailing attitude amongst believers to the church prayer meetings.

B. The Person to whom we pray (38b)

1. When faced with the great need of the harvest field, we resort to the only one who has the power and resources to meet the need. God has ordained that prayer play an important part in the work of world missions.
2. Christ is the ruler and owner of the harvest field – “pray ye the Lord of the harvest”. It is His work; He is the Director of world missions! Christ is building His church and we have the privilege of labouring for Him and with Him.

C. The Point of the prayer (38c)

1. “send forth” = strong word. Means to “cast out” or thrust forth.
2. 'laborers' = not just full-time pastors and missionaries! Every Christian can be a worker in Christ's harvest field. Every believer should be doing SOMETHING for the Harvest field. We need:
 - a. Believers who will reach out to their home mission field (soul-winning).
 - b. Believers who will give generously to the work of missions.
 - c. Believers who will join the local church team and strengthen the home base so that more can be done for missions. Every Gospel preacher needs a strong team of workers to help keep him at his post.

D. The Performance following the prayer

1. If soul-winning and missions is made a top priority in our prayers, then we will be more likely to make it a top priority in our schedules. **If you pray “Lord send labourers” you need to also pray “here am I send me” (Isaiah 6:8).**
5. A passion for souls is born in the place of prayer. The closer we draw to God, the more we will learn that soul-winning and missions is the heart beat of God. Example: Isaiah 6:8 “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, **Here am I; send me.**”
2. We need to put legs to our prayers and go! We are commanded both to **“pray ye”** and **“go ye”** (Mark 16:15)
3. Never underrate and underestimate the importance of the part you play in the work of God, small and insignificant though it may seem on the surface.

Conclusion:

1. Who will surrender to the call of God today?
2. Who will join the soul-winning efforts of the church?
3. Who will by faith, increase their mission giving?
4. Who will join the local church team?
5. Who will pray, give and go!?