

The Messiah's Mission: Pray for Harvest Laborers

Matthew 9:35-38

MPS Jesus calls Christ-followers to engage His Kingdom mission by praying for more harvest laborers.

OBJ Every Christ-follower should engage Jesus' Kingdom mission because of two recognitions and by one earnest prayer.

INTRO At the start of 2021, I made a commitment to pray about the things that weighed heaviest on my heart and mind MORE THAN I would speak of or talk about them. I vowed to close my mouth and silence the tongue in favor of opening the window of prayer. I wish I could tell you I've done a really good job of this. However, when I have practiced this, and I have in some very particular situations, I have experienced greater peace from God, joy in the Lord, points of harmony and encouragement in the relationships of my life, and I have observed Godward movement in the situations for which I have prayed. I do not believe that God is changing everything the way I pray or want it to change. In obedience, I aim to make my opinion as clear as I know before the Lord because He commands us to make our requests known and cast all our cares on Him.^{1Peter5:7} But I must confess: far too often there are things I would prefer to just rant over and give vent to my spirit, then blame on others when it doesn't turn out the way I think it should have. But like an exhaust pipe on an engine, the only thing that venting one's spirit produces is toxic fumes that harm and hurt others as the activity of a fool.^{Prov29:11} I want to add more life to the world, not more toxicity. I am learning that the healthiest and most beneficial way to "exhaust the zeal of my spirit", that serves the Lord's harvest, is to use my zeal to super-charge the earnestness of my prayers for His Kingdom harvest.

TRANS **Do you believe prayer works?** Now understand, I am not heralding the value of prayer as some generic activity that anyone can practice with equal outcome. No, absolutely not. Prayer is only as effective as the One to whom you pray. **But in praying according to God's Word and by His Spirit, are you convinced of the power of prayer such that you are moved to pray, more, more effectively and fervently, and with greater faithfulness?** I hope today helps and encourages us in this.

READ Matthew 9:35-38

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. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Matthew 9:35-38

Matthew uses these verses to form a literary refrain in his gospel to introduce Jesus' ministry.

ILLUS A refrain is the part of a song, typically a short line, regularly repeated that culminates the song's message. Longer and more expansive than the chorus, a refrain may be part of the chorus or separate but serves as the most concise statement of the song's whole message. We can see this in the songs we sing. Many are titled by their refrain. **Exercise** Help me here with this one. "Hallelujah, highest praise, Name above all other names, through earth and heaven, let it resound; He bore a cross, now He wears a crown. Lifted to the highest place, name above all other names, through earth and heaven let it resound, He bore a cross, now He wears a crown."

Matthew's first refrain, 4:23, emphasizes Jesus' authority by introducing Jesus' ministry and recording the people's response.(7:28-29) This second refrain emphasizes Jesus calling and sending His followers to engage the labor of His Kingdom mission. **What does Matthew declare in His refrain?** Jesus holds sufficient authority and power to address people's problem, but more laborers are needed to address the greatness of the harvest.

Jesus calls Christ-followers to engage His Kingdom mission by praying for more harvest laborers.

OBJ Two Recognitions and one prayer compel Christ-followers to engage Jesus' Kingdom mission:

TRANS First, Matthew heralds the refrain of an all-sufficient Savior.

Recognition 1: An all-sufficient Savior: the grace and truth of God has come in all authority and power.



The central message of Matthew's gospel is this; God has come in the glory of grace and truth as an all-sufficient Savior. This is what Matthew means by his title of "Messiah" for Jesus.

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. Matt 9:35

Matthew provides an all-encompassing snapshot of Jesus' ministry that exhorts us to recognize His all-sufficiency in everything that He encountered. I want to point out three profound aspects. **First, Jesus went to the people.** People don't stumble on God. God is the One who pursues; He seeks out people to save! Were it not for God coming to us we would not because we could not find Him. [Recognize this first and foremost; that any and every time you encounter God it is always and only because He is pursuing you.](#)

Second, Jesus marked His ministry by teaching truth and proclaiming God's grace. Jesus' teaching is distinctively marked by God's law, which He Himself stated He came to fulfill, not to abolish.^{Matt5:17} But Jesus' teaching is never cold, ruthless condemnation heaped upon people. Rather, He calls us to repentance for where we have broken God's law and to trust in Him.^{Matt4:17} This is truth and grace, teaching that raises God's law to identify sin, our helpless state in sin, and preaching that declares the One who has come to save, Jesus Christ. [You always miss Jesus and are left with dead religion when truth and grace are absent of each other.](#)

Third, Jesus is revealed as fully sufficient and always willing to minister to everyone He encountered. Let this sink in; Jesus never encountered any situation that He could not fully satisfy. Nothing overwhelmed Him, made Him anxious, or left him speechless. [Matthew marks Jesus' ministry by His willingness to meet and minister to people in any condition.](#)

The work of God to bring forgiveness and cleansing for sin in people's lives cannot be done by anyone other than Jesus! [The Kingdom of God is advanced ONLY by Jesus' authority and power, not man's ability, ingenuity, or accomplishment.](#)

TRANS Jesus' sovereign authority and power is contrasted against the harassed and helpless state of people.

Recognition 2: An Insurmountable problem: people hopelessly condemned and helplessly enslaved.

³⁶*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Matt 9:36*

Matthew uses two words to describe people, harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Without a shepherd, sheep may not harm themselves, but they do put themselves into harm's way, ignorant of their vulnerability. "Harassed" means annoyed and troubled by something within, but without knowing what it was or being fully aware of it. The sense is one of being grievously affected and torn apart by what is harassing. When coupled with "helpless" it means that though being torn apart, they could not do anything about it. Matthew paints a succinct and accurate picture of people in sin's condemnation. [Sin destroys from within and leaves us helpless to do anything about it in our strength or ability, even when we are aware of it.](#)

APPL "Harassed and helpless" is such an accurate and easily observable description of society today. Almost two decades ago we were talking about the dangers of Moral Therapeutic Deism, the belief that God wants us to do good and that He exists to make me feel good. But it seems that over the last decade we've become so frustrated with our lack of moral gain we finally said, "Forget it." Now, we have entered a time when we've dismissed the value of morality, thrown off all moral restraint, and taken to deconstructing our faith to remove the validity and reality of God, or our acknowledgement of Him, so that we are only left with "Therapeutic Me-ism". ["What is 'Therapeutic Me-ism'?"](#), you ask. A term I just made up to identify this prevailing ideology of what most describes us today, that is determined by what makes me feel good. Or, to put in contemporary labels, whatever I need to do to quell my anxiety must be not only accepted, but championed by all others, or else they are bullying, victimizing, and traumatizing me. This is nothing new, for sure, merely the next mutation of sin's dark deception. [All the therapy in the cosmos will not work out sin's guilt and shame without Jesus.](#)

[Do you know what "harassed and helpless" is labeled today? Anxiety. Anxiety that plagues our world today, THE leading mental health issue of this generation, IS a manifestation of sin's harassment.](#) I'm not reducing or dismissing



the significance of it, nor am I saying that one should not seek therapy or help for it. Though we know it, yet do not want to admit it, much of it is self-induced by a source that we recognize but don't want to deal with, social media. But social media is merely a conduit, not the true source, that merely stirs up materialism, greed, envy, jealousy, lust and every other sinful evil as listed in the Bible. Hence, we justify it for the good it provides while being ruled by the harassment it brings.

Matthew's account tells us; all the therapy in the world will not remove sin's tearing apart of our lives.

And what does Matthew say was Jesus' response to the people? Compassion. The love that sent Jesus produced compassion for the people when He saw the crowd. I am all too familiar with a "loveless" response; "you got what you deserve", "play stupid games, win stupid prizes", "you did it to yourself", or some other love-absent rationale. When love for God does not compel you, compassion for people will not move you beyond what you understand or can or want to do. When love for God compels you, you will sacrifice to labor until the true need of people meets the authority and power of God in Jesus Christ to forgive and cleanse from all sin. **Matthew culminates the whole message of his gospel in this refrain; the One who is all-sufficient in sovereign authority and power stands ready to meet and minister to those harassed and helpless in sin.**

TRANS This MUST move you, Christian, to know the One who is Help for the harassed, Truth for the deceived and grace for the condemned, IS hope for the hopeless! And so, Jesus addresses his disciples.

One Prayer: An Earnest Intercession; "Lord, send more laborers to the great harvest."

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

³⁸therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." **Matt 9:37-38**

There is a labor crisis in Kingdom work. Jesus reflects on the situation by saying that the number of laborers for the harvest are disproportionate to the readiness that the harvest demands. He's not overwhelmed by the demand of the need, but states that the "harvest is ready". Great sin and crowds of sinners, great deception and darkness, great confusion and chaos in the world did not cause Jesus to get discouraged or believe the situation was hopeless. Rather, it moved Him to action because of what He knew, (vs35-36). He instructs His disciples to pray for more harvest laborers. **Jesus IS the ANSWER, but He's not the ONLY messenger; He calls his followers to engage His Kingdom mission by recognizing this great disparity and interceding for the Lord to send more laborers.**

So with this before us, what must we do? PRAY. Yes, Jesus doesn't say, "go do" or "go tell", but first He says, "PRAY to the Lord of the Harvest"! **Prayer is our catalyst NOT only to stir God's heart or address the needs of others, but to move us to seek the Lord to move in us.** We pray first because when we work, we accomplish what we can do. If we go to work first, we will do some good to address people's need, from our perspective and in our strength, but miss His good. When we pray first, we recognize what God can and wants to do; God reveals how He wants to address people by moving in His people. **We pray first because the Lord who saves is the Lord who sends His people as the harvest laborers.**

Prayer is not the culmination of our serving, but the priority of it. Prayer must precede our activity; it must receive our first energy, our highest urgency, our greatest earnestness, our deepest conviction and our maximum engagement. **From beginning to end, prayer is our first labor of love, our first move of mission.**

When you know the Savior who is all-sufficient, and see people's true need that is insurmountable, you will heed Jesus' call to engage the mission and pray for the Lord to send more laborers.

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CLOSE The readiness of the harvest means God is working! **Will you seek the Lord of the Harvest to send laborers?**

