**The Harvest Is Plentiful; The Workers Are Few**

October 14, 2018

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.’”

Jesus’ ministry can be summarized with 3 key words: teaching, preaching and healing. He went through all the towns and villages. While doing his work, he saw the crowds who were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus had compassion on them. The word, “Compassion” means, literally, to be moved in one’s stomach with pity. Do you remember the last time you felt real strong pity? Two weeks ago in Chicago, I talked to a missionary whose son ran away 10 years ago. He has not heard from him since. His son ran away because of shame of failure in school. I saw the great pain as he told me the story. I was moved to tears because of his pain. I also remember my older brother who ran away due to bankruptcy. The world is full of broken people. When Jesus saw the suffering crowds, his heart went out to them. 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. Jesus felt their pain and suffering. So he wanted to bring them to the kingdom of God and he worked diligently. But he could not do it alone because, as a man he was limited in time and space. There were too many helpless people. Jesus needed workers to share his work. Jesus said to his disciples in verse 37, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.” 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. Today Jesus is looking for harvest workers. Who will respond to his calling?

Look at verse 37 again. “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.’” The metaphor changes. Unbelievers are not only like sheep who are in trouble. They are also like wheat that can be harvested. There is not only neediness. There is potential salvation. Just as we need the eyes of Christ to see the lostness of people and the compassion of Christ to feel pity for people, we need also Jesus’ hope that anticipates harvest time. Do you look upon your neighbors and colleagues and classmates with the lively sense that here is a potential saint? It has probably been so long since the Lord has used most of us to lead a person from unbelief to faith, that we really wonder if there is any potential left. Could it ever be harvest time in my life after so many years of fruitlessness? The answer to that question is a resounding Yes!

When Jesus said that it is hard for rich people to enter the kingdom, the disciples responded, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus seemed to take away all potential for harvest. But actually, what he was doing was laying a new basis for potential. He answers, “What is impossible with men is possible with God” (Luke 18:24–27). If there is going to be harvest time in Toronto, it will not be because there are so many competent preachers. The harvest we want is impossible with men. New birth is a miracle. God will do the impossible through failures like us. That is the way it has happened in history, and that is how it will happen again. In God’s time, he will perform the miracle of harvest, and it will be marvelous in our eyes. “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and (then!) you shall be my witnesses (harvesters!).”

Is the harvest still plentiful? Are many people ready to accept the good news of the kingdom of heaven? University of Toronto at St. George campus has 60,000 students. About 4% of them attend weekly Christian fellowship. That means that 96% or over 55,000 of them do not attend Christian fellowship. The harvest is plentiful at the University of Toronto. Jesus also said, “...but the workers are few.” Even among those who attend Christian worship services, there are few committed Christians, and many more nominal Christians or non-Christians. Nominal 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. So 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 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, and 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 God’s time.

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, etc. Jesus also wants us to pray and labor for gospel-needy areas in our community, nation, and the world. One of our UBF church prayer topics is 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 such as North Korea. 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. Active workers 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.

Jesus saw the world in need of harvesters and shepherds. He encouraged his followers to pray for workers to be sent out. But Jesus did not just pray for this. He also did something practical: 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? Look at verse 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.”

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; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. 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 following Jesus full time. We are also called to follow Jesus 24/7, not part time. When we look at the disciples, they were not chosen because they had great faith. They were often rebuked, “You of little faith.” But they responded to Jesus’ calling, and they were people with humble hearts and learning minds.

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: students, bankers, factory workers, office workers, doctors and nurses, lawyers, teachers, 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.

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.’” First we must note that Jesus is the sender and his disciples are sent by him. Disciples are envoys of Jesus. Paul calls Christians “ambassadors of Christ” (2 Cor 5:20). God wants to use us to make his appeal to the lost. In this first fieldwork training, Jesus specifically said that they should go to the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus even makes the point that they should not go to the Gentiles or to the Samaritans. After Jesus was raised from the dead, Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.” But at this time he limited their work to the lost sheep of Israel. Why? It was to follow God’s world salvation plan: “first for the Jew and then for the Gentile” (Rom 1:16). God’s servants must follow God’s plan, not their own plan. Moreover, the disciples were not ready for cross-cultural ministry; they needed to learn how to serve lost sheep in Israel first. They were those who the disciples can approach without any preparation such as learning different languages or cultural barrier of eating pork chops. To us, they are like family and friends, classmates. They are always around us and come in contact with us. The disciples were also among the old friends a short time ago. Now they were called by Jesus and became citizens of the kingdom of God. Now Jesus is sending them back to the old world as ambassadors of Christ.

Look at verse 7. “As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’” “The kingdom of heaven” is one of the main themes in Matthew’s gospel, in which it appears 32 times. The kingdom is not a geographical location; it is wherever God reigns. When people accept God as their King, the kingdom of heaven comes to them. People’s root problem is that they abandoned God and his mission. They have lost direction, and been overwhelmed by sinful desires, the power of death, and evil spirits. They have no peace. Rather, driven by greed, envy, and selfish ambition, they suffer from contention and strife. Losing the kingdom of heaven is not a small matter. It is the root cause of all the miseries and troubles of mankind. The kingdom cannot be restored by man. Only Jesus, the King can restore the kingdom of heaven to us. So the message, “the kingdom of heaven has come near,” should be proclaimed clearly to bring freedom to those bound by darkness. To do so more effectively, it should be accompanied by service for those in need. Look at verse 8a. “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.” At that time there were so many people who were suffering from diseases, the power of death, guilty consciences, and demons. The same problems exist in our times. Human culture and technology have advanced in many ways, but the fundamental problems of mankind remain the same. People are still suffering from all kinds of diseases: cancer, AIDS, heart disease, and others. They also suffer from the elements of death, guilty consciences, mental illnesses, depression, and so on. That is why psychiatrists and psychologists are popular and make a lot of money.

Many college students look fine outwardly but inwardly they suffer from guilt, loneliness, meaninglessness, fatalism, and fear. They are harassed by school study and worries. Jesus wants to reach and heal them. The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Let’s respond to Jesus’ calling to be his harvest workers.