

PRAY FOR MORE WORKERS

What is needed is not more harvest but more laborers. For too long, we have said, “*The Church doors are open, why don’t the people come?*” Instead, we should realize that we have to go and make disciples as Christ commissions us at the end of the book of Matthew (cf. Mt. 28:18-20). It doesn’t just happen in a vacuum!

Matthew 9:36 (NKJV)

36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.

The idea of compassion is that of deep empathy that cares deeply. It feels sympathy with great emotion. He saw them as weary and scattered, which is better translated as “distressed and downcast”. He saw them in spiritual misery.

Weary (Gk. Skullo) means “distressed, harassed, severely troubled”.

Scattered (Gk. Rhipito) means “downcast, thrown down utterly helpless”.

But the qualifier “**like sheep having no shepherd**” explains the root problem behind their miserable condition (cf. Num. 27:17). People need shepherding; they need spiritual care. “*Sheep are neither strong, nor smart, nor swift.*” (John Phillips). They tend to go astray and get lost (cf. Isa. 53:6). “*Not possessing fangs, claws, or powerful muscles, they have no weapon for self-defense and need a shepherd for protection.*” (Ed Glasscock)

These people, with their hypocritical, legalistic, proud, self-oriented, religious leaders, had no real shepherding care, and they were distressed and downcast because of it. In chapter 10:6, Jesus calls them “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Many commentators think Jesus may well have had Ezekiel 34 in mind as He said this.

Ezekiel 34:1–6 (NKJV)

1 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

2 “Son of man, prophecy against the shepherds of Israel, prophecy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?”

3 You eat the fat and clothe **yourselves** with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock.

4 The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but **with force and cruelty you have ruled them.**

5 So they were **scattered because there was no shepherd**; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered.

6 My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and **no one was seeking or searching for them.**"

So, what does God say He will do to remedy this situation?

Ezekiel 34:11 (NKJV)

11 'For thus says the Lord GOD: "Indeed **I Myself** will search for My sheep and seek them out.

God in effect says He Himself will come in the person of the Messiah to provide the shepherding care that is needed. Indeed, Jesus came as the good shepherd Who laid down His life for the sheep (Jn. 10). In the Bible Jesus is called "the good shepherd" (Ps. 22; Jn. 10:11); "the great shepherd" (Ps. 23, Heb. 13:20); and "the chief shepherd" (Ps. 24, 1 Pet. 5:4). Christ's shepherding ministry will come to a climax in the kingdom.

Isaiah 40:11 (NKJV)

11 **He will feed His flock like a shepherd**; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.

Micah 5:4 (NKJV)

4 And He shall stand and **feed His flock** In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; And they shall abide, For now He shall be great To the ends of the earth;

Jesus Himself is the ultimate shepherd Who ultimately will tend to His flock in the coming kingdom. But in the meantime, God's program calls for using people to help Him in the work of bringing people to faith so they, too, can have a place in the kingdom. God could just supernaturally do anything and everything without the help of anyone. And indeed, even though God uses human instruments to carry out His plan, all the glory goes to God alone.

But the point is, God wants to use people in the process of bringing in the harvest of souls. This is His plan and mode of operation. He uses people, and He uses prayer! He uses people who pray.

Matthew 9:37 (NKJV)

37 Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

Jesus here changes metaphors from that of “sheep” to that of “harvest”. People are like sheep gone astray, and they need to be brought in like a ripe harvest. Workers are needed. Indeed, Christ said, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.”

There is no end to the work. The harvest is plenteous! I am evangelistically seeking to make disciples, and so are many of you. There is no end to this work. The harvest is plentiful – what is needed is more workers.

They say that 90 percent of the work in the Church is done by 10 percent of the people. Of course we would like to think our church is an exception, but it is true that a minority often does the majority of the work. And no one can do everything. We need more laborers, and ministry is labor! It is work! It's easy to become a spectator – but God never intended Christianity to be a “spectator sport”. And frankly, there are a lot of “spectator Christians”. How in the world do we expect to hear the Lord say, “well done” if it wasn't done? Become a worker in the harvest! We need you!

Someone has defined a football game as 22 men on the field desperately in need of **rest**, and thousands of people in the stands desperately in need of exercise!

Sadly, that often describes the condition of the Church. Consistently, we have situations where the harvest of ministry is great, but we lack workers.

So what should we do about it? Gripe, complain, develop a critical spirit? No, Jesus said...

Matthew 9:38 (NKJV)

38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

Jesus told His disciples to PRAY to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers. We need to pray about this! That is the first thing to do. Before doing anything pray about it.

“Perhaps one of the difficulties in motivating people to the mission fields is our dependence on human inspiration rather than divine. Sincere prayer will be more effective than professional recruiting.”

– **Ed Glasscock**

Many OT texts present YHWH as the Master of the harvest at the end of the day (cf. Isa. 18:4-5; 27:12; Hos. 6:11; Joel 3:13; Matt. 3:12). The Lord of the harvest here, I believe, refers to Jesus. In the flow of thought, chapter 10 goes on to show how Jesus sent out the 12 (cf. Mt. 10:1-6).

And note that often we ourselves become the answer to our prayer. Here in chapter 9, the disciples were told to pray about the needed laborers, and then in chapter 10, they are sent out. Thus, they became the answer to their own prayers.

Perhaps we have too few laborers because we have too few prayers! Jesus connects the provision of laborers to the activity of prayer. God works through prayer! The harvest is plenteous! We just need more workers. And how do we get them? It happens through prayer!

"You can do more than pray
after you have prayed, but you cannot do
more than pray until you have prayed."

- **John Wesley**