

HARVEST TIME
Matthew 9:27-38

Intro: This passage gives us a glimpse into the busy life of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you would read through this chapter, you would see how the Lord seems to have moved from one needy person to another, or from one group to another. He healed the palsied man. He called Matthew, and later went to his home for a dinner with publicans and sinners. He always faced opposition and criticism, mostly from the men you would have thought would have welcomed Him. He went to raise Jairus' daughter (although Matthew does not give us the full account), and in going healed the woman with the issue of blood. Then He gave sight to two blind men, and finally cast out a demon from a man who could not speak.

The Lord was very busy, and the years of His public ministry were spent like this. People flocked to Him because He was able to meet their physical needs, but the Lord was always conscious that they had greater needs which were spiritual. And so in verse 35 of our text we see Matthew's summary of what the Lord was doing in every place, but which was not always mentioned. (Read.)

The Lord's primary ministry was not healing, but teaching. He met the physical needs of people by the thousands, but His main ministry was teaching the Word of God to them, pointing out their sins, and showing them the way of salvation.

One surprising thing about the Lord's ministry was that He was opposed by the very men who should have had the greatest delight in what He was doing. Cf. v. 34. Evidence of this is found throughout the four Gospels. We see that it was the scribes, Pharisees, elders, and so on, who opposed the Lord, and who went so far as to say that He was casting out demons by the prince of the demons, who was, of course, Satan. So they were blaspheming the name of the Lord, making out that He was an evil worker and not a servant of the living God.

At this point in Matthew's record he mentioned what the Lord saw when He looked at the multitudes, a sight which was far different from that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Let me begin there with verse 36 by pointing out:

I. WHAT THE LORD SAW WHEN HE LOOKED AT THE PEOPLE (Matt. 9:36).

We are told, first of all, how He felt when He saw the multitudes of people. He was "moved with compassion." This means that He was stirred to the depth of His being. It caused Him

to yearn over them. He had pity on them, and felt deep sympathy for them. Cf. 14:14. He saw them, and wanted to meet their need.

I think that we can say without fear of contradiction that what the Lord saw not only had to do with their physical condition, but even more, with their spiritual condition.

"They fainted." This means that there was very little joy manifested among them. They were burdened down with life, weary. Many of them were despondent.

But what made matters even worse was that they "were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." The Lord did not say that they had scattered themselves, but that they had been deliberately and quickly thrown away by those who should have been pre-eminently concerned about their care. The Pharisees and scribes were ever present, but their concern was not for the spiritual needs of the people of Israel.

Sheep without a shepherd have no guidance. They have no protection. They have no one to feed and care for them. It was not as though the people had a few shepherds; the Lord said that they had none!

It does not take very much reading in the Gospels by way of comparison with the OT in order to see that there had been many changes in the work of the Lord from Moses' day to our Lord's day. The leaders had imposed regulations on the people which were not known in OT times. Instead of being the way the Lord had planned it, the work of the Lord had become what men wanted to make it. When you look at the work of the Lord today in the light of Holy Scripture you can see that the same thing has happened in our day. There is no Scriptural basis for most of what is going on in churches today. The church has become what men think it ought to be and not how God ordained that it should be.

Now, since the Lord said that the people were like "sheep having no shepherd," we must assume that the Lord was saying that there were men in the ministry in those days who had no business being in the ministry. They were not there because they had been called by God; they were there because it was a good way to make a living and it gave them great power over the people, but they did not see what the Lord saw when they looked at the people.

What is the only conclusion that we can come to about those religious leaders? We can say (using language that we would use today) that there were men in the ministry who had no business being in the ministry because they had not been

called by God to do the work that they were doing. The Lord spoke in verses 37 and 38 about the need for "labourers," workers. But, using this same word, Paul spoke in 2 Cor. 11:14 about "deceitful workers," and he wrote in Phil. 3:2 about "evil workers." One problem that the Lord's work always has had has been men in the ministry who do not belong, men who have never had the call of God upon them.

So this is what the Lord saw, and this is how the Lord felt. It ought to make each one of us ask if we see people as the Lord saw them because they are the same way today.

This brings us to the last two verses of the chapter, and they give to us:

II. THE DIVINE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM (Matt. 9:37, 38).

We live in a generation of people where many claims are made as to the solution of problems. You can hear people making suggestions every day. You hear solutions in the field of international affairs. You hear solutions for local problems. Counsellors are busy every day giving out solutions to family problems—problems that husbands and wives have with each other, or problems that parents are having with their children, or problems that individuals have with themselves. We have a President who thinks that he knows how he can solve our nation's problems, and yet while he is working on health care and re-inventing government, he is opening the door to sins which inevitably will bring greater judgment upon us from Almighty God! It doesn't take a great deal of wisdom to have some suggested solutions, but right answers are very hard to find in these days.

What did the Lord have to say?

A. "The harvest truly is plenteous."

The thought moves here from sheep to a harvest. It would be easy for us to feel from reading the Gospels that people did not really want to listen to the Word of God, that they were not interested in salvation. But the Lord said that "the harvest truly is plenteous." This means that there were not only people out there who needed to be reached, but there were people out there who could be reached. There were people out there whom the Lord intended to save, many of them!

That can be said about any generation in any nation. There are people in our day, many of them, whom the Lord intends to save. They are people whom God has chosen, people for whom the Lord Jesus died, people who must be saved, and who will

be saved.

But the Lord did not speak like this was just going to happen regardless of what His people did. This is a good passage for us to know if we think that there is nothing for us to do as far as the harvest of souls is concerned.

What was the problem?

B. "The labourers are few."

From a human standpoint we here every year what this means to our Oregon farmers. If there are not laborers to harvest the crops, the crops will be lost. The Lord intended for us to learn a lesson from that. There was not a lack of people who claimed to be laborers working for the Lord, but there was a lack of the right kind of workers.

It was interesting to me to discover that this word "labourers" is the same word that Paul used in 2 Tim. 2:15 where it is translated, "a workman." But Paul was writing to Timothy about becoming a true, accurate, and faithful teacher of the Word of God. This was the kind of worker that was needed in our Lord's day, and this is the kind of worker that is needed in our day. How many ministers were there today who spent their time in the pulpit without saying anything about the Word of God? How many do you think there were who spent their time trying to prove that the Bible is not the Word of God? Or how many of them used the Bible, but distorted the teaching of Scripture?

But I am not thinking just of pastors. What about SS teachers, men and women, who profess to be teaching the Word of God. Would the Lord say today what He said in that day, the words which are recorded in verse 37? I think He would! There is much teaching, but not much teaching of the Word!

What is the solution?

C. "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest..."

This is not man's way, but it is God's way. If there are many claiming to do the work of the Lord who should not be in the work at all, how do we get the right ones.

Here we have a lot of suggestions being made also. But the Lord said that we need to pray.

Now think with me about this for a moment. This is the Lord Who was speaking. I could understand Paul writing like this, but it sounds rather strange coming from the Lord. We can

see that the Lord was aware of the need, and the Lord in His mighty power could have worked so that during His brief ministry He could have reached every person in Israel with the Gospel (or every person in the world), and you would have seen the greatest revival, the greatest spiritual awakening of all times. Instead, He said that we need to pray. And He told us the One to Whom we should pray, and He told us what our request should be.

When the Lord said that we are to pray, He was indicating that we are not to look to ourselves, or to our novel methods of reaching people, but we are to look to God. There has been much discussion about Who "the Lord of the harvest" is. I am inclined to think that this is a title for God. We are taught in Scripture to pray to God. It does not mean that we cannot pray to our Lord. Stephen did as he was dying. I don't object to people praying to the Holy Spirit. But normally we pray to God. We look to Him for the solution. We pray. We are to beseech the Lord to act.

What are we to pray?

We are to ask Him to "send forth labourers into his harvest." When the Lord's people are sent forth by the Lord, they have an entirely different attitude and different object from those who are sent forth by men, or who send themselves forth. The harvest is God's harvest, and it is for Him to determine where and how each one of us should serve Him. I do not think that the Word teaches that women should be pastors or elders in the church, but I do believe that women can be labourers in the harvest. You have many examples of women serving the Lord in Scripture. They may not be the leaders, but they are there and their work is important.

But the important thing is for us to realize that we need to call of God, the leading of God, in our lives. Many times we have to confess regarding prayer that we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but this is one request we all should be praying, that the Lord would call and send forth His laborers into the harvest. There is a great work to be done, but according to the Lord it all begins with prayer.

Concl: There is much about this that I do not understand.

It seems that the Lord could have done a much better job of getting the Word out if He had done it by Himself, or if He had at least employed angels. But we are so fickle and so frail. We are zealous one moment, and then we cool off. But the Lord says that we need to pray!

Is this a request that you bring to the Lord each day? It should be. We can be absolutely sure that we are praying

according to the will of God when we ask God to send forth laborers into His harvest. He is not asking us to meddle in people's lives, suggesting what we think they should do. We are to "pray the Lord of the harvest."

If we do the Lord's work in our way, we are going to be disappointed. But if we do the Lord's work in the Lord's way, we are going to see blessings which we never expected to see.

In Matthew 10 you will see that it begins with the calling of the twelve apostles. Luke (6:12) tells us that before the Lord called them, He did this:

And it came to pass in those days,
that he went out into a mountain to pray,
and continued all night in prayer to God.

May the Lord help us to take the Lord at His Word, and seek to put first things first. With the Lord the worker is always the key to the work. When we believe this, we will see why it is so important for us to pray.