

## Prayer 6 — Prayer and Mission

Sermon File Type	Sermon
Passages	Matthew 9:38
Sermon Series	Prayer
Topics	Prayer; Missions
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### Introduction (Connection):

[Invite to end of Matthew 9]

What an incredible gathering we had last week with getting to baptize Ashley and Jayson.

We posted their video stories on facebook and they've reached up to 2,500 people in one week... 2,500 people hearing the gospel clearly preached in each of their stories and visibly portrayed in their baptisms.

Praise God for what he's allowing us to do.

### Tension:

We're still moving on in our sermon series on Prayer, and today we're going to talk about prayer and mission work together, but let's cover where we've been so far.

We started out with the idea that if we want to be near God, to experience his presence in close proximity to him, prayer the chief expression of that longing.

Then we looked at how praying in Jesus' name isn't just a magical juju phrase we put on the end of our prayers to get what we want, but rather it is symbolic of God's great grace in Christ Jesus, that we wouldn't even be able to talk to him if it were not for Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Then we explored that the highest, most appropriate identity we can take on in prayer is one of a child talking with his or her Dad since we as believers have been adopted into God's family.

From there we went to something more practical and talked about how important it is to pray through God's promises and that, when you do, every time it will be answered yes because he's already said he would do it.

Then last week we took a few minutes to explore how helpful praying together in community can be for knowing God more deeply.

Now, today we're going to look at how vital prayer is to God accomplishing his mission to seek and save a lost world.

Here's the short of it: Missions won't be accomplished without people praying.

## **Exposition:**

Let me show you.

***Matthew 9:35-38*** — *"<sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;*

***38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”<sup>1</sup>***

Three main things we pull from this verse:

- 1) The State (of the Harvest)
- 2) The Need (of the Harvest)
- 3) The Response (to the Harvest)

## **The State of the Harvest**

After seeing so many people coming to him for healing and forgiveness like sheep without a shepherd, he looks to his disciples and says in v. 27...

*“The Harvest is plentiful...”*

This is like every farmer’s dream, right? An abundant harvest!

Remember how in John 4 when Jesus says, “Open your eyes and look at the fields, because they are ready for harvest.”<sup>2</sup>

This is the condition of the world around us, despite our doubts and skepticism.

The Lord of the harvest sees that the fields are teeming with an abundant harvest.

Current estimates show there are 7.67 billion people in the world today; of those, 3.19 billion of them have never heard the name of Jesus, and when you tell it to them they say, “I don’t know that man, go check the next village to see if he is there.”

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 9:35–38.

<sup>2</sup> [\*Christian Standard Bible\*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), Jn 4:35.

41% of the world is ripe and waiting to be harvested.

But there's a problem...

## The Need of the Harvest

Jesus says, "The laborers are few..."

### The Need: Laborers

This is every farmer's worst nightmare, right?

He's heading for a year of abundance but can't find enough workers to work the fields.

Right now, there are about 7,372 unreached people groups in the world today, meaning they don't have access to the gospel at all.<sup>3</sup>

There are currently 350,000 evangelical churches in America alone... that means there are 50 churches for just one people group... and yet we can't get anyone to go.<sup>4</sup>

The need is still as urgent today as it was 2,000 years ago with billions of people living and dying without the hope of the gospel and not enough people going to seek them out and give them the hope we have.

Friends, this is worse than cancer, and yes, despite the news, this is worse than the coronavirus too.

So what do we do?

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<sup>3</sup> <https://joshuaproject.net>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.abwe.org/blog/why-we-don't-send-more-missionaries>

## The Response to the Harvest

What does Jesus say we should do? **PRAY!!!**

***v. 38 — “therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”***

Because the harvest is so great and abundant and because the workers in the harvest are so few, we need to respond with desperate, urgent prayer.

The words “pray earnestly” here actually connote begging, like you’re on your knees, convinced of the urgent need, and crying out in desperation.

And in that desperation we’re to ask our heavenly Dad to send out laborers.

Oddly enough, the words “send out” don’t just mean add more, which is what Jesus definitely has in mind, but it also “refer to workers already in the field who ‘need to have a fire lit under them to thrust them out of their comforts into the world of need.’”<sup>5</sup>

So let’s summarize:

The State of the Harvest: Plentiful

The Need of the Harvest: Laborers (more or rekindled)

The Response to the Harvest: Pray

So let me ask you this...

Is there so many lost people around us and all over the world today and so many unreached people groups because we have a God who doesn’t keep his word and care about seeking and saving the lost?

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<sup>5</sup> F. D. Bruner, *The Christbook* (Waco: Word, 1987), 366, quoted in Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 167.

No... God always keeps his promises.

Then, according to this passage, why is there such a great need for more laborers working in the harvest?

Because we are a prayer-less people.

God wouldn't ask us to pray for him to send out laborers into the harvest if he wasn't going to do it when we asked.

So if there are so few laborers in the harvest and so many lost people, it is because we have failed to pray.

Friends, missions will not happen apart from prayer.

In fact, prayer is the work of missions.

John Piper wrote a book on missions called *Let the Nations Be Glad*, I strongly commend it to you, and all of chapter two is about the role of prayer in missions.

In that chapter he said this:

"God's goal to be glorified will not succeed without the powerful proclamation of the gospel. And that gospel will not be proclaimed in power to all the nations without the prevailing, earnest, faith-filled prayers of God's people. This is the awesome place of prayer in the purpose of God for the world. That purpose won't happen without prayer." — John Piper<sup>6</sup>

We must pray earnestly that God would raise up workers for the harvest.

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<sup>6</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 66.

I mean, can't you see how amazing it is that we can get God to send out people to work in the harvest fields of the world?

You can pray, "God, would you send out a laborer into this harvest field" and God's response will always be "Yes, I will."

Don't believe me? Look at what happens next in Chapter 10.

Jesus calls his 12 disciples to him, and then he equips, instructs, and sends them out into the harvest.

In Luke 10, Jesus equips, instructs, and sends out 72.

Jesus always responds to this request with a resounding "yes!"

We pray, Jesus sends... this has always been the pattern for missions, which we see happen all throughout the early church.

Acts 2 — The disciples are together praying, the Spirit falls, and they start preaching in different languages, Peter preaches, and 3,000 are saved.

Acts 4 — The disciples are threatened, they pray for boldness to preach, the building shakes, they're filled with the Spirit, and they go out preaching the Gospel with boldness in the face of persecution.

Acts 8 — Phillip is in Samaria witnessing and starting a movement of rapid kingdom expansion, he hears from the Lord to go South to a road where he meets the Ethiopian Eunuch who gets saved and then takes the gospel back to Africa.

Acts 10 — Peter is on a rooftop praying, he hears from God to go to Caesarea to preach the gospel to a Roman Centurion named Cornelius, one of the first non-Jews to get saved.

Acts 13 — The Church is worshiping and fasting, they hear from God that Paul and Barnabas were to be set apart for missions.

They pray and send them out, and they go to Cyprus and the whole proconsul believes, and then they go to Antioch, Paul preaches eventually to the whole city and the gospel starts to spread throughout the whole region out of that church plant.

Acts 16 — Paul hears from God in a vision that he needs to go to Macedonia and they meet Lydia who hears the gospel and believes.

Acts 20-21 — Paul gets this longing from God to go to Jerusalem to be a witness to the gospel there, even though the church doesn't want him to go, but he believes it is from God, so he goes, and he preaches the gospel before rulers and kings and high councils, and even eventually to Caesar.

God will answer your prayer when you ask him to send out laborers into the harvest.

Isn't that amazing?

At our prayer, God creates boldness in the soul of a sister in Christ to share her faith with her brother who is skeptical of the legitimacy of the life and works of Jesus.

At our prayer, God breaks the heart of one of his saints for his next door neighbor who is lost and doesn't know the Gospel.

At our prayer, God strengthens an indigenous pastor in India to trek for miles to an unreached village to preach the gospel and plant a church.

At our prayer, God empowers a martyr to stand before his persecutor and speak words of life and love with a gun to his face.

At our prayer, millions of people can be saved.

So where is our urgency?

Where is our persistence and determination in prayer over this?

Where is our begging?

God, give us a soul that begs for you to accomplish your mission in the world!

## **Application/Vision:**

Here's what I want to challenge you to start to do, and yes, the challenge has to do with prayer.

I want to challenge you to set an alarm on your phone or on your watch for 9:38 AM and 9:38 PM for Matthew 9:38, two alarms each day, and when each goes off, I want you to pray to God to send out laborers into the harvest.

I don't care if you're at work, I don't care if you're not supposed to have your phone.

It's just an alarm.

Turn it off and pray as you work. Twice a day. 9:38 AM and 9:38 PM.

I have been doing this for the last 7 months and let me show you what God has done.

There is a group of families that I know locally here who are unchurched and not saved, and it seems generational.

Two months ago I started seeing that group of families as a harvest field, and I started praying twice a day, "God, would you send out laborers into that harvest field?"

A week later, I had a meeting with a partner in our church and she told me that God had recently laid it on her heart to have a monthly breakfast with every wife in that group of families to get together to talk about God's word.

Two weeks after that, I got another call from another believer who attends here saying God has laid it on his heart to start a small group and invite a few of the couples in that same group of families.

I'm telling you, If you pray, Jesus will send.

Sometimes he may just send you.

## **Announcement:**

8 years ago my wife and I surrendered to the Lord our occupations and our locations... wherever he sent us we'd follow.

I love when the song 10 Billion Reasons says, "If the wind goes where you send it, so will I."

It's what lead us up here to the tribal people group of Beach Lake to work in the harvest here.

In those five years 35 people have given their lives to Christ, and 47 have been baptized.

The harvest has been and continues to be very plentiful here.

At the same time, we have continued to leave everything about our lives up to the Lord's leading.

We believe God is leading us to go work in another harvest field.

2.5 Months ago we were set on working in this harvest field here for many years.

But one call changed all of that.

A Free Methodist church in Virginia had their pastor leave his role there and after much prayer, the leadership of our conference believed I would fit really well for the pastoral needs there.

I got off the phone, walked to my house, told my wife, and we sat at our dining room table and cried.

We started to pray and fast, and to experience many restless nights.

I'd be lying awake till 3 a.m. begging God to close every door, even if it meant I looked like a fool and my reputation was ruined if it meant I'd know what his will is.

At the same time I'd be praying that God would make his will as clear as a pillar of fire in the night...

My girls just got the movie Frozen 2 and our family loves it... this whole time Elsa keeps hearing this voice that's calling to her, and it leads her all the way to this island.

Yea, we never got anything like that.

But we did get peace; we did start to see longings in us that didn't make sense because everything better is here...

Friendships are here.  
Ministry growth is here.  
Love and acceptance are here.  
Job security is here.  
Financial security is here.  
Future ministry is here.

It still doesn't make sense for God to reassign us.

That's why Phillip's example is so helpful... he's a part of this massive ministry movement of God in the region of Samaria... high numbers, high impact...

And God prompts him to leave to go to seek out one guy.

God can and will lead us from something so good to accomplish his purposes.

Even Paul, he knew God was leading him to go to Jerusalem even while most of the people in the churches were telling him not to go.

And so Kaitlin and I finally agreed with God that we needed to accept his new assignment for us, and we'll be heading there in May or June.

We notified church leadership early last week, which has made this the hardest week of our lives.

I understand how shocked many of you are; deep feelings of hurt, maybe even abandonment.

I am so sorry. After the conclusion of the service, we'll have a formal Q&A time in here where you can ask me any question you want to try to get clarity.

Some of you may even feel like, if we leave, who will continue the work here?

Some of you are envisioning a harvest field that is this community, and perhaps you've seen me as the only laborer in the harvest.

If that one laborer leaves, who's going to take on the work?

Brothers and sisters, that's not what I see, and that's not been my role.

There are already many workers working hard in this harvest field, and they are here on assignment by God to continue to work hard in this ministry here.

Let me show you.

Shepherds Gary Sligh, Bill Greco, Howard Barnes, and John Williams, please come forward.

These men are on assignment by God to be elders in this church, providing pastoral care to our members.

Our Board of Administration members, please come forward.

Bradford Myers

Lori Glossenger

Bill Miller

Ryne Spaulding

Megan Reager

Billy Buselli

Colin Hauseman

Cathy Phillips

These are laborers on assignment from God to oversee and support the vision and ministry here through the hard work of administration.

Ministry directors, please come forward.

Cindy Sue Barnes who engages our youngest children in the faith with God's word.

Helene Chappell who labors earnestly to see our elementary and middle school students see how awesome life with God really is.

Colin Hauseman who stands against cultural trends and fights to see our middle schoolers and high schoolers know God and love him.

Lori Glossenger who leads a council of women who care deeply for the souls of our women here.

Nancy Williams who sees to it that no personal need in our church goes unmet.

But is this it? Not at all.

If you are a partner of this church please stand where you are.

All of you are on assignment from God to work in this harvest field.

Finally, if you are a follower of Jesus, please stand.

Look around... these are the laborers in this harvest field.

What is there to fear? God is with us to the end of the age.

Wayne County doesn't need me. Wayne County doesn't even need better pastors.

Wayne County needs you! Sullivan County needs you!

The ministry will continue to go on, and if it fails to do so when we leave, then it was built on the wrong guy and it should fall.

But if it is built on Christ, the solid rock, then it cannot fail.

Earlier this week a friend texted me a song that sings the words of Psalm 126, and I couldn't have been more broken by the timing of it.

Psalm 126:5-6 — "Those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy. Though one goes along weeping, carrying the bag of seed, he will surely come back with shouts of joy, carrying his sheaves."

I can tell this deeply saddens many of us, including my self.

But there's a promise here!

Even though we're grieved, even though the tears stain the dirt of this harvest field... sow the gospel, and you will reap with shouts of joy!

So go out in your weeping with your bag of seeds and come back with shouts of joy bringing back with you a harvest from the fields.

The mission is yours... it always has been... so beg God to send out laborers, and rejoice as they go.

I've asked our shepherds Bill and Gary to pray over us and over our church.