

The Commands of Christ

Sermon # 18

"Pray For Laborers"

Matt 9:37-38

In our last examination of the commands of Christ we looked at the command recorded in Matthew 7:15, to "*beware (prosechete) of false prophets.*" There found that there were four things we need to know in relation to these false teachers or false prophets; they are dangerous and they are deceptive, there are those who are especially vulnerable to false teachers and there are ways they can be detected.

Tonight we move on to Matthew 9 where Jesus discusses with his disciples the plight if the harvest of souls all around them. The command is found in verse thirty-eight, ". *therefore pray (deethete – 1st aorist passive imperative) that the Lord of the Harvest to send out laborers into his Harvest.* " I difficulty in understanding why the command is not to go to the fields but to pray that the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers, is removed if we see that this command is really a three step command. We need to look at the parallel accounts to see the whole picture.

The first thing that Jesus says that we must do is we must "see the harvest." In the account found in John 4:35 we read, "*Behold, lift up your eyes and look at the fields for they are already white for the harvest.* " In fact three words in this verse are imperatives "*behold*"* - (*idou*) "*lift up*" - (*eparate*) and "*see*" (*theasasthe*). Jesus is creating an image of a harvest so great that it boggles our mind. The harvest is all around us bountiful, overflowing, ripe and ready to pick. Leon Morris in his commentary on John says, "*if wheat is not reaped when it is ripe, it turns a whitish color (they call rotten ripe)... -Jesus is saying the harvest is overdue.* " [Leon Morris. Reflections On the Gospel of John (Vol 1 - John 1-5) (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986) p. 150]

The latest figures by George Barna (2002) state, "*The number of people in the United States who are not born again Christians is about 180 to 190 million people. If that group were a nation unto itself, it would be the fourth most populated nation on the planet...* " [George Barna Grow Your Church From the Outside. (Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 2002) p. 221. With the present U.S. population at 292 million that means that 63% of Americans are lost. Over half of everybody you run into in the course of your day is lost. The fields are white all around us.

The presence of the multitudes both in the text and all around us, suggests the need for something similar to the hard work that is required when a crop is to be harvested.

- *Harvest time is a time of great opportunity.*
- It is a time when any one who wants a job can certainly get one.

- *Harvest time is a time of tremendous exertion.*
- The crops are never brought in without a great deal of work.
- *Harvest time is a time of great urgency.*
- When it is time to harvest everything else is secondary.
- *Harvest time is a time of great joy and exuberance.*
- Psalms 126:6 *'He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him'*

Not only are we to see the harvest but...

The second step that the Lord suggests is found in our text (Matt 9:38) *"pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth laborers."* But if the need is so great why are the laborers so few? Seeing that the harvest is so abundant and knowing that the laborers are few, shouldn't we just get up and go to work? So why does Jesus instead command, "Pray."

John MacArthur suggests, *"It is possible to pray regularly for the salvation of a loved one, a neighbor, a friend or a fellow employee and to let our concern stop with our prayer. But when we earnestly pray for the Lord to send someone to those unsaved people, we cannot help becoming open to being that someone ourselves. It is possible to pray for someone's salvation while keeping them at arms length. But when we sincerely beseech the Lord to send someone to witness to them, we place ourselves at His disposal to become one of His workers in that ministry."* [John MacArthur. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary - Matthew 8-15. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987) p. 1171

It is through prayer that we will gain the compassion we need to see the harvest as they really are and it is through prayer that we will see the great potential in the harvest and it is through prayer that we will be moved to ask the Lord of the harvest to include us in those He is sending forth.

Not only are we to pray but...

The third step in the process being laid out by the Lord is found in Matthew 10:5-6 *"go (poreuesthe) rather to the lost sheep of Israel."* He was telling his disciples to *"go first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* The command in this verse is to go.

In the days of the Lord's ministry the laborers were *"few"* and they still are today. How can we pray *"Lord send out laborers"* without being willing to say, *"Lord send me!"*

But when it comes to carrying out the command to *"go,"* I am afraid that we are an awful lot like Moses. We may resist the call of God for any number of reasons but it usually comes down to the fact that we are afraid. When God appeared to Moses out of the fiery bush

and said, "I am sending you," (Ex. 3: 10) Moses' replied, "who me?" (Ex. 3: 11) He said, "what if they have questions I can't answer, what if they don't believe me. "

We seemingly always have a reason for why we cannot "go." But in the end they are the equivalent of Moses "list of excuses" in Exodus 3 and 4.

Jesus command is three-fold,

We must see the harvest

We must pray for laborers

We must go to those that are scattered and lost