

Prayer: The Fuel for Missions, “For Harvest Workers” Luke 10:1-3, 2/9/2020

Recap: Last week we launched missions month and our theme is prayer: the fuel for missions. We likened prayer to a wartime walkie-talkie to call headquarters to send supplies to the spiritual frontlines where the battle is fiercest. We are praying missional prayers this month—prayers that are toward the accomplishment of the mission of God: to make disciples of all nations. Transformed lives through the gospel. And if you are on our prayer chain you have been receiving each day a short, missional prayer that we want you to pray. We have 400 people on the prayer chain, if you don’t get that, put on connect card. Last week we prayed for **fruit-bearing**, for transformed lives in one of the fiercest battle grounds: addiction. And what a Sunday it was. DATC was here, a new ministry partner. If you missed last week I implore you, the best thing you can do this week for your soul is to go back and watch that message and hear the stories of Jesus breaking the bondage of substance addiction. This week we are looking at another missional prayer, a prayer of Jesus for **harvest workers**.

Matthew 9:35-38

³⁵ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Like the farmer looking out over their field and seeing just a sea of white tips of grain, Jesus caught a vision of a spiritual harvest. He knew that in a few short months and years there would be a movement of the Spirit upon the city of Jerusalem and surrounding towns the likes of which the world had never seen. A spiritual awakening so powerful that all the powers of Rome couldn’t stop it from spreading, though they tried every means necessary. I long to see a spiritual awakening like this happen in our city. A movement of the Spirit upon our city, upon our families, upon our churches...where stories of Jesus breaking the chains of bondage like we heard last week are not uncommon. Where Christians are eager to share their faith and invite people to know Christ. Where people are giving their lives to Christ at a rate where we must have special baptism services because there are so many people who want to testify to what God has done. Where there is a movement of joy and love for one another that is so palpable...and a desire for purity is seen tangibly. Where we are seeing sense a call to mission work. That our churches cannot hold all those who hunger for the Word and want to worship together. Now if your heart longs for that, know that is a holy, God-given desire. Maybe your heart longs for this awakening on a more personal level. Maybe your heart longs for a spiritual harvest in the heart of your spouse, child, parent or friend.

While we don’t have the vision of Jesus to see into the future, what we can do is prepare expectedly for the spiritual harvest, just like Jesus prepared his disciples. If you study Scripture and if you study the history of the church, you will notice a harvest pattern. There are **two**

movements of God's people that often proceed a spiritual harvest, a spiritual awakening, whether in an individual life or a church or a city. And we see this same pattern in this text. We want to study these movements and ask what about you and me.

#1 A Movement of Compassion

³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

While Luke's gospel shares this same event, it is Matthew's gospel that gives us a behind the scenes look into a very tender moment. A look into the heart of Jesus, which is a look into the very heart of God...and there we see compassion. There are three components of compassion that we see from Jesus' example that he modeled with his followers.

Compassion sees the need.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he saw that they were harassed and helpless. They were beaten and worn down. They were helpless, they had no power, no ability to change their own situation. Jesus went through life eyes wide open to reality. And he took his disciples on a journey to really see people.

Compassion feels the need.

The word compassion is the Greek word "Splanchnizomai" - just a fun word to say...and I think it would make a great hashtag...custom license plate. We don't have a good translation but it literally means to feel it in the bowels...maybe the best way to say it is when we say, "my heart hurts" for someone. Jesus' heart hurt for the people he encountered. This is the heart of God, not aloof, indifference- but he feels your pain and burdens. But just because we might feel the pain of others, it doesn't mean we have true compassion yet. We can cry at puppy commercials.

Compassion moves toward the need.

You haven't walked in compassion until the seeing and the feeling result in doing. Jesus walked the streets. He got eye to eye with the blind, he touched the hands of the leper and listened to the plight of the poor. He did something about it- ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of those he encountered.

If you lived in the 17th century on the streets of Cartagena, Columbia, you would have found Christ follower by the name of Pedro Claver. Pedro dedicated his life to serving the black slaves coming into the busy port city from the slave trade. One of the first things you would see is Pedro with baskets of food ready at the port because they no doubt were starving and hungry. Many slaves didn't have clothes and so he and his fellow companions would also have baskets of clothes to clothe them. He understood many were sick and so he had medications, many had leprosy and so a movement of compassion began in that city among other Christians and they started a leprosarium to serve them. A regular sight would be to see Pedro Claver hugging these leprous slaves, putting his own health in harm's way. But not only that, he knew that these slaves had a greater need than even their physical welfare, but knew they had an eternal

need to meet their savior and so he preached Jesus Christ and many came to know Jesus as their Savior. If you would ask him: Pedro, why did you do all this? Pedro would say, I have compassion for them. I saw them. These are not objectified, soulless beings, but these are people made in the image of God, harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

I'm concerned for our day- we have access to see so much need and pain...but do we really see it? Or do we see it, but we don't feel it...get numb to it? Numb because of the violence in movies, video games, 24 hr. news cycle. Just the wearing down of the pains of life...Our souls become numb. Do we see it, we feel it, but we don't do anything to move toward it?

If you are honest and saying I don't really feel anything, I am numb, none of this does much to help me be compassionate. What did Jesus do with his disciples? **He practiced the ministry of presence.** To meet the people they never had eyes to see. Some of us need an adrenaline shot to open our hearts to compassion. Do you see the neighbor, the colleague? If you have the eyes of Jesus you see through the shell of self-assurance, you will recognize sheep without a shepherd. Do you see the needs right here among us in our church? Do you see the needs in our own city? Maybe you need to practice the ministry of presence. Skip class one day, skip a day of work, take a weekend and walk the streets of Wilmington. If ever there was a city that was in need that has many who are harassed and helpless, it is the city of Wilmington. We will be toward the high end of every national statistic for: generational poverty, lack of resources, fatherlessness, juvenile gun violence, incarceration, poor education, racial tension, spiritual poverty. What we need is a movement of Jesus-like compassion, that he taught to his disciples.

With the help of the Spirit, compassion can be taught...I have two boys and I am well aware that living in a hedonistic, materialistic society where trying to explain materialism to my children is like trying to explain water to a fish. It's just the culture we live in. If I do nothing, I will unleash from my house materialistic, hedonistic, self-righteous kids that think that life is all about them and whoever has the most fame and fortune and toys is the happiest and wins. So we must practice the ministry of presence with our kids to train compassion. We have brought them to help with needs in the city. We have set aside money to give a World Vision gift, we encourage them to go to the Philly Blitz and Student missions trips. And this is a driving reason why we are taking our kids to Africa. Is there a movement of compassion in you?

#2 A Movement of Prayer

Matthew 9:37-38

³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Notice a few quick observations in this verse.

- **A movement of prayer flows from a movement of compassion.** God breaks our hearts and then fills our hearts with prayer. There is no meaningful, sustainable prayer without compassion. You pray about the things that break your heart.
- **God is "The Lord of the Harvest" NOT us.** This is so encouraging because it is a constant reminder that it is not on us to convince, to shake, to threaten or coerce anyone into the

kingdom of God. It is his field, his crop. No one comes to the Father unless the Spirit draws Him.

- **God uses us as the “farm hands” to work the harvest.** God’s means of accomplishing the mission is us. He doesn’t have to, but chooses to use us as his hands and feet to work the harvest. And instead of thinking of that as a chore, as something you have to do...rather think of it as something you get to do, you are privileged to do. What other work, hobby, activity or ambition in the universe yields such a lasting crop, makes an impact for eternity? You want a real adventure, real meaning, real joy? Follow Jesus on an adventure in ministry where you have no idea where it might take you, who you might encounter and the thousands of blessings you will receive.
- **God uses the movement of prayer to reap the harvest.** Here Jesus prays for the sending of workers. Paul prayed for doors of opportunity to share. In the infinite wisdom and ways of God, that are so far above our ways, in God’s operating system, He has made it so that his miraculous work of harvesting be preceded by a movement of prayer. He loves to bless the world. But even more, he loves to bless the world in answer to prayer.

On July 1, 1857, a quiet and zealous businessman named Jeremiah Lanphier took up an appointment as a City Missionary in down-town New York. Moved to compassion by the incredible needs for spiritual revival, poverty alleviation and relational harmony, Jeremiah Lanphier decided to invite others to join him in a noonday prayer-meeting, to be held on Wednesdays once a week.

At twelve noon, September 23, 1857, the door was opened and the faithful Lanphier took his seat to await the response to his invitation. Five minutes went by. No one appeared. Ten minutes elapsed. Still no one came. Fifteen minutes passed. Lanphier was yet alone. Twenty minutes; twenty-five; thirty; and then at 12.30 p.m., a step was heard on the stairs, and the first person appeared, then another, and another, and another, until six people were present, and the prayer meeting began. On the following Wednesday, October 7th, there were forty. Within six months, ten thousand businesspeople were gathering daily for prayer in New York, and within two years, it was estimated a million new Christians were added to area churches.

Undoubtedly the greatest spiritual harvest in New York's history came as a result of a movement of compassion flowing into a movement of prayer. And it starts with just one. I think we have Jeremiah Lanphiers here.

And I have a sense that the Spirit is preparing us for a spiritual harvest. He has been preparing us by beginning to remove financial burdens of debt. I sense it in the spirit of unity, and life I see in this church, in my conversations with many who are hungry for the Lord. I sense it in the way He is moving among our churches slowly but surely toward a spirit of unity and mission. Whether or not it is on a large scale or on a smaller, subtle scale, what I do know is that the Spirit is on the move.

Prayer Time:

- For God to move us to compassion. Break through numb hearts, help us to see and act.

- For God to prepare a spiritual harvest in our families, churches, city.
- That God would send us on mission and show us where He wants us to serve.