

Sermon Title: The Principles of a Harvest Laborer

Sermon Text: Matthew 9:35-38

Sermon Purpose: To beseech the hearer to become an effective harvest laborer.

Sermon Proposition: There are 3 effective principles for an active harvest laborer.

Introduction: “So it was not surprising for the disciples to have questions. If Jesus was truly the Messiah, why were many of His followers so obviously superficial? How could the long-awaited Messiah come to Israel, only to be rejected by the nation’s religious leaders? And why did He not exact power and authority to establish the promised kingdom with the fulfillment of all that was pledged in the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New covenants?”

The issue was this: Jesus was preaching a hard message that required radical sacrifice from His followers. On the one hand, following Christ was very appealing. It offered freedom from the labyrinth of oppressive man-made regulations imposed by the Pharisees (Matthew 11:29-30; cf. 17:25-27). On the other hand, following Christ was daunting, because it required finding the narrow gate, denying oneself, and obeying Him even to the point of death (Matthew 7:13-14; Mark 8:34). To follow Jesus required recognizing that He was divine, and that apart from Him there is no salvation and no other means to reconciliation with God (John 14:6). It also meant completely abandoning Judaism that focused on religious practice instead of a penitent heart turned to God.” [John MacArthur, *Evangelism: How to Share the Gospel Faithfully*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 2011, p.2]

- I. To be an effective laborer in the harvest requires orderliness. V.35
- II. To be an effective laborer in the harvest requires observation. V.36
- III. To be an effective laborer in the harvest requires obedience. V.37-38

I. To be an effective laborer in the harvest requires orderliness. V.35

A. The first order is movement. V.35a

Went about is in the imperfect tense pointing to a continuous process or action. (**Matthew 4:23**) This is what Jesus kept doing. “We learn from the Jewish historian Josephus that at the time there were some two hundred cities and villages in the region of Galilee, an area about 40 miles wide and 70 miles long. Their population some 3 million people.” [John MacArthur, *John MacArthur Commentary on Matthew 8-15*, p.103]

B. The second order is method.

Matthew provides a threefold description of effective ministry.

1. Teaching in the synagogue. V.35b

Jesus’ ministry in the synagogue shows that He originally started out focusing His ministry on the Jewish population of Galilee, but this focus then widened to include Gentiles and Samaritans. The synagogue was the place of instruction as well as of worship, they were a natural place in which a teacher would do his work. Synagogues were the centers of the Jewish community life. They were used for worship, town hall meetings, and a courthouse or school. The word synagogue simply means “place of assembly.” People would meet on the Sabbath and the 2nd and 5th day of the week. (**Acts 20:17-31**)

2. Preaching the gospel of the kingdom. V.35c

The primary topic of Jesus preaching was the long awaited Messiah, the human ruler through whom God would establish His reign on the earth, had come at last. Jesus was proclaiming the News of the Kingdom [**Matthew 3:1** *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, Matthew 4:23* *And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.*] referring most likely to the rule of God in men’s hearts and life.

Jesus was proclaiming the New Covenant which He would seal with His blood [**Matthew 26:28** "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.]. He was therefore providing and proclaiming new revelation about God's plan of salvation.

C. **Healing** as a demonstration of His Deity. V.35d

II. To be an effective laborer in the harvest requires **observation**. V.36

A. Requires the observation of **community**. V.36a

B. Requires the observation of **compassion**. V.36b
Compassion for the abused and neglected sheep. Jesus identifies Himself as the Shepherd of God's people (Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24). The verb "to have compassion" (splanchnizomai) is used in the New Testament in the synoptic gospels 11 times. The word suggests strong emotion, it means to feel deep sympathy, affection or inward deep gut/bowls feelings.

C. Requires the observation of **conditions**. V.36c

1. They were stressed without a shepherd.

2. They were scattered without a shepherd.
The imagery is that of shepherdless sheep wounded and torn.

3. They were sheep without a shepherd.
Ezekiel 34 is the reference, he implies that Israel's spiritual condition reflected the failures of the spiritual shepherds. The people were like, "sheep abused by wolves, lying down and unable to help themselves, and having no shepherd to guide and protect them, the people were maligned by the religious leaders, helpless before them, and wandering about with no spiritual guidance." [**The Bible Knowledge Commentary of the New Testament, John F. Walvoord/Ray B. Zuck, p.41**]

Numbers 27:17 "who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd."

1 Kings 22:17 Then he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the LORD said, 'These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.'"

2 Chronicles 18:16 Then he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the LORD said, 'These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.'"

III. To be an effective laborer in the harvest requires **obedience**. V.37-38

A. Obedience requires a plenty of **opportunity** focus. V.37a

Harvest is used metaphorically of people in the world. "The Pharisees saw the common people as chaff to be destroyed and burned up; but Jesus saw them as a harvest to be rescued from the coming judgment to be reaped and to be saved." [**Quote by Barclay**]

Revelation 14:14-20

Isaiah 17:10-11 Because you have forgotten the God of your salvation, And have not been mindful of the Rock of your stronghold, Therefore you will plant pleasant plants And set out foreign seedlings; **11** In the day you will make your plant to grow, And in the morning you will make your seed to flourish; *But* the harvest *will be* a heap of ruins In the day of grief and desperate sorrow.

Joel 3:11-14 Assemble and come, all you nations, And gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O LORD. **12** "Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. **13** Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; For the winepress is full, The vats overflow-- For their wickedness *is* great." **14** Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD *is* near in the valley of decision.

Matthew 13:30 "Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.""

Matthew 13:40-43 "Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. **41** "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, **42** "and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. **43** "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

“The New Testament often depicts spiritual leaders as shepherds of God’ flock. It is an appropriate image, because a shepherd leads, feeds, comforts, corrects, and protects the sheep under his care. Those same responsibilities belong to every church leader. In fact, the word *pastor* means *shepherd*.

In Biblical times, shepherds were without status. They occupied the lower rungs of the social ladder. For spiritual shepherds, that fact serves as a fitting reminder. Pastoral ministry is not intended to be prestigious or self-exalting. As our Lord explained, “Whoever would be first among you must be slave of all” (**Mark 10:44** (<https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Mark%2010.44>)).

By God’s design, leadership in the church is a position of humility and selflessness. Church oversight is ministry, not management. Those whom God designates as spiritual shepherds are called not to be governing monarchs or slick celebrities, but humble slaves. In submission to Christ, they must exemplify sacrifice, devotion, submission, and lowliness.

The apostles wholeheartedly embraced that perspective, often referring to themselves as slaves in the Master’s work. Even Christ Himself took on the form of a slave (**Phil. 2:7** (<https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Mark%2010.45>)). We are called to imitate His supreme example of humility and love.”

[**John MacArthur, The Pastor as a Shepherd, The Master’s Seminary Blog,** (<https://www.tms.edu/bio/JohnMacArthur/>), March 17, 2015]

Someone has said: “There is no way to describe hell. Nothing on earth can compare with it. No living person has any real idea of it. No madman in wildest flight of insanity ever beheld its horror. No man in delirium ever pictured a place so utterly terrible as this. No nightmare racing across a fevered mind ever produced a terror to match that of mildest hell. No murder scene splashed with blood could describe it.” [**John MacArthur, John MacArthur Commentary Matthew 8-13, p.115**]

- B. Obedience requires initiating a **problematic** laborer force. V.37b
2 Corinthians 2:14-16 Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. **15** For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. **16** To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things?

“not willing to serve, sacrifice, and suffer for Christ or the lost.”

- C. Obedience requires a prayerful **operation** factor. V.38
By preparing to send out the disciples (**Matthew 10:1-5**) Jesus identified Himself as Lord of the Harvest. Since Old Testament texts and rabbinic parables presented Yaweh as Master of the Harvest in portrayals of eschatological judgments
Isaiah 18:4-5 For so the LORD said to me, "I will take My rest, And I will look from My dwelling place Like clear heat in sunshine, Like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest." **5** For before the harvest, when the bud is perfect And the sour grape is ripening in the flower, He will both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks And take away *and* cut down the branches.
Isaiah 27:12 And it shall come to pass in that day *That* the LORD will thresh, From the channel of the River to the Brook of Egypt; And you will be gathered one by one, O you children of Israel.
Hosea 6:11 Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you, When I return the captives of My people.
this is a strong reference to Jesus deity (**3:11-12; 13:39-41**).

The Greek work for prayer (**δέομαι**) is used here in Matthew and 22 times in the New Testament to mean prayers that springs from a sense of need. To appreciate and understand the need is to be driven to prayer. **Acts 1:1-4; Acts 4**

- D. Obedience requires implementation of a **purposeful** mission fact.

(**ἐκβάλλη** denotes the enthusiastic impulse of mission work).

No matter how great our personal effort, we will not be able to gather in the whole harvest. Therefore we are to pray to Him who can send out workers that are needed.

The praying is not to be a substitute for the laborer: disciples are to be reapers as well as praying people. But realize the work will not be done without prayer as a starting point for the harvest.

Jesus is talking about the care God and Jesus and disciples should have for people and the absolute important urgency of gathering them in before the end of this age. The first realization is that workers are few, but workers are needed and can be increased by the Lord of the harvest provision and power. Therefore, the necessary step that proceeds work in the field is prayer before entering the field. Also pray for the lost (1 Timothy 2:1-8). Then go!