

# A Farmer's Prayer

*“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’” (Matthew 9:35-38)*

The marines are looking for “The Few and The Proud.” The army is looking for those who are willing to “Be All That You Can Be.” The Navy is looking for those who want “Not Just A Job, but An Adventure.” The Air Force is looking for those who want to “Aim High!” Jesus is looking for “Laborers”—laborers willing to go out into the fields of the world.

*“The harvest is plentiful.”* Ask any farmer what those words mean and you will hear words like “urgency,” “immediate,” and “no time to waste.” When the fields are “plentiful,” there is a window of opportunity for the harvesting the crop. Wait too long and the crop is in danger of being lost either to over ripening or a storm destroying it before it is harvested.

Jesus saw the potential for a great spiritual harvest. Yet, there were not enough laborers to send into the fields. Two things impress me about Jesus in this particular moment: His passion and His priority. First is His passion, which is rooted in love. His love reminds me of what a former Jehovah’s Witness, now a Christian, once said about witnessing: “Do not attempt to witness to a Jehovah’s Witness at your door unless you have love within your heart for that person.” That makes sense. Our most effective witness is the love of Christ within our hearts. If our witness is not born out of compassion for the person we witness to, then we run the risk of merely engaging in a debate.

*“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36).* Jesus’ heart went out to the crowd. That is no small thing when you read the verses or even the chapters that precede this. One gets the sense that the calendar of Jesus was pretty full. The crowds were pressing in on a daily basis. It would have been enough to cause anyone to crave a little space and time to self. Jesus’ reaction, however, was one of great compassion. He was moved by their situation. They were *“sheep without a shepherd.”* Sheep are not only fairly dumb animals; they are defenseless. Without a shepherd, they stand little chance against attack. These people were no different. They were without direction or defense.

The second thing that impresses me is His priority. His first thought is to ask us to pray. *“Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest fields” (Matthew 9:38).* While prayer is too often my last resort, it is the first thing Jesus thinks of. That speaks to my heart in many ways. First, it convicts me. If Jesus depended so much on prayer, certainly I need no less. It also humbles and even perplexes me. Jesus connects the spiritual harvest of the world to the people of God falling on their knees in prayer. This raises the bar extremely high for me as to prayer being one of the most important works that a believer can do as a mission response. If Jesus attaches such importance to prayer, why

don't I? Martin Luther, referring to the prayers of God's people in worship, wrote:

“O if any congregation, please God, were to hear mass in this way and pray in this way, so that a common, earnest, heartfelt cry of the whole people were to rise up to God, what immeasurable virtue and help would result from such a prayer! What more terrible thing could happen to all evil spirits? What greater work could be done on earth whereby so many pious souls would be preserved and so many sinners converted. . . . For indeed, the Christian Church on earth has no greater power or work against everything that may oppose it than such common prayer. . . . What matters is not the place or building where we assemble, but unconquerable prayer alone, and our really praying together and offering it to God (Luther's Works, Vol. 44, p. 66.)

The effect of such prayer is illustrated wonderfully by a story that we'll pick up in the year 1858. A Sunday School teacher by the name of Mr. Kimball introduced a Boston shoe clerk to Jesus Christ. The clerk was Dwight L. Moody who became an evangelist. While Moody was preaching in England in 1870, the heart of a pastor named F. B. Meyer was set on fire, and he later came to an American college campus to preach. Under his preaching, a student by the name of Wilbur Chapman was saved. He engaged in YMCA work and employed a former baseball player named Billy Sunday to do evangelistic work. Billy Sunday held a revival in Charlotte, North Carolina. Because the revival stirred the hearts of many, some 30 businessmen wanted to devote a day of prayer for Charlotte. In May of 1934, a farmer lent the men some land to use for their prayer meetings. The leader of the businessmen, Vernon Patterson, prayed that out of Charlotte the Lord would raise up someone to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The businessmen then called for another evangelistic meeting asking Mordecai Ham, a fiery Southern evangelist who shattered the complacency of

church-going Charlotte, to preach. The farmer who lent his land for the prayer meeting was a man by the name of Franklin—Franklin Graham. He brought his son Billy to the meeting, and it was at that meeting that Billy became a Christian.

The world knows the rest of the story. Or then, maybe we don't. Who can tell how many other lives have been touched and will yet be raised up for the sake of Christ to impact this world? “Out of Charlotte the Lord would raise up someone to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth.” This was the prayer of 30 businessmen. Franklin lent his land so that this might happen. Did he know that his own son would be raised up in the way that God would use Billy Graham? Probably not. As a farmer, though, he more than likely understood the urgency that is reflected when Jesus said, “*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest*” (Matthew 9:37-38). A farmer can relate to a farmer's prayer of this nature. The priority of Jesus to pray became his priority. The land of Franklin's became the Lord's. Billy was set ablaze through the Word entering his heart. E. M. Bounds in his book, “Purpose in Prayer” writes,

“When we calmly reflect upon the fact that the progress of our Lord's kingdom is dependent upon prayer, it is sad to think that we give so little time to the holy exercise. Everything depends on prayer, and yet we neglect it—not only to our spiritual hurt, but also to the delay and injury of our Lord's cause upon the earth. The forces of good and evil are contending for the world. If we would pray, we could add to the conquering power of the army of righteousness; and yet our lips are sealed, our hands hang listlessly by our side, and by holding back from the prayer chamber we jeopardize the very cause in which we profess to be deeply interested . . . .”

The forces of good and evil are contending for the world. When you look over the decay

and decadence of Jesus' day, He saw the potential. *"The harvest is plentiful."* He saw the opportunity to offer people hope and direction. It is no different today. There is a growing spiritual curiosity in the world. It may not seem that way in some churches, but there is a spiritual awakening going on around us. Do you find that hard to believe? Go into a bookstore and see how many books there are on meditation and spiritual matters. Not necessarily Christian, but the quantity demonstrates the interest of people who are hungry to know more about spiritual matters. People are hungry for hope. Surveys will reflect that almost 50 percent of those not presently attending church say they would consider going if someone were to invite them. The fields are white unto the harvest, and there are plenty of them. The task before us can seem rather intimidating. It all depends on our view of things. We can either look out over the world and see the problems, or we can look out over the whitening fields and see the potential.

John Elway, retired quarterback of the Denver Broncos, was known for his late game heroics. He had a knack for bringing his team

from behind with just seconds remaining when everything seemed lost. In one particular game, they were 80 yards from the end zone, less than two minutes to go and down by six. As he got into the huddle, he said, "It is a great time to be playing football." What a great attitude to reflect in the church. This is the Lord's moment. Sure there are many obstacles standing in our way, but who else can offer the hope we bring with the Gospel of Jesus? It is a great time to be witnessing. Where do we begin? We begin as Christians gathered in small and large huddles for prayer.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, the fields are plentiful. There are so many in this world who are hungry and searching. They are restless until they are at rest in you. Raise up workers who will devote their lives to serving you in the mission fields and within our churches. Raise up men and women who will in their jobs and neighborhoods give witness unto you through their words and actions. By means of your life saving Gospel, bind Satan so that nothing stands against your Word of Salvation from being proclaimed throughout the world. **Amen.**

**Challenge:** Pray for laborers for the harvest. Pray for more missionaries to be raised up throughout the world. Pray for men and women in your congregation to come forward as future full-time workers in the Church.

**Scripture Reading:** Matthew 9

**From the Book of Concord:** "Therefore, on the basis of God's Word we now want to give a further account of how the human being is converted to God; how and through which means (namely, through the oral Word and the holy sacraments) the Holy Spirit desires to be active in us and to give and effect true repentance, faith, and the new spiritual power and capability to do the good in our hearts; and how we should respond to such means and use them.

It is not God's will that any are damned but that all turn to him and be saved. Ezekiel 33[:11]: 'As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn back from their ways and live.' 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' [John 3:16]" (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II: Free Will, p. 553.48-49).