

**MATTHEW 9:35-38**  
**KEEPING THE HARVEST FROM RUIN**

*Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."*

Every year each farmer has the same goal—to get the crop out of the field into the bin. I remember my father-in-law telling me about the year he had the best rye crop ever. Maybe it was wishful thinking, but he figured it would have run about 80 bushels to the acre. Except he never got it into the bin. The rye was cut and left in windrows to dry, and that's where it stayed. It rained and rained and rained, until the rye sprouted in the windrows. It never got into the bin. On this Mission Festival Sunday, we are talking about getting the Lord's harvest into the bin, getting the souls of a world full of sinners of into heaven in the name of Jesus.

This text comes rather early in Jesus' three years of preaching, teaching, and healing. In this chapter of Matthew, He had healed the crippled man whose friends brought him to Jesus on a mat. When they couldn't get through the crowd at the house, they opened up the roof tiles and let him down in front of Jesus. Jesus saw their faith and said, Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you; arise take up you bed and walk. In this same chapter Jesus called Matthew the tax collector to follow Him and become one of His disciples. Jesus also went to the home of Jairus' and there brought back to life to his dead daughter. He healed two blind men who had faith in Him. He drove the demon out of a deaf man so that he could hear again. There were many physical and medical needs in the land of the Jews, to say nothing of the spiritual needs of the people—everyone longing to know that their sins would not bring God's wrath and condemnation. They were seeking forgiveness.

*Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom.* Jesus made it a point to reach many people. He traveled about on foot covering *all the cities and the villages*. Jesus was seeking all. Nor was He going only to the town people and skipping the country dwellers. Most of the people of the day lived in the communities—the farmers and shepherds as well. Each day they would leave their community and go out to their fields and pastures. Jesus was, and is, interested in all. "Going to all" needs to be the mission outreach of this congregation, of all the congregations of the CLC, and of all Christian churches. Jesus said, Go and make disciples of all nations.

The text says Jesus was *Teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people*. What was Jesus' foremost goal? Teaching and preaching spiritual truth to people's souls. To do so, He taught in the synagogues. "Synagogue" is the Greek word for "a gathering place" It was the gathering place for learning about God's words of the Old Testament. The Old Testament taught God's demands and rules together with His wrath for disobedience (sin). The Old Testament also taught the merciful promises of God that that He would send a Savior through whom those same sins would be taken off the books—forgiven! Jesus was teaching and preaching God's message. To teach, "to give instruction." To preach, "to proclaim a message" (as did a herald or messenger of a king). The Christian today also does both. Parents, Sunday School teachers, pastors, Christian missionaries, etc., all heralds of THE KING, instruct and proclaim, teach and preach, to the flocks entrusted to their care the truths of sin and of forgiveness by grace.

What if a Christian, or if one of our pastors or CLC missionaries, taught only a part of the "package"? What if only the "rules," the laws, of God were taught—in mild fashion with God's wrath over disobedience being soft pedaled? The results would be proud, self-righteous people who felt they were keeping all God's rules very well and would not get punished. Does that help with the "harvest" of souls? No. What if God's rules and laws were taught with overarching emphasis on His punishment for breaking them? The result would be hopeless people filled with despair. They would only see their lost cause. Again, the harvest would not be gathered, but lost. What if only the Gospel is preached, God's love and forgiveness, and no law and condemnation for sin? People would drown in the muck of sin—"I can do, and keep doing, anything I want, because it's all forgiven." How much love for the Savior would there be in such a heart? None. Again the harvest would be lost.

The law and the Gospel both must be preached. The Christian, the pastor, the missionary's job is to "afflict the comfortable" –to preach the law to those who think they are fine; "and to comfort the afflicted"—to preach God's mercy and forgiveness to those have no hope, who know they are not fine. Preaching the Law and the Gospel. It's a practice that can mechanically be taught or learned, but it is the Holy Spirit who is the real teacher of the skill and art of preaching both law and Gospel to what extent and at what time.

Besides teaching and preaching, Jesus was *healing every sickness and every disease among the people*. He showed His love and concern for the bodily needs of the people. He still does. He gives us each day our daily bread. He delivers us from physical evils at the time and in the measure He knows is best. So then, it is our concern to do likewise. If people at our church, gathered about the Savior's forgiveness and God's grace, were also in physical need, would you help them in love and joy or would you be aloof and skeptical, leaving them to languish, actually driving them away? "I don't want someone to taken advantage of me!" we cry. But God knows. Certainly don't be naïve about scams, but if you are taken advantage of, God knows. In our CLC mission fields we provide spiritual Truth, but we also seek to meet physical needs, through the MDF (Mission Development Fund) and the Kinship Fund. Physical help is not our congregation's first goal, or the CLC's first goal, but in love for Christ it also our goal.

*But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.* Do you sense the love of Jesus? Do you feel His compassion for the forgiveness and comfort of heart needed by the people and for their daily needs as well? Such love moves our hearts too. You are harvesters. Welcome the visitors, pray for God's Kingdom of salvation in Christ throughout the world, support the advancement of Gospel message of salvation from sin in Christ. Certainly it involves gifts of love, whether in terms of time, or effort, or supplies, or money. Gifts of love for the harvest. Do you help in God's harvest only because of obligation—"I have to," "Nobody else will do it," "Let's just get it over with," "It's my duty." Or is your service as harvester one of willingness and love?—prompted by the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit's love for you. The Apostle wrote, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Corinthian 1:3-4).*

Without Him you and I, as well as the rest of the world, are weary, crumpled, scattered sheep, facing sure ruin. We are like a unit of soldiers without a sergeant to order and maintain them, like a classroom of students without a teacher in the room. Jesus' heart reaches out for us and all the world. In love, He came to suffer and die on the cross, to gather together sinners forgiven in His name before the Father, so that we might be his family. The rest of the world needs that same message to be brought into God's harvest bin.

*Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."* The world is ripe for harvest for God's kingdom. Imagine seeing five acres of ripe tomatoes. How can you pick them all before they spoil? You need more hands, more laborers, lest the harvest rot on the vine. So in the Kingdom of God, in the church. More laborers are needed. Our efforts in Africa, India, South America, could use a dozen more men. We cannot send them, because we do not have them. Our own home congregations need laborers, harvesters. Pray for harvesters. Pray for students to fill our training system.

The harvest is waiting. Each of you—even in our own small way, if that is the case—is privileged to help. The harvest is waiting. Don't let any of it go to ruin on your account. The Lord is at your side every step of the way. *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20).*

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach--