

PREFACE

Honest conversions come as a result of only honest prayer. Prayer for the lost that is honest or genuine or truthful must acknowledge and entertain both God's Sovereignty and man's responsibility. The reasoned doctrine of both are in Jesus' instruction concerning honest prayer for the honest conversion of the lost,

³⁸Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

Matthew 9:38

Honest Prayer Acknowledges God's Sovereignty to Affect Conversions

Honest prayer for the lost is sometimes disappointing from somewhat disappointing results, at least as we may falsely assume them to be. We tend to judge too quickly before the real end of the matter; however there may be a degree of reality in our disappointments. We pray earnestly for this person or that person, perhaps a dear person to us, and it is truly honorable, genuine, and honest prayer. But God seems to us to be inactive and not too responsive. That also may be a too quickly made judgment. Yet, perhaps we could learn from our Lord what seems to be His emphasis upon the means more than on the men, so to speak. Jesus accentuated prayer for the laborers of the harvest of souls more than prayer for the souls. That is not to suggest that He meant the means were more dear to Him than the men, but rather that our acknowledgement of God's particular involvement should include more specifics, more particulars, more precise recognition of God's overall Sovereign provisions for the lost. We should glorify God in His comprehensive redemptive purpose—the entire methodology, fashion, and system of God's redemptive love for His human family. This glorifies God in the reality of His Person, The Sovereignty of His Love.

Honest Prayer Acknowledges
Man's Responsibility to Affect Conversions

But that is only one reason for Christ's emphasis upon the means for winning the lost. Rather, Christ would have us give attention to the laborers needed in the harvest, and hence to the labor, the efforts, the personal involvement of us—involving ourselves, we humans, those of us who were once the lost ourselves. This is accomplished through our prayer-minds being filled with humanity's active participation in God's redemptive purpose. When we are praying constantly for laborers to be added to the harvest of souls, surely we will become more sensitive to the Spirit's promptings within us to add our labors to that purpose. Indeed, Christ wisely would encourage His disciples to be praying and so be continuously mindful of our own divinely appointed involvement in God's great redemptive purposes in Jesus Christ. Therefore, He urges us to pray for more laborers to be added to the numbers of Christ-devoted witnesses that give themselves to reaping the fields white unto harvest. He fully anticipates our honest prayers in such a manner to be answered by ourselves. Amen.

HONEST CONVERSIONS THROUGH HONEST PRAYER

³⁵ *And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.*

³⁶ *But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.*

³⁷ *Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few;*

³⁸ *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.*

Matthew 9:35-38

¹² *And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*

¹³ *And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.*

Luke 6: 12-13

¹ *And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.*

⁷ *And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand*

Matthew 10:1, 7

Souls were the pursuit of Christ's life. *For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*¹ There was no hesitation or lack of intensity toward the lost on Christ's part. The Prophet Isaiah forecast the fervor of His life for the lost with the words, *He...was clad with zeal as a cloke.* Again, John recorded His own words, *I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day....* And Luke

¹ *Luke 19:10; Mark 2:17.*

recorded Him as saying, *I have a baptism to be baptized with* [i.e. an intense immersion into pain]; *and how am I straightened* [i.e. constrained, driven, compelled] *till it be accomplished.*² Jesus' whole life was one of zest and enthusiasm for His redemptive sacrificial work, which would bring the lost into the Kingdom of God.

And while his death on the cross absolutely fulfilled every need for any lost man to believe and to be saved, yet for all that vigor towards the perishing, He considered His efforts incomplete and somewhat impaired at reaching the multitudes with the gospel. It is clear in our text that Jesus honestly addressed His failure to reach all men with His message; it was a physical impossibility. Christ was not at all content with the physical limitations that a human body placed upon Him. This left Him with discontent concerning His work of evangelism, which He performed before the cross and while living on earth. He was satisfied with the rightness of His motives to reach the lost, indeed; and He fully accomplished His work of redemption, as the Father verified in raising Him from the dead. But Jesus did not communicate with all men His message of salvation and free pardon for sinners as He would have liked. Consider again His admission to His somewhat limited and restricted accomplishments in evangelism,

³⁷Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few.

Matthew 9:37

Therefore, Jesus, not satisfied with His limited work of seeking to evangelize souls while on earth, in our text, turned to His disciples to achieve what He had longed for, but what had eluded Him during His own somewhat limited personal ministry of only three years duration. But how was Jesus impaired? And how can Christ succeed? The verses of our text ask and then answer those questions.

² *Isaiah 50:17; John 9:4; Luke 12:50.*

Analysis of the Text

First, Matthew details the ever increasing and expanding activity of King Jesus in *verse 35*. But even though He was so busily engaged in meaningful and productive ministry, still He was moved with compassion as He saw with spiritual perception so many men still in disarray, disorientation, and turmoil, *verse 36*. Then immediately in *verse 37*, Jesus acknowledged that He could not possibly reach so great and scattered a multitude. Whereupon, in *verse 38* He asked for prayer that more laborers would be sent into the harvest with a like compassionate nature as He possessed. Then, after spending one whole night in prayer—in the kind of prayer that He had just instructed His disciples to employ—, Jesus appointed and sent out His apostles to help accomplish what He could not do alone, Chapter 10, *verse 1*.

In accord with this analysis, we shall observe:

- I. First, **What did not cause Jesus' limitation in reaching souls, 9:35-36.**
- II. Second and contrastively, **What did indeed cause Jesus' limitation in reaching souls, 9:37.**
- III. Third, **What assures Jesus' unlimited success for reaching souls, 9:38-10:1**

I. WHAT DID NOT CAUSE JESUS' LIMITATION IN REACHING SOULS

Jesus Was Not Impaired Because He Lacked Effort.

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.
Matthew 9:35

Jesus was earnest in the prosecution of His work. He spent much energy on **teaching** in their synagogues. He made and presented in tireless devotion interpretations of the Jews' own Scriptures. He emphasized the truth of the Scriptures for immediate application to the lives of men. He actually spent much time studying and preparing Himself and His lessons in order to reach the multitudes with the message of salvation. He read old and perfectly familiar words and gave them new life and meaning, teaching their deepest intention. He did what is the present ministry of the Pastor in today's church, *And he gave some...pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints for their work of ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ.*³ This He did in *all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues*. He was a Master Teacher, Who knew the Book from which He taught, and He knew the heart of man and how to reach into its recesses with the truth of God's Kingdom salvation. He used that knowledge to the maximum to teach tirelessly the necessary truths of God. Certainly, this was not any cause for Jesus to have failed to reach all men with the truth of God. There was no fault in Jesus' teaching; it was precisely what it should have been.

Jesus, in this honest prosecution of His work of evangelism, went everywhere **preaching** the gospel of the Kingdom. The good news of the victory of God over the dark kingdom of evil was the message of King Jesus. He proclaimed the true gospel. From the day that

³ The Author's translation of *Ephesians 4:11-12*.

Jesus ascended into heaven, there have been many “gospels” which are not gospels. Paul was troubled constantly throughout his ministry with the Judaizers. The Judaizers were a group who added human merit to the finished work of Jesus’ cross. They preached a false gospel, which was not the gospel at all. “Gospel” is good news for men. Any additions of human works and human merit turn the good news of Christ’s gospel into bad news because no man can do what is necessary to merit salvation.⁴ But Jesus preached the true gospel of the Kingdom, free from error and additions. Today it has yet to be seen or heard just what the purest and truest preaching of the gospel is like because sinners are preaching it. But when Jesus preached the gospel of the Kingdom, He trumpeted true sermons of power and persuasion into the hearing of sinners as no other preacher before or since. No! There was no fault to be found in Jesus’ preaching. His failure to reach the multitudes with the truth was not the result of any negligence to preach to them just what they needed.

Also, Jesus went about *healing every sickness and every disease among the people*. These were supernatural demonstrations of God’s endorsement of this Man, Jesus, and His message. These acts of healing served to demonstrate both Jesus’ loving heart of compassion and His sanction from God. Only God could do the healing which He performed; therefore people listened to Him as listening to God. His message was thus authenticated as genuine and as true by these manifestations of God’s authority in the healing. But more, this healing ministry showed the compassionate heart of this Man, Jesus. People would listen even more attentively to His message because His healing of all who came to Him exhibited a caring love for their best interests. The apparent goodness of Jesus brought power and persuasion of its own into the hearts of the multitudes to whom Jesus preached. There is no reason for failure here. As with all His work of ministry, His healing only served to secure His evangel even more to men’s hearts and lives.

⁴ *Galatians 1:6-9; Romans 3:20-28.*

And no town or village or city was exempt from His ministry, because He was **traveling** *about all the cities and villages*. No place was unnoticed to His compassionate eye. The *cities* were the large communities; the *villages* were the small communities. Whether large or small, whether good or evil, still He traveled to each as He could. Jesus went to apostate Judea, to the held-in-contempt Galilee, to the despised Samaria, and even to the neglected gentile area of Peraea. Never could it be said of His ministry that He failed to travel to any area or that He overlooked some part of mankind. No! Jesus did not fail to reach the multitudes because of some inadequate teaching, or preaching, or healing, or traveling itinerary. It was caused by something entirely beyond His then immediate control.

Jesus Was Not Impaired Because He Lacked Compassion.

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Matthew 9:36

Even though so busily engaged in teaching, preaching, healing, and traveling, and even though meeting with such success, still He was moved with compassion at the sight of those very same people. The *But* which begins *verse 37* marks a contrast. Right in the middle of so great a ministry, Jesus saw even greater need than He could hope to meet. He was not satisfied with the multitudes already reached, but strove to reach even greater multitudes. *But* Jesus was continuously *moved with compassion* even though He was doing much ministry flawlessly, because He counted His own limitation, as being only one Man, an impediment to the salvation of those lost sheep to whom He could not minister.

The compassion of Jesus is evidenced in how He saw **the state and shape of the multitudes**; *they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd*. Jesus saw men as sheep because He is their spiritual Shepherd. As such He saw men in their actual

condition, *as fainted*, that is literally, tormented, worried, vexed, as fleeced, lacerated, and half-dead from violence and neglect. Jesus saw them as they are before His Holy and Almighty Father as a result of the ravages of sin. They were not merely as sheep that have grown weary and faint, hungry, looking up and yet not fed, but were as those that had been harassed by the wolf and were the prey of thieves and robbers. This was as Jesus saw men who had been “fleeced” by the Pharisees, being ravaged by their savage and merciless teaching of works and rituals, as well as being ravaged by their own innate depraved natures. Men need a Shepherd Who will show them the real way of God, and will cleanse their sin-festering wounds, feed them with manna, and encourage the growth of their fleece for their comfort. This Jesus did as He was able, but He saw all men like this, and was moved with compassion. Furthermore, Jesus saw them *scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd*, without a guardian for their lives and very souls.

Spiritually, they were a vast disorganized mass, their physical circumstance being but a dull picture of their spiritual wretchedness as the victims of Pharisaical guidance, satanic rule, and fleshly desires. Their souls were uncared-for, yet drawn after and hanging upon Him for direction. It is through Jesus that, *Ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.*⁵ Jesus understood the state and shape of the multitudes for whom He would minister; therefore His inability to reach them was not because He did not know their condition. They were neglected and abandoned, but not by Jesus.

Compassion was also exhibited **in the state and shape of Jesus**; *he was moved with compassion on them*. The original has it, “He was moved in the bowels or chief intestines.” This is the kind of graphic word that is mostly passing out of use today. The Greeks seldom used a word that suggested emotion by using a physical figure. Very literally, it is “His bowels were moved within him.” The Greeks regarded the bowels as the seat of violent passion, such as anger or

⁵ I Peter 2:25

love. The Jews regarded them as the seat of the tender affections. Jesus went into the cities and villages and saw something that made His whole inner physical life, as the observing facility of His spiritual subsistence, burn and move within Him.

**With joy we meditate the grace,
Touched with a sympathy within,
Of our High Priest above;
He knows our feeble frame;
His heart is made of tenderness,
He knows what sore temptations mean,
His bowels yearn with love.
For He hath felt the same.**

Isaac Watts

We all know something of this sensation of physical infirmity at the movement of our inner feelings. The sudden hurt of the inner soul will bring a corresponding weakness and pain to our physical bodies because of our deepest emotions. This is what Jesus experienced as He saw these lost sheep as scattered and not having Himself as their Shepherd. Jesus was moved to the distress of His physical body through the anguish of seeing with spiritual sight these multitudes perishing without a shepherd for their souls.

The very definition of *compassion* is “feeling with, pain with, comradeship in sorrow, fellowship in agony.” Jesus came into such comradeship and empathy with human life that its pain was His pain. He saw into the awfully spiritual condition through divine eyes also. Together—that is, because of the human feeling and the divine insight—there was produced in Jesus this true compassion with the hurt and torn and lost condition of their souls before God. He could see beyond the physical into the possibilities of consoled and healed and retrieved sheep, who would know the peace and joy and love of His safe fold. Jesus’ inability to reach the multitudes with the gospel of the Kingdom was certainly not caused by any lack of compassion; He has rich experiences with it of the highest rank.

II. WHAT DID INDEED CAUSE JESUS' LIMITATION IN REACHING SOULS

*Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is
plenteous, but the laborers are few; Matthew 9:37*

There is a word which is a very fine word because in its meaning lies a great many successes and a great many failures. Someone has said, "Being in the right place at the right time is the whole of success." The accuracy of that is obvious to any thinking person. No matter what skills one may possess, and no matter what preparation one may secure, and no matter Who one might know, if one has no **opportunity**, then all skills and all preparation and all politicizing will end in little or nothing accomplished. Jesus had the skills for evangelizing. He had the preparation of a spotless life of whole devotion to His one task given by His Father. He had the prerogative of the God of the universe, Who would even endorse Jesus' every deed and Word as His own.⁶ Jesus was the epitome of every skill, every preparation, every resource needed to succeed at evangelism..., except the one thing necessary always for success in any venture, **opportunity**. Jesus, the Man, though perfect in every detail as regarded all necessary skills, preparation, and official partisanship from God, never had the opportunity to use them all for all men. That task He left to us, His disciples.

A Modest Crew in a Monumental Harvest

Jesus acknowledged that alone He could not reach the multitudes. Hampered by the physical body of a Man, Jesus could not possibly preach to every human being on earth while here. Even in the relatively small area of Palestine, He found Himself hopelessly bested by the outright numbers facing Him. He was overmatched to gigantic proportions. He was only one Man. Though skilled at teaching, preaching, healing, and winning the multitudes, nonetheless, He was only one Man. He looked forward

⁶ *Matthew 17:5*

to the time when the Spirit would indwell every believer. Through the Holy Spirit, He would be living in every heart and life of His disciples. Then, He could go forth to the entire world in the lives of many men. His same compassion would be evident through the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Who is Christ's spiritual Presence. His evangelistic skills would be everywhere His disciples were, through the special spiritual gifts of ministry.

But during Christ's personal ministry qualifying factors were different. The reason for Jesus' limitation was a plenteous harvest, but few laborers. In *verse 37*, the Greek has two untranslated particles, μὲν and δὲ. With these translated the verse reads, *On the one hand the harvest is plenteous, but on the other hand the laborers are few*. It was not enough for Him to feel compassion Himself. He needed *laborers* or workers—a plurality of compassionate lives—to reap the fields *white already unto harvest*.⁷ On the one hand there awaited *plenteous* souls; that is, many, abundant, and great numbers, who were ready to be brought into the granaries of the Kingdom. But on the other hand, there were *few* workers; that is, small, slight, and tiny numbers of workmen, who would be called on to do no more than just reap the harvest that God had made ready. The workman does no growing. He cannot produce the growth of the Kingdom, which Jesus described as a mysterious bringing forth *first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear*. The workmen may plant and water, but it is *God Who giveth the increase*.⁸

Jesus desires His disciples to possess the sympathy that He had, or rather, for them to be possessed with the empathy that possessed Him. This empathy does not register with the inner feelings only—that is meant and is necessary—but His kind of empathy projects one's own personality into the personality of lostness and wretchedness and haplessness which is strangling the lost. His empathy travails actively by sharing in the responsibility to

⁷ John 4:35 ⁸ Mark 4:28; I Corinthians 3:6.

respond to the need of the multitude. That is precisely what His empathy was, and did.

The desire of Jesus is for all His own Elect to join in the harvest. A great challenge lay before Him, and He saw that His own are the only agents to meet that challenge by their giving all to the task as He did.⁹ Unlike the figure of the sheep and the shepherd wherein God meets man's need, Christ now turns to the figure of a harvest, with us Christians as the laborers who fulfill God's need for harvesters. We disciples meet the needs of God's harvest by our labors. On the other hand, no one can be the Shepherd to His sheep except Christ: God meets that need by the inner workings of His Word in men by His Spirit—that is the divine exhibition of election, predestination, and foreknowledge, things beyond our purview and power. However, men—yes, plain and ordinary men—are the agents through whom God actively meets the needs of the multitude to hear and to believe the gospel of the Kingdom. Therefore, in *verse 38* He recommends the means that will effect the large numbers of laborers needed to harvest so great a number of souls. In other words, he gives the determinant for bringing the lost into the Kingdom.

⁹ Q.v. *Luke 9:56-62*

III. WHAT ASSURES JESUS' UNLIMITED SUCCESS IN REACHING SOULS

Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

Matthew 9:38-10:1

Jesus Assures Success through Prayer

Jesus' method for reaching the multitudes with the gospel begins with prayer and ends with personnel. In between those is the power to save lost souls, which is only and always appropriated through prayer. At the outset of a real harvest of souls there must be earnest prayer to God, and then adequate power will be forthcoming from God's resources supernaturally to call, regenerate, and equip enough men to succeed. In this divine way Jesus will no longer be limited in any way in sharing His compassionate heart with the lost. Furthermore, if God is not sovereign in salvation and in calling men into the harvest, why would Jesus instruct His disciples to pray to Him to do it? The key to all successful evangelism is in this instruction. Obeyed, it will lead to a harvest of souls being brought into the Kingdom, but unbelief in God's sovereign power and sovereign way to save will be met with frustration, disappointment and fleshly professions of religion.

Jesus said for His disciples to pray if the harvest is to be made. He saw a great harvest too large for His then small group; therefore He attempted to convince them and us that prayer is the primary determinant in evangelism. He looked at the fields; He was overcome and moved with compassion for them. He felt Himself somewhat frustrated in reaching all of them; whereupon He immediately said, *Pray ye therefore to the Lord of the harvest*. Jesus saw His Father as the *Lord*, or overseer, superintendent, and director of the harvest of souls. He alone calls men into the harvest—both into salvation and into service—and directs all

operations from heaven. Christ did not hesitate at all; immediately He gave Himself to this very kind of prayer to the Lord of the harvest. Although omitted by Matthew, Luke gives to us details of Jesus' prayer at this same time,

And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.

Luke 6: 12-13

Jesus at once recognized the Father's needed role in evangelism, and that His indispensable and essential function as *Lord of the harvest* must be recognized and acknowledged by those of us in the harvest.

This appreciation of God's essential role in the harvest of souls will bring response from God. Jesus spent the entire night in prayer to the *Lord of the harvest* for God's *calling* to be consummated in some disciples (learners) that would make them His apostles and laborers in the harvest.

Jesus Assures Success by Sending Forth Laborers

Jesus chose the twelve whom God had chosen, and sent them out into the harvest,

¹*And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.*

⁵*These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:*

⁶*But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

⁷*And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

Matthew 10:1, 5-7

God sent forth laborers into His harvest only after prayer, and in later years those same laborers won many, who, in turn,

also joined in the harvest. God must move in lost men's hearts in order to bring about salvation in them. In the Bible that "move in lost men's hearts" by the Lord is His *calling*.¹⁰ Jesus described that *calling* as being *sent forth*, of which the original Greek word is *εκβαλη*, "to thrust out, to throw out." God's effectual *calling* of lost sinners is actually a thrusting forth of persons into His harvest. He is in control. He actually takes hold of lost souls and literally casts them into the continuing harvest. Consequently, prayer that acknowledges and appropriates God's sovereign power in personal salvation is indispensable for His harvest's success. Jesus gave us the example; even He recognized God's hand in *calling* His laborers (apostles) into His harvest. He spent one entire night in prayer before He sent anyone into the harvest of souls. Jesus taught prayer to the *Lord of the harvest*. In His own praying He acknowledged the Father's sovereignty in directing the *harvest*, then He relied upon His sovereignty in choosing who would be the laborers as well as who would be *harvested*.

Success through Honest Power

Jesus conceded His own limitations in reaching the multitudes; therefore He asked for our help, even in prayer, that more will be sent into the harvest with the same compassion for and empathy with lost souls as He exhibited. If we would see the multitudes as Jesus saw them—as hurting, suffering, wandering sheep without a shepherd—then we will of necessity be forced to pray out of a similar frustration, and with an overwhelming sense of deficit human resources as He. This very feeling of weakness, followed by fervent prayer to the *Lord of the harvest*, will be for us the vehicle through which God's power comes into our evangelistic endeavors. Power is released from God's repository in heaven when Christians pray. The success then comes through prayer as God

¹⁰ *I Corinthians 1:26; Romans 8:30*, et al. And see the Author's Booklet, The Reason for Electing Grace—Human Weakness Requires a Divine Calling.

begins to move in the lives of the lost through His Holy Spirit with the preaching of the gospel. He then adds *to the church daily such as should be saved*.¹¹

The Holy Spirit through Honest Prayer

Jesus had another particular reason for requesting prayer. The particulars of this reason involve a divine principle found in *Luke 11:9-12*, verse 12 being the principal factor:

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

Luke 11:12

Jesus had just taught, as recorded in the preceding verses of *Luke*, that the continuous asking, seeking, and knocking at God's prayer door will result in one of two possibilities: either the supplicant will receive a positive response from God and the request will be granted, or, over a course of time—either long or short—, the worded prayer will be changed by the Holy Spirit's presence until it corresponds with God's perfect will.¹² Either way the supplicant will be personally benefited by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God will thus be actively engaged in one's ministry of prayer until He either grants the request, making it a reality, or He causes a change within the Christian's heart with a corresponding change in the prayer, which changes will profit both the Lord's work and the person's general disposition and ministry. That same principle is involved in Jesus' instruction to pray for laborers to be thrust into God's harvest. Such prayers will impact the supplicant with the presence of the Holy Spirit until a change is wrought that will make the answer to the prayer a sure happening. That is the undisclosed motive in Jesus' instructing the apostles to request

¹¹ *Acts 2:47* ¹² See this explained in Chapter 4, Honest Motivation for Honest Prayer, pp.

of God that He sent forth laborers into His harvest. Their prayers were intended to prepare them for their mission.¹³ Likewise, as we pray, we will grasp His will and way, which will result in His griping us with His compassionate power. Continuous prayer for the lost and for laborers for His harvest of the lost produces influential disciples with God and with the lost.

Success through Personnel

Jesus desire for His disciples, and especially for His apostles, was/is to enter into spiritual prayer until they received the good gifts of the Holy Spirit. There should be little doubt that these disciples who heard Jesus' instructions to pray for laborers for the harvest did truly pray as instructed. That, along with the power of Jesus' own all-night prayer, resulted in the calling of the twelve apostles. Those same men (the apostles) who prayed most fervently for laborers became the answer to their own prayers; Jesus chose them immediately after His and their prayers.

As we pray we condition ourselves to be fit vessels for the Holy Spirit's use, just as did the apostles. In Chapter 10, Jesus sent the twelve apostles out to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*. After being instructed to pray for laborers in our text, they were themselves afterward sent. It was so with the original apostles and that is the success of Jesus' ministry today. As we disciples pray for souls and for laborers to be provided for their salvation, we will find ourselves, through that prayer ministry, to be readied for doing the task for which we had only prayed before. God will then call us as well as others to the same assignment that had properly been only a prayer to us in the beginning. We, as also those others for whom we prayed, will then become the answer to our own prayers as these apostles were to theirs.

¹³ Lange, John Peter, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, Matthew (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1960), p.179.

The Ripe Harvest

The figure of a harvest that Jesus used in our text is full of meaning. He saw the fields *white unto harvest*, ripe and ready with no time to be wasted, else the precious heads of grain be lost to fowls or thieves or storms of hail and wind, or to any one of perhaps a score of other dangers to standing grain. That is how Jesus viewed the lost. He was urging haste and immediate action, because the need was for quick gathering in of the grain into God's protective granary—the stronghold of Christ. That Jesus desired for more and more harvesters to be sent into the work of souls was evidence again of His compassionate nature. He felt the urgency because He felt the pain of the lost in His own body. Being moved with compassion, He began imploring His disciples to pray for more and more laborers, else choice grain (the Spirit-prepared elect) be finally and irretrievably lost.¹⁴

The Lone Laborer

Jesus could not reach the multitudes. He would continue to be handicapped as long as He remained a lone laborer attempting to tackle the *plenteous* harvest. He saw the need for a quantity of laborers and for a precise quality of laborers. God only could supply both the great numbers necessary for so large a harvest, as well as the great gifts necessary for reaping so difficult a harvest. "They must be God-sent, not self-appointed. They must be men of love for God and love for souls."¹⁵ They must be God-empowered, not self-motivated, or self-sustained. They must be Christians who are empowered and enabled by God through a new birth and a filling of the Holy Spirit. They must have pleasing God and His Christ as the supreme motivation of their lives, and not only an emotional burden for the lost which is usually nothing more than fleshly sentimentalism. In other words—or really, in the words of Jesus—they must be the product of prayer to God, for

¹⁴ We do not pray and evangelize because the Elect's salvation principally depends upon us, but because the Elect's salvation altogether depends upon the Gospel preached., *Romans 10:13-15*.

¹⁵ William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary, Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 441.

God only can produce such a quantity and quality of laborers for His harvest of lost souls. Honest prayer to God, therefore, is essential.

Christ—The Source of Compassion

Real compassion must be as Jesus' own, only now it is Christ's own through His personal Indwelling, the Holy Spirit. When He is within, pleasing Him is the dominant desire of one's heart. Therefore, this prayer for laborers for lost souls, and for lost souls, will surely be entered into as He instructed. This kind of Spirit-induced prayer will be about the lost: prayer first and foremost for the means of their salvation and then for their salvation. Then, as a result of those prayers in the Spirit, God will send all of us into His harvest as His laborers, who will be assured of success because of His effectually "thrusting forth" even more laborers into his harvest. We will have a success that escaped Jesus as relates to quantity, because, though He was perfectly fitted to the task, He was only One Man among so many.

Jesus prophesied what amounts to a promise to us concerning the quantity of our works as compared to His, when he said,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

John 14:12

Certainly, Jesus' reference to *greater works* done by us could not mean greater works in quality. No works among men could excel the excellence and superiority of Jesus' beautiful works. Jesus meant that we would do more works in number, because of His limited ministry of being only one Man, and being a ministry of short duration. The only reason for the greater number of His believing disciples' works is *because I go unto my Father*. No longer will He be here to do personally any more good works. But now, the Exalted Lord Jesus Christ is succeeding through His disciples when they pray as Jesus instructed us to pray for the lost honestly. Honest prayer for the lost begins and is contingent upon praying for the *Lord of the harvest* to provide the means to harvest them for His Kingdom. Amen.