

Evangelize: "An Earnest Prayer For Laborers"

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Preacher: Jonathan Chancey

- [0 : 00] Amen. If you would, please take your Bibles and open them up to the book of Matthew chapter 9 this morning. We're finishing our mini-series on our mission and vision this morning.
- We've been going through our mission and vision in the month of January, specifically the past three weeks, discussing our vision in terms of the theme of prayer. And so we've come to our last E, enjoy, equip, evangelize, this morning.
- So we'll discuss that the task of evangelism cannot be accomplished apart from prayer. So if you would, please turn to Matthew chapter 9 and listen along with me as I read verses 35 through 38.
- And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.
- When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.
- [1 : 12] Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Lord, that we pray now as we consider the great task of evangelism.
- We pray as we hear your call to us to pray for laborers. We ask, Father, that you would stir our hearts with a heart of compassion for the lost. Would you lead us to pray and to ask you to move?
- And would you lead us to go and to proclaim? We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. Amen. I was reading some missionary stories this week, and I came across the story of a missionary named Hudson Taylor.
- You may be familiar with Hudson Taylor. Taylor was a missionary to the lost in China, and he was a man deeply committed to the gospel and deeply committed to the power of prayer.
- I read an excerpt from a book called Heroes of the Faith on Pioneer Trails. It was a missionary biography book, and it told the story of a sailing vessel that was struggling for control near the shores of New Guinea.
- [2 : 24] Seeing the captain's anxious face, Hudson Taylor, he asked him what the issue was, and the captain told him that a four-knot current is carrying us swiftly towards some sunken reefs over there.
- Our fate seems to be sealed. To make matters worse, on the shore, waiting for them were cannibals lighting their fires and eager for them to crash so that they might have their next meal.
- And so the captain said, again, we have done everything that can be done. And Hudson Taylor looked at him, and he replied, no, captain, there's one thing that we have not done.
- There are four of us on board the ship here who are Christians. Let each of us retire to his cabin, and in agreed prayer, let us ask the Lord to give us a breeze immediately.

This was agreed upon, and it was done. And after a few minutes, Hudson Taylor came out of his cabin, came up on the deck, confident that his petitions had been granted. He found the first officer, and he asked him, would you let down the corners of the mainsail?

[3 : 24] Well, what would be the good of that, asked the officer. Taylor told him that he and the other three men had been asking God and praying that the Lord would send a wind, and that it was coming immediately, there's not a minute to lose.

Let down the sail now. And the officer replied, nonsense. You cannot pray up a wind. Well, just a few moments later, they noticed that the topmost sail was beginning to tremble a little bit.

And so again, Hudson asked the captain, would you let down the sail? And they did. They let down the sail, and within a few moments, the breeze came just as they asked. And they were sailing away from the dangerous reefs, away from the cannibals on the beach, and the Lord had answered their prayers.

As he later reflected on this experience, Taylor wrote down in his journal, he said, Thus God encouraged me, air landing on China's shores, to bring every variety of need to him in prayer, and to expect that he would honor the name of the Lord Jesus, and give the help which each emergency required.

What I'd like for us to see this morning from our passage, as we look to Matthew chapter 9, verses 35 through 38, is that the world that we live in is in a state of emergency.

[4 : 54] And there is a problem facing us that's far greater than most of us tend to realize is a problem that's more dangerous than a sinking ship, is more dangerous than cannibals on the shoreline, is a problem that faces each and every one of us every single day, and it's a problem that you and I, we as Christians, are called to address.

And the solution that the Lord gives us to this great problem, it begins with prayer. So what I want us to see this morning is the problem, I want us to see the problem clearly as it is, and then I want us to see the perspective that we ought to have regarding this problem, and then we'll close with the solution that the Lord prescribes, which is prayer.

The problem, the perspective, and the prayer of evangelism. That'll be our outline for us this morning. First, let's consider the problem.

Look there to verse 35 with me. Matthew tells us that Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every affliction.

See, Jesus' ministry, it was one of miraculous demonstration of the power of God. He healed the sick. He cast out demons. He did many miraculous signs. And it was one of powerful teaching.

[6 : 24] It was a ministry of proclamation. He was not just healing for healing's sake. His deeds had a message attached. He proclaimed with word and deed the gospel of the kingdom of God, meaning that the rule and reign of God can be seen, and can be known, and can be entered into in Jesus Christ.

That was his message. He proclaimed a message that sinners like us don't have to belong to the kingdom of this world anymore, but rather through faith in Christ, sinners like us can be transferred from belonging to this earthly kingdom, and now belong to the rule and the reign of God as citizens of the kingdom of God.

He came proclaiming good news. And he did this because of the bad news. There's a problem here. Look there to verse 36 with me.

It says, When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. I don't know if you know much about sheep, but they are not intelligent animals.

And without a shepherd, they wonder about, they easily get lost, they're at risk of being harmed, they have nobody there to feed them, to provide for them, to guide them, to lead them, to protect them from dangers, from predators of wolves and others that would seek to do them harm.

[7 : 58] They're weak, they're vulnerable, they're at great risk to themselves without a shepherd. They're harassed and they're helpless, as our passage says this morning. But Jesus, he looks out at these crowds of people and he says that these crowds of people are like sheep without a shepherd.

This is a description of lostness. They are aimless, helpless, harassed, because they don't belong to the good shepherd, Jesus Christ.

They're lost. What I want us to understand is that this is the state of everyone outside of Christ. And this is the greatest problem in the world.

Now think about it with me. What do you think the greatest problem in the world is right now? If your answer goes to poverty, that's a problem.

That's too small. Bad politicians in Washington, bad leadership, bad decisions, that's a problem. It's too small. Cancer, disease, sickness, that's too small.

[9 : 11] War, violence, people killing each other here and there and everywhere, that's too small. The greatest problem that the world faces right now is lostness.

There are people in every place of the globe who are spiritually harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd because they do not know Jesus.

And we should understand that this is an eternal issue, church. I realize it may be going out of style to speak about hell, but I want to be clear with you, church, that hell awaits all who are lost.

This is the bad news of the gospel. The only way that sinners can escape the wrath of God that we have earned ourselves for our sin, the only way that we can escape the punishment that we are owed for our sin is for sinners to hear the message of the gospel, the good news that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, the good news that Christ Jesus has paid for our sins so that we don't have to, the good news that Jesus defeated death so it's no longer an enemy for us, the good news that Jesus conquered the grave so that it won't conquer us, unless you hear that message of the good news of the gospel and believe it, you will die in your sins and go to hell.

Does this sound like bad news to you? Does that sound like a problem to you? Paul Chitwood, he rightly says, every other problem will end the day you die.

[10 : 53] There is no addiction in the grave, no family conflict in the grave, all your problems end but one. The magnitude of that problem sets in the minute you die.

The greatest problem the world faces right now is that men and women all over the globe do not know the name of Jesus, do not love Jesus, do not honor Jesus, do not worship Jesus, they're lost.

And what they desperately need more than anything is to enter into the kingdom of God by faith in Jesus Christ. And the only way they will enter into the kingdom of God by faith in Jesus Christ is if they hear the message of the gospel spoken to them so that they might believe and be saved.

Let me give you a little perspective on this, church, globally. Globally, the issue of lostness globally is profound. You may have heard me pray for unreached people groups and maybe you've heard that term and you don't know exactly what that means.

Unreached people groups. This definition comes from global frontier missions. Unreached people groups are defined as an identifiable group of people distinguished by a distinct culture, language, or social class who lack a community of Christians able to evangelize the rest of the people group without outside help.

[12 : 32] That's key. Without outside help. So in other words, the only opportunity for the people group to hear about salvation in Jesus Christ is through an external witness.

Somebody else coming in from the outside bringing the gospel to them. Most missiologists they consider 2% of the population becoming Christ followers as the tipping point at which the group is now considered generally reached with the gospel.

Just 2%. How many unreached people groups are there? Let me give you some numbers. There are now 8 billion people alive in the world today. 3.4 billion of them live in unreached people groups with little to no access to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's 42.5% of the entire global population. Now approximately 85% of these unreached people groups they live in what's called the 1040 window.

Now I'm going to take you all the way back to elementary school when you learn latitude and longitude. The 1040 window is the rectangular area of North Africa the Middle East and Asia that is approximately between 10 degrees north latitude and 40 degrees north latitude.

[13 : 56] two thirds of the world lives there. Many of them unreached with the gospel. They have never heard the name of Jesus.

And this is a shocking number. Less than 3% of all known missionary work is done in this area. What are we doing?

Why? Why? Well it's dangerous. It's incredibly dangerous. This message is not well received there.

It's costly to go there. It's difficult terrain. It's hostile territory. It is not safe for you and your family to go. There are a million reasons not to go but someone must go or they will die in their sins and they will go to hell.

Church, Romans 10. The message of the gospel is so simple and profound. Romans 10 it tells us that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

[15 : 02] How beautiful is that? But then Paul goes on and asks some questions. How then will they call on him whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.

It's a problem globally. Lostness. But it's not just a problem out there. Let's zoom back in to where we are here all in all South Carolina because think with me it's not just an out there problem there's a problem of lostness right here in our neighborhood right here in our community right here where we live locally.

Most of us here where we live are familiar with the name of Jesus. Most of the people where we live know the name of Jesus. But I am convinced that many have confused familiarity with faith.

It is not enough to be familiar with the name of Jesus. To know who Jesus is is not enough to save anybody. Just like if you are drowning to know what a life jacket is is not enough to save you.

[16 : 26] Not unless you take hold and grab and grasp and cling to that life jacket wrap it around you so that it preserves your life. To know intellectually what salvation is is not enough.

You have to cling to it. to know who Jesus is is not enough to save anyone apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. Our problem here is not that we have not heard the name of Jesus.

It's that we think knowing his name is enough. To have gone to church as a child and to be familiar with the stories of Jesus is not enough to save you.

To know the old hymns. to have a copy of the Bible and the glove compartment of your truck. It's not enough to save you. The only thing that can save anyone is personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

As I look at the landscape here where we live I think it's clear that we have a lostness problem right here. The latest religious data that I could dig up was from 2010 I realize that's 14 years ago now lots has changed in 14 years but as of 2010 43 and a half percent of Charleston County residents claimed no religious affiliation whatsoever.

[17 : 53] That's almost half. Does that number surprise you? And so if you're wondering where you can go find a lost person to talk to go find two people and between the three of you one of you needs to hear about Jesus.

That's what the numbers say. 14 years ago and I don't know that they've made positive trends since then. That's just a guess. Just 22.2% identified as an evangelical Protestant and I have no idea of that category how many of those are what I just described.

People who grew up in church are familiar with church, familiar with the gospel, familiar with Jesus but do not have personal faith in Christ. Lostness is a problem right here in our neighborhoods, in our families, in our places of work.

How many of us have lost people in our families? How many of us in our own neighborhoods, on our own streets, within a five minute radius of where we live, where we go about our day to day lives, have people within our reach who are lost, harassed, and helpless like sheep without a shepherd?

What are we going to do about this problem, church? Well, the first thing we need, point number two, the first thing we need is to share Jesus' perspective on the problem.

[19 : 24] This is the perspective, point number two. I want you to notice Jesus' perspective on the problem of lostness. Look there to verse 36 again. It says, when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them.

He had compassion on them. That word there, compassion, you know what it literally means? It means a movement in the bowels. Okay? It's not a potty joke, all right?

It's not what you think when we hear that language. In this culture, in this time, the bowels were thought to be the place of love, and pity. In other words, what it's saying is he felt this in his gut, deep down within him.

This wasn't a fake, superficial, surface-level pity. This was a movement within him of genuine, heartfelt, yearning, and compassion for the lost.

It's the same language, same word that's used in the parable of the Good Samaritan. You know the story. Everybody else went about their business. They saw this man struggling on the road, hurt, needy, and they went on about their business, but the Good Samaritan felt compassion, was moved with compassion to love his neighbor in need.

[20 : 41] He felt compassion. We have to ask whether or not we share that same movement within us. When we think about the lost around us, do we feel compassion? compassion. So many Christians, unfortunately, if we're being honest, we don't feel compassion.

We feel indifference. We are too busy with our business, too busy going about our day, too occupied with our own lives to actually look out and care about the world around us that is perishing.

I wonder if that describes you. If we're not indifferent, sometimes we, act even worse than that, sometimes we actually feel anger and frustration towards the lost.

They don't act like Christians. Well, should we be surprised? They don't think like we want them to think or act like we want them to act. They act like lost people, so instead of having compassion on them, we get frustrated with them.

Why can't they get themselves together? Church, this ought not be. If we want to reach the lost in our community, it has to start within our hearts.

[21 : 50] We have to view them as Christ views them. We have to be moved with compassion for them. We have to love them as Christ has loved us. Aren't we glad that the Lord had compassion on us?

Aren't we glad that the Lord was not indifferent towards our need? Aren't we glad that the Lord was not angry towards our sin? That the Lord came down to us to bring us a message of hope, to pay for our sin, to love us by laying down his own life for us?

Aren't we glad that the Lord had compassion on us? As we think about bringing the gospel to the lost, we don't have to extend to them anything the Lord has not first extended to us in the gospel.

Jesus sees the lost with a perspective of compassion. Not only this, he also sees the lost with a perspective of hope. Perspective of hope.

Look there to verse 37. As Jesus looks out and sees the crowds, he says to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful. The harvest is plentiful.

[23 : 02] See, the metaphor, it changes here from a shepherding illustration now to a farming illustration. He says the lost people in the world aren't just shepherdless sheep. Jesus says they're also like wheat, ready and waiting to be harvested.

The harvest is plentiful, he says. This isn't the only time that we see this sort of illustration, even in the book of Matthew. And typically as we think about harvest, as we hear that language of a harvest being reaped, speaking of end time language, end time language, the end of the age when Christ returns and he saves all of his people all over the globe, every corner of the earth, every tribe, tongue, and nation.

There's a harvest of those coming to the Lord. Just a few chapters later, Matthew 13, Jesus tells a parable called the parable of the weeds, and he tells the disciples that there is coming an end time harvest where the weeds of the world will be burned up, but the wheat will be gathered into the barn.

Matthew chapter 3, John the Baptist, he warns the Pharisees and the Sadducees that judgment is coming. He says his winnowing fork is in his hand, he will clear the threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn away with unquenchable fire.

See, Jesus looks out at the lost world, at the lostness of the world, and he sees what only he can see. He sees with complete clarity the wheat that are ready to be harvested.

[24 : 37] He sees with perfect sight future believers from every tribe, tongue, and nation, all of God's elect from every nation on earth. He sees the harvest.

All those who will certainly come to faith in Christ when they hear the message of the gospel. That's Jesus' perspective on the lost.

And if that's his perspective, we should know that the problem that we face is not hopeless, church. there is a harvest to be had if we would go and share.

The problem of lostness is an incredible opportunity to bring glory to King Jesus. Could you just imagine it?

That 1040 window with all the lost and unreached people groups. Could you imagine men and women from the Ansari people of India hearing and believing the gospel for the very first time?

[25 : 38] The very first people from their people group to hear the name of Jesus. For them to come to faith in Jesus. For that faith to spread throughout their family. For it to spread throughout their community.

For disciples to be made. For the church to be built. For the gospel to spread in areas where it's never yet come. For men and women of the Bambara people in Mali.

People who are made in the image of God who have never heard the name of Christ. Church, there is work to be done. The church isn't meant to just be a gathering place where we come together and worship as significant and important as that is.

I pour so much energy into this one hour a week. I hope you know I value it. This is not the end of what the church is meant to be and do. We gather here that we might scatter with a message to proclaim to the lost who don't have what we have by the grace of God.

church, there is a harvest to be reaped. Can you imagine it? What would it be like if our neighbors who don't know Christ right now heard the message of the gospel from your lips, came to faith in Christ?

[26 : 48] If our family members who don't know Christ right now, currently, heard the message of the gospel and came to faith, could you imagine the potential for eternal impact that sits in this room right now?

Every day we have these opportunities to impact someone's eternity for the glory of God, but there's another problem here, isn't there? Jesus says, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

The harvest is plentiful, church, but the laborers are few. The harvest that we long to see, we long to see lost people coming into the kingdom, don't we?

Amen? Don't we? The harvest will only come in as laborers go out. I don't know how much farming you have done.

Wheat does not walk itself into the barn. Neither do the lost walk themselves into the kingdom of God. I don't know if you've noticed, that non-believers are not beating down the doors of our church to join us for worship on Sunday morning.

[28 : 04] That's not how this works. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers, the laborers who will go and share the good news, who will go and proclaim the gospel so that that seed of the word of Christ might sow deep into the hearts of the lost and sprout faith in their hearts.

The laborers are few. So, what should we do? The answer might surprise you. He says, third, pray.

Pray. Pray. Pray. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Pray, he says. does that answer surprise you? If you and I were given the instructions here, you know what we would say? The harvest is plentiful, there's a harvest to be had, laborers are few, therefore, go, right?

Go out there, go, go earnestly, go, get to work. But he says, therefore, pray. Now, of course, the disciples, they do go.

[29 : 21] This is where context helps us, right? They pray and then they go. This isn't pray and don't go. Look at what happens just in the next verses here in chapter 10.

Jesus sends them out into the harvest field. Chapter 10, Jesus sends out the twelve, telling them, proclaim as you go, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

This is not pray for somebody else to do what you are unwilling to do. The disciples were about to be sent out as laborers, but before they go and as they go, Jesus commands them, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest, the one who rules over it all.

Pray earnestly that he would send out laborers into the harvest field, not other laborers beside you, other laborers alongside you. More and more and more and more laborers so that the message of the gospel would be heard and would be believed and that we might see a harvest for the glory of God.

Pray and go. Pray and go. That's the game plan for the church. Pray and go. Pray and go. Craig Tuck is the associational mission strategist for the Charleston Baptist Association.

[30 : 41] Some of you know that name. He's somebody who cares deeply about seeing the gospel spread throughout our area and the Charleston County area. If you go get breakfast with Craig at 938 you will start to hear this beeping noise.

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep. I'm telling you right now so you know what to expect. 938 is going to happen. I just assume it happens in the evening as well at 938 but every day his watch is set with an alarm to go off and interrupt whatever it is he's doing, whatever important meeting he has, Whatever it is, he will stop and he will be reminded to pray.

Matthew 9, 38. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Church, I want to ask you two questions as we consider how to apply this passage. I want each of you to answer these two questions in your own heart and as you go from this place this afternoon.

Number one, are you praying for laborers? Are you earnestly asking God to send out more evangelism-minded Christians into the world that are ready to open up their mouths and actually share the good news of the gospel no matter the cost?

[32 : 01] Are you praying for more laborers here in Charleston, here in Allendal, in Mount Pleasant and beyond? Are you praying for laborers in the 1040 window all across the globe where men and women do not know the name of Jesus?

Are you praying? And question number two, are you going? The Great Commission is given to all of us, church.

Jesus says, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you, and surely I am with you even to the uttermost ends of the earth.

Are you going? For some, that might mean packing up and going somewhere far away. Church, I pray that a Seaweed Bay Baptist Church might in some time, in some way, be used of the Lord to send missionaries to the end of the earth.

That might seem like a big prayer for us right now. Maybe it is. I believe the Lord will do it in time. I pray that the Lord would show us somehow, some way, how we can support this missionary endeavor to the ends of the earth to bring the gospel to places and peoples who do not know the good news of Christ.

[33 : 35] But for all of us, it means beginning to see right where you are as a mission field.

Right now, right where the Lord has placed you in your homes, in your places of work, in your neighborhoods, in your communities, in your route to and from the grocery store, whatever it is that you do day in and day out, to begin to see it as a mission field, and to begin to see the lost all around you as Christ does, with compassion and hope that the Lord will save, if we would open our mouth and proclaim the good news of the gospel.

Who do you know that needs to hear the message of the gospel? Who do you know that is harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd?

Who needs to hear the gospel? I want to close this morning by sharing one more story about Hudson Taylor. His life was an answer to prayer.

I don't know if you know his story very well or not. His mother and his father, before he was even born, committed him in prayer to the Lord and prayed that their child might one day be saved and might one day go and be a missionary in China.

[34 : 55] Can you believe that? And through prayer, their desires were answered. Hudson Taylor became obsessed with bringing the message of the gospel to China. He joined the Chinese Evangelization Society and set sail in 1853.

And the Heroes of Faith on Pioneer Trails book shared one more story I want to share with you this morning. He said that while traveling one day on a boat, Hudson Taylor met a Chinese man who had once visited England.

And the man listened to Hudson Taylor as he shared the gospel. And he was emotionally moved by what he heard about the grace of God. He was moved to tears at the message of the gospel.

But something within him, I don't know what it was, he refused to accept the offer of salvation. Well, a little while later, Hudson Taylor was watching. And the man, Hudson Taylor saw the man distressed and saw him throw himself overboard and began to sink in the water.

Obviously distressed, Hudson looked around for help and he saw a fishing boat that had a drag net close by and so he shouted out to the fishermen, Come over here, drag your net on this spot. A man just jumped over here.

[36 : 09] He sank, he's drowning. And they responded and they said, It's not convenient. I said, Don't talk about convenience. A man is drowning here, he cried.

We're busy fishing. We cannot come. Taylor urged them to come at once. He offered to pay them and they perked up a little bit about this offer. They wanted to know how much they could get.

He offered \$5 and they refused. So he said, Y'all come quickly and bring this net. I'll give you all the money I have, \$14. Finally, the boat was brought and the hooks were let down.

In less than a minute, they brought up the body. But all efforts at resuscitation failed and the man was dead. Hudson Taylor, the incident obviously was sad in and of itself.

But in this incident, he saw an even greater lesson. The book asked the question, Were not those fishermen guilty of the death of the man?

[37 : 08] And that they had the opportunity and the means of saving him, but refused to use them. Most assuredly, they were guilty. And yet, says Taylor, let us pause, ere we pronounce judgment against them, lest a greater than Nathan answer, Thou art the man.

Is it so wicked a thing to neglect to save the body? Of how much sorer punishment then is he worthy who leaves the immortal soul to perish?

The Lord Jesus commands me, commands you, go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Shall we say to him, No, it is not convenient?

Shall we tell him that we are busy at fishing or other business and cannot go? Oh, let us pray and let us labor for the salvation of China's un-evangelized millions.

Let us pray and let us labor, church. Let us pray and let us go. Lord, we ask now in prayer, would you send out laborers into your harvest field?

[38 : 28] We ask, Father, would you move this church to obedience to the Great Commission? Help us to see this is not optional. Help us to see the harvest as you see the lost.

Help us to share your heart of compassion on those who are suffering, harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Father, we pray, would you bring eternal salvation to the souls of the lost through the lips of this church?

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.