



January 11, 2026  
Pastor Wil Staley

## “The Motivation for Mission”

Matthew 9:35-38

### Introduction:

Matthew 9:35-38 – “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; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

#### I. The Hands of Christ on the Mission (v. 35)

Matthew 9:35 – “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.”

This is a near word for word replication of the sentence that prefaces the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 4:23).

Four verbs worth noting in the opening verse:

- A. went throughout – *periágo* – walking around; a continuing process
- B. teaching – *didásko* – as one with authority *in their synagogue*
  - a. As a Jew, it was Jesus’ synagogue as much as anyone else’s, but the Jewish authorities often set themselves in opposition to Jesus.
- C. proclaiming – *kerýsso* – preaching; to make known by a herald (Matthew 3:1; 4:17)
- D. healing – *therapéuo* – cure; refers to attend or serve
  - a. Suggests a “therapeutic” element to Jesus’ work.

Jesus brought wholeness to people meeting their spiritual needs and life afflictions.

#### II. The Heart of Christ for the People (v. 36)

Matthew 9:36a – “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them...”

- had compassion – *splanchnízomai* – to have a deep empathy for; to feel in the viscera
  - A verb always used about Jesus or by Jesus in the New Testament.
- Christ sees not just with human pity but with divine compassion.

1 Peter 5:6-7 – “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”

Matthew 9:36b – “...because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

- harassed – walking with difficulty
- helpless – cast down or barely making it

Sheep have no offense or defense mechanisms. All sheep need a shepherd who can lead them to green pastures and beside still waters (Psalm 23).

Hebrews 4:15-16 – “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

### **III. The Prayer of Disciples for the Laborers (vv. 37-38)**

The Harvest Reality (Plentiful Harvest. Few Laborers): Matthew 9:37 – “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few....’”

Jesus uses a metaphor here of a harvest field to refer to the very types of people who He saw and had compassion for.

The harvest is ready, but the crop is not going to walk itself in. Where are the laborers?

The Worker Reality (Pray Earnestly...to the Lord of the Harvest... for the Workers): v. 38 “...*therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*”

- *pray earnestly* – *deomai* – ask, plead, beg.

When is the last time you begged God for something?

The Lord of the Harvest: Psalm 127:1a – “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.”

In an age of analytics, critical thinking, and strategic planning, the expectation is for our call to action from the Master to be vigorous, tactical, and effective. Yet, the Master’s mission starts with our prayer for laborers.

- *laborers* – *ergates* – “workers” is the simple translation. Not professionals, experts, or leaders.

A healthy, growing, living church should be filled with members who feel called in some sense to be a “worker”.

Jesus doesn’t encourage us to pray for the harvest, Jesus encourages us to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest for laborers.

#### **Conclusion:**

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 – “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”

May we pray that more workers would go out into the harvest knowing that their efficacy depends on God.

#### **FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:**

1. What does it look like for you personally to model the “hands” and “heart” of Christ, based on this passage?
2. Name a time when the details (dates, costs, schedule) of a mission came before prayer. What was the experience like? Was the mission successful?
3. Were you surprised that Jesus doesn’t encourage us to pray for the harvest? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever felt like you were the lord of the harvest responsible for the consequences of your work?
5. How will you commit to prioritize prayer and fasting during our 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting campaign?
6. What names has the Lord begun to place on your heart for the “Each One Win One” campaign?