

**Practicing This One Thing:  
How to Pray for the Nations  
Matthew 9:35-38**

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**Text Introduction:** On August 13, I began preaching on the subject of prayer. I hope you have benefitted from this study as much as I have. I am concluding the preaching series today, but I sincerely trust that we will forever be growing into a “House of Prayer.” Remember that is the Scripture that has guided us. Jesus said, “My house shall be a house of prayer.”

At various times, I have reminded us of some foundational principles to guide us as a church. I have suggested that we adopt these four core values as a church.

1. We must preach the same Gospel.
2. We must declare this message to the next generation.
3. We must preach this same Gospel to all the nations.
4. Whatever we accomplish must be all for God’s glory.

Today’s message concerns that third principle—preaching the Gospel to all the nations. Specifically, I want to end our series on prayer with the reminder that we must be praying for the Gospel to be made known to the nations. Here’s the text for our consideration.

**Text:** Then Jesus went to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. 36 When He saw the crowds, He felt compassion for them, because they were weary and worn out, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. 38 Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”

**Introduction:** The context of our Scripture reading today is a summary of Jesus’ ministry. The specific passage that we have read also immediately precedes Jesus’ appointment of the disciples who are being tasked to go to those who need to hear about Jesus. Therefore, the summary passage at the end of Matthew 9 gives us an excellent point of view from Scripture regarding the primacy of prayer in the endeavor of preaching the Gospel to the nations.

**Praying for the nations is a command.**

Therefore, pray. This is a command. What specifically are we to pray.

**The Prayer: “to the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”**

**This Prayer for the nations is . . .**

**Consistent with the Situation.**

The News is Good—The Gospel is good. We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But, God, in His love, loved us while we were sinners. He proved His love toward us in this way: He died for sinners. And, if we confess with our mouths, having believed in our hearts, we can be saved. We will be saved from our sin, forgiven from our sin, and saved for everlasting life to be with God forever. That is good news!

The Needs are Great—Jesus saw. He felt compassion. Real compassion always leads to action. At the least, seeing the needs ought to lead us to the action of prayer.

The Harvest is Ready—Jim Denison writes:

More people are coming to Christ today than at any time in Christian history.

David Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia* documents 82,000 conversions a day. Some think his number is far too low. I was told that as many as 100,000 people come to Christ every day in the People's Republic of China. South Korea is one-third to one-half born-again Christian.

Brazil will be one-half evangelical Christian by 2025. I can tell you that more than a million Cubans have come to Christ in the last ten years. More Muslims have come to Christ in the last fifteen years than in the preceding fifteen centuries, many after seeing dreams and visions of Jesus.

We are truly witnessing a fifth great awakening around the world.

The Workers are Few

### **Confident in the Savior.**

The early disciples of Jesus understood that the missionary endeavor depended upon prayer. As a matter of fact, they understood that everything depended upon prayer. We have this example to pray. Then, in Acts 13, we have another example to pray. Before sending out the first missionary team, the Bible says that the church met, fasted and prayed, then sent the team. The first great missionary, the Apostle Paul asked the Colossian church to pray for him in these words:

Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray for us that God may open a door to us for the message, to speak the mystery of the Messiah. (Colossians 4:2-3)

In Thom Rainer and Ed Stetzer's book, Transformational Churches, they write:

Our only hope is divine intervention, not our latest revitalization tool or church-planting strategies. Where people pray, God works. Where God works, transformation happens.

Then they quote from Leonard Ravenhill, born in England in 1907 and one who influenced many great leaders and churches through his writing, teaching, and preaching.

Poverty-stricken as the church is today in many things, she is the most stricken here, in the place of prayer. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, few prayers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion,

little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere. (Quoted from Ed Stetzer, Transformational Church, p. 144)

Pastor Jim Cymbala of Brooklyn New York said, "I have discovered an astonishing truth. God is attracted to weakness. He can't resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need him." (Quote from Jim Cymbala in Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire as quoted by Stetzer in TC, p. 124.)

He is the Lord of the Harvest!

### **A Commitment that every Saved person can make.**

We have multiple opportunities to go. This year, folks from our church have gone to Brazil, Haiti, Alaska, and Romania. We have a couple of young men who will go on our behalf in a few days to Nicaragua. We have people from our church who have been sent to the far corners of the world. We rejoice in this. Others have given. We all participate weekly when we give our offering to this local church. Not all can go. Not all can give, especially large sums of money. But here is something that every single person can do and yet few really do. We can all pray.

Peggy Smith was eighty-four years old. Her sister, Christine, was eighty-two. The years had taken sight from the first and bent the body of the second. Neither could leave their house to attend church.

Yet their church needed them. They lived on the Isle of Lewis, off the coast of Scotland. A spiritual darkness had settled upon their village of Barvas. The congregation was losing people, and the youth were mocking the faith, speaking of conversion as a plague. In October 1949 the Presbytery of Free Church called upon their members to pray.

But what could two elderly, housebound sisters do? Quite a lot, they determined. They turned their cottage into an all-night house of prayer. From 10 p.m. to 4 a.m., two nights each week, they asked God to have mercy on their city. After several months Peggy told Christine that God had spoken these words to her: "I will pour water upon him who is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground."

She was so sure of the message, she urged her pastor to conduct a revival and invite well-known evangelist Duncan Campbell to speak. The pastor did, but Campbell reluctantly declined. Peggy received the news with confidence. "God hath said he is coming, and he will be here within a fortnight." God changed Campbell's calendar, and within two weeks the meeting began.

For five weeks Duncan Campbell preached in Barvas parish. Large crowds gathered in four services at 7 p.m., 10 p.m., midnight, and 3 a.m. The move of God upon the people was undeniable. Hundreds of people were converted. Drinking places closed for lack of patrons. Saloons emptied, and the church grew. The Isle of Lewis tasted the presence of God. All because two women prayed. (Story taken from Outlive Your Life by Max Lucado, pages 141-142.)

I long for us to catch a glimpse of moving beyond our selfish requests and move to more missionary driven, evangelistic praying. We talk often about sacrificial giving. What about sacrificial praying?

**So What? Let us be . . .**

**Invested in our praying.** Giving has a way of causing us to be more invested in praying.

**Motivated in our praying.**

We get more motivated by getting invested, but also by getting informed. Get to know some missionaries and their needs.

**Bold in our praying.**

When Jesus cleared out the Temple that day and proclaimed, “It is written, My house will be called a house of prayer,” he was quoting the prophet Isaiah. For reasons that we will never know for sure, either Jesus did not give Isaiah’s whole statement or Matthew did record that Jesus gave Isaiah’s whole statement. (This is more likely because the parallel passage of Mark 11:17 includes an additional phrase.) But, if we go to Isaiah 56:7, we learn that Isaiah had an additional phrase: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

Let it be so!