

**A Church on Mission**  
**Praying for Missions: Don't Leave Home Without It**  
**Matthew 9:35-38**

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**Introduction to Text:** At various times this year, I have done some major teaching on our core values 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.

In this current series, we are focused on the third core value. A singular word for this core value is the word "missions." Today, I want to talk about one of our chief resources for the missionary endeavor—prayer.

**Text:** <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> When He saw the crowds, He felt compassion for them, because they were weary and worn out, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> 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.

**Reasons Why We Must Make Much of Prayer in the Area of Missions:**

**We are commanded to pray for the sending out of missionaries.**

Specifically, this passage drives home four points about the Gospel before the command to pray.

The News is Good

The Needs are Great

The Harvest is Ready

The Workers are Few

In a lot of respects then, this passage doesn't say anything that we haven't said over the last few weeks. We are not plowing any new ground. So, what else about prayer do we glean from this passage.

**Prayer is the sign of our complete dependence upon God.**

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 recent 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.)

**Prayer is the one commitment to missions that all of us can make.**

We have been talking about missions for a couple of weeks. We've talked about giving and going on missions. The truth is some are not able to give large sums. Not all can go. 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.

In late 1964 Communist Simba rebels besieged the town of Bunia in Zaire. They arrested and executed many citizens. A pastor by the name of Zebedayo Idu was one of their victims. They sentenced him to death before a firing squad and placed him in jail for the night. The next morning he and a large number of prisoners were herded onto a truck and driven to a public place for execution. With no explanation the official told the prisoners to line up and number off – “one, two, one, two, one, two.” The ones were placed in front of the firing squad. The twos were taken back to the prison. Pastor Zebedayo was among those who were spared.

Back in the jail cell, the prisoners could hear the sound of gunfire. The minister took advantage of the dramatic moment to share the story of Jesus and the hope of heaven. Eight of the prisoners gave their lives to God that day. About the time Pastor Idu finished sharing, an excited messenger came to the door with a release order. The pastor had been arrested by mistake and was free to leave.

He said good-bye to the prisoners and hurried to his home next to the chapel. There he discovered a crowd of believers urgently praying for his release. When they saw the answer to their prayers walk through the door, their prayer service became a praise service.

The same God who heard the prayers from Jerusalem heard the prayers from Zaire. He’s still listening. Are we still praying? (Also from Lucado book)

What can we do beginning now? It seems that this is a sermon that ought to have kind of an immediate application. I have provided for you a couple of prayer resources in your notes today.

**Getting Started: Some suggested resources**

- Call 1-800-395-PRAY (7729) for daily prayer request from International Mission Board.
- Website—WWW.IMB.org Go to prayer link for daily prayer request from International Mission Board
- Website—WWW.NAMB.net Go to prayer link for daily prayer request from North American Mission Board