

A Plentiful Harvest

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this morning with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn to Matthew's gospel. So the gospel according to Matthew. Matthew chapter 9, and it's page 814 in the church Bible.

Matthew chapter 9. And the last few verses of the chapter. Matthew chapter 9, page 814.

I'm a reading from verse 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.

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, And obviously focusing upon the whole section, but particularly what Jesus says there in verse 37.

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.

[1 : 3 5] Shobost. Shobost. Stornoway. Calanish.

Park. South Uist and Benbecula. Gerloch. Helmsdale. Lairgon Boner Bridge. Wick. Fort William.

Nocbane. Elgin. Dunfermalin. Dumfries. Aronkill Winning. Oman. Loch Gilped. Tarbert.

Helensborough. Dumbarton. Abbey Green. Cotebridge. And Stirling. They're the names of the 23 congregations in the free church that are currently vacant and have permission to call a minister.

There are another 12 congregations who are currently vacant who are too small to call a minister. Slate. Razay. Leibster. Rogart.

[2 : 3 5] Assent. King Yusi. Aran. Mullam Call. East Kilbride. Kilmacone. Greenock. And Livonia. Which is in Prince Edward Island.

And so out of the 122 congregations in our denomination, there are 35 vacancies. In addition to these vacancies, there are 20 to 25 congregations whose minister is likely to retire in the next 10 years.

Which means that as a denomination, we need about 70 men to apply for ministry over the next 10 years. At the moment, we have 14.

And that's without even considering the need to plant more churches. Because we need more churches. Because Scotland is a secular nation, as you know, that needs the gospel.

In fact, it's estimated that if we want to reach our nation with the gospel, And if we're going to see our vision, our free church vision, a healthy gospel church for every community in Scotland, If we're going to see that vision fulfilled, then we're going to need 550 ministers.

[3 : 4 6] 550 ministers. Which is why we need to possess and practice and pray about that vision. It's not our vision.

It's the Lord's vision. And as Solomon said, without vision, the people perish. And you know, when these facts about vacancies and our vision for our nation, When they were presented to our presbytery last month, The presbytery responded by appointing today, the 17th of November, as Ministry Sunday.

So that we would specifically preach about this great need, But also, maybe more importantly, pray to the Lord for more laborers and for the lost to be saved.

For more laborers and the lost to be saved. And you know, well, what better passage to preach about? What better passage to pray over than this passage? Because it's here in this passage in Matthew chapter 9, That Jesus is looking for the lost, and he's looking for laborers.

Jesus, here, we see Him as a shepherd. And it's the compassion of the shepherd that we see, And the call of the shepherd that we hear.

[5 : 02] And there are two headings this morning. The compassion of the shepherd and the call of the shepherd. The compassion of the shepherd and the call of the shepherd. So first of all, the compassion of the shepherd.

Look at verse 35. 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. You know, when Matthew begins this short but significant section at the end of chapter 9, he introduces Jesus to us as a caring and compassionate shepherd, which, as you know, that's nothing new to us because Jesus, he's repeatedly revealed to us in our Bible as this caring and compassionate shepherd.

In fact, when you look at the Bible as a whole, you can see that there's this shepherd theme. There's a shepherd theme not only in the Psalms that we're singing this morning, but there's also a shepherd theme in Scripture.

And the shepherd theme in Scripture, it runs from the book of beginnings in the book of Genesis all the way through to the concluding apocalypse in the book of Revelation. Because in the book of Genesis, we're told that Adam's righteous son, Abel, he was a keeper of sheep.

[6 : 27] And then you progress through the pages of your Bible, you see that all the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they were all shepherds. Moses was a shepherd. The Israelites were shepherds.

David was a shepherd. Amos was even a shepherd. But then you come to the prophets. And all these Old Testament prophets, they viewed themselves as under-shepherds. They saw that their role and their responsibility was to point out the way for people and even to prepare the way for the Lord to appear as a shepherd.

It was Isaiah who said that the Lord will feed his sheep like a shepherd. Ezekiel claimed that the Lord will rescue and redeem and restore his sheep. And Zechariah prophesied that there will come a shepherd who will be smitten and stricken on behalf of his people.

And of course, the identity of that shepherd, as we know, he's revealed to us in the New Testament. Jesus declares, as we read in John 10, I am the good shepherd.

Peter claims about Jesus that he is the chief shepherd. And Paul states that Jesus is the great shepherd of the sheep. But as we said, the shepherd theme of Scripture, it reaches its climax and its culmination in that book of Apocalypse, the book of Revelation, where John is given this great vision of the throne room of heaven.

[7 : 50] And he says that the lamb is there in the midst of the throne, and he has been slain, slain for his sheep. And that lamb, we're told, he will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

You know, the shepherd theme in Scripture, it's a wonderful reminder and a wonderful reassurance to us of just how good the good shepherd really is.

And that's what Matthew is doing here in his gospel. Matthew is presenting to us in these closing verses. He's pointing out for us just how good the good shepherd really is.

In fact, Matthew tells us that he's so good, and that he's such a good shepherd, that Jesus is willing and wanting to go to all people in all places and deal with all their problems.

Look at what he says in verse 35. Jesus went through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every affliction.

[8 : 57] So Jesus is willing, he's wanting to go to all people in all places and deal with all their problems, which should immediately jump out to us about Jesus, that there's nowhere Jesus wouldn't go.

There's nowhere Jesus wouldn't go. There's no one to whom Jesus wouldn't help, and there's nothing that Jesus couldn't deal with. So there were no boundaries and no barriers that ever held Jesus back.

There were no classes or categories of people that made him concerned. There was no status or even standing in community that would stop Jesus from going to these people, because there's nowhere Jesus wouldn't go.

There's no one to whom Jesus wouldn't help, and there's nothing that Jesus couldn't deal with. And this is what Matthew wants to emphasize to us. This is what he wants to explain to us this morning, that Jesus is willing.

In fact, he's more than willing. He's even wanting to go to all people in all places and deal with all the issues that are going on in their life.

[10 : 03] Because for Jesus, this good shepherd, there is no problem that is too big or too small. There's nothing that is insurmountable, and there is nothing that's too insignificant to Jesus.

No, there's no one. There's absolutely no one to whom Jesus does not want to show care, compassion, and concern for.

Which means, my friend, this morning, whether you're here or watching at home online, you are included in this passage. You're not excluded. You're invited, not ignored.

You are welcomed by this Jesus, not rejected. And this is why Matthew tells us, 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.

And you know, the amazing thing is that when I read this, and when we read it, we have to see that there's a sense in which Jesus, the good shepherd, is still doing this.

[11 : 15] He's still going through every city and every village where the gospel has been proclaimed and preached. Jesus is still seeking. He's still searching for lost sheep in every nation.

And he's searching for lost sheep in every city of every nation. So consider our nation. He's looking for lost sheep in Inverness, and Aberdeen, and Perth, and Edinburgh, and Glasgow, and Newcastle, and Manchester, and Liverpool, all the way down to London.

Jesus is looking for lost sheep in every city, and even every village. Every village in our island, Jesus is still seeking and searching for lost sheep.

Whether you live in Braggar today, or Arnall, or Brough, or Barbus, or Balatrushal, or Shader, or Borv, or Melbost, or Golson, whether you live in any of these villages, or none of these villages, Jesus is still seeking, still searching for lost sheep.

Because as Matthew is reminding us this morning, there is nowhere Jesus won't go. There's no one to whom Jesus won't help. And there's nothing that Jesus won't deal with. And that's because Jesus is still full, full of compassion.

[12 : 33] He's still full of compassion. This Jesus hasn't changed. He's full of compassion. Look what Matthew says in verse 36. When Jesus saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

My friend, when Jesus looked at the lost sheep, He loved them. When Jesus looked at the lost sheep, He loved them because He cared for them.

He had compassion towards them. And He had a concern for them. Jesus could see that there was something wrong. He could see that they, as it says there, He could see that they were harassed and helpless.

He could see that they were like lost sheep, wandering aimlessly in this world. And you know, it doesn't matter what day and generation we're living in.

Whether it's, we're living in the first century, as it was for Matthew, or even the 21st century, when Jesus looks at us. So when Jesus looks at you this morning, He sees that there's something wrong.

[13 : 48] In fact, He knows there's something wrong. He can see all the stresses and all the strains in your life. Sometimes He can see all the anger and all the anxiety that's going on.

He can see the problems. He can see all the pressures. He can see all the trials and all the temptations of life. Jesus sees, just like He saw long ago, He sees that we are harassed and helpless.

More than that, He can see this morning, if you are a sheep without a shepherd, He can see that you're lost.

And the amazing thing is, when you're a lost sheep, you're without a shepherd. You're wandering aimlessly in this world. And Matthew's reminding us, as I'm sure you've been reminded many times before, we need Jesus to be our shepherd.

You need this Jesus to be your shepherd. And you know, this is what I love about Jesus. There are many things I love about Jesus, but this is what I love about Him. Because Jesus, He not only helps us physically, He also helps us spiritually.

[14 : 59] Which means that Jesus, He's not only practical, He is also personal. He's not only practical, He's also personal. And we sang about how personal Jesus is, when we sang that well-known Psalm, of Psalm 23.

We sing it, probably sing it off by heart, but sometimes I wonder if we're singing it with our heart. But Psalm 23, it's given, it gives us this personal confession of everyone, in every city, in every village, in every town, and every nation throughout the world.

We're given that personal confession of everyone who has come to experience and enjoy the care, and the compassion, and the concern of this good shepherd. And you know, it's no wonder people refer to Psalm 23 as their favorite psalm.

Because in it, Jesus is practical. He promises us that, as a good shepherd, He'll go before us. How practical is that?

The shepherd says, I'll go before you into green pastures and beside still waters. He's also practical. He says, I'll walk beside you when you're faced with the valley of the shadow of death.

[16 : 11] And He says, I'll follow behind you with my goodness and my mercy. And not just for the first wee while. No, no. All the days of your life. Every single day.

As a good shepherd, He'll go before us. He'll walk beside us. He'll follow behind us. But Jesus, our good shepherd, is not only practical, He's also very personal.

Which is why He calls everyone, everywhere, in every city, in every village, in every town, in every nation throughout the world, Jesus calls us to personally believe in our heart and confess with our mouth that Jesus Christ, and say about Him, the Lord is my shepherd.

The Lord is my shepherd. That's what the Bible calls you to do this morning. That's what Jesus is calling you to do. Not only to believe in your heart, which I'm sure, I don't know, all of you would.

You believe that Jesus is the good shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. But the issue is when you confess. You must confess, the Lord is mine.

[17 : 24] He's not only a practical shepherd, He's a personal shepherd. He's my shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd. And you know, my friend, it's because of the compassion of the shepherd that this same shepherd is calling you this morning.

It's because of the compassion of the shepherd that the shepherd is calling you this morning. That's what I want us to think about secondly, the call of the shepherd. So we see the compassion of the shepherd and then the call of the shepherd.

The call of the shepherd. Verse 36, When Jesus saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, for 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.

You know, when it comes to the concept of Jesus as the good shepherd, who is a shepherd who's seeking and searching for harassed and helpless lost sheep, you know, the Bible not only describes Jesus as the good shepherd, the Bible, or Jesus Himself, declares that He is the good shepherd.

[18 : 42] Jesus declares that He is the good shepherd. And He does that in different places throughout the New Testament. He says that He's the good shepherd in the parable of the lost sheep.

Parable we've all heard before, where the shepherd, He leaves the 99 in the open field, and He goes to seek and to search for that one lost sheep.

And you remember what Jesus says about it. When He finds that one lost sheep, when the lost sheep is found, Jesus knows what's going on in heaven. There is rejoicing in heaven over that one lost sheep, that one sinner.

who repents. There's rejoicing in the presence of the angels. But Jesus not only explained that He's a good shepherd in the parables, He also explains that He's a good shepherd through His preaching.

Jesus preaches throughout the New Testament. But in John chapter 10, which we were reading earlier, Jesus was preaching to the people of His day. And Jesus preached to the people of His day, declaring that He is completely unlike all the Old Testament under-shepherds that Ezekiel had to preach and proclaim against.

[19 : 59] Because back in Ezekiel's day, the shepherds of Israel, the under-shepherds, the ministers, the clergy of the day, back in Ezekiel's day, those shepherds didn't really care about the sheep.

They didn't have compassion towards the sheep. They didn't have a concern towards the sheep. They were only interested in themselves, in their own gain, what they could get. And Jesus describes them as thieves and robbers because they left the lost sheep.

They left these lost sheep all harassed and all helpless. They left them like sheep without a shepherd. Which is why Jesus went on to say in John 10, that all who came before Me, they are like thieves and robbers.

And they only came to steal and to kill and to destroy. But Jesus says, I have come. I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.

Why? I am the good shepherd. And my friend, if you want to know how good this good shepherd really is, if you don't know already, Jesus says, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

[21 : 11] For the sake of the sheep. On behalf of the sheep. In place of the sheep. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And Jesus says, the hired hand, those who came before Me, they don't care about the sheep.

They have no compassion towards the sheep. They have no concern for the sheep. But Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. I know My own. And My own. Know Me.

And I lay down My life for the sheep. And you know, it's with that declaration that Jesus issues the call. The call of the shepherd. We read there in John 10 and verse 27, great words of Jesus when He says, My sheep hear My voice.

And I know them. And they follow Me. And I give to them eternal life and they will never perish. And no one, absolutely no one, will snatch them out of My hand.

My friend, if you're a lost sheep this morning, and the thing is, you know if you're a lost sheep. I don't need to tell you that. If you're a lost sheep and you feel harassed by your sin and helpless with salvation, then know this.

[22 : 28] Know this. The shepherd is calling you. The shepherd is calling you. And if you've heard the call of the shepherd, my advice to you is flee from your sin and follow the shepherd.

Flee sin, follow the shepherd. Come to this shepherd, this Jesus, and confess Him. Confess Him as your shepherd. Confess that the Lord is my.

He's my shepherd. He's my shepherd. But what we see here is that Jesus doesn't stop. He doesn't stop there because the call of the shepherd is not only a call to be saved, it's also a call to serve.

As you know, we're saved to serve. We're saved to serve. And this is something Christians often forget, but Jesus is reminding us this morning that we're saved to serve.

We're not saved to sit back and sit out. No, no. We're saved to step up and serve. And the thing is, as those who are saved by this good shepherd who laid down His life for us, as those who are saved, we need to serve.

[23 : 42] We need to serve because, as Jesus emphasizes and explains to us here, there are lost sheep out there. There are so many lost sheep out there.

There are lost sheep, as Jesus tells us, they are all harassed, they're all helpless. And they're there in every city and in every town and in every village and in every nation of the world, which is why we need to serve.

We can't sit back. We can't stand back and watch everybody else do it. No, we need to serve because the need is great. We need to serve because the need is great.

And as Jesus, our good shepherd, says, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

He says to His disciples, He says to us, my Christian friend this morning, look around you. Look around you. The fields are white.

[24 : 47] The fields are full. The fields, you could say, are flourishing. The fields are ripe and ready for harvest, but there's a problem. There's a massive problem.

The laborers are few. Those willing and wanting to serve are few. The laborers, they're few and they're far between. And sadly, and maybe more solemnly, no one is seeing the need to serve the shepherd.

No one sees the need to serve the shepherd. We all want to sit back and sit out. We're all too caught up and too consumed and too concerned about our own lives while the people perish.

But you know, the lack of laborers for the harvest field, it has always been a problem. It's not a new problem. It was a problem in the first century.

It's still a problem in the 21st century. But as it was in the first century, so it is in the 21st century. Jesus, the good shepherd, is still saying to us, we need to pray about this problem.

[25 : 57] We need to pray about this problem. Look at what he says in verse 38. Therefore, here's the answer. Here's the solution to the problem.

Therefore, pray. Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest.

And notice, Jesus doesn't say, pray about this problem occasionally. Or pray about this problem casually. No, Jesus says, pray about this problem continually.

Pray about it consistently. Pray about it persistently and passionately and earnestly and even urgently. Pray about this problem because as those who have been saved to serve, this problem should be a daily prayer.

this problem should be a daily prayer. Look around you, Jesus is saying. Look around you. The Lord of the harvest is calling us to pray to Him that He would send out laborers into this great harvest field.

[27 : 06] He's calling us to serve. He's calling us to pray. to pray for more pastors and more preachers, to pray for more teachers and more trainers, to pray for more laborers who love lost people, more laborers who love the lost.

my friend, Jesus is calling us to pray. Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.

And so in this passage, Jesus, He's looking for the lost. He's looking for you this morning if you're still lost.

And He's looking for laborers. He's looking for people to put their hand to the plow and not turn back. Because you know the compassion of the shepherd is that Jesus knows that there are lost sheep and they're in every city, every town and every village.

There are lost sheep in here and there are lost sheep out there. They're everywhere. They're all harassed and helpless. They're all looking for satisfaction, looking for safety and security, wandering aimlessly like sheep without a shepherd.

[28 : 35] And we need to tell them that there's a shepherd to flee their sin and follow this good shepherd. We need to tell you because you've heard it before but you need to hear it again to personally come to this Jesus, this shepherd, and confess the Lord is my shepherd.

shepherd. But you know the call is not only a call to be saved, it's a call to serve. We're saved to serve.

We need to serve because the need is great. My Christian friend, the need is great and we need to serve practically and we need to serve prayerfully.

And if you come back this evening, which I'd always encourage you to come back at night, we're going to consider not the saving call of the shepherd or the serving call of the shepherd but more about the specific call of the shepherd to enter into the pastoral ministry because Jesus is saying to us, he says, the harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few, therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

But may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, give to us a burden this morning for what Jesus is saying.

[30 : 11] Help us to look around us and see that the fields, they are white and ready for harvest. Lord, help us not to look around at other people and wonder where are the laborers.

Help us to look at ourselves and to see that the Lord has saved us in order that we might serve him. And Lord, we pray that we would be willing to serve, willing to serve in any way that we can, whether practically or prayerfully, to pray to this great Lord of the harvest that he would call more men, men into the ministry, men to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ.

And Lord, our plea is that thou wouldest fill these vacancies and that thou wouldest do it for thine own glory, that souls would be won, that the church would be built up, that the name of Jesus would be glorified.

And O Lord, our God, we ask that thou wouldest continue to build thy church, that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. Hear us, we pray. Help us to pray.

Help us to plead. Help us to be earnest. Help us to be urgent, to see that the need is great, and that the Lord is able to do in us and for us, exceedingly abundantly above all, more than we could ask, and more than we could ever think.

[31 : 35] Do us good than we pray, go before us we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name, and for his sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning.

We're going to sing the words of Psalm 119. Psalm 119, page 415 in the Blue Psalm Book. Psalm 119.

We're singing the last four verses of the Psalm. So, verse 172 to 176. As you know, Psalm 119, it's the longest psalm in the Psalter, it's the longest chapter in the Bible, and it's a chapter that emphasizes the importance of God's Word.

So, if you're a lost sheep, this is what you need to read. This is your map. This is your compass. This is what gives you direction. The Word of God will give you direction.

That's what the whole of Psalm 119 is about, emphasizing that God's Word gives direction. It's the only rule to direct us. And what's the confession right at the end of Psalm 119?

[32 : 58] This is what he says, I, like a lost sheep, went astray. Thy servant seek and find, for thy commands, God's Word, for thy commands I suffered not to slip out of my mind.

He used God's Word to direct him. So, we'll sing Psalm 119, verse 172, down to the end of the Psalm, and we'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise.

I turn off thy most blessed word, just be counted on praise, because of thy commandments, our perfect righteousness.

Let thy strong hand make help to me, thy precepts are my choice.

I longed for thy salvation, Lord, and in thy law rejoice.

[34 : 38] O, let my soul live and it shall give be excuses unto thee, and let thy judgments Sag nonsense be helpful unto me, I like Like a lost sheep went astray, Thy servants seek and find.

For thy commons I suffered not to slip out of my mind.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.