

Asking God for Workers

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[0 : 0 0] Tonight, as you may gather, we want to look with you at Jesus' request that His disciples would pray to the Lord of the harvest for workers. 58,000, that's the number of people who die in Scotland each year. 58,000, around that, up or down a little bit. They die, some tragically, some peacefully. 50,000, that's the number of babies born in Scotland each year, maybe a little less. We know it's going down, and we know why it's going down. Who is praying for all these people?

Who is there at their side? This year we've heard it's important that people do not die alone, and we think that's true. But is that the most important thing, that they just don't die alone?

Throughout the world, the Scottish statistics are different to most places. Twice the number of people are being born each year, generally, than are dying. So, we enter the world of Jesus Christ.

We enter this place. We don't know where it is where Jesus sees this. It was not the times of COVID. It was not the time of staying at home and locking yourself indoors. It was the time of going out and hearing this teaching from this person who was going through all the synagogues, who is proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God, and who is healing not just the leper that we heard of this morning. But He's healing every disease and illness. Good news for every aspect of your life.

It was not the days of a vaccine. It was the days of complete cure and restoration. There was no roadshow. There was no big red bus with giant promises on the side or anything like that.

[2 : 3 0] There was just one man with these disciples with Him, men and women who were following Him around. And we join Him one day. We join Him as He ministers to a crowd in a busy place. And we don't know how long He'd been there. We don't know how long this aspect of His ministry lasted. We haven't got dates.

We haven't got locations too specifically. He's going through all the towns and villages. He's in...I've got to watch what I say around here because you've got some silent letters in your names, but He's in Dunecht, and He's in Afford, and He's in West Hill, and He's in Aberdeen City Center.

He's all over the place. That place isn't too big, and that place isn't too small. He's going to all of these places. And He teaches us here one way that we can fulfill the mission of the church, or one way that we can take a giant step towards fulfilling the mission of the church. It's a step that we often ignore. It's something we're probably quite good at when our congregation is vacant, but the rest of the time we take our eye off this goal and command. So, what I want us to do tonight is to try and see what Jesus saw, and to try and do what Jesus asks us to do. And if you're not yet a Christian, you might think, well, there's not so much in here for you. I don't think that's true. I think there's a gem. There's a treasure. There's something that if you grasp this, you might feel just how inadequate you are to do anything on your own, and how wonderful the work of God is that can be done in your life. So, the first thing to see is to try and see what Jesus saw. He saw crowds.

We're delighted to be here tonight with 50 people. We look forward to being here in a fortnight with more than 50 people, but when was the last time we really saw crowds? Probably your heart sank the last time you saw a crowd because they were all queuing to get into the supermarket at the same time as you. Crowds can be inconvenient to us, and we just go into our own wee world and look at our phones and do what we want to do. Maybe you long to be in a crowd that is cheering on the football team or dancing to the same tune. Crowds are there for our pleasure sometimes. We like to be part of them.

Well, Jesus saw the crowds. Jesus saw the crowds, and He was filled, overwhelmed, I think. He has compassion on them. He has a different response to my, oh, this is inconvenient, or crowds are part of what I belong to. He sees something quite different, and He has compassion.

[5 : 53] What is the compassion of Jesus like? The compassion of Jesus is like seeing 5,000 men and their families and noticing that they're hungry, and instead of sending them away to get food, the compassion of Jesus provides the food for them. In Luke chapter 7, we read that the compassion of Jesus is such that when He sees a widow whose only son has died, He doesn't just wish her well, but He raises that son to life.

The compassion that Jesus recommends or commends to us is like the compassion of the good Samaritan, the one who was a neighbor. Which one had compassion on the one who fell among thieves?

The lawyer asks the one who showed him mercy, and Jesus says, go and do likewise. So, the compassion of Jesus is a merciful compassion. The compassion of Jesus is also found in the story of the prodigal son, because the father, when he sees that wayward son coming home, when he saw him at a distance, he had compassion. So, he sat in his seat and did nothing. Well, you know that's a lie. He ran towards him. Compassion moved this father to go to his son. So, what does the compassion of Jesus do? It's not just a feeling. It's not just He enters into their sorrow. He doesn't just understand their frustration.

The compassion of Jesus drives him. It moves him to do something. And why is it that he has this compassion? It's because they are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

They're bothered by life. There's no answer to their problems. They've got no one who will gather them in. No one who protects them. So, if you think of the comfort that you take from singing Psalm 23, the Lord's my shepherd. I don't need anything else. They can't say that. Trouble is, to us, most of them look like they think they've got everything, but they don't have anything that they need.

[8 : 28] They're not lying down beside the green pastures or being led, and then they're not lying down beside the still waters. They have to keep looking. They have to be restless because they have no shepherd to look after them. They are not restored to walk in the right way because they have no interest in walking the right way. They can't walk in the right way because they don't know what it is.

When you have comfort, even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death and you fear no evil because God is with you, this is a terrifying time. This is a time of great fear. This is a time where there is no light because it's not just a shadow that they face. It is death. It's the end.

It is the beginning of their punishment. When they are surrounded by their enemies, they do not know the provision of one who will look after them. And when they come to the end, even though if they were honest, they would be able to acknowledge goodness and mercy in their life, they're not able to say, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

They have nothing. They have nothing. They are lost. They are harassed and helpless without a shepherd. And some of them live in our homes. We go to school with them. We spoke with some about cutting the grass yesterday, or we said, when will this all end when we spoke about the lockdowns? We go to work with them.

They often look like they have more than us, and sometimes they even appear happier than us, which when you get money, free church ministers, doesn't always sound that impossible. But they're not that happy, are they? They're everywhere. That's the sort of people that they are. They're helpless. They cannot do it themselves. And this do-it-yourself world and fix-it-yourself world they don't understand that they cannot simply turn this around all on their own. They need something to happen. They need compassion. And when we think of the compassion of Jesus, we see where the compassion of Jesus took him. We see that it didn't just mean that he folded his arms and said they need something done for them. It was a compassion that took him to the cross to give up his life for them. A compassion that bought them their righteousness, their freedom, their forgiveness. It bought them everything that they needed. That's the picture that Jesus paints of these people. They are harassed and helpless in this crowd like sheep without his shepherd. And then he further paints a picture as he explains what we're to do. He says, they are like a field. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. So he presents this as a field, a field that is white to harvest, a field that is ready to be chopped down. And if there's a harvest, you know it, you know it yourselves, let's not, well, let's treat you like you're a bit silly here, but the harvest doesn't just decide it's time to go in and walk into the barn or into the, into the stack. The harvest needs something to happen, doesn't it? It needs a worker to go to it and to gather it in.

[12 : 28] And the harvest will not come in unless a worker does that. It's just impossible for it to happen. So Jesus sees that this field is ready to be cut down and that's what needs to happen.

And he tells his disciples, and he tells us that our mission, our mission is that there would be workers sent into his harvest field. So the mission has to be that the workers go and bring in people from this harvest. That's what happens. Go and get them. I've heard of preachers who've seen unbelievers and they hear God whispering in their ear, or they try and imagine God whispering in their ear, go and get them for me. Well, somebody has to go and get them because they can't just come in on their own. Somebody has to bring in the harvest. It's simple. It's Jesus that's painting this picture. It's not that difficult. He does tell us that they are to go, Matthew chapter 28, the Great Commission. He tells the disciples at the end, go into all the world and make disciples. That's how we do it.

And if you're not a Christian yet, it's great that we can say yet. If you're not a Christian yet, you can become a Christian. But do you realize what you are? You're currently part of this field. And somebody's got to come and get you and cut you down and bring you in, which sounds a little bit brutal, doesn't it?

But how can, when we read through the Bible, we discover that we're dead in our trespasses and sins, that we need to be made born again, that we need something to happen to us that we can't make happen all on our own. We realize that God has to do something. And the great news is, the great news is that you're ready. You're ready to be brought in. God's doing, God's done everything that it needs for you to be brought in. He's prepared your heart so that you would want to be brought in, so that you would ask to be brought in. He sent maybe a preacher tonight or a granny 20 years ago or whoever it is, he sent somebody to bring you in. And he's going to do that. He's going to do that from now to the end of the age. His way of building the church is sending out workers that are going to bring people in.

It's not difficult, is it? It's easy. And so if you've not yet come in, let me invite you to come into God's kingdom. Let me invite you to hear the message that Jesus sent his disciples out with, that the kingdom of God is near. It's the time for you to come in, to preach to you good news of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of heaven has come near. Jesus has come to you. Jesus has died for you.

[15 : 52] Jesus has given himself for you. And you just come. And we bring you in. And then you become not part of that harvest field, but part of the workforce, part of the people that go out.

So that's what Jesus sees. He sees crowds on whom he has compassion because they are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. And he sees them as a field of harvest that needs workers to bring them in. So what should we do? What should you do as a result of this sermon?

This is really simple. Do what Jesus asks you to. Because the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. This is all you need to do. And I'm sorry, I'll go on about it for another 10 minutes or so, but this is all you need to do. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Ask him, God, what's your great plan for recovery of the church in Scotland?

What is going to be the way that we get hundreds of thousands of people into the kingdom of God? I think it's here. God would be asked by his people to send workers out into his harvest.

field. And then things are going to happen. So we want to obey Jesus. Is Aberdeen Free Church a congregation that wants to obey Jesus? Yes. Are you obeying Jesus in this command?

[17 : 47] When was the last time in your private prayers that you asked the Lord to send a worker into his harvest field? When was the last time in my private prayers? I resolved to try and do it, and I keep on failing. But it's very, very simple. This is what we need to do. Do you know how many times Jesus tells us to pray? This then is how you should pray, our Father who is in heaven.

And maybe there's a command to pray when he says, ask and it shall be given to you. But this, this is about the simplest command. This is what we need to do. Ask the Lord of the harvest.

Are we doing it? Are we doing it? It's clear what needs to happen. Often when we ask God for something, when we're worried about the people that we're worried about the people that we love who don't trust in Him, what's our first prayer? Lord, would you open their heart? Lord, would you change them? Lord, would you let them see? And it is by no means a bad prayer. It's not the wrong thing to ask, but it's basically saying, Lord, change them. Isn't it? But what Jesus is saying is, they're ready. The fields are white unto harvest. And yes, they need to be cut down. They need to be changed in some way. They need to be brought in. But what maybe should the prayer be? Lord, change me.

Change us. Change us. Because as we acknowledge our own weakness, it's one of the things we really struggle to do, isn't it? To go out and to bring people into this church from the harvest field.

Lord, change some of us so that we'd be workers who go and do this ministry. Do you understand how Jesus is feeling here? I'm not sure that we do, but He's tired.

[20 : 13] He must be tired by now. He went through all the towns and villages. I'm going to have a rest tomorrow because I've come to Aberdeen today. Jesus has been going through all the towns and villages, and He's not slacking because He sees this vast crowd in front of Him. And He says to us, we need to ask.

And I want that to be an encouragement to you because we are facing what we think is an insurmountable problem. We haven't got enough workers. I tried to pray for some of the vacant charges in our denomination, and we're struggling for workers. We could do with more.

But it's not just in the Scottish picture. In school, how many Christians are in your class? At work, how many of your colleagues are Christians? How many people in your street are Christians?

And let's face it, we've been in these places a long time, and we find it so hard to talk to them about Jesus, don't we? We find it hard to see that they are hopeless and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. It is insurmountable. We cannot, have not been able to fill our churches with people responding to the good news. We simply seem unable to do it. So, renovated buildings are good, but they don't do it. New signs outside are good, they don't do it. Better preaching is good, but it hasn't done it. So, will we go back to basics and make sure that we ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his harvest field? See, our translations give us the gist of this, but I want you to imagine Jesus. I want you to try and imagine him. Sometimes we think Jesus is Mr. Robot because he doesn't do anything wrong. He always does everything right. His moves are almost programmed, and it's going to be okay. But can you hear Jesus here? He says, it's an old word, but he says, beseech, beseech the Lord of the harvest. It gets into a pleading. It's like, it's, will you ask the Lord of the harvest? Sorry, didn't mean to upset you.

Ask the Lord of the harvest. Just ask him. Make this the thing that you do to send out workers into his harvest field. Just do that. And you answer me, yeah, but we need to do more. And you're absolutely right. We do need to do more. We need to equip people to go into the harvest. What happens in Matthew chapter 10? Jesus sends out the people he's been equipping to go into the harvest.

[23 : 35] He's trained them. We do more than ask. We try to bring people in. We try and train the church. We try and make the church as accessible as it can be so that we're not talking a completely different language with archaic words or anything like that. But we need to just be simple about this.

We just need to ask God. We need to start asking God to send out workers into his harvest. So in your prayer life, are you asking God for this? And if not, will you ask God for this?

Will you start to make it a priority? Even if you're a boy or a girl, ask God for this. Will you make it an ongoing prayer until there's no fields left to harvest?

I guess one reason you might be a little bit reluctant to do it is because you're scared. And one of the things that we get scared about in this sort of prayer is that God says, well, you're the answer to this prayer. Do you see who Jesus told to ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers out into the harvest? He says to his disciples. And then in chapter 10, Jesus calls his 12 disciples to him and gave them authority. And then he sent them out, verse 5, he sent them out with the following instructions. The things that we pray for should generally be the things that we want. The things that we want, we generally move towards. You're in the supermarket, you go to the sweetie aisle because you want sweeties, you move towards them, the people you want to be with, you go towards. You're commanded to pray. Perhaps God will send you out. And that is quite scary.

That is something you might not yet feel prepared for. But notice just as you glance at chapter 10, God gets them ready. The Lord Jesus Christ gives them instructions. And you might scoff. Anybody says, just be careful. If you're worried, if you're thinking, not me, you don't know me. Let's read the names in chapter 2. These are the names of the first apostles. Simon, Andrew, James, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, and Matthew, the tax collector, James, son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. You might think, not you, but two years ago, these guys didn't think it was them either. But they were taught by Jesus Christ. So, as we finish, we do need to be as smart as possible, don't we? We need to communicate the good news as simply as we can to a world around us that doesn't have a clue often what we believe. We need to communicate as best we can, not be sloppy. We need to do lots of things. But we need to start here. Look at the world around us.

[27 : 11] Please look at the world around you and try and see it as Jesus saw it and ask God to send out workers. Since we came in here an hour ago, in Scotland, six or seven people on average will have passed away.

Who told them? Surrounded by their family? Wonderful. Did they know about Jesus? Where have they gone?

Five or six babies may have been born. Who will tell them? Who will make sure that these are not babies that grow up to be harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd?

Where's the answer to this problem? Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest. Let's pray.

Lord, Isaiah was bold enough to say, Here I am, send me. We may not quite be there tonight, but we ask that from here to Aberdeen and to the ends of the earth that you would send forth workers into your harvest.

[28 : 38] Thank you that you have a work for us to do, a work that is ready to be gathered in, and it's plentiful. So, Lord, we pray that our response in going would not be to send a few, but to send many workers into this harvest.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.