

**SENT OUT**  
**Matthew 9:37-38**

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If you are a farmer, it's what you think about all year long. If you make your living with your hands in the soil, then the thought of harvest is never far from your mind. The ground has rested through the winter. You've turned the soil. Planted the seed. Fertilized. You've tried to pray away the pests and hope away the hail, drought, or floods that threaten to steal a year's worth of labor.

What will the harvest be like this year? Will it yield fruit – abundant and plentiful?

Everything depends on the harvest.

- How much food you will be able to put on the table for your family all year long.
- Whether you'll have enough money to buy the seed corn for next year.
- Can you really take three slim yields in a row?
- The cycle of the farm says the bounty must come at some point. Will this year be the year of the great harvest?
- Will the weather cooperate or will a season too wet cause mold or too dry cause parchement?

Everything depends on timing. And it's harvest time.

Jesus looked at all of humanity as a wheat field ready to be harvested. He looked out at a harvest that was ripe and ready – just waiting to be reaped. But there were no laborers to go into the field. There were no hands to give Him any help.

Matthew 9:37-38

Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

Right before Jesus saw lost humanity as a field and His disciples as harvesters, He looked at the multitudes and He had compassion on them because they were distressed and downcast. They were just like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). He wanted to gather them into His fold.

The sheep into the fold, and the grain into the bin.

It was harvest time.

The harvest is still ripe. It's still ready.

The harvest is ready in the time between the ascension of Jesus and His return. That's the only harvest time we have. The season was then, and the season is now. And God calls us, as His laborers, into the field.

Will you go into the field? Will you share the story of Jesus? Will you pick the grain and bring it into the Kingdom? Will you lead people into the arms of God?

### **I. The harvest is plentiful.**

Your task, as a follower of Christ Jesus, is to bring more people into the Kingdom of God. More people into the church. To bring the good news of great joy to all people everywhere, starting with your family. Taking mission trips – perhaps across the street or across the globe – bringing the harvest into the Kingdom of God.

A church member shared with me that his father was about to undergo surgery. He shared Christ with his father. His father accepted Christ as a result of a word from his son.

If I were to ask you, right now, to list five folks who need Jesus Christ who are your family, your friends, co-workers – people for whom you are praying and actively seeking to incorporate into church – what five names would you put on your list? Could you name five? Could you name four? Could you give me three? Two? Or even one?

The harvest is plentiful. If we can't come up with five names – or even a single name – that we're trying to bring into the harvest, how can we ever consider ourselves laborers with God?

**Mike Nelson tells a story. He had the privilege of sharing an office with Bob Evans, a retired pastor who served a Lutheran congregation as a voluntary evangelism consultant. One week he had an insert that he placed in the Sunday worship bulletin that simply stated, "Surveys show that the average Lutheran invites someone to church once every 14 years." (www.homileticsonline.com)**

This isn't a Lutheran problem. It's a Baptist problem. It's a Christian problem.

Why do we not share our faith? Why are we so fearful? If the good news of God's love is for everybody, and if it really is good news, why are we reluctant to share good news?

A. For one thing, I think we've been ground down by an accommodating culture that teaches us that we have no right to share our faith with anyone. We're told, "You believe what you want, but leave me alone, and we won't try to influence each other." In fact, we really have reinvented God into a kinder, gentler old man where hell is a monstrous myth and everybody, in the end, gets in the gates of the Kingdom of God – a universal sense of salvation. **We've adopted Oprah-like theology when she said, "One of the biggest mistakes humans make is to believe there is only one way. Actually, there are many diverse paths leading to what you call God." (Richard Hostetter, "Oprah Winfrey and persistent universalism," *Restoration Herald*, Sept. 2002, quoted in *Current Thoughts and Trends*)**

C. S. Lewis wrote, “I would pay any price to be able to say truthfully, ‘All will be saved.’” But C. S. Lewis, great intellect that he is, says he can’t say that because there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Jesus wants the harvest to come in at the moment he has compassion for the people. Look at Matthew 9:36. “And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast.”

Instead of letting a common culture drive us away from sharing our faith, we must, rather, hear the call of the Messiah to have compassion enough for people to share the good news with them. Life can be lived differently. There can be hope because of Jesus Christ. There can be forgiveness of sins. We can be free from the power of sin and death because of the cross. There can be life eternal because we can choose to worship a resurrected Savior.

Do you love enough to share the gospel?

B. Another reason we don’t participate in the harvest is that we feel like we’re not worthy. We’re an unworthy messenger to take such a great message. “I can’t do it,” we think to ourselves, because we have sin in our own lives.

The story is not dependent upon you. The story is dependent upon Jesus. You’re not telling the story of your life. You’re telling the story of Jesus Christ. And He has called the broken, the sinful, the wayward, and the weak to Himself.

And we must take this message to all people.

Jesus didn’t seek to establish the preaching and teaching of God’s word in only the fastest growing neighborhoods, the most popular school districts, or areas with the greatest financial capacity. The mission of Jesus does not employ such discriminating tactics. To live on mission as the people of God, we must avoid the tendency to focus only on those most like us or those who have the most potential to be like us. The gospel is for all people in all places, not some people in some places.

**In a classic study of evangelism in the early church, Michael Green observed, “They made the grace of God credible by a society of love and mutual care which astonished the pagans and was recognized as something entirely new. It lent persuasiveness to their claim that the new age had dawned in Christ. (Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*)**

The harvest is plentiful. The world is dying and lost, alienated from God, separated from His people. And it’s not just in the lands far, far away. It’s your neighbor across the street. It’s the new teacher in the classroom across the hall. It’s the new clerical worker in the cubicle next to yours. It’s the new doctor in town who shares in your practice. Maybe it’s an old, old friend – you’ve lacked the courage, you’ve neglected to tell the story.

The harvest is plentiful.

**II. The workers are few.**

God does not send without equipping those sent with everything they need.

God does not send those who are not ready, or able.

And this is where faith comes in, because we may not think we are ready,

And yet our readiness is not in what we think,

For the power is in God who sends

And if God sends us, we will be ready

And it all begins with the very simple thing

Of praying to the Lord of the Harvest to send out laborers

Of asking God each day what He would have us do

With the day he has given us.

([www.lutheran-hymnal.com/sermons/020616](http://www.lutheran-hymnal.com/sermons/020616))

God doesn't have a Plan B by which He is going to save His creation. His plan was to send the Christ. This Christ would lead the disciples. The disciples would reproduce themselves by leading others to Christ throughout these 2,000 years of history since the day of Jesus. You and I are the important plan of God. The church is the Bride of Christ. We are the bearers of the message. We cannot shun or shirk our responsibility. There is no other plan than God's plan to use you to bring in the harvest.

**An observer asked Lyman Beecher, a well-known preacher of old, how it was that he had so many converts every Sunday. Dr. Beecher answered, "I preach on Sunday and I have 400 members. They go out and preach every day, and that is the way it works. With the blessing of God, that's the way it works." (William R. Key, "The What-Is and How-To of Evangelism, The Foundation for Evangelism, [www.evangelize.org/articles/article22.htm](http://www.evangelize.org/articles/article22.htm), July 6, 1999)**

Sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ is my job. But it's not any more my task or burden than it is your task or your burden. You are a bearer of the story. You are walking in the light. You are the salt of the earth. You are a vessel that contains the message. And you must go out – you must share, you must speak.

Sometimes we can get so caught up in playing church and keeping the ministries going and serving ourselves that we forget the purpose for which we exist.

**In a book by Irving Wallace, he tells the story of a man named William Phelps Eno. William Phelps Eno is known as the father of traffic safety. When William was born, there were no automobiles, but Eno watched as horses gave way to carriages, which gave way to automobiles. He wrote numerous articles on traffic safety and practical traffic patterns. He even established a nonprofit organization to study traffic safety.**

**But here's the great irony. Phelps never learned to drive a car. He talked about how to drive a car. He talked about rules and safety on the road. He knew everything about what**

**everybody else ought to do, but William himself never drove a car. (Michael Shannon, *Preaching*, Jan/Feb 2002)**

How about it, preacher? How about it, staff member? How about it, deacon? How about it, Sunday School teacher? We can talk about leading people to Jesus. We can pray about leading people to Jesus. But at the end, we must share the story of Jesus.

The laborers are few. But the good news is that God has chosen you to go and tell.

### **III. Pray to the Lord to send out workers**

We don't want to share the gospel mechanically. We want to share the gospel empowered by the Spirit of God. We are to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send His church, will send you, will send me out into the fields ready to bring in the harvest, ready to bring in the fruit for His Kingdom.

Who have you neglected to bring into the Kingdom? Who have you neglected to pray for? Pray that the Lord of harvest will send workers into His field.

**Years ago, a new Christian by the name of Albert McMakin, 24 years of age, loaded up his truck with friends, taking them each night to an evangelistic campaign in his city. You may never have heard McMakin's name. But you have heard the name of one of his passengers – a young man who was converted that week. His name was Billy Graham. (*Turning Point Daily Devotional*, 5/1/04)**

Who do you have room for in your pickup? Who can you lead to Christ so they can lead the world to Christ?

You know, the difficulty with prayer is that you can't ask the Lord to send people out into the harvest unless you, yourself, are willing to be one of those people. God knew that prayer was transforming. And even as you pray for God to send others, you have to be willing to go yourself.

Notice that we are to send out workers into His harvest. So much of contemporary church is terribly misguided. So many churches have tried to rewrite their worship in such a way as to attract lost people, to try to bring people into their worship services who are more attracted by flash and style than they are by theology and substance. The problem with the "seeker service" is that designing one's worship service around those who may be seeking God but do not know God is that we spend more time entertaining the goats than we have feeding the sheep.

Really, quite frankly, very little evangelism begins here in the sanctuary. It happens when you and I go out. "Send out workers..." (Matthew 9:38). We can't expect the wheat to come to us.

**There's a story – now, I know it's a fish story, but it's supposed to be substantiated by a journalist. A man by the name of Jim Cone was boating on the Intracoastal Waterway in North Carolina when a Spanish mackerel jumped into his boat. It grazed his daughter's head and landed in his wife's lap. Other than a few small cuts, there were no injuries except to the fish. (Michael Shannon, *Preaching*, Jan/Feb 2003)**

Most fishermen do not expect the catch to come to them. The fish to jump in the boat. And the church cannot expect the lost people to come to us. We must go out into the field. We must go to the wheat and bring in the harvest.

There is a legend that there are two questions at the entrance to heaven. First of all, “Did you come alone?” And if you answer, “Yes,” the second question is, “How could you?”

How could you not share God’s grace?

How could you not be a laborer in the field that is white with harvest?

Will you commit yourself at the beginning of this fall season, this new Sunday School year – will you commit yourself, Sunday School teacher, deacon, will you commit yourself church member – to sharing the good news, to show new courage and new boldness to share an old faith?

I was present when, in her welcome speech for Texas A&M University Medical School’s match day in Round Rock, Texas, on March 17, 2017, Dean Carrie Byington shared about her first day as a resident. At match day, medical students across the country open an envelope to discover where they will spend the next 3+ years of their lives. The air is filled with nervousness and expectation, as the soon-to-be doctors realize they are going to “hit the floor as practicing physicians” somewhere soon. Dean Byington explained that on her first day as a resident in pediatric medicine, things were going well during the day when the hospital was full of seasoned doctors. In the evening, however, everyone else went home, and she spent her first night in residency as the doc on call. As fate would have it, a premie baby was born, that she described as being about the size of a potato. The baby fit in her hand. Her pager alarmed, as the head nurse needed a doctor to attend to the struggling newborn. Arriving at labor and delivery, Byington was approached by the nurse, as she explained the baby was struggling for his very life. Having shared the stats and the facts, the experienced nurse looked the young resident in the eye and asked, “What do you want me to do with the baby?” Immediately Byington replied, “Oh my, somebody needs to call a doctor!” Without hesitation, the nurse looked the first-day doctor in the eye and replied, “I just did. I called you. Now what do you want me to do?”

The Dean went on to explain that after she got over her first-day fears, she and the nurse worked together to save the baby. At some point, every one of us has to learn, “We are it. We have to step up and get it done.” (Ryan Batson Smithee’s match day, 3/17/2017)