

The State of the church...pray Ye Therefore

by Aaron Dunlop

The sermon emphasizes the need for labourers in the harvest and the call to pray for God to send forth labourers, highlighting the condition of God's people and the reluctance of the church to get involved in missions.

Duration: 35:52

Scripture: Ezekiel 34:4-6, Ezekiel 34:8, Ezekiel 34:11-12, Matthew 9:36 - 10:1

Topics: "Declension"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of prayer in fulfilling the duty of Christians to share the gospel with the world. The speaker highlights the condition of the world, describing it as sheep scattered abroad and fainting without a shepherd. The text used is Matthew 9:36-10:1, where Jesus is moved with compassion for the multitudes and instructs his disciples to pray for laborers to be sent into the harvest. The speaker urges Christians to go beyond simply fundraising or organizing missionary trips, but to consistently pray for the Lord to raise up laborers and leaders for His kingdom.

Transcript

Matthew chapter 9, and we're reading up to verse 36, down to verse 1 of the chapter 10. Matthew chapter 9, and to verse 36. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Then saith he unto his disciples, Harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest. When he called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease.

Amen, because the Lord will bless the reading of his word to our hearts. The text that we have before us is filled with rebuke to Christians. It is a text that is often used in a missionary meeting.

It is a text that deals with the Christian's duty to the world, the Christian's duty to Christ. It is a text that would lend itself in many, many different directions. But I think, as we take the words today of the verse 38, Pray ye, therefore, you'll see how many and varied are the applications of it.

Whatever your dilemma, whatever your complaint, whatever your problem, pray ye, therefore. Whatever work you're involved in the church, whatever issue you have with the church, pray ye, therefore. But the context here, that we see it in, is a context that is not only one of us going out into the world, into the harvest field that the Lord has identified here, it is a context which is much more problematic, much more sad, than what we often give it credit for.

Verse 36 says, that when he saw the multitude he was moved with compassion, because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. That verse in itself could take us down a road whereby we could deal with the church of Jesus Christ today, whereby we could deal with evangelicalism today, whereby we could deal with our own lives today. And Christ says, therefore, pray ye.

Pray. There's always been, in the history of the church, there has always been a reluctance to pray. There has always, in the history of the church, been on the part of those in the church, a reluctance to get involved.

A reluctance to be proactive in the work of the church. This was the problem in the early church, they were huddled around the center of worship in Jerusalem, and they did not want to move. But persecution scattered them.

Acts chapter 8. It scattered them, and they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the gospel. But it took that persecution to scatter the people, the Christians, the church abroad, and to infiltrate into the other countries around about, into the other societies, into the other cities, it took persecution to do that. In more modern times, in the 1700s, William Carey, if you know anything of the history of missions, William Carey is termed the father of modern missions.

And when he and a few others, Andrew Fuller and a few others, had the mind to go into missions, they had the mind to go abroad and to spread the gospel, they were met with opposition by the church. Not by their families, not by the world, they were met with severe opposition by the church because of a theological argument, because of a preconceived idea of what the church ought to do. Hyper-Calvinism.

Today, in today's world, if I could bring it up to date, there is on the part of the Christian church a reluctance to get involved in missions, there is a reluctance to go abroad into the regions beyond, there is a reluctance to leave this society that we are in and to go into third world countries, to go into countries where the internet is slow at a snail's pace, to go into countries where we do not have all the technological advantages and comfortability that we have here. And so, if I can categorize it, we could say that modernity, materialism, technology, is what stands in the way of the church today. There is a reluctance to go.

Many missionary societies, if not all missionary societies, indeed the church, the church itself, and the pastorate, and I know numerous churches, denominations that have problems getting young men to go into the ministry. And those who go into the ministry, they have problems getting men who have that spirit of a pioneer, that spirit to suffer for Christ, that spirit to go out for Christ no matter what that holds. The church today is so used to the comfortable, materialistic lifestyle of modernity that we are stifling the work of God, stifling the work of God.

Whether it is the comfort of home, whether it is your preconceived theological idea, or whether it is that what they discovered in the early church, that hub of Christianity that you like, that fellowship that you don't want to leave. And I know what it's like to grow up in a church where there is a fellowship that is unique

and that is desirable to be there. And I can say that every time the church doors were open in my home church as I was growing up, I enjoyed when to the house of God go up they said to me.

Because there was that unity, there was that fellowship, there was that which they discovered in Jerusalem, that love for the brethren and unity. Whether it is that that causes us to be stagnant and inactive, the Bible holds for us a condemnation, a condemnation. Because Christian work is hard work, Christian work is hard work, it is hard spiritually.

Those of you who know anything what it is like to struggle in the place of prayer, to struggle in the place of Bible study, Christian work is hard work. Spiritually it's hard work. Physically it is hard work.

Emotionally Christian work is hard work. And the running of souls and the encouragement and edification of God's people is not easy work. It takes courage, it takes resolution, it takes preparation of heart and mind.

There is this spiritual dimension that we need, that is essential, that is imperative for a vibrant work. It takes time with the Lord in prayer, it takes time with the Lord in Bible study. And it makes one vulnerable to criticism and persecution.

Christian work is hard work. And since success is not always seen, it leaves us vulnerable to thoughts of inadequacy and hopelessness. And many, many, many have given up.

The statistics for pastors giving up is staggering. I'm talking about pastors in established churches. It's staggering.

All of this that I've described today is an advertisement for God's work. It's not a very pretty advertisement, but it is an advertisement for God's work. All of this needs to be overcome.

It's the reality of Scripture. All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Therefore we need to see a responsibility.

Every professing Christian needs to get over the world, needs to get over themselves, needs to get over the materialism, needs to get over the technology that holds us back, and we need to see our responsibility to the world, our obligation to the world, our accountability, as we learned in our adults in the school class, our accountability to the world and the church. We lack labourers. This is what the Lord says, we lack labourers.

There are two aspects of this passage that I read that I want to draw your attention to. And between these two aspects of this passage, there is one preeminent part that God says we can do. The first aspect in verse 36 is the condition of God's people.

The condition of God's people, now I say God's people, speaking of them as they are left before the foundation of the world. The condition of those who are God's sheep, those who will be God's sheep, those who will come into the fold. Other sheep I have, Christ said, which are not of this fold, them also I must bring.

And so our obligation to the world, our obligation to the church, is not only for those who have a profession of faith, it is an obligation to those who will be saved. It is an obligation, in other words, to evangelize. We do not know who the elect are, we do not know whom God has chosen before the foundation of the world,

but we have an obligation to evangelize all.

We have an obligation to all to give them the free offer of the gospel. The offer of the gospel that says that Christ said, come unto me all you that labour and are heavy laden. We have an obligation to stand where Christ stood and say, if any man thirsts, let him come unto me.

We have that obligation to the world. Why? Because the world and the harvest, as Christ describes it here, are as sheep scattered abroad, fainting, torn asunder. The other aspect is ascending out of the twelve in verse 1 of chapter 10.

And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. There is the obligation to go at the call of God. Between the condition of the harvest, between the need of the harvest, and the going out of the harvesters, there is this idea of praying.

The Lord says, pray ye therefore. Pray ye therefore. Because of the condition of the harvest, because of the condition of the world, because my people are languishing in a world, they are sheep scattered abroad, having no shepherd, they are torn asunder, and the language there is of sheep that have been torn.

They have been pillaged. They have been destroyed. They have been violated.

Pray ye therefore. Pray ye therefore. In relation to the other aspect, the ascending out, that the Lord would send out men, that the Lord would raise up men who can teach, apt to teach.

That the Lord would raise up men who can lead stewards over the house of God. Pray ye therefore. Pray ye therefore.

We can pray. We can pray. That's a simple command.

That's a simple command. The Lord does not ask of you anything more this morning than to pray. It would be easy.

Let me put it this way. It would be easy to send money to the mission field. It is easy to send money to the mission field.

It would be easier for some to go to the mission field and work, and put in their missionary and mission course, three weeks or four weeks. It's easy to salve our conscience. It's easy to buy our conscience by sending money.

It is not so easy to consistently pray that the Lord would send forth laborers. It is not so easy to consistently pray, recognizing the need of the church of God. My friend, what the Lord asks us to do is simple, but profoundly difficult.

Pray ye therefore. Pray ye therefore. It's not enough for us to buy our conscience.

It's not enough for us to fundraise. It's not enough for us to organize committees, organize missionary trips. It's not enough.

The Lord demands of us to pray. Pray. Why? Why? Because of the condition of the world.

Look at verse 36. But when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. As the Lord looks out on the world, as the Lord looked out on the world and Jerusalem, then he sees the multitude as sheep having no shepherd.

And the Bible says his heart was stirred in him. He had compassion on them. And the word compassion is a very strong word.

It speaks of pain. It speaks of ache. It speaks of a heartache at the sight of suffering.

That's what the Bible describes Christ. When he sees the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them. Now, this suffering that the Lord has, this ache that the Lord has in his heart, it is not an impotent ache.

It is the desire of Christ to relieve. And it is a desire of Christ to move him to action on behalf of that relief. It is not that he looks on the world and pities as one impotent or unable to do anything.

It is a compassion that moves him to do something. It is a compassion that moves him, first of all in our context today, that moves him to call upon us, his people, to pray. That compassion that the Lord has for the world, that compassion that the Lord had for you before you were saved, he is moved to ask others to pray for you.

And he is moved today to ask you to pray for others now. That's the implication of what he's saying here. He is moved with compassion.

Why? Because they are sheep scattered abroad. We look out at the church today and we see an apostasy. Apostate churches, mainline churches that have gone completely into apostasy.

They have sold out the truth of God. And they have brought in ungodly practices and sin has been legalized. And I look at churches like that and I see professing Christians languishing.

And Christ looks at churches like that and he sees his people languishing. That's the message of this verse. He has compassion on them.

Why? Because they are a sheep having no shepherd. They have no shepherd. Their minister is a man who has denied the truth of Scripture.

Their minister is a man who has denied the miracles of the virgin birth and the miracle of inspiration of Scripture. Their minister is a man who has undermined the authority of Scripture. Therefore they have nothing to teach.

And the sheep are scattered. Theologically, each man does that which is right in his own eyes. They bring to Scripture what they think it might say.

They bring to Scripture what someone else thinks it might say. They are untaught. Untaught.

And the Lord looks down and he has compassion on them. Because they are fainting. Fainting.

You go to a funeral today. And you go to the house alongside some of these modern ministers who have nothing to say when they preach peace, peace, when there is no peace. They give a false hope.

They have no comfort. And God's people are languishing, fainting, nothing to hold on to. Because their ministers have forsaken the truth.

Pray ye therefore. Pray ye therefore. Evangelicalism, broadly speaking, is going in the same direction.

Evangelicalism today is reaping the fruits of that denial of Scripture that liberalism brought in in the 1800s. We are seeing this in the church. And we are seeing aberrant thoughts and aberrant philosophies moving into the church.

And aberrant ideas of how to deal with problems in the church. Because every man is doing that which is right in his own eyes. And God looks down, Christ looks down and he says, according to this verse, He has moved with compassion.

And he says to us, pray ye therefore. Pray ye therefore. This is God's plan.

This is God's plan for the church. This is God's plan, not only to evangelize. This is God's plan for us to encourage God's people.

And to bring them out. To bring them out of these churches where they are not being taught or where they are being taught falsehoods. It is God's plan that we pray.

It is God's plan that we do. It is God's plan to bring people and to teach people and to instruct people in the way that they should go. And it is our responsibility to pray.

It is a difficult thing to do. It is a difficult thing to do, but Christ commands us to do it. Petition the throne of heaven.

Seek the face of God. There are two reasons that I want us to see here why Christ says to pray. Because in praying we enter into the ministry of Christ.

We hear a lot of talk in today's world about being like Christ. We hear a lot of talk about what would Jesus do? To use a modern slogan, what would Jesus do? This is what Jesus would do. Pray ye therefore.

What Christian does not want to be like Christ? What Christian does not want to partake of the ministry of Christ? And if we are going to pray with fervor, if we are going to pray with feeling, and if we are going to pray with the compassion of Christ, then we need to see men as God sees them. Do you see the context there? Do you see the implications of that? We need to see men as God sees them. We need to see men and women where they are at.

We need to feel their heartache. We need to not pridefully look over their heads as though we have got the truth and they don't. Not arrogantly look down our nose as though we have come to a knowledge of the truth and they haven't.

We need to see them where they are at. And feel the implications of being untaught in the ways of God. And feel the implications of having nothing to hold on to in a time of struggle.

We need to feel that compassion that the Lord has. We need to see men and women as sheep having no shepherd. It is only then, it is only then when we feel that, that we will be compelled to pray for them.

We will be compelled to pray for them. This, my friend, is entering into the ministry of Christ. To take a look over the world.

To see men on their way to hell. But more than that, to see God's people in churches where they are not being taught or where they are being taught falsehood. To feel for them.

To feel for them. Not to be arrogant and think that we have it made, stand aloof. But to be humble and seek for their betterment.

And seek that they are taught. Seek to pray them into a place where they will be taught. He was moved with compassion.

He was not moved with compassion because of their physical need, their physical tiredness. He was not moved with compassion because of their physical tiredness. And while I am an advocate of helping socially on the mission field.

The church is not a social club. The church is not a charity. The church is to be charitable.

Don't misunderstand me. The church is to be charitable. But the church is not a charity.

The church's primary focus. The church's primary concern is for the spiritual welfare. For the spiritual welfare.

When that has been dealt with. When that has been dealt with first. Then we can do what we can charitably.

What the Savior sees here is the house of Israel lost. If you turn over to Ezekiel. On the chapter 34.

Ezekiel on chapter 34. Striking commentary on this passage. We read in the verses 4 to 6. What a description of the church.

Visible today. The diseased have ye not strengthened. Verse 4 of Ezekiel 34.

Neither have ye healed that which was sick. Neither have ye bound up that which was broken. Neither have ye brought again that which was driven away.

Neither have ye sought that which was lost. But with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. What a description of the church of Jesus Christ today.

As it is seen visibly in this world. Men loading it over the church. Men in the church for a living.

Men happy to extract from the church. A fat income. And give in return nothing to feed the soul.

This is what they have done. They have not healed up. They have not healed that which is broken.

They have not bound up. They were scattered. Verse 5. Because there was no shepherd.

They became meat to wear the beasts of the field. When they were scattered. I know.

In coming to Victoria. Of people who have no teaching in their own church. What do they turn to? And in Northern Ireland now.

It's the same. It's getting this direction also because of cable television. Unfortunately.

What do they turn to? They turn to the television. They turn to radio. And there are all sorts of aberrant theologies out there.

All sorts of teachers wanting to get on to the radio. Wanting their voice to be heard. And they know nothing of the grace of God.

They know nothing of the truth of God. And they have one little hobby horse that they want to ride. People latch on to it.

Why? Because they have had no shepherd and they are scattered. The sheep are scattered. All sorts of theologies.

All across the spectrum. All sorts of little hobby horses. With no biblical grounding.

And no biblical theology. And when I say biblical theology I mean the theology that spans the scripture. And ties the scripture together into one whole.

We have not the authority. We have not the right. We have not the privilege to take out of scripture one little verse.

Or one passage. Or one thought. And to run with it.

Ignoring other passages of scripture. The scripture comes as a whole. And you take it all or you leave it all.

And the church today is scattered because as Ezekiel says. And as Christ said. They are sheep having no shepherd.

Verse 6. My sheep wandered through all the mountains. And upon every high hill. Yea, my flock was scattered upon the face of the earth.

And none did search or seek after them. My plea today is that we would search. That we would seek after them.

That we would, as the Lord says. Pray ye therefore. We have an obligation.

To empty. Mainline churches that have forsaken the truth. We have an obligation.

To draw men away from places that have not got the truth. We have an obligation to stand against places that are preaching heresy. It's an obligation.

It's not a choice. It's an obligation. Pray ye therefore.

And as Ezekiel says. We are to search. And seek after them.

Search and seek after them. Verse 11. Of the same chapter.

For thus saith the Lord God. Behold I, even I. Will both search my sheep. And seek them out.

Verse 13. I will bring them out from the people. And gather them from the countries.

And I will bring them to their own land. And feed them upon the mountains of Israel. By the rivers.

And all the inhabited places of the country. Verse 15. I will feed my flock.

I will cause them to lie down. Saith the Lord God. God has made a promise.

God has made a promise. That he will feed his people. This is not what he prayed in John chapter 17.

Verse 18. He says. As thou hast sent me.

Even so have I sent them into the world. And then verse 20. He says.

Neither pray I for them alone. But for them which will believe on me through their word. He is praying.

He does not send us out to pray. He does not send us out to search. He does not send us out to seek.

Alone. He is praying for them. Who will believe on him through our word.

He is praying for his people. And he is praying for those. Who are to believe.

Whom you are witnessing to. That leads me to my second thought then. In closing.

We are first of all entering into the ministry of Christ. And secondly to pray is to be assured of success. To pray is to be assured of success.

The work of Christ is a successful work. From beginning to end. That is presupposition.

And this is a great encouragement. As the Lord tells us to pray. It is encouraging for us to know that he is going to answer our prayers.

In that specific realm. That he points out to us. We can pray then with certainty.

We can pray with faith. Believing that what he says in his word is true. He says we are to pray for the harvest.

Because he is going to bring his harvest in. Pray ye therefore. When Christ says pray for the harvest.

He is saying that the Lord has prepared a harvest. He has prepared a people. And so he is not saying pray.

Without knowledge. He is not saying pray without certainty. He is saying pray for the definite harvest.

And he will bring it in. Pray ye therefore. When Paul went to Corinth.

The Lord said to him. Be not afraid to speak. For I have much people in this city.

That was Paul's comfort. That was Paul's assurance. Paul then to pray therefore.

God in his sovereignty. He is in control of the harvest. He has prepared the harvest.

And he will bring the harvest in. This is what Ezekiel says in Ezekiel 34.15. I will feed my flock. I will cause them to lie down.

Saith the Lord God. We have an obligation. To pray therefore.

For the harvest. We have an obligation to pray for God's people. We have an obligation to do.

On God's behalf. And to seek as far as lies within us. With all grace, humility and love.

To empty faithless churches. And to draw men and women to the truth of scripture. It is not only standing for truth as Jude says and as Paul says.

It is not only separating from truth. It is the desire that others in God's household. In God's family.

Will come to that same knowledge of the truth. And will be brought into full assurance of faith. And will be given a proper understanding of scripture.

In order that they might be shepherded. In order that they might not be scattered abroad. In order that they might not be fainting.

And if we can have some concept. Of God's fainting people. If we can have some concept of God's people who have nothing.

Of substance to hold on to. In a time of trial. Then I think we will pray.

We will pray as we enter into the ministry of Christ. That we will pray for the work of Christ. And seek to encourage others in it.

Let's bow in prayer.

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