

Reading: Matthew 9:35-10:16

Theme: Great things to consider!

Occasionally playing rugby and our team had one player missing. One occasion playing for Swindon, a car load of our players had got lost and began the game with 12 players and we played the first half without them. Rugby is a hard and tiring game and it was even more so that first half! We took the lead, held it and eventually our other players came, but we played worse with them, than without them! Probably the 12 of us were all shattered and eased up! Yet we managed to hang on and win the game by a narrow margin.

It is hard to carry on work with less than you need, with less than the job requires. Imagine building the pyramids with a gang of 10! Or if the channel tunnel had been dug with only 2 workmen with spades! In v35-38 we see Jesus emphasising the need of workers in the great work of gospel harvesting. We will look at these verses to see what we can learn and apply to ourselves:

1. The Great Work. (v35)

Matthew tells us of the King's great work in v35. In v34 Jesus had been rejected and criticised by the Pharisees! His answer to them was to go everywhere - in towns and villages - teaching God's word in the synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and doing many miraculous things.

Nowhere was too small or too big. All needed to be taught, to hear the gospel - the good news and many needed healing. Jesus' great work was that of teaching, preaching and by His divine power, doing people good. Surely the Pharisees would

see He was of God as they listened to what He taught and preached, as they saw the good He was doing - wouldn't they? Sadly, they didn't and at later times they repeated their bitter attacks on Him as they again claimed He was working with the Devil's power. The Pharisees hated Him so much that they plotted to kill Him and later achieved His death.

We too are to carry on in Jesus' great work - by teaching God's word, by preaching the gospel - the good news of God's salvation offered freely to all people irrespective of their background. We are also to do good as we have opportunity. Personally, I feel we are not expected to perform miracles of healing, but we are to point everyone to the fact that all healing comes from the Lord and whether He uses means i.e. medicines, doctors etc. or intervenes directly and grants healing to "hopeless" cases. Whichever way He uses, His healing power is to be recognised, acknowledged and prayed for.

There is a place in Christianity for good works - doing things for other's benefit. Yet we are to keep in view that good works do not earn us our salvation, but they are to be present as an evidence of our salvation. Society, especially in the West, has benefited from the good works of godly men and women e.g. Lord Shaftesbury, William Wilberforce, educational progress, workers' rights (unions), hospitals, schools and many other areas of social reform. As we do good, we need to be careful to maintain the biblical balance, the balance the Lord Jesus had - teaching, preaching and doing good.

There is the danger of an extreme on either side - of only doing good but letting people plunge headlong into hell; or only viewing people as preaching subjects and not doing good as we have opportunity. The Lord Jesus had the balance right and so we must try to do the same where we are - to rich or poor, to educated or uneducated, to those of all backgrounds who we come in contact with. The Lord Jesus had a motivation for this great work and we see this revealed to us as the crowds come to Him:

2. The Great Love. (v36)

Jesus looked on the crowds around Him, all who'd come to Him and were following Him, who wanted to hear Him - whatever their motivation. He doesn't think "*Oh, I've had enough. Why can't they leave Me alone for a short while!*" No, not at all. He was moved with compassion, tenderness and love for them. Among them were many sick, blind, lame and diseased people, but this is not the main reason why He had compassion on them. Yes, that was a true part of His concern and love for them, but the main reason, the primary reason given is that they were "*harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*" (NIV) or in AV "*because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd*".

Here the Greek words have wide meanings - "*harassed*" or "*fainted*" means - to flog or lacerate and is a metaphor = vex, to trouble, annoy. The particular form of the verb here (*nominative plural, masculine, particle perfect passive*) means they were ones who would be and remain in such a sorry condition. The word "*helpless*" or "*scattered*" means

to hurt, to throw down, to cast down or aside, to be dis-placed, to be scattered (*the word has the same form as the previous verb*). These ones were in and would continue to be in this situation of being scattered, downtrodden, cast out from any real help.

There is a wordplay in Greek and the NIV tries to catch it – “*harassed and helpless*”, so would “*dejected and deserted*” or “*fatigued and forlorn*”. Their condition was pitiful and they had no hope of anything better - for they were like helpless, harassed lost sheep, with no shepherd to care for them. Sheep cannot really look after themselves. They are not aggressive creatures with sharp claws and teeth! There are no reports of flocks of marauding sheep savaging people, dogs or other animals! Sheep are defenceless and fairly helpless - especially when left exposed to the ravages of other wild animals.

The priests in Israel were supposed to watch over God’s people, to be shepherds to them, but the rabbis, the Pharisees, the teachers of the law by Jesus’ time had put heavy burdens on the people - treated them as *pack sheep* (*pack horses*). Instead of helping them, the people had these burdensome shepherds that left them in a worse state than ever. Previously leaders in Israel had been condemned as bad shepherds by the Lord in Ezekiel 34.

What an awful predicament! Yet, many are still in that condition. They are helpless and distressed and the shepherds they are under are worse than none at all! Incredibly, some churches do not hold with the Bible, deny Bible truths and

teach all sorts of false things about the Shepherd and the poor sheep in their care are to be pitied. Many people have no idea of Christ, of Christian things and they too are to be cared for and loved.

Do we see people in their need as the Lord Jesus saw them? They may have religion, wealth, possessions, health, even prosperity, may be very nice people, but unless they have the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, they are to be pitied and are in a helpless and lost state. Yet hold on a moment, as some here may need to see themselves like that before they see other people around them in that condition! If we do not have the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, then we are in this condition and need to have Him as our own Shepherd.

The Lord Jesus had compassion on these people and He has compassion on us and wants us to know and delight in His compassion and love and all it brings. He still feels that compassion for us, for those around us and we are to show and feel something of that compassion personally towards others.

This will affect our attitude to people, to the outreach of the church as we would be moved by the love and compassion of Christ to present to people, to tell them the good news that they can know and experience His love in a personal way. We tell them this so they will no longer be scattered, fainting, helpless and harassed. The love of Christ is a strong motivating force, but as we consider all that is involved for, we see:

3. The Great Need. (v37 & 38)

There is a great big world, society, country, town out there. That is the harvest field - our harvest field. Jesus told His disciples of the harvest field and the need for workers and also the need to ask the Lord of the harvest for workers.

Sometimes in orchards, fields there is fruit, a harvest waiting, it falls to the ground, rots and is wasted. In the spiritual harvest fields, there is a need for workers, planters and reapers - to go in and gather people for the Lord. The work is so great, but the workers are so few! Many say “Yes” to the need; “Yes” to Christ’s love, but in practice they stand at the edge of the field and, like supporters in a sports game, they may be shouting help, advice and even abuse at those who are slogging on the pitch, i.e. doing all the hard work.

The great need of our days is for God to send workers to witness, teach, preach and do good with and through the gospel. There are multitudes around us - modern travel and communications have opened up the world and yet missionaries going out are far less than needed in the mission fields. Our own land is sinking into a pagan godless society. We need workers to be raised up and serve the Lord in the harvest field of our own country and also abroad.

We are to realise that each of us as believers are a witness for our Saviour - **whether for good or bad!** More often than not, we are the only Bibles, the only word of God that people will “*read and see*”! I wonder what they think of Christ because of us? Every believer has the duty, honour and privilege to be witnesses for Christ. Yes, some are called to serve above and

beyond the “ordinary” calling of Christians. Some are called to be workers, labourers for God in specific ways - ministry, or evangelists or missionaries, for there is a need for God called-and-sent preachers, teachers and labourers. Yet in every church, especially our church here, there is a need for workers - practical helps, working with children’s clubs, Sunday school work, working alongside the young people and many more areas. If we have eyes and hearts to look and see we will note where the need is! Pray the Lord of the harvest would raise up workers in the harvest field of our own church.

Many would set themselves up - they want to teach, or have the glamour, the romance of being a pastor, preacher, missionary or the like. Yet the ones Jesus speaks of here are described as “labourers”, “workers” for they are involved in a hard slog, much work, sweat and even tears. They toil on in the hard times, as well as in good times; they are to be faithful, bear burdens and even heartaches; they are to keep on going on, even when those they love in Christ may turn on them.

The apostle Paul reinforces these things and he is an example to all who would be God’s workmen. There is a romantic, sentimental, rose tinted view of the ministry or mission field. This is to be done away with. It is a hard, sweaty slog, I once read it is “99% perspiration and 1% inspiration!” I assure you that ministers do not work just one day a week! Pray for those already in the harvest field that they would know help, strength and, if it please the Lord, success too. Pray for those here involved maintaining the buildings, involved in the finances, in teaching children and young people - whether midweek, Saturdays or Sundays. Pray for the church officers

here, if you have time pray also for me or whoever's preaching and teaching in the week. Pray for other workers to be raised up, not for people to feel they could do it or it would just be nice to try, but for God to raise up in our land, in our church, workers who are equipped, called and sent by Him.

Yet for us all, we need to realise we are to pray for workers and continue to be witnesses for Christ where we are, in whatever situation of life we are in now. I have to now give you a word of warning - if you are going to pray to the Lord of the harvest concerning the great need of workers, you may find that you get the job! You may sense the need and as you pray you may feel the Lord saying "*Who can we send? Who will go for us?*" – as Isaiah did, but the trouble was Isaiah was the only one there to go! You may find you have prayed yourself into an Isaiah corner and will have to say as he did "*Here am I, send me.*"

The great need is workers for the perishing world around us. This has to be met by God's people praying and even being sent into the harvest field to work for the King. If we know the love of God in Christ, are touched and moved by that love, then surely if we see the great work and the great need, can we then be slow to serve our Lord if He chooses to send **us** out as workers?

We are all sent out as His witnesses and I pray we would know gospel success and not be afraid to use the scythe of the word of God as we are out and about in the harvest field and that He would grant us a great harvest for His glory and honour.