

Something Needs to Change

Matthew 9:35-38 - NCBC, March 22, 2020

Main Point: **Jesus' followers live to advance His kingdom on earth.**

- Doing what Jesus does (35)
 - Advancing His message
 - Advancing His ministry
- Seeing what Jesus sees (36)
 - Seeing their true condition
 - Seeing with true compassion
- Praying as Jesus commands (37-38)
 - Recognizing it's His harvest
 - Recognizing it's His sending

Application: **Pray fervently for Jesus to send more disciple-makers into our communities.**

Opening Announcements:

- **Next Steps for the Dobbins Family** – We are excited to announce that God is leading our beloved Cameron and Ro Dobbins and their family to accept a pastoral internship with King's Cross Church in North Carolina. Move date is scheduled for summer 2020. Please be praying for the Dobbins family as they prepare for this transition, and we plan a special "send-off" service for them in the coming months. Lord, thank you for our time with this special family!!

<<Behold Our God>>



We've set time aside this morning to wash our hearts in the truth of God's glory. To behold our God – to come and worship and adore Him. No matter what storms we face... no matter how low our own resources... our God is the King of Glory who is still seated on His throne, and ruling over all.

So please open your Bible this morning to **Matthew chapter 9, verses 35-38** as we continue our worship of God together. If you don't have a Bible with you right now, but you have a smartphone, I'd encourage you view the Bible through the New Castle Bible Church's app. God's Word gives life and hope to soft hearts this morning, so I encourage you to prepare for our reading from **Matthew 9:35-38** at this time.

I also want to thank each of you for your understanding, prayers, and joyful submission to our corporate precautions as we seek to follow our civil authorities and slow the spread of the coronavirus in our communities. Certainly all of our lives are being disrupted in significant ways, yet we believe this is a disruption of love. History teaches that times of plagues and wars provide some of the greatest Gospel opportunities for Jesus' church.

religious shepherds of Israel – the Pharisees – tried to assign Jesus’ power to Satan himself... saying,

He casts out demons by the prince of demons.²

So let’s read **verses 35-38** together to see how Jesus responds to the Pharisees’ unbelieving slander.



From the **English Standard Version**, I’ll read from **Matthew chapter 9, verse 35**:

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. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

² Matthew 9:34

³ I’m thankful for this article which gave me the idea for this introduction:
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/love-neighbor-pandemic/>

This is God’s Word. **Let’s Pray Together.**

It was the middle of August 2017 and Houston Texas was in trouble. *Hurricane Harvey* was barreling towards the city and the interstates were jammed with vehicles as millions of people followed evacuation orders to flee to safety.



But the next morning our nation was startled to see **lines of trucks ...pulling boats...** not *leaving* the city, but heading *into* the city to bring help in time of need.³ The volunteer “Cajun navy” was racing into the storm... to offer help to officials as they faced this crisis together.

What a vivid picture of how God’s church is called to respond in times of crisis. Jesus’ followers don’t live for ourselves, but for the sake of Jesus’ Name.⁴ Christians don’t hide and run away from storms in our community. Jesus followers should be the first to line up to help!

While Christians of course submit to and work with our God-given authorities,⁵ we should also be the most

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:15

⁵ Romans 13:1-5; 1 Peter 2:13-25

willing to risk our personal comfort and security for the sake of others' eternal good. After all, we have a living hope⁶ – death is not our enemy.⁷ If we die, we are present with the Lord.⁸ But if one of our unbelieving neighbors dies, they face eternal judgment.⁹

Further, God's Spirit in us empowers sacrificial generosity,¹⁰ and enables us to remain steadfast under trial.¹¹ We are not surprised by troubling times.¹² God's Scriptures have prepared us for such times as these.¹³

In other words: Jesus' followers do not live by watermelon-seed-theology!

What's watermelon-seed-theology?

I'm guessing our children can help us understand this. Kids, if you use your thumb to put pressure on a wet watermelon seed, what's going to happen?

Pa-ding! The seed is going to immediately fly away, right? Watermelon seeds have no staying power under pressure. When life gets hard, pa-ding! – the watermelon seed is gone!

But Jesus' followers do not live like watermelon seeds! God's Spirit gives us staying power in the midst of trials and tribulation.



No matter the pressure around us, **Jesus' followers live to advance His kingdom on earth.** That's the main point of these verses in front of us this morning. Jesus' followers don't live for themselves. Salvation has given us a new purpose – to multiply and advance Jesus' kingdom – in the good times and in the bad.

In **verse 35**, we discover the first way Jesus' followers live to advance God's kingdom is by,

⁶ 1 Peter 1:3

⁷ Matthew 10:28; 1 Corinthians 15:55-57

⁸ Philippians 1:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:8

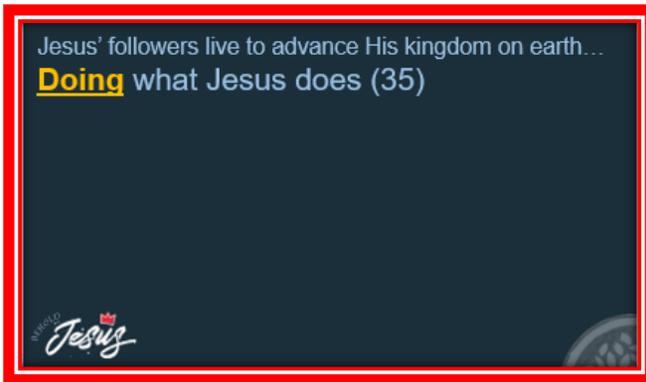
⁹ Matthew 3:12; 25:41, 46; Mark 9:44-49; Luke 13:5; 16:23-26; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 14:10-11

¹⁰ Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Timothy 1:5

¹¹ James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:10

¹² 1 Peter 4:12

¹³ Matthew 24:6-8; 2 Timothy 3:1ff;



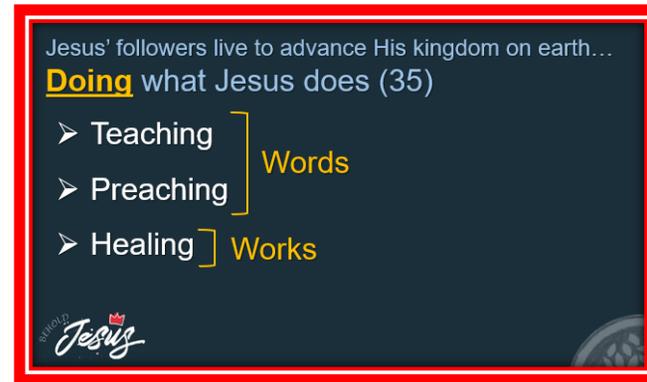
Doing what Jesus does.

Look at **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.

Now this verse repeats exactly the description of Jesus' ministry we already studied in **chapter 4 verse 23**.

Jesus' earthly ministry was characterized by these three activities:



Teaching, Preaching, and Healing. Matthew repeatedly highlights Jesus' words and works – all to prove that He is the long-promised Messiah in fulfillment of the Holy Scriptures.

So carefully consider Jesus' ministry strategy. We know from Josephus' writings that there were more than 200 villages and cities in the Galilee region at the time of Christ.¹⁴ An estimated population of over 3 million people were spread across all these unwalled villages and fortified cities in a 60-mile by 30-mile region.

If you were trying to reach 3 million people over 1,800 square miles,¹⁵ what would be your strategy?

Jesus went throughout all the region – not meaning necessarily that he stepped foot in every specific village without exception, but emphasizing that His ministry was not partial or discriminatory – but rather freely given to all. Jesus didn't care if it was a rural or an urban people. Rich or poor. Gentile or Jew.

¹⁴ C.f. Broadus commentary on *Matthew*

¹⁵ For comparison purposes, the nation of Trinidad and Tobago covers

approximately 1,981 square miles and supports a population of ~1.4 million people.

He would continually¹⁶ teach in the Pharisees' synagogues. Teaching in the synagogues means reading a portion of Scripture and then explaining its meaning to the people. Jesus taught the Bible to people. He didn't teach man-made traditions. He didn't allow economics or social issues to distract his message. He combatted biblical illiteracy by teaching God's Word – understanding that a failure to know the Scriptures leads to confusion, despair, and helplessness in times of trouble.

And Jesus would also preach: *proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom*. This is slightly different than teaching. To proclaim or to preach is to act as God's messenger – to cry out God's message in order to elicit a desired response.

Preaching is when teaching becomes personal. Preaching calls for the listener's response.

And notice what Jesus continuously preached – *the gospel of the kingdom*. I bring you good news – tidings of great joy – God is sending His King to reign and rule over all of creation! If you have sinned against God, you must repent, and believe in God's Messiah who alone can remove sin and make you righteous before God!

Make no mistake, Jesus preached that God is the ruler, and it is good to be His slave. Jesus preached that God's kingdom – His rule and reign – was dawning upon them, and they must repent of their sins to prepare for the Messianic King's arrival!¹⁷

And that's why Jesus' strategy included healing. Because healing authenticated His preaching – proving beyond doubt that God's rule is one of blessing and freedom from sin and all sin's consequences.

Before Adam and Eve sinned, there was no death or disease of any kind in the world.¹⁸ Sin brought death into our human experience.¹⁹

So Jesus' healing ministry was giving these people a taste of what living in God's kingdom was going to be like once all sin is eradicated from human experience.

Can you imagine what it would have been like to live in Galilee during this year of Jesus' ministry? For a season, no more viruses. No more demon possession. No more paralysis or blindness! Every kind of disease and every kind of affliction was healed...as Jesus was bringing God's kingdom into everyone's experience through His message and His ministry.

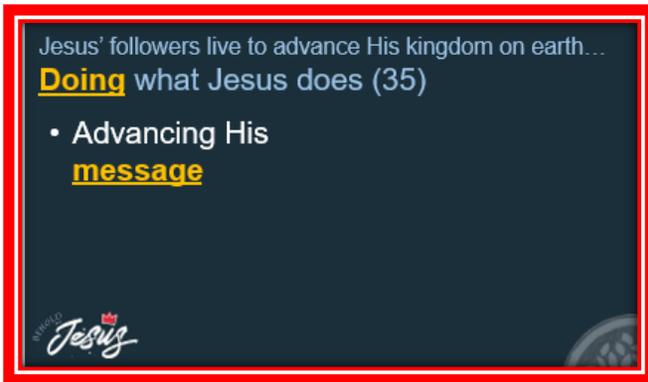
So doing what Jesus does first means that Jesus' followers today must seek to be,

¹⁶ All three verbs are in the present tense to emphasize their continuous and ongoing nature.

¹⁷ Matthew 4:17

¹⁸ Genesis 1:31

¹⁹ Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12, 19



Advancing Jesus' message.

Listen. We must teach the Bible and proclaim the Gospel in order to advance God's kingdom agenda in our communities.

Notice I didn't say we must win an argument. Jesus' followers live to tell others that God is God, we are sinners, and Jesus came to be our sacrifice and rescue us from the hell of selfishness.

Troubled times offer fertile sowing fields... trouble often opens hearts to the Gospel. So do what Jesus does... and share the good news that sinners can be delivered from sin simply by believing on the finished work of Jesus. Open your Bible, and explain what God's Word teaches regarding the last days and the coming judgment. Biblical illiteracy is rampant around us. People want to know what the Bible actually says. So Jesus' followers don't hide themselves away in self-preservation. No they live to advance Jesus' message through teaching and preaching God's Word.

And second believers follow Jesus by,

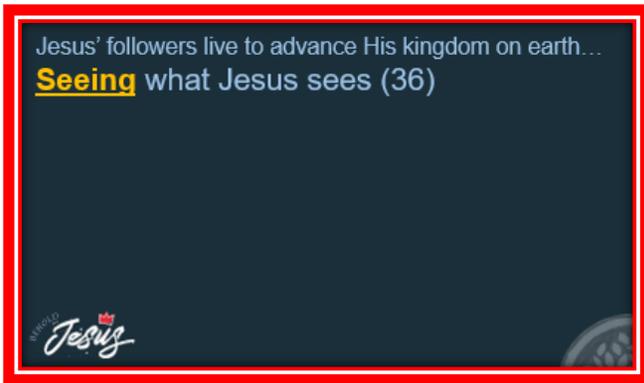


Advancing His ministry in our world. Unlike Jesus, we are not God. So we don't have the power to heal others. But we do whatever we can to remove the consequences of sin and brokenness from people's lives. It is our loving ministry of helps and good deeds that validates the gospel that we proclaim.²⁰

Church – something needs to change about how we are living in our communities at this time. Are we doing what Jesus does? Are we actually opening our Bibles and sharing the good news of God's sovereign reign over all things? Are you teaching the Scriptures to others? Then, are you validating your words with the works of practical love for sinners of all kinds?

Now **verse 36** reveals the motivation behind all kingdom living, since Jesus' followers live to advance His kingdom by,

²⁰ 1 John 3:18



Seeing what Jesus sees.

Do you see what Jesus sees? Are you viewing these troubling days from Jesus' perspective?

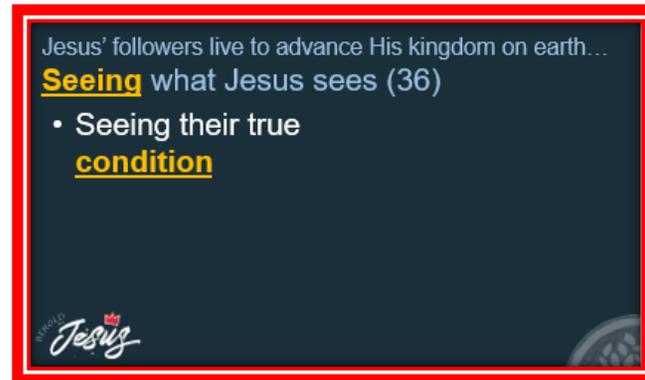
Look at **verse 36**,

When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Now place yourself on Galilee soil for a moment. The fame of this miracle worker must have spread throughout the entire region quicker than greased lightning! In a territory with a population of 3 million people, we can imagine all the paparazzi, curious onlookers, and desperate people trying to get a personal audience with Jesus.

So how do you see the crowds around you? When you go to the grocery store, and there's a long line of people waiting just to enter the store, how do you see the crowds? When you show up at a gas station, and there's a long line of cars, how do you see the crowds? Do you

see the crowds as your enemy, or your competition, or do you see them like Jesus sees them by,



Seeing their true spiritual condition.

In other words, Jesus didn't just see people with outward symptoms of disease and hunger and Roman oppression. Jesus saw spiritual souls who were truly lost.

You could say it this way – Jesus saw the crowds as an opportunity for God's glory, not a problem to overcome.

Jesus saw that these people were *harassed, helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

Harassed means worried, or troubled, or confused and upset. *Helpless* means defeated, vulnerable, hopeless, and cast down. Do these words accurately describe any of the crowds around you this week?

Sheep without a shepherd is language that comes from the prophet **Ezekiel**, which refers to the fact that the

people have no spiritual anchor, no spiritual leaders who are helping to direct their focus back to God Himself.²¹

You see, something needs to change in how we see our neighbors if we are to advance God's kingdom together in these days.

I trust we do not see our neighbors as competitors for food and necessary supplies! But do you see the crowds around you as a Gospel opportunity or a problem to overcome?

Further, let me ask this – how do you see the crowd's greatest problem?

Jesus' disciples see that our community's greatest problem is not poverty, or unemployment, or physical disease or isolation. Our society's greatest problem is that we've sinfully followed the wrong spiritual leaders. God Himself is not our shepherd.

People are following wealth gurus, or health gurus, or religious gurus, or political gurus, or self-improvement gurus... only to end up being harassed, helpless, like sheep without a shepherd... unable to see that their greatest problem is their lack of real living relationship with their creator God as their personal Shepherd.

Seeing people's true condition as lost and spiritually misguided souls will help you,

²¹ Ezekiel 34 actually helps us understand Jesus' perspective on the spiritual blight of the Galileans at this time. Because the prophet Ezekiel is prophesying against the spiritual leaders, the shepherds of Israel, for their selfishness. Instead of caring for the people of God, the leaders have fed



See with true compassion, not self-righteous judgment or condemnation.

After all, **verse 36** says that Jesus responded to the people's true condition with true Divine compassion.

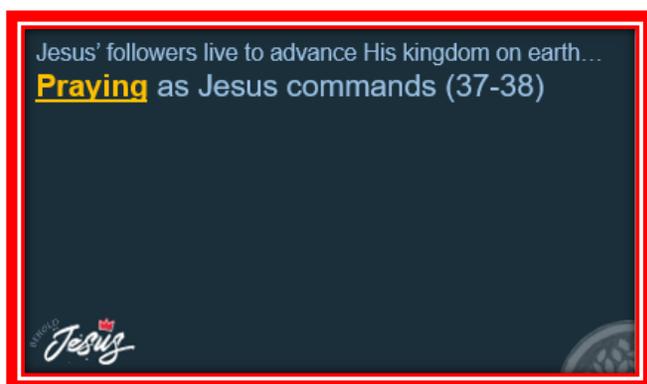
Jesus has a real gut-ache for hurting people. This is deeper than human pity. This is a word that describes God's own hurt that moves Him to merciful action when He sees how our rebellion continues to lead us away from Him.

Listen church, Jesus' true disciples ache for the deepest problem of the spiritually lost. Yes, we will help people with their finances, and their health, and their relationships...but all with aim of serving their greatest need for a personal relationship with God Himself as their shepherd. Souls can never experience true wholeness apart from faith's union with Jesus, who is our life!

themselves (verse 2). They have ruled over God's flock with force and harshness (the end of verse 4). And so verse 5 says the people were scattered, because there was no shepherd.

When you look at our world today, is your heart flooded with mercy and compassion, or judgment and disgust?

Jesus' followers live on this earth with the purpose of advancing His kingdom...and His reign and rule will only be advanced when we see others as souls in need of the Gospel more than problems to overcome. We can only advance Jesus' kingdom when we see as Jesus sees, and then finally by,



Praying as Jesus commands

This is the surprising and unexpected action of Jesus' compassion. When He sees the overwhelming needs of the people around him, **verse 37**,

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;

Now frequently in Scripture "harvest" is used as a picture of God's judgment at the end of the age.²² And certainly God is the Judge of all people at the end of time.²³

²² Matthew 3:12, 13:30, 39-42; Isaiah 18:4-6; Jeremiah 51:33; Joel 3:11-14; Amos 9:13-15; Revelation 14:14-20

But here, the plentiful harvest is not referring to end-times judgment. I believe the plentiful harvest represents the crowds of lost people waiting to hear the good news that they might believe and be gathered into God's kingdom.

The plentiful harvest refers to the huge opportunity for Gospel ministry in the world. When Jesus sees the crowds...thousands of lost souls around him, and he recognizes that Israel's spiritual leaders are not faithfully preparing the people to glorify God, he exclaims,

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;

Something needs to change! The glory of God demands more Christ-followers who will compassionately replicate the ministry of Jesus to lost souls on this planet.

Church, there's almost 8 billion people alive today. But according to conservative estimates, more than 1 billion souls alive today have not yet heard of Jesus Christ!²⁴

Listen carefully – these people haven't rejected the Gospel. They've never even heard the good news of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone! There are over 1 billion people on earth today on their way to hell who have never once heard the good news of God's reign!

With all our concern about a deadly pandemic that may end the lives of thousands of people, let that sink in for a moment.

Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

²³ Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 14:10

²⁴ https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/has_everyone_heard

Note Jesus doesn't command His disciples to *go* into the harvest. He commands us to *pray earnestly* to the Lord of the harvest to *send out* laborers into His harvest.

In the next chapter, those who prayed will be sent. So praying is not a substitute for going... but praying must always precede going! Because when we pray fervently as God commands,



We are **recognizing it's His harvest**, not ours.

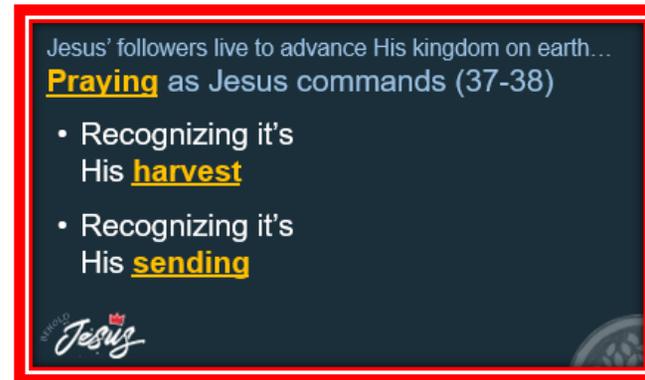
God Himself is the Lord of the Harvest. He's the sovereign harvest master. The end of **verse 38** is clear – it's *His* harvest.

Jesus' followers must never think of Gospel ministry as our own work. It's not our strategy to come up with. It's not our goals to achieve.

The gathering of faithful believers from among all the nations of the world is the plan and priority of God Himself! We are just his laborers – His humble workers

who merely do what He tells us to do...living to advance His kingdom purposes on earth.

Further, when we pray as Jesus commands, we are



Recognizing that it's His sending

Only the Lord of the harvest has the authority to send out laborers into his harvest.

So we pray fervently for God to *send out* – literally fling or urgently throw out into the world – more disciple-makers for the advancing of His kingdom. The matter is urgent. Over 160,000 people enter eternity every day.²⁵ Gospel opportunities are urgent – so something needs to change about what we pray for, when we pray.

Notice that the workers must be sent by God, since God is the Harvest-master and the harvest is His. If people enter Gospel ministry when God Himself has not sent them, they will only bring shame upon the Name.

²⁵ <https://ourworldindata.org/births-and-deaths>

This world already has too many self-appointed, false shepherds. So pray fervently that God Himself will send out laborers into His harvest!

God-sent workers who do as Jesus does, see as Jesus sees, and pray as Jesus commands.



Here's the point – in all our doing, seeing, and praying – **Jesus' followers live to advance His kingdom on earth.** Christians don't live on this planet for ourselves. This world is not our home.

Therefore, in this time when urgent needs for Gospel ministry are present all around us, something needs to change about how we live, and see others, and pray.



And this change begins by **Praying fervently for Jesus to send more disciple-makers into our communities.**

Pray for God to raise up and send out missionaries and church planters and pastors from our own congregation to the utmost ends of the earth. This is why we celebrate in God's calling of our beloved Dobbins family to join a church-planting effort in North Carolina this summer! This is an answer to prayer! Let's pray fervently that God would send more and more of our brothers and sisters out to the nations for the sake of His Name.

But the harvest is plentiful right here at home as well, isn't it? We can learn from the Cajun Navy! But before we go... we must first pray fervently. May our compassion for our lost neighbors cause our knees to bend and our heads to bow. May we be a church who sees Gospel opportunities clearly – begging our Father to send more Christ-imitating laborers – brothers and sisters who advance Jesus' message and ministry...for the sake of the glory of His Name among us.

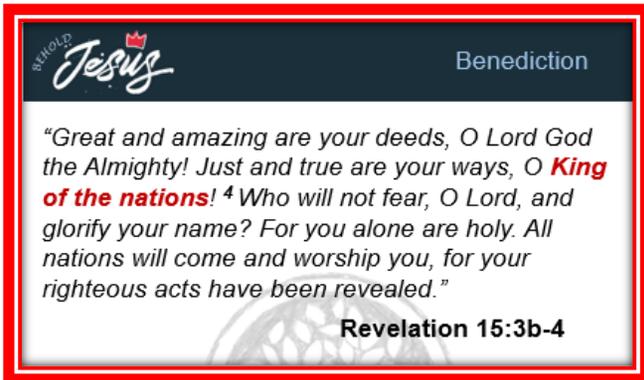
In these days church... may we sincerely and fervently pray.



Let's pray.

<<O Church Arise>>

Let's pray our benediction together as we dismiss.



Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.
Revelation 15:3b-4

Recommended Resources on Something Needs to Change:

- Numbers 27:17
- 1 Kings 22:17
- 2 Chronicles 18:16
- Psalm 23:2; 67:1-7
- Ezekiel 34:5, 23
- Joel 3:13-14
- Zechariah 10:2
- Mark 6:34
- John 4:35-38; 10:11-16
- Acts 1:8
- 2 Corinthians 5:13-20

- <http://multiplymovement.com/>
- <http://www.operationworld.org/>
- <https://www.imb.org/research-maps/>

- *The Art of Neighboring*, Jay Pathak & Dave Runyon
- *Something Needs to Change*, David Platt
- *Don't Waste Your Life*, John Piper

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Read Matthew 9:35. Imagine what it would have been like to live in this region at this time in Jesus' ministry. How is our life different today from this verse? What most excites you about Jesus coming back to establish His kingdom reign on the earth someday?
2. Read Matthew 9:36. How do you typically react to being around large crowds for extended periods of time? What do you find most surprising about Jesus' reaction to the crowds?
3. Compare Ezekiel 34:4-6, 23-24 to Matthew 9:36. Who did Jesus blame for the people's lack of receptivity and preparedness for His arrival as the promised Messiah? How does Jesus' ministry in 9:35 contrast with the ministry of the scribes and Pharisees?
4. Read Matthew 9:37-38. Who or what does the harvest represent in this illustration? What is meant by calling it "plentiful?" Discuss the urgency of this situation from Jesus' perspective here.
5. Review Matthew 9:38. How important is the concept of 'calling' in the life of discipleship? Would you distinguish a call to discipleship in general from a call to specific types of Christian service (for example, missions or ministry)?
6. Review Matthew 9:38. Who is responsible to send out Christian workers? What happens when someone decides to enter Christian ministry on their own initiative, for their own reasons? Why does Jesus here urge the church to pray, rather than to go?