

A World In Need Of Workers

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[0 : 00] It's December. December 2024. How about that? How do you feel about that? How do you feel that it's December already? Has it come too quickly for you? Yeah? Or maybe it doesn't come quick enough for you. Who's looking forward to some holidays? Who is needing a holiday? Put up your hand.

Yeah, quite a few people. I know how you feel. See, and this is how it is this time of year. Most people I speak to this time of year, they're just, how are you? I'm tired. I'm exhausted. I can't wait for just to take some time off. Most people are like that. And most people, you know, when they're at work, this is the month when generally people are starting to lose focus, not work as efficiently. All the energy is gone. And they're just counting the days to the holiday.

You know what I mean? I'm sure you're feeling it as well. But, you know, there are some occupations who can't afford to do that. There's some people who can't afford to lose focus, especially this month. And no matter what time of year it is, some jobs that just can't afford to lose focus. I mean, imagine an air traffic controller slacking off and letting planes crash because, oh, you know, it's December. I'm just so exhausted. I'm so tired. I can't wait for the holidays. No, they have to keep focus, especially now that there's more people traveling and flying around in December. What about the emergency services, especially in December? You think about lifeguards on the beaches, when now there's more people coming to the beaches in Cape Town than any time of the year.

They really have to focus now. This is their high season. Or paramedics, because sadly, we know that the accident rate on the roads increases during December. And so paramedics, really, this is when they've really got to focus. They can't slack off. Even fire services. Did you know that every year there's over 400 Christmas tree fires? True story. It happens. It's a statistic.

[2 : 09] Christmas tree fires. I mean, you can imagine people putting trees in their house and then putting electrical wires all over them. Something's bound to happen, right? And so these emergency services, they have to really be on the ball. They can never slack off, no matter what time of the year it is. They can never, people who do those kind of jobs can never give less than their full focus to their work. And it's for the simple reason that lives are at stake depending on how well they do their work. And that's the thing about those jobs. If they lose focus, it'll have dire effects on other people.

Well, if you're a Christian this morning, I wonder if you feel the same about your work for God. Because you might not realize it, but any work you do for God, no matter how small or insignificant you might think it is, is in the same category as those other occupations in that lives are at stake based on how well you do that work. Think about that. And that's what we're going to learn. That's what we're going to see in this passage this morning. And in what Jesus tells us, that God has given us all as Christians important work to do in this life. And we can't afford to lose focus, no matter how tired we are, no matter what time of the year it is. Because it's through our work, it's through our efforts as Christians that God saves people in this world. That's how important it is.

And we live in a world that is in desperate need of saving. And so that's why we need to take seriously what we hear this morning. We live in a world that is in desperate need of saving. And we might forget that, especially in the festive season, right? We're in that time of year where we're looking forward to celebrating and eating good food and maybe opening some presents at Christmas time and there's holidays and there's lights. And it's kind of a season like this where the world seems okay. And as Christians, we can't let that make us forget just how desperately this world is really in need of saving. The world likes to ignore the problems and it likes to just look at the happy things and just turn a blind eye to everything that's wrong. But as Christians, we need to have our eyes open and realize this world is still in desperate need of saving from so many things.

I mean, you look at just the amount of wars that are taking place. You would have thought through centuries that we've learned our lesson on how not to fight each other. But no, there's just, there's as many conflicts as there's ever been. There's so much poverty in the world. There's still so much corruption. There's crime. There's so many people just that don't have clean drinking water.

[5 : 26] There's diseases. There's natural disasters. The world is, if you just take a few minutes just to look around, you realize. And in South Africa, you don't have to look far, do we? To realize how much this world is in need of saving from so many things. But what's interesting is that Jesus here in this passage, Jesus, one thing he realized, you see, is that there's something we need saving from more than anything else. And we see it reflected in verse 36. Jesus realized we need saving from something more than all of these other things. Look at verse 36. When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them because they were distressed and dejected like sheep without a shepherd.

Like sheep without a shepherd. You see, that's, that is what Matthew summarizes as Jesus's burden when he looked out to these crowds, when he looked out to the world. That was his burden. And that's what he saw. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. That's what Jesus realized was humanity's biggest need when he was here. And really the cause of all the other problems we see, all the other needs that this world has are all rooted in what Jesus identified here, what Matthew tells us, that humanity is like sheep without a shepherd. Have you ever seen sheep without a shepherd?

I mean, I'm sure you have, if you've been driving maybe on the, the N2, there's a lot of farms, fields, and often you'll see sheep wandering around. And when they don't have a shepherd, what are they doing? Not much, right? They don't organize themselves very well. They don't go hunting for, you know, better fields. They're just, wherever they are, they're just walking around. Just pretty aimlessly. Oh, there's some grass, let's eat it. But they don't have any ambition. They don't have anybody to guide them. There could be a green field with lush grass right next door, and they won't go there. They won't see it because no one's there to guide them to it. They're really stupid, okay? We should not be flattered that it's one of the most common analogies in the Bible for humanity. Sheep without a shepherd. Sheep wandering around, not knowing what's best for them. Not knowing exactly where to go. No one to guide them. Don't you think that is such an apt illustration for humans, if you think about it? What a fitting image of humanity. People in this world just not really knowing where they're going. Not really knowing why they're here. Not really knowing what's best for them.

You know, I remember once, years ago, went on a hike up in the mountains by Oak Harp's area, and night had fallen, and we were sitting up at the top, just looking over the lights, you know, of southern suburbs all the way to Table Mountain, and just all those lights. And I remember just sitting there, and I was being all philosophical, and I was watching the cars just driving backwards and forwards, and there's always cars. No matter what time you go and you look at the lights, there's always cars, just driving here and there and everywhere. And I remember thinking to myself, where are they going? You know, where are they all going? Now, I know, obviously they have places to go, but, and people don't just drive without a destination, but, but it struck me that everybody driving there, and everybody in, all of the people in those lights are all trying to go places to find an extra little bit of happiness, their next little boost. Whether that's going out to watch a movie, or whether it's going on a date, or whether it's going, you know, out for dinner, or wherever they're going, they're going to try to find happiness. And I realized, looking at that, that that's all of us.

[9 : 58] That we're all rushing around every day, driven to find little bits of, our next little bit of happiness. Even if it's being driven to work, why are we going to work? We're going to work to get money so we can buy stuff. So we can maybe get a little bit of happiness. We're all rushing around every day, searching for greener pastures, aren't we? If you think about it, that's what we're all doing. We're all searching for, for our little patch of, of green pastures. And the thing is, we're all looking for that in different places, just like those cars that I was watching from that, that mountainside. Everybody's rushing in different directions, trying to find happiness in different things, in different places. People are pursuing all kinds of things to try to be happy.

And today, more than ever, when there's just so much different stuff available, and online, there's just so many different things. People are pursuing so many different things. Everybody's heading in their own directions to pursue happiness, but never really finding it. Everybody's looking for greener pastures. But nobody really finds them. And the reason is because we need a shepherd.

We're exactly like those sheep in the field. We don't know really where to go. We don't know what's best for us. And that's why we need a shepherd. Someone who can show the sheep exactly where to go, and where the real green pastures are. That's what you need. That's what I need. Someone who can show me where the real green pastures are, where real life is to be found. What I'm doing here, what the purpose is, what my life is about, what I should be putting my energies into. I cannot work that out by myself.

Neither can you. We need a shepherd to show us that. We need a shepherd to guide us the way, all of us, the Bible says. We're all like sheep who have gone astray, each to his own way. And we need a shepherd.

Well, you know, that's exactly who Jesus came to be for us, for you, for me. That is who he came to be. Remember, if you were here back in Matthew chapter 2, in the birth narrative of Jesus, there were a lot of prophecies, you'll remember, that spoke towards, we'll remember them this Christmas again, of course. Probably in our Advent readings, we come across a lot of these prophecies.

[12:38] But one of them in Matthew chapter 2 was this. It was from the prophet Hosea. No, Micah, sorry.

Prophet Micah, this one. And it's talking about where he's going to be born, Bethlehem. And that was actually prophesied. It says, and you, Bethlehem, are by no means the least among the rulers of Judah, because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

That's what the prophets foresaw. Someone who would be a shepherd for humans. Who would shepherd my people Israel. But it turns out he didn't just come to shepherd Israel. He came to shepherd all humanity back to their creator, out of brokenness, out of pointlessness, and out of inevitable death, back to life. That is why Jesus came.

To shepherd the wandering sheep back to life, back to the true green pastures we were always meant to be in. And we see this working out in his ministry when he's here. We see him doing that for people.

So, you know, showing people life again in his healings, in his miracles. Look back at verse 35, just in our passage this morning. Chapter 9, verse 35.

[14:01] Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness.

You see, he couldn't make it more obvious to people what he's doing. It's as if he's saying, I've come to bring you back to life. I've come to heal your brokenness.

I've come to rescue you from the brokenness that you're under. If only you will listen to me and grab on and follow me. I've come to lead you out of this mess.

That's what he's saying. Every time he does a miracle, every time he heals someone, every time he restores people from this brokenness they're under, that's what he's saying. I've come to take you all out of this, out of brokenness, into life again.

I've come to lead you to green pastures. I've come to be your shepherd. If only you will realize that and stop ignoring me and follow me and listen to me.

[15:01] I've come to take you to life, life that you can't find by yourself. And he's saying that to each one of us. If only you will grab on and follow.

Of course, where Jesus goes on is to the cross. We know that. Because he goes to die, that's why he's come.

Why is that? I thought he's come to shepherd us to life. Why does he then go to death? Well, when we read on, we find out.

It's because the only way he can lead people to green pastures and true life is to deal with the sin that is inside us, that separates us from that life.

Because that's the thing that's going to stop us from finding green pastures. That's the thing that's going to prevent us all from having life, is our sin and the inevitable death that it causes.

[15:57] And that's what Jesus went to the cross to deal with. The sin and the death that separates us from true green pastures. And that's exactly why we need him.

Because he's the only person who can do that. He's the only person in all of history, in all of the world, who can put an end to your sin so that you can find real life.

And that's exactly why I need him. And it's exactly why you need him. And it's exactly why without him we are all lost sheep. Do you realize that about yourself?

I've got to ask you. Because you know what? That's one of the hardest things to realize about yourself. To admit about yourself.

We are such proud people. We don't want to admit that we're helpless. It goes against every fiber of our proud beings to admit that we're helpless. But do you realize you're actually a lost sheep?

[16:59] You cannot be saved unless you first realize that. You'll never listen to the shepherd. You'll never embrace Jesus in your life unless you first realize you're a lost sheep.

And you need a shepherd. You are lost. It's a hard lesson to learn. And sometimes you've got to go through some hectic times for God to wake you up to that fact.

But you are a lost sheep. Do you realize that? Or are you still convinced that you can find your green pastures your own way?

That you can find life. That you can find true satisfaction and happiness yourself. In your own power. Because let me tell you, you cannot. You will not. Without Jesus.

Your sin and your death will make sure of that. Your sin and your death will prevent you from ever finding true life. You cannot find the green pastures you seek without Jesus.

[18:02] Jesus has come to save you from sin and death so that you don't have to keep wandering around in your life. You can stop trying to find your own way.

And you can listen to him and you can follow him into real life. True life. Eternal life. If you haven't done that, you must.

There is no time to waste. This is what the Bible is here to reveal to us. That we are lost but there is a way back home. Take it.

Don't ignore it. Don't ignore Jesus in your life. Don't ignore it. Don't ignore it. He has come specifically to save lost sheep. But now as we read on in this passage, you know what we discover? We discover something eye-opening. We discover that Jesus doesn't save the lost sheep by himself. He actually uses the labors and the efforts of those who are already saved in order to save others.

[19:12] And if you're a Christian this morning, if you have followed Jesus, if you are following Jesus, this is where you come in. Because this world is not just a world in need of saving.

It is also a world in need of workers. A world in need of workers. Have a look at verse 37 to 38. Then he said to his disciples, The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few.

Therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest. Okay, so now the metaphor changes from one type of farming to another.

From sheep farming to crop harvesting. And Jesus looks out at this lost crowd and he sees these scattered lost humans as crops that are now ready to be gathered in.

Now he's speaking. His original audience would have understood what he's talking about. And the urgency of what he's saying, because they were all agrarian workers. They all used to agriculture.

[20:23] It was their life. It was their livelihood. And the thing about farming is that it's seasonal. If you're a farmer, you'll know. Farming is seasonal. There's certain seasons you do certain things.

There's low times throughout the year and there's high times throughout the year. There's times of waiting in farming for the new season, for the growth. And there's times of activity.

And harvest time is the time where you've got to work. That's the time you've got to put in the extra hours. That's the time you've actually got to employ day laborers to come and boost your workforce on your farm.

Because harvest time is serious time. It's what everything else has been building towards. And if you don't work now in harvest time, then you risk losing your crop.

And so you've got to work. There's urgency in harvest time. Well, Jesus is saying the same about our world now that he's arrived. Now that Jesus has come and the truth is available, there is work to be done.

[21:27] And it is urgent work. And that is what the church is here for. That is why we exist as a church.

To do that work. To do that urgent work. Not to sit around and to sing songs. Nice as that is. We are here to do work. Because it's harvest time. The church is called and Jesus constructed and made and formed the church for one goal.

And that is to help lost people discover Jesus and follow him. That is why we're here. To help people who are lost to discover Jesus and learn how to follow him to life.

That is why St. Mark exists. And everything we do in this church. Every activity. Every service. Every little thing we do is for that one purpose.

To help in some way. To help lost people to discover Jesus and to follow him. That's why we send youth to Crossword Camp.

[22 : 41] So that they can, if they haven't yet, discover Jesus. And if they have, learn how to follow him and help other people to discover him. It's why we have cake sales. It's why we have services. It's why we do music.

It's why we have these sermon series. It's why we have our carol services. It's why we maintain our buildings. It's why we have tea afterwards. Every single activity we have in this church is towards that one goal.

To help lost people find Christ and learn how to follow him. And so who are the laborers that Jesus is talking about here?

When he says, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers, workers into his harvest. Who are they? Well, I'll tell you who they are. They're not just the pastors in the church.

They're everyone who is involved in some way in what the church is doing. They are the workers. Everyone who's in some way involved, who's putting some effort into something in God's church.

[23 : 40] Because the church is God's body to do God's work in the world. And if you're involved in that church, even in a small way, you're involved in God's work. And it's through your efforts that God will do his work in the world.

That's what it means to be involved in the church. And so that's who the workers are that Jesus is talking about. You know, often people will read this passage and think it's talking about the missionaries. You know, those are the workers that we need to pray that God would send out into the mission fields.

Or it's talking about the pastors. These are the people we've got to pray that go to GWC. And we've got to pray for the students. Of course, that's central. It's essential. There's people who can teach the word. But that's not all Jesus is talking about here.

When he's talking about the workers, that original word that he uses here for workers literally means those who toil. Those who toil. Those who toil. In other words, all who expend time and effort and energy in the various different work of the church.

The various work that the church does. Whether that's big or small. Whether it's up front or behind the scenes. All who toil. All who put effort into what we are doing here.

[24 : 47] Are the workers Jesus is talking about. You know, whether that's teaching in children's church. Whether it's being involved in running our services. Whether it's playing music.

Whether it's being in the choir. Whether it's the hospitality ministry. Serving tea after the church. Whether it's lifting people to church. Whether it's maintaining the building.

Whether it's administration. Those are all different ways that we toil towards God's work. And all contribute to the church running properly so that we can do what we're here to do.

Which is help people to discover who Jesus is and to follow him. All of it is work in God's harvest. Because it is all working towards that one outcome.

For people who are lost sheep. To find their shepherd. That's why we're here. But the sobering lesson we learn in this passage. That if you take nothing else home today.

[25 : 49] I want you to take this home. Is that it's only through our willingness to toil in those jobs that God has given us. That Jesus can save people. Let me say that again. It is only through our willingness to toil.

That Jesus can save people. He needs workers. In order to save people. Literally that's what he's saying here. Literally that's why he's telling his disciples prayer.

That the Lord will raise up workers. Because without workers. I cannot save. People won't be saved. The lost will not be saved.

Without people willing to toil. In God's harvest. Have you considered your toil for God in that life? That it's necessary for people's salvation?

Have you considered what you do in church? As necessary for the salvation of other people? As important as a paramedic or emergency services?

[26 : 56] Emergency services? Actually more important than those things? Of course their job is necessary for people's life. For their physical life. Our jobs are necessary for their eternal life. And you know those paramedics?

Those firemen? Have you met people who are on the job doing those things? They're not slacking off. They're focused. When they're on the clock. Doing their job. Paramedics. Because they know that their effort saves lives.

And so they don't do half jobs. Because they know their work's important for other people's lives. Even if it's a small part.

Even if it's like the dispatcher. Who sits at the phones. You know dispatching paramedics and policemen and firemen. Where they need to be. That dispatcher. Even though it's kind of a back room job.

They know that their work is involved in something important. And they take it seriously. It's a matter of life and death. That they answer phones properly. That they send people to the right places.

[27 : 57] Because it is. And so they take it seriously. They're part of something that matters. And that's what drives them. Well Christians knowing that about our work. Whatever it is. Should drive us in the same way.

Shouldn't it? No half measures. That we focus on it. It should motivate us. But let's be honest. It doesn't.

Especially this time of year. We just feel drained. Oh. Do I have to? You know.

We just want to rest. I know how you feel. I'm feeling the same way. It's December. We just feel tired. There's been so much ministry. Now there's more stuff to do in December. I'm just. I'm just tired.

That's why we need this reminder. Because brothers and sisters. This is key harvest time. This is key harvest time. And if we don't make the effort now.

[28 : 59] People will not be saved. Seriously. If we don't make the efforts this month. As a church. And if we don't put our all into it. Whether or not we feel like it.

Whether or not we're tired. If we don't put our toil into it. There are people in Plumstead who won't be saved. Who otherwise would have been. Jesus uses our toil to save people.

And yet none of us really feel up to it. None of us really feel up to the toil.

That it takes. To be involved in God's harvest. Even at the best of times. I know it. Even at the best of times. Oh I'm on the roster three times this month.

Man. I just need a break. And this is like. This could be in February. Let alone December. And I know. I know how it feels. And the. You know. The devil wants to make sure that we feel that about our.

[30 : 00] Our work for God. That it's. Oh. It's just the labor. I've got so much other work to do. And I just want to relax. And I just. Now I've got to do more stuff. The church.

And we. Even though. Even though. I can tell you how important it is. I can stand here and preach. Just how vital it is. All the little bits of the stuff we do.

And then it's for people's salvation. We will feel. We will still feel that way. Won't we? We can't avoid that. And that's why we need to realize one more truth. In this passage.

And it's a vital one. Before we end. And that is this. Your willingness to toil. Will not come from you. You can't drum it up.

Inside yourself. Notice Jesus says again. In verse 38. Therefore. Pray to the Lord of the harvest. To send workers. Into his harvest.

[30 : 59] That's how it happens. It's God who sends. It's God who moves people. To do his work. With focus. And enthusiasm.

Jesus says. Pray to the Lord of the harvest. To send out. Workers. That's a very interesting word. In the original language. Send out.

Literally. It's. To cast out. It's the same word. Used of Jesus. Casting out demons. From people.

That's what we've got to pray.

That God will cast out. Throw out. Against their will. Workers into his field. That's. It's a strong. Word. To send people. Against their will.

Even when they don't feel like it. Just to put a fire. Under them. That moves them. To go. And to toil. And to put that. That extra in. That they think they don't have. Only God can do that.

[31 : 57] We can't motivate ourselves. To toil for him. I can't motivate you. To toil for him. Only he can.

And so Jesus says. Pray. That he does. Are you wanting God to work in this world? Are you wanting God to move? Are you wanting to see souls saved?

Are you wanting God to fix this world? Well. Well. He won't do that. Apart from people. Who are willing to toil. In his field. So.

Pray. That he puts a fire. Under people. To do his work. But pray. That you are one of them too. Because. Let me tell you. When all is said and done.

I know you're feeling tired now. But when all is said and done. And you look back on this life. You will realize. That there is no better. And there was never. Any better work. To expend your toil.

[32 : 58] And your energy. And your sweat. And your tears on. Than the work that God has given you to do. Because that is work that counts. For eternity. And you can't do other work like that. In this world. Other than the work God gives you to do.

There's no better work to do. And you won't always feel that. I know you won't always feel that. But there is no better work to do. And. God has work for you.

You might not think it. But as a Christian. If you follow Jesus. He's got work for you to do. He's got toil for you to do. No matter who you are. And you might not feel like doing it.

And I guarantee you. You won't always feel like doing it. And that's why you need to ask God. To put a fire under you.

To toil. In the work that he. Has. Given you to do. As if. Lives dependent on us. Because they actually do.

[34 : 02] Let's pray. That we will be those people. Lord. Lord. Lord. We're honored and.

Overwhelmed at the same time. That you have given us work to do. That. That you will use to save people's lives. We feel.

Ill equipped. Lord. As a church. And yet. You also have given us. Everything we need. In prayer. In the Holy Spirit.

In powers beyond. The power that we have. To do the work you've given us to do. And Lord. I do pray. For us. I pray for us. As a church. That this month.

You will help us. Even when we're feeling tired. To. To toil for you. Lord.

[35 : 04] Would you put a fire under us. Would you put a fire under us. That causes us to. To put aside. Reservations. And to put aside.

Hesitations. And the things that. Would cause us to. Otherwise be lazy. And focus on. Chasing things in this life. And help us Lord. To turn. And focus on the work.

That you've given us to do. And to toil joyfully. In that. Knowing Lord. That you are going to save people through it. And would you do that. This month.

Would you save people. And even now. Even today Lord. As there are people. Here. With us. Who are not yet saved. Who are not yet following the shepherd. Help them Lord.

To. To give up their final defenses. Of trying to live life their own way. To realize. That without Jesus. They are lost. And there is no life.

[35 : 59] No true life. Apart from him. And. And cause them to listen to. To his voice Lord. And to follow him. As their true ship. We pray this in Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Let alone theirs. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.