

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 3 March 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Lord of Harvest

Matthew 9:35-38

In the year 1916, a young man named Charles Fuller heard the Gospel through the preaching of Paul Rader, the pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago; and his life was never the same again. He had been brought up in a well-to-do home; had a college education in chemistry; and was a board member and manager at his father's citrus-packing business in southern California: yet, he knew that God had an infinitely more important plan for his life. Though still a young believer, he was soon teaching an adult Sunday School class in his church; yet, deep in his heart, he sensed a deep conviction that God wanted him to resign his lucrative job, and train for the ministry.¹

As time went on, he became increasingly "restless," as he tried to resist what he knew God wanted him to do. By 1918, the conviction was so overwhelming, that while he was at work one day, he got up from his desk, left his office, went down into the orange-packing house, slipped into a storage room for orange boxes, and knelt down to pray. As he prayed, all kinds of doubts went through his mind—doubts as to how he could ever be fluent or eloquent enough to be a preacher, or how he would sustain himself and his family on a pastor's salary. He had, only a short while earlier, made a down payment on a 21-acre orange grove. How could he disentangle himself from an already well-established career, and go out on faith? His heart was very weighted down; but finally, he prayed, "Oh, Lord, I will walk in your path. I will even try to preach. I will resign my position and trust you to supply our needs as I prepare for ministry."² When he got up from his knees, the burden was gone, and his heart was filled with joy.

Soon afterward, he let the board know that he was resigning; and the other board members were shocked at his decision. One of them said, "Charlie, you're too good a man for the ministry. You should stay here. Why, a minister only has to work one day a week—Sunday when he preaches. Furthermore, I don't think you're qualified for the ministry. You might well starve."³

Well, Charles didn't starve; and in time, God equipped him for the work He had for him to do. By the year 1925, he had, by conviction, left the Presbyterian church, and become a Baptist; and he pastored a church in California for many years. He also hosted a radio program with music and preaching, which eventually reached millions of people worldwide, and resulted in the salvation of many people.

Brethren, there is nothing more important than knowing and loving the Lord; walking by faith in Him; obeying His word; and serving Him in His harvest fields. Jesus is the King of Kings; and we who have been born again are His ambassadors in this world, and labourers in His harvest. This morning, we will talk about this commission that Jesus has given to us. The title of this message is ***The Lord of Harvest.***

Read Matthew 9:35-38.

I. The King's calling (v. 35)

At this point in Jesus' ministry, He began to launch out from Capernaum, and to visit the synagogues throughout Galilee. He didn't go merely to the big cities: He went to the small villages, as well. He made sure that everyone had the opportunity to hear His words, whether

they chose to *heed* the message, or not. (This is why, as a church, we go door-knocking not only in Athlone, but in towns and country cottages all around the region. We want *everyone* to have the chance to hear Jesus' words at least once.) As Jesus went through the towns, He healed diseases, in order to prove that He is the Messiah; and as He healed, He preached.

Now, *what* did Jesus preach as He toured Galilee? Matthew says that He preached "***the gospel of the kingdom.***" This was Jesus' calling—to preach the Gospel. This is what Isaiah prophesied of in **Isaiah 61**: "***The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek.***" Those words "***good tidings***" mean "good news," or "Gospel." This is exactly the word that Jesus used when He quoted this Scripture in the synagogue of Nazareth. He said, "***The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.***"

Jesus had a calling: to preach the Gospel. Here in **Matthew**, Matthew particularly calls it "***the gospel of the kingdom.***" And what *is* the "***gospel of the kingdom***"? To answer that question, we need to focus on two words—the word "***gospel,***" and the word "***kingdom.***"

First, let's talk about the "kingdom." What "kingdom" was Jesus talking about? When Jesus spoke of "the Kingdom," was He always talking about the exact same thing? No. You see, Jesus spoke of *two* kingdoms—a **physical, visible Kingdom**, and a **spiritual, invisible Kingdom**. Sometimes He focused on the physical Kingdom; other times, He focused on the spiritual Kingdom; and at other times, the two Kingdoms seemed to overlap. For this reason, His audience was often confused. They had only *one* understanding of "the Kingdom": and that was the *physical, visible* Kingdom of Messiah, which they had heard about all their lives, from the rabbis. Was Jesus using "double-talk"? Did He speak of a physical Kingdom in some settings, when it was "safe" to speak of such things, and speak of a "spiritual" kingdom in other settings, when it *wasn't* safe to speak of it? No, He did not! Jesus never conveniently minced words, nor spoke ambiguously. (If He had done so, He would have been a deceiver, and not the sinless Son of God!) There really *are* two distinct Kingdoms!

Now, make no mistake about it: the rabbis were *right* when they said that a visible, physical Kingdom was coming to earth one day. Jesus spoke about this Kingdom often: and He gave it a particular name—"***the kingdom of heaven.***" It is the "Kingdom of Heaven" that Matthew emphasized as he wrote to his Jewish audience. In fact, Matthew specifically mentioned "the Kingdom of Heaven" **thirty-two times** throughout his Gospel! The other Gospel writers didn't use the specific term "Kingdom of Heaven" in their Gospels; but they spoke of it, as well. They simply called it "the Kingdom."

Read Luke 22:28-30.

In this passage, Jesus promised His disciples that He would “**appoint**” unto them “**a kingdom**”; and He said that in that Kingdom, the disciples will sit upon twelve thrones, “**judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**” Obviously, when Jesus mentioned this “**kingdom,**” He was not talking about the heavenly city of New Jerusalem, because in Heaven there will be no need for “judges” to preside over people. Why? Because in Heaven there will be no sin, and thus no conflicts to resolve, or wrongdoings to punish! Jesus is clearly talking about a future Kingdom *on this earth*, where there will still be the presence of sin, and where judges will still be needed! Jesus often referred to this earthly Kingdom as “the Kingdom of Heaven”: and although it may sound like a contradiction to call it the “Kingdom of *Heaven*” (since this Kingdom will be located on *earth*), it is no contradiction at all. The reason Jesus called it “the Kingdom of *Heaven*” is that it is a Kingdom which will *come down from Heaven*. The Kingdom will be *of heavenly origin*. When King Jesus returns to earth, His Kingdom will come with Him. His very presence will usher in the glorious 1,000-year Kingdom!

In **Matthew 24**, the Lord said that when He returns to earth one day, “***all the tribes of the earth shall mourn***” when they “***see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven.***” Did you catch that? Jesus says that all the tribes on *earth* will mourn when they look up and see Him coming down from “***heaven.***” In **Matthew 5:3** Jesus said, “***Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven***”; then, in almost the same breath, He said, “***Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.***” Again, Jesus is saying that “the Kingdom of Heaven” will be located *on earth*. In **Matthew 25**, Jesus says that when He returns to earth one day, all nations will be gathered before Him to be judged; and to those who repented and believed on Him during the Great Tribulation, He will say, “***Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.***” These believers will be standing *on earth* as Jesus speaks these words to them; yet, Jesus will welcome them into *His Kingdom*. Does this mean that they will suddenly be beamed up to Heaven? No! They will *remain* on earth, because earth is where the Kingdom of Heaven will be established!

And so, we see that there will be a *physical, visible* Kingdom on earth, which will be called “the Kingdom of Heaven.” Jesus offered this Kingdom to the people of Israel; and it could have come within their lifetimes, *if* they had repented and believed on Him. Even after they committed the crime of crucifying Him, the Kingdom of Heaven *still* could have come within their lifetimes if they had, as a nation, repented and believed on Him. Sadly, though, this did not happen. The “Kingdom of Heaven” has not come yet, because Israel still has not believed on their own Messiah; but it *will* come one day!

Now, there was another kind of Kingdom of which Jesus often spoke. This Kingdom is not physical and visible, but *spiritual* and *invisible*. It is called “the Kingdom of God.”

Read Luke 17:20-21.

On this occasion, Jesus said that the “Kingdom of God” cannot be seen or observed with human eyes; and its citizens are “within” (or “among”) the general population. In other words, it is a *spiritual Kingdom*, not a physical one. Does this contradict what Jesus said in **Matthew 24 and 25**, when He spoke about a *visible, physical Kingdom* on earth? No! He’s simply talking about another *kind of Kingdom*—a Kingdom that **“is not of this world.”** Jesus said that the means of entry into the Kingdom of God is the New Birth. In **John 3**, Jesus told Nicodemus, **“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** Throughout the New Testament, we are told that the New Birth is a spiritual birth into the Kingdom of God, which is received by placing your faith in Jesus; and it results in the *Holy Spirit’s* coming to live inside you *permanently*.

The Kingdom of God did not come during Jesus’ earthly ministry; but after Jesus’ resurrection, the Holy Spirit came to *live inside* believers. *That* is when the Kingdom of God began; and since then, the Kingdom of God has been opened up not only to Jewish believers, but to Gentile believers, as well. *Anyone* who repents of his sin and believes on Jesus immediately enters into the Kingdom of God. It’s all part of the promise of the New Covenant, which was foretold by the prophets. In **Ezekiel 36** Ezekiel wrote, **“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”** In **Ephesians 1**, Paul reminded the Ephesian Christians that **“after...ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.”** The Kingdom of God is a spiritual Kingdom, in which all who believe on Jesus are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God; and He never leaves them nor forsakes them.

The spiritual Kingdom of God has already come; and the physical Kingdom of Heaven is yet to come, when Jesus returns to earth. These two Kingdoms are distinct. Yet, there were times when Jesus spoke of these two Kingdoms almost interchangeably. Let’s look at an example.

Read Luke 13:23-30.

There is no question that on this occasion, Jesus was describing the future 1,000-year Kingdom here on earth. We know this to be so, because Jesus speaks of *literal* geographical regions of this world. He says that people will come from the “east, west, north, and south,” and sit down in this Kingdom. *Yet*, He refers to this Kingdom as the “Kingdom of God”—the very same term that He used in **Luke 17**, when He said that **“the kingdom of God”** cannot be seen or observed with human eyes. So, which is it—the spiritual Kingdom, or the physical Kingdom? Why does Jesus call it the “Kingdom of God,” when the Kingdom of God is supposed to be invisible? The answer to that question is simple, yet profound: when Jesus returns to earth one day, **the spiritual Kingdom of God and the physical Kingdom of Heaven will overlap!** Literally *every soul* that enters into the visible Kingdom of Heaven will also be a member of the *invisible, spiritual Kingdom* of God! In other words, *everyone who enters the Kingdom will be saved!*

The Kingdom has two different “aspects”—a physical aspect, and a spiritual aspect. They are like two facets on one diamond. And what is the “diamond”? The “diamond” is the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the message that Christ *“died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”*

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

As Jesus went through the villages preaching *“the gospel of the kingdom,”* He was preaching the very same Gospel that Paul talks about in **1 Corinthians 15**. Of course, Jesus had not yet died on the cross and risen again; but He openly proclaimed, time and time again, that He was soon going to die on a cross as the ransom for our sins, and rise again the third day. The “Gospel of the Kingdom” was *not* some other kind of “gospel.” For the believer, there *is* no other Gospel than the Gospel of salvation! (In fact, in **Galatians 1:6-9**, Paul said that *“If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”*) The “Gospel of the Kingdom” **is** the Gospel of *salvation*. It is called “The Gospel of the Kingdom” because it is by believing the Gospel that a person is *birthed* into the Kingdom of God, and is also promised entry into the future Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus’ disciples may not have yet understood *all* the facets of the Gospel of the Kingdom (such as the difference between the two Kingdoms, or why Jesus would have to die on the cross); but for the time being, what they *did* understand is that Jesus was the One who had come to save them from their sins—and that they needed to believe on *Him* if they would enter into the Kingdom.

Have *you* believed the Gospel? Have *you* placed your trust in the one who died for your sins, and rose again? There is no “in between”! Either you are *in* the Kingdom of God, or you’re *outside* of it. If you have not been born again into God’s Kingdom, I urge you to do so today!

II. The King’s compassion (v. 36)

(Read verse 36 again.) Brethren, this is a verse that should touch our hearts, and change the way we view the world around us. Matthew says that as Jesus saw the multitudes of people coming toward Him, He was *“moved with compassion on them.”* Interestingly enough, nearly every time the Greek word for *“moved with compassion”* (*splagchnilomai*) is used in the four Gospels, it is referring to the Lord Jesus Christ! The only two places in the Gospels where this word does *not* refer directly to Jesus are in the parable of the lord who forgave his servant of the unpayable debt, and in the parable of the father and the prodigal son: and even then, the “lord” in the parable of the unpayable debt *represents* the Lord Jesus Christ! (And in the parable of the prodigal son, the father represents no human father, but *God the Father*.)

Folks, no one else can have compassion on people as Jesus can, because He is the God-Man! There is no greater Friend than He, and no greater love than His. Jesus wasn't moved with compassion simply because of people's *physical* infirmities, either: He was moved with compassion because of their *spiritual* condition. As Jesus looked out over the crowd, He saw souls that were slipping downward into hell, because they did not realise the seriousness of their sin; the imminent danger that their souls were in; nor their great need of the Saviour. They were like lost and wandering sheep, desperately in need of a shepherd.

Of all the animals that man breeds, sheep are the most defenseless, and the most prone to wander away into danger. That is precisely why God describes *us* as "sheep"! **Isaiah 53:6** says, "***All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.***" We are all like poor, lost, stupid sheep, constantly wandering from God, and getting ourselves caught in the thickets of sin. (All the while, our enemy, Satan, like a ravening wolf, is crouching toward us, licking his chops, and preparing for "the kill"!) Who, then, will save us from ourselves? What shepherd can rescue us? There are many people who are *called* "shepherds," because they profess the Lord's name, and are supposed to be His representatives; but the vast, overwhelming majority of them are false shepherds, who care not for the sheep, but only for themselves. Most of the religious leaders of Israel in Jesus' day were just like that: they were false shepherds, who fleeced the sheep, and ruled over them with cruelty. In fact, they actually *caused* the people to go astray from God by teaching them a false "gospel" of salvation through good works and rituals. In **Jeremiah 50:6**, the LORD said, "***My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains.***" That is why Jesus came—to do the work that no man (not even the best and most sincere under-shepherds) could ever do. In lovingkindness, Jesus came to gather the lost sheep of Israel that had gone astray! He also came to gather the "***other sheep***" (the Gentiles), who were not of the fold of Israel. He came to gather *all* these sheep, and to *die* for them! Jesus said, "***As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.***"

Read Ezekiel 34:6-16.

Jesus was filled with compassion for the lost sheep all around Him. Christian, how much compassion do *you* have for the lost around you? Have you ever gone to the street corner and just *watched* people for a while, to see the look in people's eyes? I have; and every time I do this, I wonder, "Where are all these people around me going when they die? How close are some of these people to eternity? What pain, hurt, and guilt in these people's pasts is keeping them from coming to Jesus?" I have a missionary pastor friend here in Ireland who, every time he hosts a group from a church in America, takes them into the city, and asks them simply to stand on a corner for an hour or so, and *watch* the people going by. He then takes them into a cathedral, so that they might observe the people who are going there to try to make peace with God by performing empty rituals. Before they hand out any tracts, or do any evangelism, he wants his brothers in Christ to see the sadness, fear, anger, aimlessness, bewilderment, guilt, shame, and hopelessness in people's faces, so that their eye might affect their heart.

Folks, we *must* get a burden for the lost around us! We *must* ask Jesus to give us a heart like His. It is said that there was a time, back in the 1800's, when some of William Booth's Gospel workers were becoming frustrated on account of people's lack of response to the Gospel; and so, they sent a telegram to Booth, in which they said, "We've tried everything. We've tried preaching on street corners, beating drums, passing our tracts, and nothing works." In reply, William Booth sent them a telegram, in which he said two simple words: "Try Tears."⁴ *This* is what we need, brethren—*tears*. We don't need momentary feelings, which have been stirred up by a powerful sermon, or by an emotional invitation song: we need a genuine inner burden, which is generated by faith in the Word of God. We need a real burden which has been placed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, because we are yielding our heart, mind, and will to Him. The Apostle Paul said that he had a "**great heaviness and continual sorrow**" in his heart for the people of Israel. Are we willing to have some heaviness of heart for the lost around us? Are we willing to have "**compassion, making a difference**"?

III. The King's command (vv. 37-38)

(Read Matthew 9:37-38.) As Jesus was looking upon the multitudes with compassion, He turned to His disciples, and made a sobering statement. He said that "**the harvest**" (meaning the harvest of souls out there) was plenteous; but the labourers were few. The implication of this statement is staggering: if labourers were *not* forthcoming, then the harvest of souls would be lost. Let me put it bluntly: unless many more disciples were willing to answer the call to take the Gospel to these precious souls, then most of them would slip into the flames of hell!

In light of this truth, Jesus had a command for His disciples. He commanded them to "***Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.***" Who is the "Lord of harvest" to whom they were to pray? Himself! *Jesus* is the Lord of harvest; and even as He spoke, He was already preparing to send His labourers into the harvest. In **chapter 10** (which we begin to study next week), we are told that shortly afterward, Jesus commissioned His disciples to go throughout the cities, and to preach the Gospel.

Now, this raises a question: Why did Jesus *need* His disciples to pray for labourers, when He fully intended to send *them* out as labourers very shortly, anyway? There are two answers to this question. First of all, God chooses to use *us* to accomplish His will: and part of the way He accomplishes His will is by using us to *pray* for His will to be accomplished! Couldn't God simply do it *without* our prayers? He could. In fact, He could do it *entirely* without us! He could send the *angels* to preach the Gospel, and they would do a much better job! However, He chooses to use *us*—sinful and unreliable though we are—to accomplish His will. He uses us as vessels to *pray* for His will; and then He uses us to *accomplish* His will.

This leads us to the second reason why Jesus wanted His disciples to pray for labourers: He wanted to prepare them to *answer* the call! You see, when you begin to pray for labourers—

and you *sincerely* mean what you are praying for—then you will, *yourself*, be willing to be called as a labourer! How can you honestly pray for labourers when you, yourself, are not willing to go? When you truly pray for labourers, God gives you a *burden* for the lost! Perhaps that is why so many Christians stay home from prayer meetings. There are, of course, *many* reasons why Christians don't attend prayer meetings: and probably the biggest reason is that they simply don't believe that there is power in prayer. Their *own* prayer life is dry and lifeless, on account of their lack of faith; so why would they believe that there is power in *corporate* prayer? However, probably the other big reason why Christians don't want to pray with others is that they are *fearful*—fearful that if they band together with other believers to pray for the lost, God might commission them to do something they don't want to do!

Brethren, Jesus Himself set the example. In **Luke 6**, Luke recorded Jesus' commissioning of the disciples to preach (just as Matthew recorded it in **Matthew 10**); however, Luke included an additional fact. Luke says that on the night before Christ commissioned the disciples to preach, "***He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.***"

Read Luke 6:12-16.

Christian, when was the last time you spent the better part of a night praying for people? How much do souls really mean to us? If Jesus, the Son of God, needed to pray to His Father for wisdom and power upon His disciples, whom He was about to commission, how much more do *we* need to pray for our own selves; for each other; and for the lost? Are we willing to humble ourselves before God, prostrate ourselves on the ground, and pray? Are we, ourselves, willing to be commissioned? Are we really willing to go wherever He calls us to go, and to do whatever he calls us to do?

Before we close this morning, I would like to examine the testimony of a man whom God commissioned to go to the house of Israel seven hundred years before Christ's birth.

Read Isaiah 6:1-8.

As Isaiah stood before the LORD, the LORD asked, "***Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?***" Now, *that's* a pointed question, isn't it? Isaiah knew that this question was directed at *him*! To whom *else* would the LORD be speaking? God was *not* speaking to any of the millions of angels that were gathered around His throne. If God had wanted to commission an *angel* to take His message to the people of Judah, He wouldn't have needed to bring Isaiah up to Heaven to witness the commissioning ceremony. No, the LORD was speaking to Isaiah! Why *else* would God have gone to the trouble of bringing Isaiah up to Heaven in a vision, and of blowing His mind with the sight of His glory? Why *else* would God have caused Isaiah to cry out in despair, as he realised how sinful he was, and how infinitely holy God is? Why *else* would God have gone to the trouble of cleansing Isaiah of his besetting sins, and of sending an angel to touch his lips with a coal from the altar, as a symbol of his cleansing? Why *else* would God have done all this, if He didn't have a commission for Isaiah? *Of course* God was

directing this question at Isaiah! Undoubtedly, God was looking directly at Isaiah, with His eyes of flaming fire, as He asked the question, “*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*”! Isaiah knew that there was only one appropriate response to this question. With deep humility, Isaiah answered, “*Hineniy: shelacheniy*” (“*Here am I: send me*”).

Conclusion: *Every* believer has been called to proclaim the Gospel! It is not just the pastors and missionaries, or the “talented ones,” whom God has called: He calls *every* believer to go out of the “house,” and into the harvest fields. Endeavouring to win souls for Him is all part of “the call” of service for *every* Christian. Jesus said, “*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*” Yet, many Christians refuse to answer that call. Many young men are refusing to answer the call to be pastors and missionaries, because they are too interested in acquiring things of this world; many young women are refusing to consider being a pastor’s wife or missionary’s wife, because they have their own plans and dreams that they want to accomplish; and many Christians in general are refusing to be involved in praying, giving, and going into the harvest, because they don’t want their heart to be burdened with the things that burden God’s heart. God forgive us for our negligence and disobedience! Our Master has *commanded* us to pray that He would send labourers into His harvest. Will we obey? Will we, like Isaiah, and like old Charles Fuller, say, “Here am I, Lord, send me”? Perhaps you are not saved. Perhaps you have never entered the Kingdom of God. If not, don’t wait any longer! Jesus wants to receive you today! Repent of your sin and trust in Him, and He will come into your heart, and never leave you!

¹ “Chales E. Fuller (Baptist Minister),” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_E._Fuller_\(Baptist_minister\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_E._Fuller_(Baptist_minister)).

² Robert J. Morgan, *Preacher’s Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations* (Nashville, TN: -72.Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), pp. 87-88.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ “Sowing in Tears...Reaping in Joy,” Dr. Ernest Easley, <https://www.preaching.com/sermons/sowing-in-tears-reaping-in-joy/>.