

Sent

Matthew 9:35 – 10:8

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago some people from our church took a mission trip to Belize, a small country on the northeast coast of Central America. While we were there, we led a Vacation Bible School and did a lot of maintenance work on a medical clinic.

There are many special memories from that trip. One that has always stood out to me had to do with the sugar cane fields that were everywhere.

- Did you know that before they harvest a sugar cane field, they will set it on fire?
- The fire does not damage the sugar cane, but it does burn away the weeds.
- Most importantly, burning drives the snakes out of the field, making it safer for those who will harvest the crop.

I am not a farm kid by any means, and I know very little about harvesting crops, but that is one of the most fascinating harvest techniques I have ever heard of.

That memory popped up when I read the key verses for today's sermon because in this text Jesus talks about harvesting. Those verses start like this:

Then (Jesus) said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful

And then He continues with His own unique strategy for that harvest ...

but the workers are few. Ask (Pray) the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 9:37-38)

I want to call your attention to the word "send" in that 38th verse. During these summer months we are highlighting 10 words that describe the church Jesus established in His ministry on earth.

You might remember that day when Peter made a bold proclamation that Jesus was the promised Messiah and Jesus responded with these very special words:

... on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. (Matthew 16:18)

Church was a new concept to the people of that day. So it is natural they would want to know what He meant by that word. And so do we! What does that church look like? What's it all about? 10 words. One each week. Drawn from the assigned text.

- Last week our word was "CALLED."
- This week it is:

SENT

The text says:

Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers ... (Matthew 10:38)

That's us. The SENT ones. A people who are CALLED and SENT into the harvest field. Jesus reveals a three step harvesting process here.

STEP #1: LOOK AT THE HARVEST FIELD

Let me call your attention to verse 36 again:

When he saw the crowds, (Jesus) had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)

Sometimes the smallest words point to the biggest truths. Jesus SAW the crowds. Only three letters, but those letters reveal a very important first step.

- The first step in the sending process is to see the needs of the people around you.

One of the longtime ministry partners for this congregation is called SCYM. That acronym stands for "Springfield City Youth Mission. If you connect to their website, you will read:

In 1998 a group of community leaders came together out of concern for kids on the west side of Springfield, Ohio, and formed Springfield City Youth Mission (SCYM). Now we serve elementary and middle school students city-wide each year, with the help of volunteers dedicated to "helping kids crush the odds with the love of God." (www.crushtheodds.org)

What was the first step for SCYM? People saw the kids. They were concerned for the kids. And SCYM was born.

Go to the webpage of Naomi's Heart Mission, and you will read:

In 2003, we took our very first short-term mission trip. It was such a life changing experience, we came home asking "Would it, could it be possible, to be missionaries in the Philippines?" It became such a burning desire... God led us to sell our house and possessions, quit our jobs and raise support. (www.naomisheartmission.org)

What was the first step? Danny and Kristie saw the mission field firsthand. They were left with a burning desire. And Naomi's Heart Mission became a reality.

In order for a person or a church to be SENT they have to first see the harvest field. They need to see the harassed and helpless. They need to see those sheep in need a shepherd

- And they need to see it so clearly that they are moved with the compassion of Jesus Christ.

Many Christians and many churches, unfortunately, are so inward focused that they only see themselves.

- They become what church growth writers call an “ingrown Church”
- The central question in those churches switches from “how do we minister to them” to “who is going to minister to me.” “What about me?” “You should take care of me.”
- As a result there is a disconnect between the mission of the church and activities of the church. That is, the church stops focusing on the mission field and turns inward.

The mission of Jesus – the mission of the church – requires us to see the harassed and helpless who need to know the Good Shepherd and to be moved with compassion for their souls. That’s step one.

STEP #2: LOOK FOR A SPIRITUAL SOLUTION

I take you to verses 37-38:

Then (Jesus) said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matthew 9:37-38)

Spiritual problems require spiritual solutions. When the people around us are harassed and helpless, in need of the Good Shepherd, that is a spiritual problem.

- And prayer is the greatest spiritual weapon we have. Nothing can stop a church that prays. The gates of hell buckle when a church prays for the harvest.

Throughout history, every time there has been a great movement of God, it began with a group of believers who were deeply committed to prayer. Whether it was the elderly sisters of the Hebrides, the prayer groups in Northampton, or the 100-year prayer chain of the Moravians, the two Great Awakenings in this country or the more recent Asbury revival, prayer was the catalyst that invited God’s Spirit to move.

Prayer was not casual or secondary; it was desperate, persistent, and often around-the-clock. When God’s people take Him at His Word and cry out for His presence, He begins to move.

And that doesn’t mean we simply pray a one-liner in the Sunday morning Prayer of the Church or delegate the responsibility to a small prayer team that meets once-a-month.

- It means that people of faith who have been called by God and who see the harassed and helpless world around them stop looking outside of themselves for solutions and start seriously to pray.

It is not new “news.” Remember these words? Many of you can quote them.

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

STEP #3: LOOK WITHIN

One of the most fascinating truths within today's Gospel text is this one.

Verses 37-38 of chapter 9 read like this:

Then (Jesus) said to his disciples, "Ask (pray) the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 9:37-38)

Who was Jesus talking to? His disciples. Who did He tell to pray for workers? His disciples. Who is supposed to do the praying? His disciples. Got it?

Those are the last words of chapter 9. Turn the page to chapter 10. Here is how the chapter begins:

Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness... These twelve Jesus sent out ... (Matthew 10:1, 5)

Jesus told them to pray. And then He equipped them and sent them out. The very people who did the praying turned out to be the answer to their own prayers.

There was an old deacon in a little country church who often was called on to pray the closing prayer. One of his oft-used phrases was "Oh Lord, touch the unsaved with Your mighty hand."

On this particular night, he was closing the service with prayer, and sure enough, prayed "Oh Lord, touch the unsaved with Your mighty hand." But as soon as he prayed that line, he stopped talking. He said absolutely nothing for multiple minutes.

The longer he was quiet, the more concerned the other members of the congregation became. Thinking that perhaps he had suffered a stroke, a nurse who was present stepped up beside him. He was quivering.

"Are you OK?" she asked.

"No," he replied, "I just heard a voice say to me "You are my hand."

It is safe to pray "send someone ... else." But it is not the way of Jesus or His church. The Jesus way is reflected in the response of Isaiah:

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8)

APPLICATION

We are the church! We are the CALLED and SENT people of God.

And it all begins with what you see.

- Do you see harassed and helpless people? Do you see people who need Jesus?
- I hope so, because as the church we are SENT to them.
- If we don't see them, we won't be moved with compassion and we won't say "yes" when Jesus sends us.

We are the church!

Amen