

Workers For His Harvest

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[0 : 00] Well, for a wee while this morning, I'd like us to turn back to Matthew chapter 9 and let's read again verses 37 and 38.

Matthew 9 verse 37 to 38, then Jesus said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few, therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Our title for this morning is laborers for his harvest. Now, as many of you will know, once a month in our church, we have what we call a Presbytery meeting.

We are a Presbyterian congregation, presbytery just comes from the Greek word presbyter, which is the word that means elder. So it just really means that we are a church that's led by elders.

And once a month, all the ministers who are elders, every minister is an elder. And then one of the, what we call ruling elders of each congregation will come together for the Presbytery meeting.

[1 : 00] And the idea behind that is that each church doesn't exist in isolation. We're part of a family of churches that are connected together across the nation and that nation's divided into areas that we call presbyty.

Presbyty are responsible for things like helping out vacant congregations. So just now Chobos and Kalanish beside us are vacant. So Presbyty has to make sure that they have a minister looking after them and that they're being well cared for.

Every five years, Presbyty will come and visit a congregation to check how things are going and to help with any difficulties to make sure that everything is in order. Presbyty supports youth work.

It seeks to help congregations that are weak and struggling either with personnel or with financial support. Presbyty takes care of ministers in terms of pastoral care for us.

And Presbyty has oversight over people who are training for ministry. Now, you might be saying, why on earth are you telling us all this, Thomas? Well, at a recent Presbyty meeting, we had a presentation from the Free Church's Board of Ministry that was highlighting the fact that we need God to call more men into ministry.

[2 : 09] There's a shortage of ministers across the church and in the free church. And during the discussion that we had after the presentation, Murdoch Campbell, Minister of the Church of St. Louis, suggested that we should set aside a Sunday where we would all pray for workers and where we would all preach about the need for God to send laborers into his harvest.

So we agreed that where possible, all of us would preach about this on November 17th, which is today. So today will be a funny day where some people I know, when they go home in the afternoon, will maybe look at some of the other services that have been preached.

And everybody's going to go and be like, Thomas and Murdoch, and everybody's all preaching on the same thing. And that's why, because we agreed to do that. And I am so glad that Murdoch suggested this, because it's such an important thing for us to think about, such an important thing for us to pray about.

And it's maybe something that we don't talk about enough. So I'm so grateful that Murdoch suggested this. The free church and the wider church across Scotland and across the UK desperately needs more workers for the harvest.

We need more laborers. Now when I use that word, that word is applied in several ways. First and foremost, and I want to emphasize this really, really strongly, the church desperately needs Christians who will serve in their local church alongside their regular job or their other responsibilities that they have in life.

[3 : 47] And I cannot emphasize, I cannot overemphasize how crucial this is. Our churches need members who are teachers and joiners and accountants and carers and weavers and police officers and admin workers and everything else that our society needs to function.

And people who are doing all of these things, who are mums and dads and grannies and shenners, and at the same time, they are plugged right into their local church.

They're sharing their gifts, their time, their skills and energy to serve Jesus. That is really the thing that will make or break a church.

A church is the members who will plug in and serve alongside all the other responsibilities that they have. And we are so blessed in Carlyway that we have so many people who are doing that and those workers are just vital for the work of the gospel.

Alongside that, the church also needs people who are willing to serve in broader ministry roles. The church, you know, widely needs administrative staff, we need youth workers, people who work with students, people who help those who have addiction, family workers, counsellors, fund raisers, all of these are needed across our denomination.

[5 : 16] Now, sometimes that will be part-time work, sometimes it will be full-time work, sometimes it might be voluntary work, but all of it is crucial. And alongside all of that, the church also needs more ministers.

And there's no point really beating around the bush about that. We live in an era where there are not enough people going in for the ministry. It's not enough in the free church, there's not enough in the wider church.

We need God to call more men to be ministers. So we're going to talk about this a little bit today, so it's a little bit different, but it's a great opportunity for us to think about it, and we're going to pray about it in the weeks ahead.

So for this morning, we've got three headings. Number one, we need to see the harvest. Number two, we need workers for the harvest. And number three, we need to pray to the Lord of the harvest.

So first of all, we need to see the harvest. If you look at verses 35 to 39, you'll see that what Jesus says here in 37 and 38, sorry, I put 39 up there, that should be a 38.

[6 : 24] What Jesus says in 38 is prompted by what he sees in verses 35 and 36. His words are prompted by his observations.

He's been travelling around and before him, there's a helpless crowd. And as Jesus looks at them, he sees a harvest.

And he made the same emphasis elsewhere. In fact, it's even clearer in John chapter four, Jesus said to his disciples, do you not see yet there's four months in the harvest comes? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest.

Now, he was not talking about the crops that the farmers were growing. He was talking about the people that the disciples could see around them.

And the key point here is that we need to see what Jesus sees. So as we look at our nation, as we look at our communities, as we look at the empty seats in this building, it's so, so easy for us to feel discouraged.

[7 : 33] So easy to think that the church is dying and we cannot deny the fact that in the last 50 years in Lewis, the church has got smaller.

And it's easy for the lifting up of our eyes to give us reasons for our hearts to sink. But it's so crucial to remember that that is not how Jesus thought.

That is not how Jesus thought. And that's the crucial thing that we have to recognize that if we're going to see things the way Jesus sees them, then we will realize that the people around us in Scotland today are not a wilderness.

They're a harvest. They are the people who desperately need salvation. They're the people that Jesus has come to call into his kingdom. And they're the people who are being left empty by all the broken promises of a sinful world.

The people who live beside you, the people that you work with, the people who never come to this church, they are a harvest.

[8 : 44] And that imagery of harvest is so helpful because it teaches us lots of things. And I want to highlight three key lessons that we must never forget about this imagery of harvest that we're looking at.

Number one, the harvest is precious. My brother lives in a rural Aberdeenshire and his house is surrounded by farmland.

And I love walking through the fields and you see, depending on which time of year you go, you see crops of various sort growing. And one of the things that always strikes me when I look at these massive fields is that you think that farmer has got a lot of money in that field.

Now, I don't mean that from like a lucrative point of view. I'm not saying that they are making a fortune. Although some of the farmers around there are making a fortune. If you go to Tuddiff and the garage where they sell cars, there's a lot of very cool cars in that garage.

So they are doing very well because they've got great farmland. But I don't mean it from that point of view. What I mean is from a risk point of view. That if you look at a farmer's field, if that crop gets ruined, he is going to lose thousands and thousands of pounds.

[9 : 55] I saw that, I was preaching in Dornoch in September and it was really interesting because well, as everybody here knows, the summer in Scotland this year has been terrible. And so all the crops were late in being ready for harvest.

And so it was well into September that they were trying to bring the harvest. And I was driving from Inverness to Dornoch and again and again and again, there was massive combine harvesters sitting in fields stationary with half the crops done, half of them not done because it was too wet and I spoke to one of the farmers and he says, we are praying for dry weather because there's a big risk that we're not going to get it back in.

And the fear and the anxiety is all because a harvest is incredibly precious. And you'll all know that it's not that long ago that in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, a poor potato harvest meant that starvation was a very real danger.

And that preciousness of a harvest is something that we've got to remember as we look at the people around us. And you see that in this passage, that's exactly how Jesus looked at the people around him.

He looked at them and he had compassion on them. And he doesn't have compassion on them because they're brilliant listeners or devoted followers.

[11 : 12] They're actually confused and helpless. And maybe they don't even realize that, but they're lost. And maybe they were even a bit frustrating.

Maybe Jesus, like he was teaching them and they weren't listening. And we know that actually Jesus taught the same things several times, possibly because people were just not listening. And he describes them like a flock, like a sheep without a shepherd.

Those of you who are like me and only ever take the Pentland Road because you're always running late will know that there's lots of sheep on the Moorjah's now. And sometimes they're just sitting there and they're just wandering across the road and they're a bit frustrating.

Jesus doesn't have compassion on this crowd because they're impressive, because they aren't. He has compassion on them because they're precious.

Every person you meet this week, every person in our community, every person you interact with, even the person who frustrates you, even the person who hurts you, every one of them is precious.

[12 : 17] Every one of them is harassed by the effects of sin. Every one of them is ultimately helpless on their own. Every one of them is incredibly precious for Jesus.

That's the harvest that's all around us. And we must never forget that the people who aren't for church, the people who aren't really particularly interested in the Gospel, the people who aren't for the church are the very people that the church is here for.

Second big lesson is that a harvest requires patience. That's another reason why the harvest language is so helpful. A harvest always requires patience. A harvest is never an instant result. And that's so important for us to remember in all that we're doing as a church because it's so easy to be discouraged in our work as a church because we can feel like the things that we're trying are not having the results that we want.

That might be collective things that we do as a church when we do things to try and reach out to the community, whether it's Christianity explored or even the buffet last night or whatever it might be. Sometimes you think, well, we're not seeing lots of new people come and sometimes that can discourage us.

Or maybe even in your own efforts, maybe there's people that you are inviting to church. Maybe there's people that you have prayed for for years and there's people that you long to see come along and it feels like nothing is happening.

[13 : 31] It feels like it's not working. You must never forget that we're working for a harvest and no harvest ever comes without patience.

Jesus made that so clear. He told the parable of a man sowing seed and he emphasizes the fact that he scatter seeds in the ground and then he sleeps and rises day and night.

It takes time for that harvest to come. And that's reminding us that patience is needed. We keep sowing, keep inviting, keep praying, keep reaching out and we do that with courage, with expectation, with patience.

It's reminding you that if you're inviting someone, if you're praying for somebody, if you're trying to reach out to your community, never, ever give up.

Never ever give up. So the harvest is precious. It requires patience. Third thing is the harvest is promised.

[14 : 31] Just as they all begin with P, that wasn't even deliberate, but there we go. This harvest is promised. Going back to verses 35 to 38, this is one of the most important points that the New Testament teaches and it's maybe one of the easiest to forget.

Jesus does not send out workers to come back empty-handed. He's sending us into a field where a harvest is promised.

And you see that in a crucial little word in verse 38, it says this is his harvest. This is God's harvest.

And we must never forget that. This is a harvest that he has promised to bring in and all of our theology confirms this. God is sovereign. He is the one who initiates all of this work.

He is the one who is effectively calling people by his spirit. He's the one who's opening people's eyes. He's the one who softens people's hearts. He's the one who has chosen from all eternity to bring his people into his kingdom.

[15 : 35] There's a harvest out there and it's his. And that means that as we are laboring, we are always doing that as his fellow laborers. We're always doing that as tools in his hands.

We never accomplish anything. God accomplishes stuff through us. And that should give us confidence and energy and excitement.

So often today I hear people say that the church, they talk about the church and they say it's a day of small things. And I totally understand why people are saying that. And often it's people who can think back to days when this church was much fuller and many more people came and they'll say, well, today is a day of small things.

But I wish they wouldn't say that because a day of small things in the church just means it's a day of bigger fields for the harvest.

That harvest is all around us. That harvest is promised to us. It's his harvest and we can go into it with expectation, with eagerness and with a lot of excitement.

[16 : 40] When Jesus first called Peter, Andrew, James and John as his disciples, they had just come in from a night of catching fish. You read that in Luke 5, they'd been fishing all night, they caught nothing.

Jesus was about to call them to become fishers of men. So he's about to call them to basically come and be the ones who are going to go out with the message of the gospel eventually. But before he calls them to be fishers of men, he sends them back out into the sea.

And he tells them to go back out to let their nets down again. And they bring in a huge catch so that their nets are starting to break. Why did Jesus do that?

Why didn't he just say, well, don't worry, you're not going to fish anymore. Forget the terrible nights fishing that you had. Come and follow me. Why did he send them back out to go and catch fish again? He did it to show them that when they go out with the gospel, they are not going to come back empty handed.

There's a huge harvest to come in. And that's exactly what's happened. There are now millions and millions of people who are trusting in Jesus.

[17 : 51] And there have been many times throughout history, even in Scotland, and there are many places in the world today where the church buildings are bursting because they're so full of people.

There's a harvest around us. That harvest is precious. That harvest requires patience. But that harvest is promised to us.

It's his harvest. So we need to see it. We also need workers for the harvest. That's another reason why the language of harvest is so helpful because it emphasizes the need for workers.

We must never forget that a harvest doesn't come in by itself. It comes through work. No farmer sits at home in the living room and says, well, I'm just waiting for the wind to come in October and blow all the crops into my barn by itself.

He knows that he's got to go out and work to bring it in. And that is always how God accomplishes his purposes. He works through the laborers of his people.

[18 : 53] That is how God accomplishes his purpose. That's why Jesus didn't come and say, look, I'll just do everything myself. He came and he gathered disciples. He gathered men and women around him. And he taught them.

He said, go, go, go, and I am going to build my church through you. That is always how Jesus has worked. And so we need workers for the harvest. There's two crucial lessons here.

Number one, a few workers is not adequate. Notice Jesus doesn't say that he doesn't say that there's no workers.

He says that there's just a few. And the key point there is that a few is not enough. We need many. And that comes back to what we said at the start.

Every one of us, every single one of us needs to see ourselves as a worker in God's harvest field. And I want you to think of yourself as you go into this week. I want you to think of the witness that you can be, to your colleagues, to your families, to your friends, that even in the smallest ways, you can make such a difference.

[19 : 56] So that might be as part of your job because you're meeting lots of people. It might be through the family that you care for and love and look after. It might be something that you accomplish in your retirement thinking, how am I going to use my time to work for Jesus and to serve Him?

It can even be through your mobile phone. You can do incredible things for Jesus through your phone, through messaging people, through telling them that you're praying for them, to inviting them, to encouraging them. There's so much that can be done.

And sometimes God will call people into specific roles in the church and more and more we need God to call men to come into ministry because the free church needs God to do that.

We need workers. And so I want to tell you just a little bit more about that. Again, this is going to be just maybe a little bit different for a Sunday morning service, but there's a list of every free church of Scotland.

It's very small writing because I couldn't fit it all in. I'm going to go through it in a little bit more detail at Sulehr tonight. So if you can't see and read it just now, then that's okay.

[20 : 59] There's about 120 congregations all across Scotland, one in London, five, four in North America. Here is the number of vacant congregations currently in the free church.

These are the ones that are vacant and that are able to call a minister. So you'll see Shobas and Kalanisha there, Stornow is there, Park is there, and many more all across the country.

Then these ones are now too small to call a minister. So these congregations, some of them maybe could afford a part-time minister, some of them are maybe too small to be able to afford even that, but yet there's a need in all of these communities for ministers.

And then on top of that, the greens and the blues that you can see there, on top of that, there's probably about another 15 or so where the age of the current minister means that at some point in the next 10 years they'll be retiring.

I didn't want to put them up there because if that would make me just highlight all the old people. But so basically seeing that, those are the ones needing ministers now and then there's another 10 or 15 that are going to need ministers soon.

[22 : 26] And then there's other things that can happen. So sometimes there are people who are ministers who might get called away overseas or called to a different role. We've got to remember the seminary as well.

Our ministers are sometimes needed there. It's not going to be that long until Ivor Martin retires in the next four or five years or so. They'll need in all these areas of our church.

If you add it all together, there's about 45 gaps. And that's not including the fact that we're also hoping to plant many more new churches. So it will be great in the next 10 to 15 years if there was another 10 or 20 church plants as well.

I haven't included them, but that's part of the vision. Right now there's about 45 gaps and we have 14 people training for ministry.

So it's not enough. Now there's another five or six applying for ministry just now. That's hugely, hugely encouraging.

[23 : 29] But the number of gaps is bigger than the number of people who are coming into ministry. So we need workers. We need God to call men into the ministry. And if anybody wants to talk to me about that, please, please, please talk to me about that.

But it's most importantly something that we just need to keep on bringing before the Lord in prayer. So we need workers. A few is not enough. But the other thing that's super important is that workers need to work.

Jesus is calling laborers into his harvest. The workers for the gospel need to work. Now, it's an opportunity to say something that I'm keen to say.

I've sometimes heard people say that ministry is the hardest job in the world. I've heard people say that quite a few times. It's not true. And I do want to say that it's not true.

It's not true from the point of view that there's no such thing as the hardest job in the world because every job has got hard bits. Some jobs have got incredibly hard bits.

[24 : 34] And some parts of ministry are hard, but so many aspects of ministry are absolutely amazing. And I absolutely love my job. I feel so incredibly privileged to do it.

It's such a wonderful job. I remember being a postie and being a postie was great, but you did sometimes wake up thinking, oh, I've got to go to work again.

I have never felt like that as a minister. You get up every day and it's such a privilege and blessing. And honestly, I can say that caring for a congregation, seeing people come to faith in Jesus, seeing people become members of the church, seeing people serving together, it's such an amazing privilege to be part, to see that and to be part of that.

It's such, such a brilliant job. And Carlyle is especially brilliant. And so it's a wonderful job. I feel so, so privileged to do it. And I don't, you know, sometimes people make it like ministries really hard and horrible.

That's just not through at all. It's an amazing job, but it's definitely a job where you need to work. And that's true for every worker in God's harvest.

[25 : 52] Serving Jesus is about rolling up your sleeves, about stepping out in front of a task that looks a lot bigger than you thought and that feels a bit impossible on your own.

And you go for it. Verse 38 speaks about being sent out into the harvest. See that word there? That's actually the same word that you get later on. You got a couple of verses earlier where it spoke about Jesus casting out demons, send out, cast out.

That's actually the same word in Greek. And I quite like the fact that it's the same word because it's just the idea of the fact that we need God to just chuck us out into the harvest, get out there, get our sleeves rolled up, go for it together.

And that is such an exciting thing to be part of. But also, this is reminding us, all of this is reminding us is that ministry is work that no one can do on their own.

And we mustn't forget that a harvest is always a collective work. Even today, the farmer who drives the big massive combine harvester that does the work of 100 men on its own, that farmer is still completely reliant on the engineers who built that combine harvester.

[27 : 01] And he still needs somebody else to drive the tractor that the combine harvester is emptying into. It always, always, always relies on collective work. And ministry is the same.

I cannot emphasize enough how much I need you all as we serve together, how much this church needs everybody to muck in together. And I cannot overstate how thankful I am to God for all of you and for all that you do.

And I want you all to see yourselves as part of that. Now, everybody here is at different stages of their journey in faith.

Some of you have been following Jesus for a long, long, long, long time and you've worked very, very hard and maybe you're sitting here feeling a bit weary. And I can understand if you do because you worked really, really hard.

We are so thankful for the work that you have done. And please, please keep on serving as you can, but also please be the encourager for the next generation and courage the rest of us to step up and to live the way you lived, to serve the way you have served.

[28 : 11] Some of you may be younger in your faith. Some of you are maybe just battling the busyness of life. You've got a job, you've got a house, you've got finances to think about, you've got loads going on and it feels like life is overwhelmingly busy.

And that is absolutely how it can be. And I am not asking people to do, to add another 10 hours of work a week into your lives in order to do stuff for the church.

But I do want you to think about how you can serve. I want you to find joy in that serving and I want you to think about how you can be such a blessing to others, both serving in the church and in your witness, in your work and other responsibilities that all an opportunity.

Some of you are maybe a little bit earlier on. Some of you are maybe just, just new Christians. Some of you have maybe not yet, not yet sure or maybe, and maybe you are a believer, but you've not become a member and you're thinking, I'm not sure, I'm not sure.

I'm nervous. I'm anxious. I'm hesitant. I want you to take that step. I want you to take that step and just think, I'm going to take that step. I'm going to profess my faith and I'm going to serve Jesus.

[29 : 23] I am actually going to do this and I'm going to live my life following Him, loving Him, serving Him, working for Him. I'm just going to do it.

And honestly, the reason I can say that to you, the reason that I can say that to you is every single Christian I have ever met who has done that has never, ever, ever said to me, I wish I'd put it off a bit longer.

Everyone has said, I wish I did it sooner. So take that step. And if you are not yet trusting in Jesus, if you're certain today that you're here and you're like, I'm not a believer in this yet, well, honestly, there are so many reasons to trust in Jesus.

But one of them is that you get to step into such a brilliant team and you get to be part of such an exciting mission and you get a purpose and a meaning in your life that nothing can compare with.

It's such an amazing thing to do. Working for Jesus's harvest is amazing. It's hard, but it's amazing.

[30 : 37] And Jesus is calling us all to step into that field. So we need workers for the harvest. Last of all, we need to pray to the Lord of the harvest. In so many ways, this is very self-explanatory, but it does raise a really important point, very brief.

Sometimes when we talk about the need for workers, we talk about the need for ministers, it's easy to think that we need to go on a recruitment drive. We think we need to go and kind of advertise. People will even say, well, we need to pay them more and all that kind of stuff to try and encourage people into ministry and all of that.

That is not what we need to do. That is not what we need to do. That's not what Jesus tells us to do. He tells us to pray. That's what we need to do first and foremost, pray to the Lord of the harvest to raise up workers for the harvest and to send them into the harvest.

It's telling us and reminding us that all of this is a spiritual matter. It is about what God is doing. It's about what we want to cry out to Him to accomplish.

We need to pray that He will raise up more workers. When we look at vacant congregations, when we look at an island that is unreached for the gospel, when we look at a nation that desperately needs Jesus, it's so easy to think we need to do something and there's a sense in which that's true.

[31 : 56] First and foremost, we need God to do something and we need to plead and pray with God to press it onto our hearts as to how we can serve Him, to press it into men, to think about ministry, for Him to gift men for that and to raise them up and for us to deploy people, to serve, to work together, to use our gifts and to go for it.

And so, so crucial because if we don't do it, the generation that comes after us has got nothing.

Because if the generation before us hadn't done it, we would have nothing. And that's what Psalm 22 spoke so powerfully about, about generation after generation after generation, rising up to follow Jesus and to proclaim the gospel.

We do not want to be the generation where the gospel fizzles in Carlyway. We want to be the generation where the gospel thrives. I want your children and your grandchildren and your great grandchildren to be able to look at you thanking God with all their hearts for what you have done to serve Him and this community.

That is how Jesus built His church. So we need labourers for the harvest. We need to see the harvest. We need workers for the harvest. We need to pray to the Lord of the harvest.

[33 : 30] Such an important thing for us all to think about, such an important thing for us to pray about. Very last thing, what if you're not going to get a Christian?

What has all this got to do with you? The answer is everything.

It's everything to do with you. It's all about you. It's all because Jesus wants you.

The free church invests millions of pounds in ministry every year. The wider church across the UK invests tens of millions every year. Better people stationed all across the country, deployed to serve in communities.

There's even people coming from overseas to the UK now in order to help. Why is all that happening? It's all happening because Jesus wants to reach you.

[34 : 34] Jesus wants you in His family. Amen. Let's pray.