

Matthew 9:35-38 How do we reach the unchurched in our country? Pentecost 4 July 2, 2017

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Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from Jesus Christ who wants lost to be saved! Amen.

We read a portion of the Gospel lesson in Matthew 9:35-38.

These are Your words heavenly Father. Help us grow in our faith and love for others through Your Word.

Dear Christian Friends,

Many people are asking, "What is happening to our nation?" Moral laws that stood the test of time for centuries are being thrown out as irrelevant. Our citizens are losing moral absolutes and replacing them with whatever appeals to their sinful natures. St. Paul warned, *"There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."* (2 Timothy 3:1-4) There many thefts and robberies. How many are dying from overdoses? Even computers are not safe from viruses. We just want our families to be safe! What will stop the wave of crime and violence in our nation? Some want harsher penalties. It will help. But the best way to reach people is from inside. They need a change of heart to make changes in their lives! We also need to fight against compromising our faith & morals. We're sinners, too. Jesus: a beam in our eyes, splinter in others. We ask:

How do we reach the unchurched in our country?

According to Jesus, it starts with our attitude: not selfish. The Lord cares for people. It states, *"When He saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."* (v.36) If we were living at Jesus' time and saw crowds following Him, how would we judge them? We might call them trouble-makers and "low-lifes." But, Jesus looked beyond the outward forms and saw sinful people who needed Him. Two other times in Mathew, it states that Jesus had compassion on people. Out of love for the hungry, He fed over 5,000 people and another time over 4,000.

Jesus hasn't miraculously fed us with fish and bread, but He has fed us spiritually. His Word tells us that we are sinners whom God has fully forgiven. We deserved death; but, Jesus died instead to give us life! Also, Jesus miraculously gives us His body and blood in the Lord's Supper to offer us His forgiveness. This is out of pure compassion for us who were people harassed and helpless. "Harassed" in the original language means one who is wounded. "Helpless" pictures someone overwhelmed by life and worn out.

Jesus also helps us have compassion by calling troubling people sheep without a shepherd. In the Old Testament, God appointed rulers and priests to protect His people. But too often they lacked any concern for the people. They were like evil shepherds who ate the sheep rather than lead and protect them. In Ezekiel 34 it states that the Lord was so angry with them, He proposed to save the lost sheep Himself. He did this by sending His Son so lost people could hear His Word and to return to God for safety.

We can't wait for politicians or famous religious leaders to show compassion for people. We who know Christ's compassion and love are best suited to have God's love for others. Even if people don't respond at first, we will continue to care for them. Of the 1,000's of people that Jesus miraculously fed, only a few continued to trust in Him as the Savior. Yet, He was willing to keep doing good to all people!

A second way to reach the unchurched is to pray. Jesus said, *“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest... to send out workers into His harvest field.”* (v.37-38) I can’t imagine anything more frustrating to a farmer, than to prepare a field, plant it and care for a crop, only to not harvest it. Many a farmer had serious prayers with God for dry weather at harvest time. If people can be so concerned about corn in a field, how much more Christians should pray for the unchurched people of our country. Think of all the people in our country who haven’t heard that Jesus died to save them. Jesus went to all the trouble to pay for their sins, what a loss if they don’t benefit from it! Through our prayers, we ask God to bless pastors, missionaries, and any Christians to reach the lost. Paul wrote, *“Pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you.”* (2 Thessalonians. 3:1-2)

We read earlier in Romans 13 that we are to honor the leaders of our country and pray that they serve faithfully and be positive influences. In Old Testament times, godly kings led the people to have a higher moral standard and the country was blessed as people turned to God and trusted in Him to save them. Also, we are to pray that evil and trouble in our world be stopped. James wrote, *“Is any of you in trouble? He should pray.”* (James 5:13) In summary, we pray, asking that God’s will be done to stop trouble in our nation by changing the hearts of troubled people with the news of Christ’s love.

Third, we are to share God’s Word. We had Ilma Hartwig’s funeral yesterday. The family commented how she influenced generations of family. Someone also brought God’s Word to us, like Jesus. *“He went through the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.”* (v.35) Jesus saw many people who were discouraged. He told them the saving truths of God and worked miracles so they could have hope in God. He always kept the goal in mind to lead people to eternal life. One time in Samaria, Jesus was so intent on confronting someone about sin and then turning her to God’s forgiveness that He refused to eat. He told His disciples, *“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now ... he harvests the crop for eternal life...”* (John 4:34-36)

As our nation seems to grow worse in immorality, God can work through us to show the blessings of being with Him, following His truth and offering His power to save. Jesus said, *“As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me.... While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”* (John 9:4-5) The saving light is that Jesus was crucified for all sin. Then, His empty grave assured people that through faith in Him they will have eternal life. We were sinners by nature and public enemies of God. But, the moment we believed, God saw us in Christ’s forgiveness as His people set for eternity. If this weren’t enough blessing, God includes us in His plan to reach others for Christ. Perhaps a neighbor needs to be baptized and we can encourage that. Perhaps a friend is in trouble and doesn’t know where to turn. We can listen to him or her, pray, and seek ways to encourage them with the love of Christ.

In the end, we must trust in God to accomplish His good purpose for our nation. He tells us to pray for our nation for order and continued peace. We pray that God would work changes in people’s hearts to improve their lives. God help us to have the same kind of compassion as Jesus so that when we see someone in trouble we are ready to respond about the true hope that we have in Christ. We will keep speaking the truth in love not only so our nation will be blessed but so that God’s kingdom will be filled with believers! For now, we should feel privileged that God called us by the Gospel: first to believe and then serve Him in this great nation so that many more people may know Christ, turn to Him from their harmful sins, and be blessed! Amen.