

PRAY TO THE LORD OF THE HARVEST

Have you ever heard anyone pray addressing God as “Lord of the Harvest”? I hadn’t until recently.

Jesus almost without exception used the name ‘Father’ when talking about God. But when he talked to his disciples about the harvest he said “Ask *the Lord of the harvest* to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matt.9:38) Ponder on that name, ‘The Lord of the harvest’ for a moment. What is it saying? ‘The world is God’s harvest field. He is the owner of it. He expects a great harvest.’ What a revolutionary way to look at the world.

What prompted this request of Jesus? His compassion. He saw crowds of people harassed and helpless without him as their Shepherd, and his heart broke for them. He saw a plentiful harvest, and few workers. So he said ‘ask’ or plead that the Lord of the Harvest thrust out workers into his harvest field.

Do we do what Jesus asks here? I have often heard people pray for individuals who need God, or pray for ‘the lost’, but hardly ever heard anyone pray this prayer, “Lord of the harvest, thrust out workers into your harvest field.”

Perhaps we could call this Jesus’ forgotten prayer request.

In Matthew 10, after he has asked them to pray this prayer, we see Jesus sending out the twelve into the harvest field with many instructions and warnings about how they will be treated. Is it dangerous to pray this prayer then, because we might be the ones ‘compelled out’ into the harvest field?

In Luke 10 we read of Jesus sending out the seventy-two disciples to prepare the way for his coming visit through many towns and villages. He uses the same words to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask (beseech) the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field.” Clearly he needed even more workers, so great was the harvest.

Jesus saw things we haven’t seen. He felt things we haven’t felt. In order to pray ‘to the Lord of the Harvest’ we will need Jesus’ perspective. The world is God’s harvest field. He is expecting a great harvest. He sees needy, helpless, hungry people as the ripened harvest. He feels deep compassion about them, rather than anger that they are sinful and rebellious.

I remember some years ago sitting alone in a very hot car in the middle of a busy African city, with crowds teeming past. **And the Holy Spirit whispered to me ‘They are lost!’** I came unglued... I wept off and on for days. I was given a glimpse of the heart of Jesus. ‘They are lost. They need the Shepherd. So please, please cry out to the Lord of the harvest to compel workers to go out and bring them in.’

We will need a glimpse of the heart of Jesus in order to pray to the Lord of the harvest.

We will need to see the world as God’s harvest field rather than the devil’s playground. There is a harvest all around us - in our street, in our workplace, among our family, among our friends and acquaintances. What if we kept saying to the Spirit, “Open my eyes, show me the ripened harvest around me. Give me the compassion of Jesus for these harried and helpless ones,”? What would begin to happen – in our hearts, and in our surroundings?

Jesus was with his disciples at a well in Samaria. The disciples had gone to the nearby village and bought food and taken it back to Jesus. Meanwhile Jesus had a conversation with a woman, who was so amazed at his words about her life and about who he is that she runs to the village and calls the people to “come and see... Could this be the Christ?” As the people stream out towards them Jesus said to the disciples, “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.” (John 4:35) He is seeing these people as ‘the harvest’, which was ripe. And many came to believe in him because of his words. The disciples couldn’t see it, but Jesus could.

Do we have eyes to ‘see’ the fields that are ripe for harvesting? Or are we saying ‘It is too hard. People are resistant,?’ There will be no harvesting without faith. This is a supernatural work. The Lord turning hearts towards him and directing us to share the good news with them is the work of the Spirit. Of course we cannot do it ourselves. But the first step into faith is ‘seeing’ the unseen. And only an ‘eye-opening’ by Jesus will bring that ability.

But when we can see, faith will rise, prayers will flow, and compassion and courage and innovation will increase. We must begin the process by asking to see, and when that vision comes we will walk in our streets, or sit at our workplace with a burning heart – alert to any direction of the Spirit to pray, or care or speak for him whenever he prompts. We will be saying inside, ‘Where are you at work Lord, what is going on around me, what can I do to bring in the harvest?’ The adventure of the Kingdom has begun.

“Pray to the Lord of the harvest...”

Pray for the heart to feel his compassion.

Pray for the eyes to see the harvest all around us.

Pray for the courage to speak and act on his behalf.

“Pray that he will thrust out workers..”

Two men involved in a network of home churches in Denver, Colorado were prayer partners. John White and Kenny Moore were reading these verses and realized that when Jesus sent out seventy-two he obviously wanted more workers, hence the prayer request. They were struck by the thought that they should also pray this prayer for their work. So they agreed to somehow pray it together daily, either by phone, voice mail or in person.

In their report in ‘house2house’ magazine (issue 8 - www.simplechurch.com) they said that praying this prayer resulted in a continuing ‘conversation with the Lord about the harvest and its workers’ – resulting in fresh strategies for church planting. Also they heard many stories of double the number of workers offering to help with evangelism and planting house churches. They plan to ‘infect’ as many as possible with the ‘10:2b virus’ because they believe ‘a prayer movement must precede a church planting movement.’

“Without prayer, God will not act,” said John Wesley. He should know! Reaping the harvest for our Lord will require many more workers. Let us plead with the Lord of the harvest to burden hearts and compel many to see and go and reap the harvest for Him.

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