

Lord of the harvest, send out workers into your harvest field. Amen.

Summer is finally here! And, amidst all the awesome summer activities of which we partake, one stands out for us Americans. Summer is a time when we think about our country.

We just had Memorial Day, when we celebrate the sacrifices that secured our freedoms. Soon we will have the Fourth of July, when we celebrate the declaration that made our freedoms.

But, sandwiched in between those two holidays is June, which over the last twenty-four years has become a month-long festival for the abuse of freedom – something we cannot celebrate. America may be the land of the free, but freedom to sin is nothing to be proud of (Romans 1:26), and it's not really freedom at all, it's slavery (John 8:34).

And every year as the country sinks deeper into the moral sewer, it gets easier for our sense of dread to grow. So many people are led by an Adversary that wants only to devour them (1 Peter 3:8). We are facing a seemingly insurmountable spiritual crisis.

So what do we do? Well, what did Jesus do when he faced the same thing? Jesus was traveling all over Galilee, teaching and preaching and healing (9:35). And no matter where he went, there was one constant: a seemingly insurmountable spiritual crisis. **When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (9:36).**

The people had turned God's law into something it was not – it was intended to prepare them for the coming Savior, but they used it to earn God's favor. They had also turned God's gospel into something it was not – it was all about salvation from sin, but they expected salvation from their political enemies. As a result, they thought that they were free, but really they were slaves (John 8:33).

And yet, when Jesus saw them, he saw sheep. He viewed them not as the cause of this crisis, but as its casualties. So Jesus had compassion on them. He hurt for them and had to do something about it.

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few" (9:37). These shepherdless sheep were like a field of grain that is ready for harvest. In other words, Jesus did not see an insurmountable crisis; he saw a golden opportunity.

Is that how you see things? It is obvious that right now immorality is increasing, hostility toward biblical Christianity is intensifying, and lies about the nature of God and humanity are spreading like wildfire.

But are you and I able to look at the crowds of immoral, hostile, lying people, and see them the way that Jesus does – as casualties who need your compassion? Because if you don't, if you stand at arm's length, filled with nothing but anger and disdain for them, then this opportunity truly is a crisis.

Because we can't politic our way out of this, and angry Facebook posts won't accomplish anything. Jesus never said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you own them on social media." But he did say, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

When we Christians, like our Christ, have compassion on people, a seemingly insurmountable crisis becomes an opportunity. Jesus did not tell his disciples to ask God to plow the field under or burn it to the ground. He said, **"Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (9:38).** Don't wring your hands and lament America's moral slide, fold your hands and pray for God to send out more workers.

Pastors and teachers and missionaries don't just appear out of thin air. God is the Lord of the harvest, and he gives us workers (Ephesians 4:11-13). And because Jesus is God, that's what he did here: **Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. ...⁵ [And he] sent [them] out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons" (10:1, 5-8).**

Jesus told them where to go and what to do. Eventually he would send them out to all nations (Matthew 28:19), but for now they had to stay in Israel. And everything he told them to do should sound very familiar because it was exactly what Jesus had been doing.

So notice that not only were they to proclaim the gospel, they were also to care for people's physical needs. Do you see the wisdom in that? When you carry the gospel into the world, you travel in enemy territory (John 15:18). You bear a message that is offensive to the culture that so desperately needs it (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

But Jesus knows that. So he gives you a way to get through the barriers that people build against the gospel. And it's compassion – love one another and care for each other. When the truth of the gospel and the love produced by the gospel are carried out as a package deal, people change (Philippians 2:13).

That is the opportunity that Jesus gave the Twelve, and it's the same opportunity that he gives to you. Are you up to the task? Don't be worried. Listen to this: "**Freely you have received; freely give**" (10:8). Now, just let that sink in. This verse explains a lot.

For starters, why can you and I get so angry with the culture around us rather than feeling compassion for it? Why do you let opportunities to share the gospel slip through your fingers? How can you ignore real human need, even when it's right in front of your nose?

Because deep down you want to believe that everything you have, you have earned. You do not want to believe Jesus when he says, "**Freely you have received**" (10:8). You want to believe that the reason you trust the gospel is because you're smarter than other people. You want to believe that you've got a roof over your head and food on your plate because you've done all the right things.

But you and I are a sheep, and without the Good Shepherd we would be as harassed and helpless as everyone else. You needed him to look at you and be filled with compassion not anger; to see you not as a crisis, but as an opportunity.

An opportunity that Jesus seized by living perfectly for you, and pouring that perfection on you in your baptism (Ephesians 5:25-27), sacrificing that perfection for you on the cross. Don't you see? Everything that you need Jesus to do for you, he has most certainly and completely done.

That's good news! Good news about a Good Shepherd who had compassion on wandering sheep, who laid down his life for them, who promised that no one can snatch them from his hand (John 10:28). That is what you have freely received from your Good Shepherd, and *that* is the very thing that you turn around and share just as freely.

And yes, I know, these words apply most directly to people like me, the ministers of the gospel that God gives to his church. But the principle behind these words applies to each and every one of you. Even though our roles may be different, we are all workers in this harvest field. Workers with the simplest job description in all the world: take what Jesus has freely given to us and share it.

"But pastor, how? What if I don't know what to say? What if I don't have answers to all the questions? How am I supposed to help others when I'm barely scraping by?" Well, remember, Jesus says, "**Freely you have received; freely give**" (10:8). He does not ask you to give what you have not been given.

Sure, he told the Twelve to **heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons** (10:8). But before he said that, he gave them the authority to do it (10:1). Has Jesus given you the ability to perform those miracles? Me neither. So don't worry about it.

Don't know your Bible backwards and forwards? Don't know the answer to every single question? It's okay, neither do I. What do you know? What have you been given? Whatever that is, that's what you share.

Jesus never sends you to give something that you have not first received. And he has given you the gospel, "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16), the only thing that can turn casualties of the crises into sheep of the Good Shepherd. It's the answer to your prayers!

I mean ... you caught Jesus' dirty trick, right? He huddled his disciples together, told them to pray to God for more workers, and what did he do next? He answered their prayer for workers by sending *them* out as workers!

Isn't that great? We usually think of answered prayer in terms of what we get. But often the answer to prayer is what Jesus calls us to be.

So pray for our country. Pray that when Jesus comes again in glory there will be an abundant harvest. And know that the answer to your prayer is not just something that you get, but something that Jesus gives you the opportunity to be. **Freely you have received; freely give**. Amen.