

GOD'S UNEMPLOYED

Matthew 9:35-38

When Christ first entered upon His earthly ministry, Galilee was the scene of His labors. In spite of the opposition of the leaders in Israel, He proceeded on a circuit around Galilee. With a great love for people, Christ went into the villages and cities, where there were so many of them, and engaged in a three-fold ministry of teaching, preaching and healing. Great multitudes followed Him as He went from place to place, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all kinds of diseases. Christ might have established His residence and dispensed His favors to all needy applicants, but, instead, He went about teaching the ignorant, healing the sick, comforting the sorrowing and raising the dead.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was the master teacher. He was an impressive teacher—"He taught as one having authority." He was a persuasive teacher—"The common people heard him gladly." He was the prince of teachers—"Never man spake like this man."

Christ Jesus was also the great physician, "healing every sickness and every disease among the people." No case was too difficult for Him. A word, a look, or a touch, and their bodies were healed.

I. The Condition.

When Christ surveyed the over-populated villages and crowded cities of Galilee with perfect sympathy, what did He see? He saw multitudes on their way to a devil's hell. That made Him sad. Even so, there is something very saddening to a Christian to look upon a multitude. To stand on a crowded street of a large metropolis like New York or London, as I have done, and to see the current of human beings floating onward to eternity brings a real sadness over the spirit. Why is this true? Because most of them are perishing souls. Of all the crowds that pass along the streets in our town on busy days, less than half of them will ever be saved.

II. The Concern.

As Christ moved hither and thither, He saw the great masses of people crowded together in those populous centers and woefully neglected. His heart was deeply moved, as many a godly person's heart is touched by a similar sight now. Multitudes of them were poor, weak and frail. They were wandering here and there, turning every one to his own way. They were going after different things—money, pleasure, debauchery, etc. His heart was stirred to its depths by the sight of need. Perceiving the havoc and ruin wrought by sin in their lives, "He was moved with compassion." His heart quivered with sympathy as He observed their condition and needs. His pity sprang from His perception. His compassion was the result of His vision.

That word "compassion" is a beautiful and rich word. It describes perfectly the feelings of Christ when He beheld the multitudes. Derived from the Latin, "compassion" is compounded of two words which mean "suffering with." That is exactly what Christ did when He came across need, pain and distress. He "suffered with" those who were afflicted. He felt the distress and pain as if they were His own. He bore their griefs and carried their sorrows.

This word "compassion" is such an expressive one. It is more than pity or mercy. It means the going out of the inmost soul of the Saviour in tender love and earnest longing for the salvation of lost souls. This is one of the great needs in the lives of present-day Christians. Is your heart moved with compassion as you see the unsaved all about you? What are you doing toward their reconciliation with God?

At a particular time during the Civil War, the fighting was heavy near the nation's capitol. Many public buildings had been confiscated for use as hospitals. One Saturday night great piles of lumber were unloaded on the sidewalk in front of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. The following morning Doctor Gurley, the minister, made the announcement from the pulpit that this would be the last Sunday service until the close of the war. By order of the military authorities in Washington the pews were to be turned into cots. As soon as the minister had finished the announcement, President Abraham Lincoln rose slowly from his pew and asked for permission to make a statement. He said: "That order was issued without my authority. I rescind it. We need this church to keep the stars shining in their lives."

Today we need our churches to keep the stars shining in the skies. We need them at their greatest strength. We need them to be all that Christ ordained and intended that they should be. But, when we look at the condition in our churches today, we know that they are not at their full strength. There are far too many unemployed laborers in the vineyard of the Lord. God, the greatest employer, has more people out of work all of the time than He has working, and none of those who are unemployed draw "unemployment compensation." They belong to the W. P. A. "We piddle around" with our Christian obligations and duties. Do you know of a single church where every member is employed and working for the Lord? While we are singing "We Will Be Somewhere Working For The Lord," more than half, or fully half, of the people whose names are on the church roll are not doing anything. They are indifferent, cold-hearted and swelling the ranks of God's unemployed. Do you know of a single Sunday School class where every member is active? These unemployed constitute one of God's greatest problems and one of the greatest tasks that a church has.

III. The Causes.

What are the causes for this large group of unemployed? Why aren't they powerful in prayer? Why aren't they willing and cooperative in spirit? Why aren't they intelligent and informed about the work of the Kingdom? Why do they not have compassionate hearts? Why aren't they filled with the Holy Spirit?

1. It is not because the work is scarce.
The fields are white unto the harvest. They were white unto harvest when our Lord was here in the flesh. They are still white unto the harvest. While the harvest is waiting here at home and abroad, the laborers are few. We have a gospel to proclaim; we have a witness to bear; we have a charge to keep; we have a life to live; and we have a story to tell. These activities alone will keep every one of God's own busy and engaged for full time. There is plenty of work for all of us to do. The ranks of the unemployed in the vineyard of the Lord are not swelled by those who say truthfully, "I am idle because there isn't anything for me to do."
2. It is not because they are unable to work.
Christ knew that in our own strength we could not do anything. He reminded us that apart from Him we could do nothing. Apart from His spirit, His attitude, His love, His courage, His faith and His power we cannot do anything. But through Him and in Him we can do all things because He strengtheneth us. Everyone is able to be friendly, to be obedient, to be spiritual, to give time and thought to meditation, prayer and the study of the Word of God. Everyone is able to be grateful and to be humble. Everyone is able to spread cheer and optimism.
3. It is because they have permitted things that matter least in their lives to crowd out the things that matter most. A machine can do the work formerly done by scores of men. What such machines have done in industry, material things, worldly things, are doing in the lives of thousands of Christians. We have permitted business, social life, indulgence in things of the flesh, to crowd out the eternal things. Our souls are starving while our bodies and nerves are being exhausted.

4. It is because the employer makes high demands of every employee. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." He demands full allegiance. He demands that we forsake all and follow Him. He asks that we lose our lives for His sake and for the gospel's sake.

IV. The Cure.

1. Prayer.

The shortest route to every idler in a church is by way of the throne of prayer. Do we pray regularly and fervently that God will send back to work the unemployed of our congregation? The most direct way to the human heart is by way of the throne of God.

2. Personal witnessing.

We can never tell what a word rightly spoken for Christ will do. We can never know what an invitation to usefulness will mean in the life of another. If we can encourage those who are actively engaged in the Lord's work to give by deed and by appeal their testimony to the joy of their Christian life, we will enlist numbers of the unemployed.

3. Preaching the Word of God.

Our day certainly needs unctonized, scriptural and spiritual preaching. It needs the preaching that wells up from hearts that are hot--preaching that has in it deep convictions about God, sin, salvation, Christian living and service, and the hereafter. That is the kind of preaching that leads people to see that they are laborers together and with God.

The harvest is great and the laborers are few. The gospel ship is far undermanned. More preachers, teachers and workers are needed. There are various ways of getting men into the field. They may be overpersuaded or influenced by some personal motive. The right way to get them is to pray unto the Lord to send forth laborers into His harvest. We have listeners, learners and loiterers, but we need laborers who can endure hardness as good soldiers; fishermen who can toil all night in the presence of disappointment; watchmen who will sound an alarm at the approach of danger, and who neither slumber nor sleep.

Our Lord has directed us how to obtain a supply of laborers. He bids us to pray for them. Do you ever pray for God to send such workers into His vineyard? It is the Lord's business, and only He can send us the right men. He has a right to send whom He pleases, for it is His own harvest, and one may employ whom he wills in his own field. God alone has the making of ministers, and the raising up of true workers, so the petition must be addressed to Him.

Notice the expression used here, "that he would send forth laborers." The Greek is much more forceful--it is that He would push them forward, and thrust them out. It is the same word which is used for the expulsion of a demon from a person. It takes great power to drive out a demon; it will require equal power from God to drive a man into the work of the gospel ministry. May the Lord push men out, thrust them out, drive them out, and compel them to preach the gospel; for unless they preach by a divine compulsion there will not be any power in their ministry to influence the hearts of others for God.