

THE RADICAL PRAYER - PART 2

A Radical Problem

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Luke 10:2b
Subject:	Though the harvest truly is great, what problem did Jesus identify
Complement:	that the laborers are few
Exegetical idea:	Jesus pointed out that even though the harvest truly is great the laborers are few.
Homiletical idea:	God can take distracted and discouraged non-laboring laborers and renew them by His grace, empower them by His Spirit, and send them out as effective laborers in His harvest field!
Purpose:	To help my hearers to see that the real problem with gathering in the harvest is not too few laborers but too few laboring laborers and to encourage them to allow the Lord of the harvest to renew them by His grace and empower them by His Spirit to become effective laborers in His harvest field.

Introduction

The Lord of the harvest has a problem. A radical problem. We learned in Part 1 of this series on the Radical Prayer that the harvest truly is....GREAT! There are many men and women, boys and girls, who are just waiting for the invitation to become a part of the Kingdom of Heaven. Some of you have been praying this simple prayer: "Lord, open my eyes so that I can see as You see." And you are beginning to see from God's radical perspective, that the harvest truly is great!

But there is a problem. A radical problem. We can read about this radical problem in Luke 10:2. Please open your Bible to the gospel of Luke 10:2. Jesus says to the apostles, and also to us, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few." (Luke 10:2).

If the radical perspective is that "the harvest truly is great," what is the radical problem? "The laborers are few." I have a question for you. Why are there so few laborers? Perhaps an inadequate number of laborers were assigned. In that case, we could blame the Lord of the harvest. He should have anticipated the size of the harvest. If He knew that the harvest was

going to be great, abundant, extensive, He should have assigned an adequate number of laborers. Maybe it's His fault that the laborers are few. What do you think?

Let me ask you another question. How many individuals has the Lord of the harvest called to be laborers in His harvest? Everyone! Everyone who chooses to become a part of His kingdom! You're right! When Jesus gave the command to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, He wasn't just speaking to the eleven remaining disciples. When Jesus said, "Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," that command was for all of us, for everyone who accepts the call to become a follower of Jesus and part of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus says, "Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

So, if we are all called to be laborers in God's harvest field, perhaps our initial question should be modified. Instead of asking, "Why are there so few laborers?" we should rather ask, "Why are there so few *laboring* laborers?" Most of the so-called "laborers" seem to be inactive. "The harvest truly is great, but the *laboring* laborers are few."

So why are there so few laboring laborers, if the harvest truly is great? We may find the answer to that question in a story that Jesus told about a man who had two sons. The story is recorded in Matthew 21:28-30. "....." Their father asked them to work in his vineyard, to be laborers in his harvest field. One refused but later regretted his hasty decision and went. The second son initially agreed to go, but didn't. Have you ever wondered why the second son didn't go to labor in his father's vineyard? Do you think that he was lying to his father, deliberately trying to deceive him? I doubt it. He probably intended to go—after all, it was the right thing to do. But somehow the second son became distracted. Someone or

something else captured his attention, and before he knew it, the day had slipped away. We are left wondering what distractions might have caused him to become a non-laboring laborer.

In another story, Jesus told about some guests who were invited to a great banquet. They weren't expected to do any labor. They just had to show up and enjoy the party. But they also became distracted. If you read the story, you'll discover some of the excuses that they made. The story is recorded in Luke 14:16-20: "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'"

Do you notice the distractions? Material possessions—a piece of land. Business activity—trying out a new pair of oxen. Relationships—the person just got married. Now there's nothing inherently wrong with material possessions, business activity, or relationships. But when any of these get in the way of God's invitation, we have a real problem.

There's a second possible explanation for the spare number of *laboring* laborer's in God's harvest field. The laborers might have become discouraged. After all, the task is enormous. The harvest truly *is* great. It's easy to feel overwhelmed.

There are several reasons why a laborer might become discouraged. A laborer might be trying to bring in the harvest all by himself, all by herself. I have met some laborers who labor unceasingly until they're exhausted. They give their all and then some, but it never seems enough.

May I remind you that the Lord of the harvest doesn't expect you to work yourself into an early grave. Just like the early disciples of Jesus, you need to take time to come apart and rest awhile (Mark 6:30-31). But you ask, "How then will the great harvest be gathered in?" The apostles faced a similar challenge in the early days of the Christian church. They were overwhelmed with the immensity of the task. And so, guided by the Holy Spirit, they delegated responsibility to others. You are not called to do all of the laboring alone. Make room for others to labor by your side.

You may also become discouraged because you are trying to bring in the harvest in your own strength. If you try to serve the Lord of the harvest trusting in your own resources, you will surely become discouraged. We all need to live by the words of the prophet Zechariah, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the LORD of Hosts." (Zechariah 4:6) Otherwise, you will surely become discouraged non-laboring laborer.

At this point you may be thinking, "This is a *radical* problem! The harvest truly is great. There are many people just waiting for the invitation to become a part of the Kingdom of heaven. But there is a radical problem. There are too few *laboring* laborers! Too many of the professed followers of Jesus have become distracted and discouraged."

But there is good news! The Lord of the harvest can take distracted, discouraged non-laboring laborers and renew them by His grace, empower them by His Spirit, and send them out as focused, effective laborers into His harvest.

Consider the experience of Simon Peter, one of the first followers of Jesus. He had listened to the words of Jesus when the twelve were sent out and also when the seventy were sent out: "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few." (Luke 10:2) He had experienced the

power of the Lord of the harvest as he labored in Jesus' name. The sick were healed. The oppressed were set free. The good news was preached with power. But Simon Peter became distracted by his own failures and discouraged by his own frailty. Perhaps you remember the story during the trial of Jesus when Peter cursed and said, "I don't know the man!" Even after meeting Jesus, risen from the dead, Peter is still distracted and discouraged. He says to his colleagues, "I'm going fishing." Now, there's nothing wrong with fishing. But Jesus had died on the cross to save us from our sins, He had risen from the dead as a glorious demonstration that He was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, and He had told His followers to preach the good news to everyone that they met. And what is Peter doing? He is going fishing. He is a classic example of a distracted, discouraged, non-laboring laborer.

How did Jesus respond? Jesus didn't give up on him. Jesus is there to meet Simon Peter on the beach after a wasted night on the lake. You can read the story in John chapter 22. Jesus calls Simon Peter again, renews him by His grace and empowers him by His Spirit. And that distracted and discouraged disciple experienced a personal transformation. He became bold, not in his own strength, but by the Spirit of God. Simon Peter became focused and fearless. We heard his testimony in part 1 of this series, recorded in Acts 2:36. And as a result of that powerful testimony, three thousand men and women took a stand for Jesus. Not long after the day of Pentecost, Peter and John were talking to the Temple. As they approached the Gate called Beautiful, they met a beggar, asking for a gift. And how did Peter respond? Was he distracted, discouraged? No! You can read his response in Acts 3:6, "....." And then Dr. Luke records in Acts 3:7-8, "....."

If Jesus can take a distracted, discouraged non-laboring laborer like Simon Peter and

transform him into a focused, effective laborer in the Lord's harvest field, then He can do that for other distracted and discouraged non-laboring laborers. Isn't that true? He can do that for me and He can do that for you.

Some years ago, a young man named Simon came into my office. He had spent his teenage years in East Los Angeles. The Lord Jesus Christ had rescued this young man from a life of violence and crime, and called him to be a laborer in God's harvest field. Simon had already seen God work in his life in marvelous ways. But Simon had become distracted and discouraged, not so much by the present, but by the past. Some nights he sat on his bed looking at his gang tattoos, and wondered, "Can God really use me, after all that I've done?" He was a classic example of a modern distracted and discouraged laborer.

As Simon sat in my office, tears filled his eyes. As I listened to his heart-cry, God gave me a word of hope for Simon. We don't have to stay where we are. We are not bound by what we used to be. Simon embraced the good news of God's word. That distracted and discouraged young man was renewed by the grace of God. He was empowered by the Spirit of God. Just a few weeks later, as Simon was sharing the good news about Jesus with others, God impressed Simon to give his testimony. Simon had been too ashamed to tell his story in public before. But not any more! At the end of his testimony, Simon gave a simple invitation, and fifteen people came forward to receive Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord.

A few days later, Simon received a call from a Christian mission organization, asking him to serve on a mission team in South America. Simon worked in the city of Salvador, in northeast Brazil. He visited people in parts of town where the locals were afraid to go, and where the police didn't even go! God even used Simon's old gang tattoos to earn him a little

respect among the local gang members! As a result of those meetings, five thousand people chose to become fully devoted followers of Jesus.

Simon has devoted his life to telling people the truth about Jesus. He still remembers his past. He still bears the scars. But he is rejoicing today that God can take distracted, discouraged, non-laboring laborers, and transform them into focused effective laborers in His harvest field.

And Simon isn't the only distracted, discouraged, non-laboring laborer that God has renewed by His grace, empowered by His Spirit, and sent out as an effective laborer into His harvest. Just this past week, I listened to the testimony of a member of the team here at Forest Lake Church. For 10 years, he served as a pastor in California. But he became discouraged. Finally, he quit. For several years, he just sat on the back row of the church. He never denied Jesus, or renounced his faith, but he was another example of a distracted, discouraged, non-laboring laborer. He could have stayed that way for the rest of his life. But I told you the good news, didn't I? God can take distracted, discouraged, non-laboring laborers and renew them by His grace, empower them by His Spirit, and send them out as effective laborers in His harvest.

That is exactly what has happened for Delwin. He became involved in a church plant in West Palm Beach, and then, after moving to Orlando, Delwin connected with the web church ministry of the Forest Lake Church. Today, Delwin Finch is our volunteer web church pastor and a vital member of our media ministry team! And I say, "Praise the Lord!" What do you say? Hundreds of people join us every week via our web church at www.forestlakechurch.org. We receive prayer requests from all around the world. God is opening our eyes to see that the harvest truly is great!

And even though there is a radical problem, that the laboring laborers are few, the good

news is that God can take distracted, discouraged, non-laboring laborers and renew them by His grace, empower them by His Spirit, and send them out as effective laborers in His harvest.

At the beginning of this message, I asked you to put a brown response sheet in your Bible. It says, “I want to be an effective laborer in the harvest with Jesus.” How many here feel that way today?

I want to invite you to take a pen or pencil and write your name and a contact phone number on that brown response sheet. If you’re already connected in a ministry for Jesus, just write “ALREADY CONNECTED” at the bottom of that sheet, and we will thank God in prayer that you are a laboring laborer in His harvest. If you would like to know how you can be involved, how you can be trained and equipped to be an effective laborer in God’s harvest field, just write your name and phone number on this sheet and write “NEED TO CONNECT” at the bottom. One of our ministry team will contact you. At the end of this service, I want you to place that response sheet here at the front of the church, or leave it on the table in the foyer.

And I want to invite you to join us next week, as we consider a radical prayer that Jesus asks us to pray. Because the harvest truly is great, and the laborers are few, Jesus asks us to cry out to the Lord of the harvest in a way that will change our lives forever! I hope that you’ll be with us for that life-changing message.

Let’s pray.