

“The Mission of CFC: To Pray Earnestly”

Matthew 9:35-38

Rev. KJ Kim

(Large Group, March 6, 2020)

Matthew 9:35-38

The Harvest Is Plentiful, the Laborers Few

³⁵And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Introduction

The vision of CFC is to raise up kingdom laborers, and the way we raise them is to pray earnestly. Leonard Ravenhill described what a church that prays should look like. “The church has many organizers but few agonizers. Many who pay, but few who pray. Many resters, but few wrestlers. Many who are enterprising, but few who are interceding. People who are not praying are playing. The worldly Christian will stop praying and a praying Christian will stop worldliness. Tithes may build the church, but tears will give it life. When we have paid, the place is taken. When they had prayed, the place was shaken.” The last line is taken from Acts 4:31.

Acts 4:31 – And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

We are praying and striving to be a kingdom-shaking, earth-altering church. If the church stops praying, it will die out spiritually. Satan operates by trying to pull us away from prayer and from the Word of God. This week as I was preparing, God placed two phrases in my heart: “Not on our watch” and “Keep the line.” On our watch, we’re not going to let the mantle of prayer die in CFC. Regardless of the attacks and battles that we face, we will keep that line. May we be a church that prays earnestly and shakes the place where we gather. I believe God wants to rattle us out of mundaneness and bring us back to a place of earnest prayer.

I. Why should we pray? “Therefore pray”

A. The need

The first thing that we see is that there is a clear need. The word “therefore” in verse 38 points us to the context that happened before this passage. When we look at the context within Matthew 9, we see that there’s brokenness and need.

Matthew 9:36 – ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

In verse 36, Jesus had compassion for the crowds because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. They were broken and feeling the effects of sin everywhere.

There is also barrenness, but not because the field is barren. We're told in verse 37 that the harvest is plentiful. There are many eager people that are ready to meet God and enter the kingdom. Rather, the barrenness is because there are not enough workers to reap the field. There's a shortage in the quantity and quality of impactful laborers to reap the harvest and help usher the people into the kingdom of God. In the context of brokenness, need, and barrenness, the church is given the charge to pray.

Matthew 9:37 – ³⁷*Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;*

B. The call

Therefore, in light of barrenness, pray. The word “pray” is given in an imperative tense as a command. The passage seems to have an illogical progression because we expect Jesus to say “go.” Instead, he commands us to pray. The progression seems illogical until we realize that we cannot do anything about the brokenness or barrenness of the field, only God can. God commands us to pray because we can't do it and we need His empowerment. Whenever there is a command in Scripture, there is also empowerment through obedience in faith. In Matthew 14, Peter sees Jesus walking on water and says, “Tell me to walk on water.” Jesus replies with a command, “Come.” The next part says, “*Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water.*” It doesn't make sense, but when Peter obeys in faith, there is empowerment from God. Some people might argue that praying is a legalistic, work-based idea. On the contrary, prayer is a life-based idea.

Three things can happen when we pray: things can change, people can change, or we can change. When we pray, situations and people can change because they're in the hands of God. And we can change because even one moment in the presence of the living God can completely transform our lives. Our prayers never fall on deaf ears, and as we interact with the living God through prayer, we're never the same again. The strongest people are those who are weakest before God. A healthy church is not marked by the size of the church but by the cries of the church. That is the kind of church and the kind of people we are striving to build at CFC. We are standing on the shoulders of those who have prayed, fasted, and sacrificed for us to be here, and that's what we plan to do.

II. How should we pray? “pray earnestly”

How should we pray? It is found in the phrase, “pray earnestly.” The phrase literally means “beg.” When you beg, you have nothing to lose and everything to gain. You've exhausted all your options, spent all your resources, and all you can do is beg. Although this is the only time in Matthew that the phrase “pray earnestly” appears, it's actually scattered throughout the New Testament. In Luke 9, there's a father that has a son seized and controlled by an evil spirit. The man is desperate, looking for any option, and he comes to Jesus.

Luke 9:38-39 – ³⁸*And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. ³⁹And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him.*

“I beg you” is the same word when Jesus tells us to pray earnestly. Earnest pray is passionate prayer. You can feel this man’s desperate heart when he sees his child in harm’s way. Earnest prayer can be loud cries and tears like Jesus in Hebrews 5:7, because you just cannot contain it. But sometimes earnest prayer is prayer from the heart, like Hannah in 1 Samuel 1, where we’re told she was so consumed that her lips were moving but no voice was coming out. Earnest, passionate prayers mean gushing of the heart. So, evaluate your prayers.

Earnest prayer is not only passionate prayer, but also persistent prayer. The desperate man in Luke 9 keeps going to Jesus because Jesus is his only hope. Don’t relent and keep going to Jesus. Passionately and persistently pray to him. Too many people treat prayer like an accessory, but it is a spiritual necessity. We pray earnestly because we will spiritually die without it. If you look at your life and see that you do not pray earnestly, pray that you would have a heart of God that breaks for people. If God gifts you that heart through a process of repentance and denying your addictions, you will pray earnestly.

Matthew 9:36 – ³⁶*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

If we lack earnestness, we lack a heart of Jesus. His heart broke and felt pain that resulted in prayers. Jesus always stops and listens to the pleas of earnest prayers. It doesn’t mean we’ll get what we ask for, but we can be confident that he will answer with our good and His glory in mind.

III. What should we pray for? “laborers”

We should pray for laborers. In verse 38, Jesus doesn’t tell us to pray for the broken people or for the plentiful harvest. Jesus tells us to pray for the laborers, fellow believers. Before there’s a reaping of the harvest, there has to be weeping from his laborers. Although there are other places in Scripture that call us to pray for the lost, Jesus challenges us in this passage to love the body of Christ through prayer.

Although God doesn’t need us to do his work, prayer is the ordained means in Scripture for God to work. It is undeniable that when God’s people pray, God works. At the end of the day, He is doing all the work. He is the one that is raising a harvest, the one transforming hearts, the one that is doing everything. And yet, he allows us to play a part in His redemptive story. At the end of eternity when we see him, he will thank us even though we have contributed nothing. Prayer is the way that we are included and used in this process. Prayer is the very DNA and fabric of our church, so please try to come to our various prayer meetings to pray for our church as a whole. Some people question if praying corporately is necessary. God does meet us individually and we must learn to pray on our own, but there is a special presence of God when His people gather. Matthew 18:20 says, *“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”* We want to cover every day in prayer, so we will be a church that prays.

IV. Who should we pray to? “the Lord of the harvest”

We are praying to the Lord of the harvest. This is our hope. We have to be faithful to our part, but at the end of the day, He is in control. We tend to think that we are the ones that are in charge of the harvest. Although this is true, we must remember that this is His harvest that He will raise.

A. He will raise the harvest

Evangelism is His work. We can't manipulate people to salvation or bring souls to Christ. No one can make a spiritually dead heart come alive but Jesus alone. That's why we pray to the Lord of the harvest, because He is the one that has to save. Prayer recognizes that this is His work.

B. He will reap the harvest

He has to disciple the people and raise quality laborers. He has to transform lives and hearts. He has to grow them to maturity in faith. Only God can bring them in and send them out. So, be faithful where you are until God calls you elsewhere. He is the one who has the authority under heaven and earth to harvest. So, we cry out in prayer and pray that God would continue using this church.

Conclusion

It's fitting that we're talking about prayer following the passing of CFC's spiritual mother and grandmother, Kim Jipsanim. Her calling was to pray, and I promise you that she has lifted you up by name to the heavenly Father. She prayed for our church. If you were ever near her, you caught the urgency to pray. She just so wanted us to learn to pray. She has carried us and covered us in prayer, and we are here because of her prayers. She has stored up prayers for us and our generation, but we've got to pick up the mantle and fill the void of prayer. As pastors, we make this covenant with you to do our best to carry the mantle of prayer. But we cannot do this alone. Worship team, make sure that we keep the line and you cover your singing in spirit-saturated prayer. Education ministry, cover and chase after your students in prayer, because each child matters. Parents, raise your children to become people that would die for the gospel and leave a legacy of faith. Make sure that the most important thing that you leave behind is your prayers for them. Small group leaders and seminarians planning to go into ministry, lead and be people of prayer. Make sure there is fire saturated in prayer covering your Bible study. Older people in CFC, keep the line and take up the mantle of prayer. Don't let your training go to waste and lead the church through your prayers. We will not let the lamp of prayer die on our watch. We will keep the line that Jipsanim has been pushing us to keep. Praying, fighting, and leading in this way is biblical. In Acts 4, when they had prayed, begged, cried out, and earnestly prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken. CFC, may we shake the ground of Champaign-Urbana.