

The Prayer of Mission

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[0 : 0 0] Well, the prayer, give me Scotland or I die, came from the lips of John Knox, the Scottish! reformer, and it expresses Knox's great burden for his beloved Scotland. So John Knox was! willing to devote his life to working for the salvation of the people of Scotland.

And God did, in fact, greatly use John Knox in the 16th century to bring about not just a reformation in the church, but also a transformation in Scottish society. In fact, such was the impact of Knox that Mary, Queen of Scots, is reputed to have said, I fear the prayers of John Knox more than all the assembled armies of Europe. And we know that Knox prayed hard and Knox worked hard and against much opposition in order to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ in Scotland.

And Knox took no credit for the spiritual or for the social reformation that took place in the 16th century, but in words ascribed to others, he explained, God gave his Holy Spirit to simple men in great abundance. Now, if you're here this afternoon and would call yourself a Christian, I wonder if you long for people to come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. That is why we planted Christ Church Glasgow, and that is why we are involved in planting a new church in the Merchant City, and why our denomination, the Free Church of Scotland, seeks to see a healthy gospel church in every community in Scotland. And so the question is, well, how is this going to happen? Because the spiritual need is so great in our land that we might be overwhelmed at the thought of the task that Jesus gives to us. And so that's why we're doing this mini-series on the mission of the church, to remind ourselves what Jesus sends us out into the world to do. And today, we're going to see how his mission, the mission of Jesus Christ involves prayer. So Jesus said in Luke chapter 10, verse 2, and David prayed that prayer in his prayer for others. Jesus said, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. So it's a mission prayer, isn't it? About the expansion of the kingdom of God in this world. Now, we know that Jesus gave us what we call the Lord's Prayer, and we pray that prayer every Sunday, if not every second Sunday. But this is the other Lord's Prayer, another prayer of Jesus. And in fact, I think it is the only other time in the Gospels where Jesus tells us explicitly and specifically what to pray for. And so this afternoon, I hope that studying this prayer together will encourage us to make it our frequent prayer, a prayer of mission. So three points we're going to think about are the opportunity. The harvest is plentiful. The challenge, but the workers are few. And then the prayer, ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. The opportunity, the challenge, and the prayer. Let's look first of all at the opportunity. Jesus said the harvest is plentiful. So let's just get the context to see what Jesus means. Look at verse 1. He says, Look, after this, the Lord appointed 72 others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. Okay, that's the beginning of Luke chapter 10. But at the beginning of Luke chapter 9, Jesus sent out the 12. So the 12 are his disciples, the apostles. They're chosen as the future leaders of the church. So they were sent out to, in chapter 9, do three things, proclaim the kingdom of God to drive out demons and to heal the sick. But the 12 clearly were not enough for the job.

[4 : 3 8] More people were needed. And so now at the beginning of Luke chapter 10, Jesus appoints another 72. So they go out two by two and they go ahead of Jesus to every time and place where Jesus was about to go. Now, only Luke records this mission trip, the mission of the 72. And the number 72 is not insignificant. In fact, it echoes the number of nations of the world in Genesis chapter 10 that spread out over the earth after the flood. And so Jesus is on a mission, his mission, and he sends his people out on that mission. And it is a mission that will advance beyond Israel to the world, to the ends of the earth.

So what is Jesus's mission? Well, Jesus ultimately came into this world to save people. And this mission in Luke comes through the announcement that the kingdom of God is near.

And if you notice that twice in the passage that we read. So Jesus has now arrived in this world, and now is the time to welcome people in to the kingdom of God. And so Jesus sends his people out and tells them the harvest is plentiful. So Jesus sees people as ripe and as ready to be welcomed into God's kingdom. And so there's a great harvest of people just waiting to be gathered in.

But there are too few workers to do the job. Now this is obviously an agricultural picture that Jesus gives us here, where the image is of this massive field of corn that is heavy and is ready for the scythe, but there's not enough laborers to bring it in. And it's a striking picture because there is people instead of corn who are ripe and ready for collection. Now that was then, and this is now, but today is still a time of tremendous opportunity. In fact, every day is a day of tremendous opportunity until the day that Jesus Christ returns. The world is still a vast harvest. It is full of people who are in desperate need of salvation, the salvation that comes from Jesus Christ, whether it's the towns that Jesus and the 72 visited back then, or the cities and towns and villages that we inhabit today, whether it's Glasgow or Gaza, the Merchant City or Milton, Partick or Postle. People need to hear the good news of Jesus. So as we apply this to ourselves, the message is the harvest is plentiful. And so the opportunity is there, here, to reach out to people with the good news of Jesus Christ. Now, of course, there are plenty of people whose hearts are hardened and plenty of people who are not interested in Jesus

Christ. And so they won't respond positively to the message of Jesus. And we saw this last week when Neil preached from the parable of the sower. And yet, according to Jesus, there are people who are waiting and ready to be welcomed into the kingdom of God, which means that there are people out there who are not as opposed to the message of Jesus Christ, as we might think, and who are actually interested in finding out more. In fact, there has been much reported over the past year about how the secular tide seems to be turning, where Christianity now is much more prominent in the public square, and even appears to be undergoing some kind of revival or beginnings of a revival here in the West, as academics and influencers are increasingly discussing the value of the Christian faith and the need for the Christian faith. I guess you've probably heard of Joe Rogan, the American podcaster. If you haven't heard of him, you probably should, because I realized that his podcast, the Joe Rogan Experience, is the number one podcast in the world, with millions of subscribers and probably billions of listeners. And his podcasts are basically lengthy conversations with different people on a host of different subjects. And one of last week's podcasts of his, when it dropped, it was a conversation with a Christian historian and apologist called Wesley Huff. And in this podcast, there was a discussion about the historical reliability of the Bible, how you can trust it, how it came together, and also a discussion on the person and work of Jesus Christ, his historicity, and also the reliability of the resurrection. And it was an over three-hour discussion with a Christian and somebody who wasn't a Christian, but who was really interested in discovering more about the Bible and about Jesus.

[10:36] And so this is happening out there. And of course, I'm sure you're aware that it's happening around you too. That there are members of your family and people in your friendship groups who are not as some of us might think antagonistic to Christianity but who are actually interested in Christianity.

Listen to this message I got from a friend recently. He sent me a text. Ever since then I felt really connected to the spiritual world and was wondering if I could come along on a Sunday. The world works like this at times and I feel like it's crying out for me to go. A friend who something sad had happened in his life and his gut reaction was to reach out to God by way of response. And ever since we've had great conversations about Jesus and the Bible together and you will know many more people like him. And I don't know perhaps that's where you're at yourself this afternoon.

Not quite sure what to believe when it comes to Christianity but actually really interested and wanting to find out more. Well that is not surprising because remember the words of Jesus, the harvest is plentiful. And so some are ready to hear about the good news of Jesus. Even some are ready to respond in faith to the good news of Jesus. And so that's Jesus' analysis of the situation.

[12:15] It is that there is a shortage of workers to engage with people about the message about him. And so that takes us to our second point. The first is the opportunity. The harvest is plentiful.

The second point is the challenge. But the workers are few. So Jesus has outlined this huge opportunity but then it comes with a huge challenge. And the challenge is there's just a shortage of

people to do the work that Jesus wants to be done in this world. So Jesus chose 12 and then he appointed 72 and then he tells them to pray for more because still there weren't enough people. Because people need to be gathered in to the kingdom of God. And we know as the church that it is the Lord's plan and purpose to use people, to use his people, to do that work of gathering others into the kingdom of God.

So as the church scatters the seed of the word of God out into this vast harvest field, God uses it to bring in the harvest. He's the one that does the work but he uses his people to do it. And so the question we might ask is, well, why so few workers? Why is that? Why wouldn't you want to work for the best boss in the world? He's the one who owns the biggest corporation? And he's the one who gives the best pay. Not financial pay. But there's more to pay than it just being about money. And perhaps the reason why there are so few workers is because following Jesus is always costly. You'll know that whether you've been a Christian for a short time or for a long time. And so if we devote ourselves and our lives to working for Jesus, then it will be dangerous. And that's actually the job description that Jesus gives to the mission team he sends out in Luke chapter 10, verse 3. He says,

Go, I'm sending you out like lambs among wolves. Not only that, it is also going to require sacrifice. And it's also going to need a single-mindedness. Verse 4, do not take a purse or bag or sandals and do not greet anyone on the road. Not only that, because of what you believe, if you profess to be a Christian, and because of what you say, then there are some places where you just won't be welcome. Look at verse 10. But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into the streets and say, even the dust of your time we wipe off from our feet. Now, no doubt the reasons here are reasons why people don't rush into signing up to work for Jesus. But the need for more workers is just as urgent now as it was back in Jesus' day. And so Jesus not only alerts us to the situation, but he urges us to do something about it. He tells us to pray and he tells us to go. Because although witness to Jesus Christ began around 2,000 years ago, the fact is there are still billions of unreached people around the world today. Vast areas of our globe where people know nothing about Jesus.

Even in countries that have had a rich Christian heritage in the past, countries like Scotland, today there's great ignorance when it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Scotland's now considered to be a post-Christian nation. In the 2022 Scottish census, only 38.8 of Scotland's population said they were Christian. And this is down from 54% in 2011. But then when you consider the declining evangelical population in Scotland, which is now down to less than 3%. It's tragic. And if this decline continues, then Scotland will fit the Joshua Project's criteria for being an unreached people group. [17:07] The Joshua Project is an organization that highlights the people and the places that are in the people and the people and the people and the people and the people and the people and the people in Scotland with no access to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And they have no access because the workers are few. Let me just highlight this in our own denomination that David prayed for, the Free Church of Scotland.

Here is one of the National Day of Prayer, prayer points. And I quote, There are currently 14 ministers in training across our denomination. Good thanks for this provision.

To fill our vacancies and to plant new churches, we need around 70 new ministers in the next 10 years. Pray that the Lord raises up new leaders to serve the church. 70 leaders in the next 10 years.

Where are those people going to come from? Because clearly there is not enough people to devote their working time, their working lives to reach the swathes of people who need to hear about Jesus.

Now, of course, we can't reach all of these people by ourselves, but there are some people that we can reach, family members, friends, neighbors, colleagues, classmates. But the point is, the diagnosis of Jesus is still the same.

[18:51] The workers are few. And so before we think that it's just down to human effort and that it solely depends on us, that we've got to do something and we can do something, just listen carefully to Jesus's words.

So we're to pray to the Lord of the harvest. It's his harvest because it's his harvest field that we're to work in.

In other words, the Lord is responsible for the growth of his kingdom and he is responsible for sending workers out into his harvest field.

It all ultimately depends on him. So the Lord is in control. And so the mission advance is not determined by our sheer human effort as if we just needed more people.

And if they just worked a bit harder, then we'd get results. No. But as we pray to the Lord of the harvest and pray for workers, the Lord sends them out.

[20 : 07] So he is the director of mission. The harvest is his. The appointing is his. The sending is his. And so the results are his.

He takes responsibility for the whole enterprise. And yet he's still got a job to do for his workers. Workers can't produce the harvest.

But workers are needed to bring the harvest in. And that is as much of a challenge as it is a comfort because it means there's no excuse for not getting involved in the mission of Jesus.

Now the primary application here is for gospel workers, for those who will devote their lives full time, their working lives to serve Jesus in gospel ministry.

That's who Jesus tells us to be praying for. But there is obviously an application here for every Christian. So even if you're not a full time gospel worker, and even if you will never be a full time gospel worker because of age or circumstances or whatever, it doesn't mean gospel work is primarily the responsibility of those who get paid for it.

[21 : 31] Or that we should never really be called to be making any kind of sacrifices for gospel work. Because we all need to shoulder the burden of responsibility in the mission of Jesus.

And that might be serving as an elder in church or serving as a deacon. It might mean leading a particular ministry. It might mean volunteering in a certain area.

And so whether it is word ministry or welcome duty, there's a sense in which we all need to step up to the plate and be a worker in the mission of Jesus because the opportunity is so great.

Now, of course, if we profess to be a Christian, then we are all part of the mission team of Jesus.

And yet this passage is saying we still need to be active in it.

Active by praying and active by going and active by doing. So by way of application, my question is, what could you do in response to Jesus' call to pray for more workers?

[22 : 53] Could it be that the Lord is calling you to full-time gospel work? Could it be that there's a desire in your heart not just to pray for gospel workers, but actually to become a gospel worker?

And maybe that's been something that God has been stirring in your heart for a while. Maybe a Christian leader has suggested this to you.

Or an older, wiser Christian has said, I wonder if you should think about using your time, using your gifts to serve God. And don't dismiss any of this if this has come to you, even if now's not the right time.

You should do something about it. But even if full-time gospel work isn't the Lord's calling for your life, because it's not for everybody, then could it be that he's calling you to use your time, or to use your talents, or to use your treasures, and to invest them in his work in a greater way?

Now, of course, we've all got demands on our lives, careers, families, mortgages, hobbies, interests, whatever.

[24 : 19] All worthy of our time, all worthy of our investment, all things that need to be done. But perhaps the words of Jesus here are a direct challenge to your life right now.

Because you've always had your hopes, your dreams, your desires, your plans, your priorities.

And then Jesus confronts us with his priorities. And so we need to readjust our lives to fit with what he wants, rather than what we have always wanted or been working towards.

And if Jesus' words are a challenge, then don't leave it there. Do something about it. C.T. Studd, who is a missionary, a missionary to China, to India, and to Africa, said this, Only one life, it will soon be passed.

Only what's done for Christ will last. And so there is an opportunity. Secondly, there is a challenge. And thirdly, there is a prayer, the prayer of Jesus.

[25 : 33] Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. So if neither the opportunity nor the challenge has changed, then Jesus' prayer doesn't change either.

Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. So the mission of Jesus continues until the day that Jesus returns.

And so we're to keep praying for the provision of more workers. And I think it's to the extent that we're burdened for those who are outside the kingdom of God, who we want to come in, that we will make the prayer of mission that Jesus gives a priority.

And so it's worth asking, well, how do we gauge whether this priority that Jesus gives us, this prayer, is a focus of our prayers?

I think it's fairly easy. We just need to work out how much of the time that we spend praying is spent praying for ourselves and our needs and our desires and our wants and our wishes, and how much time do we spend praying kingdom-focused, kingdom-centered prayers like Jesus calls us to.

[26 : 55] Prayer that is about people coming to salvation in Jesus Christ. And so, Christ Church Glasgow, how can we obey Jesus' command to pray this prayer of mission?

Well, two ways. First of all, corporately, and then personally. So first, corporately. We can obey this prayer by, on our Sunday worship services, regularly be praying in line with Luke chapter 10, verse 2, as David did in our prayer for others.

So we don't just pray the Lord's Prayer in our services, but we pray this other Lord's Prayer. And then at our prayer meeting, our central prayer meeting, once a month, we pray Luke chapter 10, verse 2, all the time.

Because we want to ensure our prayers are focused on God's kingdom and His work. So we should pray Jesus' prayer corporately, but we should also pray it personally.

So let me suggest a good way to get into the habit of doing this. And this is something that we have done as church planters in the Free Church of Scotland, where we set an alarm on our phones.

[28 : 14] It's going to come up on the screen. Set an alarm on our phones where each day we would pray Luke chapter 10, verse 2, at two minutes past 10 in the morning, praying that God would raise up new workers and praying for fruit from gospel work.

It's a good habit. I'm sure we could all do it. It's not difficult. But it keeps our minds and our lives focused on what Jesus sends us into the world to do.

But bear in mind, if you do pray this prayer, you find that it is actually a dangerous prayer to pray. Notice what happened to the 72 in Luke chapter 10.

He appointed them, Jesus did, and they prayed this prayer, and it became a self-answering prayer. Because what happened after Jesus told them to pray it?

Well, they went out and they did it. And so it may be that as you pray this prayer, you become the answer to it. And it was certainly a strong factor in my own call to ministry.

[29 : 32] That as I prayed this prayer for God to send other people out to serve him, God send them and them and them, send them, I then sensed a strong call to go myself.

And so as we pray this prayer corporately, or as we pray this prayer personally, I think we should actively be looking around Christchurch Glasgow to see the next generation of gospel workers being raised up, praying with expectation that God would answer our prayers from within our own church family.

Because it is wonderful to imagine that here at CCG, we've got the opportunity to be the answer to the mission prayer of Jesus.

So we are a church that trains gospel workers, and we are a church that sends out gospel workers, but we can also be a church that raises up gospel workers, ministers, church planters, missionaries. Yes, of course. But also Christian men and women and young people who are ready and willing to serve the Lord by pointing the people they know to Jesus Christ.

[30 : 52] Because we all need Jesus. There is nothing more important in life than knowing him as our Savior. And when we have tasted his salvation and we have been welcomed into his kingdom, then there is nothing better for us to do with our lives.

No better way to invest our lives than sharing Jesus with other people. Where the motivation to do this, to give our lives in his service, comes from the one who gave his life for us on the cross.

Let's pray.