

EVERY HOME FOR CHRIST SCHOOL OF PRAYER

HARVEST PRAYER – STEPHEN VENABLE

I. THE NATIONS

“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” (Luke 10:1–2)

A. The Crisis

1. The Problem of Sin

- a. The problem that salvation answers is not primarily human discontentment. We are not just being saved from our unhappiness. We are being saved from wrath that is rightly due us because of our treasonous rebellion away from our created purpose of giving glory to God and toward all manner of self-gratification (*cf.* Rom. 3:23, etc.).
- b. The chief crisis that the Great Commission is intended to remedy is *not* that men are going to be judged and sent to a lake of fire forever. The impending doom of the unregenerate masses *is surely a crisis*, but the ultimate mission of God driving the Great Commission addresses the crisis that is actually causing a compassionate Creator to send them to the lake of fire.
- c. God will be glorified by *all* of His creation, in *all* ways, and for *all* time. The heavens and the earth were fashioned to magnify Him exhaustively, incessantly, and eternally. A horrendous rebellion compromised this purpose, but God is on a mission to rectify that. His purpose is unstoppable, and His cause will triumph.
- d. As we cast our eyes upon the nations, we behold thousands of unreached people groups and billions of souls who have never heard the gospel and do not worship their Maker who came in the flesh and was crucified on their behalf.
- e. Then, if we consider the tiny percentage of the missionary work force working in the regions of the earth where a witness of Jesus is most needed, we find ourselves in caught in the grip of the words of Jesus - *the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few.*

2. The Great Imbalance

We live in an age of information. Our over-saturation with figures and statistics means that we need to be very intentional about actually connecting our hearts to the reality behind these numbers.¹

a. Unreached People Groups and Population²

There are approximately 7,000 unreached people groups consisting of roughly 2.8 billion people. This represents over 40% of the total population of the earth.

b. Global Christian Population

There are approximately 2.2 billion Christians worldwide (Catholic, Orthodox, Coptic, Protestant, etc.). There are around 78,000 Evangelical Christians for every unreached people group, and 900 Evangelical churches for every unreached people group.

c. Missionaries and Workers

There are an estimated 400,000 missionaries in the earth, and 5.5 million full-time Christian workers. Approximately 13,000 missionaries (3%) and 20,000 local workers (.37 %) currently labor among the unreached. Therefore, of nearly 6 million in vocational ministry, only 33,000 (.6 %) are focused on the 40% of the earth’s population that is considered unreached.

¹ These figures are based directly (and with much gratitude) on statistics from www.travelingteam.org/stats which includes a detailed list of the various sources used to produce their findings.

² A people group is defined sociologically as cultural entity that is distinct or unique based on ethnic, linguistic, or geographic limitations to the spreading of the gospel. A people group is *unreached* when less than 2% of the population is evangelical Christian.

d. Conclusions

The number of those focused specifically on the evangelization of the unreached people groups of the earth is .0015 % of the total Christian population in the world. If everyone is obeying God's 'calling', then God is calling 99.9985 % of His people on the earth to either stay exactly where they are or to minister to the 60% of the earth's population with a significantly greater access to the gospel. When we compare this to the final words of Jesus before His ascension, we must realize that we are grappling with an almost incomprehensible issue of disobedience on the part of the Church. Truly, *the laborers are few.*

And Jesus...spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28:18–20

B. The Remedy

1. The Prescription from Heaven

- a. We must brace ourselves for what follows next. Jesus does not fall silent after identifying this grim crisis. If the Maker of all things took on flesh and uttered a remedy to the grave, treasonous plight of the unregenerate nations, would we not be wise to give it the utmost attention? Should we not direct all of our energies toward obedience to this great "answer" to this problem of global and eternal consequences?
- b. Would not our chief concern be to make sure that no matter what the cost, we would not neglect the prescription offered from heaven to the horrific malady of blasphemy and idolatry that fills the earth?

And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Luke 10:1–2)

- c. *Pray!* The sole response to the lack of laborers that was specifically commanded by Jesus was *prayer*. There it stands, in its simplicity and singularity, challenging all of the complicated apparatus of the modern missions world.

2. The Testimony of the Fathers

"Every step in the progress of missions is directly traceable to prayer." A.T. Pierson

"Prayer is the mighty engine that is to move the missionary work." A.B. Simpson

"The history of missions is the history of answered prayer. It is the key to the whole mission problem. All human means are secondary." Samuel Zwemer

II. HARVEST PRAYER

A. Praying for the Laborers - the New Testament Pattern

1. The example and instruction given by the New Testament is consistently to *pray for the church* and for *the messengers sent out by the church*. Paul offers prayer for believers in various cities and then requests prayer from them for his ministry of proclamation. This agrees exactly with the specific nature of the command of Jesus. The nations will be reached through human vessels.
2. In 1792 the Missionary Baptist Society was founded in the English home of Andrew Fuller. As a small band of men spoke of the 'heathen nations' and compared them to the dark abyss of a mine, William Carey uttered the famous words, "*I will go down, but you must hold the rope.*" The next year Carey set sail for India with his wife and son. This is a picture of our duty in intercession.

B. Gripped by God – a Vision for Personal and Corporate Prayer for Harvest

1. *Power and Persistence* – the challenge of personal prayer
2. *Priority and Perpetual* – the challenges of corporate prayer