

You know what is weird about prayer?

Matthew 9:35-38

o8.o2.o9

One of the things I struggle with often is the question: “Why doesn’t God do more?!?”

- Which slowly becomes: “Why don’t I do more?”
- Which also becomes: “Why don’t we do more?”

One out of 100 believers has any meaningful involvement in the Great Commission¹

- But, imagine the difference that would be made if that shifted from just one to two believers out of 100
- That seems small—but it would be doubling the resources and people
- Is this something we should pray for?
- Does God need to do this? Or do we need to do this?

Our text today highlights that delicate interplay between God doing and us doing

- It gives us an invitation to participate in a unique (and perhaps unexpected) way

v e r s e 3 5

Jesus is doing *His* work

- Teaching, proclaiming, healing
 - Teaching in their synagogues
 - Proclaiming the good news of the kingdom
 - Healing every kind of disease and sickness

v e r s e 3 6

Jesus takes note of the multitudes

- Distressed, downcast, like sheep without a shepherd

He is the Lord of compassion

- Isaiah 38:18
Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you,
And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you
For the LORD is a God of justice;
How blessed are all those who long for Him.
- In the Gospels he was always moved with compassion

a. Maybe you are here today and you need compassion...

b. Do we have compassion for these type of people? Who are they?

- Here is the twist

¹ Jason Mandryk, “The State of the Gospel” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 367.

Notice that Jesus does a couple of unexpected things here:

1. He asks them to prayer—but not necessarily work
2. He asks them to pray for workers—but not necessarily for the people with the problems

Strange right?

- Normally you would think:
 - “Okay, lots of people with lots of problems. Let’s roll up our sleeves and get to work”
 - Or: “Let’s pray for the people and all their problems. Let’s ask God to fix it.”
 - After all, Jesus had already been doing that very thing in **verse 35**

But Jesus

1. Asks them to pray—not work
2. Asks them to pray for workers—not the people

What’s going on?

- Why even ask the disciples to do anything?
 - I was speaking at a pastor’s conference sometime ago and there were several other speakers and one of them taught that God needs us to do His work.
 - I was reading a commentary on Matthew by Warren Wiersbe (whom I love) and he wrote, about this passage: “[Jesus] **could not do the work alone—he needed others to help him.**”²
 - **I don’ think it is a need thing**
 - **I think it is a love thing... (He is sharing His heart with us, not just His work)**

Okay, but notice (concerning this love thing)

- He doesn’t just invite us to **do stuff**—He invites us to **pray stuff**
- Because:
 - “Prayer to God is not a way to get things from God, **but so that we may get to know God.**”³
 - Cf. The priority of Mark 3:13-15
 - 13 **And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him.**
 - 14 **And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach,**
 - 15 **and to have authority to cast out the demons.**
 - Notice the above priority
- The issue is not so much **doing** as it is **being** (Cf. Martha and Mary)

² Warren Wiersbe, *Be Loyal* Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1980), 63.

³ Oswald Chambers, *If You Will Ask: Reflections on the power of prayer* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1985), 10.

- Once they had **been with Him** they would be able to preach for and about Him
 - “When we pray as He commanded, we will see what he saw, feel what he felt, and do what he did.”⁴ (Warren Wiersbe)

God loves to bless people

But even more, He loves to bless people in response to prayer

Genesis 20

- During Abraham and Sarah's journey king Abimelech took Sarah to be his own
- God busted Him and threatened to kill him, but said:
Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die. (v. 7)
 - Why not just let him live when he returned Sarah?
 - God was willing to do that
 - Why does God force prayer to be part of the equation?

Ezekiel 36

- God is promising Israel that He will one day restore the nation
 - It is God's will to do so
- But, again, He will not do it without prayer
37 Thus says the Lord GOD, "**This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them:** I will increase their men like a flock.
38 Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the waste cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they will know that I am the LORD.
 - God wanted to do it and promised He would do it
 - But not without Israel asking Him to do it

Back to our text in Matthew 9

- Jesus saw the multitudes, He knew He wanted to heal them and care for them, and He had already been doing so in v. 35
- But now He wanted to do it **in response to prayer**

God loves to bless people (vv. 35-36)—but even more, He loves to bless them in response to prayer (vv. 37-38)!

Again, it is not a need issue—it is a love issue.

- “Prayer to God is not a way to get things from God, but so that we may get to know God.”⁵

What this does is moves prayer away from being **utilitarian** to being **relational**

There is no way around this fact: *the more we cultivate our prayer lives the more we experience of Christ's life.*

- The life of Christ in us is the one thing we all want more of
- Prayer is the one thing we all struggle to do enough of

⁴ Wiersbe, 64.

⁵ Oswald Chambers, *If You Will Ask: Reflections on the power of prayer* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1985), 10.

There is both a **centripetal** and **centrifugal** effect that happens in our relationship with God

- God is always pulling us in
- And pushing us out
- In that order

It is possible to pray for the well-being or salvation of a friend or other and let our concern stop with our prayer

- But if we earnestly pray Lord to send someone to them, we cannot help becoming open to being that someone (at least possibly)
- When we draw near to God's heart, we catch God's heart, we put ourselves at His disposal to at least possibly becoming one of the **workers in the Lord's harvest**

In the disciples case: They would not pray to long before they themselves were the answer to prayer

“When we pray as He commanded, we will see what he saw, feel what he felt, and do what he did.”⁶

How can we be responsible with this passage?

Because **if** what we see here is true: That prayer changes things

- And it does (Otherwise it would be the dumbest thing in the world for Jesus to ask us to pray for Him to send workers)

Then we have a Christ-caused responsibility to pray for workers (which = helping others)

- As a church we are responding to this by praying for and planting churches
 - Because this is Christ's strategy
 - New churches are most effective at evangelism
- Reached people group = church planting movement
- As individuals, how are we responding and being responsible?
 - Because of who Christ is

This morning though, I really think God wants to manifest His compassion...

⁶Wiersbe