

THE RADICAL RABBI: A RADICAL RECRUITMENT (Matthew 9:35-38)

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INTRODUCTION

Help wanted. We see those signs all around us, along with similar displays advertising that such and such a company is “hiring.” Advertising for help is nothing new; did you know that the first “help wanted” ad to appear in a US newspaper dates all the way back to 1705? A newspaper called the “Boston News-Letter” advertised for “a single man to drive a team in Boston.” But often these ads were dispersed throughout a newspaper; they weren’t grouped together as we would see today, meaning that you might have to read all the advertisements scattered throughout an entire paper to find any notices for help wanted. But such ads were growing in popularity; in 1790, President George Washington advertised that his family had the need of a cook and a coachman.

Somewhere in the 1830s, the idea of “clumping” — putting “help wanted” ads in one section of the newspaper — began to take hold, but it wasn’t really until the 1850s that such a practice became relatively uniform for all papers. And that “clumping” of ads has gone through several evolutions — dividing ads by gender (specific ads only for men or only for women) and race (ads looking for specific ethnicities to apply). And another thing: For most of the 1700s, when answering an ad, you wouldn’t contact the employer; you would instead make your inquiries to the postmaster, or maybe the printer of the paper. It wasn’t until around 1795 that ads began to include an employer’s street address, where an applicant could apply in person. And recommendations — or references — so common today, didn’t really begin to trend until around 1805. And even then, that was the only thing an employer might ask about; assets like education or previous experience didn’t begin to be requested until much later.

Of course, sometimes what people want help with is just weird. Here are four actual in print “help wanted” ads that I found. I promise you; I am not making any of this up.

- 1) **WANTED:** Someone to go back in time with me. This is not a joke. You’ll get paid after we get back. Must bring your own weapons. Safety not guaranteed. I have only done this once before.
- 2) **WANTED:** Someone to grind or chew hay for horse with bad teeth.
- 3) **WANTED:** Grape stompers. Must have good balance and large feet. Skinny folk need not apply.
- 4) **WANTED:** A volunteer to work as a scarecrow in a field (weekends only). No previous experience is needed as full training will be given. Must be able to stand up for several hours without a break and have no fear of birds.
- 5) **“BONUS” WANTED:** Surgeon for a new health clinic opening in the area. No experience necessary. Must have own tools.

Today we are going to be talking about a “help wanted” ad. The potential employer? None other than Jesus Christ Himself. It’s a brief conversation that He had with His disciples as recorded by the disciple Matthew — and it also sets the stage for what the disciples would be enabled to start doing very soon. So, let’s begin studying this extremely important conversation with **a moment of prayer.**

TEXT (Matthew 9:35-38)

Jesus went through all the towns and villages [of Galilee] — Matthew 9:35a.

Jesus is essentially “on tour,” appearing in every Galilean town and village He could. Now while the first-century Jewish historian Josephus suggested in his writings that there may have been over 200 villages in Galilee at that time (a number most modern historians dispute), no matter the number, Jesus was presenting Himself and the kingdom of heaven to everybody He could.

[Jesus was] teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom — Matthew 9:35b.

This reflected a good portion of Christ’s overall mission, as He explained it to Pilate just before His crucifixion: ***“For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world — to bear witness to the truth” — Jesus Christ, John 18:37b (ESV).*** This was also something that had been prophesied by Isaiah 700 years before Christ’s life on earth, when he wrote: ***The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners — Isaiah 61:1.*** All of this made up “the good news of the kingdom.”

[A]nd [Jesus was] healing every disease and sickness — Matthew 9:35b.

Again, this had been a prophesied, promised aspect of Christ’s mission. Through the Holy Spirit, David had been able to see this day coming, writing: ***Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits — who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases — David, Psalm 103:2-3.*** Some four centuries later, the prophet Jeremiah provided these wonderful words of great expectations: ***Heal me, Lord, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for You are the one I praise — Jeremiah 17:14.*** And then the prophet quoted God Himself to underscore the truth of His word: ***“I will restore you to health and heal your wounds” — God speaking, Jeremiah 30:17a.***

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

Now there were always a couple of “givens” that were beyond dispute whenever Jesus was out in public. One was that He would always be surrounded by crowds, and the other was that He would always be treating these crowds with compassion. Now of course, His healings were one of the most visible displays of His compassion. But Christ’s teachings, while always being done with unheard of authority and unthinkable knowledge, were also presented from the standpoint of somebody who understood His audience, who had empathy for them, and who had compassion for them as well.

In fact, the Greek helps us hear His compassion. To be “proclaiming” was to be acting as a herald. Remember in the Middle Ages, the guy coming out with the latest words of the king, getting everybody’s attention by crying, “Hear ye! Hear ye!” The Greek word for that proclaiming is “kerusso.” If that word seems oddly familiar to you, like maybe you’ve seen it someplace before, a number of my “message” shirts are made by a company called “Kerusso.” But the word itself means to literally be a public crier, to be proclaiming something with all the force and passion and dynamism required to make sure that everybody in that audience hears it. And that is a wonderful picture of Christ’s compassion, that He

wants to ensure that everybody possible hears the “good news” — the gospel — of the kingdom.

But the compassion of Jesus goes even deeper — literally. The Greek word for “compassion” means literally to “have the bowels yearn,” suggesting a passion that literally is felt right down to your insides. For Christ, His compassion for everyone in those crowds was palpable; He could feel it through and through into His deepest, innermost emotions. He was passionate that people hear His message; He was passionate that people would respond to His message. He wanted these people in His kingdom — and He was the way, the only way, to be brought into that kingdom.

And, at the same time, His compassion was mixed with sadness, seeing that they were both downcast and outcast — downcast by the often overwhelming burdens of their lives, and outcast by the “shepherds” they had — the religious leaders — who saw everybody around them as beneath them, leaving the people making up these crowds totally alone and unable to change anything. As a result, what Jesus saw was a people spiritually lost, with no idea how to get home, very literally like sheep without a shepherd. He came to change all that, which is what drove Him from village to village, all over Galilee — always teaching, always healing, always with compassion.

And watching all of this were His disciples. But Jesus didn’t just want them watching; He wanted them involved as well. He didn’t want them to be spectators; He wanted them to be players. He wanted them to understand that His mission is their mission, and so He spoke to them: ***“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 9:37.***

He affirms to them what He Himself has seen: There is an absolutely massive crop all around them, a great quantity of souls for the kingdom that is absolutely ready to be harvested and taken in. But there’s a problem: a worker shortage. There is more work to be done than there are workers to do it.

“Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 9:38.

So, what’s the solution? Exactly what you would do on any job site — talk to the boss, the owner of the harvest. But according to the Greek, this is also an incredibly passionate plea; to “pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest” is quite literally to beg, to bind ourselves to that request in our petitioning for workers — which very much reflects the same passion as Jesus felt for the crowds He saw. We are to beg God for workers to both be brought in and then to be sent out, to accomplish the task of harvesting that God has in mind, in the fields which God owns and has seen becoming ready for His ingathering.

APPLICATION

OK; so now we know that Christ has hung out a “help wanted” sign. He’s placed an ad in His paper — the Bible. So how do we answer that call? The answer actually comes best from understanding what surrendering our lives to Jesus has placed in us — His Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit has two main functions: (1) to present us before God as being pleasing in His perfect sight, completely clean from sin, and (2) to transform us into the image of Christ. And it’s that second function that comes into play for us here.

To be transformed into the image of Christ ultimately means to see the world as Jesus does, to love the world as Jesus does, and to respond to the world as Jesus does. So, let's look at those individually.

To see the world as Jesus does is spelled out very clearly by Christ toward the end of His talk with Nicodemus, where He says: ***“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him” — Jesus Christ, John 3:17.*** He came to save the world, not judge it. And as God's Son, He had every right to judge every last bit of sin He saw around Him. But He didn't. Why? Because His Father had another idea in mind — and Jesus was obedient to His Father's will. So, instead of judging, He saw people struggling, helpless, as He said, ***“like sheep without a shepherd” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 9:36b.*** He saw their lives as the consequences of living in their own strength, in their own ideas — quite separated from any kind of real relationship with their God. So, everything that Jesus did or said was a direct outcome of seeing a world in need of salvation and restoration.

So, for us, that means that we absolutely fight against sin, but we wage that fight by being a means of God's changing sinners through Christ. And how do we do that? Planting seeds, God's seeds of new life through Christ, every chance we get. Seeing the world as Jesus does means that we see fields in need of seed that God alone can cause to grow. Change that lasts into eternity will never be achieved in government centers or at the ballot box. Change that lasts into eternity starts with our seeing a world so in need of the life-saving, life-changing presence of Jesus that we eagerly look for places to plant His seed, and then go and do it. Fields never move. Farmers have to bring their seed to the fields. So do we.

To love the world as Jesus does means to take the approach to everybody that Jesus took. While He certainly could have declared Himself to be the king of the world — and who was going to be able to stop Him — He came, instead, with some very clear objectives in mind, all of which were going to go back to that most basic foundation — to love the world. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus told His disciples that He came to be a servant: ***“[W]hoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for man” — Jesus Christ, Mark 10:43-45.*** He even washed His own disciples' feet once, telling them: ***“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” — Jesus Christ, John 13:14-15.*** How quick are we to see ourselves as servants to one another and to those around us? How quick are we to see ourselves even as willing slaves to another? That's the example of love and of putting all others ahead of ourselves that Jesus gave us.

And do you want to know how profoundly impacting love can be? Remember the Tate-LaBianca murders in Los Angeles in August 1969? A vicious, horrific scene of human slaughter. Five adult victims dying of multiple stab and gunshot wounds — plus the lost life of an unborn baby boy. And the perpetrators? Members of the so-called Charles Manson “family,” one of whose members, who participated in both nights of murder, was a 21-year-old girl named Patricia Krenwinkel. Found guilty for her part in the murders, she is still serving time in a women's prison in California as a now 73-year-old inmate. Here's what she had to say back in 2014 about her life: ***“I had to make the decision that everything I had***

believed was now wrong. I would now have to be fully responsible for the damage, the wreckage and the horror. It is countless how many lives were shattered by the path of destruction I was part of. And it all came from such a simple thing as just wanting to be loved” — Patricia Krenwinkel, 2014. You see, when this love-starved life met Charles Manson, he was the first one to tell her how beautiful she was. She had never heard that before. Think how different the world of several victims, and their families, would have been if somebody with Christ’s love had crossed paths with Patricia at that time in her life. Serving from a heart of love is what Jesus was all about. Seeing the world through Christ’s eyes means becoming that kind of servant — willing to serve in any way to reflect the love of Christ.

And last, to be transformed into the image of Christ also means responding to the world as Jesus would. Our world today is full of anger, mistrust, suspicion, hatred, greed and envy. Yesterday’s fender benders have become today’s road rages. The world seems to have only one way to respond — to anything — and that is to strike out and hurt whoever expresses opposition to you. And yet, when you consider that Jesus Christ was treated more unfairly than any human being in the history of human beings, how did He respond? **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”** — *Jesus Christ, Luke 23:34a* — saying that while hanging from the cross upon which they condemned Him. Remember that, when the mob came to Gethsemane to arrest Jesus, Peter grabbed his sword. What was Christ’s response? **“Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?** [Yes, He could do that; why didn’t He? His response:] **“But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”** — *Jesus Christ, Matthew 26:52-54*. Many years later, the memory of Christ’s response was still so impressed upon Peter’s heart that he was led by the Spirit to write: **When they hurled their insults at [Jesus], He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly** — *1 Peter 2:23*. In simple terms, Jesus’ response was all about reflecting His Father’s love, His plans, and His kingdom.

It’s such a simple, basic message that Jesus gives His disciples: “Guys, there’s a lot of work to do. The fields are looking great, so ready to be harvested. But I won’t be doing that work alone. I need you to come into the fields to work with me, and to work for me. The work may sometimes be hard, even scary, and appear to not give you much in return, but I promise you — the benefits are out of this world.”

And the world is crying for help — the spiritual 9-1-1 calls that we’ve talked about:

- 1) Both President Biden and community leaders have said virtually the same thing within the last couple of months when responding to the increase in gun violence in our country: “We need a change of heart.”
- 2) Within the last few days, three local chiefs of police in suburbs of the Twin Cities remarked on the “brazenness” of crime, often being committed in broad daylight with little fear or thought of consequences, and how officers are finding very little cooperation in even the most minor traffic stop.

And it’s into this world, in this time and in this place, that God has appointed us — coincidentally the same world that Jesus saw 2,000 years ago. Nothing has changed. People still stumble about completely lost, just like sheep who have no shepherd. And as Solomon so

wisely said some 2,900 years ago: *[T]here is nothing new under the sun — Ecclesiastes 1:9b*. But God has also been at work nonstop over all these years, getting seed planted in all kinds of fields, located all over the world. And now we're heading toward harvest time.

But in God's planning as shared in Christ's words, He is calling us to be the ones who work those fields, who bring in that harvest. And in calling us to work in His fields, He has never called us into only comfortable fields, or safe fields, or timely fields, or nearby fields. And He has not once asked for our permission to be called. He just wants us to go in obedience into the fields He owns. But it's not just the fields He owns; He owns us as well — our lives, our length of days, our gifts, our talents, our strengths, our weakness — it's all His. But here's the deal: If our focus going forward is on the comforts and good times of this world, and how working the fields might interfere with all that, then God's call through Christ will be a difficult one to sign up for. But, if our focus is on the eternal world waiting for us in heaven, then every Christian out there should be about ready to run each other over to get into those fields. Nothing but upside — literally.

CONCLUSION

This study has prompted two (2) questions as I was working my way through it:

- 1) Do you know how valuable you are? Not sure how often you're asked that question, but it's worth asking again: Do you know how valuable you are? Remember Paul's words: *[W]e are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do — Paul, Ephesians 2:10*. He's got a gig for us! And on this whole planet, there is nobody like you. And that is because God had in mind His plans, His fields, His outcomes, when He made you, when He made each one of us. Not only does He know us perfectly, but He put us together perfectly — exactly the way He wants us for exactly His perfect purpose. In God's eyes, we are valuable beyond imagination. He's made us that way!
- 2) Do you want everybody you see to be able to come into the Kingdom? Also not sure how often you've been asked that question, so here it is again: Do you want everybody you see to be able to come into the Kingdom? Think of all the people we see — in our daily lives, our workplaces, on TV, in the news, on movie screens, whatever. Do we want each one of those people in the Kingdom of God? Whatever their sins, whatever their causes, do we want them in the Kingdom of God? I must confess; I had some "face-planting" time to do before my Master this week because my answer to that question has too often been "no." Guess what? I was wrong! Jesus died because he wanted everybody possible into his Father's kingdom — of course not as sinners, but rather as sinners saved by the grace that could wash all those sins away and change all those lives, just like what he did for me. Our efforts for the Kingdom will never matter unless we want the same outcomes for the Kingdom that God does.

We are all called to work God's fields. That's not a burden. That's a gift — and an incredible blessing! Let's pray!