

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The Friends of Christ Part 5 John 15:16

There are many professing believers who as they go through life will make very little if any eternal difference in the lives of the people they meet. This is a tragedy in light of the desperate spiritual condition of those people. But it certainly does not have to be that way. But why can I say this?

I can say this because we have been called as professing believers into God's harvest field, not to fail but rather to succeed. This should not be simply our hope but our expectation.

And this brings us back to the passage that we have been considering for over a month. This brings us back to **John 15:12-16** and to Christ's discussion of friendship and more specifically to the things that should in fact characterize those who call themselves His friends. So what were those things?

The friends of Jesus will love one another (John 15:12-14).

The friends of Jesus will know divine truth (John 15:15).

The friends of Jesus did not choose Him but He chose them (John 15:15).

The friends of Jesus will bear fruit (John 15:16).

The friends of Jesus will have their prayers answered (John 15:16). But what prayers will He answer? He will answer those prayers that are prayed in His name. Isn't that exactly what Jesus said in **John 15:16**? And what does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus? It means that we are seeking to pray even as Jesus Himself would pray in any given situation, in other words it means that we seeking to pray according to His will. And what specifically is God's will for us in terms of His harvest according to **John 15:16**? It is God's will for us in Christ Jesus that we bear fruit.

So in light of the fact that Christ will answer the prayers prayed in His name, or in other words according to His will, and based on the fact that it is Christ's expressed will that we bear fruit, I would like this morning to ask the following question. How should we as the friends of Christ pray in light of Christ's expressed will that we bear fruit? This is the question that I would like us to focus on this morning. So what might be first thing that it might be a good thing for us to pray for?

We need to pray for workers (Matthew 9:35-38). When we begin to see the people around us as spiritually bankrupt and desperate for the good news of the gospel I believe that it will cause us to recognize that the work to be done far exceeds the present number of workers available and it will compel us to pray for more workers. And of course as we pray a prayer like this you know what will inevitably happen? We will inevitably find ourselves working in God's harvest field.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

I would like us to consider for a moment **Matthew 9:35-38**, beginning with **verse 35**. What does it say? **“And Jesus was going about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind sickness.”** This verse gives us a brief synopsis of Christ's early Galilean ministry.

And what do we learn about this ministry? We learn that Christ during this period did not limit himself to just a few cities but rather He was seeking to reach all the cities and villages in the greater Galilean area.

So exactly how big a task was this? The Galilean area is approximately 5000 square miles, or in other words a little over twice the area of the Antelope Valley and had a population of approximately 3 million people scattered about in 200 cities and villages, according to a Jewish historian named Josephus.

And what was Christ trying to do for all these people scattered in an area over 5000 square miles? The passage tells us. Jesus was seeking to teach them, and to proclaim to them the Gospel of the kingdom, and to heal them of every kind of disease and sickness. This is what He was doing.

And why would He have wanted to do this? He would have wanted to do this because He felt compassion for the Galilean people because He saw them as “distressed” and “downcast” like sheep without a shepherd.

Let me read for you **Matthew 9:36** **“And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.”**

What does the word “distressed” mean? The word “distressed” (SKULLO) means flaying or skinning. It often connotes the ideas of being battered, bruised, mangled and ripped apart.

So what does the word “downcast” mean? The word “downcast” (RHIPTO) has the basic meaning of being thrown down prostrate and utterly helpless, as from drunkenness or a mortal wound. So what did Jesus see when He looked out on the Galilean multitude?

When Jesus looked out upon the Galilean multitude He saw them as distressed and downcast. He saw them as battered, bruised, mangled, ripped apart, utterly helpless and without a shepherd, or in other words He saw them as spiritually doomed unless someone was able to intervene with the gospel of the kingdom or in other words with a message of spiritual healing and hope.

But what was the likelihood of that happening at least at that particular point in time? It was very unlikely. Why? Let me read for you **Matthew 9:37** **“Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”**

How many workers were there at this particular time to meet the needs of this Galilean multitude? How many workers were there at this particular time who were in fact taking a message of spiritual healing and hope to this distressed and downcast Galilean multitude of 3,000,000 spread out of 5,000 square miles. There was exactly, ONE person! And His name was Jesus!

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Obviously more help was needed just like more help is needed here in the Antelope Valley. So what did Christ exhort His disciples to do? He exhorted them to pray for workers.

Let me read for you **Matthew 9:38** “**Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.**” So now let me ask you this question. Was their prayer for workers answered? And of course we know it was. And who became the workers? They became the workers.

Let me read for you **Matthew 10:1, 5-7**, “**(1) And having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. (5) These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them, saying, “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; (6) but go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (7) And as you go, preach, saying “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**”

Disciples who pray for workers will inevitably become workers in God's harvest field (Matthew 10:1-7).

Our Valley is full of spiritually bankrupt people who are in need of a message of spiritual healing and hope, and everyone of us is needed in bringing that message to our valley. But this will not happen until we all begin to pray for more workers.

But this is not enough, there is still more for us to pray for in terms of the harvest. Not only should we be praying for workers but ...

We also need to pray for open doors for the Word (Colossians 4:2-3). Even though each of us may be praying that God would thrust forth more workers into His harvest field and even though as a result of our prayers the whole of our congregation is mobilized and focused on getting this work done, nothing will be accomplished unless God Himself opens the door for His Word. Certainly the Apostle Paul understood this.

Let me read for you **Colossians 4:2-3** “**Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving: (3) praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned.**”

What did Paul ask the Colossian church to pray for? He asked the Colossian church to pray that a door for the Word would be opened to Him. This is what he asked for.

Just because the Lord working through His Word and through our prayers might thrust us forward into His harvest field, does not mean that our circumstances will necessarily be conducive, at least on the surface, to effective outreach. Doors will need to be opened.

This is certainly true for me in my neighborhood. As of right now the doors of opportunity to minister the Gospel of Christ to my neighbors has been limited.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

What do I mean by this? I mean that my neighbors as of yet have not opened the door or given me access to share the Gospel of Christ with them. Other doors have been opened for me but this particular door has not yet been opened.

Should I give up? No! What I need to do is to be devoted to prayer. And I need to do the same thing that Paul did here in **Colossians 4** and that is to encourage others such as yourselves to pray for me that a door for the Word might be opened to me.

Can this really work? Of course it can! When Paul asked the Colossian church to pray for him that a door for the Word might be opened, he was in a Roman prison (Colossians 4:1-3). On the surface it might appear that he was in a very difficult situation in terms of having a door opened to him, but through his prayers and the prayers of others a door was opened, and that door was not opened just a little but rather wide open.

Let me read for you **Philippians 1:12-13** “**Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, (13) so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else.**”

Though Paul was in a Roman prison, his prayer and the prayer of others, that a door for the Word would be opened, was powerfully and wonderfully answered (Philippians 1:12-13).

Just because we may have prayed that the Lord would thrust forth workers into His harvest field and as a result of that praying may have found ourselves searching for ways to share His Word with others we should not assume that we will find opportunities to do that unless we are faithful to pray that the Lord of the harvest open those doors.

But we are still not done. It is not enough simply to pray to the Lord of the harvest to thrust forth workers into His harvest field. It is not enough that we pray that the Lord of the harvest open doors. There is still something else.

We need to pray for confidence to speak the Word boldly when the doors are opened (Acts 4:23-31). Just because God opens doors does not mean that we will have the courage to step through those doors. But hopefully this will not be the case with us, and it won't be the case with us if we pray. Certainly the early church understood this.

Let me read for you **Acts 4:23-31**. This passage that I am about to read to you records for us events that took place after Peter and John had been commanded and then threatened by Jewish authorities to no longer speak or teach in the name of Jesus and what was the response of the church to their threats? This was their response beginning with **Acts 4:23**, “**And when they had been released, they went to their own companions, and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. (24) And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, “O Lord, it is Thou who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, (25) who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Thy servant, dist say, “Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things?**

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

(26) The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ.” (27) For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the gentiles and the peoples of Israel, (28) “And now Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence, (30) while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus.” (31) And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness.”

Did Peter and John pray, that in spite of the threats being made against them they might speak the Word with all confidence? Absolutely! And was their prayer answered? Absolutely! What did **verse 31** tell us? This is what it told us after the prayer by Peter and John on behalf of the disciples prayed that they would speak the word of Christ confidently that verse tells us that they (the disciples) began to speak the word with all boldness.

Just because we, after praying, may have a desire to seek out opportunities to share His gospel and though after praying we may have opportunities to share His gospel we will still need to pray that God will supply us the confidence to courageously go through the open doors.

And what should we expect if we in fact have the courage to do this? We should not expect failure but rather success for this is the will of God for us in Christ Jesus.

Some professing believers are willing to go through this life without making any eternal difference in the lives of the people they meet. They are no better than a wooden sign-post that might be planted alongside of a road, perhaps noticed but easily ignored. Hopefully this will not be true of us, and it will not be true of us if we pray.

May God give us the grace to commit ourselves to pray for workers, for open doors and courage as we look out over the Antelope valley and the fields that are white for harvest.