

It's Harvest Time!

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Preacher: Chaplain Doug Carver

[0 : 00] Thank you for that wonderful worship this morning.

Good morning, church. Three things that were not in my notes, but I've got to mention them up front since Tim actually said something about football. I wasn't going to talk about football, but we will be having a tailgate over in Charlotte later on this afternoon.

For those of you who are volunteer fans, I did graduate from University of Tennessee. Anyway, we won't go there. Sorry. Finally. The second thing I want to say, again, thank you for this invitation, Pastor Daniel and Pastor Jeff.

I was in the back talking to Jeff before the service began, and I was really asking how long the service was. I said, well, how long do I have, an hour? And he said, if you take an hour, they're going to walk out in the middle of it, so I'm watching the time.

And secondly, thirdly, if my dates are correct, we've got a lot going on today with the missions conference.

[1 : 07] But I do believe, I saw on my iPhone, that today is Pastor Appreciation Day. And if I'm wrong, you need to appreciate your pastor anyway when you've got a Bible believing, fully proclaiming the whole counsel of God as you do in this pastor.

So can we praise God for our pastors here in this congregation? Let me do the most important thing I can do this morning and read from God's Word, the Word He's laid on my heart for this service this morning here at First Baptist Church of Pickens.

a very familiar passage when we're talking about missions and about harvest time and going out into the fields, which are so ripe for us to show the good news of Jesus Christ from Matthew chapter 9, beginning with verse 35.

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

And when He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

[2 : 39] Then He said to His disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, and this is a command, by the way, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.

So I want us to begin this service in prayer and that we pray earnestly. In the original language, this word for prayer basically means to beg, to cry out, to implore upon Almighty God for the Lord to send out laborers into the harvest field.

A command from the Lord Jesus Christ, something that was on His heart, that only God can do it. And my prayer this morning for this service, in which I'm going to share a very simple passage, is that even today you will hear the call of God upon your life or upon those that you know the call is up around in their life for Him to send out laborers into the harvest field.

It is harvest time if we've ever been in one in our entire lifetime. For such a time as this, it's harvest time. It doesn't require seminary. It doesn't require any professional education other than the fact that God's call is on you and you must go.

It has nothing to do with how old you are or how young you are. Caleb really came into his own when he was 85 years old when he cried out, Lord, give me my mountain. So all of us senior citizens in here, if you've never answered the call, it's not too late.

[4 : 30] This world needs a fresh anointing from God and the Holy Spirit to send the good news of Christ Jesus to those who have never heard it. As we were talking about the Afghanis even this morning, how could we forget that picture of the last day our troops were in Afghanistan formally and the plane was taking off and the crowds on the runway and even some who clung to the outside of the plane to try to escape that nation?

How can we fail to see the images of the homeless in our streets? The desperate, the bullied, the lost, the forgotten, the refugees, the mentally ill, those who have never heard the sweet news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that God sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins.

What sweet news for somebody today that our sins are forgiven by the blood of Jesus. What wonderful news that someone needs to hear.

If you know Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. No shame, no guilt, no fear. Oh God, may we be that people that God uses in this hour of creation.

Father, I ask you to take these few moments and use them for your glory. Lord of the harvest, I pray in the name of Jesus and by the conviction of the Holy Spirit that even today, now, you bring forth harvesters for your glory.

[6 : 29] In Jesus' name, amen. Well, I bring you greetings from Dr. Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board. I was with him and the trustees just a few weeks ago in Chicago, and we heard the good news, hopefully you have as well, that Annie Armstrong Easter offering surpassed all of our prognostications.

\$68.6 million that our Southern Baptists have given for the mission work to plant churches and to spread the gospel in North America. So thank you for your giving.

You're part of 47, 46,000 churches, 16 million Southern Baptists who have given sacrificially even during the pandemic.

We continue to give. So thank you, thank you, thank you. With that money, we've planted over 1,000 churches since 2010, the last 10 years. With your prayers and your offerings, yes, we have 3,720 endorsed Southern Baptist chaplains who serve in places where the churches cannot often go, 1,500 chaplains in the armed services, chaplains in hospitals and health care and hospices, chaplains who are on disaster relief deployments and corporate chaplains serving in Fortune 500 companies and prison chaplains and law enforcement chaplains and community service chaplains.

Let me just give you just a couple of quick stories. Chaplain Captain Jose Rondon, a graduate of North Greenville University. You may have heard of him in 2018. He was at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

[8 : 06] Some of you veterans may have heard of that place. And over an 18-month period of time, God used him and his chaplaincy team to lead over 2,000 young men and women in the United States Army going through basic training to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

My pharisaical robes got on me when I keep seeing these numbers rising. And by the way, it's not about numbers. But it is kind of interesting when you see thousands coming to Christ.

So I did what anybody else would do. I sent a team to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, to see what was going on, to see if Jose was not, maybe he didn't know how to count, or maybe he was embellishing the numbers, but it was true.

So then we have to ask collegiate ministers and others, what's the reason that these young 18- to 24-year-olds are going to the gospel as they hear it and they're making Christ Savior and Lord?

It's because so many of them, first of all, at least in the armed services, have never held a Bible in their hands. As an 18- to 24-year-old, we give them Bibles, they begin reading the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth, and that's what they are interested in.

[9 : 21] They're not interested in relativism or secularism. They're truly interested in truth, and not just any truth, but the truth of God, spiritual truth. They're interested in relationships, meaningful relationships with people who have found purpose and significance in their lives through the gospel and meeting Jesus as Savior and Lord, and they're looking for community.

Oh, my goodness. We're talking about the bride of Christ. May our churches, may First Baptist Church of Pickens one day soon be filled with young people that are flocking here from our public schools, that are coming here to find that truth in Jesus Christ alone.

I could tell you about Chris Rice, a young chaplain down at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Every 11 weeks, we make soldiers out of these young men and women. Every 11 weeks, he'll baptize some 70, some 100 young men and women who have come to saving knowledge of faith in Christ Jesus as their Lord and their Savior.

I could tell you about Michael Slaughter, a young Navy lieutenant up in Chicago with the regional training command where every cycle of those basic trainees as we make sailors out of these young men and women, some 200, 250, have made professions of faith in Christ Jesus, and they come for believer's baptism.

That's great news, but let me give you some bad news. Can I just give you some bad news? Baptisms are down in the Southern Baptist Convention. According to Lifeway Research, we have dipped to a level that we haven't seen since 1918 and 1919.

[11 : 09] After the influenza, the Spanish flu that took so many people's lives. Hey, let me tell you something else. Church attendance is down. I've heard a statistic once that while we're meeting in this wonderful place, about 11 churches close their doors every week in our denomination.

Those answering the call to the gospel, those answering the call to be laborers in the field as pastors, as missionaries, as chaplains, those numbers are down in our Baptist colleges and our seminaries.

We so desperately need a harvest of laborers who will go out into the field. May we pray the Lord of the harvest sends more laborers into the field.

That's what this passage is all about in Matthew 9, verses 35 through 38. Some refer to this as a turning point in the gospel of the book of Matthew.

It's a key that needed to be understood. If you read Matthew 3 through 9, beginning with Jesus' baptism, where he fully identified himself as righteous before God, he who was without sin was baptized, going into the desert for 40 days and 40 nights, preparing himself for his mission, being tempted by the things that we're all tempted about, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, and the pride of this world.

[12 : 37] And yet he committed himself to serve Almighty God with his mind, body, soul, spirit, and strength. And then in Matthew 4, verse 17, Jesus began to preach the gospel of the kingdom.

Do you know what the gospel of the kingdom is? Jesus put it this way in his first public address from the book of Isaiah. The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to those who are captive, to set free those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year, the time, right now, of the Lord's favor.

You read the following chapters up to chapter 9, verse 35, and you see that he healed the sick, cleansed the leper, cast out demons, and raised the dead, broke fevers, with a word, healing every disease, every sickness.

Brothers and sisters, I don't know where you come from. I've been Southern Baptist all my life, but I believe that we may see in this dark and dying world the day when God uses his labors with a word to heal the sick, cleanse the leper, yes, cast out demons, and raise the dead.

I don't hear one amen in this room. Look, this world needs some good news. Does it not need some good news? I read an article recently that says that this pandemic of 2020 and 2021 has done something to us psychologically, and we have not paid the price and not really seen how it has affected us mentally and emotionally with the isolation and the rolling traumas and the loss financially, relationally, and death.

[14 : 35] We have not paid the price. We've not caught our breath. Do you see the crowds that are struggling with this world? What did Jesus see?

The Scripture says He saw the crowds. I think one of the reasons that we don't see the crowds is that we don't pick our eyes up off of our iPhones or our Facebook pages long enough to see the people walk.

It's interesting watching people cross the street in Chicago and other places and they got their hand just like this. That's very dangerous. You know, that's hazardous to your health. But I think if we just took a moment in the supermarket, in the mall, in public places and just kind of looked around we'd see the crowd.

Jesus traveled in His lifetime, earthly lifetime, over 200 towns and villages in a 40-mile radius of Galilee. And the more He spoke about the gospel of the kingdom of God, the bigger the audience.

That ought to tell us something. The more we talk about the good news of Jesus Christ, about one who has come to set us free from our sin, who forgave us of our sin, cleansed us of all of our unrighteousness, I think people want and need to hear that.

[16 : 12] Do you see the crowd? What crowd are you talking about? How about the college? Do you see the 31 million men and women in our campuses, universities, colleges, graduate schools?

33 million. And Tim, you may have to correct me, but the last I saw, it's less than 1%, 0.68% of our collegiate students have any kind of active faith in Jesus Christ.

let's talk about our veterans for a moment. I spent 38 years in uniform. I know something about that tribe. How many veterans we got in here? Can I see the hands? I got a few in here. Thank you for your service.

Since 1775, when Washington stood up the Continental Army, less than 1% have ever put on this uniform. 44 million Americans since 1775 have worn the uniform.

What's interesting is that 24 million veterans are alive today. It's a large group. What are our issues? Post-traumatic stress, moral injury, suicide.

[17 : 27] You hear the news about suicides. 23, 25 veterans commit suicide every day, one every 65 minutes. The news that's breaking now is it actually might be higher because our veterans are also overdosing.

Oxycodone, fentanyl, other drug-inducing means to dull the pain. We haven't found a solution yet.

our veterans need our ministry to them. Our collegiate young men and women need our ministry to them. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life says that the Protestant religion of Christianity is no longer the major denomination in the United States.

We have lost a number of our members to the nuns. And I don't mean the Catholic variety. I mean those who have no religious preference. And then we have the duns.

Those who are done with church. They're done with something they haven't seen lived out in the lives of those who profess it. They say, why would I want to experience the abundant life in Christ?

[18 : 45] Because as I look at your countenance, I hope it's not catching, but I don't want it. Look, the kingdom of God is about righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

And it has nothing to do with our current circumstances. Does anybody know what I'm talking about in here? I want the power of the resurrection.

But the apostle Paul says you've got to also want something else. You've got to experience and want, and you will experience and want as a child of God, a joint heir with Jesus Christ, the fellowship of his sufferings.

We can do all things though through Christ who strengthens us. Do you see the crowds? A crowded world of almost 8 billion people. Do you see the crowded cities where many of our North American Mission Board missionaries have gone to these large cities, giving it all up and going to these huge cities to share the gospel?

Cities that are infested with extremist ideology and secularism and everything else. Here's the good news. The harvest is ripe.

[20 : 05] I heard someone say recently that the harvest always comes at that darkest point in time. And how much darker can it get than we're living in right now, brothers and sisters?

We should be expecting God to break forth and do something because people are desperate do you see the crowds?

I spend a lot of time in crowded airports. It does not get any easier. I don't care what level of points you have with Delta or American Airlines. I was in a Memphis airport several years ago now, but it's one of those visions that I just can't get off my mind.

I was at the baggage claim waiting for my bag. I saw a young man in front of me. Had a baseball cap on. Go Army. And so I tapped him on his shoulder to tell him, thanks for your service.

And when he turned around, his face was almost inhuman looking. Terribly scarred. Burned. It was hard to look him in the eye.

[21 : 25] I thanked him for his service. And as I was walking away, his mother tapped me on the shoulder and she said, please pray for my son. I said, well, I'm so sorry. Was the wound from an improvised explosive device?

Did something happen while he was in Iraq or Afghanistan? She said, no. She said, he came back from the war with these war wounds and he's tried so many self-destructive things and he continues to jump in a fire.

An open fire. And that's what happened to him as he is just almost burned beyond recognition. Do you see the crowds? Do you see the desperate?

The scripture says that we need to have the eyes of Jesus and see what he saw. He saw the crowds. He saw an opportunity with the crowds. A time that was pregnant with opportunity to take the gospel.

The second thing is when he saw the crowds, notice what happened. He had compassion. If you see the crowds, there has to be a response in today's world.

[22 : 37] You hear the stories of these refugees who have escaped with their very life and something has to happen internally. Someone once said, we'll never have a heart for the harvest of the gospel unless we see the Lord's heart for the harvest.

as the crowd thronged around Jesus and brought him their physical needs and their issues and their sacred stories and their diseases and their burdens and their brokenness.

The scripture said he had compassion. I love studying languages. This word in the Greek for compassion, which means pity. It means your gut turns splint, nitsomai.

Boy, now that sounds terrible, but actually, a splint, nitsa, is actually some kind of a medical procedure. A splint to me. I can't even spell that. I'll just say it.

But Jesus' internal, his intestines churned by what he saw. Has that ever happened to you?

[23 : 42] No. 2004, I was at the Assassin's Gate. Nice place to be in Baghdad. And there was an explosion.

A Volkswagen van exploded with about 500 pounds of C4 explosive material. And I can't tell you what that did to a crowded marketplace.

But you can only imagine. Without getting too graphic. It's one of those combat memories I hate to look at. I feel like it's a stack of photos and I don't want to go too deep and stay too long.

But I mean, literally, our troops were helping the Iraqis pick a body remains out of trees. And I remember walking by a young Iraqi soldier on his knees in tears.

He was in tears just weeping. I don't speak a lick of the Iraqi language of Arabic. But my gut churned for him as he was kneeling and weeping over part of human remains.

[25 : 03] I remember touching my chest, my heart, a term of endearment in the Islamic world and I prayed in English for that brother and we both wept.

My heart churned at what happens in war, the devastating effects of war. My heart churns for young troops, 16, 18 to 24 year olds who we send to war and they see things that human beings should not see.

They come back differently. Losing their innocence and a part of their humanity. I see their faces even now.

Do you have compassion? Do you allow the things of this world to go so deep that you churn with pity and mercy for them?

The thing that Jesus saw, he said he saw people who were faint, harassed, other words. They were worn out. They were exhausted. They were beaten up.

[26 : 15] They were battered and ripped and torn. One translation, they felt like they were skinned alive. They were bullied. That's what he saw. The harassed and the helpless.

Those who were thrown down. Those who were thrown aside. Those who were lifeless, immobilized, ready to quit, tired and weary, prostrate.

The man at the pool of Bethesda, there's your picture, John chapter 5. His excuse when Jesus says, do you want to be healed? He didn't say, yes, Lord. He said, Lord, I've been here for decades.

I haven't been healed. Helpless, hapless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Brothers and sisters, the religious leaders of that day were uncaring, unconcerned. They didn't lead anybody to pasture. They didn't tend or bind wounds.

[27 : 18] They didn't rescue. They just gave you more law, more this or that, more heavy burdens. But Jesus came along and he identified with the crowd.

Isn't that wonderful that our Lord identified with us? He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The scripture says, the chastisement of our peace with God was upon him and with his stripes were healed.

He was the God-man. He suffered everything that you and I will ever suffer yet without sin.

He never allowed their circumstances to take away the gospel of the kingdom about the fact that we can do all things through Christ who gives us the strength.

Let me tell you very quickly, I know my time is, I know the Methodists are going to be out there somewhere with their, of course, we're going to eat here.

[28 : 31] I don't know if they're going to join us. I don't, I can't speak for the pastor but I remember Mondays are a good time when a lot of pastors decide they're going to resign from the ministry.

So pray for your pastor especially on Mondays. I had a situation as a chaplain that I just couldn't get fixed. It was awful and I lost sleep over it.

You ever lost sleep over problems? I'm not going to ask that question. I remember waking up in the night and said, Lord, I quit.

I've been in the ministry 20 years. I've been preaching by the way since I was 14 years old similar to your pastor who called at a young age. I didn't have a chance. My mother named me after a general, Douglas MacArthur and a Baptist preacher, Forrest Lanier.

But I quit. Lord, I'm not who you, I'm probably in basic Christianity. I'm not ready for the advanced course or the war college in Christianity. I quit.

[29 : 33] I feel weak, helpless, ignorant, like I'm starting all over again. I quit. And you know what the Lord said to me? Congratulations, I've just recommissioned you.

You're exactly what I need in your brokenness. Because when you are willing to admit that you are weak, God says in 2 Corinthians 12, then I'm going to be strong.

For my grace is made perfect in your weakness. So brothers and sisters, if you've been called to the harvest, don't blame it on the fact that you're too weak to testify about the goodness of God in your heart. That you're exactly the person that God wants instead of one who has some slick evangelistic tool that they can use and they've memorized it.

But if anybody's going to be brought to the kingdom, it's by God's power through the Holy Spirit who convicts. The wind that blows as it will. I've got to bring this to a close.

Jesus saw the crowds. He was moved by what he saw. And then he said something. The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few.

[30 : 44] Here is a command. Pray, beg, plead with God, the Lord of the harvest, to send out laborers into the harvest.

Now, why would God not answer the prayer of his son and the prayer for the good news to be carried by people into the harvest field?

The harvest is ripe, it's full, it's ready. There's an urgency with that kind of praying. Brothers and sisters, there's an urgency. Do you realize how many people right now on this globe are dying and going to a real hell because they've never heard the gospel?

or they've never accepted it? The harvest is ripe, the laborers are few. Send out the laborers into the harvest. Well, what kind of, what's a harvester supposed to look like?

So I'm going to give you a job description for a harvester. One, God is looking for that person who says, Jesus Christ is sufficient for all my needs and he's proved himself over and over and over again.

[32 : 00] He's taken the rough edges of my life and he's smoothed them out through the furnace of affliction. These temporary things that are doing nothing more than making me stronger to serve him so that I have a testimony to share of the goodness of God.

I met, I met a harvester last night. I don't know if she's here. I walked into the hotel where I stayed and spoke to this woman who was sitting there folding towels.

Boy, let me tell you, she's had it hard here this last year or so. She's had three or four recent surgeries. Her house just burned. Her husband just left her and I saw the countenance of God on her life who continued to tell me how much God had blessed her and kept her and strengthened her through it all.

I can't see in the back row right now but I'll tell you what, she had a smile of an angel on her face. That's what you and I need to be. If you want to be a harvester, we've got to look like we're harvesting souls for the glory of God.

We've got to be able to tell people that Jesus' grace is sufficient for all of our needs. We might be weak but he's going to be strong. The one who began a good work in us, he's going to bring it to completion.

[33 : 24] Yes, in this world you're going to have troubles but brothers and sisters, be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. That's what Jesus said. That's who he's looking for.

Individuals who say, I know in whom I have believed. Though he slay me, I'm going to trust him and then I'm going to tell somebody about his faithfulness.

I can't keep this fire. It's like a fire inside my bones. I've got to let it out. Is that your testimony? Because if it is, the Lord, he's recruiting you right now.

Secondly, he's looking for those who are fully submitted to Jesus where you say without reservation, Lord, I'll go everywhere to everyone with the gospel of Jesus.

No strings attached. Wherever, Lord, you lead, I will go. I can confess to you that I've had my list of those places that I don't think I could go and I said, Lord, send me anywhere but I'm not going to fill in the blanks but you know what I'm talking about.

[34 : 36] The Lord is looking for those who are fully submissive to his plan. And then last of all, if you really recognize that Jesus is sufficient for your life, he's proven it and that you've submitted to him, there's only one other thing you've got to do.

You step out on God's word and you serve his purposes for his glory. A few years ago, I had a dear saint in my life, one of my prayer warriors.

She'd been in and out on morphine from the cancer and she was under hospice care. I went to visit this little 84-year-old woman who'd not even recognized her family. They asked me to come see her because she was dying and when I walked into her bedroom, she woke up and she said, Doug Carver, you stand firm.

Don't you quit. Don't you let go. Don't you throw in the towel. You stand firm in the word of God. I mean, the way she said it, I almost started apologizing. Like, hey, what's going on here?

What's she reading in my mail? Does she know my devotional life because it's not the greatest? That's what the Lord is looking for, to stand firm in his word.

[36 : 02] Brothers and sisters, where this world is going, I believe that it's going to be a challenge for you. You're going to be challenged maybe even with your life should you choose to believe everything in this book from Genesis to Revelation, the whole counsel of God.

I close with this last story. I promise. I know you harvesters are getting ready to come down the aisle. The pastor's ready. Brother, you need to come on up so I know to quit. A few years ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago, I had the opportunity to meet Richard Vermehron.

You may have never heard of him. Founder of Voice of the Martyrs. He spent time in one of the worst jails in the world.

Underground. About 12 feet underground. For six years. Can you imagine that? They had to carry him in because while he was in prison, the guards tried to get him to renounce Jesus.

He continued to profess Christ as Savior and Lord. He even witnessed to the guards. He was a harvester in this prison. The guards had taken hard rubber hoses and beaten the soles of his feet so he no longer could feel.

[37 : 29] He couldn't walk. All the nerve damage was so tremendous. But you know, as he stood up to speak to us, he had the look of that little lady I saw last night at the hotel.

He had the look of an angel. He said, you know, really the guards were pretty nice to us in there. He said, they gave us musical instruments. Musical instruments in a prison 12 feet underground for six years?

He said, yeah. They gave us steel handcuffs. And he said, we could sing with them. This is the day.

Clink, clink. This is the day that the Lord hath made. And I thought to myself, I'm never, ever going to allow the rocks and the trees and the hills to shout my praise to a God who can do that with a prisoner for his faith.

All right. The message has been proclaimed. It's harvest time. I know, I know that I know that I know God is calling somebody, not just somebody, some people in this room to step out in faith and say, I'm going to be, God is calling me to be one of those harvesters in these days in which I live.

[38 : 41] As we stand and sing here in just a moment, I want you to step out with the very first word we sing. Your pastor will be down here and make this a day where you are committing or recommitting yourself to be a harvester.

Maybe there's somebody in this place that has never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. The good news that God so loved the world that he sent his son to a broken world full of sin and corruption and sinful people and he died on a cross for our sins to set us free, to redeem us from the slavery to our flesh and to forgive us of our sins and to give us the promise of eternity in heaven forever.

If you've never repented and accepted and turned to Jesus as the author and finisher of your faith, as your redeemer, as your savior, would you make this day, that day of salvation.

Father, take this service now. Use it for your glory. Come Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen. All right, let's go.