

Matthew 9:37

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;

Analysis

Jesus offers agricultural metaphor: 'The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few' (Ο μὲν θερισμός πολὺς οἱ δὲ ἐργαταὶ ὀλίγοι). 'Harvest' (θερισμός) represents people ready to respond to the gospel—the fields are 'white unto harvest' (John 4:35), indicating readiness and urgency. 'Plenteous' (πολὺς) emphasizes abundance: vast numbers need the gospel. However, 'labourers' (ἐργαταὶ, workers) are 'few' (ὀλίγοι). The problem isn't lack of receptive people but shortage of workers to reach them. This creates urgency: harvest timing is critical; delay means lost opportunity. The metaphor shifts from shepherding (9:36) to harvesting, both expressing need for workers. Jesus prepares to send out the Twelve (chapter 10), expanding ministry beyond His personal reach through multiplied workers.

Historical Context

Agricultural imagery would resonate with Jesus' largely agrarian audience. Harvest was intense, time-sensitive work requiring many hands. Missing the harvest window meant crop loss. In spiritual terms, Jesus sees Israel ripe for response but lacking adequate workers to reach them. The Twelve's commissioning (chapter 10) addresses this need by multiplying ministry. Early church understood mission as harvest work (Romans 1:13, 1 Corinthians 3:6-9). The urgency remains: people ready to respond but lacking workers to reach them with the gospel.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does viewing evangelism and mission as 'harvest' shape our understanding of urgency?
2. What prevents Christians from becoming laborers in the plenteous harvest?
3. How can churches identify and mobilize workers for gospel ministry?

Interlinear Text

τότε	λέγει	τοῖς	μαθηταῖς	αὐτοῦ	Ὁ	μὲν	θερισμὸς
Then	saith	G3588	disciples	G846	G3588	truly	The harvest
G5119	G3004		G3101			G3303	G2326
πολύς,	οἱ	δὲ	ἐργάται	ὀλίγοι·			
is plenteous	G3588	but	the labourers	are few			
G4183		G1161	G2040	G3641			

Additional Cross-References

Luke 10:2 (Parallel theme): Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.

Mark 16:15 (Parallel theme): And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

1 Corinthians 3:9 (Parallel theme): For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

Matthew 28:19 (Parallel theme): Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

2 Corinthians 6:1 (Parallel theme): We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

Acts 16:9 (Parallel theme): And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

Luke 24:47 (Parallel theme): And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Psalms 68:11 (Parallel theme): The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it.

1 Timothy 5:17 (Parallel theme): Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

Acts 18:10 (Parallel theme): For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.