

What did Jesus mean when he told the disciples to pray for more laborers?

In both Matthew 9:37 and Luke 10:2 Jesus tells his disciples that the “harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.” He follows both of those statements up by telling his followers to pray earnestly that God would send laborers into the field to assist in the harvest. Jesus was a master of simile and allegory. When put into context, especially in Matthew’s account, we get a more clear understanding of what Jesus may have meant. In Matthew 9:36 the Bible says that Jesus had compassion on the multitudes because they had no one to shepherd, or guide, them. So we see that Jesus’ statement about the need for laborers is directly linked to his compassion on the multitudes of people he was ministering to. So what does that mean for us? What we can draw from this is that there are multitudes of people in the world who are walking around like sheep without a shepherd who need someone to share the gospel with them and help them understand God’s plan of salvation for them. Jesus is saying the field is ripe for harvest; there are many people out there who need to hear the message but haven’t had anyone share it with them yet. The field is so large and so ripe that the number of workers is very few in comparison. That can be seen easily in the fact that approximately 2.1 billion of the 7 billion people on the planet are “Christians” (I use this term loosely because the definition of Christian can vary given this secular survey).¹ That begs the question, how many of those Christians are faithfully sharing their faith with the other 5.9 billion people? What Jesus is saying here is that we should be giving our lives to the harvest but also praying that God would bring other individuals, either through conviction or evangelism, to assist in the labor. The Great Commission, which is God’s call for all believers to make disciples, is a difficult task and we should be praying for God to send others to work along side us as we seek to extend the kingdom. So in essence, when Jesus made that statement he was instructing his followers to pray that God would continue to raise up Christians to be emboldened and empowered to take the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ out into the harvest in an effort to bring as many people as possible to salvation.

1. “Word Distribution of Christian Population,” *Pew Research – Religion and Public Life*, PewForum.org, retrieved from <http://features.pewforum.org/global-christianity/world-maps/weighted-christian.php>