

MANY JOB OPENINGS BUT FEW APPLICANTS!

Today's Text: Matthew Chap. 9

Extracts:

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, *teaching* in their synagogues, *preaching* the gospel of the kingdom, and *healing* every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “*The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few*. Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest” [Matt. 9: 33-38].

The Miami Fire Department (in Florida, USA) recently advertised 35 openings in the next firefighter training class.¹ Within days, more than 1,000 people stood in line to submit their applications, some standing there for days. By Monday, 9 February 2009, the city had accepted 750 applications. It had to call in City of Miami Police officers to keep an eye on the surging crowd.

According to the US Bureau of Labor and Statistics, Florida's unemployment rate was more than 8 per cent in January 2009, that is, more than 750,000 unemployed people actively looking for new jobs. With families to feed and mortgages to pay, not to talk of dwindling savings, unemployed people are certainly desperate. Also, government public service jobs in Florida come with a starting annual salary of over \$40,000 with good benefits, a pension and job security. Therefore, there may be plausible explanations for the abundance of applicants for just a few openings. Would it have been different if the job had been unattractive? For example, in spite of the high unemployment rate, how many people would have applied if the city had advertised for “flatulence analyst” or “bomb expert”?²

In today's text, Jesus drew our attention to the fact that in the Lord's vineyard, the harvest is ripe but “the labourers are few.” In other words, there are more job openings there than there are labourers. What can be responsible for that? Why are we not joining the line to submit our applications? Let us find out from this week's study.

¹ Based on “Hundreds Turned Away For Miami Fire Dept. Jobs,” Story by www.justnews.com

² Considered among the top 20 worst jobs for American men, Eszter Hargitta, “Worst Jobs Ever?” <http://crookedtimber.org/2007/07/19/worst-job-ever/>

1. What are you looking for in a job?

People are in paid employment for different reasons but the following are among the most common:

a) *For economic reasons*

There is a stage in life when you can no longer depend on others for your sustenance. For example, at some age, after graduating from school, children are expected to take care of their own needs. That is why Paul says, “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” [2 Thes. 3: 10]. Consequently, we all work so as to be able to meet our economic needs.

Such needs may be immediate or long term. For example, in the run, we need to feed ourselves and our wards (spouse and children). We need to pay school fees. We need to provide for shelter (by leasing or buying). For the long term, we need to save for the rainy day and for our retirement life.

Our ability to meet all or some of such needs depends, to a large extent, on what work we do and where we do it. If it is a paid job, can it pay your bills? If you are self-employed, can it meet your needs? How stable or secure is the job that you do? What if economic circumstances were to make your position redundant, what else could you do? What if your employer could no longer provide and decided to close operations? The Miami Fire Department’s case shows that economic hardship can push any of us into the job line.

Unfortunately, *no pay is ever enough for any worker!* We all tend to believe that we are underpaid (relative to our needs) whereas employers believe that workers are overpaid (relative to their productivity)! Secondly, we cannot keep working forever. Sooner or later, we have to retire and leave room for the younger generations to take our place. So, economic reasons alone cannot justify why we work.

b) *For non-economic reasons*

Some people claim that they work more out of personal interests or values than for economic necessity. For example, Paul had the authority to depend on the churches for his sustenance but he “worked with labour and toil night and day” so as not to be a burden on them and to make himself and his helpers “an example of how you should follow us” [2 Thes. 3: 8-9]. Paul needed *economic independence* for the credibility of his ministry.

Some people work just to keep themselves busy, not because they need to work at all. For example, Bill Gates is one of the richest people in the

world, having topped the list for over fifteen years.³ He co-founded Microsoft and was its CEO for the better part of 30 years. In June 2008, he gave up full-time work with the company (but remains as non-executive chairman) to devote full-time attention to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Only he can explain why he is still so busy!

Another possible reason why people work is for *social status*. This point is well illustrated in an answer that the late Chief Moshood Abiola⁴ (the richest man in Nigeria in the 1980's) once gave during a television interview when he was campaigning for the Presidency of Nigeria in 1993. He was at the time of the interview the Chairman of the Concord Group of newspapers, reputedly one of the most respected then. He was asked why he still worked in spite of being so rich. He replied, "You cannot introduce me as 'Chief Abiola the millionaire' but as 'Chief Abiola, Chairman & Publisher of *Concord*.'" In other words, work confers social status on your wealth. That is why even corrupt politicians set up some business when they leave office to give the impression that they have worked (or are working) for their wealth!

Working seems to be an integral part of humans because they are made in the image and likeness of God. Jesus has said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" [Jn 5: 17]. The work that He is talking about is for the kingdom of God for which cause He came into the world. It is to be expected that the jobs or work to which people are attracted will be closely related to where their heart is "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" [Matt. 6: 21]. That may in part explain why there are a few of us who fight to apply as labourers in the Lord's vineyard.

2. Job openings in the Lord's vineyard

As Jesus went about the cities and villages of Israel, huge multitudes followed Him. He taught in their synagogues, preached the gospel of the kingdom and healed the sick [Matt. 9: 35]. In addition, He had compassion on them because they were "weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd." So, He said to His disciples [vv. 37-38]:

The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His vineyard.

What jobs do labourers in the Lord's vineyard do? How are they paid or rewarded? Why are the labourers so few for the ripe harvest? Let us attempt to answer those questions.

a) *The jobs in the Lord's vineyard*

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Gates

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moshood_Kashimawo_Olawale_Abiola

We get the clue from the work that Jesus was doing as He went about all the cities and villages in Judea. We are told that He was *teaching* in their synagogues, *preaching* the gospel of the kingdom, and *healing* every sickness and every disease among the people [v. 35]. There was no way that He could continue to do so many jobs alone and at once without help from others. That is why, as we shall see in the next lesson, He selected twelve apostles [Matt. 10: 1-5] and later seventy disciples [Lk 10: 1] that He trained to assist Him.

After Jesus had ascended to heaven, the apostles found the work too much for them. They needed an effective administrative structure and differentiation of jobs, saying, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.” So, they selected seven deacons, “men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” whom they could appoint over the administrative tasks [Acts 6: 1-4]. By the time the early church had taken roots, the following five ministries had become established as the jobs in the Lord’s vineyard [Eph. 4: 11]:

- Apostles
- Prophets
- Evangelists
- Pastors, and
- Teachers

As we approach end-times and as wickedness is growing worse, we find that the number of people that ought to receive the message of salvation through Christ Jesus is growing astronomically. It is not everyone who today answers to the name, “Christian,” accepts Christ’s message of the kingdom. Time is running out; the harvest is ripe; but where are the labourers?

b) *The remuneration plan for such labourers*

In the words of Jesus, “The labourer is worthy of his wages” [Lk 10: 7]. But what wage is the labourer in the Lord’s vineyard worth? The Parable of the labourers in the vineyard [Matt. 20: 1-16] gives us a good lead to the answer.⁵ Jesus began the story by saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early to hire labourers for his vineyard” [v. 1]. Clearly, the landowner is God who chooses labourers for the harvest [Matt. 9: 37-38], and we as believers qualify to be the labourers. Those who were hired at 6.00 a.m. were promised “a denarius a day” [v. 2], while those hired every three hours after that, including those hired at 5.00 p.m., were promised “whatever is right” [vv. 3-7]. But when it was time to pay all of them, each one received a denarius, beginning with those hired

⁵ “Equal Pay for Unequal Work,” *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 1, No. 7: 22 October 2000; http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_1/PDFs/Equalpayforunequalwork.pdf

last. Those who had been hired at 6.00 a.m. grumbled that they had been underpaid. However, the landowner maintained that he had paid each worker in accordance with the terms of their hire [vv. 8-12].

Was that fair? Was that not equal pay for unequal work? No! Winning souls for the kingdom of God is the labour in the vineyard [Matt. 9: 38; Matt. 28: 19]. When Peter asked Jesus what was the reward for those who had forsaken all to follow Him, Jesus replied that they would have double their earthly blessings that they had lost plus everlasting life in heaven after death [Matt. 19: 28-29]. Therefore, *salvation is the reward for the labourers in the vineyard*. It is not divisible; there is nothing like a fraction of salvation, and it cannot be earned by our efforts! Therefore a denarius (or penny) per day represents eternal life in heaven for the faithful labourer. It is immaterial whether you served from your mother's womb or at the point of your death, The reward is the same. It is no wonder that it looks so unattractive!

c) *How to apply*

Jesus told His disciples, "Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His vineyard" [Matt. 9: 38]. Elsewhere, He told the Jews, "No one can come to Me *unless* the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" [Jn 6: 44]. Therefore, neither you nor your church can make you an apostle or prophet or pastor or evangelist or teacher *unless* that is what God calls you to be in His vineyard. Jeremiah was called as a prophet even before he was formed in his mother's womb [Jer. 1: 5]. Peter was a fisherman when Jesus called him out to become a fisher of men [Mk 1: 17]. Matthew was a tax collector when Jesus called him out to become an apostle [Matt. 9: 9], and he used his record-keeping skills to write the first gospel.

You can have an idea of where God will use you by the natural talents that you exhibit. For example, after giving Moses the description of how to make the tabernacle of meeting, God named Bezalel of the tribe of Judah, and Aholiab of the tribe of Dan, and "put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans that they may make all" that He had commanded Moses [Ex. 31: 1-6]. Paul was a Pharisee who studied under Gamaliel, a doctor of the law [Acts 5: 34-KJV; Acts 22: 3] as well as a Roman citizen that spoke excellent Greek, the official language of the empire [Acts 21: 37-39; Acts 22: 25]. Does it surprise you then that God chose him as the apostle of the Gentiles to spread the gospel to the then known world instead of the poorly educated fishermen from Galilee? So, much as you can desire what to apply for, only God who distributes talents for His purposes knows where He can use you. It may not be what you want because your personal ambition may not necessarily be His purpose for your life!

3. Conclusion: It is Christ that chooses!

From the foregoing, we can draw the following conclusions:

- God is in deed looking for labourers to work in His vineyard. They come in the form of apostles or prophets or pastors or evangelists or teachers. Within those five broad categories of workers, God needs administrators, healers and workers of miracles (by Christ Jesus) [**1 Cor. 12: 28**].
- Just as we have scams in secular activities, there are also many fraudsters posing as workers in the Lord's vineyard. By their evil fruits, you can easily discern that they were not called by God but are simply small enterprises disguised as churches or ministries for their self-aggrandisement. That was why when Jesus was sending forth His disciples, He warned, "As you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand,' heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. *Freely you have received, freely give*" [**Matt. 10: 7-8**].
- Much as you may desire or covet a specific job in the vineyard, only the Lord can give it, just as you cannot impose yourself on an employer who does not want you. That is why Jesus has said, "You did not choose Me; but I chose you, and *appointed* you, that you should go and bear fruit, that your fruit should remain; that *whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you*" [**Jn 15: 16**].

There are many job openings in the Lord's vineyard but very few genuine applicants. Can you be one of the very few? Join the elite club that Christ will say to on His imminent return, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" [**Matt. 25: 34**].