

# The Gospel Must Be Our First Priority

I was 20 years old, preaching in a small church. The passion for winning the lost consumed me. Night after night, I left that little church, devastated that no one was getting saved.

I could not stand it any longer. The lack of souls was wrecking me emotionally and making me physically sick. Then I made a foolish vow to God. I told Him I would quit the ministry if no souls were born again in my next meeting.

That night it seemed like the entire world was against me. On the one night I needed the most help, thunder, lightning, and hard rain thinned the crowd. I preached my heart out but to no avail. No one was saved. It all felt like an emphatic statement.

## My Ministry Beginnings

I was staying at a Christian resort a few miles from the little church. The drive back became treacherous as the downpour flooded the dark country road I was on. I was crying and emotionally wrecked as I faced the prospect of leaving the ministry. I was in no condition to drive.

I had one small bridge left to cross, and the rising creek was attacking it. When I finally arrived at my hotel, in my emotional state, reaching safety provided no relief. I parked, grabbed my Bible and some preaching notes I never wanted to see again, and got soaked running to the lobby. It was the perfect storm.

Once in my room, I began to pace. I did not know how to pray in this situation—or even if I should. It was 10:30 p.m. Midnight would make it official. I would be out of the ministry.

My anxiety kept mounting, only to be outdone by my disappointment. The inner fire to win the lost is hard to gain and even harder to quench. Watching the minutes pass, I felt like a prisoner on death row, awaiting execution and hoping for that call from the governor granting a stay.

Ironically, the phone in my room did ring an hour later, at around 11:30. But it was no reprieve; instead, it was like rubbing salt in my wounds. The voice on the other end was the last person I ever expected to hear from.

"Hi, Mario, it's Bob."

It was an atheist classmate from my high school. He had the locker next to mine and made it a point to torment me every day.

I replied, "How did you get this number, and what do you want?"

Of course, I knew exactly what he wanted and precisely how he got my number. I was sure Satan had given him my number and provoked him to call at just the right moment to put the finishing touches of humiliation on me. But what he said next was nothing at all like what I expected.

"Mario, I didn't call you to say hello. I just found out you are staying at this resort. I became a Christian after high school." Let me interject here and say that if Bob could get saved, anyone can get saved!

He continued, "I also didn't call you to tell you I am a Christian. I'm calling you because I'm a chaplain with the California Youth Authority. We are doing a conference here. We do a late-night devotional for young gang members and drug addicts. Our guest speaker didn't make it because the bridge washed out. Can you come and speak to them tonight?"

Have you ever seen a cartoon where someone is on the phone,

and suddenly the person they are talking to is standing right there? Yeah, it was like that. In a moment he was standing next to me outside my hotel room door, and I said, "Where are they? I haven't got much time."

That very night, not a single one of those youth escaped salvation. Before the clock struck 12, they were safely in the kingdom of God.

I found my harvest. Now let's find yours.

God's greatest protection might be when He prevents us from becoming skilled at something we are not supposed to do. I did not belong with the church crowd. Jesus loves the church, and some are indeed called to congregations. But I belonged in the harvest. And God the Father, in answer to my cry and in His mercy, put me there.

### **I Was Honored to Have My Turn. Is It Your Turn Now?**

Have you decided it's your turn now? This cannot be a light decision. It must be from the core of your being. Unless it is, none of the training will stick, and you will not act on what you have learned. Without an irrevocable decision, the power will not come and the fire will not fall.

To be stirred but not changed makes you no different from the millions of Americans who call themselves Christian. They agree there's a problem. They believe something should be done. They may even be fooling themselves and thinking they are doing something. But they are unavailable and therefore disqualified.

We know God will use people in this massive opportunity. But who are they? In Matthew 22:14, we are told that "many are called, but few are chosen."

The scriptural context is important. So let's see the context of that verse to understand who is called and who is chosen:

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen,” (Matt. 22:11–14).

Jesus’ reference to the man building on sand or the seed falling on hard ground represents a person who heard the Word but did not take it to heart. Wearing the required wedding garb says that you understand and honor the ceremony. This man did the unthinkable. By not wearing a wedding garment, he disrespected the event. He treated it as if it were common. He was invited, but because of his insult, he was rejected.

Similarly, another call goes out to the general Christian population, not to a wedding, but to a mission: “Who will march in and harvest the vast field of souls? Who will go and save a nation?” Indeed, many are called, but only those who hear and respond correctly are chosen.

### **Are We Living to Present the Gospel to the Lost?**

The greatest threat to soul winning is not outside the church but inside the church. If ever a barking dog slowed the soul-winning train, it was this one: an *anti*-soul-winning attitude. We can use all the excuses we want, but the truth is that we lost America because we stopped winning souls.

The miracle harvest that awaits you begins with a sobering truth. We are at odds with God the Father regarding soul winning. He sees winning the lost as the supreme function of the church.

God the Father gave His Son for one major reason. It’s found in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not

perish but have everlasting life.” Sometimes the most important truths are so simple and familiar that we lose the meaning entirely.

So let’s rehearse this with a quick question-and-answer session.

How much did God the Father love the world? So much that He gave His only Son. That is what He did.

Why did He give His Son? So that souls would not be lost.

You and I can name all sorts of things we think the church should be doing. But we are on totally different frequencies when we do not win souls. And the fact of the matter is, we simply don’t see the supremacy of winning souls the way God the Father does.

Soul winning is not primarily attacked in the church by direct words, although sometimes it is. It is usually attacked by culture and attitude. Many Christian leaders bristle when I say this, but it is true. I can cite simple examples:

- Many Christian meetings end with no appeal for lost souls to be saved.
- Christians are not being trained to witness or to bring their friends to church.
- Even when there is an appeal to come to Christ, it is a nervous plea tacked on to the service.
- Instead of a towering gospel presentation, it is presented in fits and spurts. The outsider is surprised when the preacher suddenly switches gears in an “oh-by-the-way” altar call.

But the real culprit is the selfish congregation. If the average pastor were to announce and give a total gospel message that laid out the work of the cross, the threat of hell, and the promise of the return of Christ, he would be attacked by members who complained that “such a simple message

did not feed them.”

To win souls, you must detach yourself from all anti-soul-winning Christian groups. If you don't, when the next call comes for the impending harvest, being around these people will deafen you to the voice of God.

The sleepy church will not stop God from finding workers, but it will embarrass the leaders of these lukewarm congregations. Many Christian leaders who have served God for years will become jealous of nobodies that emerge from nowhere and win thousands, perhaps millions, to Christ.

Tragically, these leaders will likely ignore the obvious reason for being skipped over. They will simply think it is unfair and therefore not legitimate. All they must do to enjoy the harvest is repent and jump in.

### **Are You Activating Heavenly Plans and Purposes for Others Through Your Prayers?**

The immediate command of Jesus was “pray [to] the Lord of the harvest” (Luke 10:2). Interestingly, we do not see where Jesus taught His disciples how to preach. But He did teach them to pray.

What must prayer consist of if even preaching does not rank as its equal? I am not saying preaching is not important. I am saying that a sermon will ignite a thousand-fold more from prayer than from the mechanics of public speaking.

What are we praying? Notice this: our prayer must be the urgent reaction to finding out souls are ready to be saved, and we must have workers to go and get them before it is too late.

Jesus is not saying we should pray for lost souls to get ready or to make them responsive to the preaching. We are imploring the Father to send workers before the harvest is lost. Why are

we imploring God the Father about this? Because He has the power to send.

As you survey America, God needs to open your eyes. Jesus said, "Look to the fields!" It is possible not to see the forest for the trees. Our minds and hearts might be so weighed down with "facts" about what Americans want that we cannot see what they really want—and who it is that wants it.

Prayer will lift you out of limits and evil. It will cleanse you of the world's noise and clamor. Satan controls the soundtrack and the volume—until you pray.

But a part of this call to prayer is almost like a trick. God knows that you cannot sincerely pray for workers to be sent into the harvest without it causing their hearts to want to be sent.

Can you see what I am telling you? God the Father has a master plan for your harvest of souls. Pray until you are dead to human planning and alive only to go forth at His command. Heaven will back you up.

**Mario Murillo** rose from poverty in the Mission District of San Francisco. After being revolutionized by Christ, he felt a call to evangelize at the University of California at Berkeley. After a four-day conference in San Jose, California, extended to six months, with nearly 250,000 people in attendance, he launched his international ministry. Murillo's voice has been heard by millions, bringing a message that zeroes in on the hurts of society and Christ's power to end addiction, racism, violence and disease.