

A MINI-MISSION'S COURSE John 4:35-38

“Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”

Jesus was an itinerate teacher/preacher. Throughout the Four Gospels we see Him continuously on the move. He did not wander about aimlessly. His travels were well calculated and planned out so as to accomplish the maximum effect upon those to whom He ministered, and, especially, to teach His entourage of disciples valuable lessons.

This is vividly demonstrated in John chapter 4. The chapter opens with Jesus at a well talking with a woman about water. This was not a common scene for two reasons:

- Because of strict Jewish laws forbidding having contact with Samaritans, who were considered beneath the Jews as verse 9 states, “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.”
- Because talking with a woman in public was taboo. Normally, Jewish men did not speak to women in public: “His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman” (John 4:27). And yet Jesus addressed this woman saying: “Give me to drink.”

Therefore, Jesus broke through two barriers—the one steeped in racial bigotry, the other a sinful attitude toward the opposite gender. Why? Because Jesus was always concerned about the harvest! Not an agricultural harvest but a human harvest; not a material harvest but a spiritual harvest.

He had said, “I must go through Samaria” (verse 4). The Jews avoided going through Samaria but Jesus deliberately chose to take that route. Why? Because there was a harvest to be gathered in Samaria! In the last assignment He gave before He ascended to the Father after His resurrection, He said, “You shall be witnesses of me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Notice that He said, “*and Samaria.*” There is to be a harvest even among the Samaritans!

There are no people groups unloved by God and that will have been totally unreached when Jesus returns. Some of the lyrics that will be sung when the redeemed gather around the throne in heaven will be: “You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9).

When the disciples came and saw Jesus talking to the woman at the well, He used the occasion to teach them, and us, lessons about the harvest. This was not the first nor was it the last time that Jesus talked about the harvest to His harvesters. Seven separate times he spoke about the harvest in the Four Gospels.

We need repeated reminders that our ministry, as it relates to the lost, is one of harvesting. The harvest marks the end of the growing season, or the growing cycle. We live in the midst of the harvest fields, surrounded by souls that need to be gathered to the Savior. Constantly seeing the “fields that are ripe already for harvest” (John 4:35) we are prone to grow lethargic regarding the work of the harvest. However, Proverbs 10:5 is a warning: “He who gathers in summer is a wise son; He who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame.”

Missions, evangelism, witnessing—by whatever name you call it, we must be everlastingly at it! This we see from the mini-missions course that Jesus gave the disciples at the well of Samaria. What can we learn about harvesting souls for heaven from the talk Jesus gave at the well? Four important points:

1. The Instructive Alert in His Harvesting Message.

“Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? they are already white for harvest!”

In the alert that Jesus gave His disciples there are at least three facts about the harvest that should motivate His harvesters to be about the business of harvesting. They are:

a. The harvest time-element – The time for harvesting is the present, the immediate, not four months away. The harvest is “now” - do not postpone until tomorrow what you can do today. The best time to do something worthwhile is between yesterday and tomorrow!

b. The harvest condition – The harvest is already ripe – “already white for harvest!” Jesus was reaping the harvest of His witness to the Samaritan woman, and the Samaritan woman was reaping the fruit of her testimony as well. Many in the village believed in Jesus Christ and were saved – harvested for heaven. Both the sower and the reaper of the Gospel seed rejoice when God's grace is received and people are saved.

c. The harvest places – “look at the fields” – plural. There are many “fields”. What the Lord said to His disciples is a very important passage in the Bible, especially to all mission-minded local churches. There is a noticeable indifference among the converted about the plight of the unconverted. They have been harvested but are indifferent to those who are in danger of destruction;

- Indifference blurs our spiritual vision;
- Indifference blunts our awareness;
- Indifference subdues our real purpose;
- Indifference robs our opportunities;
- Indifference reveals the callousness toward Christ's commission;
- Indifference demonstrates our lack of compassion.

2. The Investigative Action that is Essential to Harvesting.

“...lift up your eyes and look...”

Jesus said that there are two deliberate actions that harvesters need to take: (1) “lift up your eyes” and (2) “look.” That is, face the fields and then focus upon the lostness of humanity. Be done with self-centeredness!

Why do we lose sight of the peril of souls all around us? Is it because our eyes are downcast and looking at that which only pertains to self-interest? Paul said to the Philippians “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4).

Helen Keller was asked once “What would be worse than being born blind?” to which she replied “Having sight without a vision.” How is your view of the world? The vision I am talking about goes beyond the natural sight of our physical eyes. It goes to the heart of the matter – not what we see at our feet but what is possible to be seen.

We can’t see that for which we do not look. There is more to be seen than meets the eye. A 5th grade S.S. class was asked to go home and count the stars in the sky as part of their next S.S. lesson. They came back with various numbers. Some said 100, some said 1,000, some said a million. Finally the teacher asked a little boy who had said nothing, “How many stars did you count?” He replied, “3”. The teacher asked how did you only see 3? He said, “I guess we just have a small backyard.” That’s our problem when it comes to seeing the harvest potential, we have a small backyard.

Dare we to look discerningly? The Greek word translated “look” is “*theaomai*” and means “to look closely at; to perceive.” This is not just a glimpse or a glance but a gaze. Look until you perceive the drastic condition of the Christless crowds all about you and if the sight does not move you to compassion your heart is stone cold!

In 2 Kings chapter 9 there is a story about four lepers who found treasure. “Then they said to one another, “We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king’s household” (verse 9).

3. The Intensive Activity that is Required in Harvesting.

“Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His *work*” (John 4:34). Again in verses 37 and 38 He says, ““One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you have not *labored*; others have *labored*, and you have entered into their *labors*.”

In the above verses the word “*work*” and the words “*labored*”, “*labors*” and “*labor*” occur 4 times. The intensive activity that is required in harvesting, whether an agricultural harvest or a spiritual harvest, is work, labor—the expenditure of physical, mental and emotional energy!

A farmer knows what work is, and hard work at that. There is more to harvesting than just reaping the crop. There is the preparation of the soil, the sowing of the seed, the watering of the plant, the cultivation of it before there is the harvesting. All of these activities require intense labor.

When Jesus talked about harvesting He was speaking about all of the above activities as other passages of scripture emphasize. He speaks to this point in verses 37 and 38 when He said, "One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors."

In I Corinthians 3:6-8 the Apostle Paul wrote, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that plants any thing, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase. Now he that plants and he that waters are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor." And, in verse 9 he says, "We are God's fellow workers."

What a privilege it is to work with God in His harvest field! This is called the divine/human cooperative. "We are God's fellow workers." It almost sounds too good to be true! Yet there are many who claim Christ as Savior but are not cooperating with Him in His labor. Saved but not serving.

4. The Incentive Announced to the Faithful Harvesters.

"...he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together" (John 4:36).

Again, Paul writes, "...every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Corinthians 3:8)

To have the privilege of working along with God is wonderful but, in addition to that, faithful workers in the Lord's harvest fields will be rewarded. Jesus said, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:12). What an incentive for faithful field-hands of the Master!

"If we consider the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak." (Swindoll, Improving Your Serve)

Earth for work, heaven for wages;
This life for the battle, another for the crown;
Time for employment, eternity for enjoyment.
- Thomas Guthrie

Conclusion

Did you miss five little words that Jesus spoke which sum up our mission on earth? The words are "**I sent you to reap.**" (Verse 38) We are either missionaries or we are a mission field!

A one-legged school teacher from Scotland came to J. Hudson Taylor to offer himself for service in China. "With only one leg, why do you think of going as a missionary?" asked

Taylor. "I do not see many with two legs going," replied George Scott. He was accepted. Do you have two good legs?

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