

The Fields are White for Harvest

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Matthew 9:35–38 (NKJV) *“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. ³⁶ But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. ³⁷ Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. ³⁸ Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.’”*

John 4:35–38 (NKJV) *“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! ³⁶ And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. ³⁷ For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”*

On September 24, 1983, three sports fishermen motored to an island off the west coast of Florida. Sudden squalls whipped five-foot waves into their boat, drowning the engine. Helpless before the tide, they drifted into the Gulf of Mexico. There was no need to worry, they thought. The sea lanes hummed with activity, and early rescue seemed likely. When, finally, on the third day a Coast Guard jet flew overhead, they felt they had been seen and celebrated by eating nearly all the food left aboard. No deliverance came. In desperation, they watched thirty ships pass close by and move on, despite their frantic gestures for help. They ate fish to survive and drank water by the sip morning and night to prevent dehydration. Finally, on their tenth day adrift, a freighter spotted and rescued them. Later the men asked angrily how they could be so close to so many potential rescuers, yet never be seen. ¹ This story may well be the sentiment of many on judgment day who died without knowing Christ. Will they say, “How is it that we were so close to so many Christians every day and yet were never seen?”

Sometimes we as Christians fail to see that there are many lost and spiritually hungry people around us. Often time we assume that people are not interested in God or spiritual things. Sometimes this is the case but most often it is not. In most cases people who seem to be disinterested have had negative experiences with Christians or they have adopted negative views of God because of their ignorance of the nature and effects of sin and evil. In fact, many are spiritually hungry and are searching for something that will satisfy.

Sometimes we see the mass of humanity around us in terms of numbers. We become overwhelmed with the numbers which causes us to become indifferent. If we cannot reach them all then we talk ourselves out of reaching any at all.

Jesus came to save the world. He walked among the masses without becoming indifferent. In fact, when He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion. How did Jesus do this?

First, Jesus saw the multitudes not as masses but as people. Jesus saw people. Do we see people or do we see masses? Often we count numbers but behind every number there is a name and a story. Jesus saw people not as numbers but as individual souls who needed to be saved.

Second, Jesus saw their need. The people gathered to Him because He had answers to the needs in their life. They were sick or bound by demons. Sometime we can become overwhelmed by the needs of the masses and close our eyes in order to cope. However, Jesus saw beyond the felt needs of the people to the real needs. Jesus saw them as they really were. They were weary. Literally this means they were harassed. They were scattered. Literally this means they were beat down and abused. They were like sheep without a shepherd. They felt alone, insignificant, and cast aside. They had no one to care for their soul, no one who *really* cared for them. Jesus cared. Do we care? Do people know we care? Do our actions show that we care?

¹ Hurley, V. (2000). *Speaker's sourcebook of new illustrations* (electronic ed., p. 66). Dallas: Word Publishers.

Third, Jesus was moved to action by what He saw. Jesus was moved with compassion. He was moved by love and mercy to meet the needs of individual people gathered together as masses. Jesus did not hide from the need. He did not run from the need. He did not allow the overwhelming needs of the people to make Him indifferent. Instead, Jesus saw the need not as an obstacle but as an opportunity. He saw them as a harvest field of opportunity. He said, "The harvest is plentiful."

We must begin to see and respond to people and their needs as opportunities to share the gospel. Jesus did identify the obstacle. It was not the people and their needs. It was the people who could meet their needs. Jesus said, "The laborers are few." While the opportunity is vast, the ability to reap that harvest is limited by workers.

Fourth, Jesus identified the spiritual solution to remove the obstacle and seize the opportunity. His solution was prayer. Jesus told His disciples to "Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." The word for "send" literally means "to thrust". It is important that willing workers work in the field but they are not to be satisfied to work alone. The full harvest is at stake. Busy workers must pray for an increase in the labor force. No, we cannot call and send others but the Lord of the harvest, who is Christ Himself, can call and send them as we pray. Both the problem and solution is spiritual in nature. It can only be solved by the Lord who works in the heart.

Jesus came to save the world. He paid the price on the Cross to make that possible. He has commanded His people to go share the gospel to gather lost souls. If we are going to do what the Lord has said, we must have a change of mind and heart.

How shall we respond to the Lord of the harvest? First, we must have a renewed spiritual hunger for doing the will of God. Jesus' food was to do the will of the Father. Are you hungry to do the will of God more than anything else in life? Second, we must believe that the harvest is ready now. Jesus said the fields are already white (ripe) unto harvest. Third, we must lift up our eyes and begin to see the ripened harvest of souls around us. We must begin to see the people around us not as masses but as individuals. Each individual has a name, has a story, has a need, and has a soul. Each of these souls is loved by God and is valuable in His sight. He loves them as much as He loves us. Do we really see others in the way God saw us in our need?

Fourth, we must develop an urgency in our heart to bring in the harvest. The opportunity to reap is time sensitive. The longer we delay, the more of the harvest is lost and the less fruit we gather for eternal life. We are co-laborers together with others in the Lord's harvest field. Some sow while others reap. We must sow when it is time to sow. We must reap when it is time to reap.

Fifth, we must understand the nature of the Lord's commission. The Lord of the harvest is always working to bring in the harvest. We are called to enter into His work. He has already sent people before us who have sown the seed of the gospel into their hearts. He now sends us to reap that for which we have not labored in sowing. Others before us plowed, sowed, and watered. He sends us now to share in the harvest of their labors. In the same way we also sow and others will come along after us to reap. In this way both those who sow and those who reap rejoice together and each receives wages for their work in the fields.

The fields are white unto harvest! It is time to lift up our eyes and to see people the way God sees people. He loves them and cares about them. It is time to repent of self-centered pursuits that prevent us from being involved in the work. It is time to pray that the Lord of the harvest send out more laborers. It is time to see the opportunities before us. It is time to remove the obstacles of procrastination and unbelief. It is time to give the Lord Jesus the reward of His sacrifice—souls for which He died.