



Harvest: A Labor of Love

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When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples,

“The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.” Matthew 9:36-38



In the synoptic gospels (Matthew 13:3, Mark 4:3, Luke 8:5), Jesus tells the memorable parable about the sower and his seed. In it, He identifies the seed as the Word of God. The ground represented the various ways people responded to the Word. As far back as the fall of man, God has been sowing the seeds that would yield a harvest, a large ingathering of lost souls in great need of salvation. Indeed, there will be no harvest without seed time. God first introduces this cycle of seedtime and harvest in His promise to Noah after the flood, *“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night will not cease.”* (Genesis 8:22). Yet, even before that time, God was sowing seed.

The Son of God, Jesus, was a master teacher and communicator. Because of the agrarian society in which He ministered while here on earth, Jesus often used the principles of farming to demonstrate eternal truths. Jesus emphasized to His followers the importance of harvesting lost souls for the Kingdom. Just as the farmer knows when corn, wheat and barley are ready to be harvested, so Jesus knows when souls are ready to receive Him. During His three year ministry, Jesus gave Himself to the task of enlisting, equipping and empowering *soul harvesters*.

In our focal scripture, Jesus recognized, revealed and redressed the readiness of the fields for harvesting. He noted the signs of readiness surrounding Him and his trainees. The enthusiastic receptivity to His teaching in chapters 5-7 and the yearning for His touch in chapters 8 and 9 illustrate the readiness of the multitude. The diseased, demon-possessed, and dying, as well as the blind, the paralyzed and persons suffering from all manner of sicknesses, flocked to him. As is the case today, their utter desperation signaled their readiness.

Just what does harvest “readiness” look like? Allow me to suggest that it looks like RESTLESSNESS! Notice how Jesus describes them in verse 36...**distressed**. They were confused, weighted down...utterly “stressed.” The human heart, it seems, becomes more open to hearing from God when it is ensnared in life’s most difficult circumstances. These souls also were **dejected** (v. 36). Their conditions forced them to the fringes of society. Jesus could see their misery and empathize with their wretchedness. Jesus also observed that these hapless souls were **directionless** and **defenseless**, “like sheep without a shepherd (v. 36).” They were in desperate need of someone to show them the way and to protect them from the predators lying in wait.

Oh, the grace of God. He does not desire us to remain in such a vulnerable state. Jesus restored the restless souls, providing the much-needed remedy for their “lostness.” Jesus offered them hope through salvation. Unlike those who see only with natural eyes, Jesus sees worth and wealth in the harvest. So much so, that He sends workers into His fields to gather and preserve as much as possible. Why? Well... let me not get ahead of myself.

The harvest is valuable to Jesus. Each soul has **WORTH**. The harvest’s value is so great, Jesus says it deserves our prayers. We should be **praying** for additional laborers to be sent into the fields so that lost souls reached with the Gospel can be saved. Because the harvest is great, it also requires our **prioritization**. Saving souls should be top priority for all believers. Sadly, without enough laborers, much of the crop will rot – ready people will die without salvation. Working the harvest warrants our **participation**. As once-lost souls ourselves, we must share the Good News with others, so that they, too, can escape the darkness and fire of hell.

The harvest also has **WEALTH**. First, its wealth is found in its **abundance** (v. 37). Notice, Jesus points out to His disciples that the harvest is plentiful. The volume of lost souls is so great that it can hardly be measured, and the souls can be found everywhere. This, too, speaks to its wealth...its **accessibility** (v. 36). The harvest is right within our reach! Our responsibility is to p-REACH (Mark 16:15). And when we do, we will help to draw the lost to the Lord. There’s more wealth in the harvest, still. It’s in its **ability**. Harvested corn, for example, can be used to feed thousands. Likewise, harvested souls can be used to harvest other souls. Unless we reach them before they die, all the wealth is wasted.

The **WORK** of the harvest is teaching, preaching and healing (v. 35). “*Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people*” (Matthew 9:35; cf. 4:23). First, let’s consider the work of the harvest as a **TRANSFER-ma-tion-al** work. During harvest time, the message of salvation is *transferred* to the lost. Secondly, this truth – when preached to those ready to be harvested – is a **TRUTH-for-mission-al** work. This truth has the power to reshape the *mission* of one’s life, providing new purpose and potential. Thirdly, as a **TRANSFORM-a-tion-al** work, it changes – transforms – those who receive the Word. The ministry of harvesting is to heal the sick, the brokenhearted, the hurting, and the hopeless.

Workers are needed to salvage the wealth and worth of the harvest. According to the scripture, not just anybody can work the harvest. The **WORKER** must have **relationship** with the Lord of the Harvest. Only those who have been saved can do the work of harvesting. Because of this incredible relationship, the worker is **responsible** to the Lord of the Harvest. Yes, this is an accountable relationship; and we are responsible for reaping the harvest. Finally, the worker is a **representative** of the Lord of the Harvest. When we reach out to the lost, we are representing the Lord. We are His ambassadors in the world.

Before we close, let’s get back to the **WHY** of the harvest. Why all the attention to and concern for this harvest? The answer is found in the text. Jesus’s love for desperate, hurting lost souls is the motivation. **Compassion** was a huge “Why” for Christ. It should be huge “Why” for us as well. Christ went all the way to the point of death, so that all would have the chance for salvation. Why? Because of His **Commitment**! How’s our commitment today?

The **Commission** of Christ is one final “WHY.” “For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). He was sent to salvage souls. That’s why He died. Jesus taught his disciples about the harvest so that they could carry on the harvesting work He began. “As the Father sent me into the world, even so send I you (John 20:21).