

# God's Word on the Harvest

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A major goal of every believer must involve participation in fulfilling the great commission. As believers we must follow our Lord's instruction by each of us committing to "*deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow Jesus*" as He instructed us in Luke 9:23. In contrast to this command, church involvement surveys indicate that only about 5% of lay members of the average church directly win a soul to Christ during their Christian lifetime. Most of the soul winning is done by the clergy and a few active lay persons. Our prayer is believers in all of our local churches will become active witnesses for our Lord and mobilize others for this task as well.

Our objectives include:

- learning to present the gospel through persistent personal contact involving neighborhood visitation and home Bible study.
- learning how to better develop relationships.
- understanding that winning the lost is far more of a *process* than an *event*.
- understanding our own need of spiritual preparedness.
- accepting the fact that we have a responsibility to follow-up and disciple those that we win for Christ.
- learning that fulfilling the great commission must become a sustained *lifestyle* rather than an *event*.

Dr. Lamar Vest, former General Overseer of our denomination, writes that, among other responsibilities, the mission of the church is that "*every member will make a commitment to daily prayer and Bible study*" and that "*soul winning and discipleship must be given the HIGHEST priority in the church's ministry objectives.*" It is a sad reality that in many of today's churches we see a church described by John in Revelation chapter 3:1 as he wrote to the church in Sardis, "*you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.*" We must look closely at our motivation for the various programs and ministries we have in place in our churches. Is the primary goal to win the lost? Or are they structured where they are mostly supportive of us as a congregation with only a residual soul winning objective? It is easy to see that in the "church of today" there is a confusion of purpose due to the pursuit of methodologies that have become more event and success oriented than discipleship and prayer oriented. Reinhart Bonnke (now in Heaven!) said, "*Why does the church exist? The cross reminds us that we exist to spread the message of the cross...the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ.*" This is why we are here.... not to merely be in support of the work of God. While all of us have ministry support roles we have a divine calling into, we are, first and foremost, called to be a witness to the world of the gift of eternal life provided to a lost and dying world by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

We need to begin to make the changes in our life that demonstrate to God our commitment to fulfill that mission. Our challenge to the church and to all Christians is to *commit to living your life everyday as if you KNOW that Jesus will return within the next year!* What would you change in your life if you knew Jesus was coming in a short time? Would you have to repent of any sin in your life? Are you really prepared for the rapture? Jesus said that He is coming after a church that is looking for His return. Not just being busy, but really looking for His return! Who do you know that is lost? If you knew Jesus was coming, you would make sure that you take the time to share with them the truth of the gospel of Christ...their only hope for the future.

When Jesus told us the parable in Luke 19:13 where the nobleman told his servants to "occupy until I come" He was speaking of the need to be busy with the task at hand. However, consider that passage of

scripture in a military context. In the military, when you are commanded to “occupy territory” it means to take it with force, stay on it and control the territory. What if we applied Luke 19:13 to our great commission requirement? Matthew 11:12 states *“the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force.”* We live in a state of violent spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness; against spiritual rulers in high places, if we aggressively “occupy; take territory” for the kingdom of God in these last days before the coming of our Lord, we will prevail and be victorious!

Barna research did a survey and asked the question “are you a Christian?” Eighty-five percent of Americans responded in the affirmative. However, when asked if they believed in the Biblical doctrine of being born again, only 41% responded that they embraced this belief. Finally, when asked the question if they believed in salvation by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus alone, with no requirement for works, as indicated in Romans 10:9 and Romans 10:13, only 7% responded that they held to this fundamental belief! This is a strong indicator that the harvest in America is plentiful. We know that churches in foreign countries are responding to this need by sending missionaries to our country! Many church leaders are now telling us that we live in a “post-Christian nation. Joel 3:14 makes a statement that is applicable to the time in which we live: *“Multitudes, Multitudes, in the valley of decision.” Multitudes of our countrymen are in the valley of decision.*

The paradigm shift (a shift in the pattern of the way we do things) we experience when we begin to take the gospel to the world instead of waiting for the world to come to our church and let our pastor preach to them produces a realization in our individual lives and corporately in our church of the fulfillment of all of the myriad promises and blessings of the Word of God in our lives. Promises like Matthew 6:33 (seeking Him first) involves obedience to His commandments. Jesus said, *“if you love me, keep my commandments.”* What are His commandments? The gospels are filled with commandments of Jesus, but one of His greatest commandments are found in Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8. The Great Commission is the last instruction given by Christ before He ascended to heaven. He could have given this commandment to His disciples at any time during His brief three-year ministry on the earth, but He chose to give the Great Commission to them as his last instruction. Why? When we are preparing to go on a trip, we speak to those important to us and give them last-minute instructions as to the matters that are of immediate importance to us. The fact that Jesus did this indicates the great importance of this commandment. He wanted His disciples to remember that the last instruction He gave them was to take all **that He had taught them and teach and preach it to the world.**

Most believers have heard sermons on the “last words of Jesus on the cross.” These were not His “last words!” His last words before returning to Heaven are found in Acts 1:8. *“And ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the world.”* Where is your Jerusalem? Did Jesus expect all of us to move to Israel? No! He was telling us—His disciples that we must first evangelize our Jerusalem! Where is your Jerusalem? It is our homes, our schools, where we work and have entertainment, where we shop, our friends, and yes, even our church! We must prepare ourselves to be not only a living witness, but an active witness for Jesus Christ in “our Jerusalem!” Jesus told us in Matthew 22:8-9 that *“the wedding is ready, but they which were bidden are not worthy.”* He then told us in Luke 14:23 how to resolve this problem, *“go ye into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”* A pastor recently stated “We built the church and they didn’t come. Now we realize that we must go out there and get them!” This is the way God has provided for us to populate His wedding feast...to go out there and bring them in! Who is going to do this work? We are! We are the laborers the Lord of the Harvest has called to compel them to come in!

God’s word on the harvest reveals His **plan**. Jesus said in Mark 4:26-29 *“This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed*

*sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain-first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.*" The timing of the harvest requires divine guidance. The leading of the Holy Spirit is essential. We may not have knowledge of why a person is ready to hear the Word. We must realize that we may or may not be the first person to plant the seed. This is why prayer and preparation are both of such vital importance. Notice the process involved. Next, the harvest reveals the **passion** of Christ. In Matthew 9:36-38, we are told that *"when He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."* His intense love for the lost exploded into a cry for laborers to enter the harvest. This statement came after Jesus demonstrated His compassion for the people in verse 36. He notes that they were harassed and helpless. Passion and sincerity will usually outperform knowledge. (Remember when you first got saved and how many you influenced with very little scriptural knowledge?) One who has a powerful or compelling feeling or belief is said to have a passion for that subject. An artist or performer who has no passion for his or her craft will never be great or even remembered.

God's word on the harvest reveals the **price** of obedient service. Jesus said in Luke 9:62 *"No man who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of heaven."* Jesus did not say this to intimidate us but to impress on us the seriousness of the commitment. Looking back does not serve us well. (Ask Lot's wife!) Running a great race for a short distance is not what God wants. He encourages us to finish the race, to run with perseverance, the race marked out for us. It would be a good idea for us to check our over-sensitive (thin-skinned) nature at the door. Jesus said *"Remember the words I spoke to you: No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."* (John 15:20-21)

Lastly, the harvest reveals the **peril** of the times. *"Do you not say four months more and then the harvest? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now, the reaper draws his wages, even now, he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying, one sows and another reaps is true."* (John 4:35-37) One of the biggest lies the devil has ever told us is not that there is no heaven or no hell, but that there is no hurry! The focus is on the urgency of the harvest. *"For many will come in my name, claiming, I am the Christ, and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people."* (Matthew 24:5-8, 10-11). We do not know exactly when our Lord is to return, but we do know the possibility of the end of life comes to friends and neighbors each day. We must look upon the harvest with a desire to "possess" it for our Lord. If these are indeed the last days (prophetic revelation says they are) then we must be diligent in getting the Word out to the lost. God wants us to reap now!

*Everyone has seed.* Every Christian has a unique testimony. It is yours and someone will respond to your experience. You and the Holy Spirit can handle any situation that presents itself. *"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."* (II Corinthians 4:7). Your seed will produce fruit because God's Word will not return void. God would not ask you to do something He would not equip you to accomplish and what you possess is sufficient. Our words and actions will affect more people, positively or negatively than we realize. ***What you sow determines your harvest.***

*You should expect a return when you sow the seed.* God has promised that His Word would not come back void, so if we are properly using the Word of God, we can expect results. The way we reap the harvest changes with the times. Consecutive sowing brings consecutive harvest.

*What we should know about the harvest. It is the Lord's.* “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into HIS harvest field.” (Matthew 9:38). One of the natural tendencies of humans is to take ownership and responsibility for that which we are engaged in. We can judge our motives by how we judge kingdom work versus church or denomination work. The harvest is souls and God says, “All souls are mine.” (Ezek. 18:4) It is God who gives the increase! (I Corinthians 3:6). **The harvest is plenteous.** If the potential harvest was plentiful in Jesus’ day, how much more plentiful for us now with the world population over eight billion souls? The whole world is ready. (John 4:35). The time is right and conditions favorable for the good news. People are yearning for hope.

*What we should do about the harvest.* First, we should **lift up our eyes** (John 4:35). The meaning of this verse indicates we are to look up for spiritual guidance which will give us a better view. We will then see (really see) the fields in which we are to labor. The upward or spiritual vision allows us to see people as God sees them—in need of a shepherd. Second, we should **look on the fields**. To look and see is not enough. That’s an academic exercise. To look and FEEL is what Jesus is asking us to do. Look, assess, have compassion, decide, plan, execute, get involved and do the work of an evangelist! Not only are we to be active in the spreading of the good news, but we are to pray for, recruit, train, support and encourage others to be productive. Third, we are to **reap**. (John 4:36-38). Many of us have observed a salesman who spent all of his time talking about all the pluses, and every aspect of the product, but never got around to asking if you wanted to buy it. Reaping, for most of us, is the phase of the soul winning process that is the most satisfactory and inspires us to do it again. To know we have participated in the prayer that opens the kingdom of heaven to the new believer is one of the greatest joys we can experience.

## **Closing thoughts**

In the parable of the landowner in Matthew 20: 1-16, Jesus teaches the landowner of verse 1 and the owner of the vineyard in verse eight is the same person: the Lord Jesus Christ. We are the laborers. We are called and chosen. (1 Peter 2:9). There is an urgent need described here. The laborers were idle (v.6) If we picture this in our mind as a literal event, we must assume that these men were not engaged in any meaningful endeavors, and thus, must be considered “lazy people.” By doing so, we can miss the teaching point of the entire narrative. The fact that we are gainfully employed and are very busy, cloud the fact that spiritually we are idle just as those in this narrative. We also are void in the Lord’s harvest field and will have nothing to show eternally for our time spent on earth. The idle workers had a good reason for their idleness: “No man hath hired us.” (v.7). They were not idle because they did not want to work. They were idle because they were not directed into the marketplace. There will be jealousy and envy in the process. (vs.10-12). Have you ever considered that it takes God longer to get a Christian ready to witness than it takes Him to get a lost person ready to be saved?