

Spiritual Harvest Needs Spiritual Harvesters

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[0 : 00] Well now let's turn to the Gospel according to John, and chapter 4.

John chapter 4. And we may just read at verse 33.

This is when the disciples had come back to the well to Sychar, the well near Sychar, that is, Jacob's well.

We'll read at verse 33 then. Therefore the disciples said to one another, Has anyone brought him anything to eat? And Jesus said to them, My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work.

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.

[1 : 14] 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.

These verses in particular, verses 35 to 38. And I want us to continue the theme that we had earlier on, the harvest.

We looked earlier on at the harvest in the natural world, and also in the spiritual realm too. And this evening I want us to focus on how the spiritual harvest needs spiritual harvesters.

And it's really Jesus teaching in this context of dealing with the woman of Samaria by Jacob's well near the village of Syca.

[2 : 27] And it's nothing new to us who know our Bibles that the scriptures, particularly the Old Testament, give us these figures of harvest being gathered, illustrating not just the material, the physical harvesting, but the spiritual harvesting that is done too.

And this harvesting has necessarily to be done by people who are spiritually aware. Jesus tells his disciples there that he had ordained, verse 38, I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored, others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.

And this little passage, John 4, 35 to 38, really shows us how Jesus had to switch the disciples on a bit more.

To me it's like the dimmer switch that you turn up until the lights are brighter. They had light, they had true light, they had understanding, but the time came for Jesus to turn up the light a bit more, and to show them what they were really to be about.

They had harvesting work to do, and they had to be more aware of their opportunities than they actually were at the time, as we shall see. A harvest had to be gathered.

[4 : 03] And the interesting thing here is that the harvest that Jesus is teaching his disciples about was actually, in its beginnings, if you like, gathered by himself here at the village of Saika.

Those choice disciples were so blinkered, as it were, by what the Saviour said, go into the lost sheep of the house of Israel, that they took that as an absolute, and they never looked beyond that.

And the Saviour instructs them here that they were to look beyond their own local situation, beyond the Jewish people themselves.

They weren't to neglect them, but they were to look beyond them, because the harvesting had to be done not just in the land of Israel, but in all the world.

And so, Jesus is about the business here of teaching them this, and he does it by gathering a harvest there at the village of Saika. As I said, in doing this, in showing them this, it was an object lesson, a powerful object lesson.

[5 : 21] But in doing it, he is, as it were, giving them more light on the task they are to perform. Now, we read there that they had gone away.

They were just returning, verse 33. They had gone away to Saika to secretly get some food. And they had come back to the well. And when they returned, they were amazed that Jesus was talking to this woman at the well, and particularly as she was a Samaritan.

But that's what they found. He couldn't understand it. It was a bit of a mystery to them. The apostles wanted Jesus to stop talking to her and to eat food.

And, of course, he tells them, verse 32, I have food to eat, of which you do not know. And they wonder, has somebody brought him food that we do not know about? My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

And so, he instructs them, you see, on using their spiritual opportunities, on seizing the moment, and on not be over-concerned about food for the body.

[6 : 40] This instruction, then, we will consider together and to see how Jesus stares his disciples to have a better vision, a greater vision, and a bigger heart for reaching the lost.

Two things I want us to think about, chiefly, but we'll look at a few things within these main points. First of all, the harvest reaped by Jesus.

The harvest reaped by Jesus. Now, it's clear from the passage, you see, that the disciples themselves were not at Jacob's well thinking about missionary strategy.

They weren't at Jacob's well to consider converting Samaritans or preaching the gospel to Samaritans. Actually, they were just there because it was a handy place to stop and rest and get a drink and get some food and get on their way to Galilee.

That is abundantly clear in the context. Rest, relax, eat and drink and let's get on our way. There's work to be done in the villages and towns of Israel, in northern Israel.

[7 : 59] You see it there, if you go back to verse 27, they're not interested at all in the salvation of the Samaritans.

Verse 27, at this point, that's when they come back, they marveled that he talked with a woman. Yet no one said, what do you seek? Or why are you talking to her?

They're not interested. They're not concerned. What they are concerned in, we've noted. They had made up their minds why they were there and where they were going and what they were going to do when they got to Galilee.

Bishop Lightfoot was an evangelical Anglican scholar of top rank, but a very warm preacher of the word, so the records tell us.

But he had a tremendous insight into the languages of the Bible. And his commentary on this, this is what he says, they had appointed themselves a church extension committee.

[9 : 17] And then they surveyed the potential in Samaria for receiving the gospel and concluded it was just a case of moving on. They were needy but not ready.

Let's leave them to a more convenient season. Let's get up into Galilee and do the work there. And he suggests, as indeed Trent suggests, they must be dealt with separately.

They need preparation. The soil needs preparation. The soil needs preparation. There needs to be ploughing and then sowing, then watering. But we are reapers, you see. We've been appointed to reap a harvest.

They're needy but not ready. They're not for us. And that's a dangerous approach. It's a blinkered approach.

It's an almost visionless approach under the pretense of a vision for church extension. Needy but not ready.

[10 : 26] So their attention was fixed really on the generalities of life. They considered this was a beautiful spot to sit and to relax and to eat and drink and then to get on their way.

And it's quite obvious, you see, from what Jesus says that they were looking at the countryside all around them. They were looking out on the beautiful green fields where the crop was coming on nicely.

But it was four months from harvest. Their minds were surveying and reflecting on what it was like then and what it would be like later on.

But you see, Jesus had an eye on the salvation of these folks. Though he had come to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, he had come as the saviour of the world and his vision was universal.

That's why he was going to turn up the light on his disciples that they might have the same perspective as his. He saw, I can't remember who said it, he saw with the eye of omniscience, but it's an interesting way of putting it.

[11 : 47] He saw us only he could see. But he wanted his disciples to recognise that they were to be imitators of him in this, to always be seeing an opportunity.

How many times have we come to the end of a day and we thought, now I wish I had said this to so and so. Good, I got one nod.

I wish I had said it. I wish I had said it. How many times have we thought that? I had an opportunity and I didn't take it.

How many times do we think that God has put someone in our way that we may tell them the gospel story? Not just that we could get acquainted with them and think, what a nice lady that is, what a nice chap he is.

what does it matter? But that we might impart to them words of eternal life. That matters. Seeing the opportunity and seizing the opportunity.

[13 : 00] And so our Saviour lifts their vision and he enlarges it. He takes the very thing that they are surveying and musing on. He says to them, you're looking out there and you're seeing it is four months to harvest.

And of course he's pointing by this time down to the village of Sychar and he says, lift up your eyes and look, the fields are already white for harvest. The woman has returned.

But the woman is bringing along with her at a distance of course but they're coming to the well to meet Jesus. She had found her Messiah and they were coming to find him too.

They were touched by her witness and they wanted to hear him for themselves. And so Jesus says, look, the fields are already white for harvest.

You're saying, verse 35, 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.

[14 : 17] Jesus is gathering a harvest before their very eyes in the most unpromising place, the town, the village of Sychar among the Samaritans detested by the Jews.

And so the Savior brings them into his way of thinking. To think about people standing in need of the Savior, the fields are white for harvest.

And many Samaritans, verse 39, and many of the Samaritans of that city believed in him because of the words of the woman who testified, he told me all that I ever did.

So when the Samaritans had come to him, they urged him to stay with them and he stayed there two days. Notice that. And many more believed because of his own word.

You see what's going on here? the disciples are being instructed on how to view people. How to have a vision that's different than what we've been brought upon.

[15 : 45] To look at people and to see them as people who need the Savior. And here in this most unlikely place by Jacob's well, Samaritans were coming to faith in Jesus.

I like the touch that Lightfoot has on this because he reminds us that they were coming up, the Samaritans were famous for their very white linen robes and their white caps and he reminds us that this was very symbolical you see of the harvest field.

White for harvest. And he sees these hundreds of folks coming up towards him to hear him for themselves. And they're going to be taught line upon line over two days about the Lamb of God who came to bear the sin of the world.

Not just of Jews but of Gentiles too, even of Samaritans. And I suppose that the disciples themselves were just jammed in their brains with this.

How can any good thing come out of Samaria? How can they come to faith? And we've been going round the villages and towns of Israel and people are rejecting us.

[17 : 17] How can they come to faith? But our Lord says it's true. That's what's happening. You see, the end of verse 35, lift up your eyes and look at the fields for they're already white for harvest and he who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit for eternal life.

Jesus is entering into a reaping ministry here in the most unlikely place. and the wage is the joy of seeing these folks come to faith.

The gladness of heart over sinners repenting. And he says this, somewhat enigmatic way of putting things, he says, so that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.

For in this the saying is true, one sows and another reaps. Well, I have no doubt that the disciples were asking by this stage, who did the sowing?

And the truth is, John the Baptist did the sowing. Not very far away from there, people from all the parts, the Samaritans and the Judeans and so on, came to Anon and Salem where the water was to be baptized, confessing their sins.

[18 : 53] John the Baptist was one who sowed in tears and the harvest has come. And you see, it's not about, oh, one woman doesn't make a harvest, because we've just said, these inhabitants of Sychar are coming out to Jesus, to hear for themselves the wonderful works of God.

They're coming to listen to the Messiah himself, to hear his word, and to believe the report. As we know, that's what happened.

So, something exciting is going on here. The reaping time has come, it's going on apace. in Amos chapter 9, it is, there's an interesting passage there towards the end of it, how that God will build up the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down, by gathering Gentiles to the Messiah.

And, it's happening right here. The reaping is going on apace, as it were, and many of the Samaritans in the city believed in him, because of the woman's testimony, and many more believed on him, because of his own word, verse 41.

And, my dear friends, the practical import of this for you and me is that to do the spiritual work of harvesting, we must be spiritually switched on.

[20 : 40] It's true that informed and intelligent, biblically intelligent, I mean, and converted people have been able to share the gospel with others.

That's true. That has happened. And people have come to faith. That's the exception, not the rule. The rule is that being switched on to Christ, being in the faith, following him, believing the report about him, on his person and his saving work, we are to be volunteers to impart to others that good news.

And we're to be alert to spiritual opportunities. This, I think, is one of the points that I'm taking most out of it myself. We're always going to, but we never just quite get there.

That's not saying we don't do it at all, I'm not saying that. But what I'm saying is we need to make more use of our opportunities, and the best way to do that is to consider a passage like this, where the apostles themselves were found wanting.

We're not trying to grind anybody's face in the sand, so to speak, but to show us that we're in this together, to show us that the apostles were in it, and were found out, blinkered in their vision.

[22 : 12] Isn't it true? And I suppose most of us here tonight have been guilty of this. When somebody shows a wee bit of interest, what's their background? And what we sometimes more often than not mean is have their free church background.

There's a few smiles, so that means you agree. Well, the Samaritans hadn't got a free church background.

They hadn't got a Jewish, good Jewish education. They hadn't got a Jewish background. They hadn't an Old Testament background. They had the Samaritan Pentateuch, which was all they had.

But Jesus saw them as sinners who needed salvation. And Jesus saw that his disciples need to see that too. God will be to see where we are ourselves.

Take stock of ourselves and see that there are things we can do by way of sharing the gospel, by simply saying, this is an opportunity the Lord has given me.

[23 : 24] I'm not going to waste it. There needs to be a more serious attention given to asking the Lord to make each day count.

I nearly said something from a song. Let's make every moment count. Let's make every day count. as regards the eternal good of those we meet.

Not worrying about the background. Oh, if we happen to come across the background, fine, but not that it's sometimes background is useful to know about simply because you know, well, I needn't start talking about Isaiah and Jeremiah and Lamentations and the more obscure books to so-and-so because so-and-so doesn't know hardly a thing about the Bible.

Background in that sense is valuable. Of course it is. But we need ourselves to be crystal clear on the importance of praying that the Lord would guide us and indeed of making conscience of praying together when we can for such opportunities and to be looking for them.

You know, it's a crazy thing when you think about it, to be praying for an opportunity and not to expect that opportunity. If we pray for it, let's expect it.

[25 : 02] Let's look for it. If we pray on Monday morning for an opportunity on Monday, let's look for it, expect it, take it. Now, you see, Light Food had it there.

they weren't thinking like that. They were there for a seat to refresh themselves, to eat and drink and go on their way. There was work to be done, not in Sychar, not among the Samaritans, but up in good old Galilee.

And the Saviour taught them otherwise. And he reaped a harvest before their very eyes. were not therefore to take the view entertained by the disciples at that time, needy but not ready.

Not the right time, not the right opportunity. I think I can honestly say, looking back, that that's one of my biggest regrets.

Wasted opportunities. opportunities. That doesn't mean I haven't taken opportunities, not at all. But one has to say with shame of face, so many opportunities wasted.

[26 : 27] Needy, but not ready. And we have to rid ourselves of that approach. As indeed we have to rid ourselves of the approach, that there's a job for the minister and the elders.

There's nothing better for a believing person than to tell others how they came to faith in Jesus, how they have come to know the Saviour, not to know just about him, but to know him.

To walk with him day by day. And to have a story to tell. in fact it's interesting, you know, this is a wee digression, but it's interesting that some of the great preachers of the past, and they were mighty preachers, and greatly used, they began their ministry, inverted commas, simply by telling their story of how they came to the Lord, of how the Lord found them and they found the Lord.

and sometimes in their preaching it comes through. You'll not know it, unless you know Duncan MacLeod very well, but some of his background, some of how he came to faith, came through in his preaching.

Because it's really and is the core of his being. It matters, and he wants it to matter to others too.

[28 : 04] We cannot but speak the things which we have come to know. So the harvest Jesus reaped.

Secondly, Jesus says the harvest will come. He says, for in this, verse 37, 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.

Now this is an important and encouraging point here. We looked in the morning, in Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6, we've looked at how, not only in the physical world of farming, and preparing, and the hard work, until the harvest comes, the God-given harvest, but we saw the same principles in the spiritual realm.

The work's got to be done, the slog has to be put in, the tears have to be shed, the prayer has to be made, the agonizing over people, until at length the fruit is gathered.

[29 : 29] But it will come, the Savior says, it will come. As surely as the work is done, precious souls will be saved.

They'll be delivered from the wrath to come, they'll embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, they will be fruit and to eternal life, as he says, there in verse 36.

And he who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit for eternal life, sinners into the kingdom of Jesus, that both the sower and the reaper may rejoice together.

The saying is true, he says, one sows and another reaps. And we must therefore be prepared to put work in.

Be prepared to take out opportunities. I have no doubt but that the disciples had a huge transformation in their thinking as a result of this.

[30 : 41] For the Savior showed them how it should be done, how they should have a vision, how they should be ready to grasp their opportunities in this great work.

Christ promises the sower and the reaper will rejoice together. The Lord of the harvest has planned it this way. And so you see, those of us here tonight who love Christ must enlarge our vision and strengthen our hands in the work.

The harvest has its season. And just because the whole sweep of life today in Scotland and the UK is against that, we are not to go with the flow.

We are to remember the Savior's words and believe his words and reaffirm in our souls, the harvest has its season.

we thought earlier today in Genesis 8.22, God's word to Noah, as long as the earth remains, seed time and harvest, summer and winter, cold and heat, shall not cease.

[32 : 05] The disciples there in verse 38 were told by Jesus, the disciples were specifically called to a reaping ministry.

they were to enjoy a gathering in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Did he not tell them that they were to wait in the room until the Spirit came at that great Pentecostal outburst? And then they would go forth and they would gather a tremendous harvest.

harvest. But you see, in the context we're looking at, they were getting a taste of what it was to be about and how they were to have a vision that was broad.

And of course they entered into a wonderful harvest time. and they entered into it because Jesus had appointed them to that.

[33 : 13] I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored. Others have labored and you have entered into their labors.

And as we saw already, John the Baptist for one had labored there, not far from Syphar. people came flocking to him to hear his message.

The sowing was done, and in due time the harvest was reaped. I remember on one occasion I was talking to folks in Alt Bay about the ministry of the Reverend John McKenzie.

I don't know if some of you may know his last church I think was in Coltern, Evanton. And he had labored in his ministry there and saw in terms of conversions none at all.

And he left that corner pretty discouraged with the years that he had put in there. But when the Reverend Alistair Ferguson went there, he found that many of the people were under deep conviction of sin.

[34 : 35] And they were under that conviction because of John McKenzie's ministry. He had removed from there. But the Lord was working in them, you see, through the sowing of the man that was there before.

And when Alistair Ferguson came along, he had a reaping time. Many people came into the church there in Alt Bay, I mean into membership. But it's clear, they tell it themselves, many of them were under conviction of sin, a sense of lostness, of almost utter despair.

They had been convicted, you see, under John McKenzie's ministry. And then along comes Alistair Ferguson in the providence of God, and many become followers in truth.

And the point of that is, we're not to get bogged down in whether our ministry, our witness is to be sowing or reaping.

We get on with the sowing. And we ask the Lord to be gracious to us and let us see some fruit for it. We're not to withhold our labor, we're not to withhold our witness because nothing's happening.

[36 : 02] Not a bit of it. We're to sow the seed of the kingdom, watering it with our tears, begging the Lord in his goodness and mercy to convert this one and that one.

We know he can do it without our prayers. We know he could do it without the witness of the people and the preachers of the gospel, but he has not chosen to operate like that.

He has chosen to use his people and his preachers, he has chosen to use prayer as a key part of the whole story and sowing in tears.

these things are there because he has put them there. The order is his, not mine. And therefore we ought all the more to resolve on the importance of praying and expecting God to work.

there is an interesting passage you remember in Isaiah 62 isn't it, about you watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem, do not hold your peace, pray night and day, give him no rest until he makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

[37 : 35] Well, whatever that means, this much we can say, it is talking about an attitude to prayer in the witness of the church that we need. How can you give the one who does not sleep or slumber, but how can you give him no rest?

Well, it is obvious, isn't it? It is a figure to tell us that we must keep pleading, earnestly pleading, in all that we do in the sowing of the seed, we must be about the business of pleading with him.

for the blessing. The law of the kingdom, says Jesus, is that there will be a season of reaping.

And indeed he says, the fields are already white for harvest, if you have eyes to see them. And we need to ask the Lord, where are those harvest fields?

We might look at what we've been doing for the last couple of years or so, and say, so where is the fruit of it? Where's the harvest? We might need to be saying to ourselves, and then to the Lord, Lord, guide us in the way that we should go and help us to take the opportunities you give us.

[39 : 05] We need to take a lesson from Jesus, that should, to bring the living word to the people who need it. Didn't he bring living water to that woman at the well?

He that drinks of the water I will give will never thirst again, but will have a well springing up into life eternal. And if you're sitting here tonight as an adherent friend, surely this is an encouragement.

This is an encouragement rather than to despair, to look away to Jesus, to bless his word to your soul, to save you and you shall be saved.

Just as he saved that woman at the well, he can bring his word to bear upon us, that we believe it.

Listen to what these Samaritans say, now we believe, verse 42, they said to the woman, now we believe, not because of what you said, some had of course, but we who hadn't then believed, we believe because we ourselves have heard him and we know this indeed is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

[40 : 40] Jesus brought him to that place and he can bring us to that place and maybe that tonight for each of us where we are in our own experience, that there's something from Jesus here to help us as regards the harvest that needs spiritually aware and alert harvesters to sow the seed and to bring in the sheaves.

Amen.