

The cost of being Harvesters (1)

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Please turn with me to Matthew chapter 10. We're going to read from verses 16 through to 33.

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to the courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.

When they deliver you over, do not be anxious about how you are to speak or what you are to say, for you are to say what will be given to you, given to you in that hour.

For it is not you who speak, but the spirit of your father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake.

But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

[1 : 23] A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.

If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household? So have no fear for them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.

What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father.

But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.

[2 : 36] But whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven. Most, I think, will be familiar with the idea of a cost-benefit analysis.

It's used very commonly in business. And it's a really helpful process when it's done well. And it's used to evaluate a particular decision. And cost-benefit, just as it sounds, you add up all the costs and you put that against the benefits.

And that's your analysis. That helps you see the value of a decision. Now, I introduce that because as we move into this topic this morning, I think typically we see cost as loss.

So we say something that's really costly. We sort of feel as if, whoa, there was a considerable loss involved in that. But that's not always the case.

So, for example, I decide to buy a particular product and I research and I find it. I find one in a shop and it's \$100. And I think, whoa, that's a fair bit of money. But then, over the next couple of days, I discover there's actually a very similar product, an identical product, but it's a better quality.

[3 : 53] But the price tag's \$200. Now, I pay twice as much money. It costs me twice as much. But I get the more expensive product.

Because the benefit outweighs the extra cost. So, what I want to set up this morning as we move into these verses is to ask the question, what would a cost-benefit analysis, what would your cost-benefit analysis suggest in the matter of getting involved in the work of mission or harvesting or proclaiming the gospel of Jesus, which is at the heart of this section we're working through at the minute from chapter 9, verse 35 to the end of chapter 10 of Matthew's gospel.

What would your cost-benefit analysis look like? What would it suggest to you in terms of, will I get involved in this harvest work? Will I get involved in mission proclaiming the work of Jesus? Or is it too costly?

Jesus describes his mission as harvesting. We saw that last week. And as well as describing it as harvesting, he invites, not just invites, but he expects his disciples to share in this exciting but challenging work.

And it's work we saw last week that's actually guaranteed by him. He's the Lord of the harvest. So the harvest is hard work, but the outcome is guaranteed. But here's the question as we move into verse 16.

[5 : 30] Could anybody remain excited about this work of mission, this work of harvest, when we read these verses? They're not easy to sugarcoat, are they?

If you just start with that picture in verse 16, sheep in the midst of wolves. Well, coming off a farm, I've seen firsthand what a pack of wild dogs does in a flock of sheep.

And it's gruesome. That's the picture. They isolate one sheep after another, and they work together. And literally, they rip that sheep to pieces.

And in case you think, well, maybe they're hungry. They're not. When they're doing that, it's for the sheer joy of killing, when they get in that pack mentality.

That's the picture. And then against that, Jesus keeps on saying, do not fear. Do not fear.

[6 : 39] Do not be anxious. Do not fear. Now, another question arises. There's lots of questions. Hopefully, I'll be able to give you some answers this morning. Why would Jesus use such a terrifying image, followed by several equally confronting scenarios, if he wants to encourage his followers to get involved in this work of mission?

It doesn't seem like the way to go, does it? I went to a cross-cultural mission seminar thing.

It was setting out all the different people came and set up their stalls. And I was really saddened but intrigued by how many images of beautiful landscapes and smiling children.

It was almost as if the appeal was, come and work on the mission field, and you'll see some beautiful places, and you'll meet some lovely people. I didn't see any stalls who had this picture of wild dogs attacking sheep.

You just wouldn't use it for advertising, would you? And yet, Jesus did. So, what's the go? Well, I think Jesus is presenting a cost-benefit analysis, for want of another picture to help you see it.

[8 : 09] So, he's not trying to sugarcoat that which can't be sugarcoated. The costs are real. But the benefits make it a no-brainer.

So, what at first glance looks totally negative, totally repulsive, is actually, I think, a perspective which allows courage, confidence, and opportunity to triumph over fear and a sense of inability when it comes to thinking about our engagement in the work of mission, the work of harvesting, as Jesus describes it.

Now, stepping back from the passage for a minute, looking historically, clearly this worked for the disciples. Because the reality is that all the disciples, with the exception of Judas, mentioned in the beginning of chapter 10 here, all of those disciples spent a lifetime, as far as we know, spent a lifetime on the mission field, wandering around Asia Minor and various other countries, speaking the good news of Jesus.

Most of them, and the evidence here is a little bit more iffy, but it seems like, on reasonable balance, most of them, either died under arrest, or were killed, in the line of duty, as it were.

So, with that, let's jump into the text and dig into the details a little bit more. But I'm going to jump in in two stages. I want a big perspective in the text, and then we're going to look at some of the detailed scenarios. Hopefully that will help.

[9 : 53] The first heading I want to use, is that the Lord of the Harvest briefs his harvest workers. Now, if you know anything about Special Forces troops, and I know little, but my son did a commando training course a few years ago, and they spend weeks and weeks and weeks preparing for any given mission.

Why? Because the success of the mission is largely determined by the quality of the preparation. Each soldier in the unit or the section, typically 10 or 12 in a commando section.

Each soldier must have total confidence in their commander. Total confidence. Each soldier must know each part of the operation so that any one of them, in the event of a casualty, can step in and do any particular task on that particular mission.

They need to know the lay of the land. They need to have confidence in their weaponry. They need to know the strength of the enemy. They need to know the point at which counterattack may be launched. They need to know what time frame they work on, and so on and so on and so forth.

And when all of that is just second nature to them, then they're ready for mission. I think that's what Jesus has said to his disciples here.

[11 : 12] Look, this is so big. This is so different. I want to get you ready for that which I'm asking you to do.

This is a loving briefing by Jesus for his stormtroopers. Now is the time to prepare for harvest mission.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed. So as I said before, Jesus, verse 16 again, come back to that picture. There just cannot be sugarcoating in this.

It will be really tough, says Jesus. It will be really dangerous. Sheep are no match for wild dogs. I'm calling you to work in the context of which you can expect to be savaged.

So Jesus is sending his disciples to do something so new to them, so left field to what their life experience has been thus far, so difficult for them, so different from anything they've ever experienced.

[12 : 27] And he says to them, okay, to get ready for this, you need to be aware of the dangers, and then the doves and the snake thing, that's idiomatic language, you need to be strategic and thoughtful as you prepare for this.

It's going to be rough, but you need to be cunning. That's the imagery of a snake. And you need to be cunning and yet maintain integrity and gentleness towards people.

That's the image of a dove. And now is the time to get that sort of stuff prepared because when you're in the battlefield, as it were, and I'm mixing my metaphors here between harvest and battlefield, but when you're on the battlefield, there is no time.

That is not the time to sit down and think, well, okay, how are we going to do this or how are we going to think about that? They need to listen to Jesus.

He's calling them to the task. He's the Lord of the harvest. He knows the end from the beginning. So listen to me, says Jesus. Take your lead from me, says Jesus.

[13 : 34] I'll talk you through it. Understand the cost-benefit analysis as you go into the task because if you don't understand that, you just won't have the stomach for it.

It's my harvest, says Jesus, and I'm the one that's sending you out. Don't forget that. Big picture. Now it's interesting that even though the imagery here is quite gory, there's no sense of panic on Jesus' part.

The harvest is going according to plan. And if we go back and look at chapter 9, verse 37, Jesus says it's going to be a bumper crop. All systems go. Let's get into it.

Opposition and hostility, while fully expected by Jesus, does not mean, does not mean that either Jesus or the success of the harvest is somehow or other in doubt or in trouble.

And so what's left then? Well, what's left is this. that the very things that are expected ahead of us do not generate the same amount of fear.

[14 : 56] Let me just use an illustration of that. A couple of years ago, I went and did the Southwest Trail in Tasmania, Southwest Coast Trail, 90 kilometers. Some really hard climbs, some really exposed areas, tough weather.

I was quite fearful about doing it with my son who is also the one who's done his commander training. So he's super fit and I'm, well, you know, Matt's already covered that this morning.

But in preparation, I got the maps out and I looked at the topography. I saw where the climbs were. I knew what days, what climbs would be on, what time would take me.

I read the track notes that you can find on the web and it tells you what sort of terrain you're in, how long it'll take to climb, where the shelter spots are, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And when I got to do the track, it was quite manageable.

Why? My fears settled because I knew what was coming. I had prepared for it. My friends, if we listen to the words of Jesus, we can have full confidence in the Lord of the harvest.

[16 : 11] He has actually provided us ahead of time as what we might call a harvest manual. The track notes, the topographic maps, in a sense. The things we need to prepare ourselves for what lies ahead.

And if you look at the language throughout these verses, verse 16, I'm sending you. Verse 18, on my account or for my sake, you will such and such.

Verse 19, when this happens, da, da, da, da. Verse 22, because of me, da, da, da, da. Jesus is stepping us through the mission.

When this happens, make sure you're thinking that. When that happens, make sure you're hanging on to this truth.

And at all time, keep looking to me, the Lord of the harvest. If we expect to be targeted for speaking the gospel, then we can't, at the same time, be blindsided when that incoming round comes to us.

[17 : 33] We won't be, therefore, devastated. We won't be debilitated because we've been prepared for it. We're expecting it. And we know what we need to be thinking to counter it.

So Jesus says, identify with me, identifying with me means opposition will be normal for you. Identifying with me means opposition will be normal for you. Being a disciple of Jesus can be described in many ways, but one way, it's just to say, is to identify with Jesus, living under his rule, expressing his likeness to those around us.

And verse 32 and 33, in this passage, in choosing to serve Jesus, we are automatically choosing at the same time to be on a collision course with our culture.

The two choices are made in one choice, as it were. Our culture is determined to find life apart from Jesus, so therefore, by definition, if we choose Jesus and choose to build a life around him and in him and through him, then we're choosing to be opposed to our culture.

And we can expect a clash. If you look at the details then, verse 24 and 25, sharing in the mission of Jesus, oh, I got a fright there because the verse didn't line up.

[19 : 16] It's the wrong chapter. I mean, that helps. Verse 24 and 25, a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher and for the servant like his master.

If they've called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they malign those of his household? Sharing in the mission of Jesus is to step into the role of the suffering servant.

Is to follow the pathway that Jesus followed, which was the pathway of suffering and then glory. Verse 17 and 18.

Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues and you'll be dragged before governors and kings for my sake to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.

Like Jesus, we can expect all sorts of people to try and silence our testimony from the informal, subtle exclusion from family or conversations at work to the much more formal, judicial exclusions of courtrooms and punishment.

[20 : 58] And at times that means we'll be cast as criminals when the things that we see vile in society are venerated and applauded and protected.

We'll be the subject of unjust accusations and I think in the not too distant future imprisonment. Physical and verbal abuse and so the list can go on.

And verse 21. You will be hated by all for my name's sake. So Jesus has some very specific scenarios but then he sort of steps back and says, well look, actually, the truth of the matter is that there'll just be a randomness to people who hate you.

People who've got no other reason to hate you except that you use the word Christian. We've experienced that. It's just, there's no rationale to it, except that I'm a Christian therefore I've got to be the subject of hatred.

Verse 22. That was verse 22 I was looking at there more. Yep. Verse 21. Got myself back to front here again.

[22 : 19] We can expect the hatred of family. How many times have we seen that? One family member becomes a Christian and they're just excluded, if not formally.

They're excluded by sniggering behind the scenes. Innuendo. And sometimes just the hatred against Christ will actually override the strong binds of family.

and in their most extreme cases will actually result in total exclusion or even in cases of murder.

Brothers and sisters, various levels of opposition will be normal. It is enough for the disciple to be like the master.

in some ways you can read that statement, that sentence as a statement of privilege. In that context, go back to what I said earlier about verse 16, in that context we must be smart, we must be sober, and we must be gospel-shaped as we plan how to respond to these sorts of things.

[23 : 56] And that takes me into the next point where the Lord of the harvest calls us to trust him as well as to serve him. In chapters 8 and 9, we worked through a few weeks ago now, the context of nine miracles.

miracles. And in those two chapters we were confronted with a theme of faith across the different miracles. And some involved in those circumstances and situations were commended for great faith.

And the disciples particularly were called out for a lack of faith. And as we're working through that, I wanted to find a word that would pick up the idea of faith there.

I describe faith as the ability to see past what you can see. To see past immediate circumstances to something that's true behind those circumstances.

So there was uncleanness, there was sickness, there was death, there was storm, there was demon possession. So faith meant being able to see past those immediate things to the Jesus who actually had the power and the compassion and the authority to control and change those things.

[25 : 18] Well I think it's the same here. The word faith isn't used but I think it's the same concept here. As Jesus sends out his disciples to the work of harvesting, he called them to great faith.

That is, he presents scenarios here and as he presents these scenarios he's saying to them keep looking at me. Look through your circumstances when they arise in front of you.

Look through your circumstances and see the Lord of the harvest behind each one of those circumstances. The Lord of the harvest who will use each of those circumstances towards the success of the harvest.

Now, just let me prop here for a minute and say I'm not for a moment advocating that we should go yay, suffering and persecution.

That would just be stupid in the extreme. Nobody in the right mind would enjoy the opposition and suffering listed here. There will be anxiety.

[26 : 24] There will be fears. Jesus' point here is that when those anxieties and fears threaten to overwhelm us and debilitate us, then he says, look through them.

Keep your eyes on me. Keep looking at me. Not only have I gone before you down this pathway, but I am actually the answer to your fears. I am the one who will actually set you free from fear and allow courage and confidence.

I will set you free from saying, no, I don't want to go there. I'm not going to risk putting my head up to speak for Jesus. I'll get it blown, clean off. To opportunity to speak of the Lord of the harvest.

If we keep our eyes on Jesus, then we will have opportunity to bring gospel truth to each circumstance. Fear will be dispelled in favor of courage, confidence, opportunity, and yes, even privilege.

If you're into history at all, countless thousands of believers have died in the most gruesome circumstances expressing their sense of privilege.

[27 : 55] Hard to believe. Maybe it's an outworking of the Holy Spirit saying, I will give you words to say in your darkest moment. For countless thousands of those words have been, praise God that I've been counted worthy to suffer with.

it's a little bit foreign to me, I have to be honest and say to you, I have not experienced that, but I sure hope that will be real for me if the day comes when I do have to face it.

I sure hope and I sure pray. So let's jump into four points very quickly and then I'm done. Four detailed points now looking through each of the scenarios.

We're never on our own in this harvest field. Verses 18, 19 and 20. Now imagine the fear. So he's talking there about dragging them before courts and governors, religious courts, religious professors cross-examining them and so on and so forth.

Imagine the fear that would take hold of these twelve guys whom we said last week were uneducated, probably even uncouth, very ordinary fishermen.

[29 : 10] That's all they'd ever known. The biggest argument they had to have was with a fish. And here Jesus is saying you're going to be dragged before courts and you're going to be there to give testimony to me.

Imagine the fear. Before all sorts of powerful officials, hostile courts, how could they possibly have any consistent compelling testimony to Jesus, let alone one that would stand up against an intimidation of public trial and cross-examination?

how could it possibly be possible? Too many possibles in there. Look through the circumstances says Jesus and remember that the Holy Spirit will be your unseen resource at that moment.

The supernatural enabling of my Holy Spirit will give you both words and physical strength, not just to be there but to be compelling as you testify to me.

Truth dispels anxiety and fear and means the people who otherwise would not hear the gospel get to do so. There they are in these courts.

[30 : 28] The courts were meant to silence them and the court officials are actually hearing the gospel. We see that right through the book of Acts. These same disciples hold before the Jewish religious courts, hold before Roman courts, before even the emperor himself, Roman provincial leaders and so on and so forth and they speak with such passion and conviction and clarity that blow me down, they get the better of their learned court officials.

Who silences who? Well read Acts and you'll find out. We're never alone in the harvest field. Number two, apparent defeat becomes new opportunity, verses 22 and 23.

Now I'm not quite sure exactly about this but this is my best take on these two verses. In verse 16 and then verse 10 to 15 last week, Jesus gives his disciples freedom to be strategic and intentional in their work.

Without context in the background, I think the point here in verse 23 is that at times his disciples must just be content to say, look, the most faithful thing for me to do today is to pack up and move to another village.

Such is the hostility and the persecution here that there's nothing to begin. I'm just going to flee. I'm going to move on while I can still move on. and the reason they can do that is because security is in Jesus, not in the actual place of doing the harvesting.

[32 : 05] so when the time comes to flee to a new place, then Jesus said, don't flee thinking that you've been defeated, even though it might feel and look like defeat as you're fleeing, rather, in a sense, relax and move to a new relocation because a new relocation is a new opportunity, a new village, a new setting to speak the truth of the gospel, the truth of Jesus.

Don't fear being hated, don't fear fleeing as refugees. In serving Jesus, you're actually more secure, more stable than those you're fleeing from.

And again, we see that worked out in Acts chapter 8. Remember, the Christians were very reluctant to leave Jerusalem, even though that's the brief that Jesus had given them.

What was it that forced them finally to leave Jerusalem? Persecution. And it says in Acts chapter 8, as they left and wandered around various places looking for somewhere to bank down, they gossiped the gospel.

Who would have thought persecution brought in the harvest? Well, who would have thought Jesus thought it? We were a bit slow to learn it, perhaps.

[33 : 27] many were saved as a result. Number three, the truth will come out, that life with Jesus is much better than life in this world.

And again, 26, 27, 28, it's hard to know exactly what the application should be or how to understand it, but this is what I've come up with this week. So it goes like this, verse 26, have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known.

What I tell you in the dark, say in the light. What you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. I think it goes something like this, that the enemies of Jesus think they can get away with mistreating and abusing Jesus' harvesters.

Why? Because those sorts of things often happen in the secret or discreetly. But I think the point here is not so.

That every action one day will be made public and they'll be called to account for them. And so what does that mean for Christians who are perhaps in history, if you want to step back and look at history, perhaps being severely abused if not butchered?

[34 : 42] Well, it means this, that they can rest in their suffering. It is enough to be like the master.

They can rest in the suffering knowing that one day both the truth of the gospel and their own faithful witness to Jesus will be brought to light and that the deeds of their enemies will be judged accordingly.

in other words, we don't have to worry about justice or injustice or validation or even protecting life itself because the Lord of the harvest sees everything.

And ultimately that's where it takes us, verse 28 I think. The gospel perspective in verse 28 is this, that we need in situations of unjust accusation and unjust treatment, unjust accusations, whatever the word is, I don't know, unjust, unjust, I'm confused.

In those situations we can just in a sense let it go. We don't need to fear the enemies of the gospel. We sit loosely to life because we see life in this world, physical life here and now in this world as a temporary life.

[36 : 06] And we see this world as something we don't really belong. And we're actually waiting for the forever life that is the real life for us in the world to come.

So therefore we don't need to fear the enemies of the gospel because they don't have ultimate power. They think they have ultimate power but in actual fact they have very limited power. The most they can do is just take my life physically.

They can't actually get close to my spiritual life, my forever life. And again if you look back through history that has absolutely caused rage from those who have been butchering Christians in the most awful ways because they knew jolly well that having inflicted the worst horrors they could on that person that person in a sense was defying them.

There was something they couldn't get to. Jim Elliot, missionary to Indian tribes in South America once said, he is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep in order to gain that which he cannot lose.

I think it was only months after that that Jim Elliot was murdered by the Indians he had sought to gospel for so many years. And I think the story is that I think there was nobody had been responded to Jesus before he was murdered.

[37 : 40] But strangely to us anyway, not to the Lord of the harvest, that tribe of Indians became Christian, many of them, observing Elliot as he died.

Again, who would have thought? And again, the answer is, well, the Lord of the harvest thought that. We're just a bit slow to catch up on that gospel perspective. Lastly, your father cares deeply for you and controls every detail of your life.

Look at verses 29 through to 31. Jesus tells his disciples, and it's a funny verse here, Jesus tells his disciple that a sparrow does not die apart from your father.

Now, it seems to me like the sentence stopped abruptly there. Apart from your father's what? I think the word we have to supply there, and we're meant to supply there, apart from your father's will.

will. The point is simple, I think. God's will determines the lifespan of a sparrow whose relationship to God is simply creature to creator.

[39 : 06] By comparison, we relate to God as father and child. So it's a how much more argument. If God cares for the details of a sparrow, how much more does he care for the details of his child?

Again, we do not need to fear. if we can see through the circumstance. We feel abandoned. We feel as if in the middle of ministry, well, God's so busy around the world, he doesn't even see this that I'm experiencing and enduring.

Not so. God's sovereign power and will guards and determines every moment of your life and my life.

and our moment and method of death. Your father is equally caring in the hardest times as in the easiest times.

In whatever part of the harvest field you may find yourself in. He will never deny or abandon his child. Picking up this verse, David Livingstone, missionary to Africa, once said, we are immortal until God has done with us.

[40 : 46] That would allow courage to come to the surface, wouldn't it, over fear? Corrie Ten Boom, the same, didn't use exactly their words, but the same idea as she expressed her faith in front of the Nazis day in and day out in a concentration camp.

Friends, we need to learn to trust God as well as serve him. I think that's been my problem over the years. I've been busy trying to serve, but I haven't quite been as busy trying to make sure I trust him in every situation.

we need to keep our eyes on Jesus. We need to always have our eyes on Jesus, because that's who we're looking through the circumstances to see.

And only that, I think, will give us the perspective to be faithful and engaged with excitement in the harvest.

So, wrapping up, and I know I've gone way over length, so you've been very kind that you haven't actually worked out yet only, but I just want to wrap up with a couple of thoughts. Where has your cost-benefit analysis of what Jesus is calling you to hear in the harvest, where has that left you or taken you?

[42 : 19] what's your mindset when it comes to engaging in the harvest, as Jesus invites you to and expects you to, as his child?

Do you find yourself wanting to get involved in witnessing for Jesus, but you just can't find yourself getting past how much you'd have to give up to do so?

Basic comfort, personal freedom, reputation, money. Is that where you're stuck? Do you find that your anxiety and fear renders you silent?

When you know jolly well, it's not a lack of opportunity, even though we often say that. It's actually fear. We render us silent when we should speak. Are you stuck being debilitated and crushed by previous attempts at witnessing because you think they've not worked out well for you or because the person you spoke to in the end didn't become a Christian?

Or perhaps worst case scenario is you actually know you actually mucked it up. I didn't say what I should have said or I said too much in the wrong way. Is that where you're stuck?

[43 : 35] By your own failures in the past? Well my friend, can I just say to you this morning, if that's you, then can I suggest you've taken your eyes stuffed Jesus? And that's a lonely place to be, I think.

I know because I've been there. You've stopped listening to him. You're probably trying to serve Jesus in the harvest mission without having learned to trust him.

cost benefit analysis that we could remember of Jesus in his saving of you.

Massive cost to deal with the sins of David Calderwood. Benefit. Jesus doesn't get the benefit.

I get the benefit of his death. And the scripture tells me I've been filled. Jesus was rich and he became poor and I get the riches of his blessing.

[44 : 55] I'm filled daily with the riches of his blessing to overflowing. So when I see Jesus and look at Jesus, I can be free to allow those blessings to overflow for the sake of Christ.

Pray the Lord of the harvest might send you into the harvest field with new faith, new ability to see the Lord of the harvest behind every immediate circumstance of persecution or suffering.

And pray that you might learn to trust. Pray with me now. Lord, we thank you for your kindness.

That in a passage that immediately presented as just overwhelmingly negative, and yet it opens up with a rich warmth and positivity.

We thank you, Lord, that you've not just called us to a task that you haven't also equipped us for. And we pray, Lord, that we might, in a sense, read your manual that's before us today, and take it on board, and practice, practice, practice, so that we might be able to keep our eyes on you and see through immediate circumstances and find that our fears and anxieties are dispelled.

[46 : 24] health, and we have instead courage and confidence and compassion like you and desire to speak your word to those around us.

I pray in Jesus' name, amen. Thank you.