

Ready For Harvest

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn again now to John chapter 4. John chapter 4, reading again at verse 31. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, Rabbi, eat. But he said to them, I have food to eat that you do not know about.

So the disciples said to one another, Has anyone brought him something to eat? Jesus said to them, My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. Do you not say there are yet four months, and then comes the harvest?

Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. So on down to verse 38, particularly this morning.

I'd like to focus in both our sermons and studies this morning and evening at this passage, this passage, this chapter really. We're looking at these verses just now, and God willing, this evening we will look at the following verses from 39 to 42.

And we're doing that in relation to the outreach that we're planning and hoping to carry out this week, but really in general terms also, in terms of being a mission congregation, a congregation that's dedicated and concerned for mission, to bring the gospel to the world, to bring that message of salvation in Christ to those around us.

[1 : 2 7] That is not only our responsibility, but our privilege under God. That is what he has set us in the world to be, a mission congregation, not just looking inwardly to our own spiritual well-being and growth, but outwardly as well to bring that gospel to the world around us that so needs it as we do ourselves.

Now the Lord is using here an illustration of harvest time, and he's using that illustration in regard to the disciples and their view of the world around them, especially these Samaritans that have started to come towards Jesus.

As we read in verse 30 there, they went out after hearing this woman and her testimony, they went out of the town and were coming to him. And it's in relation to that that Jesus then spoke in these terms to the disciples when they were urging him to eat.

This is his response to them, that he had this spiritual food that they did not yet realize fully what it was, this food of doing the Lord's will, doing the Father's will, and carrying out his will in terms of the work of spiritual harvest.

And you'll find that, of course, throughout the Scriptures. Psalm 126 comes to mind, where you find an emphasis by the psalmist on those who go out weeping, bearing the precious seed.

[2 : 5 2] They come back rejoicing, carrying the sheaves. In other words, there's that sowing followed by reaping that in spiritual terms also applies to our lives as we come to know of a fruitfulness resulting from the work of planting, the work of sowing, the work of laying down the seed, which as we'll see is really very much a part of our living as a Christian congregation.

In verse 35, you'll find here verse 35, the second part of it, one of the emphases that we're looking at this morning is that the fields are already white to the harvest. In other words, the matter of evangelism or mishkin or outreach, whatever word we use to describe that, it's always in the present.

It's never just in the past. It's never just with a view to the future. As we'll see from this passage, Jesus is emphasizing the harvest time is now. The harvest time is here.

The need is always there. The responsibility is always upon us. The privilege is always ours to be witnessing Christians, to be sowing the seed and indeed reaping something of the harvest as well. And we're looking today at these verses under the title, Ready for Harvest. That's what Jesus is saying. These fields, he's saying as he speaks spiritually, they are ready for harvest.

[4 : 18] Lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest. The reaping time has arrived. And we'll look at this, first of all, looking at the example that Jesus set us and secondly, the employment that Jesus has allocated to us.

The example he set us and the employment that he's allocated to us. What is the example, first of all? Well, look at verse 31 here. Here is the disciples saying the rabbi eat.

They were concerned, obviously. He had gone without food for some time. And they had gone to the town to look to get something to eat. And they came back with some meager resources.

But then they realized that he was still hungry. He hadn't had anything to eat. So they said, Rabbi, they urged him. They were really saying, look, you've got to eat. They were afraid that he might faint or something like that, that he needed food.

And this is his response. My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish or finish his work. That's the food that Jesus is particularly concerned about.

[5 : 30] That's his response to the disciples' concern for his physical well-being. He's saying, this is my food. My food is to do the work that the Father sent me into the world to accomplish, to do the will of my Father, to finish that.

And that's a great example for ourselves. You go back to Psalm 40. Psalm 40, as you know, has verses used in the New Testament in Hebrews, which are applied to Jesus and fulfilled by Jesus. You remember there that it speaks about him coming into the world as the Messiah, as the Savior. He's saying here, sacrifice and offering you've not desired, but you have given me an open ear. He's personalizing this in regard to being a type or a symbolic of the Savior. Then I said, behold, I have come.

In the scroll of the book it is written of me, I desire to do your will, O my God, your laws within my heart. That's what Jesus is about. He's carrying out the will of the Father.

[6 : 36] And the amazing thing is the way he puts it here, that's his food. That's the example he's setting the disciples and setting for ourselves. Where is our spiritual food from?

Well, there are different ways of answering that. You have your spiritual food from the Bible, from the truth of God, from coming to worship, either privately or together as we're doing today. All of that is nourishing.

You nourish your soul through prayer, through these spiritual exercises. But all of that is really ultimately carrying out the will of God. As God has made his will known to us, as we want to do his will, whatever that will holds for us, whatever he has set for us, that's where our nourishment comes from.

I have this food, Jesus says, to do the will of my Father and to accomplish his work. Isn't it a marvelous thing to see that although Jesus knew the challenging, difficult, terrible things that were within the will of the Father for him, in other words, he was to lay down his life ultimately on the cross.

He was to bear the sin of his people and die their death, the death they deserve to die spiritually. He was to take this eternal death, this hell, this damnation that his people deserved to himself and actually die that for them.

[8 : 07] That's the will of the Father for him. And yet he's saying about it, this is my food. This is where I have my satisfaction. This is what gives me satisfaction and delight knowing that I'm doing my Father's will.

Now what an example to set us. Here we are thinking of being and continuing to be a mission congregation, a reaching out congregation, and one aspect of that is what's planned for this week. Only one aspect, but an important aspect of it. Here's our example as we go forth. As you think of what Jesus said in Matthew 28, 19 to 20, verses 19 to 20, that's what we call the Great Commission, as it's been called, where he says, go and make disciples of all nations, of all different kinds of people, in other words.

This is what you take with you. That you're doing the will of God. That Jesus took delight in doing the will of God.

And that we today are to be satisfied to receive our nourishment indeed, to have satisfaction in our own souls.

[9 : 22] That we are carrying out that mandate from Jesus to be not just a worshipping, but a witnessing congregation. That as individuals too, we have the privilege of being his disciples, reaching out to a world that doesn't know him or doesn't want to know him.

That's the example that he set us. And that's a very important part of what the passage contains because that example comes before what he's saying about the harvest time.

And they have to carry that with them as his disciples into the practice of what he's now saying. So what is this employment that follows on? What's the employment allocated to us by Jesus following the example that he set?

Well, the first thing about this employment, of course, is to, using the imagery of harvest, to be the kind of Christians that carry his word into the world and sow the seed of the gospel and wait for the harvest and indeed sometimes rejoice in seeing a harvest in return for that.

That's the imagery, but it's a spiritual work, it's a spiritual employment, spiritual labor. The first thing he's emphasizing is that the harvest is now.

[10:42] Now he says here, do you not say, verse 35, that there are yet four months, then comes the harvest? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white already for harvest.

Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, one sows and another reaps.

I sent you to reap on that which you did not labor for. Others have labored and you have entered into their labor. The first thing that you see from that is that he's saying there is a harvest now to be reaped.

And he's asking them, lift up your eyes. He's not here, of course, talking of a natural harvest. That's the imagery that's used. He's saying in the natural world in terms of a natural harvest, there's a gap between the sowing and the reaping.

There's a gap of four months, he's saying here. But I'm telling you, he says, as you lift up your eyes, as you see these people coming out of this town, as the fields are actually now filled with these people that are streaming out towards him, he is saying to the disciples, lift up your eyes.

[11:51] What are you seeing? You are seeing fields there ready for harvesting. There's a crop waiting to be harvested. It's already begun in the woman of Samaria that went to tell her fellow townspeople of who she had met and what she had actually been told.

This is surely, she said, the Christ. We'll have a look at that this evening, just that particular verse, as it led to the many Samaritans coming out of the town and coming to know himself personally, which is the response, the reaping that the passage also contains.

We're looking here at the fields ready for harvest and what Jesus is describing is these people as they're just beginning now to make their way toward Jesus and as the harvest has begun and this one woman that's already been converted and gone back to tell her fellow townspeople of what she now knows and who she now knows.

This is what is being seen. Now that's very important for ourselves as well. As you look around you today, how many people in this town, you take in the town and the environs of the town down as far as Mackenzie Park, Park End or out the other way what you might call the environs of Stornoway, how many people in comparison to those here and every other church in the town today, how many people are actually at a service of worship?

How many are engaged in worshiping the Lord? Far, far fewer than the totality of that number. Look around you and Jesus is saying what do you see?

[13:31] Do you just see people that you know are not Christians, that are not interested in coming to church or coming to know the Lord? What do you then do? What do you think of as you look upon them?

Do you just think of them as people have chosen to live that way so that's it, that's their choice, that's their responsibility or do you see that as a harvest waiting to be reaped? Do you see that as a place in which you sow your spiritual seed of the gospel and then by God's blessing await the return of the harvest as he blesses that seed?

That's how we have to look. What do you see when you look around you? You see people who don't know the Lord. You see people who are going headlong to a lost eternity. You see people who if they die without Christ will be lost forever.

The time is short as we'll see in a minute. And he's asking us today and calling upon us today to actually lift up our eyes and just focus on what it is to be lost.

On what it is to live without God in your life. What it is to be in the grip of secularism or atheism or any other kind of philosophy or lifestyle or world view that leaves God out of the picture altogether.

[14:43] What do we see? What's our response to that? Well here is our response as a congregation but it's for you and for me as individuals too to be involved with it.

The fields friends are white unto harvest. That harvest is not for tomorrow. It's not for next year. It's not for sometime later after a series of events have happened or time has elapsed.

Jesus is saying the fields are now white for harvest. If we're not involved in that the reason is not that the harvest is not there to be reaped.

Something else must be a reason for that. what we want to be is a people who do both sowing and reaping. There's some difficulty in really being absolutely sure about some of the details there that he's saying already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life.

He might in fact be talking about himself there. He's the one who has sown the seed that has resulted in the beginnings of this crop with this one woman that became effectively a missionary and is now seeing the response to her mission in her fellow townspeople coming out to Jesus.

[16:10] Whatever you say of it however we interpret it what he's saying is this is now the time for the reaping. Time for the harvest to be taken in. And you know that's really so true of us as a congregation and as individual Christians as well that in a sense it's always the case that we are both reaping and indeed sowing at the same time.

Because what we are engaged in today is from a sowing perhaps of previous generations. The fact that you are here today in church goes back very likely to the prayers of other people who have actually prayed for us from the time we were children as we now pray for our children.

There's always that sowing before the harvest takes place in our own lives. I'm sure you can all think of someone or some people today who witnessed to you and spoke to you about the Lord who brought you up in a Christian family or if that wasn't the case who nevertheless showed Jesus to you.

A sowing resulting in a reaping. And for ourselves it's a time of sowing as well. If there's been a sowing before of which we are now the crop you might say well we're engaged in sowing because our interest and concern is for the succeeding generation for those who are coming after us.

Why do we have Sunday schools? Why do we have tweenies? Why do we have that concern and campaigners and all the work we're doing with the children? Because it's sowing the seed. It's looking for the harvest. It's praying for the God of the harvest to bless the sowing of the seed.

[17:49] So you see we are both reapers and sowers at one and the same time. And that's going on all the time. That's how we have to look at it. It's important that the harvest is now and that God is sending us into the harvest so that we will indeed both sow the seed and reap from the previous sowings that have taken place.

That means secondly in this employment allocated not only is the harvest now but the harvest needs workers. I spent some years working on a farm after finishing an agriculture college and it was quite common although I wasn't involved in working out in the fields or that part of the farm's business.

Nevertheless when harvest time came the farmer would often call upon us to leave whatever we were doing if it wasn't urgent which normally it wasn't working with animals whatever and go and help those who were actually engaged in the harvest.

So we'd be going out to the harvest fields at the time when the harvest was at its height. In other words that was a time when extra hands were required in order to take in the harvest successfully because you know farmers are in that dilemma all the time aren't they?

They're just waiting for a window in the weather if it's not a very good summer or autumn they have to actually do this when the window is there when the weather is dry especially if you're engaged in sowing barley that's going to be used for seed one of your concerns is that it doesn't get too wet it doesn't have to be dried out too much and so on so you have to use that short window of opportunity and you need extra hands to do that in a sense you carry that into the business of being spiritually sowers and reapers for Christ and in that every Christian has a role came across this quote from Spurgeon he says I will not believe that you have tasted of the honey of the gospel if you can eat it all yourself as soon as a man has found Christ he begins to find others and that's what you really find in this chapter now if you look back to verses 17 and 18 just cast your mind your eye back to that the woman answered Jesus

[20:18] I have no husband Jesus said to her you are right in saying I have no husband for you've had five husbands and the one you now have is not your husband what you have said is true would you have said at that point if you didn't know the rest of the chapter would you have said at that point this woman is going to be a really successful missionary she's going to be an outstanding Christian who's going to bring the gospel to our own townspeople know you would have said that

woman has a very very dubious and shady past there is no way that that woman is ever going to fit into Christ's church she's never going to be a disciple surely Jesus would never use the likes of that that's what he does he changed that woman he revealed himself to her as the savior she accepted that she went away with great excitement to tell her fellow townspeople of it and what was the result of it they're streaming towards the lord you see you never rule yourself out and you never rule anybody else out of being successful missionaries successful in the sense in which god can use us the disciples as they saw this woman certainly looked past her looked beyond her didn't really have much interest in her this is what you read of course as they came back they were surprised that he was talking with a woman that was their first thought verse 27 they marveled that he was talking with a woman not just the type of woman she was but any woman at all that she was actually being spoken to by

Jesus that he had taken the time with this woman that they would simply have passed by and ignored and saw as of little if no significance at all but you see Jesus saw her as part of the harvest he included her in his sowing and in his reaping of this great spiritual crop that he was sowing among the Samaritans what a difference she made as god used her to her fellow Samaritans as we'll see this evening resulting harvest in the verses 39 to 42 but just think the moment for a moment at the fact that they marveled that she was talking with a woman what can women do in the harvest fields well as I look out over this congregation I'm thankful to god that there are so many women here who serve the lord we're not in the business at all of saying women can just do something in the kitchen something practical in that way and that's all really they should be allowed to do in the work of the gospel in the church of christ

I have no time for women in pulpits that's against the teaching of god's word women being preachers of god's word that's clearly contrary to what god himself has appointed as a teaching ministry but apart from that and office in the church what else cannot women do here is a set of disciples they're marveling that jesus was talking with a woman there are so many things that women can do and should do and are privileged to do for christ in his kingdom in his church and all of you women that I look out on here today have your own significant place in the work in the employment that god has allocated to his disciples so many different ways in which you serve the lord which you have your own particular type of ministry if you like that is what you find throughout the bible if you look for example at philippians chapter 4 and verse 3 just to take that one example there are many others as well and philippians chapter 4 as paul was writing to those beloved christians in philippine this is what he says chapter 4 and verse 3 he says i entreat you oh dear i entreat syntache to agree in the lord yes i ask you also true companion help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life now that's the interesting thing he says that these women have labored side by side with me in the gospel paul didn't say hey i'm a man i'm an apostle i'm called by god by jesus to be an apostle there's no place alongside of me for me alongside of me for women how can women possibly serve alongside of me an apostle of christ well what he's saying there is help those women remember those women who served alongside of me in the gospel you may not by christ's will be allowed into a pulpit allowed to preach the gospel but you are alongside of us those of us who do you are companions in labor companions in this employment of sowing the seed and reaping the spiritual harvest and this congregation is blessed above many with the talents with the gifts of many of its women to serve alongside others in the gospel and you know it's all a matter of serving together in any case if you look at romans chapter 12 it doesn't matter whether we're male or female whatever our background may be whatever gifts are romans chapter 12 is one of those passages that tells us about the importance of unity and the importance of using all the gift together that god has bestowed upon us verses 12 romans 12 verses 4 to 8 for as in one body we have many members and the members do not all have the same function so we though many are one body in christ and individually members one of another having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us let us use them if prophecy in proportion to our faith if service if he mentions teaching he mentions exhortation he mentions one who contributes he mentions one who leads he mentions zeal he mentions acts of mercy you'll find two broad categories there categories that use speech a category that uses speech including preaching but also a category of you might say more practical works of mercy of charity of practical love and in all of that apart from office and apart from preaching the gospel women are disseminated through all of these gifts so that they come together with us men in the gospel to sow

the seed and to reap the harvest that's what God has actually given us the gifts for back in Nehemiah's book there's a wonderful chapter there chapter 3 I think we looked at it way back but chapter 3 is really a list of names by and large and you might very quickly pass over it and say well it's just a list of names don't need to stop much over that and think too deeply about it what can you do with a list of names well have you look at it carefully it's during the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah's leadership and it says of all the families that are mentioned there it tells who took part in this work of repairing and the different types of backgrounds the different types of employment naturally that they had some were jewelers some were involved in practical works and heavy work some were involved in very delicate work but they're all together there repairing the walls and the interesting thing is as you go through that chapter what you find is repeatedly as it mentions certain names the heads of families then it says next to him and next to him and next to him and next to him as you follow that all the way you realize that you've gone all the way around the wall and you're back where you started in other words there is no gap in that wall in the number of those who are actually serving there there's no gap they've all come together they're all side by side in repairing the walls of Jerusalem that's spiritually how it should be for us too as a congregation that's what we're aiming at that's what we're learning the gospel really for in that sense harvesting is a time for concentration and taking in the harvest needs concentration needs unity that's one thing this congregation is blessed with let's pray that it continues because taking in the harvest really in many ways depends on the unity of the workers of applying the gift severally and in the variety of gifts that are there and that's today what we want to focus on and carry forward in our life employment allocated to us the harvest is now the harvest needs workers and the time is very limited or short the farmers will tell you that the window of opportunity for the harvest is very brief and if it's not used efficiently what's left growing farmers call it plowing back into the ground it's just plowed into the ground becomes part of next year's crop or fertilizer for next year's crop crop and that's why there's an urgency in mission work as well the harvest time is now it's for you and I to engage in it together whatever type of work it is there's something for you to do today in the harvest fields of the gospel as you lift up your eyes ask yourself what more can I do in the work of the gospel in this congregation doesn't have to be speech doesn't have to be teaching maybe it's something that you see is very small practically but it all fits together next to him next to her next to him

all comes together in the work of gospel sowing and harvesting famous violinist Franz Fritz Kreisler who lived from 1875 to 1962 just died in 1962 but he was a world famous violinist and he earned a lot of money from playing at concerts and performances and so on but he was a very generous man he gave away a lot of his money and on one occasion he came across a really exquisite violin I don't know what it was one of Stradivarius or something like that one of these really precious violins and he came across it for sale but he didn't have enough money to buy it there and then so he went away and he raised some money and he came back and asked the seller would he sell a tomb and he discovered it had been sold and it had been sold to a collector collector being someone who didn't necessarily play it but just had it as a collection to show other people here is a famous violin anyway he went to the collector's home and he met him there and he offered to buy the violin from him and the man said well it's really very precious to me it's a prized article in my collection and I've decided

[32 : 46] I'm never going to sell it I'm sorry so Chrysler very disappointedly turned around and was about to walk out and he said could I just play this instrument once before I leave the collector said yes yes of course please take it and play so he took up the violin and being the virtuoso that he was he played whatever it was he played I don't know but the collector was moved to tears he was overcome with emotion such was the brilliance of this violinist on this wonderful violin and he said look he said I have no right to keep this to myself please take it it's yours Mr.

Kleiser take it what he said then was this take it into the world and let people hear it you see that's the crucial thing instead of remaining in his collection never giving out a sound he was saying to this expert violinist this virtuoso you take it you take it into the world and the way you play it let the world hear its music well that's isn't it why are we Christians why are we a Christian congregation is it just to keep the music in house no take it out into the world let the world hear the music of Christ the music of salvation play it there because the fields are white unto harvest amen may God bless these thoughts to us let's sing now in conclusion from

Psalm 126 Psalm 126 that's in the Scottish Psalter on page 419 we'll sing the whole of the Psalm when Zion's bondage God turned back as men had dreamed were we then filled with laughter was our mouth our tongue with melody Psalm 126 on page 419 and after the benediction of you let me get to the main door please I'll greet you on the way out Psalm 126 the whole of the Psalm when Zion's bondage God turned back as men the dream were we they filled with laughter was our plan our tongue with melody they mucked the heathen said the Lord great things for them have brought the Lord have done great things for us when joy to us to ask to ask to ask his broad as streams of water in the sand have goodness after ANTERING who has been Christval poi and Nup in age In joy for the Lord, He's helpless, freeing, That his sheep rejoicing shall return. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you, now and evermore. Amen. [37:13] Amen.