

Harvest

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Date: 02 October 2022

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[0 : 00] I want to thank the church for being able to bring in goods for those who will need them. And of course, this just doesn't happen this week. It happens, of course, over the weeks with the basket out the front.

I also want to thank those who set this up. It's a wonderful representation of natural goods in the sense what grows from the ground, what grows on the trees, and what is produced for us by the work of human hands, but nonetheless by the blessing of God.

And one interesting truth in many ways concerning food is that out of all creation, human beings are the only ones who prepare their food and mix and match and put things here.

It may be an irrelevant truth, but I actually quite like it myself. There are some combinations when you grow up and you eat, and then when you're an adult you think, I can't imagine that I ever had that.

I don't know what combination. I can remember having, there was no meat in the fridge once, but there were cornflakes in bread. So I put cornflakes in the bread and I thought, this is going to be a bit dry.

[1 : 13] So I put tomato sauce on it. And it's amazing what you can be accustomed to after a while, which is why when I actually did sort of start my business and buy my house at 19, I continued to go to my nan's for the next foreseeable future.

There's nothing wrong with my mom's food. It was just that she had, well, there was a few things wrong with my nan's food. That's a joke, mom, if you're watching humor.

Please, if you would, turn to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 24. So in Deuteronomy, chapter 24, we need to go down to verse 19.

The second part of Deuteronomy 24 is really to do with a number of different laws which affect the people of God or which ought to regulate the people of God.

And this is what we mean by interpreting the Bible with what we call the regulative principle, which means that what you can say has to be regulated by what the scriptures say.

[2 : 52] The normative principle, which was made famous by one guy, says that you can say anything if the Bible doesn't say anything. So you get a lot of people that will speak about a number of subjects as though they speak with great authority on it.

But it's very difficult to have that authority if it's not connected to scripture. And so, for instance, if the Bible says I can't do it, if it doesn't mention it specifically, then I'm free to do it.

But there are a number of things in the Bible that it doesn't mention which are incredibly important, like the word Trinity. We believe in the trying God of scripture, but the word Trinity is never mentioned once.

And so you come to an understanding of scripture through accumulation and systematics, and most importantly, the biblical understanding from beginning to end.

And with that in mind, as you read Deuteronomy, you must remember that you're reading a law.

You're reading laws given from God to his people. And therefore, laws naturally infer that these are commands to be followed.

[4 : 00] So as you hear these words, understand that you're hearing not just thoughts from God or thoughts of God's people, but actually a command given to the people of God.

So in verse 19, we read, now hear God's word. So when you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back and get it.

It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterwards.

It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt. Therefore, I command you to do this.

[5 : 03] Well, let's pray as we consider these words of God. Father God, we ask of you this morning that you would continue to enlighten our minds so that our hearts would be changed and that our behavior would reflect your word.

We thank you this morning that we have brought gifts and blessings for others, not for ourselves, but from ourselves, for others. And we would ask, Father God, for a blessing to be upon them and upon those who receive them, those in need.

We ask, Father God, as we consider these words, which are clearly time-stamped to harvest, yet nonetheless it is a principle that we should hold to within our Christian life, that we who have should give to those who have not.

And so, Father, we ask this morning that we would understand and be able to celebrate harvest with thanksgiving properly. In Jesus' name, amen. Well, there are a number of things to consider when we consider harvest.

The first is that harvest is attached to a command, or rather, a command of God is attached to harvest. Harvest doesn't happen unless you have sown, and therefore, harvest is also attached to the labor of your hands.

[6 : 29] Therefore, when we think about harvest, we have to think about work. We don't just think about the reaping. We have to think about the sowing as well. And so what God is considering here is that, yes, you've put the work in, but there comes a point in time where the harvest happens, but your work is not just for yourself.

It must be for others also. But in the modern world, we don't ever tend to consider that. We don't tend to consider that the end of our working week, that a portion of what we have worked for should always go to someone else.

And yet in the principle laid out here in the harvest, it's quite clear that you are not just to work for the benefit of yourself, but actually for the benefit of others. And that is what harvest lays out quite clearly, almost without no ambiguity.

God has removed every possible misunderstanding by the repetition that you shall leave it for the sojourner, the fatherless, and for the widow.

Any idea that you think, well, this is just for me, God removes that, any form of ambiguity, so that it's clear that the work of your hands is not just to bless you, but it is to bless others.

[7 : 44] Here in harvest time, that is abundantly clear. Now those who celebrate harvest are recognizing two things, that the blessing of God is not just seen in what is engathered, the harvest, but the blessing of God is recognized in the sowing in the first place.

So harvest is about giving thanks for being able to sow and being able to ingather, to collect what you have sown, to reap the harvest.

And so this is obviously done by people, and this is obviously connected to work. And so we must never look at harvest as simply an ingathering, as though that is where the blessing is.

Rather, the blessing is also in the sowing, because the blessing that God gives in provision is that he enables you to be able to provide for yourself.

So God provides for you by enabling you to be able to provide for yourself, and that's called work. Okay, that's how God blesses. God blesses me by enabling me to be able to provide for myself.

[8 : 55] Now, that doesn't mean that I have done it myself, or that what I produce is the work of my own hands. It's actually the blessing of God. And this is something that I must recognize, that God created me to work, and that's a blessing, because the blessing doesn't just stick with me.

Then, as we see in the harvest, it is to be spread out to others as well. So God must always give the increase, or else the work that we do is always in vain.

Okay, the builder can build, but unless God is in the work, those who labor, labor in vain. And therefore, we do live in a world where most people will try and convince you that the harder you work, the more you will receive, as though it has nothing to do with the blessing of God, as though God hasn't ordered the world that that is the way that it actually works.

So the idea that if you work hard, you will receive more is a biblical idea attached to the blessing of God, because that's how God designed it to be. And God has designed it to be that way, so that it would not just be a blessing for you, but for others.

So, first principle of harvest in sowing and reaping is a very simple one, that God provides for me and you by enabling me and you to be able to provide for yourself.

[10 : 22] Now, of course, there comes a time where you get old, and you can no longer sow in the same way. And so needs and debts can occur quite easily, especially in a world where there is no social security, like the biblical world.

Ruth and Naomi, for example, in a world where there is no social security, you need community, and you need a community of people who are going to think biblically, who are going to remember the commands attached to the harvest, so that those who have not, like widows, can actually be fed.

Okay? So it's absolutely impossible in a world without social security, which would be a good world, that would be a very good world if we were at that place, because it would force the issue that you cannot simply look out for yourself.

That is not the way God designed the world to be. And social security, for instance, exists because in a fallen world, people do only look out for themselves, and therefore the whole system breaks down.

Okay? I'm not saying let's remove social security. What I'm saying is that it is a product of fallenness, not a design of God. And that is important to remember.

[11 : 41] We are to look after one another. And so those who celebrate harvest and give thanks for the harvest recognize the design of God of sowing and reaping and looking after one another.

Sowing and reaping and looking after one another. So the idea of work is attached to community. It is also attached to the fact that there is young and there is old. There are those who can work and those who cannot work.

There are those who have been blessed much, and there are those who have fallen on hardships. And therefore, harvest is addressing all of these issues. In fact, we ought to have a harvest economy. I mean, if you based the economy around the harvest principles, you'd have a much better economy and working economy.

But of course, the New Testament does address other issues as well, which is important. And that is, the man who doesn't work shouldn't be laid to eat. It's that simple.

So God's quite clean. No work, no food. You know, that's pretty harsh. No, because look at the way God designed the world. And so is it possible, just possible for us, that we have been conformed to the world through supermarkets, that we have been conformed to the world through online shopping, through credit, that without even recognizing it, that we have actually lost the meaning of harvest and the harvest thanksgiving and the harvest celebration because we are being conformed every time we step into a supermarket and online shopping and that, that we forget that actually these are a product of God's order and of God's blessing, that only in Christ are all things held together.

[13 : 19] And if Christ were not there, then everything would fall apart. And so the harvest is recognizing way more than just the fact that you gather at the third part of the year, the end of the year, not quite the end, but the end of the year, sort of this time.

So the harvest for us is a time of thanksgiving. It is a time of celebrating. It is also a time where we ought to recognize that those who have are to give to those who have not.

That's a principle here, a command laid out in harvest. You can only do this in a community. You can only do this in a community. You are always, those who have not are going to have to get what they need from someone.

From someone. And the principle here is one of charity and love, not one of mandated legislation where taxes go up in order to give to those who have not.

So there is no doubt in my mind or even in your mind that the world economic system, for instance, is entirely backward. because the principle here is that we're, if we recognize that everything is a blessing of God's upon us, then God decides where it goes and who it goes to and according to who works and who doesn't work and, of course, those in desperate need.

[14 : 53] So here's a few considerations which we must consider as we think about harvest. The first is this, that the importance placed upon the harvest is attached to people praying for a good harvest.

That they have sown, they thank God, that they are able to provide for themselves because God has provided for them by enabling them to work. And therefore, they pray because now everything depends on the harvest at the end of the year.

I've put in all the hard work. This is why we read Psalm 126. What do you do when you are weeping with seeds in your hand? Do you feed your children on the last few seeds that you have because they are hungry or do you take the risk and plant them in the hope that you'll get a bigger harvest at the end of the year?

What do you do? Okay, and that's the type of environment that Psalm 126 is addressing. That then allows us to understand in connection with the harvest as well that debt forgiveness is connected to harvest because if you have a bad harvest, it's very easy to incur a debt.

If you owe your next door neighbor, for instance, you know, several pounds of potatoes and you've had a terrible harvest, you, through no fault of your own, you are automatically in debt to your neighbor because you were dependent, depending on a good harvest, the harvest has failed and now you, you haven't sinned against your neighbor, you've just fallen into debt through a bad harvest and so debt forgiveness, which we see in the Lord's Prayer, is not necessarily where one person is sinning against another but it could be quite easily to do with a failed harvest that I've automatically fallen into debt through no fault of my own.

[16:42] I sowed, I prayed, but the harvest failed. So debt forgiveness is also a big thing as we think about the harvest and then of course most importantly is how Jesus uses the image of harvest to speak about the gospel and evangelism.

That the fields are wide unto harvest and yet there are not many workers to go out into that field and gather the crops. So we are then brought back as it were right to the very beginning that we are created to work.

So there's the physical work that produces physical blessings and there is a spiritual work that produces spiritual blessings. We are still workers of the field like Adam.

This time it's a spiritual field where hearts and minds and souls are to be presented to God holy and acceptable. So here's the first thing.

Sowing and reaping. We cannot as Christians get away from this principle of sowing and reaping. There is a spiritual sowing and reaping that if you sow to the flesh you'll reap corruption.

[17:46] If you sow to the spirit you'll reap the blessings that come with that. But there is also a physical sowing and reaping clearly seen in the harvest. God provides for me by enabling me to be able to provide for myself.

I may not be sowing seeds but if I am working in this kind of system there should be a harvest of sorts whether it comes monthly or it comes quarterly or whatever it may be.

And so those who can work and can provide must recognize that they are not simply to work for themselves but the produce of what is produced by their work has to be left for others as well.

So I'm allowed to sow as much as I can but I am not allowed to reap as much as I can. Okay, I'm allowed to sow 100% but I'm not allowed to reap 100% because I have to consider those who are fatherless, those who are widows, those who are sojourners.

I have to remember that like Israel had to remember they were slaves in Egypt, they were sojourners, they were in a land that was not their own. So, you know, and that helps you to remember well if I was that then I needed help then I need to help others who are in the same position.

[19:11] And so we see from the very beginning that God created man to work in order to bless himself or to be blessed by God in that way and to bless others with those who have fallen on hard times.

So work is not a product of the fall. Work is not something you have to do because the world is sinful and fallen. Work was designed by God. God created man to work.

God created man to carry weight on his shoulders. He also created women to work as well. And Proverbs 31 is a clear example that the godly wife is one who engages in business, is one who's wise and shrewd and knows how to go about business in the world.

So, you know, both the husband and wife in that setting are able to have skills by which they can produce things for themselves and for others, for their family and for others.

So the idea of sowing is connected to work. God has created you to be workers and what you produce is not just for you. That's the principle here laid out in Harvest.

[20 : 21] What you produce is for others, the fatherless, for widows. You are to look after those who are in a position where they can no longer look after themselves.

And of course, the idea of the fatherless is that where's the community for the fatherless? Well, what about auntie and uncles? Yeah, they should step up. But what if there are none?

Well, then this is where you have the church. The church is the family of God that looks after widows and orphans. We shouldn't even think as to whether or not this is right.

It is just automatically right as laid out in the command of God. And so notice how God provides.

God provides for me by enabling me to be able to provide for myself, but he provides for the widow through me.

The widow's fallen on hard times, on very difficult times. If she's in a position where she's ill or old or she cannot work herself, then who will provide for her?

[21 : 23] And the answer is God will. How does God do it? Through those who obey the command of the harvest. That is how God provides for others in the community that he sets forth.

And of course if you move away from that, you then need a form of governance that is able to tax and give to the poor and what have you. And even give to those who don't work, which is opposite of what God actually wants.

God does not expect a person to receive if they're not willing to work. Or let me put that, work should not be connected to pay. It should always be connected to the idea of contribution.

Okay, because not all work, not all forms of contribution is able to earn you or provide everything that you need. But you should always be willing to contribute whether that work is paid or unpaid.

Okay, this idea that the household is, well, how many people are working? You heard that? There's only one person in my household that's working. I mean, it's just ridiculous because work is so often associated with income and it shouldn't be.

[22 : 35] It is rightly associated with that but not totally. The idea of contribution is that you think how hard, you know, men, you think how hard your wives work if they're not out at work earning money.

Are you saying that they're doing nothing all day? Well, that could be a topic for, you know, marriage discussion or divorce or anything of those type of things. There's a book coming out on marriage on Tuesday.

Read it and you'll see. But the idea is that contribution blesses everyone whether it's paid or unpaid. And so think about how Ruth and Naomi who are both widows come back with nothing and then Ruth goes out into the field and Boaz obeying the harvest command doesn't reap everything in his fields.

He leaves it for Ruth. Right? And he even commands his men to leave it for Ruth. Right? Why? Because she is a widow and Naomi is a widow and who's going to look after them?

Well, the people of God who understand the commands of God will make and take the necessary measures to make sure that the people of God are looked after. That's part of the Christian community or part of a biblical community.

[23 : 51] So Boaz is understanding the principle of harvest following the command of harvest and as a result Naomi and Ruth are fed. That's how they are provided for by God.

And so Boaz understands as we have said already that what he produces is not just for himself but for others. And that's so important that you can sow 100% but you are not to reap 100% at least not for yourself.

You're to reap it all but you are to give to others or allow them to benefit from your work which is a very hard thing to say in a world that doesn't like that idea.

Why should someone else benefit from my hard work? And the answer is because God said so. Because God said so. I don't like it.

I don't care if you like it. God said so. What about the rest? Well the rest is fairly simple in Psalm 1 isn't it? And the rest is that God has designed every person who dedicates his life to God in prayer and meditation on his word to be like a tree by living water or by water producing its fruit in its season.

[25 : 15] That's the definition of a godly person who prays and who meditates on God's word and then produces fruit in its season like a tree does. And every single one of us in here know that trees don't eat their own fruit.

That what a tree produces is always for somebody else. You ever young you went apple pinching? I shouldn't say pinching we're Christians we didn't do anything like that did we?

I got caught a few times you know. But the idea is that you go up to a tree and you think it's just there. I'll just take it. And the tree gives up its fruit without any resistance.

Often without any resistance. You shake the tree and the fruit would fall. That's the idea of the godly person in someone. That what you're producing is not even for you.

It's actually for the people around you. That's again another harvest principle. Secondly, what then about debt forgiveness?

[26 : 22] Well, because reaping is not a private concern, it's a public reality. It is something we must consider others. And that's not a justification for nicking apples off your neighbor's tree by the way.

Well, biblically, he's supposed to leave at least 10% for me. If only I thought of that when I was young, that would have been a good argument, but it doesn't work that way.

Debt forgiveness, as taught by Jesus in the Lord's Prayer, is not just about when one person sins against another person.

And often we tend to think that that's all that it's about. That I am a debtor in need of forgiveness, so I ask God to forgive my sins. And people have sinned against me and so they're in debt towards me and I am to forgive their debts.

And too often we read the Lord's Prayer as though the only thing it's talking about is sinful actions from one person to another person. But what if Jesus is also addressing, and quite clearly he is addressing, debt forgiveness in the context of harvest, where your harvest is failed.

[27 : 36] Through no fault of your own and you cannot pay the farmer next door whom you've taken several gallons of milk from and you need to give him several pounds of potatoes as payment, but your harvest is failed.

You're in debt. You're in debt through no fault of your own. And so the farmer is duty bound to do debt forgiveness because he recognizes that you've put the work and you've done everything that you can and through no fault of your own.

You've incurred a debt. And as you've incurred this debt, you've got no way of pen it off because next year, not only do you have to pay back what you owe, but now you're constantly behind on yourself.

And so debt forgiveness is absolutely necessary in a world where harvest is recognized as a blessing of God, the sowing and the reaping. Some people, through no fault of their own, can get themselves into terrible debt.

Some people, through complete fault of their own, can get themselves into silly debts through spending money that they do not have. So there are some debts which you incurred which you're responsible for paying off, but at the same time, you're responsible for paying off all debts.

[28 : 59] But there is a place for debt forgiveness. In a world where trade matters, potatoes for carrots, carrots for leeks, leeks for milk, whatever it may be, in a world where trade matters, if you have nothing to trade with, then you fall into debt.

Because you then, well, can I have a pint of milk, or can I have a few gallons of milk and several pounds of potato, and then you say, well, next year I'll be able to pay you back, and you can't.

And so you're in debt. And that has nothing to do with sin. That simply has to do with living in a fallen world. And so the fatherless, people would not be fatherless if sin were not there.

You wouldn't have widows if sin was not a reality. Okay? Those things exist because death exists, and the wages of sin is death. And so you begin to understand that the fatherless and the widows are suffering the consequences of original sin.

And as they suffer those consequences, they incur hardships by which a community of God's people are to help them out. So harvest is a reminder to us in connection with the Lord's Prayer that those who have debts and cannot pay them off ought to be forgiven, ought to be forgiven.

[30 : 24] And when it becomes apparent that the person simply cannot pay, then you're duty-bound to forgive. But at the same time, we're to be no man's debtor.

So we should never lean that way as to say, well, it is an obligation of God's people to forgive me, so I'll just get myself into debt month on month because it's the obligation of you to forgive me.

No, that's not biblical either. We are understanding these things properly understood. And then finally, of course, the harvest as an image of the gospel and evangelism.

Every man, woman, boy, and girl that does not belong to Christ is in debt to God. And that debt is a debt that they cannot pay. And the gospel is that only in Christ are your debts forgiven, that only in Christ are you saved.

And so the harvest, the final harvest and the final separation of the wheat and the tares and the weeds, for instance, is a reminder that we live in a fallen world where God's kingdom is going to grow alongside fallenness and only in the very end separation will happen.

[31 : 43] But the harvest is plentiful, Jesus said, Matthew 9, 38, but there's not many workers. The workers are few. So the harvest now reminds us as Jesus, by attaching harvest to the idea of evangelism and people being saved, reminds us that we are workers.

It reminds us that we have another field to work in. And we need to have our eyes open so that we are out there reaping the harvest of men and women, boys and girls, into the kingdom of God. And so Jesus is touching on the reality of two things. One, the harvest is plentiful. There are people in the world to be brought into the kingdom of God. And then secondly, there are people in the church who are not doing any work.

The laborers are few. Now, the argument is, are the laborers few because the work is so great and we need more people? Well, that's clearly true throughout every generation. generation, the harvest field gets bigger and bigger and bigger and every generation you're going to need more and more workers because old workers have died and gone to glory and now you need a whole new workforce, a kingdom workforce who can be able to ingather the spiritual harvest.

[33 : 03] But at the same time, it could also be addressing the truth and the fact and definitely the observation that we see that actually there may not be many people in the church who are working in that field.

Jesus has to say to his disciples, look up. The fields are wide unto harvest. In other words, the disciples did not see what they were meant to see.

They had their heads down, whatever, doing whatever, what. But they did not see what they were meant to see and therefore their eyes were not focused on what they should have been.

And so Jesus is reminding, look, the workers are few. You need to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field. So harvest now is a reminder that the world, people in the world, have debts that they cannot pay.

And in Christ is debt forgiveness, the forgiveness of their sins before God. And in Christ they can be brought into the harvest, into the kingdom of God.

[34 : 13] So there is a physical harvest, which we remember, and there is a spiritual harvest that reminds us of the accomplishment of Christ. Christ. So here is the exhortation as we close.

It is important for us to remember that as we give thanks for the harvest, that none of this would be possible if Christ did not hold all things together. That the world was created through him and for him, and in him every single thing is held together.

So without Christ, none of this would be possible. So harvest is a reminder that Christ holds all things together.

Harvest is also a reminder that we are to be thankful and mindful of the fact that God is the one who provides, even if I am the one doing the work.

That God provides for me by enabling me, by enabling you to be able to provide for yourself. And in a world where there is fallenness and sin and hardships, the answer to those problems is not social security.

[35 : 26] Let's send them out and let them rely on the world. But actually, the kingdom of God and the people of God are looking out for one another.

The state will look after you. It's quite a sinful comment if you really think about what God has commanded his church to do. What God has commanded his church to be.

Now the other issue is, have we got to the point in 2022 where we have been conformed so much by supermarkets, by online shopping, and by credit, where we have lost the truth and the reality of what harvest really means.

That harvest is simply about collection and giving. And we have lost the full sense of what it means to be a harvest people. That what we receive, we do as a blessing from God.

And so let's finish with a command. And the command is this, that as you gather your harvest, that as you account for everything that you have, do you account for the fact that you only have it because God has given it to you.

[36 : 40] God may have given it to you directly without you doing any hard work, or he may have given it to you through your hard work, which is a blessing which God has given to you in the first place.

And so whatever age and stage you are at, you are always being blessed by God, whether it's directly or indirectly, whether it's through people working or whether it is through a church giving things out to you.

You should never be embarrassed if you're in the position like Ruth and Naomi. That is not a place of embarrassment. That is a place of reality.

That is how hard the world is full of sin. And in a world like that, the church do not make those people embarrassed for their condition.

They support them because they recognize the full picture. Only in the world are those things overlooked. So let me finish with this. May our harvest this morning be a full recognition by us of thanksgiving, a full reflection, and a full blessing upon us.

[37 : 47] May we, as we stand and sit here this morning, recognize that we have what we have because God has blessed us. And we do not have what we do not have for equally the same reason.

And what we have is not just for us, but for others also. Amen. Amen.