

“Look to the Harvest”
John 4:35-38
(Preached at Trinity, May 30, 2018)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we've seen, Jesus entered Samaria by Divine appointment. There was a sinful Samaritan woman who had been ordained to eternal life. Jesus made His way into Samaria and arrived at Jacob's well at precisely the right moment to intercept the adulterous Samaritan woman and engage her with the Gospel.
2. By the end of their encounter she was convinced that Jesus was the Christ. John tells us that it was at this point the woman departed, returning to her town to proclaim Christ.

John 4:29-30 NAU - "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" ³⁰ They went out of the city, and were coming to Him."
3. The disciples have arrived after their trip to town to obtain supplies. Having traveled for a distance without having eaten anything they press upon Him to eat.

John 4:31 NAU - "Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat."

 - A. Jesus takes this opportunity to teach them regarding His priorities. He describes it as His true nourishment. As with Nicodemus and again with the Samaritan woman, Jesus used the physical world to teach theological truths.

John 4:32 NAU - "I have food to eat that you do not know about."
 - B. Jesus described a life with an appetite for God.

John 4:34 NAU - "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."

 1. The greatest passion of Christ was to accomplish His Father's will. God's will in sending His Son is that He would save His people from their sins.

John 6:39 NAU - "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."
 2. This is why Jesus had come to the well. He had an appointment with the Samaritan woman. He had come to bring her deliverance.

Luke 19:10 NAU - "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."
 3. It was the passion of the Son to complete this work.
4. Jesus would have felt the magnitude of His work. His work as Savior was to fulfill all righteousness and lay down His life to redeem His people from their sins.
 - A. Jesus perfectly accomplished this work. He perfectly fulfilled all righteousness. He perfectly met the demands of the Law by His perfect life of active obedience.

- B. Jesus perfectly satisfied God's justice in laying down His life as an atoning sacrifice for His people. He shouted from the cross:
John 19:30 NAU - "It is finished!"
 All was accomplished. The Temple veil was torn from top to bottom signifying the end of all sacrifices and the right of access of His people into the presence of God.
5. We believe in the substitutionary atonement of Christ. He stood in our place. He suffered God's judgment for us. Our sins are not longer held against us. It is finished. But there is something remaining. The atonement must be applied. It must be received. There remains the inseparable work of evangelism. The Gospel must be proclaimed and received by faith.
6. There is a clear teaching of human responsibility in this passage.
- A. On one hand, God is sovereign over all things. He is the first cause of all things. Nothing happens apart from God's sovereign direction and decree.
- B. John has been drawing our attention to the Divine element in the salvation of the lost.
1. The Father had chosen to redeem a people and sent forth His Son as their Redeemer. Jesus had a passion to accomplish the will of the Father.
John 4:34 NAU - "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."
 2. Jesus went to Samaria by Divine appointment.
John 4:4 NAU - "He had to pass through Samaria."
 The Samaritan woman had been predestined to eternal life. She was one of God's elect. Jesus went to the well to meet with this woman and reveal Himself as her Savior.
 3. God is the power behind the Gospel. It is His work.
Romans 1:16 NAU - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."
1 Corinthians 2:4-5 NAU - "and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."
7. But there is an inseparable human element to the Gospel. The Gospel must be proclaimed. It must be shouted from the rooftops. The elect must be brought in and the proclamation of the Gospel is the means.
- A. Jesus compares the elect to a great harvest, ripe and ready to be brought into the storehouse.
John 4:35 NAU - "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and *then* comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest."
- B. The common proverb was "Four months until the harvest." Normally, it would take four months from sowing to harvest time. If you sow seed today you must wait until harvest time. Jesus is saying, "Pay attention, while the grain harvest may be four months away, the soul harvest is upon you."
- C. The hills of Samaria were ripe for harvest. If they closed their eyes to this reality the harvest would be missed.

8. Jesus is describing the great duty of every believer to be engaged in the great Gospel endeavor. He uses the context of this Samaritan woman. Immediately upon experiencing God's transforming grace she runs to tell others. Now Jesus tells His disciples:
John 4:36-38 NAU - "Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.
³⁷ "For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ "I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."
9. While there are earthly duties, we must keep our sights on the need of eternal souls. Jesus is telling His disciples to remember the harvest of souls. Jesus did the same thing regarding their vocation as fishermen.
Mark 1:16-17 NAU - "As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."
- I. The harvest of souls is a commanded labor
- A. We are servants of the Lord of the Harvest
1. Jesus often used the farming metaphor to describe our duty
Luke 9:62 NAU - "But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."
 2. He sends us forth into the world ready for harvest
Luke 10:2-3 NAU - "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. ³ "Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves."
John 20:21 NAU - "Peace *be* with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."
- B. This is the Great Commission
Matthew 28:19-20 NAU - "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
1. We are often criticized regarding our Reformed Theology – If God has elected some to salvation why should we go? He'll save His own regardless of our actions. Yes, God will save His own, but the means of salvation is the Gospel. And the means of spreading the Gospel is evangelism.
 2. James Montgomery Boice:
 "The first great motivation for evangelism is that the followers of Jesus Christ are not at liberty to set their own priorities. We are under marching orders. What are the orders? The orders are that we are to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, baptizing those who believe, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."¹

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 325–326.

II. The harvest of souls is an urgent labor

- A. There is a time sensitive factor agriculture
1. Crops are perishable. They must be harvested and sent to market quickly
 2. Laborers must be present at the right time in order to bring in the harvest quickly. Delay means risking the loss of the crop.
- B. Human beings have an expiration date. Souls are perishing
1. 151,600 die each day. That's almost two every second that enter eternity, most facing an eternity under God's condemnation. The door will soon be permanently closed.
 2. The task is huge
The population of the world is exploding
During the time of Christ there were an estimated 200 million people
By 1804 the number had climbed to 1 billion. Since then the number has increased exponentially.
1975 – 4 billion
2000 – 6 billion
2012 – 7 billion. That's 35 times the number when Jesus spoke these words.
 3. Time is a precious commodity. It passes quickly. We are commanded to use it carefully
Romans 13:11-12 NAU - "Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. ¹² The night is almost gone, and the day is near."
Ephesians 5:15-17 NAU - "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."
- B. No laborer can afford to relax or excuse himself.
1. Compassion for the lost compels us
Keith Green wrote a song titled "Asleep in the Light":
"Do you see, do you see All the people sinking down Don't you care, don't you care Are you gonna let them drown How can you be so numb Not to care if they come You close your eyes And pretend the job's done"
 2. Election in no way reduces the urgency – men are dying daily
If you knew that a man was asleep in a burning building would you first stop to consider whether God has ordained him to be saved from the flames?
 3. These are serious times. We must always be mindful of the peril of those around us.
Colossians 4:5-6 NAU - "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. ⁶ Let your speech always be with grace, *as though* seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person."

III. The harvest of souls is a shared labor

A. Jesus Christ is the chief and ultimate sower

1. In the text we are not told specifically who the “others” are in **Verse 38 John 4:37-38 NAU** - "For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ "I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."
Some have said John the Baptist. Others have said Moses and the prophets. Some have even included the Samaritan woman who has gone forth to sow.
2. The ultimate Sower is Christ. The work of the Gospel is always done in light of the cross. It is only by our Lord's work upon the cross that any harvest is possible.

B. Evangelism is a shared work

1. In most cases, the Christian who enjoys the reaping of a soul is profiting from the work of others. Christian work is a team activity.
John 4:36 NAU - "Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together."
2. The Great Commission has been delivered to every believer. We share in the work. No one is exempt.
Of all the duties of the Christian life our Lord gave special emphasis upon this one – Go, tell, teach
3. This generation of Christians is responsible for this generation of lost people.

C. Although it is a shared labor, each one will receive his own reward

1. In the context of evangelism what is our reward?
 - a. Too often we evaluate the concept of reward from a carnal perspective. We think in terms of wealth and pleasure.
 - b. This is not to diminish the reality of our reward – and of degrees of reward.
Matthew 5:11-12 NAU - "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹² "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
2. In terms of his Gospel labors Paul considered his reward to be those saved under his ministry
1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 NAU - "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy."
Philippians 4:1 NAU - "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."

3. If Paul didn't have enduring converts he considered his labors to have been in vain.
Philippians 2:14-16 NAU - "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; ¹⁵ so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain."
1 Thessalonians 3:5 NAU - "For this reason, when I could endure *it* no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain."
Galatians 4:11 NAU - "I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain."
4. Do you see the work of the Kingdom in this way? Do you see those coming to faith a wonderful reward?
5. And notice it is a shared reward for a shared labor. One may have labored long and hard while another reaps the harvest. Both share in the reward.
John 4:36 NAU - "Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together."

Conclusion:

1. It takes many laborers to bring forth the harvest. We should pray for more laborers
Matthew 9:37-38 NAU - "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. ³⁸
 "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."
2. The question we should all ponder: Am I being faithful in the great evangelistic work of the Gospel? Am I committed to sowing seed, in sharing the Gospel with the lost. Never grow weary or discouraged. God doesn't hold us accountable for the result, only for our faithfulness. The results are in God's hands.
3. One of the great dangers for a church is when all of their focus turns inward. They begin to direct their energies upon internal issues rather than upon the work of the Kingdom and reaching the lost. This is said to be the final nail in the coffin of a church.
4. May we be a church that maintains a high emphasis on reaching the lost. And may this be a high priority in your life.
 You may never see the fruit of your labor – but you will not lose the reward.
 William Barclay wrote: "Someday you will labour and you will see nothing for it. Some day you will sow and you will pass from the scene before the harvest is reaped. Never fear! Never be discouraged! The sowing is not in vain; the seed is not wasted! Others will see the harvest which it was not given for you to see."²

² Barclay, William, *The Gospel of John, Volume 1*, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1956), Page 136.