

(Message #7 of **The Church: A Divine Design**)

The Labor of the Church

Matthew 9: 35-38

As I studied this passage I wondered what the attitude of the average church member is regarding the purpose of the church and their association with it. For many, church attendance is nothing more than a **habit**, a ritual that they have done for an extended period, with little benefit to themselves or anyone else. Others come only to **receive** but have no interest or intent to give of themselves for the glory of God or the good of others. Some attend merely out of **obligation**; they feel obligated to attend, but really have no desire to be there and would rather be somewhere else.

The passage that we've read this evening reveals the heart of our Savior. It reveals His passion for mankind and their eternal soul. These verses disclose the obligation of the church. Our Lord is looking for those who have not come out of habit, obligation, or merely expecting something in return for their attendance. He is seeking those who will embrace the work of the kingdom and minister to the lost and hurting. **Jn.4:35-36 – Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. [36] And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.**

There is a work to be done and we have been chosen to fulfill that work. We may wish that someone else be called or sent, but if we fail in this effort, who will accomplish what the Lord desires. The modern church needs to realize her obligations and embrace the work of the Lord.

These verses deal with the field of harvest. Christ has spoken of the need of the harvest and His expectations for those who follow Him. I want to look at the **principles** of the harvest as we consider: **The Labor of the Church.**

I. The Field of the Harvest (35) – **And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.** Jesus spent His earthly ministry with those in need. Often He is found among the poor, sinful, and needy. His work wasn't confined to certain social circles or classes of people.

- In our text, He went to **all the cities and villages** in the area. Jesus knew there were people everywhere who needed to hear the gospel.
- We can learn much about the field of the harvest from His example. We are obligated to all of life. We must not overlook certain areas or types of people, anywhere people are found is a field of harvest.

- Jesus instructed the disciples, prior to His ascension, on the field of harvest. This included Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth. The field is limitless!

I. The Field of the Harvest (35)

II. The Focus of the Harvest (36) – But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Jesus saw people differently than we do. He saw them as they truly were. He looked beyond the outward appearance and saw the heart. He saw them as weary, cast down, and wandering aimlessly through life without the Shepherd.

- We too must learn to see people as Jesus did, not to condemn their unbelief, but to have compassion. There are those who appear to have it all, but deep down there is a void that material possessions can't fill. With all their abundance, they are lacking. There are others who don't have anything. They don't enjoy the comforts of life or the comfort of the Lord. They may be adamant in their resistance to God, but deep down there are questions, fears, and desires. They all need the Lord.

- I pray we can see them as God does. Unless they accept Christ, the little pleasure they enjoy here will soon pass and they will spend all of eternity in torment. Can you see the focus of the harvest?

III. The Fullness of the Harvest (37a) – Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Jesus was well aware of man's need of a Savior everywhere He went. He found them in the synagogues, large cities, small towns, and remote villages.

- He was criticized for eating with Publicans and sinners. The religious elite condemned Jesus for His association with the outcasts. Mk.2:17 – When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

- The world around us is that field and that field is full! The harvest truly is plenteous. There has never been a shortage of folks who need to hear the gospel. We are surrounded by them each day.

- The Barna Research Group has been compiling and analyzing church data since 1984. Their findings show that 33% of Americans are un-churched; they have no church affiliation at all. They also found that 20% of church members believe that simply living a good moral life will ensure a place in heaven. These 2 statistics alone reveal that 53% of Americans are lost and on their way to hell. Over half of the people we meet are lost! That number is bound to increase. We don't have to look around very much to see the fullness of the harvest.

I. The Field of the Harvest (35)

II. The Focus of the Harvest (36)

III. The Fullness of the Harvest (37a)

IV. The Failure in the Harvest (37b) – Jesus knew the fullness of the harvest. He understood their need. He also recognized a failure in the harvest: there were few who were willing to labor.

- We are still faced with that problem today. The work of Jesus will never end in failure, but we are failing in our obligation to the lost. America has more Christians than any other nation. Why are 53%, at least, undone without Christ? (The 33% of un-churched that Barna researched doesn't include those involved in cults or false doctrine.) There are few who are willing to share Jesus with a lost and dying world.
- Now, we don't want anyone to go to hell; we are aware of their pitiful condition, but there is little work in the harvest. Jesus said to Peter and Andrew, **Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.** If we are to catch any fish, we must engage in fishing! We can't catch them if the boat isn't in the water.
- Many of you plant a garden. With the Lord's blessing there is a plentiful harvest; but, the fruit and vegetables don't pick themselves. It requires work. You could have the best garden yield ever, but if you left it in the field to rot, it would result in failure! I pray that we won't be a failure in the harvest.

V. The Future of the Harvest (38) – **Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.** There are those who hold a Calvinistic view on sharing the gospel (explain). This verse reveals that we play a significant role in the harvest. This includes:

A. Prayer – We are instructed to pray to the Lord of the harvest. We can plant the seed, but God must give the increase. 1 Cor.3:6-7 – I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. [7] So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

- God is in control! He can break up that hard, stony heart so that it can receive His Word. We can't save them, but God can, any of them! We tend to categorize those whom we feel are too far gone or too sinful for God to save. None are beyond His reach or ability! The future of the harvest at Fellowship can be influenced by the prayers of the saints.

B. People – We are told to [pray that the Lord would send forth laborers](#). For years I held a skewed interpretation of this passage. My main focus was to pray for those who are lost, and we certainly should, but we need to pray more for the laborers who will go forth into the harvest. The harvest is ripe; it is ready, but we need those who will labor in the harvest. The seeds have produced fruit; they just need to be gathered into the barn!

- As we begin to pray for the lost, I can assure you that God will begin to burden our hearts for them. As we begin to feel that burden, we are compelled to go unto the harvest. God desires us to be a participant in the harvest. We can see great things if we are willing to go forth. Are you willing to respond as Isaiah did? [Here am I, send me.](#)

I trust these verses have spoken to your heart tonight. There is a real need for revival in our land. This will only come when God's people get serious about His work.

I am sure we all have family, friends, and co-workers who need to be saved. We have carefully looked at the aspects of the harvest. Are you willing to follow the example and teachings of Christ? We can serve and honor Him in the harvest.