

August 7, 2016

## THE SPIRITUAL HARVEST

Matthew 9:35-38

*"Ask the Lord of the Harvest to send out laborers into His Harvest!" (v. 38)*

Their message would be that *"The Kingdom of God has come near..."* (Matthew 10:7) This is what the laborers are supposed to do – tell this message. It is not a message of prosperity. It is not a message of positive thinking. It is not a message about how to build self-esteem. It is a message that reaps a harvest.

How? They were not going to tell the people how to be subjects of that Kingdom. They are simply going to go out to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Not every message proclaimed is going to include instructions on how to live right. Not every message will tell people exactly what to do in order to be blessed. Sometimes the purpose of the message is just to clarify the vision. The people must align themselves to the vision in order to know why they would follow the King, the Author of the Vision.

The vision of Christ is a plentiful harvest that needs enough laborers to bring it in. The idea of a harvest has eschatological implications. At the end of time, the faithful would be gathered in and they would be welcomed into God's eternal Kingdom. *"The Kingdom of God has come near!"*

In another four chapters in Matthew, Jesus would talk again about a Harvest. I will be focusing on these passages in a few months, hopefully. Suffice it for now to note that His explanation of the Parable of the Sower includes a vision of a harvest that *"yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."* (Matthew 13:23) And after the parable of the Weeds in the Wheat, Jesus says, *"Let them both grow together until the harvest; and at the harvest time I will tell the reapers, 'Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn!"* (Matthew 13:30)

The idea of the Harvest includes roots, shoots, growth, fruitfulness, and ripening to maturity. A spiritual harvest would include being rooted in belief, growing in faith, being fruitful in acts of righteousness, and becoming mature in our discipleship. And finally, it includes being completely given over to the Kingdom at the time of God's Harvest of souls...souls being reaped!

But look at what seeds were being planted: *"Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues..."* His Words of Truth were seeds. Anything we might learn can be something that is reaped someday. What you know, what you learn, what you believe can be a part of what explains who you really are...ultimately. If you've heard the teachings of Jesus, you have had seeds that have been planted. Seeds become roots. Notice, however, that we need to be good, fertile soil; not hard like the path; not rocky with no depth; and not thorny so as to choke the shoots. These seeds produce roots and shoots. The shoots are visible. Do people see our faith? Do people recognize that your faith is in Jesus Christ? Do they see the Kingdom in the background of your life? *"...and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom..."* Once you know about the Kingdom of God, you are responsible for what you know. That's why there are tests, to prove that you are a responsible learner. For Christians, the ultimate test comes at the time of the Harvest. *"...and curing every disease and every sickness."* (v.35) if you have known healing, you have known the grace of God. We live in a world where diseases and sickness are cured. Hallelujah! But...as I've said before, it is a fallen world, diseases and sicknesses can still cause death...even among believers, even among the best of the faithful.

The greatest seed that was being planted is seen in the next verse: *“When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd!”* (v. 36) The disciples saw Jesus’ **compassion**. Compassion can be catching. In order for there to be a spiritual harvest, the laborers need compassion...the compassion that Christ had... a compassion that sees others as harassed and helpless...that sees them as sheep without a shepherd. Now remember, Christ is the Shepherd, the pastor is just a sheepdog. And that dog is a laborer too!

The Harvest is a spiritual harvest. It is not really about wheat, or, stuff. It is about souls. It is about being gathered into eternity. But what happens if the souls do not gather on earth?

The Kingdom of God has come near! We’ve got some work to do. The Harvest is now! We need to gather!