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## Sowing and Reaping

**John 4:35-38**

**Intro:** Last time we focused on vs35, where Jesus reveals to the disciples that His “food,” His real sustenance came from doing the Father’s will. Here, Jesus is teaching that spiritual realities should always take priority over physical things in the lives of believers and there is no greater spiritual reality than the Father’s will for us. Jesus saw His obedient compliance to the Father’s will as the joy and strength of His life, the very nourishment of His soul. Doing the Father’s will is what brought Him the greatest and most complete sense of satisfaction and it can for us as well. But Jesus then turns from the subject of His “food” and now speaks to the disciples and the rest of the Father’s children about their own spiritual food; which would be the will and the work that the Father has for each of them.

There are few things in life so tragic as having missed a great opportunity. At the Battle of Gettysburg, Lee’s army was soundly defeated and began to withdraw to the South only to find their retreat halted by a rain-swollen Potomac River. Lee was trapped. General Meade had a golden opportunity to attack and destroy Lee’s army, thereby ending the Civil War 2 yrs earlier. But Meade didn’t pursue, he didn’t engage even after Lincoln order him to. He refused to seize his greatest opportunity and thus, Lee would eventually surrender to Grant at Appomattox, not Gen Meade.

There are plenty of examples of missed opportunities in the business world, whether it’s Ross Perot’s refusal to buy into Microsoft for \$60 mill in 1979 or the fact that Kodak invented the digital camera but never bothered to develop it.

Blockbuster refused to buy Netflix for \$50 mill in 2000 and My Space rejected a buy-out offer from Facebook in 2005.

Each one of these stories shows us the tragedy of having missed a great opportunity. But if this principle is true in the physical realm, it’s even more so in the spiritual realm. The Bible acknowledges this when it says, “**For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?**” (Matt 16:26).

It’s quite possible that Jesus had been thinking along these lines as the

result of the disciple's failure to comprehend the real need of the Samaritan woman. Just imagine that, as the disciples had started climbing the hill toward the town of Sychar, Jesus was watching them go. He would have seen them pass right by the woman who was on her way down to the well. She's the one Jesus had come to Samaria to witness to, but the disciples were oblivious of her need. Maybe they had even forced her to go around them on the path, while the whole time, Jesus watched from the well. What were the disciples thinking about when they returned and found Jesus talking with the woman? They were certainly not thinking of her or her need. They had completed their errand. Now they just wanted Jesus to eat.

There's no doubt that the disciples had missed a great opportunity to witness to the woman themselves but Jesus doesn't chide them or brow-beat them for it. No, He takes this opportunity to teach them. First, He teaches about the priority of spiritual things over physical; then, about their great opportunities. To do this, Jesus uses a proverb...

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**35-** The gist of the proverb is that after sowing seed a farmer will need to wait at least four months for the harvest. Whether that particular time frame is accurate or not is beside the point. Jesus isn't creating the proverb; He's merely quoting it from the common vernacular. The use of the proverb may simply have been to indicate that there was no hurry for a particular task. "The seed may be planted but there's no getting around the months of waiting." Growth is slow and cannot be hurried. But Jesus didn't share this view in relation to spiritual things. He had an urgent sense to His mission and His words here conveyed something of that to His disciples. They cannot afford to be lazy, relaxed or even distracted, thinking they have more pressing things to do or plenty of time to get to the Father's business.

The fields are ready for harvesting right now! As the story progresses, we'll see that this is metaphorically true. The hills of Samaria were spiritually ripe, for many of the Samaritans would come to have faith in Jesus. Still, it may even have been true in a literal sense. Just imagine the woman returning with the men of the city as Jesus was talking with the disciples. When He says that the fields were "ripe" to harvest, this was literally true as hundreds of the townsfolk in white robes began streaming down the hillside toward them. These Samaritans, recently satisfied by their midday meal, were still hungry – hungry for that which will truly satisfy their deepest longings.

To see this harvest requires proper vision. Jesus indicates this by giving us a 3-fold imperative: ***Behold, lift up your eyes*** and ***look***... This is not a special kind of vision but rather a willingness to see. To look beyond the physical and see the spiritual; to look beyond our own personal wants and desires and see the desperate spiritual needs of those around us. This is the mindset of eternity we spoke about last week. It's what allows us to recognize what is most important, what takes priority over everything else. A vision that seeks to recognize and respond to the Father's will. The harvest was truly ready; it only needed faithful workers to claim it!

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**36-** The type of sowing and reaping that Jesus describes here is distinct from normal agricultural efforts both in the call for ***urgency*** and in the ***unity*** it implies. The harvest is ready, the wages are there; don't be dragging your feet. A harvest will not wait! If it's not reaped while it's ripe, it will spoil and there will be no harvest. Equally important, the reaper is not competing against the sower – he's cooperating with him! The reaper is simply completing the work the sower had started. Both are hard work but the sower seldom gets to see the end result of his labor, at least not on this side of eternity. But here, Jesus assures us that the sower and reaper will rejoice together over the eternal fruit.

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**37-38-** Even if they are looking for the same results, we must remember that sowing and reaping are very different tasks. It takes faith and dedication to sow seed even when circumstances look discouraging. It takes faith and vision to reap the harvest, especially if you hadn't sowed in that field. Though they are different, sowing and reaping are just 2 parts of the same grand work. Thus, there's no competition in ministry. If you're a sower it's because that's what the Father has called you to be. If you're a reaper, ditto. Both are working to gather ***fruit for eternal life***! Which is more important? Neither, because as Paul reminds us in ***1 Cor 3:7***; it's ***God who gives the increase***.

Jesus was also trying to teach them that they were not alone in the Father's work and they must never consider an opportunity to witness as a waste of time or energy. Depending on where you're at or who you're with, you may be called to sow seeds of the Gospel or you may be called to reap a harvest of souls. At this time, the disciples were about to reap a harvest for which they had not labored – they hadn't lifted a finger to plant seed or prepare soil. Who were these other laborers? Some believe it may've been John the

Baptist and his followers who had sown seeds in the region; but that's just supposition. Clearly, Jesus had sown seeds of faith in the woman's heart and now she was busy sowing seeds of faith in her fellow citizens back in the town. The disciples had gone into the village to get food but they did no evangelizing. The woman took their place! Not because she was more able, just more available.

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The disciples had missed one great opportunity; Jesus didn't want them to miss another. He uses this incident to show them that there were now great opportunities for the spread of the gospel, and He was encouraging them on the basis of these opportunities to be missionaries. Of course, this is not their only motivation for bringing people to Christ, nor is it ours. Our 1<sup>st</sup> and greatest motivation for evangelism is that we are under strict marching orders from headquarters. Though we, as God's people, have liberty in Christ, we do not have the liberty to set our own priorities!

What are our orders? 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. This particular command, spoken to the disciples much later, is given to us no less than 5 times—once in each Gospel and in the opening chapter of Acts.

In each case the emphasis is different. In **Matthew's** account, the authority of the Jesus is emphasized (**28:18-20**). In **Mark** the emphasis is on final judgment (**16:15-16**). **Luke** presents the great commission as the fulfillment of OT prophecy, because it's through the preaching of the cross that the nations are blessed. In **John**, Jesus places the great commission in the context of His own commissioning by the Father. "**As the Father has sent me, I am sending you**" (**John 20:21**). Finally, in **Acts 1:8** the command's linked to a definite program of world evangelization. In light of these texts it's clear that the command to evangelize the world touches each of us personally. It touched all Jesus' disciples then. It touches all His disciples now. The question is not whether you should evangelize but where, how and whom you should evangelize. Wherever God sends you, there you are to be a missionary and an evangelist.

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The next motivation for evangelism is that people are lost without Jesus Christ. This means they're lost in this life as well as for eternity. Paul wrote of the lost state of man saying they are "**without Christ...having no hope and without God in the world**" (**Eph 2:12**). But are most folks really lost?

You wouldn't think it by looking at the focus and efforts of most churches today. In fact, the great weight of theological opinion in our day is against this conclusion. Why?

The various shades of universalism in the church are opposed to this teaching. It's probably this more than any other single factor that's blunted the cutting edge of evangelism and severed the lifeline of missions. The view of most anthropologists is against it. They like to glorify primitive cultures and believe that the spread of the gospel ruins an essentially beautiful belief system. But nothing could be farther from the truth! The testimony from primitive tribes who receive the gospel is that before the missionary came, they feared everything; but after, they had no fear. Religious relativism is another reason the clear teaching of the Bible is opposed; the view that all men are on the same road to God and that the differences we see are only the differences between the various stages along it.

Are these views right? If they are right, then we may take our ease, leaving the world at peace. However, if they are wrong and the Bible is right, then we must be willing to support missions and we must go wherever God sends us.

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There is another motivation for evangelism suggested in our text that is not readily apparent to the casual reader. When Jesus quotes the proverb (35) about waiting four months between sowing and harvest and disagreed with it, saying that the sowing and reaping could take place simultaneously, He's reminding the disciples of an Old Testament prophecy that had to do with the coming of the Messiah. According to the Old Testament, the Messiah would usher in a period of great physical blessing for this earth. Amos wrote, "**Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows seed.'**" (Amos 9:13). Moses said, "**Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage (grape harvest) and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing**" (Lev 26:5). These were both clear cut signs of divine blessing which would be realized when Messiah arrived. In a spiritual sense this had already come true. The Messiah had come. Thus, the age of waiting had passed, and the age of perpetual sowing and immediate reaping had dawned. This is the age of grace; this is the age we live in! The Lord is coming back soon and the events leading up to His imminent return will

rattle the world and bring even more folk to saving faith.

Are we aware of this harvest? Are we aware that God's Spirit is moving in our time? It's not difficult to see if we would only ***Behold, lift up our eyes*** and ***look***... There are hurting people all around us. They hunger and thirst for something more and don't know what it is - but we know. I'm convinced there are souls in each of our lives that are ripe unto harvest tho we don't know who they are – but God knows and He's preparing us & them for an encounter of faith. Are we awake to these opportunities and ready to take advantage of them? Do we prepared to speak the Word in season? Are we available for the Father's work? If not, we must ask the Lord of the harvest to give us the vision that will help us to see the fields of ripe grain and the courage and strength to go into the fields and do the work.

Sowing and reaping are difficult tasks, not only in the physical realm but in the spiritual as well. There is no place in the harvest for those who are distracted, discouraged or demoralized. The work is too hard, the laborers are too few, the stakes are too high and the time is too short.☺