

HARVEST TIME IS HERE

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
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Let's Begin

While the disciples went into town to buy food (v. 8), Jesus brought a thirsty woman to the Fountain of Living Water. The woman who found Jesus and the water that quenched her thirst immediately raced back to town sharing with everyone her new found faith. "Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did" she announced to the gathered crowd. "Is not this the Christ?" she concluded (v. 29). The crowds assembled and headed up the hill where Jesus and His disciples were.

We have in this passage before us the wonderful fact that the Kingdom of God is similar to a harvest of grain ready for the reapers to gather in the abundant crop God Himself has nurtured: "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (v. 35).

As we consider the harvest that is ready for an innumerable amount of reapers, let's use the following outline to guide us:

- I. The Harvest of a Single Soul: The Discarded Woman (vv. 1-30)**
- II. The Harvest of a Section of Town: The Destitute Crowd (vv. 31-42)**
- III. The Harvest of the Sick and Afflicted: The Diseased Boy (vv. 46-54)**

I. The Harvest of a Single Soul: The Discarded Woman (vv. 1-30)

God's harvest never minimizes the significance of a small crop. For Jesus, each soul is precious and one for whom He gave His life.

Chapter four opens with Jesus leaving Judea and heading toward Galilee (v. 3). John recorded the particular route Jesus traveled: "And He must needs go through Samaria" (v. 4). This is John's way of saying that Jesus did not travel through Samaria either by chance or accident. He went by divine appointment. How often modern Christians believe the acquaintances they make in their circles of travel are haphazard is hard to tell. Yet every Christian should view their daily routines as a divine opportunity to share Jesus.

Wearied from the journey, Jesus makes Himself comfortable at a nearby well while the disciples trek into town to buy some food (v. 6). Not long after the disciples departed, a Samaritan woman made her way up the hill to the well for some water (vv. 7-8).

While John does not reveal the woman's identity (other than being a Samaritan), we are able to discern several things about her from the surrounding verses.

The most notable thing about her is the many problems interlaced throughout her life. And with the skill of a surgeon, Jesus deals with them one by one. Each of us can be fully confident that no problem we possess is too great for Jesus to address. Even more, there is no problem that is so overwhelming that Jesus will reject us.

Let us note a few of the woman's many problems. First is the problem of her tongue (vv. 7-9). While Jesus makes a gentle request, her hateful snappy answer dripped with venom and was meant to amplify the hatred and prejudice of her heart: "How is it that thou, being a Jew, asketh drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (v. 9).

Lumping Jesus into all the other Jewish Samaritan-bashers, she revealed her own prejudice-driven heart. For centuries, the Jewish people hated Samaritans believing them to be inferior since they mixed bloodlines with Gentiles.

Reflection Connection

What are some things that you do to build relationships with lost people at your job? How often does the opportunity present itself to assist someone that is a "reject" from society? Do you think the church does a good job in assisting society's fringe? Why or why not?



Reflection Connection

Recall a time when you were sharing your faith and the person continued to change the subject. Be prepared to share this with the group.

Jesus, however, held no contempt in His heart for Samaritans; instead He only had compassion. After all, that is why He “*must needs*” travel through Samaria. By doing so, he shattered the traditional, very visible barriers of prejudice, since no Jew would be caught dead in Samaria. The words we speak inevitably reveal the deepest beliefs of our hearts. This only made Jesus more intentional in reaching her, however.

The woman also had a definite thirst (vv. 10-15). Jesus’ first response to her was “*if thou knewest*” (v. 16). That was her problem. She knew a lot. But she did not know the real source of her spiritual thirst and what could quench it. Nor did she realize that all the water from Jacob’s well could not satisfy her. She surely would “*thirst again*” (v. 13). However the “*living water*” could solve her deepest woes (v. 10).

The problem the Samaritan woman had is one with which we are plagued today. In essence, she was trying to get more out of the well than it could give. We similarly attempt to get more out of this world than it was designed to give. Our basic thirst is spiritual. God planted eternity in our hearts, and material things, no matter their abundance, can not satisfy such a need. In every human heart, there is a nameless, unsatisfied longing for something only Jesus can satisfy.

Jesus held no contempt for Samaritans.

Another problem was revealed as the woman’s conversation with Jesus continued: transgression (vv. 16-19). Never would we have guessed the request Jesus made of her: “*go, call thy husband*” (v. 16). Suddenly, Jesus brought her to her senses. She stiffened as if a sudden pain caught her spinal cord. Jesus brought her face to face with her sin. Sin will always be part of the package when meeting with Jesus. It is not all warm fuzzies and cozy comfort. Our biggest problem we face is our sin. Thus, it should not take us by surprise that Jesus confronts us with it. It has been well said that Christianity begins with a sense of sin. To talk about salvation, redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation, conversion, justification, or any number of other terms about which the Bible speaks would make no sense whatsoever if sin were not involved. From what are we saved? Or from what are we forgiven? Why do we need to be reconciled? All of this is because of sin.

It is true we do not like to face speaking of sin. Neither did the woman. She replied, “*I have no husband*” (v. 17).

This brings us to the final problem we easily observe: theology (vv. 20-24). Facing her sin was too much. So, she changes the subject of the conversation and all of a sudden got religion! (vv.19-20). Often times in our witnessing experiences we find this to be precisely the case. If we get too close to the issue in a person’s heart, they will change the subject, more times than not, to religious ritual. For her, however, she revealed a flawed understanding of worship. Jesus corrected her place-centered worship with person-centered worship (vv. 22-23). In other words, Jesus instructed her that worshipping God is not about locality but reality. Authentic worship is inner not outer.

From this encounter, we learn vividly that the harvest God summons us to reap, does not have to be a large number of people (as later we will see). Instead God commands us to go to the lonely, the down-and-out, and the discarded. The Gospel is for the one as well as the many. Jesus loves every precious soul.



II. The Harvest of a Section of Town: The Destitute Crowd (vv. 31- 42)

Reflection Connection

The ministry of Billy Graham may have reached more people with the gospel than any single evangelist in church history. Do you think the days of “mass evangelism” are over? Explain.

Reflection Connection

What preparations does your church make in reaching the entire community around your church? If you do not know, ask your pastor or other staff member to lead a time in your class sharing the evangelism efforts in your area. Ask for ways your group may become involved.

God equips and empowers His people at many times to reach large sections of the population. The harvest became abundant. Nonetheless, the crowd is just as lost and destitute of real meaning as the lonely woman we just observed.

As the disciples approached, the woman was already headed back to the city. Surely she drank from the well of living water! As she announces to the town gathered what Jesus had done, she planted within these the seed that He was the Messiah (v. 29). As a result, the crowds headed to the well where Jesus was. In this passage concerning the harvest, we learn that God sends us to the street to reap a great harvest of souls from the destitute crowd.

As we focus now on the mass harvest there are four principles we may consider. First of all, there is the principle of potential (vv. 31-35). Jesus instructed His disciples to “*lift up your eyes*” (v. 35). One may envision Jesus standing on the hillside pointing to the crowds below headed up to the well. Part of our problem in harvesting souls for God is that we aren’t looking at the crowds. The field rarely catches our gaze. Instead we sadly look around at ourselves, focusing on our own personal needs. For too many of us, we have never seen the great need of the destitute crowd. And if we do not envision the crowd we will not envision the potential. Think for a moment of our potential. Jesus Himself said, “*The field is the world*” (Matthew 13:38). And that field is “*white already to harvest*” (v. 35). That means the harvest is ready to reap. No need to wait exists. It is “*already white.*”

Though John does not reveal the obstacle in the way, Matthew tells us plainly: “*the laborers are few*” (Matthew 9:37). It is ripe; it is rich; it is ready. But it stands to ruin if laborers are not forthcoming.

One thing to note here is that Jesus did not specify what laborers he lacked. He did not say, “*We don’t have enough preachers to get it done.*” Nor did He say, “*We don’t have enough teachers.*” The fact is, the laborers missing are general, not particular. In other words, there is a shortage in every single area of gifting. Each believer must operate in the gifting he/she has to share Jesus with a destitute, dying world.

The second principle we discover is that of preparation (v. 36). Those who “*soweth*” must be prepared. God can never work through us if we refuse His working in us (cp. Phil. 2:13; 1 Thess. 2:13).

As we consider God’s work in us there are three spheres that quickly surface. There is the sphere of life: God will not use an unclean laborer (Lev. 26:14-16). While you can teach algebra and be a drunk, you cannot so teach the Word of God. The laborers seek always a pure life before God.

The second sphere is that of the mind. The seed of God’s Word must be laid up in our mind. We are called to be renewed by our mind’s transformation (Romans 12:1-2).

Finally, there is the sphere of our heart. Souls are not easily won. It took every drop of Jesus’ blood. It also takes the broken heart of a believer. We are the voice of Jesus to a lost world.



The third principle is that of partnership (vv. 36, 38). For the work of God's harvest, there are sowers as well as reapers. For this reason, a spiritual liaison must be linked. We must serve and work together, respecting one another's roles and contributions. Jesus indicated that sowers and reapers "*rejoice together*" (v. 36). What a thrilling promise!

The fourth principle we glean is the principle of productivity (v. 36). The promise we have from God is a great harvest. In this particular case, one imagines the masses that could come to Jesus out of the destitute crowd.

How often we think the days of Acts are over when thousands at one time believed the Gospel. And while we learned the lesson earlier that God takes no soul as insignificant, this should by no means cause us to conclude that Jesus cannot save the many. Our goal should ever be to share the Gospel with as many as we can. God's harvest is a destitute crowd in His field which is the world.

IV. The Harvest of the Sick and Afflicted: The Diseased Boy (vv. 46-54)

In chapter four, we began the focus on the harvest time with one lonely, discarded woman. Though she had been with five different men none of them considered her more than a used-up wash rag. Then she met Jesus. Her life changed.

From there, we went on to see that while the harvest is about one soul, it is much, much more. It is about winning the crowds to the Lord Jesus. As the disciples peered down the hillside, where they stood with Jesus, they caught a glimpse of the massive field to which Jesus was sending them to labor. Thousands upon thousands of souls were ripe and ready for the reapers to gather.

In this final snapshot of the great harvest John reveals to us, we move on from the destitute crowd to the diseased boy and find that ministry awaits the Christian there as well.

A man John calls a "nobleman" (v. 46) had left his home in a quest to find the Lord Jesus. He caught up with Jesus at Cana (where Jesus performed His first miracle). His son was home in Capernaum and in bad health, even at death's door (v. 47).

Being a nobleman, he was an official in a king's court, being of the highest social status of that day. From this we are reminded that disease and difficulty know no such rank, and may plague the lives of any and all.

No doubt the nobleman had exhausted his options searching for answers to save his little boy. There are things like health, heart-condition, and clear mind that no amount of wealth can purchase. There is a lesson for all parents in this story. Better to build in your child an appreciation for those intangible treasures many can not buy rather than lavish your children with an over abundance of material matter that is worthless over the grand scheme of things.

The nobleman's sorrow led him to Jesus and his persistence got him there! He had but one request of the Lord: come and heal his son (v. 47). Often it is only death that can jolt us into acknowledging the significant things in life.

If his sorrow was great, its greatness could not compare with the greatness of the Savior. One will never go wrong traveling in search of Jesus. That is always the right thing to do.

Reflection Connection

Do you think you have a gift in ministering to the sick? Allow time in the group for others to share how they are involved in a healing ministry.



There was, however, a weakness in the man's faith. He felt Jesus was limited by distance (cp. Mark 5:23; John 11:21). He proceeded to tell Jesus to go down and heal his son (vv. 47, 49). How many times do we attempt to instruct Jesus precisely how we want things to be? I dare say it is too many times!

For this, Jesus offered a gentle rebuke: "*except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe*" (v. 48). Seeking something spectacular is always the wrong basis of faith in God. In essence, Jesus was saying to him, "you want to see before you believe but you have it all wrong. You must believe; then you will see." To place strings on faith in God never pushes us forward in our relationship with Christ.

His persistent search ended with a great success! He took Jesus at His Word! There can be no simpler but profound definition of true faith in God than taking Jesus at His Word. If your faith is based on feelings or any type of flesh, you are on dangerous ground. Real faith believes Jesus. It is as simple as that: "*And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him*" (v. 50). As he went his way, one of his servants met him bringing news from home: "*thy son liveth*" (v. 51). What great news! Faith always brings success whether or not we reap rewards in this life or the next.

The result was precisely as Jesus imagined. The man went home, embraced his boy, and won his entire household to Jesus.

No greater opportunity for harvest exists than to tell those who are sick and afflicted that Jesus loves them. Many times, the sickness will be an occasion for many to come to faith in the Lord.

Golden Greek Nugget

John recorded the marvel of the disciples upon their return from the village when they saw that Jesus had talked with "the woman" at the well (v. 27). No article in the Greek means that their focus was "a" woman. In other words, their shock was the specific fact that it was a female to which Jesus conversed. The Jewish custom forbade public discourse between men and women, including conversation between siblings and even a husband and wife! Jesus, however, saw the woman as a soul to be saved not a person to be shunned.

Wrap Up

The harvest is real, and make no mistake; it is overwhelming. We can not serve in the field unless we are sold out to Jesus. Would you make it a concern to pray about how you fit into God's harvest? Whether it is going to the discarded and lonely, or to the diseased and afflicted, will you commit yourself to work in God's field? It is already white, Jesus tells us, and ready for the laborers to gather a great harvest of souls.

