

White for Harvest

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Introduction.

- A. To me at least, it's hard to believe that I am only just now coming to the end of my first year working with the saints here at Margaret St. As of today, I've been here for about eleven and a half months, but according to my perception, it's been much longer than that. I think the reason why it feels so much longer is because in terms of experiences shared and blessings received, this has been one of the richest years of my life. I thank God constantly for bringing me here and allowing me to remain here, and I hope you feel the same.
- B. One of the reasons why I regard my time here with so much joy is because I regard the future here with so much optimism. Year One has been great, but I believe that Year Two and all the years to come will be even better, particularly in the area of church growth. There is enormous potential for growth in this area right now, and there is enormous potential for growth in this church right now. If each one of us will dedicate ourselves to the work of the gospel, I know we will be the light to the world that Jesus wants us to be.
- C. In the days to come, though, there will be obstacles to reaching the lost, but the biggest of these obstacles will be not external, but internal. The biggest roadblock to evangelism will be our own attitudes. You see, Satan is constantly working on each one of us. He's trying to persuade us constantly that we live in a world that's too wicked to be interested in the gospel, that everybody will hate us if we mention the truth to them, that we won't know what to say if the subject does come up. Friends, how much we listen to the lies of Satan is how much we will be rendered useless for the work of God. If we think we can't reach the lost, we won't.
- D. Instead, in developing our own attitude, we need to look to the attitude of Jesus. Consider what He says after He talks to the Samaritan woman at the well and she starts bringing the men of her town out to see Him. The story picks up in John 4:30-35. This is another one of those "Jesus the incredible Teacher" passages. He sees these Samaritans coming toward Him, and, on the spur of the moment, tells His apostles to see these people who had never heard the gospel as though they were a field of wheat ready to be harvested. That's a perception we need to pick up. Let's turn to Jesus to learn how to see the spiritual fields as white for harvest.

I. The Obstacles.

- A. We need to recognize first, though, that Jesus saw the fields as white despite the obstacles that faced Him. The first obstacle that He had to overcome was **A PERVERSE GENERATION**. Sometimes, we think that we have cornered the market on wickedness, that alone of every time in history, people are so bad today that they won't hear the gospel. If that's our opinion, folks, we need to take a closer look at people in the first century. Not only did Jesus call them a faithless and perverse generation, they richly deserved it!
- B. Consider, for instance, the mini-biography of the woman at the well in John 4:16-18. Talk about a Bible character we can relate to today! This woman sounds like she just stepped off the set of the Jerry Springer show, and yet, here Jesus is, talking to her. Sometimes, we go through our list of friends and acquaintances and start crossing names off without talking to them first. We say, "Oh, she likes to party too much, so she'll never obey the gospel," or "He's on his third marriage. He'll never stand for the Bible's teachings on divorce." Let me ask you: do you think the woman at the well was a natural prospect for the truth about marriage, divorce, and remarriage? The fact is, becoming a Christian ALWAYS requires a massive life change, and we shouldn't exclude people because we think their change is too big. It might be exactly what they want!
- C. Second, we have to recognize that Jesus was dealing with **AN UNLIKELY PEOPLE**. Very often, our evangelistic impulses are limited to people we identify with. We say to ourselves, "He's a lot like me, so that means he'll want to get baptized and become a Christian." The thing is, though, that the gospel, and indeed the Lord's church itself, were not designed to be limited to any one demographic group. Sometimes, it is the people who are most unlike us who make the best prospects. Consider Jesus' situation, as described in John 4:7-9. Believe it or not, there are books on evangelism out there that try to tell us not to reach people from other races or classes. Jesus' example here puts the lie to that idea! Whatever racial or class-based animosity exists in this country, multiply that by ten or twenty to get some idea of how the Jews and the Samaritans felt about each other. Both groups were equally convinced that THEY were God's own special people, and that the other guys were evil apostates. They shunned each other. And yet, here Jesus is, a Jew chatting away with a Samaritan—a Samaritan woman, no less—because He wants to give her too a chance to come to God. We need to be willing to do the same. We need to be willing to talk about Jesus, even with unlikely people.
- D. Beyond this, though, we need to see that Jesus was working with **A LIMITED CONNECTION**. Sometimes, we struggle with this because of our own fears. We make evangelism this big, fat, ugly deal that's so scary that we're only brave enough to broach the subject with our closest friends. Really, though, we don't have to know someone very well at all to at least get the ball rolling. Consider the time frame that Jesus is working with here. It's described in John 4:8, 27. The whole conversation with the Samaritan woman happens while

the apostles are out on a glorified burger run. This is not someone Jesus has known for years. This is someone He's just met. We need to be willing to speak up not just on the basis of friendship, but on the basis of acquaintance. We don't have to pour the darkest secrets of our spiritual lives into the ears of that guy who works the next office over. Just inviting him to services works too, and nothing bad will happen to us if we do.

II. The Advantages.

- A. However, just like Jesus faced and overcame obstacles we also face, He had some priceless advantages that we also have. The first of these advantages is **A CONVINCING MESSIAH**. We see just how convinced the Samaritan woman was in John 4:25-26, 28-29. Thankfully, Jesus is every bit as convincing today. We like to moan and complain a lot about how all the other churches out there make our evangelistic job harder, but have you ever thought about what a blessing it is to live in a country where most of the people agree with us that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that the Bible is His word? That's half the battle won already! If we happen to be dealing with the minority, those who don't believe in Jesus, we have the use of the greatest argument for His divinity ever written, and that's the Bible itself. If we can convince people to turn to the Bible with an honest heart, they will be convinced of the Messiah too. Let's be sure to use this advantage.
- B. Beyond Jesus Himself, though, we are also blessed with **A POWERFUL MESSAGE**. Look at the power of the message that Jesus brought to the woman at the well in John 4:21, 23-24. She began by asking about a point of doctrinal difference, but Jesus concluded by talking about the truth. Friends, that same gospel that was taught in the first century is the gospel that we have in our hands today every time we pick up a Bible, and the Holy Spirit Himself still testifies that it is indeed a powerful message. There are lots of churches out there with big pretty buildings. There are lots of churches out there that offer classes on everything from yoga to potty training. We don't have those things here, but we still have the truth, and I wouldn't trade the truth for all the potty-training classes in the world! It isn't yoga that saves people. It isn't a big pretty building that gets them right with their Creator. It is the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the truth that we have.
- C. In Jesus' case, and indeed in our own, these first two advantages add up to a third one: **A GREAT OPPORTUNITY**. Let's imagine for a second that we go back in time, back to the day that John 4:5 describes. Let's say that we go up and start talking to some bystander who's watching Jesus and His disciples walk by this Samaritan village on their way to Galilee. If we were to ask this bystander how many of the Samaritans would be disciples of Jesus by the end of the week, what do you think he would say? My guess is, he would say none. He would look at all the obstacles we mentioned, and he would say Jesus wouldn't convert a soul.
- D. Let's see what actually happened, according to John 4:39-41. Many believed just on the basis of what the Samaritan woman said, and many more believed just two days later, once they heard Jesus for themselves. What a person of the time would have said was a pointless endeavor actually turned out to be one of the more fruitful preaching trips ever described in Scripture. The obstacles only concealed the opportunity.
- E. In the same way, friends, in our lives, we can't let the obstacles that are so apparent dissuade us from using the opportunities we have to spread the word. Sure, it's true—this was Jesus doing the talking in John 4. None of us are Jesus. None of us have His ability to teach. But we do have this. We do have the assurance that if we dedicate ourselves to doing the will of God, we will receive all the help we need from God.

III. Our Meeting.

- A. In fact, friends, we have a marvelous opportunity to encourage others to come to the Lord with our upcoming gospel meeting. Just a quick glance at the topics reveals just how timely this meeting is. There are likely thousands of people in just Will County alone who desperately need to hear the word of the Lord on these important matters, and now is the perfect time to do what we can to open that door for Christ.
- B. In fact, here are four things that all of us can do to help reap this harvest that is before us:
 1. First, we can all **PRAY** for the success of this meeting. None of us can do anything for God without Him, but with Him to strengthen us, we can do all things. We need His help, and we need to ask for it.
 2. Second, we can all **INVITE FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND COWORKERS** to the meeting. All of us know people who have been touched by addiction. Let's be sure to get them here to hear God's take on things.
 3. Third, we can **DISTRIBUTE FLYERS**. Brother Adams has suggested that in order to get a good turnout, we need to get the word out to people who need help. On the back bulletin board, there's a sign-up sheet with names and contact information for organizations from Al-Anon to St. Joe's cardiology department. We need to put our names down next to at least one of those organizations, take some flyers, then go talk to the person who is running that particular organization to get permission to leave the flyers there. Otherwise, the flyers will go in the trash. Lord willing, this will help us reach out to the community.
 4. Finally, we need to **WELCOME VISITORS**. If we have the kind of turnout we should, there will be a number of people at the meeting who don't know us or anything about us. We need to be friendly faces, cheerful voices, and welcoming hands so that they want to come back.

Conclusion. On the other hand, if you see that you need to come to the Lord before you can help others, begin now.