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Ready to be a Harvester?

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ARE YOU READY TO BE A HARVESTER FOR THE ABUNDANT HARVEST?

“Harvest” is a metaphor for the final gathering of God’s people. Elsewhere it is carried out by the angels or the Son of Man in **Matthew 13:39** and **Revelation 14**. In our Gospel reading, Jesus shares this responsibility for gathering with his disciples who will preach in his name. But Jesus realized that he needs more workers because the crop must be quickly picked before it spoils.

When I began to pastor and take on God’s call to the ministry, I knew that it would require a lot more time, work and energy - I was back to a 24/7 commitment. I also knew that there would be times when people would not like the decisions I had to make or like to hear the message I felt that God wanted me to preach.

I also know that there will come those times when the “wolves” will be growling at the door of my ministry and sound like the big bad wolf of “The Three Little Pigs” fame. “Let me in or I will blow your house down” symbolizes the cries of Satan as he continuously teaches humanity usually the hard way—the knowledge of good and evil.

But even with all of those negative, hurtful and sometimes frightening events, I have found that working for the Lord is still the absolutely most satisfying and rewarding thing that I could ever do with my life. I am so glad that God called me and chose me. What an honor to work for the great God of Heaven in tending to his people!

Have YOU ever felt as though God said to you, “Go get ’em, Tiger, I’m right behind you!” And then you stop to think, “Now God, I would prefer that you go before me instead of staying in back of me. After all, I don’t know what I’m facing, and you do.”

A number of years ago a restaurant had to close its doors for a couple of hours each day. They were having trouble-hiring people to work enough hours to fill the day. In other words they were not closing because they did not have enough customers, but because they did not have enough workers.

I wonder how many churches have died and closed their doors for the same reason. They did not die off because they had converted everyone in their neighborhood, but because they did not have enough workers. A congregation needs workers to survive. It needs Sunday School teachers to teach the children, committed members to share their gifts and talents on committees, persons to answer God's call for their ministry, and disciples to convert the lost. The church needs people that are willing to get and stay involved in the activities of the congregation.

God has chosen to use very ordinary people like you and me to minister to the world, to bind up hurts, to tell the truth to those who are in darkness. There are plenty of souls to teach and convert. We live in a world of lost people. Just as a farmer looks over his fields and sees the crop that needs to be harvested, Jesus could look out over the world and see the souls that needed to be saved. But our living Savior is looking over the world today – 7 July 2013 and there are a lot of lost people. God expects us to see the harvest.

The only way the harvest will be completed is if there are people doing the harvesting. A farmer realizes the crop will not harvest itself. In today's vernacular we might say, "Bring on the combines." The greater the harvest, the more combines you can use. What would you think if you had to make a choice; buy more combines or allow the harvest to rot in the fields? You would go out and buy the extra combine. It would be great to have the problem of a crop that was so good you had to have more harvesters. Our problem in harvesting souls is not in the lack of people that need to hear the Gospel, but in the workers.

Jesus warns us of putting this off. "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest?'" There is no time to wait, Salem. Jesus needs people that are willing to work today. The fact is we need people that are willing to teach classes, come to services on a regular basis, and invite others to services, and these harvesters are desperately needed today. Do not say, "one of these days I will do this or that," for it will not happen. The only promise we can keep is the one we fulfill today. Joshua did not challenge the nation of Israel in Joshua 24 by telling them to choose four months from now who they will serve but to choose this day. Elijah did not tell the children of Israel to choose between God and Baal in the next few years, but to make their choice and serve right now. *"How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him"* (**1 Kings 18.21**).

Where are you standing today? Are you following God or Baal? If you choose to follow God, then you have a responsibility to do so. You have the responsibility to

work with your fellow Christians, to assemble with the saints every time you possibly can, to use your talents in the Lord's work. "Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest." Harvesting is not always convenient, and it can be hard work, but it needs to be done. Living in a rural farming area, most of you know that you harvest the crop when it is ready and not when you are ready. The same can be said for our work in this congregation. Many Christians spend much of their lives as spectators on the sidelines. They don't really believe that the work of ministry is a privilege, that to use the gifts God has given them is an honor.

Salem family, we are at a crossroads in this congregation. Those that helped to start this work are growing older. Glory be to God – some have been called to their heavenly reward. Some of our members have moved on; others are at the crossroads of their Christian journey. Will this congregation continue to exist for another 10 or 20 years? It will depend on us being willing and able to be disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The question I want you to ask yourself is, "Am I ready for the harvest?"

Jesus tells the seventy that there is much work to do, but not enough people to do the work. "The harvest is great, but the laborers are few." He also tells them this evangelistic mission will be dangerous. "I send you out as lambs among the wolves." Jesus knew they would face opposition and danger in preaching a new and different message. There is also a sense of urgency in their mission. Jesus tells them to travel light. "Carry no purse, no bag and no sandals." He also tells them not to even take the time to greet anyone they meet on the road. The harvest is not only plentiful it is also ripe. There is no time to waste.

The seventy missionaries are told that they may not be successful or well received in every town. Not everyone will be open to his or her message. You see, these seventy were going into towns where people were worshipping many false gods, and they didn't want to give up all their many gods for the One true God. These missionaries were competing with all of these false gods.

I heard a story the other day about competing. It seems there was a barber in a small local town that had been the only barber in town for years. Everyone went to this barber to get their hair cut. Then, one day a big hair salon franchise came to town and opened up shop. They advertised, "All Haircuts for \$3.00."

Slowly, the barber's business began to dwindle. He just couldn't compete. In a last

ditch effort to save his business, he hired a business consultant. The consultant spent a day pouring over the barber's books asking many questions. At the end of the day the barber asked the consultant, "So what do you think? Should I close up shop?" The consultant said, "Not yet. I'll be back tomorrow." The next day the consultant showed up with a huge banner that he hung in front of the barber shop that said, "We Fix \$3.00 Haircuts!" The competition doesn't always win!

It was as though Jesus was saying, "You are going to go out and be chased like wolves desiring to devour you and kill you. You are going to face all-out spiritual warfare. You are going to go hungry at times. You will have to flee for your very lives at other times. You will never be rich by this world's standards. In fact, Jesus wants you to leave your money at home and don't take anything along to protect yourself with like a rod or a staff. You will have to give up being close to your family and friends most of the time. Don't bring any extra clothes or shoes because I require you to live totally by faith. And one last thing, don't dilly-dally around. Don't stop to talk to friends or make new friends, just keep moving.

The word of God is the seed that must be planted in the hearts of men. There is tremendous power in this seed. Even a tiny seed can become a big tree. No one can be idle during harvest time. In the kingdom of God the time has come for every believer to be active in the service of God. The entire body of Christ must get involved to bring in the harvest of souls. God's people should be willing to sacrifice their time and energy and talent and money and pleasures and comforts to bring in the harvest. As long as people cling to everything they like and refuse to sacrifice, they will not get wholeheartedly involved in the harvest.

Rain is indispensable for the harvest. This is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. All our efforts and labor must be undergirded by the move of the Holy Spirit. Without the spirit of God all our efforts will be in vain.

To ensure a bountiful harvest, there must be hope and confidence that there will be a bountiful harvest. All our labor must be undertaken with the firm assurance that God will bless our efforts and we will surely reap the harvest. If we lose confidence, we will get discouraged and labor with doubt and reluctance. Laboring with faith is indispensable to the success of our efforts. God will surely honor our faith and grant us an abundant harvest.

The work of the ministry is often hard, with a great deal of strain and long hours. I don't want to commit to do anything. Been there, done that, been burned or burned out, not going to do it anymore. Let someone else do it.

Now - Welcome to the Harvest! How many of you are really ready to roll up your sleeves, get your hands dirty and calloused and have the faith the size of a mustard seed to bring in the harvest that is abundant ? All that is needed is willing harvesters to do the job. Are you willing? We shall soon see.