

The Coming Harvest

by Robert Coleman

Robert Coleman's sermon highlights the urgency of the Great Commission and the joy of participating in God's harvest of souls.

Duration: 42:52

Scripture: Matthew 9:35, Matthew 28:19-20, John 4:34-36, John 4:39

Topics: "Harvest"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the Great Commission and the anticipation of the day when it will be fulfilled. Jesus taught his disciples to always be aware of the harvest that is waiting and ready. The speaker emphasizes the need for workers in the harvest and the mission that we are sent to fulfill. Finally, the speaker highlights the joy that comes from participating in the harvest. The sermon references the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John, where Jesus encounters a woman at a well and teaches his disciples about the spiritual harvest.

Transcript

I feel that the honor is mine to be invited to come to a conference here sponsored by the Navigators. These people have always challenged me, and to be in this lovely church, God, this is a beautiful place, and it's wonderful to hear these musicians. You know, music is the language of heaven, and when we get there we'll all be able to join the music, and as they were saying, let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.

I think that this is a preparation for us to get ready for what is to come, and to praise God. And with that note of praise and anticipation, I want to begin to think about the Great Commission, for the objective is to gather all of God's people, finally, around the throne of heaven, a people from every tongue and tribe and nation, who will never cease to praise the Lord. That's why, to begin, I want to cast that vision of the day when the Great Commission will be fulfilled.

And Jesus taught his disciples to live always with that anticipation, and to look out upon the world, or as he spoke of it, as the fields that are ready for harvest. Open your eyes, he said, look out there, the harvest is waiting. You'll find this in the fourth chapter of the Evangelist John's gospel, and if you have your Bible, you may want to turn to that fourth chapter of John, as we see this unfold.

It begins there in the opening verses of the chapter, Jesus is on a journey going to Galilee, and on his way, he passes through the little village of Sychar. They arrive there at about noontime, and the disciples are hungry, so they go into town to get something to eat. But Jesus lingers outside the city gate there at the well, and while the disciples are away, this woman comes with her water jar.

It's strange that she would come at this hour of the day. Normally, women would gather at the well early in the morning, or later in the evening, when it was cool, and it was a time when they could have some social fellowship. But this woman who came today would not have felt comfortable with the other ladies in the city.

She had had a very unfortunate life, and was even now living in sin, and she came at a time then when she thought she would be alone. But Jesus saw something in this woman that the other people in Sychar had not seen. They looked only on the surface, but Jesus looked into her heart and could see beyond what appeared on the surface.

He saw her not just for what she was, but what she could become by the grace of God. And he asked her for a question, asked a question for a drink of water, and this initiated a conversation which led this woman finally to the discovery Jesus was her Messiah. And she was so thrilled, she couldn't keep this good news to herself.

She forgot all about the water and rushed back into town to tell her story, and became the first evangelist of the New Testament. Meanwhile, the disciples returned. They've had a good dinner, and they probably saw this woman pass them as they approached, and they were surprised that Jesus would be talking to such a person of her reputation.

Not only that, he missed his lunch, and so they urge him to eat something. And at this point, we're going to pick up the story beginning at verse 34, and we'll read through verse 38. 38.

My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say four months more and then the harvest? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest.

Even now, the reaper draws his wages. Even now, he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. And thus the saying, one sows and another reaps, is true.

I sent you to reap what you've not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you've entered into their labors. As we think of this teaching of Jesus, there are four great truths that I want us to notice.

The first is to recognize the harvest is waiting. It's ready. The second is to see the workers that are needed for the harvest.

The third is to understand the mission that we are sent, which involves commitment to the harvest. And finally, the joy that comes in the harvest. Now let's begin with the first that's brought out so clearly in verse 35, where Jesus tells these disciples to open their eyes and to look out there on the fields, and to see the harvest that is ripe.

We're told it had been a recently planted field of grain, still several months away from what you normally would think of in terms of the physical harvest. So Jesus obviously wants them to think in spiritual terms. And with eyes of faith, to see what God wants to do.

Look out on the fields, he said. Don't you see? The harvest is ready. Well, those disciples peer out on the barren fields, and that's all they see.

But if they had used spiritual vision, they would have recognized some men coming out from the city that have heard the testimony of this redeemed woman. They're so intrigued, they want to know more. Do you see them? They're coming through the fields.

They're coming to Jesus. And when they arrive, as you read on, we're told Jesus talked with them, and now many more believe. And they urge him to stay and tell them more.

And so for two more days, he lingers in that city. And before he goes, note verse 42. Those Samaritan men realize that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

That's what Jesus wants his disciples to see. To see how God's love reaches out across the globe, and how he is seeking to gather a people from all the nations who will always praise him. He wants us to recognize the harvest is waiting.

It's prepared. Do you see it? I think of the man that was on a train going through Arizona in the summer. It was hot.

Everybody had pulled down the shades in the chair car to keep out the glare of the hot sun, all except one man who just kept looking out the window. And a big smile came across his face. And finally, the lady across the aisle became so curious, she turned and said, Mr. Can you tell me what you see out there in that wasteland that makes you smile? He said, oh, I'm in the irrigation business.

And I was just thinking to myself, if this land only could get water, why the desert would turn into a garden. That's what Jesus is teaching his disciples. He wants us to see beyond what appears on the surface.

He wants us to look with eyes of faith and to see what God proposes to do in this world. And faith is to be sure of what you hope for, and to be certain of what you do not see. Oh, to look out today with that kind of anticipation thrills you.

As some are saying, we are living probably in the greatest in gathering of the harvest since the beginning of the church 2,000 years ago. And you only have to go to many parts of the world, usually underprivileged, often oppressed, where people seem to be often living in poverty, in parts of southern Africa, all across South America and Latin America, in many parts of Eastern Europe, even extending into Russia and some parts of Asia. Oh, the world is seeing today a gathering of the people of God.

Would that we could see more of it here in North America. But if we would use spiritual discernment, we could see how God is preparing the way. Hearts are lonely and troubled, some distraught, wondering where they can turn.

Do you not see them as you look out upon the people around you, even up and down the street where you live? Don't you see that anxiety, that vacuum in the human soul that has not been filled? Oh, see the potential, the opportunity, that God is preparing today a harvest to fulfill his plan to gather a people from the nations. But he brings out here a second truth that we must understand as we think of the harvest in verses 35 and 36 and 7. He speaks about the workers that are needed. He mentions specifically those that sow and those that reap.

Of course, there are many other ways that you get involved. Somebody has to get out there early and plow the field and then harrow it or disc it, get it down where you can plant the seed. And then after the seeds begin to sprout, someone needs to be there and cultivate those growing seedlings.

And when finally you gather the harvest, someone is busy taking produce to the market. Someone is back at the house cooking a meal for the hired hands. But everybody is needed.

However we can help out, no one takes a vacation during harvest. And in the church, it's even more realistic. There are diversities of gifts, but all of us are needed.

And some way each one of us here has a part in fulfilling the Great Commission and the discipling of all nations. And Jesus pointed out how the need was to increase the working force. We read over in the ninth chapter of Matthew how he went about healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind.

He was teaching, he was preaching, and multitudes were gathered. It's not surprising when you show that kind of practical ministry to people, you have their attention. But as he looked out upon the crowd, moved with compassion, he realized that the people were harassed and scattered like sheep who had lost their way.

And the tragedy was they didn't have someone who could lead them, someone like a shepherd who really cared, who would show them the way to the fold. He was doing all he could, but in the incarnation he accepted a limitation, which is obvious. He couldn't be with all the people that needed help.

How then would he ever fulfill his mission to reach a world? Well, only as workers could be multiplied, workers who would have a heart like a shepherd, who would go in his name and minister to the people that wanted direction. And so he told the disciples, you pray to the Lord of the harvest. Every time we pray, we think of the harvest, we think of the Great Commission, because God loves this whole world.

But you don't pray in generalities, pray for the solution to the problem. Jesus said, pray that the Lord of harvest will send forth workers into his harvest. And the way those words come together indicates that workers have the characteristic of a shepherd, someone who knows the way and who will lead them.

You multiply those kind of people, and someday you will reach the whole world. And you can see that's what Jesus was doing in his ministry. While he ministered among the people, continually responding to their needs, he was alert to those that wanted to learn more.

What do we call them? What are learners called? Disciples, that's the way the word translates, as in the sense of an apprentice or a follower. And so Jesus drew these men to himself. You might say just ordinary people, but they had a desire to learn.

And with the exception of the trader, they followed him to the end. He brought them close to his own heart for about three years. And they could see his vision unfold, his compassion for the multitudes, yes, but they could also see the inner life of his spirit and his communion with the Father in prayer, his dependence upon the Word, his discipline of time.

And as they were able, he found ways for them to get involved, to have a sense of importance helping him. And he would send them out and bring them back and check up to see how things were going on, building in them a sense of accountability. And then before he left, he gave that final instruction, you go now and do what I've been doing with you, you go and make disciples.

And you leave with them a vision that you have seen as you followed me for three years, a vision for the harvest, a vision to disciple all the nations. We're going to be talking a lot more about that tomorrow, try to look at some of the details, some of the applications. But I want you to realize that's what we are to be doing now.

I think of Dost Trotman, how he would often ask, where are your men? And as you look back upon your life, do you see some men and women who are working in the harvest? And how they in turn have been able to influence a few others, and now they're reaching out, and that principle of multiplication now is continuing to move on ever farther and farther into the harvest. That's the question I want us to ask here. Where are the workers that are going out of our life to fulfill the Great Commission? But it brings me to observe that third point.

We are sent, and it certainly speaks of commitment. Because you've got to accept this challenge and actually go. That's brought out there in verse 38 when he tells the disciples, they join others who have preceded them.

I'm glad that we don't ever have to go ahead of someone else. Sometimes people have already shared a witness, and we just join their labors. But even if no one has visibly crossed their trail, they have been prayed for.

You always follow prayer, don't you? He's the one that really opens the way. You're not alone. You're following the Holy Spirit.

You'll note the same word is used in reference to Jesus, this word *sin*. It has the idea of being commissioned and sent like an ambassador. We have an ambassador from our country and all the major capitals of the world, and they're in that place to represent us, to speak for our president.

In that same way, we are sent like an ambassador with the authority of him who sends us. And with that authority, Jesus was sent of the Father. And that's why 2,000 years ago, he clothed himself with our flesh and became one with us and bore our sorrows and carried our griefs and finally accepted in his own body the judgment of our sin.

As he was hanging on the cross, you remember how the worldlings came by? They began to mock him. They said, look, well, he was the one people said would be the savior of the world. Look at him.

He can't even save himself. And they laughed him to scorn. The irony is that in their derision, the mocking crowd said the truth.

Have you thought about it? Of course, Jesus could not save himself and still complete his mission. He was not sent into the world to save himself. He was sent to save us.

He said to seek and to save the lost. He was not sent to be served. He came to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

That's why he was here. And he would not be diverted from that mission. Like one setting his face like flint, he went to Calvary and he bore it all.

And there his work was finished once and for all. It can never be added to or subtracted from. It's complete.

But the announcement, the bringing of that good news to the world is the mission that he has now given his church. That's our task, to have the joyous privilege of announcing the gospel, of making disciples, who in turn will pass the word along until by multiplication the whole world hears the good news. The temptation is for us to get occupied in other things.

They're always pressing demands. Jesus realized that with his own group of disciples. And he so earnestly prayed that they would not deviate from his mission to the world.

It comes out most powerfully in the 17th chapter of John, that longest recorded prayer of Jesus. And it's there where he prays that these disciples will be kept from the evil one, that they will have his joy. He's going to die in a few hours.

He wants them to have his joy in doing the will of him who sent him. And then he prays that they will be sanctified. And he goes on to say, as you sent me into the world, Father, I send them into the world.

And for their sakes, I sanctify or I set myself apart that they also may be sanctified through the truth. We usually think of sanctification as an inward cleansing. And certainly when you set apart a gift for God, it becomes his possession.

It becomes holy. But here is a dimension sometimes overlooked. Jesus did not need to be cleansed from sin.

He was already the blameless son of God. As the context clearly indicates, his setting himself apart for the cross, his sanctification was not that he lacked something, but as he said, for their sake, I sanctify myself. It was for the sake of the mission for which he was sent.

A mission now that he has committed to his church, that we are to take up as we go forth, sent just as he was sent of God, as an ambassador. And oh, this is going to be the expression of the holiness that flows in your heart. Let us not try to keep it to ourself.

And certainly we can be thankful for that inner cleansing, but it doesn't stop there. As the apostle Paul said, you're sanctified to be meat for the master to use, to become a channel through which the spirit of God now can move through you to fulfill a mission, to reach a world. Here in America, we have the Coast Guard branch of the armed services that has the responsibility of protecting our coast and also to be there in times of emergency to assist in rescue if someone is in peril at sea.

Some time ago, a Coast Guard station got a signal from a ship that was in distress at sea. They picked up the SOS, and the commander immediately told his men that they must prepare to go out and effect rescue. It was a stormy night, and one of the young apprentice seamen had never before been out on the high seas at night in a violent storm.

He was scared. He turned to the commander, and he said, sir, if we go out tonight, we may not come back. And the officer said, young man, learn it now.

We don't have to come back, but we have to go out. That's the purpose of the Coast Guard, not to protect themselves, but to seek to help those who have no one else to help them. In a much more realistic way, that's what the church is commissioned to do, not to enjoy our own blessing and to be thankful for all of the ways that our lives have been benefited, but to remember that God loves a whole world, and we have been sent as his ambassadors sent in the place of Christ now through his Spirit to bring in the harvest that

is waiting.

And it will involve sacrifice. It's not going to be easy. The hard part still is waiting, and there will be a price.

That's why I want to mention this last truth that he brings out. If you look again at verse 36, Jesus teaches these disciples about the joy that comes in the harvest. They were singing about it tonight.

The joy of the Lord is our strength. Isn't that beautiful? Jesus always lived in that joy, and the Bible tells us, seeing the joy that was beyond, he endured the cross. I feel sorry for you tonight if you have to whip yourself to go out and share the faith or to really care about helping someone who needs discipling.

It's the joy that feeds strength into your soul. Jesus often referred to himself as the Son of Man. Have you noticed that? About 80 times that expression is recorded on the lips of Jesus.

It goes back to the seventh chapter of the prophecy of Daniel, where the prophet envisioned one coming in the clouds of heaven like the Son of Man. And he would receive a kingdom that would never perish. A kingdom encompassing every tongue, every tribe, every people, every nation.

It's a Messianic promise. It looks to the day of our Lord's return in glory in the clouds of heaven. Sometimes we call it his second coming.

Of course, in his first coming, he knew he was sent to complete the mission of redemption that would be finished on Calvary, and that's where it was done. But on his way to the cross, he always lived in the anticipation of his return, when the kingdom would finally come to consummation. He told the disciples to pray for the coming of the kingdom.

Yes, there is the sense that you enter the kingdom now when you're born again, but it cannot really be consummated until Jesus said, this gospel of the kingdom has been preached in all the world. Then the end will come. You remember the last time he had supper with the disciples in the upper room? When they passed the cup, he told those disciples around the table he would not drink the fruit of the vine with them anymore in this world, but he would take it again in the Father's kingdom when he returned.

Every time we observe this holy sacrament, it's more than a memorial of his death. It is but an anticipation of his coming again, when finally the gospel has reached the ends of the earth, and disciples have been made of all nations, and his people are gathered around the throne to praise him forever. Doesn't that thrill you? John, the beloved, saw that day, and he wrote about it in the revelation of Jesus Christ in chapter 7. He describes what he sees as he's caught up by the spirit, and the door of heaven is open, and there he beholds the throne of God.

And gathered around the throne is this gray multitude. They are clothed in white robes, a symbolical way of speaking of their purity. They've been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

And then he sees that they're waving palm branches, which is another symbolical way of expressing their joy and their victory. And then he tells us where they come from, this great multitude that no one can even count as far as the eye can see in every direction, from the east and the west, the north and the south. He says they come from every tongue, from every tribe, from every people, from every nation.

Do you realize what he's describing? The Great Commission is fulfilled! It's already accomplished in the schedule of God! The celebration has started! And any activity now that does not contribute to that destiny

is an exercise in futility, because nothing finally will remain but the Word of God and the souls of men and women. What a day to anticipate! What a joy! The old missionary E.P. Scott spent most of his years working among the northern tribes up in India. One day, he was seeking to reach an area that had not yet heard the gospel, when suddenly he was surrounded by a band of armed warriors, and they pointed their long spears at his heart.

The old missionary thought, well, this is it. He was a bit scared, but it happened that he had his violin with him. He quickly opened that case, took that instrument, put it to his shoulder, and he began to play and sing in the native language which he knew.

All hail the power of Jesus' name. Let angels prostrate fall. Bring forth the royal diadems and crown him Lord of all.

And as he played and sang, he closed his eyes, momentarily expecting death. But when nothing happened, even after he finished the third stanza, he opened his eyes, and he saw that the spears had fallen from the hands of his captors, and tears were streaming down their faces. And they begged him to tell them of that name, that name above every other name, the only name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.

So he went home with them and told them the old, old story of Jesus you've heard so many times. And a church was raised up there that is still worshiping God today. Now I'm not suggesting that you're going to be delivered from the spears of tormentors.

I don't want you to think that you're going to be spared difficulty and hardship. In fact, if you take seriously this teaching, I can only promise you a cross. But whatever comes in your heart, there'll be a song, because you can see beyond the veil of this world.

You can see what God is doing. And you're living already in that assurance that his will shall be done. His kingdom shall come, and the great commission will be fulfilled.

And while it does not yet appear all that we will be, we know that when he appears, then we will see him as he is. At last, our faith will turn to sight, and we will behold him and all the glory of his presence. And every knee will bow before him, and every tongue will proclaim to the glory of God, Jesus Christ is Lord.

That's reality. That's eternity. Do you see it? Then open your eyes, use your spiritual vision, and behold the coming of the kingdom of God, and the fulfillment of the great commission.

Father, I'm left breathless with wonder when I think on these things, but, oh, oh, the joy to contemplate that glory. And when I look at what little I've done, and how I've often been intimidated by circumstances that were difficult, oh, Father, I can see how small has been my faith. Forgive me, Lord.

Be pleased to do a deeper work in my soul. Open my eyes that I may behold more clearly what you're doing, and I may see more definitely what I can do until that glorious day is fulfilled. Give us, Father, that sense of expectancy, that joy of the Lord.

Where is our strength? I pray in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

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