

Sheep, Sheaves, and Souls.

The zeal of the Lord Jesus Christ for the welfare of others was second to none. He visited every city and village in that thickly populated district for love's sake, seeking and saving those who were lost. In the smallest villages, in the humblest synagogues He preached the good news of the Kingdom of God, and established His rule of grace in the heart of many. In this way He manifested forth His glory to the honour of Him who sent Him. Humility, zeal - His servants should imitate Him.

He also cared for the sick, as we see in the opening verses of the chapter, in the healing of the man sick of the palsy. In this he is a great example to His disciples, who may by caring for the temporal concerns of others

may win an ear for the Gospel as He did.

Everything that is important to us is important to the Lord Jesus. He cares for individuals, and for the multitude (V.2, 20, 25, 27, 32). His heart goes out, not to favourites, not to a few select, refined, or saintly souls, but to the multitude whom He saw as shepherdless. They were neglected and uncared for, scattered, cast down, prostrate on the earth, wandering, bruised.

As Christ viewed the multitudes of rational, responsible, immortal beings with their diversified histories and emotions and destinies, He was moved with compassion. So He set before His disciples the needs of the people and urged them to pray and dedicate themselves to care for the world. He pressed that need

home by the use of another figure other than sheep.

The multitudes were like the harvest ready for the reapers, but no reapers were there to gather in the precious grain. It was "plenteous" but ready to shed and spoil and rot upon the ground. It must not be lost! And it was the responsibility of His followers to see to this. It is our responsibility today.

The Prospect of the Harvest.

Here is a picture of boundless possibilities. The harvest covers a vast area. The field is the world. Christ came not to save just a few, but aims at a plenteous harvest of precious souls. If only those who professed loyalty to Him understood this and reflected it in their teaching and preaching. Failure to do so shuts men out

from Christ and will reap nothing but failure.

A prime illustration is the doctrine of hyper-Calvinism. Not Calvinism, but hyper-Calvinism. A key proponent in so-called evangelical circles in England was Joseph Hussey, a Congregational minister from Cambridge. In his book 'God's Operations of Grace but No Offers of Grace' he wrote: "To offer grace and salvation to sinners will not help them to become Christians, since it is the irresistible grace of God that alone can make Christians." However, if grace is not offered, how will men know whereby they can be saved?

The harvest speaks of the readiness of many to hear and heed the Gospel. When the fields are ripe it is clear they are ready to be reaped. There are many souls

ready to be gathered into Christ's kingdom.

Consider Cornelius, the Roman Centurion at Caesarea – Acts 10.

The Lord had to show Peter a thrice-repeated vision before He could break down his Jewish prejudice enough to get him to go to a Gentile's house to preach the gospel.

Peter told the plan of salvation in these words: "To him [Jesus] give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). And he never got to preach the rest of his sermon! Cornelius and his whole household were converted at once. Peter, telling of it later, said, "And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning."

Consider also the Ethiopian Eunuch, Acts 8:29-39. This man

was already seeking, in the Word of God, to find peace for his soul. Notice that the unsaved man took the initiative all the way through this meeting. He begged Philip to sit with him in the chariot and explain the Scriptures. The eunuch asked Philip to explain "of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?" So Philip deserves little credit that he "opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture[Isaiah 53] and preached unto him Jesus."

John R Rice said on the readiness of men for the Gospel:

"The failure of the world to satisfy leaves disillusioned people everywhere ripe for the Gospel.

Do you know that many a man turns to God when the only alternative is suicide? Do you know that many a man has turned to God when he lost his job and was driven from his

home and had become a bum? The more saloons we have, the more certain we can have revival. The more divorces we have, the more hungry and broken hearts there are who need God and who feel it! The more men turn to infidelity and reap the barrenness of it, the heartbreak of it, the despair of it, the more room there is for the gospel.

How foolish and wicked we are to suppose that sin can keep down revivals. The wages of sin makes men fit subjects for the gospel, and makes the harvest ripe."

The Prerequisite for the Harvest.

The prerequisite is labourers. There are certain persons in the world who do not believe in instrumentalities, and habitually depreciate them. "God will save sinners. He is sovereign in this work." That is true. God alone

saves. But no one is saved who does not hear the Gospel, and the Bible says, "How shall they hear without a preacher?"

God works by means. Did you know that Christ was glorified for the purpose of making labourers? Ephesians 4:10, 11: "He that descended is the same that ascended up far above all heavens that he might fill all things. And he gave some, apostles, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers."

Machinery has done away with men but not in the work of God. God requires labourers, and we ought to labour for Him

You can labour for God in practical ways. Acts 20:35: "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of

the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

And the Lord wants labourers in ministry. Not dead professionals, letter of the law ministers, but men with love in their heart for Jesus and fire in their belly for His truth, who will preach with true compassion, who feel for their hearers. Who have a heart, and not just a mind.

Having a heart they know just how to present the message of the Gospel. Alas, not all ministers do! **A. J. Gordon said:** "The sincere milk of the Word may be dispensed so frigidly and unfeelingly as to make it difficult to receive. In Siberia, milkmen deliver their product in chunks - it is frozen solid. This is sometimes the way we deliver God's Word - frozen into logical formulas and hardened and chilled by excessive reasonings."

Labouring or loafing? Christian ministry and the service of God is not for loafers! Spurgeon comments, "A gentleman who wants an easy life should never think of occupying the Christian pulpit, he is out of place there, and when he gets there the only advice I can give him is to get out of it as soon as possible; and if he will not leave the position voluntarily, I call to mind the language of Jehu concerning Jezebel, 'Fling her down,' and think the advice applicable to a lazy minister."

Labouring in the harvest is a personal work and a cutting work. The labourer in the field brings with him a sickle. The man whom God means to be a labourer in his harvest must not come with soft and delicate words, but with the truth and speak it unequivocally.

Alas! there are so few preachers like this today! There is risen up a race of men whose purpose is to tickle the ears of their hearers, and amaze them with their intellectual grasp of doctrine.

Worse still are those preachers who are never confrontational. Who, rather than dealing with sin preach up the dignity of human nature, and the excellence of self-help, instead of declaring "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

The labourers are few! Never was so large a harvest-field open for the sickle as in our own day; never were so many labourers needed; never was there such a shortage of labourers.

Let us pray, then, for more. And let us leave ourselves at God's disposal. - "Pray ye therefore the

Lord of the harvest that He would send forth labourers into His harvest." Nothing is beyond the reach of faithful prayer, for the Lord himself hath said, "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

He sends forth the labourer. Pray for his blessing on them and on their work; that He will furnish the means to convey them to His chosen place of service and support them when they get there.

Note: There is another array of reapers coming for whom you do not need to pray. Matthew 13:41, 42: "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity. And they shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

