

## Is the Harvest Spoiling in the Field?

*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. Thus the saying, 'one sows and another reaps,' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor. (John 4: 35 – 38, NIV)*

*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. (Matthew 9: 37, 38)*

*"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse...I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty. (Malachi 3: 10 – 12)*

*Let us not become weary in doing good, for we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (Galatians 6:9)*

Jesus frequently used the analogy of planting and harvesting to illustrate the work of bringing souls into the Kingdom of God. But every farmer knows that harvest time is perhaps the busiest time of the year. The crop must be brought in as quickly as possible, because if it isn't, the crop will either be eaten by birds or insects, fall victim to disease, or simply spoil and rot in the fields. Before the days of mechanical combines, reapers would work late into the evening to gather the crops; if there was a full moon, you reaped in the moonlight.

The church of today finds itself in the position of being in the farmhouse, looking out at the harvest and asking, *Shouldn't someone be out there bringing it all in?* We are in this position because of lack of individual action on our part, passing the job onto "the professionals" (those specially called and trained for ministry) or relying far too heavily on technology, often in the form of television or the internet. We have taken the viewpoint that since we have paid good money for things such as satellite uplinks, enormous servers and web designers and web masters, let *them* do the work, forgetting that Jesus calls us *personally* to be His witnesses.

Now, since you're probably reading this over the internet, before you raise your eyebrows let me state for the record that I am not saying there is anything wrong with technology. In fact, there is a great need for the Word delivered in the brave new world of cyberspace and the 500-plus channels proposed for television (a far cry from the four networks plus a handful of independent stations I remember growing up). You all know by now what *else* is out there in these venues; the Word of God must be present to counter the amazing amount of easily-accessible lies and perversions available. I am writing this piece on what has become for me a rather indispensable technological marvel, my laptop computer. Those who have been called by God to use these tools *should* use them, and hallelujah for those heeding the call.

But technology cannot – and should *never* – replace investing our time and talents into the work of the Kingdom; belief in Jesus, trusting in and relying on Him for our needs and service to the King Eternal. The passage from Malachi is quoted at almost every church service, right before tithes and offerings are collected, and rightly so – part of our service is to provide for the material needs of full-time ministry and ministers. *But money or material goods are only part of the story with tithing.* God gave you talents or abilities, whether as a spiritual gift or perhaps genetically through your parents. Part of the reason God does this is for you to find work that you enjoy doing (and a person is always happier when he or she enjoys their work), but another part is so that you may give a portion of that talent or ability back to God for His service so that others are blessed through your work. We are all a part of the Body of Christ, and every so often we get an opportunity to be His hands or His feet, extending His blessings directly to others.

Unfortunately, we often get so wrapped up in ourselves and how we can be blessed that we do not recognize this and, ironically, miss some of God’s blessings to us. Some of His greatest blessings come *indirectly*, you might say; as we give of our lives, God’s blessings come to us through the very people we expend ourselves for. It’s like we invest in a huge, expensive, really nice top-of-the-line combine to do the work of harvesting the crop easily... then expect someone else to drive it. The problem is that because others have been called to use technology to proclaim the Gospel, some believers feel the job is pretty much wrapped up, so we can kick back and relax. Or, other believers are so wrapped up in the “prosperity gospel” – give money into the Kingdom and get all *your* needs, wants, desires, etc. met – that they aren’t as concerned about other people and where they will spend eternity, even though Jesus Himself was so concerned about them that He died to pay the penalty for their sins.

Those people are the harvest that Jesus spoke of, and that others have worked hard to bring to ripening, being prepared to come into the Kingdom. And if Jesus says those people are ripe for the harvest, it means they are ready to hear the Gospel and believe. Because we’re not out there being His witnesses, trying to be in the harvest, then *others* are going to have a shot at it. Satan is definitely interested in the harvest for himself, and sends the virus of false doctrine to taint the crop, followed by false teachers to reap what they can for themselves. Or, nothing at all happens and the people live their lives and die in their sins, lost eternally... rotting in the fields.

So, how does the church avoid or correct this? First, we have to wake up to what we are called to do. The work of the Kingdom is the work of every believer, whatever that role happens to be. Second, we must fully surrender ourselves to God, who through the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual gifts and abilities; our jobs in the Kingdom, if you will. Every believer has something God has called them to do, whether humble or not. Even if technologies exist that make bringing the Word to large numbers of people easy, Jesus still said the workers are few – and the harvest is still great. It’s time to go to work. And how we know just *what* to do, we’ll look at next time.