

What Did Jesus Say About Evangelism?
Luke 10:1-4

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Last Sunday I talked about an increased emphasis on evangelism. This morning I want to talk about three instructions Jesus gave His followers concerning the harvest.

Let's begin by turning to John 4:35. Here Jesus says to His disciples, "*Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!*"¹ Jesus is clearly telling His followers to:

I. Look at the Harvest.

He is likening unsaved people to a great harvest field. And He is saying this field is ripe and ready to be reaped.²

In the context, Jesus has just brought salvation to the woman at the well. Out of her encounter with the Lord, she led the men of her city to come to Jesus. John 4:39 says "*And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, 'He told me all that I ever did.'* 40 *So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of His own word. 42 Then they said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.'*"

Not only does Jesus tell His disciples that the harvest is ripe, He demonstrates it by leading many of these Samaritans into the faith.

This would have been a very unlikely harvest from the disciples' perspective. First, they were Samaritans. The Jews viewed the Samaritans with contempt. Samaritans did not come to Jerusalem to worship as God had instructed. Their heritage was defiled with paganism. They were not even on the right wave length as far as the Jews were concerned. It had to be a surprise for the disciples to see so many of Samaritans believe on Jesus. And perhaps more shocking was the way the Lord brought in this harvest. Who would have imagined that an immoral Samaritan woman would be the key evangelist? When it comes to evangelism, God has a lot of surprises in store. Often the people we think are least likely to receive the message are the first ones to come into the kingdom. Jesus told the priests of the temple, "*Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.*" (Matt 21:31). Those temple priests should have been the first ones to receive Messiah. But their hearts were hard as stone. Outwardly they looked good. They lived respectful religious lives. But inside they were unreceptive to the truth. Yet these Samaritans were a ripe harvest field. It had to be a powerful lesson on evangelism for the disciples.

The Living Bible captures the message Jesus was communicating to His disciples. John 4:35 "*Do you think the work of harvesting will not begin until the summer ends four months from*

¹ All Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

² Various explanations have been proposed as to why Jesus referred to the harvest as "white" rather than say, "golden". It doesn't seem terribly important since the context leaves little down that He is saying the harvest is ripe, perhaps even overripe. There is an urgency to reap the harvest.

now? Look around you! Vast fields of human souls are ripening all around us, and are ready now for reaping.” If the Devil can get Christians to put off evangelism, and keep putting it off, he will have accomplished his purpose. Do you intend to “someday” tell sinners about Jesus? (Perhaps tomorrow, next week, or four months from now?) One simple tactic of the Devil can be summed up in these two words, “not now.” Here are a few suggestions the Devil uses to get Christians to put off the harvest.

(1) You’re not yet spiritual enough to tell others about Jesus. You don’t know the Bible well enough. They might ask you something that you can’t answer; and you’ll probably say the wrong thing. But think about what had just happened in John 4. Multitudes had come to Christ through the testimony of a brand new convert. She was certainly no theologian. She didn’t really have much credibility in the community: married and divorced five times, and now just living with a guy. Who was she to tell others about Christ? But she was a woman with an experience! She was a person who had genuinely encountered the Lord and was profoundly impacted by that encounter. Her method of evangelism was simple. Just tell others what God has done for you. It doesn’t mean you’re perfect. You’re still work-in-process. But this much you know, “*I was once blind, but now I see.*”³ Just tell people God is no respecter of persons. What He is doing for you, he will do for them.

(2) They’re not interested in this right now. They are having too much fun in sin. Even if there is some truth to that suggestion, “*The wages of sin is death.*”⁴ Plant the seed now. Even if they don’t respond now, when they hit bottom they know where to go. When I worked at Bell Helicopter, I talked with a lady named Nora about salvation. She was polite, but she did not receive the invitation. Years later, I had left Bell Helicopter and was pastoring a church in the inner city. Ann, one of my parishioners that I had worked with at Bell Helicopter came up to me one Sunday morning and said, “Norma is in the hospital dying; and she would like to talk with you.” I know the response I gave to that request may horrify some of you; but I told Ann, “You talk with her; it will be hard for me to get up there.” I won’t go into all the things I was dealing with at that time. But down deep I really didn’t think it would do much good to talk with her. I had already tried years ago. The next Sunday Ann came up to me again and said she had gone to see Norma and Norma was insisting that she talk with me. Reluctantly I went up to the hospital to see Norma. The minute I walked into the room I knew her condition was dire. She had all these machines hooked up to her and her breathing was strained. As soon as we began our conversation, Norma got down to business. She wanted the salvation I had talked with her about a few years ago. That day Norma had a glorious salvation experience. The seed of God’s word had not fallen on stony ground. About a week later Norma died. She had left a request with her family that I conduct her funeral. Many of the people that I had worked with at Bell Helicopter were at the funeral. I gave a bold evangelistic message using the thief on the cross as my text. Afterward my best friend, a Mormon, came up to me along with some others and challenged the message. They question whether a person could be saved in the last hours of life like that without adding good works to the mix. That became an opportunity to explain the gospel further to them. One of those people later came and visited our church in Nixa years later. She too had come to a revelation of the grace of God for salvation. The seed you plant now may not bear fruit immediately; but plant it anyway.

³ John 9:25 “*One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.*”

⁴ Rom. 6:23

In reality, only a fool would not be interested in the gospel message. Ps 14:1 says, “*The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’*” Only a fool would come to that conclusion. All of creation screams the existence of God. Every human cell screams the existence of God. Every shining star screams the existence of God. And God has put eternity in the soul of man,⁵ an innate sense that there is more after the grave. Certainly the evidence is overwhelming that people die. An interest in what happens after that has to be important to any sane person. There is more interest there than some people will admit. A conversation could begin with the honest question, “What do you think happens to a person when he dies?” People will usually give an opinion and the conversation has begun. What could be more important than the eternal destiny of a soul? Keep this in mind: you care. It’s likely that down deep they also care.

(One other suggestion that the Devil uses quite often).

(3) Wait until you get your own problems solved before you start talking to others about Christ. Most of us have figured out by now that sanctification is an ongoing process. God will be working on us until the day we die. You and I are a piece of work that only God can fix. If we wait until we get our act together before testifying about Jesus, it may never happen. Many, many opportunities will have passed us by. We are not preaching ourselves; we are preaching Christ. Christ is the One who can help us; and Christ is the One who can help them.

We can always find something else that needs to happen as an excuse for not sharing Christ with others. As soon as I get to feeling better—when I have completely conquered this besetting sin—when I get my bills paid I’ll give more attention to the gospel—right now my family needs me. It should not be an either/or; it should be both/and. I will work on paying my bills. I will take care of my family. While I am doing that I will also declare the goodness of God to all who will hear me.⁶ The proverbial statement of Jesus’ day was “*There are still four months and then comes the harvest*”—a colloquial way of saying, “Not yet,” “In time we’ll get to it.” But Jesus said, Look at the harvest. It is ripe. Go to work in My harvest field.

Turn with me to Luke 10:1-4 and let’s explore this a bit further.

“After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. 2 Then He said to them, ‘The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. 3 Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves.’” Here Jesus makes another observation about the harvest.

The harvest is “*great*” or plenteous. If that was true in Jesus’ day, think about what it is today. In Jesus’ day there were about 200 million people on earth. Today there are 7 1/2 Billion. A billion is 1,000 million. It took 1800 years to reach the first billion. 170 years later we were at 4 billion in 1974. In the 42 years since then, we have almost doubled the population.⁷ The harvest was plenteous in 30 AD. It is certainly plenteous today.

Jesus said the same thing in Matt. 9:37 when He sent out the twelve. There is no shortage of harvest to be harvested. Are there people in your circle of influence who would receive the message if presented to them? Probably so. Like Norma, they may not respond immediately.

⁵ Eccl. 3:11; Rom. 1:19.

⁶ I like Jesus’ instruction in Matt. 10:7 “*...as you go, preach....*” Our daily labor can be “both/and.”

⁷ Worldometers, “Previous Milestones, Summary Table,” retrieved 11/18/16 at <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/#table-historical>.

But there is a cry in their hearts for answers. “There has to be more to life than just living like cattle and dying.” There is a deep need in everybody to connect with God. But people need to be told how that need can be fulfilled in Christ.

If we are holding back because we think nobody wants to hear it, if we are holding back because we think the time is not right to share the message—we need to hear Jesus words in Scripture. The harvest is plenteous. The harvest is white and beyond ready. The harvest is not the problem.

So what is the problem? Jesus identifies it in Luke 10:2 “*the laborers are few.*” There may be a lot of people who claim to be Christians. There may be a lot of people in church this morning. But “*the laborers are few.*” The people willing to inconvenience themselves and work are few. Those willing to put their job on the line for His name are few. Those willing to be marginalized for testifying of Him are few. Those willing to pay the price of closer scrutiny are few. There are plenty of people who can craft a good excuse. There are lots of people who can ease the conscience as to why they don’t fit the profile. But the problem is a shortage of real laborers. We think the problem is the lack of receptivity in unbelievers. Jesus says the problem is not with the harvest. The problem is with the harvesters. There are simply not enough people who will actually do the work.

So Jesus gives a solution. This is the next thing Jesus tells us to do.

II. Pray: “*pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.*”

This is a specific point of prayer. My tendency is to pray for the harvest to ripen. My mind tells me that the problem lies with the harvest, so pray that God will soften them and make them receptive to the truth. That’s not a bad prayer. But it is not the prayer Jesus tells us to make. “*...pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.*”

Think about what we are asking God to do. We are asking Him to send! In a general sense we have all been sent. We already have a biblical mandate to go and preach the gospel. But when God makes that call real to our hearts, it ignites a zeal that cannot be quenched. “*How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent?*” (Rom 10:14-15). This verse is not about becoming a professional preacher. It is about hearing the call of God on your life and responding. It is about experiencing the Lord and sharing that with others. What is Jesus doing in Luke 10? He is sending! He is sending 70 of His followers into the field. And it won’t be easy. “*...behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves.*” You don’t get to go out there carrying your colt 45 and throwing your weight around. You have to go in the meekness of a lamb. And, by the way, the people you’re sent to won’t always act like lambs. Some will be more like wolves. Surely this would dampen the enthusiasm of some. But when you’re sent—but when you’re sent—you’ll do it anyway. And the Lord will be with you. He will prepare the hearts of the hearers. He will defend you when you need defending. That may not be as often as you would like. But He knows how to get this crop harvested.

It is a faith journey. The money will be supplied as you need it. Homes will open to you; but some will reject you. That’s their problem; not yours. You keep doing what I sent you to do. You keep healing the sick. You keep sharing the kingdom message. I’ll be with you every step of the way.

I would identify this mandate to pray as the beginning point of evangelism. Here is what tends to happen. As I pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out laborers into His harvest, I may very well hear something like Isaiah heard. “*Whom shall we send, And who will go for Us*”? (Isa 6:8). A praying man or woman or child is likely to be brought into God’s conversation as he seeks the Lord. Perhaps someone here is hearing the very words in your spirit: “*Whom shall we send, And who will go for Us*?” As a 15 year-old teenager I heard those words as I spent time at an old fashion altar. The question becomes an invitation. “*Whom shall we send, And who will go for Us*?” Isaiah’s response was “*Here am I! Send me.*” I made that response even though I didn’t realize the full implications of my response. Nevertheless, it was a sincere response. There is something about being in the presence of this loving God that makes you want to volunteer—makes you want to do something to express your love in return. So we began by praying for laborers. In the midst of that we find ourselves volunteering to be one of those laborers. This process is different from just have an organized campaign to go out witnessing. I’m not saying that is wrong; we have a biblical mandate to take this gospel to the world around us. But when we go out with a sense of being personally sent by the Lord there comes a passion for the work. The Lord of Harvest is the director of the endeavor. We do it under His direction and counsel.

When we have spent time with the Lord we get His perception of the harvest. Ask yourself this question. Do I view people the way the Lord views them? That has not been an easy question for me to address in my own life. Have you ever been hurt by people? That could cause you to view people as a threat. Have you ever been rejected by people? That could cause you to draw back from even engaging them in the first place. I was sitting in McDonalds the other morning asking myself that question. I look at the other people in the restaurant and what do I see? If I perceive them as a threat, I will obviously keep to myself. But what if I just perceive them as unimportant? What if I perceive them as uninterested? What if I perceive them as content, even though down deep their souls are crying out for answers? I have sat in restaurants plenty of times without give the people much of a thought at all. Like the disciples in John 4, I was more interested in lunch than the harvest that was right before me. In John 4:35 Jesus said to the disciples, “... *lift up your eyes and look at the fields....*” Are you seeing what I am seeing? You have to see the harvest in order to effectively work in it. The disciples were distracted by other things.⁸ Jesus was asking for an intentional look. Most Christians do not see the harvest because their attention is on too many other things. It is a call to pay attention to what is important to God. Let His priorities become my priorities.

When Jesus sent out the twelve in Matt. 10:1, He told them to pray in the same way He told the 70 to pray in Luke 10. But in the Matthew narrative we are given some special insight on how the Lord viewed the harvest. Matt 9:35-36 “*Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. 36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.*” What did Jesus see when He saw the multitudes? He didn’t view them as a bunch of selfish rebels—although that was in them. He didn’t see them as disinterested individuals occupied with material things—although that might be said of them as well. He saw them “*like sheep having no shepherd.*” When Jesus looked at these people he saw them like weary,

⁸ In John 4:31-35 the disciples are focused on natural things (meat). Jesus is focused on the harvest and calls their attention to that. The same problem persists today.

scattered sheep needing a shepherd—needing guidance and help. And because He saw them that way, the Bible says “*He was moved with compassion for them,*” This is a key element in evangelism. Only God can give us that compassion. But it comes as we see people the way the Lord sees them: neither Democrat or Republican, neither socially elite or socially challenged, neither rich or poor—He sees them *all* as sheep needing a shepherd. When we see them through His eyes, when His compassion for them fills our hearts, we will deal with them right. Evangelism is not bragging rights. It’s not another notch in my evangelical belt. It’s helping connect people with a God who can meet their deepest needs. The process begins with prayer.

Then Jesus tells His followers to do one more thing.

III. Go!

Luke 10:3 “*Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves.*” You have to leave your place of comfort and safety and step into the harvest. It requires action. Yes you pray. But you also get up and go. “But, Lord, I don’t feel equipped to go.” “Go and as you go I will teach you!” “But Lord I don’t feel that compassion for them.” Go and as you encounter them I will express My compassion through you! I once saw a Christian t-shirt that said, “What part of go do you not understand?” It makes a point. The word “go” is fairly simple. Do we really need to consult a dictionary to understand what it means? Ok, the first definition is “to move on a course” proceed.⁹ Got to be some motion!

We find the word “go” in the Great Commission. Matt. 28:18-20 “... *All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*’ Amen.” There is packed in those words some comforting assurances.

(1) “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*” The One who sent me has all authority. That means I will never encounter anything that He can’t handle. I may experience a few bumps and bruises the way Paul did. “*Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us*” (Rom 8:37). (2) “*and lo, I am with you always.*” Well, that makes a difference. I’m not in this by myself. I’m not left to my own resources. He who sends me, also goes with me!

However, with the comfort of those realities, I have to “go.” I have to engage people with the truth. Jesus says “go” and the culture says “stay.” “Stay in your own little corner. You can talk with one another about Jesus; but don’t bring that stuff into the workplace. Don’t bother people in the marketplace.” So you’re telling me to not bother people with the most important issue they will ever face. What are they doing that is more important than their eternal destiny? You’re insisting that the creature not be bothered by the Creator? Can you see the idiocy of such a command? Have you lost your ever-lovin’ mind? Should a person being consumed in a house fire, not be bothered with a rescue effort? Should a life guard ignore the plight of a drowning man? The message we have been sent with is an urgent message. Don’t view it as an interruption; view it as an answer to your most pressing need. We need to be sensitive to the context we’re in as we share the gospel. If I am on the clock being paid by my employer, I need to respect that and give him a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay. I need to always share the gospel in a respectful way. We don’t have to be combative in order to assert our freedom of speech. But we will not allow the political correctness of the culture to shut us up either.

⁹ Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc.,1993) p. 499.

Workers in the harvest are assigned different roles. One person may be providing transportation to and from the field. Another person may be cooking lunch. Another may be transporting the grain to the silo. Others may be out in the field pulling the grain from the stalk. There may have been laborers who plowed the field six months earlier and others who watered the ground. God has equipped you to do your part in the harvest. Not everybody has the same assigned task in the great harvesting endeavor. But “go” does not mean “be entertained.” The performance/entertainment model that exists in the American Church does not fit the biblical model. Christianity was never meant to be a couple hours of good clean entertainment for us and the kids on Sunday morning. Christianity is a lifestyle that falls under the definition of “*laborers*.” Its old fashion hard work to bring in the harvest. But that is what the Lord is telling us to do. Are you willing to LOOK at the harvest through Jesus’ eyes, PRAY for laborers and volunteer your services, then GO into the harvest with the message of redemption in Christ? If you will, He will be with you. And that guarantees your fruitfulness.