

GOD'S HARVEST FIELD

I

THE PRAYER FOR LABOURERS.

“When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send labourers into his harvest.” - Matthew 9: 36-38.

All who look out on the national and international scene, whose hearts vibrate with love for lost souls, will empathise with the Lord in this compassionate expression of His inner soul. People all around are crying out in political, moral and spiritual distress. The latter may not recognise it as such, they just know they have a hunger and an emptiness which nothing they have tried has been able to satisfy.

We need to join our hands and hearts to fulfil the Lord's command:

“Pray ye therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest”.

Labourers to do what?

To reap a harvest of souls into the Kingdom of God!

Some have already been sent, some are in the process of being sent and there are those who will yet hear that call to leave all and follow Him. But equally important, there are those who will stay 'at home'. They can serve too, efficiently and effectively.

They MUST PRAY!

Can the Lord of the harvest not gather in His harvest without our prayers? Yes, of course He can! BUT He wants us to be involved with Him in this great reaping and to be fulfilled in our relationship with Him.

“The sower and the reaper will then rejoice together” - John 4:36.

II

THE PRINCIPLE OF LABOURING

“These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” - Matthew 10: 5-6.

Why the prohibition in regard to the Gentiles and the Samaritans?

Were they not lost, and part of the harvest? Perhaps even more lost, distressed and in need of the Shepherd’s salvation. Could the finger of accusation be levelled at the Lord for discrimination, partiality or even apathy?

Why go just to Israel?

He was not a racist nor was He partial. He was the KING of Israel. But He was more, He was the true Shepherd of Israel (John 10:1). In saving Israel first He would send them as ambassadors both to the Samaritans and the Gentile world as a whole. The principle has been follow through as recorded by the Lord to His disciples *“..in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1:8-9).*

Here we are now, the harvested of God, enjoying the blessings of Eternal Life.

In truth, we owe our salvation to the Jews! (John 4:22).

The Samaritans need to be saved. This is why the Lord reached out, to the consternation of His disciples, and gave Living water, to the woman from Sychar!

AND Philip, the evangelist went to the city of Samaria and *“preached Christ unto them, and the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spoke.” - Acts 8:5-6.*

The Gentiles need to be saved also. That is why the Lord blessed the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:26) and why He sent Peter on a curious mission up the Mediterranean coast from Joppa to Caesarea, to tell Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, that JESUS IS LORD OF ALL (Acts 10: 1-36).

III

THE PLAN FOR LABOURING

“*Behold*”. Pay special attention to this! The Master says to His disciples:

"This is my plan, this is how I will gather the harvest".

"I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves".

This is the 'I' of deity! He is not only the *Source* of the gospel, He is the *Sustainer* of the ministry and the *Supplier* of strength for the labourers.

Can you imagine a sheep surrounded by wolves! What possible chance of survival does it have?

It would be frightening enough to find oneself in such a situation by accident, but to be sent into it, is beyond belief! Perhaps, now, we can see the necessity of the Master's '*Behold*'.

The wonder of the plan does not stop there. Puzzling as it is, to see preachers of the Kingdom, defenceless as sheep, surrounded by hostility and persecution - and for some it would result in martyrdom. It is even more astonishing to anticipate the salvation of the wolves!

But this is God's plan, God's way of saving the world. He was going to save people not by fighting but by dying. And so it has ever been, the great Harvest Maker is still sending for the His sheep. But let us not be deceived. The world is no less hostile today than it was when Stephen was done to death in the stoning pit for the cause of his rejected Master.

It just so happened that one of the 'wolves' that surrounded the defenceless Stephen was Saul of Tarsus!

IV

THE PRESSURES OF LABOURING

"Beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils... and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake... But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak:... for it is not ye that speak,

but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you...And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake...it is enough for the disciple that he be as his master... Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" - Matthew 10: 17-32.

Humanly speaking, this is a catalogue of disincentives to follow the Master! And all spelled out in such a matter-of-fact way. The disciples were made aware that service for Him would not be an easy option; preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God would not make them popular.

In the Master's message there was certainly enough to cause them to have second thoughts. To return to their former employment may have brought short term benefits, but in the long term, it would have been disastrous, both for them AND for us!

Short term expediency is not the way to judge the success of a mission. And as if, to emphasise this point, no sooner had the Messiah come, than John, the forerunner, was put into prison (Matthew 11:2). The long awaited Deliverer and Anointed of God seemed to be in difficulties too: they said He was a glutton and a drunkard and a friend of tax collectors and sinners (v.19). Not a lot of encouragement here for the disciples.

But the truth is that "*these things are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed unto babes*" - Matthew 11:25.

V

PROMISE FOR THE LABOURER

"Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light"
- Matthew 11:28-30.

What precious words for the disciples to hear. The Master was promising them REST.

That would come as they leant on Him and learned from Him. But it seems

strange that get that to get rid of one heavy load you have to take on another one!

“Take my yoke”. This is a voluntary action. It is not imposed on unwilling shoulders. Each disciple must be ready and willing to take it on. The key to the apparent contradiction is, of course, that the Master Himself would be the other partner in the yoke! It was designed for two evenly selected load carriers. Scripture tells us that God hates unequal yokes (2 Corinthians 6:14). The yoke they and we enter with Him will be balanced and equally distributed on both shoulders. It must not be too heavy because that would prevent any work from being done. Nor must it be too light for that, too, would hinder the proper execution of the task.

So the Master is saying to the disciples and to all potential Kingdom preachers: *‘ when you bear the trial, the pain, the humiliation, I am with you, beside you in the yoke, on an equal level.’*

That surely is sufficient to remove all doubts and fears.

But even better: He promises they will *“ find rest (a different word from v 28) for their souls”*, that is, for their inner lives. In modern days terms, they would have job satisfaction. Their minds would be unstressed and they would be able to rest as they worked.

In my working life I have found that a good days satisfactory work was more restful than lying for hours on a beach!!

As the saying goes, *‘THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING IS IN THE EATING’*

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