

OPEN BIBLE CHURCH

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SERMON TITLE See the Harvest

SERIES

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KEY SCRIPTURE John 4:35

SYNOPSIS The Lord asks us to look beyond the natural to see that people need the Lord, and to share the Gospel with them.

HIGHLIGHTS



☞ See the Harvest

When asked the question, “How did you come to know the Lord,” these were the responses:

- .0001%TV or Crusade
- 1-2% Cold-turkey evangelism
- 2-4% Church program
- 3-6% Sunday School
- 4-6% "Walk-in"
- 6-8% Minister
- 74% Friends and relatives

Listen to what Jesus has to say...

☞ **John 4:35... Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.**

In the context, we see this is tied to his interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well. He was on his way from Judea to Galilee, and Samaria just happened to be on the way. He was tired from his walk and sat near the well when this woman came out to draw water. They had their famous interaction about “living water” and she realized that Jesus was a prophet. Then, after even more conversation, she came to believe that Jesus was the Christ. Once she understood who Jesus really was, she immediately went into the village and told everyone about Jesus, and they came out to see him. About that time the disciples returned and didn't realize what had just taken place. They were focused on the task at hand to make sure Jesus ate something and was refreshed. But Jesus wasn't concerned about that anymore...

☞ Open your eyes

Here we have a village full of people interested in Jesus, but the disciples were oblivious to it. This was not where they were headed; it was just a stop along the way. But God was using it as an opportunity to save people.

We are so often just like the disciples - blind to the people – both, to their spiritual needs and to their openness to Jesus. We are focused on what we think we need to be doing and we miss what God is doing. Sometimes we see their lifestyle and hard attitudes, and forget that God is able to work powerfully in them right where they are, anytime. When he is involved, miracles can happen overnight. This is a lesson about taking the blinders off regarding the people around us.

Jesus says, “open your eyes.” What are you focused on? 2 Corinthians 4:18 reminds us to “fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is **eternal.**”

A man who lived in Nazi Germany told of his experience: I lived in Germany during the Nazi Holocaust. I considered myself a Christian. We heard stories of what was happening to the Jews, but we tried to distance ourselves from it, because, what could anyone do to stop it?



A railroad track ran behind our small church, and each Sunday morning we could hear the whistle in the distance and then the wheels coming over the tracks. We became disturbed when we heard the cries coming from the train as it passed by. We realized that it was carrying Jews like cattle in the cars!

Week after week the whistle would blow. We dreaded to hear the sound of those wheels because we knew that we would hear the cries of the Jews en route to the death camp. Their screams tormented us.

We knew the time the train came past our church and when we heard the whistle blow we began singing hymns. By the time the train came past our church we were singing at the top of our voices. If we heard the screams, we sang more loudly and soon we heard them no more.

Years have passed and no one talks about it anymore. But I still hear that train whistle in my sleep. God forgive me; forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians and yet did nothing.

Sometimes we see the world around us and feel like there's nothing we can do to **make a difference**. But, that is not true. Even one person we reach out to with the Gospel is worth it. Jesus died for them, just as much as he died for you. He loves you and he loves them, too.

Matthew 9:35-36 tells us that Jesus looked at the crowds with compassion because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus was always looking for opportunities to minister, and he made the most of those opportunities, pointing people to the Lord.

Here in John 4, he was tired, only on a pit stop, taking a break, but God had other plans. He brought a Samaritan woman – someone despised by Jews – so Jesus could lead her to the Lord. She was an unlikely candidate for salvation, but now she not only believes, but the whole town is coming to see Jesus.

Here's the challenge for us: Who are the people or individuals that we would never dream of even approaching, let alone speak to? Open your eyes.

☞ **Look at the fields (look closely; perceive; view attentively)**

When you look at the way things are going in our society do you tend to be critical or does it stir compassion?

Story about preacher who said, "the world is going to hell in a hand basket and most believers don't give a d___ about it. Furthermore, many of you are more upset about me having said "d___" than you are about the people who will perish in hell.

☞ In Matthew 9:35-36, Jesus had **compassion** on the people. He didn't focus on their defects, but rather their difficulties. He was compassionate rather than critical. When you see what's going on in our world and the people indulging their sinful appetites, do you see "foes" or "fields;" do you "loathe" them or "love" them? Jesus loved them because he saw the truth – people were harassed and helpless.



In the context of John 4, verses 16-17 show that Jesus had spiritual insight; we must look beyond ☞ the surface and see the core issue... **people need Jesus!** Sometimes, it's not just an unlikely candidate that the Lord brings our way. It may even be someone who has been hostile to your faith. We tend to get defensive and put up our walls of insulation. But listen to what Jesus said about those who were crucifying him... Luke 23:34... "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

The Lord is asking us to take a hard look at the fields. Look beyond the surface with people and realize they need the Lord. They're not just a horrible person – they are lost and need Jesus. Look at the fields. Look closely; look with spiritual eyes; look with compassion.

☞ **They are ripe for harvest**

Jesus refers to a familiar adage, **"There are still four months and then comes the harvest."** This was a proverb with the idea that there is no particular hurry for a task because things simply take time and you can't avoid the waiting. Jesus did not want His disciples to have this mentality; He wanted them to think and act as if the harvest was ready now. The idea of harvest meant that there were many people ready to be received into the Kingdom of God, and the disciples should see themselves as workers — reapers — in that harvest.

The "fields are white for harvest" means the right time to bring people into God's kingdom is now. In the agricultural world, farmers must wait between the sowing and reaping seasons. In the ☞ spiritual realm, **the time for gathering in the harvest is now**—whenever and wherever a crop of ripe souls exists.

The disciples were focused on physical, earthly concerns like rest and food. But Jesus saw the spiritual necessity. He was consumed with the more urgent and gratifying mission of winning souls for His Father's kingdom. He urged His disciples to open their eyes, too, and see the crowd of villagers streaming toward them like a ripened field, ready to hear the gospel and be gathered into God's kingdom. The fields are ripe for harvest.

Ripe doesn't necessarily mean easy; harvest is hard work. But, it's worth it. Why does the farmer work in the fields so long and so hard? There is tough soil that has to be plowed up; there are long hours of planting seeds; there are weeds to contend with; etc. Why does he do it? He has in mind the harvest that is coming!

This whole story is about seeing beyond the immediate, earthly situation. The Lord wants us to open our eyes and see the truth that people are lost and need Jesus. We so often see all the problems and difficulties in reaching people, but the Lord sees a harvest. The farmer doesn't let the hard work and the weeds prevent him from carrying on. He can see the harvest coming.

--Horace Bushnell... What you call hindrances, obstacles, or discouragements, are probably God's opportunities.

☞ Do you see obstacles or **opportunities**?



Acts 17:16-17, 22-23

Paul was greatly distressed because the city of Athens was full of idols. So, he got out of there as quickly as possible in order to stay clean. Wrong! He began interacting with the people every day while he was waiting for Silas and Timothy. Then, when he had an opportunity, he took it...
...**22** Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. **23** For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

Paul turned many obstacles into great opportunities. He was just waiting for his coworkers to join him. He could see all the idolatry in the city, but he witnessed for the Lord anyway. Evangelism is not merely something to be done when we think it's convenient or easy. Waiting until the perfect moment means never getting anything done at all.

We might see a world in overwhelming crisis. God sees a world with an overflowing crop. There are many who need Jesus. And, if you can only reach one person, it is worth it. Initially, Jesus only spoke to this Samaritan woman, but it affected the whole town. Many came to faith because of the woman's testimony. And then, even more came to faith when they heard Jesus themselves.

The harvest is plentiful and ripe. Look beyond the obstacles for the opportunities the Lord is making so that you can share your faith. All you have to do is talk about how the Lord has made a difference in your life. Furthermore, if you still struggle seeing opportunities, you can create some of your own. One simple thing you can do is **invite people to church**.

A Gallop Poll of over 6 million people asked, "What would it take to get you to church?" The number one answer: "Someone to ask me to attend." Yes, they might turn you down. But, then again, they might not. And, God can use that opportunity to reach their heart.

Open your eyes to see beyond the earthly into the eternal.
Look at people around you with compassion. They need the Lord.
There is a harvest all around you. Look for opportunities to work for the harvest; there's plenty!

God is the Lord of the harvest. He chooses the right moment to do his work of salvation in the hearts of men and women. At the same time, God chooses to partner with us in that work. We must keep our eyes open, seizing the opportunities he presents to join him in offering salvation to others. Open your eyes. Look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest.

Lord of the Harvest by The Imperials

*See the fields ripe and white as snow
Up from the seeds of faith we planted long ago
So many the hearts in season; with every prayer they've grown
He has made them ready but we must bring them home*



*Time like a free wind so quickly slips away
Too soon today is tomorrow, too soon a yesterday
So little time for the reaping and laborers are few
Lift your head to the fields of white, the work that we must do*

*Lord of the harvest place Your fire in me
Servant You need now; servant I will be
Give me the eyes of Your Spirit
Your heart of compassion to know
Lord of the harvest show me where to go*