

“A Harvest of Converts” (series #9)

By Pastor Rand Lankheet, for New Horizon URC, April 16, 2017, second service

Read: John 4:27-42

Introduction: It's a tendency for every church to become a kind of club (俱乐部). Especially if the church was established many years ago. Experts say that long-established churches tend to become closed groups. They start to feel like clubs, with a reserved membership. Without intending to, they appear to be closed to new comers. This is one reason why experts say we should be planting new churches. In new churches, generally the members are more open to newcomers.

So Jesus and his disciples were traveling through the region of Samaria. Jesus is teaching his disciples (门徒) about “a harvest.” [read vs. 35. Not an ordinary harvest. He is teaching them about a spiritual harvest...a ripened (成熟的) crop of believers.

Let's look **THREE THINGS** about this harvest. This harvest of believers.

1. The first thing is this: *realize that people are like “ripened fields.” Fields ripe for harvest.*

-Read again vs. 35. Notice the direct, even confrontational language, Jesus is using.

He's commanding his disciples: “Lift up your eyes. Open your eyes. See the ripened fields. See the people who are ripe, ready, to become new followers. New converts (皈依者).” Think of it. These Twelve Men had each other, as closest friends. They had left their families, their towns and villages. They are now a “band of brothers,” led by their rabbi (拉比, 教师), Jesus. It was becoming quite comfortable for them---just the twelve of them, with their teacher. That's probably why John tells us, earlier, that Jesus “*had to go* through Samaria.”

That's in vs. 4. We considered that phrase last week. That Jesus *had to go* through Samaria. Not because there was no other road. Jesus had to go directly through Samaria for another reason. What is that reason?

Because Jesus knew that His Father in heaven had his chosen people in Samaria. Some of the Samaritan Gentiles would become his followers.

Jesus had to teach his disciples this very important lesson. That God not only loved Jewish people. But that God loved *the world*. The various peoples of the world. Remember John 3:16: “God so loved the *world* that He gave his only begotten Son.”

We read that the disciples were not present when Jesus first talked with that Samaritan woman. In vs. 27, we find the disciples returning. John tells us that the disciples “marveled.” They were surprised to find him talking to that woman. Why? Well, no Jewish rabbi would have a private conversation with a woman who was not his wife. That was forbidden (被禁止) by Jewish law. So the disciples are surprised.

Jesus explains something important in vs. 34. “My food, my strength,” says Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me.” You see, Jesus was on a mission. “Mission,” in the Latin language means “being sent.” Being “sent out.” Jesus had been sent, first to the Jews.

But he is being sent also to the other peoples of the world, to those Samaritans, also.

“Open your eyes,” Jesus commands them. “See the people in need. See them also as part of the harvest that God will bring in, by His sovereign (主权) grace.” In his many parables (比喻), Jesus often talked about the harvest of people, those who would end up trusting in Him as Saviour.

-So it is, also, for us, as Jesus' followers, today. We have to learn how to “open our eyes.”

To see people as a potential part of the final harvest. Those whom God will bring to himself. So, we must always expect some good results, as we talk about Jesus.

We should expect some people to come to faith in Jesus as their Saviour.

Oh, we also know that many people will reject the news about Jesus.

But we should not focus on that. We should focus instead on those who will respond to Jesus, positively. We must focus on that harvest of people.

-Now, probably the Jewish disciples of Jesus had become quite comfortable. They had nice club of 12 close friends. “Who cares about those other people?”

So Jesus uses this somewhat confrontational 对抗的 language: Vs. 35, in the middle of that verse:

“Lift up your eyes.” It's language of command. Jesus is saying: “Open the eyes of your heart. Open your eyes of caring. There is a field of people ready to be brought in.”

And what a harvest it was! [Read vs. 39, “*many* believed.” Many Samaritans came to faith in

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And what a harvest it was! [Read vs. 39, “*many* believed.” Many Samaritans came to faith in

Jesus. Then [read vs. 40-41. They say at the end of vs. 42: “We know that this man [Jesus] is the Saviour of the world.” ***What a harvest...what a crop of new converts!***

Someone once said, wisely, “think this way about people who may not be interested in Jesus

right now. Think of them as unripe fruit.” How helpful that is. People not interested in Jesus, when you talk to them, might be still on the stalk (茎, 杆), not yet ripened grain. Or think of them like garden vegetables. Maybe like tomatoes. They are still “green”... they still need time to ripen on the vine. Someday, who knows? God’s grace might start to change them. Then, they will be ready to be harvested.

So that’s the first thing—to open our eyes. To see everyone, potentially, potentially,
as part of the harvest of converts.

2. Here’s a ***second thing*** about the harvest. [Read vs. 36-38.

Often, other believers already have done the hard work. They did the hard work of sowing the seed. [Repeat. Jesus says this in vs. 38. He speaks of those who have “labored.”

That’s the “***hard work***.” Going out and first sowing the seed of the gospel. Sowing the seed of

By having a conversation. [Last week?] Or sowing over years and years, while that seed is dormant (休眠的) .

The Lord might be gracious and allow you or me to “reap” someone. To bring them in, as it were. But remember, there were others, before you. Who did the hard work.

Examples: I recall when I was 16 years old. And our local church held a Bible camp for

neighbourhood kids. And I was one of the first counsellors (顾问, 辅导) at that Bible camp. By the way, that Bible camp is still going, in that same church, 40 years later! Wow.

Anyway, I met this 14-year-old. He was the first non-Christian I had gotten to know in my young life. His dad was divorced (离婚), and was living with a girlfriend. But this teenager came to our church camp. He later spoke to me about his grandmother. She had told him some Bible stories when he was 5, 6,7 years old. Over the years she kept telling him she was praying for him. She went to church each Sunday. What a powerful effect that still had on him. That Christian grandmother was used by God to be sowing a seed, a very small seed, in the heart of her unbelieving grandson.

-Experts tell us that usually, when someone is converted later in life, they have heard the news about Jesus many times. Seven, eight or nine times, on average. When someone comes to faith in Jesus, they probably have talked to many believers, many times.

-Why is it “hard work” to sow the gospel seed? Well, many people, especially if they are teens or adults, they usually don’t care. They might even get a bit upset with you. Here in Canada, especially. We are supposed to be very tolerant (容忍的), open minded. Open to all religions.

Now you tell them that only Jesus saves. They might get angry at you. They might not want to talk to you.

They might avoid you. But you are patient, and kind. You keep on giving a positive Christian witness. It can be very hard work. Discouraging work.

-And think of this: if you are the one God uses at that point, to bring in the harvest...***well, be***

humble (谦卑) . Be humble! Remember that others came before you. Maybe many others.

They were the ones originally “sowing the seed” in the heart and mind of the unbeliever. You probably had easier work: one or two pleasant conversations. And that person was ready to admit their sins before God.

Maybe you led them in a prayer of commitment (委身) . Be humble. Know that God used others, many others, long before you, to sow the seed.

3. ***Then***, a third thing, about the harvest of new converts, about new followers of Jesus.

We must ***REJOICE in that harvest.*** [Repeat. [Read vs. 36. In our rejoicing, we should be ***praising God*** for His grace to that new convert.

Jesus tells three parables in Luke chapter 15. [Turn there, if time. About the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. In each case, the one who found what was lost, “rejoiced.”

The shepherd “rejoiced” when he found the one lost sheep.

The woman who swept the whole house, looking, “rejoiced” when she found that coin. And the father, how he rejoiced, when his lost, prodigal (挥霍的) son, returned home. So we must rejoice in the harvest, as God brings new people into his church.

Like that Samaritan woman, brought in as part of the salvation harvest. We learn about her,

previously in this chapter. It’s obvious she had been “looking for love in all the wrong places.” She had five previous husbands. Evidently breaking up or divorcing them.

And now she was living with a man. Shacking up (未婚同居) . She was searching for love.

But how could she hope to be loved by God? Wasn’t she a terrible sinner?

Why should God forgive her?

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But how could she hope to be loved by God? Wasn't she a terrible sinner?

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But Jesus "had to go" through Samaria, knowing her need. And Jesus "had to go" through

Samaria, knowing there *were others*. **Many others** who were hoping for the coming of Messiah.

And Jesus had to go through that region, *to teach his disciples*.

To teach them to open their eyes, see the despised Samaritans as part of God's eventual harvest. To expect a harvest. And to teach them that a harvest is brought in *after* a time of sowing. Even, spiritually, sowing for years. Years and years.

So, in the reaping of new converts, there is *so much opportunity to rejoice*.

To praise the Lord for his goodness and grace, in Jesus.

-For many of us, that starts in our own homes. As covenant parents rejoice over covenant (圣约) children.

That as they come to years of 11, 12, 13, 14, they show definite signs of true conversion. That they show they own faith in Jesus as their Saviour. The Bible is clear---that all children, even our covenant children, are born in sin. So God must regenerate (重生) them, and convert (改变) them. ***That our first harvest, isn't it? Our own covenant children and grand-children.***

And how parents MUST REJOICE, when they see their children's faith.

But then, beyond that...we talk to people we know. We talk to friends and neighbours and co-workers. We talk to classmates in school. In doing that, we are sowing the seeds of the gospel. Telling them something about Jesus. At some point, we should invite them to our church. Helping them read and understand the Bible.

On the day when they express faith in Jesus, *we must rejoice*. We must praise the Lord.

For his goodness and grace to them, to these new converts...now part of God's harvest.

And remember this: we are no different, really, from the unbelievers we meet. We all share

in the same sin nature (罪性) . That nature might manifest itself in somewhat different ways. But it's the same sin nature. Selfishness, pride, excuse-making. Getting ourselves in a mess. Resisting God's Word.

Rejecting godly advice and counsel.

Remember that you, also, are part of the gospel harvest. You have been ripened by God's

Spirit, you have been given the gift of faith. As God changed you.

And praise the Lord how He has used believers to talk to you, over the years: your Christian

parents, your pastors, catechism teachers, elders, church members. God uses a variety of people as instruments of His grace. They have "reaped us" so to speak. And now, in turn, God uses us, to bring in others. To reap others, as we speak to them about Jesus.

Now, pastors, missionaries (宣教士) , evangelists (传道人) have this as their primary task. But look again at vs.

39. [Read vs. 39. Here's that lowly, despised Samaritan woman. With such a sinful background. But she had been changed by God's grace. Changed as she met Jesus face to face. Then Jesus used her, and her words, her testimony, to bring in others. Those Samaritans [quote] "believed in Him [Jesus] because of the woman who testified." She testified about Jesus.

-So may the Lord use you.....to testify about Him today.
harvest. LET US PRAY.

That you also may be part of bringing in His