

Evangelism: A Commitment of Time

By Jim Davis

Jesus has demonstrated the importance of the service of evangelism. Even before He suffered the humiliation of the cross of Calvary, He demonstrated the priority of the gospel. In John 4 He skipped a meal in order to communicate to the Samaritans that the Savior of the world had come. How about you? Are you willing to skip a meal? I do not know how often you eat out in restaurants but if you skip just one of those meals each month you could make a significant contribution to a missionary in many parts of the world.

As Jesus traveled through Samaria He taught His disciples principles for effective evangelism. In John 4:27-30, we saw *the commitment to action*. Those who sow the seed of the gospel should reject all cultural bias and go to the downtrodden (see October article). In John 4:31-34, we saw *the commitment to duty*. Those who work as laborers should readjust their priorities and learn to feed upon God's will (see November article). In this article we will consider *the commitment of time*. Those who desire to reap must reconsider their strategy and time frame and get busy.

The Commitment of Time

John 4:35-42

God's strategy in harvesting fruit to eternal life is different from ours. The disciples were distracted and in danger of missing a spiritual feast that would greatly satisfy the soul and bear eternal fruit. Jesus was feeding upon His Father's will and accomplishing His work. The disciples were in a hurry to pass through Samaria and get back to Galilee. It is our nature to pursue unknown and illusive things in life. We are always in a hurry to burn up the time that we should be investing in eternity. We must learn to recognize what is taking place. Jesus grew tired of the disciples' incessant talk about food and commanded that they should "lift up their eyes." When the disciples "behold the fields white with harvest" they begin to mentally perceive God's strategy.

The commitment of time is urgent when we gather fruit for eternal life. In nature there is a four-month waiting period before harvest. In this circumstance there was no waiting period but there was the urgency that takes place at harvest. It is interesting that the same verb tense used of the disciples asking Jesus to eat was used of the Samaritans asking Jesus to stay with them in verse 40. They were repeatedly asking Him to stay with them. You cannot wait. When it is time to harvest you must labor.

The commitment of time involves unified labor at harvest. The disciples did not sow yet they were privileged to enter into the labor that Jesus and the Samaritan woman had begun. Harvesting a crop of fruit for eternal life brings deep satisfaction to our lives. It rejoices our soul. God's strategy involves a unified effort on the part of the laborers. The sowers and the reapers labor together and they rejoice together. There is no place for envy or bickering or selfish ambition in God's work. Effective evangelism requires the labor and unified effort of the workers.

The commitment of time involves sacrifice. Do not misunderstand the fact that hard work is involved. Inexperienced disciples see ministry through rose-colored glasses. They love to think about the glory and the fruit that endures but few understand the sacrifice and perseverance necessary. The disciples ended up spending two days laboring among the Samaritans instead of just passing through their land. It took time out of their schedule and it was in a place where they did not want to be, with people that they did not like.

The commitment of time involves unexpected strategy. It seems that God's plan for the use of our time is often different from what we would expect. Which of the disciples could have guessed that God would use a Samaritan prostitute to bring an entire city to the Messiah. I am sure that the disciples were in top form when Nicodemus, a ruler among the Jews, came to visit Jesus (see John 3). If they were like most of us they were dreaming of what an impact Nicodemus' influence could bring for their cause. We should learn that discipleship involves the sacrifice of our time and of our lives in unexpected ways and even with unexpected people. Walking with Jesus Christ is a life of faith in the power of God. God delights to show His power in the weak things of this world and that is great news for most of us.

Conclusion

What a great message we have. "This One is the Savior of the world!" With a message like this we should desire to become effective in the methods we use to proclaim it. This is Jesus training on how to harvest a crop in evangelism. There is a commitment to action. Those of us who sow must reject our bias and be compelled by the compassion of Christ to reach out to others. There is a commitment to action. Those of us who work must readjust our priorities and focus upon doing God's will. When Jesus was feeding on His Father's will and accomplishing His work He was not winning or earning eternal life. He was demonstrating that "man should not live on bread alone but on every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4). He is not teaching the disciples how to earn their salvation but how to lay up treasure in heaven. There is a commitment of time. Those of us who reap must reconsider our strategy and labor sacrificing our time to His service.