The Harvest Is Now
John 4:34–38

How many of you want to experience God using you supernaturally to accomplish His purposes?

If that's you, here's a vital biblical principle that you must embrace:

We should not expect God to work unless we pray, and we should not pray unless we are also ready to work.

Paul clearly understood this. That's why he could say, "I worked harder than any of them," and in the same breath add, "though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10). The grace of God was at work in him, and that grace produced fruitful labor through him.

Prayer and work were never in competition. They belonged together.

A pastor in our day put it this way:

"I've learned not to pray for the miracle of harvest if I'm not interested in the discipline of sowing seeds." — Ian Simkins

That sentence captures the heart of what Jesus has just said to His disciples. The fields are already white for harvest. The opportunity is now. But the miracle of harvest does not arrive apart from the ordinary discipline of sowing.

And that is really the kind of church we want to be. We don't want to settle for a therapeutic gospel that simply makes people feel better or a transactional gospel that treats God as someone who exists to make life more comfortable. We want to preach and live out a transformational gospel—a gospel that changes us, conforms us to Christ, and sends us out to serve His purposes. Our ambition is not simply to fill pews, but to equip disciples and raise up laborers for the harvest. We may not build the biggest church this way, but by God's grace, we hope to build His kingdom.

That is the spirit of Jesus' words in John 4.
Jesus is calling His disciples to recognize that the harvest is not something they should simply wait for. It is something they must be willing to enter into. They must lift their eyes, recognize the opportunities before them, and participate in the work God is doing.

And that brings us to the central truth I want us to take away today:

Main Idea: The harvest is now, so we must lift our eyes, join the work, and trust God for the increase.

There are five principles about the Lord's harvest that I want us to see from this passage.

1. We Need the Heart of Jesus for the Lost

Before we can effectively participate in the harvest, we need to see people as Jesus sees them.

Remember the setting. Jesus has just spoken with a Samaritan woman at the well. There were deep historical, religious, and cultural divisions between Jews and Samaritans. Yet Jesus intentionally crossed those barriers to reach her.

He knew her story, her sin, and her brokenness. But He didn't see someone to avoid. He saw someone who needed the living water only He could give.

After their conversation, the woman returned to town and told the people, "*Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"* John 4:29

Her testimony brought people out of the town to meet Jesus.

Meanwhile, the disciples had gone into town to buy food. They returned thinking about physical needs, but Jesus saw something much more important approaching: a spiritual harvest.

This is where we need to examine our own hearts.

Do we see people as interruptions, inconveniences, or problems to deal with? Or do we see them as people created in God's image, separated from Him by sin, and in need of a Savior?

Matthew 9:36 tells us that when Jesus saw the crowds, "*he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."*

Jesus looked at people with compassion. We need that same heart.

Think about the people God has placed in your life: your neighbors, coworkers, family members, and the people you encounter in the ordinary routines of life.

Are you seeing them as Jesus sees them?

The harvest begins with a heart that cares about the people Jesus came to save.

But having the right heart for the lost is not enough. We need more than good intentions and human compassion. We need the power and help of God. And that brings us to prayer.

2. We Need to Pray for Laborers—and Then Become the Answer

Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 9:37–38:

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Notice what Jesus tells His disciples to do. He tells them to pray.

Why? Because the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. There are people who need to hear the gospel, but there aren't enough people willing to go and share it.

So Jesus tells His disciples to pray **earnestly** that the Lord of the harvest would raise up and send out laborers.

We need to pray for open doors. We need to pray for prepared hearts. We need to pray for boldness to share the gospel. And we need to pray that God would raise up laborers—not just somewhere in the world, but right here in our homes, our church, our neighborhoods, and our communities.

But there's a danger here. We can become very good at praying for God to send someone else while remaining unwilling to be used ourselves.

Think about Isaiah's encounter with God in Isaiah 6. After seeing the holiness of God and experiencing His cleansing grace, Isaiah hears the Lord ask:

"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

And Isaiah responds:

"Here am I! Send me."

Do you see the connection? Isaiah encounters the holiness of God, receives His cleansing, and then becomes available for His service.

When our prayer life is first about seeking God's face, we will take on His heart, become more attentive to His voice, and develop a greater willingness to go after the lost.

I think of a story told about a young believer.

In 1940, Dr. J. Edwin Orr took a group of Wheaton College students to England. During their visit, they went to the home of John Wesley. He was an 18th century English Pastor who founded the Methodist movement and helped spark a great evangelical revival in England.

As the guide showed them around the house, he pointed out the indentations in the floor beside Wesley's bed. They were reportedly worn into the floor by years of kneeling in prayer.

Think about that. The ministry God accomplished through John Wesley was sustained by a life of prayer. God used Wesley in a remarkable way, but behind that public ministry was a private life marked by devotion and communion with God.

At the end of the tour, the group began to leave, but Dr. Orr noticed that one of the students was missing. He went back to look for him and found a young Billy Graham kneeling beside the bed, praying.

And as he prayed, Billy Graham was crying out, "O Lord, do it again! Do it again!"

Dr. Orr gently touched him on the shoulder and reminded him that it was time to leave. The young man stood up and joined the others.

And we know how God would later use Billy Graham to proclaim the gospel to millions of people around the world.

But here's something you may not know. There is a remarkable connection that links Billy Graham to the history of this church.

The first pastor of Midwest Bible Church was a man named Torrey Johnson. He was instrumental in starting Youth for Christ in Chicago during the 1940s. In fact, he invited a young Billy Graham to preach at one of the earliest Chicago Youth for Christ rallies in May 1944.

Johnson recognized something in that young preacher. He later helped launch the national Youth for Christ movement and hired Billy Graham as its traveling evangelist.

I wonder how many of us are asking God to do it again in our generation—and are willing to be part of the answer?

Billy Graham didn't simply pray, "Lord, do it again." His life became an instrument through which God would accomplish that work.

Perhaps God wants to use you to encourage someone who is struggling, share the gospel with a family member, or begin a spiritual conversation with a coworker.

We must never underestimate what God can do through an available life.

And once we recognize that we are all called to be laborers, we can no longer afford to keep postponing the work. Jesus confronts that tendency with a simple command, which brings us to our next point:

3. We Must Stop Making Excuses and Recognize the Urgency

Look again at John 4:35:

"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest."

Jesus uses a familiar agricultural saying to make a spiritual point. Ordinarily, people expected to wait for the proper season before harvesting. But Jesus tells His disciples not to think that way about the spiritual harvest.

"Lift up your eyes, " he says.

Jesus is calling them—and us—to see beyond the physical, to look beyond our immediate concerns and recognize the spiritual opportunities around us.

He's telling us to stop looking at what we think is coming later and recognize what is happening right in front of us.

The opportunity is now.

How often do we postpone sharing the gospel because we assume the timing isn't right?

We tell ourselves:

- I'll talk to them when I know them better.
- I'll share my faith when I feel more confident.
- I'll invite them to church when things settle down.
- I'll wait until they show more interest.

Sometimes those considerations are legitimate. We should be thoughtful, gracious, and wise. But sometimes they are simply excuses that keep us from obeying God.

Look at the Samaritan woman. She wasn't a trained theologian. She didn't have all the answers. But she had encountered Jesus, and she was willing to tell others what He had done.

You don't have to know everything to tell someone what you know about Jesus.

A conversation over lunch, a question from a friend, or a difficult season in someone's life can become an opportunity to point someone to Christ.

We cannot keep asking God for opportunities while continually overlooking the ones He has already given us.

Lift up your eyes. The harvest is not simply a future possibility. Jesus is calling us to recognize the opportunities before us today.

But recognizing the urgency of the harvest doesn't mean we will always see immediate results. Sometimes we share the gospel and see someone respond. Other times, we plant a seed and see very little happen. How do we remain faithful when we cannot see the fruit of our labor?

4. We Must Be Faithful to Sow, Trusting God for the Increase

In verses 36–38, Jesus continues using the imagery of a harvest:

"Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Jesus reminds His disciples that the harvest involves many people. Some sow, others reap. Some labor in ways that are visible, while others serve without recognition. But all participate in God's work.

The disciples were about to enter into a harvest that others had helped prepare.

This is an important lesson for us. We sometimes become discouraged because we don't see immediate results. We share the gospel, but the person doesn't respond. We pray for a family member, but their heart doesn't seem to change.

But our responsibility is to be faithful. The results belong to God.

Paul makes this same point in 1 Corinthians 3:6–7:

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”

Planting and watering were essential, but neither Paul nor Apollos could produce spiritual life. That was God’s work. And we need to remember that we are sometimes just one link in the chain of what God is doing in someone's life. Our privilege is to be faithful with the part God has given us.

We cannot control the timing of the harvest or produce spiritual fruit in someone’s heart. But we can keep praying, loving, sharing the truth, and pointing people to Jesus.

And when the harvest comes, Jesus says the sower and the reaper rejoice together. There is no competition or jealousy. There is a shared joy because God has brought about the increase.

What a picture of how the church should function! We need more churches cooperating in prayer and ministry, celebrating what God is doing through one another rather than competing for recognition or success. We are not building our own kingdoms; we are laboring together for the advancement of His.

Be faithful in the work God has given you, and trust Him with the results you cannot produce.

But sowing the seed is not the end of our responsibility. When someone begins to respond to the gospel, we must be willing to invest in that person. We aren’t simply trying to get someone to make a decision. We want to see people become devoted followers of Jesus.

5. We Must Invest in People Beyond the Initial Conversation

One of the things I love about John 4 is that Jesus didn’t merely have a conversation with the Samaritan woman and move on. He invested in her. He took time to speak with her, answer her questions, confront her misunderstanding, and reveal Himself as the Messiah.

And He continued investing in the people of that town. John 4:39–42 tells us that many believed because of the woman's testimony. But when they came to Jesus, *"…they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days."* ***41*** *And many more believed because of His word."* Jesus didn't simply want people to hear about Him. He wanted them to know Him.

We need to understand that evangelism doesn't end with an initial conversation or a response to an invitation.

As someone wisely observed:

"Evangelism without discipleship guarantees false conversions and empty hearts."

That's a sobering statement, and it should cause us to examine how we approach evangelism.

If our goal is only to get someone to pray a prayer, raise a hand, or walk an aisle, but we don't take the time to explain the gospel, understand their response, and walk with them afterward, we may give someone assurance that isn't grounded in genuine faith.

A prayer cannot save someone. Repeating certain words does not guarantee conversion. Salvation comes through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. We must be careful not to confuse a verbal profession with a heart that has genuinely trusted Christ as Savior and Lord.

This is why discipleship matters. We need to take time with people—to answer questions, open God's Word, explain what it means to follow Jesus, and help them understand the nature of saving faith.

And that raises another important question: Are we prepared to explain the gospel clearly?

My friend, Pastor Travis Whittaker, recently challenged his church with this thought:

Every follower of Jesus should have a memorized plan for sharing the full gospel. If we don't, that's a problem.

I think he's right. We should not leave the responsibility of explaining the gospel only to pastors, missionaries, or people who feel especially gifted in evangelism. Every believer should be prepared to tell someone how they can be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

Travis then shared a simple acronym using the word **GOSPEL** to help us remember the essential truths of the gospel:

- **G — God created us to be with Him.** We were made to know Him, love Him, and live for His glory.
- **O — Our sins have separated us from God.** All of us have sinned and fallen short of His glory
- **S — Sins cannot be erased by good deeds.** We cannot earn our way back to God through religious activity or moral improvement.
- **P — Paying the price for our sin, Jesus died and rose again.** He took the penalty for our sin and conquered death.
- **E — Everyone who trusts in Him alone has eternal life.** Salvation is received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
- **L — Life with Jesus starts now and lasts forever.** Those who trust Christ are reconciled to God and given new life.

We need to know this message, believe it, and be prepared to share it.

And when someone responds, we need to take the time to walk with them. Help them understand what they've believed. Open the Scriptures with them. Encourage them to become part of a healthy church and grow as a follower of Christ.

Our goal is not simply to see someone repeat a prayer. Our goal is to see people genuinely come to Christ and become devoted followers of Him.

We are not merely called to make fans of Jesus; we are called to make followers of Jesus.

Conclusion

Church, the harvest is now. There are people all around us who need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Some are in our homes, some in our workplaces, and some are our neighbors, friends, and family members.

The question is not whether there are people who need Christ. The question is whether we are willing to lift our eyes, see them, and join the work God has called us to do.

So today, I want us to put this message into action.

As you came in, you received a card. I want you to write down the names of people in your life who need to come to Jesus. Think about your family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors—those people God has placed within your circle of influence.

In a moment, I'm going to invite you to come forward and place those cards here on the platform. Our prayer team will pray over these names throughout the next thirty days. But understand, this is not about handing the responsibility over to someone else. We are committing ourselves to pray for these souls and to make ourselves available for God to use us.

Church, I think about that young Billy Graham, kneeling in John Wesley's prayer room, crying out, "O Lord, do it again! Do it again!"

What if that became our prayer? What if we stopped simply asking God to move and made ourselves available for Him to use? What if we prayed, "Lord, awaken hearts, open doors, raise up laborers—and do it through me!"

And remember the principle we began with:

We should not expect God to work unless we pray, and we should not pray unless we are also ready to work.

So as we come forward today, let's bring these names before the Lord. Let's pray with expectation and surrender ourselves to be part of the answer to those prayers.

And let this be our prayer:

"O Lord, do it again—and do it through me!"