

2 TIMOTHY 2:6

FIRST SHARE OF THE CROPS

“It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.”¹

Paul has presented a variety of images to illustrate the strong spiritual life expected of those who will follow the Master. As we saw in a previous message, the emphasis in these verbal pictures the Apostle has drawn demonstrates the principle of delayed rewards.² The fourth and final image he presents is that of a farmer. The teacher is rewarded by knowing that he has enriched and stimulated the lives of his students. The soldier is rewarded by the knowledge that he has pleased his commander. The athlete wins the award of a trophy. The Apostle reminds Timothy that the farmer is rewarded with the first share and the best example of the crops.

DELAYED REWARDS — The concept of “hard working” is key to understanding what the Apostle has written. Farming, even in this day, is a demanding occupation. When Paul wrote this letter, the vast majority of the population lived close to the land. Those who were not farmers would have been intimately acquainted with the labour required of a farmer. That is not necessarily the case today. As we grow ever more distant from the land, we become less aware of what is entailed in producing food for the nation. Fewer people than ever are producing more food; and few appear to understand that the food we eat is produced through the hard work of farmers. Let me illustrate that fact by referring to some published data.

Statistics Canada recorded a decline from 2006 to 2011 in total farm numbers that was consistent across all provinces, and a decline in every new census since 1941.³ Another report released by Statistics Canada states that the number of farms in Canada is dropping, while their size is growing along with the age of the people running them. This study notes that there were 205,730 farms in 2011. This is a decline of more than 74,000 farms since 1991. Moreover, the same study notes that the average farm area increased from 80 hectares to 315 hectares. Report author and agriculture analyst Martin Beaulieu said one reason for larger farms is that they are being consolidated as older operators retire.⁴ Similar studies from the United States make similar observations concerning the number of farms, the size of farms and the age of farmers.⁵

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Michael Stark, “Competing According to the Rules,” Sermon preached 25 October 2015, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2-Timothy-2.05-Competing-According-to-the-Rules.pdf>

³ Martin S. Beaulieu, “Demographic Changes in Canadian Agriculture,” Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/96-325-x/2014001/article/11905-eng.htm>, accessed 7 November 2015

⁴ “Number of farmers is shrinking, while avg age is climbing Global News,,” February 18, 2014, <http://globalnews.ca/news/1156570/number-of-farmers-is-shrinking-while-avg-age-is-climbing/>, accessed 7 November 2015

⁵ E.g., “Farm Population Lowest Since 1850’s,” The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/20/us/farm-population-lowest-since-1850-s.html>, accessed 7 November 2015; “What percentage of the US population are farmers?”

http://www.answers.com/Q/What_percentage_of_the_US_population_are_farmers, accessed 7 November 2015; Mary Clare Jalonick, “Number of US farms declines, farmers getting older,” February 20, 2014,

<http://news.yahoo.com/number-us-farms-declines-farmers-getting-older-182609347--politics.html>, accessed 7 November 2015; Michael Hill, “Young, Idealistic Farmers Help Keep Land in Production,” November 8, 2015,

The collected data on farming in North America speaks of a situation that differs radically from history—fewer and older farmers are producing more food than ever. North American farmers are producing enough to feed Canada and the United States with enough foodstuffs to supply much of the remainder of the nations of the world. Land that might have been considered infertile in the past now produces an abundance of crops through newer farming techniques and with the administration of chemical enhancements. The advent of genetically modified crops allows resistance to common plant diseases or increased yields. Likewise, domestic livestock breeds provide ever greater yields of dairy products and meats. To accomplish this provision of foods, farmers must work hard. In some respects, despite modern farm implements and improved grains and newer breeds of livestock, farm families must work longer hours and assume greater risks than in any previous era.

What I want us to seize on is the idea that Paul is presenting. He is emphasising to Timothy the reality of delayed gratification. We seldom see immediate rewards for the work we expend. We realise intuitively the truth of the Proverb, “In all hard work there is profit” [PROVERBS 14:23a]. We are in substantial agreement with the Preacher when he writes, “I have seen personally what is the only beneficial and appropriate course of action for people: to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in all their hard work on earth during the few days of their life which God has given them, for this is their reward” [ECCLESIASTES 5:18, NET BIBLE].

Yet, the modern mind appears inclined to imagine that rewards should be instantaneous. Do you doubt that last statement? Listen to the delicate little snowflakes currently occupying college campuses in the United States as the “cri du Coeur” bursts from their lips demanding safe spaces, trigger warnings, free tuition and banishment of all challenges to their worldview. The thought that they may encounter unpleasantness in the world or that they may meet with ideas that challenge their worldview leaves them weak! They expect to graduate after four years of campus indoctrination with a degree in some critical field of study such as Women’s Studies or Mongolian Philosophy or Ebonics and immediately receive the offer of a huge salary. How startled they are when they find they are qualified to flip burgers, work as a greeter at Wal-Mart or drive a cab if the area served is not too large! An entire generation has been schooled in the idea that they are the centre of the universe and the world is waiting for their unveiling! They bought into the lie vocalised by an American President who arrogantly crowed, “We are the ones we have been waiting for!”⁶ How has that worked out?

Even when teaching preacher boys, now over thirty-five years ago, I was repeatedly startled at the thought many held that they would leave their studies and step into a congregation of ten or twenty thousand souls. From that lofty perch they would dispense pearls of wisdom that the world eagerly awaited. When I spoke to them of planting churches in out-of-the-way places, evangelise in spiritually darkened communities, invest a lifetime building saints in smaller communities, many dissented, irritated that I didn’t see their greatness lying latent under a thin patina of poor grammar and ignorance of theology and the original languages.

Inherent in the human psyche is the thought that we are owed adulation and greatness. That the world doesn’t recognise our prowess and superior intellect is due to the benighted condition of the most of mankind. This idealisation of our own greatness lies at the heart of our own fallen, sinful condition.

http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_FOOD_AND_FARM_YOUNG_ORGANIC_FARMERS?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT&CTIME=2015-11-08-12-14-28, accessed 9 November 9, 2015

⁶ Obama “We are the ones we have been waiting for,” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=molWTfv8TYw>, accessed 14 November 2015

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When Satan approached our first mother, he approached her with the lie that God didn't want competition, and therefore God kept her from eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. She deserved better than what God had given. She could advance herself to where she actually belonged. Isn't that the essence of the account provided in the Genesis account? "The serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

"He said to the woman, 'Did God actually say, "You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?"' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'" [GENESIS 3:1-5].

The Puritan concept of work as divine grows out of the attitude of the redeemed. We are saved to serve. Again, we would do well to teach our youth the truth of the Word that teaches,

"The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance,
but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty."

[PROVERBS 21:5]

Toil, working hard, labouring is encouraged through the example of the Apostle. Listen to the conclusion of his final speech to the Ephesian elders. "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" [ACTS 20:34, 35].

Writing the saints in Corinth, the Apostle spoke of life as a servant of the Living God. He asserted of the Apostles, among whom he counted himself, "I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands" [1 CORINTHIANS 4:9-12a]. Apostles! And yet Paul would say, "We labour, working with our own hands." What? Did the Apostles not live in palaces and receive a large income? How is this possible?

Paul boldly reminded the Christians of Colossae, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

"For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ" [COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:2].

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In his earlier letter to Timothy, the aged man of God had written, “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe” [1 TIMOTHY 4:7-10].

Writing the Church of God in Corinth, Paul reminded them of his life in Christ. “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:10].

Those whom he commended are frequently commended for their diligence in their labours. As he names those he wished to greet in Rome, he spoke of their labours. “Greet Mary who has worked hard for you” [ROMANS 16:6]. This then continues as he writes, “Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord” [ROMANS 16:12].

It seems apparent that elders are expected to work hard. The language Paul employs makes this abundantly clear. Instructing the Thessalonian Christians, the Apostle wrote “We ask you brothers to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:12]. Elders should work hard; and their labour should be evident. They should not rip a sermon from a book of sermons at the last minute; they should immerse themselves in the Word and bring fresh oil to the message.

This concept is iterated when Paul admonished Timothy, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and ‘The Labourer deserves his wages’” [1 TIMOTHY 5:17, 18]. It is obvious that the Apostle anticipated that elders would be noted for their work ethic—they would be renowned for their diligence in the Work, their message reflecting hard work.

What was demonstrated in the life of the Apostle and should be evident in the life of the elder is enjoined for each Christian. For instance, as he instructs believers in the Letter to Ephesus, the Apostle writes, “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need” [EPHESIANS 4:28]. Christians are to work hard so that they will have the ability to do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith [see GALATIANS 6:10].

Among the letters Paul wrote, none are more pointed in addressing the need for believers to work hard than the Letters to the Church of Thessalonica. In the first letter, you may recall these words from Paul. “We urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:10b-12]. Christians are not to be dependent on others. They are to assume responsibility for themselves. They are to work with their own hands.

Writing the second letter to that same church, the Apostle again was pointed in his instructions. “You yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living” [2 THESSALONIANS 3:7-12].

The farmer is “hard working,” but the harvest is not immediate. The athlete pushes himself or herself to the limit, knowing that any reward comes only after he or she has denied himself or herself, pushing to excel. The soldier does not receive an award until he has hazarded himself in combat, training diligently in order to win on the field of battle. Rewards are delayed.

ANTICIPATED REWARDS — Rewards should be conferred only after they are deserved; but in the spiritual realm, especially, they may surely be anticipated. We witnessed the worldwide disaster that has attended the awarding a Nobel Prize to a newly elected politician in the United States. His tenure has resulted in chaos throughout the world as he has proven incapable of fulfilling responsibility as the leader of the Free World. Rewards should never be conferred without evidence that the recipient deserves the reward. This is especially true in the spiritual realm.

God has promised that “your labour is not in vain” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:58]. I alluded to the passage previously, but I now want to call your attention to GALATIANS 6:9, 10. The Apostle has urged believers, “Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” The final word of encouragement is one the Apostle had written in another letter drafted at about this same time. “As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good” [2 THESSALONIANS 3: 13].

I spoke in a previous message about the rewards believers should expect.⁷ God has promised those of us who are faithful, who fulfil the ministries He assigns, who hold fast to the eternal Word, that He will reward us. There are trials now, but there shall be a rich harvest. Rewards await the diligent, but there are rewards now as we see precious men and women rescued from death and brought into the life of Christ the Lord. The rewards we witness now, together with the heartache at betrayal and rejection that we must witness among some lay the foundation for what is yet to come.

Writing the dysfunctional Corinthian congregation, Paul looked forward to what was coming for all Christians. Turn to 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16 and hold your finger there. I want you to note what is said, but we are coming back to this portion of the Word in a very short while, so I want you to follow what I am reading, being prepared to come back to this portion of the Word. Listen to what the Apostle wrote in the Second Letter to the Corinthians. “We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” [2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18].

⁷ Michael Stark, “Competing According to the Rules,” Sermon preached 25 October 2015, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2-Timothy-2.05-Competing-According-to-the-Rules.pdf>

Whatever can he mean by pointing to “an eternal weight of glory?” We can’t be certain, but we know that the Apostle spoke of something similar in his Letter to Roman Christians. Remember how the Apostle has written, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” [ROMANS 8:28-23].

Turn again to the passage we were looking at in Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians. “We know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

“So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” [2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-5:10].

The Judgement Seat of Christ is where the perfection of His work is revealed in His saints. That includes us, if we are born from above. Earlier, Paul had written this same congregation, cautioning them of this truth that all believers must appear before the Judge of all the earth. However, what is said is less designed to frighten and intimidate than it is to encourage and build the people of God.

In the First Letter to the Church of God in Corinth, the Apostle has written, “No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” [1 CORINTHIANS 3:11-15].

Focus on what is said for a brief moment. Only we who have Christ as the sure foundation will appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ. Appearing before Him, is His purpose to expose us as miserable servants? Never! We already know that we are failures in our own strength! Do you remember the words Jesus spoke concerning our service? “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’” [LUKE 17:7-10]. That is humbling! We have nothing of which we may boast. Only in Christ have we anything of which to boast.

The Master does not need to expose us for being unworthy servants—He has already declared us such. However, when we appear before His Judgement Seat, our works will have already passed through the fire. The worthless efforts will have been consumed in the divine fires of judgement. The wood, the hay and the straw will have already been burned up. Our efforts at exalting ourselves—consumed! The empire building we did in this life—burned up! Those whom we disciplined to ourselves—removed! All that remains is that which is of eternal worth. The gold, the silver and the precious jewels will remain to the praise of Christ’s glory throughout all eternity. Those labours in which we exalted the Name of our Saviour will remain forever—and He will be honoured. The efforts we expended to turn men and women to righteousness will be eternally enshrined for all the saints and angels to see—and Christ will be glorified. Those for whom we prayed, to whom we witnessed and who in turn were born from above will be with us in Heaven throughout all eternity—and Christ Jesus will be glorified. The purpose of the Judgement Seat of Christ is to reveal the excellence of His work in our lives. He does not seek to ridicule and embarrass His beloved child; we will glorify Him.

In what is arguably one of the earliest of letters Paul was inspired to write to the churches is the Second Letter to the Christians in Thessalonica. In the opening verses of that letter the Spirit of God guided the Apostle to state of Christ that He is coming again “to be glorified in His saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed” [2 THESSALONIANS 1:10]. Those who will glorify the Saviour at His return and who are likewise the means by which He is honoured are appointed to this position because believed the testimony concerning Him. Those who are twice-born shall glorify the Master. The angels in Heaven shall marvel in His grace. And we who are recipients of His grace will likewise marvel at what He has done for us. Each believer can anticipate this reward.

WAITING FOR THE HARVEST — I don’t want you to grow lazy because Christ is even now working in you. He is transforming each believer now. Nevertheless, each Christian is responsible to work together with the Spirit of God as He works to transform us into the image of the Son of God. Paul urged the Roman saints, “With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give Him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to Him and acceptable by Him. Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-make you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed. Thus you will prove in practise that the will of God is good, acceptable to Him and perfect”⁸ [ROMANS 12:1, 2].

God’s Spirit is at work changing us at this moment; and we are called to work together with Him to effect that eternal change. It will be helpful for us to remember Paul’s words written to the Roman saints. The Apostle wrote, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

⁸ J. B. Phillips, **The New Testament in Modern English**, (William Collins Sons & Co., Glasgow, Scotland, 1960, 1970)

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” [ROMANS 8:18-30].

What a succession of events is transforming the people of God. We were foreknown of God. We are predestined to be conformed to the Image of God’s dear Son. We have been called. We have been justified. And our glorification is so certain that the Apostle speaks of this as fait accompli! God is at work in us and we are being changed into His image now! This is nothing less than an expression of the fulfilment of Jesus’ High Priestly prayer. Jesus asked, “The glory that You have given Me I have given to them, that they be one even as We are one” [JOHN 17:22]. Indeed, through Christ Jesus the Lord, the Father is “bringing many sons to glory” [see HEBREWS 2:10]. This is the promise given in the Letter to Philippian Christians when Paul testified, “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” [PHILIPPIANS 3:20, 21].

I have always loved the Apostle’s confident assertion concerning the transformation that awaits the people of God. His words convey a confidence that no man can generate within himself; this certainty is given by the Spirit of God Who is at work in us. The Apostle wrote, “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:51, 52].

Though we shall be finally changed into His likeness, enjoying the rewards that He graciously gives to His people, even now we have opportunity to reap a harvest, if we can but open our eyes to the opportunities. There is before us a harvest of eternal proportions—ripe and ready for reaping. Recall an incident in the life of the Master. He had a conversation with a Samaritan woman that resulted in her coming to faith in Him as the Son of God. His disciples returned from a trip into town where they were to purchase food. Jesus wasn’t ready to eat though they were urging Him to eat.

“Jesus said to [the Disciples], ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. 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. 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” [JOHN 4:34-38].

John’s account of that ministry implies that the Apostles shared in an incredible harvest of souls. “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world’” [JOHN 4:39-42]. It was a veritable revival as the disciples joined in reaping a harvest where they had not laboured!

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On another occasion, we read of Jesus urging the disciples to enter into the harvest. “Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘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’” [MATTHEW 9:35-38]. The harvest is not at some future point—it is now!

Let me refer you to just one other instance when the Master spoke of a harvest, urging His disciples to participate in what was even then ongoing and which has continued to this day. “When a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, [Jesus] said in a parable, ‘A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.’ As he said these things, he called out, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’”

“And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that “seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.” Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience’” [LUKE 8:4-15].

The child of God is commanded to ask the Father to send workers into the harvest fields. Have you prayed for workers recently? Have you offered yourself as one willing to labour? God promises that there is a harvest now. I’ve been thinking this week of a disturbing truth. Many people are upset that our government has committed us to accept 25,000 Syrian refugees. We Canadians rightly pride ourselves on our compassion and generosity. However, accepting 25,000 refugees from ISIS territory, ninety percent of which are men between the ages of eighteen and thirty, with inadequate vetting is disturbing to most right-thinking adults.

We witnessed a horrible series of attacks engineered and carried out by Muslim extremists who apparently voiced sympathy for ISIS and at least one of whom was a Syrian refugee arriving in Europe through Greece. Such events make people suspicious of those presenting themselves as refugees; nevertheless, governments appear intent on carrying through with their planned resettlement.

I’m not attempting to make a political argument at this time, but I must wonder what impact we Christians could have if we committed ourselves to pray for the conversion of those coming to our country, saying “Amen” by offering ourselves to evangelise as the Lord gives opportunity. I must believe in light of the Master’s commands that we could transform our world. I don’t mean that we would usher in the Millennium; but I do mean that for a brief moment in history we could perhaps alter the course of history. A church is established for the generation of those planting it. A witness is for the generation in which the witness is given. Though the results could redound for centuries to come, it could change things now.

What rewards might be ours to see radical Muslims converted to Christ the Lord? Don't tell me that God is incapable of transforming the vilest human heart. One of the Master's Apostles is identified as "Simon the Zealot" [e.g. **LUKE 6:16**]. We're led to believe he was a member of the Zealots, a group committed to violent overthrow of Roman occupation. Yet, He believed the Good News and followed Jesus, being chosen as one of the Twelve.

Saul of Tarsus was a violent man who opposed the Faith. His testimony before the Jews was, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished" [**ACTS 22:3-5**].

As an old man, Saul of Tarsus, now known as Paul, penned his memory of the transformation that came to him. "I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" [**1 TIMOTHY 1:12-16**].

If God could redeem one who identified himself as the Chief of Sinners, could He not save members of ISIS if we would be faithful to pray for the Master to raise up one to speak in His Name and if we were with boldness to proclaim His Name where we live? God saved me and appointed me to this ministry. He is in the business of saving lost people and making them into bright witnesses for His cause. Will you give yourself to prayer? Will you give yourself to be an instrument of His grace? Will you do it even today? Amen.