

A VISION FOR THE HARVEST

JOHN 4:27-35

27 And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why are You talking with her?"

*28 The woman then **left her waterpot**, went her way into the city, and said to the men, 29 "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" 30 Then they went out of the city and came to Him.*

31 In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." 32 But He said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." 33 Therefore the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?"

34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. 35 Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest?..."

...Behold, I say to you, (lift your eyes) and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!

Lift up your eyes and *look*...

Lift up your eyes and *see*...

My disciples, I want you to see what I see...

You see only a *nameless* Samaritan woman... but I see *a ready harvest*.

When you look out around you and you see the impossible, you see people outside of the church, those who are not in right standing with God...

- People that are *far* from the truth.
- People living in **sin** and **wickedness**.
- People with *messed up, broken* lives.

People that are different than you, look different than you, speak a different language than you, have a different culture than you, and different customs, and family traditions than you.

When you look out and see the world around you...

...if you are looking through *my eyes*, you will see a harvest that is ripe and ready.

As I have stated publicly before, this month – October – has a particular theme. On every Sunday and Wednesday, our theme and focus is: **OTHERS**.

From now until the end of the month, I will be preaching and teaching on the mission of the church – with the goal to position all of us in line with the heart of God.

- For the remainder of 2020, you will hear *a lot* about personal evangelism, making disciples, and reaching **OTHERS** with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And at the start, I feel directed by the Spirit to establish that before we as individuals, REACH our city...

...we must have a **vision** for the harvest.

And I have felt personally challenged by God to pray for “**a personal vision for a personal harvest.**”

- God has challenged me to believe that he **can** and **will** use me in greater ways to *reach* the people in my city.

You see, if we (as the church) turn ministry into a “to-do list” or a duty or a religious responsibility....

...it will eventually get *old* and *stale* – and *dead* and *dry*.

We must not forget **WHY** WE ARE DOING WHAT WE ARE DOING in San Marcos!

God has sent us all here – and has formed a team – and has provided a new-modern facility in the heart of the city...

...for the PRIMARY purpose of gaining a Harvest.

We must never forget that **people** are *always* more important than **projects** or **programs**.

God has established us and put us right where we are... *for the sake of the harvest!*

- **Everything we do as the church should be** *for the sake of the harvest.*

We must not forget that God plans to redeem and restore the lost, to heal them and bring them under his care – to get them rooted in his Word and full of the Spirit...

...and then release them into the harvest.

Jesus desires to wash away all of your sins through Baptism in his name, to fill you with His Spirit... to equip you, to disciple you, and to help you grow deep roots in your faith...

...and then he wants to send you out into the harvest!

God wants to **SAVE** you and then **SEND** you.

- From the birth of the church in the first century until now, God has been FULLY invested in **SAVING** and **SENDING!**

I challenge you today to BELIEVE that God wants to save you, renew your heart and mind, to set you free.

- **But don't stop there...**

I also challenge you to BELIEVE that God wants to **SEND** you *out into his harvest!*

- He wants to give you a **personal** vision for a **personal** harvest!
- He wants you to believe that he **can** and **will** use you in greater ways to reach the people in your city.

Jesus used the concept of the harvest many times in his teaching. It was a concept that was very familiar to the Jews – for the Jews were a people that built their entire lives upon the planting, growing, and reaping of crops such as wheat or barley.

In New Testament times, the Harvest represented times of great joy and celebration when people were finally able to reap and to take in the result of their work.

In Jewish culture, the “harvest season” came after a year’s worth of labor, cultivation, and effort.

MATTHEW 9:35-38

35 *Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. 36* *But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. 37* *Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38* *Therefore pray **the Lord of the harvest** to send out laborers into His harvest.”*

HARVEST PRINCIPLES

1. A great harvest begins with a great, personal vision.

3 Indicators that a Person Has Lost their Vision

1. They talk more about the *past* than the *future*.
2. They build emotional *walls* instead of emotional *bridges*.
3. They invest more in the *nations* than they do their *neighbors*.

...Behold, I say to you, (lift your eyes) and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!

2. Exposure breeds burden

- What you expose yourself to will stir your passions.
- What you invest yourself into will slowly make its way into your heart.

So, if you desire to effectively reach the lost you must spend time with lost people.

- You have to listen to their stories – and hear them talk about their wounds.
- You have to invite them into your home – and you have to go into theirs.
- You have to sit down with them over a meal and break bread. You have to drink coffee or tea with them.

If you really desire to reach OTHERS... you must intentionally expose yourself to their needs.

3. A burden grows in prayer

Exposure breeds burden, and burdens grow in prayer.

Your heart for the lost grows the more you pray for the lost.

If it is hard for you to see “a personal vision for a personal harvest” then I encourage you to take it to the Lord in prayer.

If you pray long enough for OTHERS, there will come a point in your prayer time when God’s heart will begin beating in your heart...

...and you will start to feel things for OTHERS that *He* feels.

When this happens, you will begin to see the people around you through *His* eyes.

4. The church is designed to be a hospital, not a funeral home

The church is designed for the sick, the broken, the addicted, and the lost.

The church is for dysfunctional families, divided marriages, wayward children, and single parents.

The church is for the depressed, the hurting, and those that do not belong anywhere else.

- The **PEOPLE** that come here are the priority.

If on a Sunday, you're in the middle of a project, or you're working on your to-do list, or if you leave one of your tasks unfinished...

...to connect with **people** – or to pray for people.

I want you to know, as your pastor, I commend you and I support that 100%.

We may not be doctors or nurses, but as we engage in the harvest – God, through the Spirit, uses us as “harvest doctors” or “harvest nurses.”

- The church is at its best when it is working as **HOSPITAL**.

We should expect, and we should **anticipate**, broken people to walk through our doors... because that is what a hospital does.

The church is not meant to be a funeral home – that only memorializes the past – gives honor to things that have died – and buries the dead.

- **As a hospital, our goal is to bring the dead to life!**

Jesus was once asked, “Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

His reply was this: *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”*

5. Soul winners face the greatest spiritual opposition but have the greatest spiritual power

The day you get serious about reaching the lost, the enemy will put a target on your back.

Because a soul-winner pulls lost people out of the grip and grasp of Satan.

- **Jude 1:23** uses the phrase.... “pulling them out of the fire.”

And Satan does not like when a church walks all up in his territory and begins calling his people out of darkness.

Yes, we have an adversary... but God promises power and favor and blessing to those that actively work in the harvest.

- In **Acts 1:8**, Jesus said that as we go out into the world to be witnesses, he would give us **POWER**.

Not just a Sunday power, but power every day of the week.

When you *really* start working in the harvest, God will *really* start working for you!

6. The heart of God for the church is revealed in a two-letter word... “Go.”

Mark 16:15 – Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to everyone...

Matthew 28:19 - Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of Jesus

In **Matthew 10:16**, Jesus told his disciples, “Behold, I send you out...”

Mark 6:7 - Jesus called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits.

- Jesus, from the first century until now, is fully investing in the mission of **SAVING** and then **SENDING**.

7. God will move the world for the sake of the city

JONAH 1:1-3 (KJV)

1 - Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, **2** – Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and **cry** against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

Jonah's calling was to a specific **place**, at a specific **time**, and to a specific **people**.

But rather than heeding to the call, Jonah got up and ran the other way.

3 - But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish **from** the presence of the Lord.

- **KJV** – he rose up to flee...
- **IN OTHER WORDS** – he got up and ran...

Understanding the kind of city that Nineveh was, Jonah allowed what he saw with his **EYES** to talk him out of what he **HEARD** from the Voice of God.

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- **Tarshish** – Was the farthest known point that had been mapped by Israel. It represented the most distant place known to the Israelites. And by choosing this city, Jonah was trying to sail *as far away from Nineveh as possible*.
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Jonah saw no hope in Nineveh.

You see, Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, long-time enemies of Israel. They were a **brutal**, **wicked**, and **heathen** people who opposed Israel.

And at the time of Jonah, it was one of the largest cities in the ancient world, twice the size of Babylon.

- 3 different times in scripture it's described as an "exceeding great city" which seems to have indicated its **massive size** and **population**.

It was also known for its large and expansive temples which had walls known historically to have been *covered with the skin of its victims*.

- It was *that* kind of city. It was an ancient metropolis that had opposed Israel for hundreds of years.

Yet, despite all these things, one day, the voice of God spoke to a prophet named Jonah and told him to get up and go to **THAT CITY** and preach and proclaim the Word of God.

- The call of Jonah was to a city – a densely populated ancient metropolis known for its wickedness and worship of brutality and death.

Today, we could rightfully ask the question – **why would God even bother?**

- Why would he risk **the life of a prophet** for *the sake of a city* that was so outwardly and publicly opposed to him?

It almost seems like the Book of Jonah doesn't even fit within the narrative of the Old Testament. You see, from beginning to end, the story of the Old Testament is about his interactions and relationship with Israel.

- They were a favored nation, chosen to be his own special people.
- The gospel wouldn't even be preached to the Gentiles for nearly 500 years later – **so why would God send Jonah, of all cities, to Nineveh?**

We find in the Book of Jonah, and throughout Scripture, that God has a *heart* for cities.

- In fact, the word “city” occurs **868** times in **47** different books in the Bible.

Often, in Scripture, a city is connected to a particular people. Cities were known, judged, and blessed by their inhabitants.

JEREMIAH 19:11 = JUDGEMENT

*‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: “Even so I will break this **people** and this **city**, as one breaks a potter’s vessel, which cannot be made whole again...*

DANIEL 9:19 = BLESSING

*O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your **city** and Your **people** are called by Your name.”*

Cities represent the cultural norms of a people.

- **They are often the seats of political power, and centers of education, and form the bedrock of economy, technology, and finance.**

Today, cities represent global trends. **As goes the city, so goes the world.**

So, if cities matter this much in the world, it makes sense that God would care...

...and we can understand why God, in the Old Testament, would step aside from his ultimate plan for Israel, and *for a season* send a prophet to a place like Nineveh.

Could it be that God, in his love and mercy and compassion, would look past the wickedness of a city and be willing to pour out **the life of a prophet...**

...so that **THE PEOPLE** of that city would hear his word preached and proclaimed?

When we talk about Jonah today, we often think about the great fish that swallowed him and after three days spit him back up on dry ground.

- But really, when we look at the Biblical text, we see that the fish was simply a vessel **to get Jonah back to Nineveh... and to redirect him BACK to his calling.**

You see, because the city of Nineveh was so great and so influential, and growing so fast that God could not ignore it...

- Looking down from his throne, he could *not* resist sending a minister to declare his Word in its streets.

Despite its wickedness and forms of heathen worship, there was a calling hovering over the city – and so God sent Jonah to answer the call of the city.

And when he didn't listen the first time, God called him again...

Like he called Jonah, he will call you and I to a specific place, at a specific time, and for a specific people.

And though we don't understand it, we must hear God's voice and obey – because we really don't know what God is willing to do to **SAVE A CITY.**

- The story of Jonah illustrates that sometimes working in the Harvest is uncomfortable and that it may send you to *uncomfortable* places.

- Sometimes, the call of Harvest will send you to **REACH FOR** people that you don't exactly get along with – and to people with which *you have nothing in common*.

You may be a Jew... and God may be calling you to reach Samaritans.

If your personal harvest is hard to see, as God to give you a **FRESH VISION**.

- This morning, as we close, I ask you: **What is Your Tarshish?**

What is the place that you are tempted to run to?

- **Are you building emotional walls instead of emotional bridges?**

However, the more important question I must ask you is this: **What Is Your Nineveh?**

- *Where* is the place of God's calling?
 - *What* is the place of your ministry?
 - If God has SAVED you, where is it that he is SENDING you?
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Could it be that God loves your city so much, your neighborhood so much, your school so much, and your family so much...

...that he has placed **YOU** in it?