

COMMENTARY ON JOHN

LESSON NUMBER 51

John 4:35 *“Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.”* ³⁶ *And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.* ³⁷ *And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.* ³⁸ *I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors.”* (John 4:35-38)

ENTERING INTO THE LABORS OF ANOTHER

INTRODUCTION

In Christ Jesus human independence is reduced to a secondary position. It is actually required that one come to *“hate his own life”* (Lk 14:26). First, we are *“joined to the Lord”* (1 Cor 6:17), *“baptized into Christ”* (Gal 3:26), and made a part of His body, which is the church (Col 1:18). In this experience, the will of God becomes the prominent will (Matt 6:10; Acts 21:14; Eph 5:17). The purpose of God becomes the dominant purpose (Rom 8:26; 9:11), and the work of God becomes the preeminent work (Psa 64:9; 1 Cor 15:59; 16:10). In Jesus *“the will of man”* is never a prominent factor, never a deciding element, and never a pivotal matter (John 1:13; 2 Pet 1:21). Valid human willingness is declared to occur within the framework of Divine power (Psa 110:3). All of these things are found in our text. Jesus refers to an existing work into which others enter. It is a work associated with *“wages,” “eternal life,”* and *“rejoicing”* – all of which are particularly of interest to laborers.

In order for the fulness of these things to occur, a new birth is required. Since the fall of Adam, every person has been naturally self-centered. Men cannot be taught out of this self-centeredness, or given a form of regimentation that will cause such disappear. It is true that there are some who will lay down their lives for a *“good man”* (Rom 5:7). A thoughtful man may even build a synagogue for another people, such as the man in Luke 7:5. However, that posture of life cannot be consistently maintained outside of Christ Jesus. In other words, men may occasionally do things in the interest of other members of Adam’s race. But here we are dealing particularly with labor and works that have to do with God, not man. The world is His. The field is His. The seed sown is His. The harvest is His. All valid labors are performed within the perceived area belonging to God Almighty. In fact, the laborers themselves are His. Once this is discerned, the reason for living, and moving, and having our being is significantly altered. No longer do we live *“unto”* ourselves (2 Cor 5:15). No longer do we see ourselves as our own.

LOOK ON THE FIELDS

John 4:35 *“Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.”*

SAY YE NOT. Other versions read, *"Do you not say,"* ^{NKJV} *"You would say"* ^{BBE} *"Don't you have a saying,"* ^{CEB} *"You know the saying,"* ^{NLT} and *"Do you think."* ^{LIVING}

Here is a saying based upon human wisdom, observation, and experience. It has nothing whatsoever to do with revelation, but with the observation of the consistent manner of nature.

THERE ARE YET FOUR MONTHS. Other versions read, *"there are still four months, and then comes the harvest,"* ^{NKJV} *"four months more and then the harvest,"* ^{NIV} and *"the work of harvesting will not begin until the summer ends four months from now."* ^{LIVING} In other words, four months after the seed is planted, it has matured and the crop is ready to harvest. It is all based upon time, and the unwavering consistency of nature. Natural productivity is associated with duration – time.

However, Jesus will show us that this principle does not transfer over into the work of the Lord. After a very brief time, the Thessalonians may be stable, while the Corinthians and Galatians vacillate after a long time. This kind of thinking has been around for a long time – namely that conversion is associated with age. Here is the latest observation from a professing Christian group:

"The current Barna study indicates that nearly half of all Americans who accept Jesus Christ as their Savior do so before reaching the age of 13 (43%), and that two out of three born again Christians (64%) made that commitment to Christ before their 18th birthday. One out of eight born again people (13%) made their profession of faith while 18 to 21 years old. Less than one out of every four born again Christians (23%) embraced Christ after their twenty-first birthday."

This is a wholly flawed way of thinking, and ought not to be dignified by any professing believer. It simply is not true, as this text will confirm.

BEHOLD, I SAY UNTO YOU. Now, Jesus will show heaven's way of responding on this subject. As He Himself affirmed, His words are *"spirit, and they are life"* (John 6:63). Jesus does not build upon human aphorisms and trite sayings.

LIFT UP YOUR EYES AND LOOK. Other versions read, *"open your eyes and look,"* ^{NIV} *"look around you,"* ^{NRSV} *"take a look,"* ^{BBE} *"look and see,"* ^{GWN} *"wake up and look around"* ^{NLT} *"observe these plains,"* ^{WEYMOUTH} and *"scan the fields"* ^{WILLIAMS}

There are things to be seen that are not apparent. Those who wish to see must raise their sight above the ordinary and the natural. There are Divine works being accomplished all around us, and many of them, because of the domination of self-interests, are never seen or perceived.

THEY ARE WHITE ALREADY UNTO HARVEST. And what was it that they were to behold? What was to be seen was a crowd that had left Samaria, and were coming to Jesus (John 4:29-30). It was a harvest of souls, coming to Jesus. From the lower side, they were coming because of the witness of the woman to whom the disciples saw Jesus speaking. From the upper side, they were being drawn to Jesus by the Father, in order that He might give them to the Son.

What a rapid harvest had been developed! The maturity of the seed occurred suddenly. This fulfilled a word spoken by Isaiah that characterized the time of Christ. *"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt"* (Amos 9:13). The sowing of new crops will take place before the harvest of the preceding one is complete. Those treading out the grapes, creating new wine, will go to work, continuing to tread them right up to the time new seeds are sown. Sweet wine will be all around that cannot be traced to a specific planting.

This is the manner of the Kingdom of God. It is noted for sudden and exponential

grown. *"Three thousand"* suddenly reaped on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), then five thousand (Acts 4:4), then *"multitudes both of men and women"* (Acts 5:14), then the disciples were *"multiplied"* (Acts 6:1,7). Then Philip goes down to the city of Samaria, and the whole city believed (Acts 8:5-8,14). What was happening? The promise of Isaiah was being fulfilled! The right seed was sown, and God blessed and multiplied it. In fact, with great specificity it is written, *"But the word of God grew and multiplied"* (Acts 12:24). The same thing happened in Lydda and Saron (Acts 9:35), and in Ephesus (Eph 19:18-19).

Jesus taught His disciples to pray concerning the *"plenteous harvest"* to the *"Lord of the harvest"* (Matt 9:37-38). All of this postulates the sowing of the proper seed (Lk 8:11) which is the most potent seed there is.

ONE SOWS, ANOTHER REAPS

³⁶ And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. ³⁷ And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth."

HE THAT REAPETH. Those who labor in the fields of the Lord do not do so for nothing. The reaper *"receiveth wages."* Other versions read, *"is receiving wages,"* NASB *"draws his wages,"* NKJV *"is already receiving wages,"* NRSV *"will be paid good wages,"* LIVING and *"Already the reaper is getting his wages."* AMPLIFIED

These wages are received while the reaping is taking place. He is not reaping all of them, but is reaping some of them. He is also reaping with joy, for the reaper *"shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"* (Psa 126:6). Even though they may have sown *"in tears,"* they *"reap in joy"* (Psa 126:5). Those who make investments in the Kingdom of God realize many benefits during their labors.

HE THAT GATHERS FRUIT UNTO ETERNAL LIFE. Other versions read, *"gathers fruit for eternal life,"* NKJV *"is getting together fruit for eternal life,"* BBE *"the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life,"* NLT *"gathering a harvest that brings eternal life,"* CEV *"gathering in this grain that's ripe for eternal life,"* MESSAGE and *"for he is gathering fruit (crop) unto life eternal."* AMPLIFIED

What happens when ripened spiritual grain is reaped – when souls are saved? To be true, as James wrote, *"Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins"* (James 5:20). However, James is addressing the matter rescuing a backslider – one who has *"erred from the truth"* (James 5:19). Such a person has to be *"converted."* That, however, is not the particular perspective of Christ's words.

There also is the perspective of First Timothy 4:16: *"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee"* (1 Tim 4:16). I do not believe that is the emphasis of Christ's words. There is also the view presented by Jesus to His disciples: *"Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain"* (John 15:16). That, in my judgment, comes very close to what Jesus says in our text. Yet it is not as specific as the words *"unto eternal life,"* or *"for eternal life,"* or *"brings eternal life."*

The point here is that the objective realized in conversion is coming to know God and Jesus Christ (John 17:3). It is coming into fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), and with God Himself (1 John 1:3). It is knowing God in a discerning way (1 John 5:20), and becoming acquainted with Him (Job 22:21). It is being integrated with the Foundation (1

Cor 3:10).

The objective of salvation is not simply to address how a person lives, although that is surely involved. It is not to improve things in this world, or to resolve the social and domestic problems in humanity. The aim is to experience *"eternal life" now* (1 John 5:13), and inherit it in the world to come (Mk 10:30). Let us be clear about this, **professing "Christians" that are living in experiential detachment from God are a living contradiction of salvation.** This is precisely why it is shameful for anyone in the church to be ignorant of God (1 Cor 15:34). Eternal life is knowing God and His Son Jesus Christ – being familiar with them (John 17:3). It is to have a life that does not wane, diminish, or fade away. This is the kind of life that requires the ongoing ministry of, and fellowship with, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 5:20). **This is why souls are reaped!**

THE SOWER AND THE REAPER REJOICE TOGETHER. Other versions read, *"are glad together,"* ^{NIV} *"celebrate together,"* ^{CEB} *"are happy together,"* ^{GWN} *"What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike!"* ^{NLT} Thus John the Baptist who prepared the way, rejoiced with Him who is the Way. He himself said, *"He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom: but the friend of the Bridegroom, which standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled"* (John 3:29). **In the Kingdom of God there is no competition among real laborers.** Whether they plant, water, or reap (1 Cor 3:7-9), they all rejoice together. The one who plants the seed rejoices if a different person does the reaping. The one who converts the sinner rejoices with the one who stabilizes that person. This is the manner of the Kingdom. It reflects the fact that a certain Divine governing is made known in both sowing and reaping. From heaven, the seed is sown as directed – as in the calling of Saul and Barnabas in Antioch of Syria (Acts 13:2), the call of Paul and company into Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10), the lingering of Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:9-11), and Paul testifying in Rome (Acts 23:11). Jesus governs a harmonious government.

ONE SOWETH, AND ANOTHER REAPETH. There are several sowers in this perspective. Moses did some sowing in foretelling the coming of the true Prophet (Deut 18:15,18). The Prophets foretold the coming Messiah, and what He would do (Acts 3:24). John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah (Mark 1:3). The Samaritan woman had done some sowing in Samaria (John 4:29). Jesus Himself, as the Master Sower was preparing a harvest that would be reaped by the Apostles (Acts 2:37-41). Ordinarily the one who sows is distinct from the one who reaps, although there have been exceptions.

ENTERING INTO THE LABORS OF ANOTHER

"³⁸ I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors."

At the time reflected in this text, Jesus had not yet sent out His disciples. He first sent them out after the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead (Lk 9:54-9:1). Later He sent out *"the seventy"* He had appointed (Lk 10:1-12). However, at this time none of them had been sent out. In my judgment, this is a backward view that recalled what was done years before the writing of this Gospel, which is generally agreed to have been around 90 A.D. If this is viewed as contemporary at that time, then Jesus was *"calling those things which be not as though they were"* (Rom 4:17).

I SENT YOU TO REAP. When He first sent out the disciples, technically it was not to reap, but *"to preach the Kingdom of God, and to heal the sick"* (Lk 9:2). However, after that, when He sent out the seventy He said, *"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers*

*are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that **He** would send forth laborers into **His harvest***" (Luke 10:2). Note, at that point, He did not tell them to reap, but to pray the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers into HIS harvest. I will press this matter no further, for I am sure more is involved in our Lord's words than are evident.

WHERE ON YE BESTOWED NO LABOR. When first sent out, the disciples went into areas where they had personally bestowed no labor. They had made no preliminary investment in the people.

OTHER MEN LABORED. *"All the prophets from Samuel"* had testified to the people through the Scriptures (Acts 3:24). *"All the prophets"* gave witness to Jesus (Acts 10:43). *"The law and the prophets"* were read every Sabbath in the synagogues (Acts 13:15).

This condition introduced certain Divinely appointed requirements. There must be a holy continuity in the work. Only a sound foundation will be honored, and that is the context of these labors. Solemnly Paul writes, *"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and **another buildeth thereon**. But let every man **take heed how he buildeth thereupon**"* (1 Cor 3:10). When those laboring for the Lord attempt to minister to those who have been really converted, they must be sure they are adding to that work, and not creating a new one. If the people are positioned on the One Foundation, Jesus Christ, and the person attempts to place *"wood, hay, and stubble"* on that foundation, assaying to integrate unconverted people with converted people, he has set himself against God, who is pledged to destroy him. The true status of such people will be made known on the day of judgment, when all *"fruit"* or *"works"* will pass through the fire of Divine scrutiny and judgment (1 Cor 3:11-17).

Because of the abundance of revelations that had been given to him, Paul preferred not to build on another man's foundation. He knew the objectives that God intended for the body of Christ, and did not want to boast in what another man did (2 Cor 10:15-18). This was not prideful, nor was it a reluctance to deal with heretical teaching. Paul did not hesitate to correct erroneous thinking caused by others in Corinth (1 Cor 15:12), Galatia (Gal 1:6), and threats to Colossae (Col 2:8). In fact, he was so intent in stabilizing the people of God that he waited to go into spiritually virgin territory until fledgling churches were grounded in the faith: *"Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labors; but having hope, **when your faith is increased**, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, **to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you**, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand"* (2 Cor 10:15-16). It is a necessary, but tedious, work to undo the effects of erroneous teaching. The person who has been given something to see prefers to build up the saints.

YE ARE ENTERED INTO THEIR LABORS. The valid labors of any person positioned by God in the body of Christ will fully integrate with the work of other *"sent"* laborers – those who *"water"* and *"reap"* (1 Cor 3:7-8). Those who plant, water, and reap are referred to as *"ministers,"* whom *"the Lord gave to every man"* (1 Cor 3:5-8). When the work is continued it is by another person who *"builds thereon"* (1 Cor 3:10). When Apollos came to Achai, he *"helped them much which had believed through grace"* (Acts 18:27). He successfully entered into another man's labors which had the same objective as his own.

It is unfortunate that faithful ministers cannot always enter into other men's labors. More often than is desirable, many laborers must debunk what the people have been taught. They must establish a fresh perspective that reflects the mind of the Lord, and point the people in a new direction that leads to the world to come. The time that must be spent

exposing men like Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim 2:17), Phygellus and Hermogenes (2 Tim 1:15), Alexander the coppersmith (2 Tim 4:14), and Diotrephes (3 John 1:9), complicates the spiritual growth of those who were subjected to them. For many the unlearning process is very difficult. It is far better to pray for the Lord to send laborers into His harvest, and to be good and faithful workers.