

MISSIONARY PAGE

Sent to Reap

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"I sent you to reap" (John 4:38).

Consider, as a starting point, who it is who speaks thus. It is the Lord of Harvest! He is the commanding Lord. Here, as elsewhere, Christ speaks with a quiet air of authority which makes its profound impression on all men of humble and honest mind. "I say unto you, Lift up your eyes!" **"I sent you to reap!"** As one listens to those accents of penetrating majesty, he is reminded of what happened on another occasion when **"the people were astonished at his doctrines, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes."**

He is also the compassionate Lord. There is tenderness and sensitiveness in His choice of figure and analogy. He likens humanity in its need of God to a crop of valuable grain waving yonder across the fields.

And this Christ of Harvest is our commissioning Lord.

"I sent you to reap!" Obligation has been laid upon us. We Christians are not a pack of drifters and dreamers, with feet that are as idle as our brains. Not if we are the real article! Upon the contrary, we are under bonds to the crucified, risen Son of God and to our millions of human fellows, to bring to them the quickening, healing, redemptive message of God's grace and peace. I doubt if anything really great is ever accomplished in this life without a sense of mission. We must be claimed and captured by some high call of duty, of need, of God, or else life for us will be frittered away in a meaningless maze of trifles.

And I am sure we should add that this Christ of Harvest is a convincing Lord. By this I mean that, if I may borrow the trite old phrase, He practices what He preaches. He had just demonstrated to these disciples what He meant by thrusting in the sickle, even in some unlikely corner of the field, and gathering a sheaf unto the eternal harvest. He talked to them about being sent, but He also assured them that He too was acting under a compelling sense of mission. Later, in His matchless prayer He said, **"As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world"** (John 17:18).

Watch His feet if you want to see the movements of a man under commission. They were the feet of one who said, **"I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work"** (John 9:4). They were the feet of One of whom it was said, **"He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil"** (Acts 10:38). They were feet that never found a road too rough or too long for them to walk, feet that never found a valley of human need too deep for them to tread, feet that never found a mountain of gracious ministry too high or rugged for them to climb, feet that Peter must have had in mind when he said that Christ left us **"an example that ye should follow in his steps"** (1 Peter 2:21).

Yes, by His flawless example, not less than by the authority of His word, He is the commanding, compassionate, commissioning, convincing Lord of Harvest. Bishop Brenton Badley of India has found it so, for he exclaims:

"Christ, if ever my footsteps should falter,

And I be prepared for retreat,
If desert or thorn cause lamenting,
Lord, show me Thy feet,
Thy bleeding feet, Thy nail-scarred feet,
My Jesus, show me Thy feet."

II

Let us note, in the second place, that the Lord of Harvest bids us to look upon the harvest. **"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."**

There is a sense in which we are responsible for what we see. Granted that it requires the touch of the Spirit of God to give any of us the piercing vision of life's realities and values, it is nevertheless true that we see that for which we are intently and honestly looking. Looking at one of Turner's paintings of a sunset, a visitor turned to the artist and said, "I've never seen a sunset like that." "No," replied Turner, "but don't you wish you could?" The inference is unmistakable: you have to have a practiced eye and one that is alert to the finer tones and tracteries of beauty which mark a setting sun.

Men see what they are looking for. In that sense there is what might be called the morality of vision. This is quite as true of the way we study men as it is of our view of a sunset or a waterfall. Before the United Cigar Stores will open on a new corner they make a survey which tells them how many people pass that corner every day. Interested in people? Of course they are, but their interest is strictly limited to the volume of smoke they can persuade men and women to blow through their lungs and out through their nostrils. Vision? Of course they have vision, but it sees a processed weed on the one hand and a ringing cash register on the other.

Contrast that, if you will, with what William and Catherine Booth saw as they looked at the drifting, wretched masses of London's East End in the last century. Out of that vision came the Salvation Army, not to make merchandise out of the bodies of men, but to salvage their bodies and save their souls to the whiteness and the usefulness of a new life in God. Commander Evangeline Booth has told how her father was one day cross-questioned by King Edward VII. At the close of the conversation the old General said, "Your Majesty, some men's passion is art, some men's passion is fame, some men's passion is gold, but my passion is souls!"

That is the way to look at men, Jesus would say. Christians must make themselves specialists in that kind of vision. "Look, I tell you! Raise your eyes and see the fields." Such is the vivid translation which Goodspeed gives to our Master's words.

Consider, next, the Law of Harvest which is laid down by the Lord of the Harvest. Jesus does not say, **"I sent you to reap,"** without laying open a certain principle of life and a service on which we may rely with confidence.

It is the law of sowing and reaping. We must not overlook the necessity of seed-sowing, which must always precede harvest. In the verse which goes before the text He plainly states, **"One soweth and another reapeth."** In the completed sentence from which the text is lifted He declares, **"I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their**

labours."

Not long ago, over in England, a Christian layman, who was presiding at a missionary meeting, astonished his friends by announcing that he was the founder of a flourishing Christian community in India. Since he had never been outside of England, it was necessary to do a bit of explaining, which he did. He said that when he was a little fellow of five he had a penny that he wanted to give for missions but he strongly objected to placing it in a certain brown box which was used for such purposes in the church he attended. What proof did he have that money placed in that container on the wall ever reached the foreign field? The pastor heard of the lad's prejudice against the box. He knew the family well; he also knew a missionary in India. He therefore arranged to sell the boy a copy of the New Testament for a penny and instructed him how he could mail the Testament directly to the missionary in India. On the flyleaf was written a simple inscription, giving the name of the boy and authorizing the missionary to pass the Testament on to someone who might need it. Many weeks later, the Testament having arrived safely, the missionary found a native at his door who had walked miles through the jungle to procure a copy of the New Testament. The boy's gift was handed to the stranger and, after a short visit, the man disappeared in the jungle whence he had come.

Twenty years went by. One day another missionary began preaching in a village where, as he supposed, the gospel had never been proclaimed. But as he preached he discovered an altogether unexpected interest and excitement among many of his listeners. Finally he paused to ask if there were any there who knew about Christ. Yes, there were many. Were there any that were Christians? Yes, there was a surprising number of them. Well, what missionary had brought the gospel message to them? No missionary! How then had they heard it—and believed it? Out came the story: the native who twenty years earlier had received a New Testament from a missionary, as a gift from a little boy in England, had returned to the village, studied the Scriptures, been converted, given his testimony to others, and had led a whole company of them to a knowledge of Christ as their Saviour.

As that missionary stood there, taking in the whole lovely story, he might well have reminded himself of the Master's words, **"I sent you to reap whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men (yes, even little boys) laboured, and ye are entered into their labours."**

It is the law of sowing and reaping. The **"seed is the word,"** says Christ, and **"the field is the world."** Sow that seed anywhere, flinging it out with a prayer and watering it with a tear, and somebody will most assuredly reap a harvest.

But here is the rub. It is true today, as it was in Jesus' day—the **"laborers are few."** We drafted an army and navy of twelve million men to kill and destroy, and destroy and kill. Can you imagine what the Christian Church could do with a comparable force of Christlike men, going out to teach and preach and persuade in the name of the redeeming Lord and Master? According to the **New York Times**, World War II cost \$190 million a day for five years. Just one day of the war would pay for six years of continuous missionary work!

I ask myself, and I ask you, my fellow Christians—
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