

Jesus and the Harvest

1. Introduction

- After I finished school I did a GAP year working in England
- While I was there I played rugby with the North Dorset rugby club
- One of the teams we used to play against was Dorchester Gladiators
- A couple of years after I left England the Dorchester Gladiators went on a rugby tour to Romania
- The team are bunch of 40-50 year old rugby players who comprise the clubs 3rd XV and who tour Europe once a year, as much for the social enjoyment as for the rugby
- However due to a translation error in the planning ... the aging team from Dorchester ended up playing the premier professional rugby club in Romania!
- The match ended up being played in the national stadium, was screened on national television and played in front of hundreds of spectators
- Nigel Jones a relatively youthful 49-year-old said,
 - *We started to get worried when our host asked us if we wanted to do a training session the night before. This is not exactly our style. So we did a pre-match build up in the bar and didn't get to bed until 4am. When the morning came, they started warming up professionally. We just sat around smoking knowing that we were in real trouble.*
- Clearly the Dorchester Gladiators had misunderstood the terms of engagement, and therefore they ended up seriously embarrassed
- For followers of Jesus it's all too easy to misunderstand the times we're living in
- And Matthew Ch 8-10 has made it very clear to us that the times we are in, mean there's a real sense of urgency and seriousness about living as disciples of Jesus
- Jesus is the King of God's kingdom who has come with power and authority has ushered in the kingdom of heaven

- During his first coming, he made it clear that his mission was to seek and save sinners for this eternal kingdom
- And it will at Jesus second coming that he will destroy all the brokenness and evil of this world and his new creation will begin
- And Jesus wants us to understand the times we are in
 - For until he returns, now is a time for forgiveness of sins and the summoning of sinners from across the world to be part of Jesus eternal kingdom and his heavenly banquet
- And Jesus is beginning to show what it means for his disciples to live in these times and he lays out with clarity the terms and conditions for his disciples
- The aim of what he is saying is to prevent Christians living their life without being clear on what it entails while they await the King's return
- As Jesus makes it clear how to understand the times we live in, he says it's
 - A time for compassion
 - A time for prayer
 - A time for harvest

PRAY

2. A time for compassion

- *v35-36 - Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*
- This a summary of all that Jesus ministry
 - Everywhere he goes he teaches and preaches about the KOH
 - He also heals the sick, lame, blind, mute, leper, even raises the dead

- As he does this ... as he goes throughout the land engaging with the people of Israel ... and what does he see?
 - He sees people who are lost – people who are like a sheep without a shepherd
- What's Jesus referring to here?
- Right throughout the Bible, the sheep image is a recurring metaphor for God's people ... and the shepherds were Israel's leaders > the priests and kings
- And time again throughout the OT ... God rebuked Israel's leaders for being bad shepherds
 - See this in passages like *Jeremiah 23:1-2*¹
- God also promised that he would not just get rid of the bad shepherds ... but that he himself would become their shepherd
 - See this in passages like *Ezekiel 34:10-12*²
- And things were no different in Jesus' time
- The Pharisees, Chief priests and Teachers of the Law
 - Failed to teach the word of God faithfully
 - Failed to care for God's people
 - Failed to live lives that matched the faith they professed
- Jesus looked out on the vast crowds under the failed leadership of first century Israel ...
 - and he sees them suffering under the reality of God's judgement and wrath ...
 - and he had compassion on them

¹ *Jeremiah 23:1-2* "Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. ² Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,"

² *Ezekiel 34:10-12* ¹⁰ This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them. ¹¹ "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness

- for the leaders of Israel are not leading the sheep as they ought

- The word 'compassion' in original language means 'innards' or 'bowls'
 - It's the sense of how we feel something deep in our stomach
 - In other words ... this is 'gut-wrenching compassion'
- Over and over Jesus showed gut-wrenching compassion for the lost people of Israel
 - As we have seen with ... the leper, the Centurion, Peter's mother in law, synagogue ruler, the bleeding woman, blind men, the demon-possessed mute
 - And most importantly in calling and forgiving sinners

- **Illustration – Lost kid**
- It's a bit like the way you or I would react we see a kid lost in the shopping centre
 - Standing there crying
 - Looking around ... can't see his mum or dad
 - Look of fear on his face
- How do you feel?
 - You feel compassion right?
- What do you do?
 - You stop and help them
 - You comfort them and help them find their parents
 - Because your heart is moved by their situation

- Jesus is moved with compassion because he knows the situation of the crowds
 - They're lost
 - They're facing eternal destruction
 - They're unable to save themselves
- But unlike the bad shepherds of Israel ... Jesus is the Good Shepherd

- This is how describes himself in John 10:11
- And because he is the Good Shepherd ... he lays down his life for his sheep
- Jesus is willing and able to save the lost and save sinners because he's willing to go to the cross and lay down his life for his sheep

- **Application**

- If this is Jesus attitude to the lost of this world ... it shows how true disciples of Jesus ought to respond to those who are living in this fallen broken world we are in
 - Now as then ... is the time for forgiveness of sins
 - Now is the time for compassion
 - Now is the time for calling sinners to repent and turn back to the king of kings
- Christians can look at the world around them and respond in one of three ways to this reality
- One way to respond is to stand in judgment on the lost and wag their finger in self-righteous moralism
 - See this with some old-school Bible thumping preachers ... or Christians who get out and protest at the Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras
 - It's judgmental and self-righteous
- Second way to respond is to find it all too hard to engage the lost and retreat into their shells and Christians ghettos and do nothing
- Or ... a third way ... is to show compassion to the lost who are like a sheep without a shepherd
- Because if we understand the times we live in ... and the future everyone is facing without Jesus ... then we'll see that the right way to respond to these times
 - Is not with high-handed moralism of the Pharisees
 - But with gut-wrenching compassion of the Lord

- I loved the illustration Peter Lin used at the Big Day Out of the Titanic and the terrible complacency and complete lack of urgency of the Captain and senior staff who knew the ship had been hit by an iceberg and was certain to sink ... but did very little to warn people about it
- The challenge for us is not be like the people on the Titanic and ignoring the reality the times we live in and judgment that is racing towards all of us ... and not be filled with gut-wrenching compassion for those who are lost and without a shepherd
- When you see people around you who are in that situation ... how can we not also be filled with compassion?

3. A time for prayer

- How do you show compassion? It starts with prayer
- As Jesus looks out on the lost sheep of Israel ... he wants his disciples to share his compassion for them as well and partner with him his mission
 - He wants them to see what a tragedy it is for there to be so many lost sheep without out a shepherd ... so his disciples will also have gut-wrenching compassion on the people of Israel
- And so Jesus says to his disciples ...
 - *"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*
- In the same way that wheat or grapes or olives are harvested and brought into a farmers storehouse ...
 - Jesus is seeing vast harvest of people who are ready to be brought into the kingdom of heaven as they put their trust in and follow him – the king of God's kingdom
- But notice ... that when Jesus sees this vast harvest of people ... he doesn't say "Go and ..."

- "Build theological colleges"
- "Start up an apprenticeship training scheme"
- "Start a Christian TV channel"
 - ... although each of those things are useful
- He says ... pray!
 - For it's the Lord's harvest ... it's his work ... it's his mission
 - And therefore ... he's the one we need to petition to bring in the harvest and save people into his eternal kingdom
- What does he want us to pray for?
 - Revival?
 - New church plants?
 - New ministries?
- No ... Christians are to pray to the Lord to raise up more workers for the harvest

- Now the worker that Jesus is alluding to is a manual worker
 - It's the image of a man
 - stripped down to his waist
 - sweat dripping off his body; as
 - he engages in tough manual labour
 - Not talking about Aussie council worker leaning on a shovel while
 - Talking about workers willing to get in and do their part in the harvest

- Notice ... the problem is not with the harvest ... what's needed is more labourers
 - There's no shortage of harvest ... Jesus says "the harvest is plentiful"
 - It's harvesters who are needed

- **Illustration – Apple harvest**
- Two years ago we visited Liana's brother in Tasmania
 - Tassie is one of the major apple producing states in the country

- More than 65% of our exported apples come from Tasmania
- When we were down visiting Pete ... he took us to a friend's farm that had an apple orchard
 - The trees were brimming with apples
 - Some of the Golden Delicious were huge! > as big as my fist!
 - So many apples some of the branches were touching the ground
- The harvest was plentiful ... but what was needed ... was workers for the harvest

- Jesus says ... when he looks out on the world ... he sees people who are lost and without a shepherd ... and it is a huge harvest!
- And what is needed is workers for the harvest
 - For the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few

- **Application**
- It's really helpful what Jesus says here
- Because as you look at our culture ...
- And you see the opposition to the gospel in the media, in schools, amongst your friends ...
- It's easy to get discouraged and be overwhelmed by just how vast and hard the harvest is
 - 1000's of people in our suburb
 - 4 million in people in our city
 - And it can be so daunting if we think that it's our job to send out enough workers into the harvest ...
 - Because if you do ... it will cause you to crawl up in the corner in the foetal position and become a blubbering mess
- But Jesus makes clear here is ...
 - That it's the **Lord's** harvest
 - And that it's the **Lord** who sends out workers into the harvest ...
 - Therefore, there's no need to

- feel helpless
 - and wring our hands of it all
 - and think it is impossible
 - and there's nothing we can do
 - and fall into passive inactivity
-
- Because what Jesus is calling you and I to do is to be **praying** to the Lord of the harvest
 - It's **his** harvest ... and **he** will raise up workers for it
 - And so friends ... when you're a disciple who has gut-wrenching compassion and you understand the times we're living in ... then you'll realise it requires earnest, urgent and sustained prayer
 - This prayer ought to be high on your prayer list
 - This is the prayer you ought to pray when you see the lost sheep of this city who are without a shepherd
 - Praying that God would raise up the right people who have gut-wrenching compassion for the lost and can go and work in the harvest field of the Lord
 - And friends ... when we pray God answers those prayers
 - I was thinking about this during the week
 - The amount of times we have prayed for workers for the harvest here at C@P and God has raised up people to go into the harvest here at C@P
 - One of our strategies here at C@P is to have all the scripture classes here at PSPS taught by C@P members
 - We've been praying God would raise up new scripture teachers
 - This year Jennie and Rebecca started teaching SRE
 - We've been praying to start a youth group here at C@P for about 4 years
 - 18mths ago we were praying God would raise up the people to lead that youth group
 - Out of the blue, Hannah said she was keen

- We were praying for a student minister to help lead youth with Hannah
 - We had one person apply - Dan
 - If I'd interviewed 20 student ministers I don't think we could have got a better man for job
- God raises up workers for the harvest

- **Great Awakening, New York 1857**
- In 1857 God raised up a praying businessman, Jeremiah Lanphier
- On September 23, 1857 he began a lunch-time prayer meeting on Fulton Street in the Financial District of Manhattan
- After widely advertising the prayer meeting ... he opened the doors and began to pray ... and for the first 30 mins no one came
- But by the time the hour was over, 5 other men had joined him
- The next time there were 20 > then 40 > and then 100
- Within three months there were over 100 meetings happening in the city with more than 50,000 New Yorkers meeting daily to pray
- Over the course of the next 18 months ... it is estimated that 1 million people became followers of Jesus
- That's out of a national population of 35 million, including 10,000 weekly conversions in New York City
- The harvest is plentiful!
- The Fulton St revival ... was the catalyst for sending missionaries around the world to India, China, Korea
 - There are now 50,000 churches in Korea with over 13 millions Christians
 - Korea used to be unreached country for Christ ... and God answered the prayers of those New Yorkers ... and what did we see?
 - The harvest is plentiful!
 - Now Korea sends the most number of missionaries around the world per capita

- This was not the result of a movement of great men or great women

- This was the movement of a simple lay man who was left behind by a relocated church who prayed to the Lord of the harvest and urged others to do the same

- We need more workers for the harvest here at C@P
- As you look with compassion on the lost sheep of our suburb ... will you pray that God would raise up workers for the harvest?
 - Pray for more youth leaders
 - Got this harvest of youth kids ... we need workers for the harvest
 - Pray for more kids church leaders
 - Got this harvest of kids ... we need workers for the harvest
 - Pray for more growth group leaders
 - Pray for more pastoral care leaders
 - Pray for more evangelists
- *"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

4. A time for harvest

- Now in case you haven't worked it out already ... the way God answers those prayers is by raising up people like you and me to go into the harvest
 - It's not like Christians pray ... and God raises us an army of droids who pop up out of the ground and go out and do all the work ... while we stand back watching and do nothing
- No, God raises up and sends out workers through his church
- It's the church who raises up and sends out the workers
- Because you and I can't pray for God to raise up more workers for the harvest ... and not expect to be a worker yourself
- We need to realise that as we pray ... the way God may answer that prayer is by sending **you** into the harvest as one of the workers

- **Illustration - Stu**

- You know it was this verse that convinced me to go into full-time ministry
 - When we were in London, the church we went to ran a '9:38 Conference'
 - Conference based around the verse – Matt 9:38 and was aimed at challenging men and women to become full-time gospel workers
 - That conference got me thinking about full time ministry
- I wasn't ready to do that at the time ... and so remained in the work force
 - But 6 years later ... Liana and I were part of another church plant at Beverly Hills
 - I was talking with our pastor after a meeting one night and he was feeling overwhelmed at just how much ministry there was for him to do
 - In other words ... the harvest is plentiful ... but it needed more workers
- And Matt 9:38 hit me like a bullet between the eyes
 - The harvest is plentiful ... and if I quit in my job and went into full-time ministry ... then I could help Pete with the harvest
 - I went home, told Liana (who just about jumped through the roof) and resigned my job and went to Bible college
- But here's the thing ...
 - People had been praying for me about going into full time ministry
 - I had also praying about it too
- God answered those prayers by sending me ... another worker into the harvest

- For some of you, full-time ministry might be what God is calling you to
- But the harvest needs all sorts of workers
- Just like a harvest requires lots of different workers like pickers, gatherers, drivers, and overseers
- So the harvest that Jesus is talking about needs all sorts of workers
- So he's not just talking about full-time Christian workers
 - Talking about ordinary Christians willing to roll up the sleeves and get involved in the work of the gospel

- Full-time workers / part time workers / lay workers / retired workers
- People who can be
 - Youth workers
 - Growth Group workers
 - Scripture workers
 - Kids Church leaders
 - Evangelism workers
 - Pastoral care workers
 - Chaplaincy workers
 - Admin workers
- All types of workers are required for the harvest

- For many of you that will be
 - Intentionally remaining in your work place ... seeing work place primarily as a harvest field
 - For others, it will be taking early retirement in order to free you up to do more work in the harvest > like Col has done recently
 - For others it will be intentionally working part-time so you are available to do harvest work
 - For others it will be making a conscience decision not to go back into the work force after you have children so you can be a worker in the harvest of amongst kinder and school families or women at church
 - For some of you it will be going into full time ordained ministry or mission work
- But the question you need to ask is this ...
 - Am I open to God sending me as a worker into the harvest in whatever capacity it may be
 - For the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few

5. Conclusion

- Do you understand the times we are in
 - Do you understand that the king of God's kingdom has arrived and
 - that he is enthroned and that he is the exalted Lord of all
- One day he will come again to usher in his new creation and destroy all evil
- The time has come therefore, for a labour force which understands the times and has a clearheaded conviction and gut-wrenching compassion ready to be sent out by God
- As we give ourselves to pray ... God himself will do the work of sending workers out into the harvest field
- Our job is to engage in earnest urgent prayer for such men and women
 - All labouring for the Lord in whatever situation of life God has placed them
 - For *"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

PRAY