

Becoming Ready Harvesters

By Bill Scheidler

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest hindrances to receiving the harvest today is the spirit and attitude of the believers themselves. Just as in the Early Church there was a struggle for those who had been in the way for a long time (the Jews) to receive the new harvest that God was bringing in (the Gentiles), the church-going people of today can resist the harvest by their very attitude.

Jesus found the same to be true with His disciples. Jesus came preaching a kingdom message that was inclusive of all. It did not matter what their background was or what their customs were, Jesus' gospel was for everyone.

Some wonder why Jesus, who was such an open and powerful ministry, did not have more followers at the end of His earthly ministry. Was it because there was something wrong with His message? Was it because Jesus' message was so hard that it repelled the masses? Was there something wrong with Jesus' demonstration of love? No! A thousand times, NO!

The problem was not with Jesus. The crowds loved Jesus. Jesus was like a human magnet to the hurting, wounded and bruised. Jesus' attitude of openness was inclusive and multitudes were drawn to Him.

The problem was not with Jesus. The problem was with the disciples. The attitude of the disciples effectively neutralized the love and compassion of Jesus. The love of Jesus drew people, but the negative, divisive, bigoted, narrow, and exclusive spirit of the disciples ran those same people off.

We are living in a day when God is sending forth messengers to preach the true Gospel of the Kingdom which is beckoning men to come. The harvest is getting very ripe and it is time for the Church to arise and reap. But is the Church a ready harvesting instrument? Is the Church going to be able to rise to the occasion? Or will we be like the disciples who neutralized what Jesus was trying to do?

THE DISCIPLES ATTITUDE HINDERED THE HARVEST

1. Matthew 14:13-16 (See also Mark 6:36 and Luke 9:12)

*When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. 14 And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick. 15 When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. **Send the multitudes away**, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food." 16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. **You give them something to eat.**"*

The people who had been following Jesus and listening to His messages were hungry and in need. What was the response of the disciples? They told Jesus to “send them away.” The disciples were a referral service. They didn’t want to deal with people with real problems; they only wanted to work with the people who were whole. Jesus said to the disciples, “You give them something to eat.”

2. Matthew 15:21-28

Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." 13 But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." 24 But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" 26 But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." 27 And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Jesus was testing the faith of a Gentile woman who was pleading with Him to help her demon-possessed daughter. In reality, the attitude of the disciples was being tested. Rather than taking up this woman’s cause, the disciples revealed the prejudice in their own hearts and told Jesus again to “send her away,” or as the Knox translation says, “Rid us of her!” The disciples are not interested in dealing with the demon possessed. They weren’t interested in people who were non-Jews.

3. Matthew 17:14-21 (See also Mark 9)

*And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. 16 So I brought him to **Your disciples, but they could not cure him.**" 17 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me." 18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" 20 So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. 21 However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."*

The disciples were trying to cast a demon out of a boy. Their ministry was at stake here. When they failed miserably, Jesus saved the day and ministered to the boy. The disciples asked Jesus why they could not cast out the devil. Jesus let them know that to minister in this way requires a life of prayer and fasting. Were the disciples interested enough in the lost and demonized of this world to give up

a meal or two for them? Not at this time. The harvest will not be truly touched with the arm of the flesh. It must take the power of the Spirit working through the surrendered life. It will not be touched with a spirit of complacency, but with hearts of passion for the lost.

4. Mark 10:13-16 (See also Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 9:37-42; 18:15-17)

*Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but **the disciples rebuked those who brought them.** 14 But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 15 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." 16 And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.*

The disciples failed another test. Here they seem to have a low regard for small children. They seemed to think that bringing adults to the Lord is more important than children. Perhaps the reason for this is that they were interested in sitting on thrones and children are not of the voting age necessary to put them on these thrones. They were not interested in ministering to people who could not give them a lot in return.

5. Mark 10:35-45 (See also Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 9:33-34; Luke 9:46-48)

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." 36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 37 They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory"... 41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. 42 But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The disciples were arguing about their favorite subject, who would be greatest and who would get the chief seats. They were not concerned about serving; they were only interested in ruling. They were not interested in humble service, they wanted to sit and be served. As long as they had this attitude, they would not be able to minister to the ones that God would send to them.

6. Mark 14:3-9 (See also Matthew 26:6-13)

*And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head. 4 But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? 5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." **And they criticized her sharply.** 6 But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do*

you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. 7 For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. 8 She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. 9 Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”

The disciples got real nervous when a woman who was known to be a harlot interrupted their meeting and made a huge scene in their nice little gathering. People do not always respond to the Lord in predictable ways. They are not used to our forms and our “sacred cows”. The disciples cared more about their comfort and forms than they did about the soul of this poor woman.

7. Luke 9:49-56

*Now John answered and said, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, **and we forbade him because he does not follow with us.**” 50 But Jesus said to him, “Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is on our side.” 51 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, 52 and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. 54 And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, **do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?**” 55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. 56 For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” And they went to another village.*

The disciples believed that they were the only show in town. They were the only true church and everything had to come to and through them. If others were trying to reach people, the disciples must work to stop them. They had a sectarian spirit that kept them from cooperating with other reapers for the sake of the harvest. The disciples had the attitude that “if they are not for us, they are against us.” Jesus reversed this and said, “If they are not against us, they are for us.” One church or one group of churches will never reap the harvest. We need each other, desperately.

8. Luke 19:1-7

*Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. 2 Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. 3 And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” 6 So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. 7 **But when they saw it, they all complained,** saying, “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.”*

Jesus was criticized for associating with sinners. In fact, over and over again this charge was leveled against him (Luke 7:36). I'm sure that Jesus would say, "How can you reach sinners if you never interact with them?" So often our teaching on being separate from the world system has helped us to isolate ourselves from the people of the world. Jesus was a friend of sinners. Not a friend of their sin, but He was a person that was always relatable to them and approachable by them.

9. John 4:9 and 27

9 Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans...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?"

The disciples demonstrated prejudice and a spirit of favoritism. They didn't like the Samaritans and they were not afraid to say so. In fact, they were quite shocked that Jesus did not share their opinions in this matter. The disciples thought that their Gospel was for one race of people. Prejudice is an enemy of the harvest.

10. John 12:1-8

*Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. 2 There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. 3 Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. 4 But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, 5 "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" 6 This he said, **not that he cared for the poor**, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. 7 But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. 8 For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."*

The disciples were again shocked at the unusual behavior of a woman who had been touched by the ministry of Jesus. They seemed to be more concerned about money than about people. They valued possessions more than the harvest. They somehow forgot that people are the most important thing in the world. They are the only things in the world that are eternal and as such will spend eternity in heaven or hell based on their relationship to Jesus.

Not Ready Harvesters

These were the followers of Jesus. These were those who were going to be commissioned to build the church and preach the Gospel to the world. But they were not ready harvesters. Their attitudes kept the harvest away.

When you read the Book of Acts, it is clear that God did a real work in each one of the lives of the disciples of Jesus. In the Book of Acts, these men were willing to lay down their resources and their very lives for the harvest.

God wants to do the same thing in the Church today. He wants to change our hearts. He wants to make us into ready harvesters. He wants to impart to us the Spirit of Jesus that is filled with love and compassion for the lost.

ATTITUDES WE ARE TO CULTIVATE TO REAP A HARVEST

1. Love the sinner the way God does (John 3:16).

God does not expect us to love sin, but, at the same time, He wants us to love the sinner. When we love the sinner, it does not mean that we condone their sin. Loving the sinner does not mean that we participate with them in their sin. However, if we are going to win the lost we must love the lost as Jesus loves the lost.

2. Adjust priorities putting people ahead of possessions.

As Christians, we must denounce the spirit of materialism and the god of money. We must realize that all of the resources that God has given to us are not given to us for our pleasure alone. We must not feel that keeping our nice things nice is our only priority in life. We must be willing to get our new carpet dirty with the muddy shoes of the unsaved.

3. Ask God for His heart of compassion.

We are not just interested in a feeling of pity. We want God to give us a heart of compassion that will motivate us to get personally involved in meeting the needs of others. We can't just "send them away." We have got to allow ourselves to be equipped to meet the needs of those that God sends to us (James 1:27; I John 3:17).

4. Maintain a servant spirit.

No matter how long we have been Christians, we must never outgrow our servant spirit. We must continue to seek for ways to serve, not ways to be served. We must not be seeking to rule or to be recognized, but we should only be thinking of how to get the job done.

5. Become a feeder of new converts.

Every Christian should be able to disciple a new convert. The elders and church leaders can only minister to so many. Don't always be sending people away to be fed. You feed them. Learn how to do it. Put some time and effort into it.

6. Deal with your personal prejudice and favoritism.

In Christ there is neither male nor female, slave or free, Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, black, red, yellow or white. All are precious in His sight! James tells us that we cannot be a people of faith giving glory to God when there is prejudice in our midst.

7. Be patient with new converts.

It takes a while for them to learn the language, to learn our forms, for the hemlines to go down, for all the changes to take place. Accept them as they are and let the Holy Spirit deal with them. Certainly we need to address sinful areas, but let's make sure we know the difference between sin and a simple violation of our traditions, forms and unique Christian culture.

8. Get a vision for children and young people.

Most people who get saved do so before the age of 20. The youth of today are the church of tomorrow. Determine never to minimize the conversion of a child who has the potential of living a full life for the Lord. Children can be so moldable and are full of such potential in God.

9. Encourage all harvesting.

It doesn't matter if the harvesting is attached to your name. It doesn't matter if we do not fully agree on each and every point. The other churches in town are not against us. They are on the same side!

10. Get serious about the harvest.

Pray, fast, intercede, get radical! We can't be complacent about the harvest when we understand the destiny of those who do not know Christ.