

*Sermon by Terry Trivette*  
**John 4:27-38**  
**“Having a Heart for the Harvest”**

1. On Tuesday of this past week, three police officers in Toronto, Canada were faced with a terrifying and demanding situation. A car crash caused a vehicle fire, trapping the driver inside the burning car. One of the officers later described what happened. He said, “We heard tires screeching. We heard the bang...It was a huge fire. Flames were shooting a good six feet over the vehicle...Officer Parker shouted back to me as I was running up, ‘There’s someone in the vehicle!’...I saw the [driver’s] hand...reaching up and I heard his voice: ‘Help me. Just take my hand and get me out of here!’”

2. Fortunately, the officers were able to rescue the man from the car, and save his life. Later, after being treated for smoke inhalation, one of the other officers said this about the incident: “It was scary. You know you could be burned. But it was scarier knowing that this guy is going to die if I just stand here.”<sup>1</sup>

3. Evangelism, the work of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, is not merely a program or ministry of the church. It is not just a push to put more people in the pews. It is not simply an effort to enlarge the ranks of the Christians.

4. Evangelism is the work of rescuing people from certain death. It is putting aside all fear and hesitance, knowing that we cannot stand by and watch people die without doing something to stop it.

5. In John chapter 4, the Lord Jesus witnessed to a woman whose life had been marked by a series of bad relationships, and was no doubt the shameful subject of much gossip in her small town.

6. Once the woman received the forgiveness Christ offered to her, it was not long before her whole community was coming out to see this man who could save the vilest of sinners.

7. As the entire city came out to meet him, Jesus used the opportunity to teach his disciples about the importance of evangelism, and reaching the fields of the world with gospel.

8. There are three truths we draw from this text that teach us what it takes for us to have a proper passion and perspective on the work of witnessing. By studying our Lord’s analogy of the fields, we learn what it takes to have a heart for the harvest. First of all, we need:

**I. AN APPETITE FOR THE LORD’S WILL**

1. While Jesus had been having a life-changing conversation with the woman at the well, the disciples had gone on a food run.
2. When they returned, they did not know what had been going on, and so they said to the Lord Jesus in verse 31, "...Master, eat."
3. The Lord Jesus was less concerned with His stomach, and more concerned with the souls of those around Him. He said to His disciples in verse 32, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of."
4. While the disciples wondered if someone had given lunch to their Lord, He explained in verse 34, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."
5. A heart for evangelism begins with a craving and hunger for the will of God to be done in your life. Notice a couple of things we learn from our Lord about desiring the will of God.
6. First of all, having an appetite for the Lord's will means that we will be:

#### **A. Satisfied to follow God's will**

1. Look again at what Jesus said in verse 34. "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me..." The word "meat" comes from a Greek word that describes food in general, and it speaks of nourishment.
2. Jesus said that which nourished and satisfied His soul was doing the will of God. He was satisfied by doing God's will in this world.
3. In May of 1965, *Rolling Stones* guitarist, Keith Richards, said he woke up in the middle of the night with a guitar riff in his head, and the words, "I can't get no satisfaction." He recorded the riff and the words on a tape recorder, and then went back to sleep. Later, he and band mate, Mick Jagger, finished writing the song at a hotel in Clearwater, FL. By June, the song was released as a single, and became the band's first number one hit.<sup>ii</sup>
4. Whether you care anything for the *Rolling Stones*, and their song or not, you can surely understand how so many people relate to its message.
5. Though people today have more than any previous generation, most people are largely disappointed and dissatisfied with their lives.
6. In John 4, Jesus teaches us that there *is* true satisfaction to be found. There is a fulfillment that comes from obeying the will of God.

7. When our appetites and desires are correct, we will be satisfied by “doing the will of Him that sends us.”

8. Notice something else that will be true of us when we have an appetite for the Lord’s will. Notice not only that we will be satisfied to follow God’s will, but we will also be:

## **B. Seeking to fulfill God’s will**

1. Look again at our Lord’s words in verse 34. He said, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” Note that phrase, “finish his work.”

2. The problem with most Christians is not that they lack the desire to do the will of God; they just don’t have the dedication to do the will of God until it is completed. The problem is not in their cravings, but in their commitment.

3. I have seen Christians who initially seemed interested in obeying God, and following His will, but somewhere, they got sidetracked and distracted, and they failed to live out their lives doing what God had called them to do. They did not finish the work they were given.

4. The distance for a modern Olympic marathon originated in 1908 in London. That year, the distance was set 26 miles, 385 yards; the exact distance from Windsor Castle to the Olympic Stadium. That year, an Italian candy maker named Dorando Pietri almost won. He was the first to enter the Olympic Stadium, but he turned the wrong way. When he realized his mistake, he staggered and fell. He got turned around, but eventually had to be helped across the finish line, and was disqualified from the race.<sup>iii</sup>

5. Jesus had a hunger and a passion to not only do the will of God, but to continue doing it until it was completed. He didn’t just want to start the race. He wanted to finish it.

6. Evangelism, and the work of sharing the gospel, begins in a life that is committed to obeying the will of God indefinitely, until their task is completed.

7. What about you? How’s your appetite? The harvest needs men and women who are hungry to do the will of God!

8. There is a second truth we draw from this text. Having a heart for the harvest not only requires *an appetite for the Lord’s will*, but notice also that it requires:

## **II. AN ALERTNESS TO THE LOST WORLD**

1. In your mind you have to picture an entire village of people heading out to meet the Lord Jesus. The woman at the well had testified about meeting the Messiah, and everyone was anxious to meet Him as well.
2. As the line of lost souls rushed toward Jesus, He directed His disciples' attention toward the people, and then gave an analogy of what they were seeing.
3. He said in verse 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."
4. Though He used an agricultural picture, Jesus was talking about people, not plants. He wanted His disciples to look at the lost world around them as a field to be harvested for the kingdom.
5. There are a couple of things we need to be aware of and alert to with regard to the lost world around us. First of all, we need to be alert to:

#### **A. The reality of the harvest**

1. When you read the gospels, do you ever get the sense that Jesus was working with a slow, thick-headed group of disciples?
2. In our text, when Jesus talks about the "meat" of doing the will of God, they are wondering who brought Him a sandwich.
3. Yet, our Lord was patient, and used every opportunity to teach His men about heavenly things. In the case of this city-wide revival in Samaria, He taught His disciples about the reality of the harvest.
4. The harvest was men and women, children, families, who needed to hear the gospel. The crowd that was quickly approaching the Lord and His disciples was made up of individual lives that needed to be rescued by the Messiah.
5. When you pass someone in the aisle at the grocery store, how do you see them? Those people you work alongside every day; how do you look at them?
6. Are they just another person living their life, or are they immortal souls who will either spend eternity in heaven or hell?

*Those aren't just bodies you walked by,  
They will all live on, after they die,  
The men, the women you meet each day,  
The people that come across your way,  
Are going to live in heaven or hell,  
Don't let them pass, thinking all is well!*

7. Your neighbor, your cousin, your co-worker, your boss, your teammate, and even your own children are part of the potential heavenly harvest, and we must see them as such.

8. Notice something else we must do in order to be alert to the lost world. We must not only see the reality of the harvest, but we must also see:

### **B. The readiness of the harvest**

1. Look again at verse 35. Jesus said, "...Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."

2. When grain becomes ripe, it turns from green, to yellow, to a light color, almost white in the sunlight. When a field was said to be "white" it meant that the field was ripened and ready to be harvested.

3. Jesus pointed to the anticipating faces of the Samaritans coming towards Him, and He told His disciples, "Look, the harvest is ready to be taken if you are ready to take it."

4. As the influence and size of the church continues to shrink, the problem is clearly not with a lack of potential converts. In fact, within the shadow of most churches there are countless people who need the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

5. The problem is not that the fields aren't ripe, and the souls aren't ready. The problem is that most of the laborers have found every reason to put off entering the field and gathering the harvest.

6. Any good farmer will tell you, however, the harvest doesn't wait for you. When it is time to bring in the crops, you either reap them or you lose them!

7. Jesus said to His disciples, "Men, we don't have months to stall and wait for the harvest. The harvest is here, and it is ready for us."

8. If we have a heart for the harvest, we will look at the lost world around us and know that we must go after it as soon as possible! The harvest is ready!

9. There is one more truth we draw from this text. Having a heart for the harvest not only requires *an appetite for the Lord's will*, and *an alertness to the lost world*, but notice also thirdly that it requires:

### **III. AN APPRECIATION FOR THE LASTING WORK**

1. Carrying on His analogy of the field and the harvest, Jesus said in verse 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."

2. Then in verse 37, He said, “And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.” With these verses, the Lord reminded His men of the true nature of the work of evangelism.

3. Several years ago, a survey by the Barna Research Group found, among other things, that 9 out of 10 adults could not accurately define the meaning of the phrase, “The Great Commission”.<sup>iv</sup>

4. If that statistic is correct (and I am sure it is), then part of the reason most Christians don’t share the gospel is simply because they don’t fully appreciate what it means to be a witness for Christ.

5. In our text in John 4, Jesus reminds us of a couple of truths regarding the lasting work of evangelism. First of all, we are reminded of:

#### **A. The process of evangelism**

1. I have read some interesting definitions and explanations of evangelism. Two of my favorites are that “evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.”

2. The other comes from an elevator operator, years ago, in an upscale hotel in Nashville. He said, “I’m just a nobody telling everybody about somebody who can save anybody.”

3. In verse 36 and 37, Jesus explained the process of evangelism as the work of sowing and reaping. A seed is planted, and that seed then grows and is harvested.

4. As the seed of the Word of God is proclaimed it takes root in the heart of men and women. As they come to faith in Christ, we reap them and assimilate them into our family, discipling them, and caring for them.

5. The principle we should take away from this text is that converts aren’t just going to fall into our laps. If we aren’t sowing, there will be no reaping.

6. A couple of weeks ago, I stopped in Greensboro, NC, and found my way to a little cemetery behind a Quaker church. I went to visit the grave of Vance Havner, a Southern Baptist evangelist that died over twenty years ago. Havner had such a unique way with words. He once said, “The gospel is not something we come to church to hear; it is something we go from church to tell.”

7. When it comes to the harvest, we must all remember that there is no harvest if there is no sowing of the seed of the gospel. We must appreciate the timeless process of sowing and reaping in evangelism.

8. Notice another truth we grasp if we are to appreciate the lasting work of evangelism. We must not only recognize the process of evangelism, but also:

### **B. The partnership of evangelism**

1. Look again at verse 37. Jesus said, “And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.”
2. The work of evangelism is not something that one person can accomplish alone. We are involved in a partnership. We must work together to see that the harvest is reaped.
3. This partnership is much larger than just the few of us that are assembled in this building. Right now, in the city of Buenos Aires, a city of 13 million people, missionary Randy Whittal leads a team from the International Mission Board trying to start churches and reach the masses of people that are lost without Christ. They are our partners.
4. 68 year-old, Ava Swiger, a retired nurse, is one of our partners. She spent three months in the African country of Niger, giving vaccines and treating medical needs while an evangelist preached the gospel.
5. When you decide that you are going to get serious about the harvest, you have the privilege of joining hands with thousands of sowers and reapers who have decided that they will not stand by and let the lost world die without hearing the gospel of Christ!
6. As a church family, we can join hands together, and partner together in an effort to both sow the gospel and reap souls in Dade County – our community.
7. I am not asking you to save the world by yourself. I am asking you to join me and others in telling the world about the One whose blood is sufficient to save the whole world!

1. Edward Kimball got a heart for the harvest. His particular field was a teenage boys’ Sunday school class. One boy in particular, Dwight, usually slept through the class, but Kimball was determined to witness to him.

2. Kimball went to the shoe store and witnessed to Dwight. The Sunday school teacher didn’t think it went too well, but what he didn’t know was that Dwight Moody had gotten saved that day, and would grow up to become one of the greatest evangelists the world has ever seen.

3. I can't promise you that if you get a heart for the harvest that you will reach the next D.L. Moody. But I can tell you this, if you reach one soul for Christ, that soul will be as important as D.L. Moody's.

4. Will you ask the Lord Jesus to give you a heart for the harvest? Ask Him to increase your appetite for the Lord's will. Ask Him to give you an alertness to the lost world. Ask Him to create in you an appreciation for the lasting work of sharing the gospel of King Jesus!

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<sup>i</sup> Eyewitness: Hero Cops Describe Fiery Rescue, 10/1/08, *Nationalpost.com*, 10/3/08, <http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/toronto/archive/2008/10/01/eyewitness-hero-cops-describe-fiery-rescue.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> (I Can't Get No) Satisfaction, *Wikipedia article*, 10/3/08, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/\(I\\_Can't\\_Get\\_No\)\\_Satisfaction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/(I_Can't_Get_No)_Satisfaction)

<sup>iii</sup> McHenry, Raymond, McHenry's Stories for the Soul, (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 2001), p. 115

<sup>iv</sup> Morgan, Robert J., Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, & Quotes, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 2,000), p. 778