

## God's Plan For The Final Harvest

'For as the rain and the snow falls from heaven and do not return there, but water the earth and make it bring forth in bud, and make it give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goes forth out of My mouth; it shall not return to Me void but it shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the purpose for which I sent it' (Isaiah 55:10 & 11).

Almost everything that is done in agriculture, is done in anticipation of the harvest. The same is true in the spiritual realm. All the activities of God are directed at the final harvest of mankind. 'The harvest is the end of the age' (Matthew 13:39). The beginning of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the end of the age of the Law as a means of righteousness (Romans 10:4). That was the end of the Old Covenant. The early rains; the New Covenant, or the age of grace began with the new church as the Lord had promised (Hebrews 8:13). From the establishment of the church in the nation of Israel 2,000 years ago, then from there, all the activities done in the church for the past 2,000 years, have ultimately been directed at the final harvest; the end of this age; the latter rain (Joel 2:23). Before this final harvest can be gathered in, many things have yet to happen. 'Therefore be patient, Brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it, until it receives the early and the latter rains. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand' (James 5:7 & 8). We see here, that the harvest synchronises with the return of the Lord. The two are united. The Lord will come at the completion of the harvest. James warns us we have to be patient.

James points out that the harvest cannot be gathered in until we have had the former and the latter rains. In many parts of the world, it takes both the former and the latter rains to make the harvest abundant and fruitful. If either rain fails to come, then the harvest is greatly diminished, and sometimes, destroyed. This is also true in the spiritual. Before this harvest can be gathered in, we need both the former and the latter rain. These rains are symbolic of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The age of grace began with a major outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and this age will close with another major outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Until that major outpouring has taken place, the harvest cannot be gathered in. This brings out one very important point that runs throughout the Bible; the rain is given for the sake of the harvest. If we do not comprehend that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is given for the sake of the harvest, we may miss the purpose of God.

Many Christians do not understand why the Holy Spirit is given, and they tend to be busy doing rather un-spiritual activities; but those who understand why the Holy Spirit has been given, tend to be busy doing more to increase the harvest. They are the people who are doing much more for the Kingdom of God. They are certainly in a minority and their workload is immense because there are not enough committed Christians to do all that is needed. Western Christianity tends to be rather self-centred. 'What will God do for me?' or 'What can I get out this relationship with God?' That is a total distortion of the Gospel. We need to ask ourselves, 'What can I do for God?' 'What can I do to hasten His coming?' 'What does God want from me?' Certainly God will meet our needs, but He does not always give us what we want. A need, and a 'want' are vastly different. Giving us

what we want is not the main purpose of the Gospel. The purpose of the Gospel is to show the way of salvation, leading up to the Kingdom of God.

Paul asked God, "Who are You Lord, and what would you have me do?" (Acts 9:5 & 6). People who have the same attitude, are the people who are most successful in their work for God, just as Paul was the most successful apostle. Most of the time, when we speak to new converts, they are told how wonderful life will be, and that God will do wonderful things for them. The reality of the Christian life is very different. God will definitely meet our needs, but the disciplined life of a committed 'Kingdom builder' can be extremely hard indeed. Sometimes it can cost us our life. In some countries, Christians are killed for their faith. Immediately after Paul was converted, he was told what great things he would suffer for the Lord's sake (Acts 9:16). How many people would stick around if we were told from the day of our conversion, we would suffer greatly? Nearly everybody would turn and walk away. People within the modern Western church are far too soft. We don't like to put God in His rightful place – as Chief of our lives. There are professing Christians who believe that Jesus revolves around us and our needs; then there are the Christians who have realised that it is we who revolve around Him. Most people have got their focus wrong. They have a blurred vision of God, of the Gospel, and of the Kingdom of God. We must change that blurred vision if we are to be effectual. We need to accept that the rain is given for the sake of the harvest and we need to toil greatly to reap that harvest. We need to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23).

If we study the Book of Jeremiah, we can see that he was a prophet in a time when his nation was in a spiritual decline that led to eventual disaster. How many professing Christians can conceive that that could be possible? Can we identify a nation that is in spiritual decline? Can we identify the signs that will lead to total disaster? There were many false prophets in Jeremiah's day, who insisted that everything would be alright. They kept on saying they had the temple and as long as they had that temple, then they would be fine. In this day, there are many professing Christians that keep on saying, they are born-again so they will be fine. There was only Jeremiah who spoke the truth in that time of decline and he was so far outnumbered by the false prophets, nobody would listen to him. That could be true in any nation. The people who are prepared to speak the truth about the Gospel are relatively few. Just as Jeremiah was severely criticised for daring to speak the truth, so are those in this day who dare to speak words of rebuke; who dare to speak out what the Bible really says. Jesus said several times, "For those who can hear – let him hear." In other words; listen to and obey the Bible.

We can equate the words of the Lord to Jeremiah, to many Christians today. What is conspicuous in the church today is a lack of respect for the Lord. People could never say and do the things we see if they had fear of the Lord. The biggest promises are for those who fear the Lord. 'These people have a defiant and a rebellious heart. They have revolted and quit His service and have gone away. They do not say in their heart, "Let us now fear the Lord our God, who gives rain, both the former and the latter in its season; He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest"' (Jeremiah 5:23 & 24). What was the rain given for? The harvest. The infilling of the Holy Spirit; the gifts of the Holy Spirit; and the fruits of the Holy Spirit, are all given for the sake of harvest. They are to equip us to go out

into the harvest. They are not given just for us to enjoy ourselves so we can be 'super-spiritual' and prophesy over one another. That is not the whole purpose of the Gospel, and if we cannot understand that, then we are missing part of God's plan for our lives.

There are two scriptural harvests. There is the 'grain' harvest, and the second is the 'grape' harvest. The grain harvest is the harvest of salvation; the grapes are the 'grapes of God's wrath' or His divine Judgement. 'And I looked and behold; I saw a white cloud and sitting on the cloud, was One like the Son of Man, with a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand; and another angel came out of heaven calling with a mighty voice to Him who was sitting on the cloud, "Put in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So He Who was sitting upon the cloud swung His sickle on the earth, and the earth was harvested. Then another angel came out of heaven and he also carried a sharp sickle. Another angel who had power over fire called with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, "Put forth your sickle and reap the fruit of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." So the angel swung his sickle and stripped the grapes from the vines of the earth and cast it into the huge winepress of God's wrath' (Revelation 14:14 to 19). The harvest of the judgement (grapes) follows immediately after the first harvest of the righteous (grain). God is a God of mercy and loving kindness, but He is also a God of severe judgement and wrath. Paul said, "See the kindness and severity of God. Severity towards those who have fallen, but kindness to you – provided you continue in His grace and abide in His kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off' (Romans 11:22).

Jesus said, "Do you not say that there is still time before the harvest? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields for they are already ripe for harvest ... he who sows and he who reaps rejoice together' (John 4:35 & 36). Jesus always spoke about spiritual matters as though they were in the natural realm, so the hearers could understand what He was really saying. We are reaping the latter harvest, and we must get the job done while there is still light, because one day the window of opportunity will close. 'We must work the works of Him Who sent Me when it is day, for the night is coming when no one can work' (John 9:4). Once that door closes, then the angels will take over from us. In the Book of Revelation, the last preaching of the Gospel is actually done by angels – not by people (Revelation 14:6). 'He who gathers in summer is a wise soul. He who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame' (Proverbs 10:5). As children of God, which of these are we? Do we want to be wise or a source of shame to our heavenly Father? 'For we must all appear before the Judgement Seat of the Messiah, that each one may receive the things done in the body according to what he has done whether good or bad; knowing therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men' (2 Corinthians 5:10 & 11).

We have a mandate to bring as many people to the harvest as we possibly can. It is what the Lord requires of us and we must work towards the final harvest, to hasten the coming of the Lord (2 Peter 3:12).

Amen and God bless you.

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