

Save the Harvest!

- ✠ Moved with compassion (9:35-38)
- ✠ Proclaiming Christ's kingdom (10:1-8)

In the Name of Jesus, the Lord of the harvest, dear fellow disciples, coworkers with Christ:

In Bible times farmers hurried to harvest ahead of storms or insects. Without storage three bad years meant famine. Modern, herbicides, weather forecasts, crop insurance cover losses now. Not so long ago grasshoppers and drought wiped out family farms. **Save the Harvest!** was a matter of survival.

The Holy Spirit inspired this sense of *urgency* in Matthew 9: *Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were troubled and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into his harvest."* Christ's command to **Save the Harvest!** allows no foot dragging, no distractions, no turf battles. There's plenty of work for all in the *energetic* love of Christ....

✠ Moved with compassion (9:35-38)

How deep is the Lord's **Compassion**? Hard times tell the story such as Mount Sinai three months after the Exodus from Egypt. Before Moses could bring down the stone tablets of Ten Commandments the children of Israel were worshiping the golden calf. God would have destroyed them, but in place of wrath Moses pleaded for mercy. *The LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and overflowing with mercy and truth, maintaining mercy for thousands, forgiving guilt and rebellion and sin. He will by no means clear the guilty. He calls their children and their children's children to account for the guilt of the fathers, even to the third and the fourth generation."* (Exodus 34:6f EHV) **Compassion** extends a thousand generations.

Here the Word of God incarnate comes in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth with almighty power as God. Critics ask, "If God is all-powerful and all-loving, why doesn't He just end the suffering?" Truly Christ could with a word then and now, but wanting our heaven on earth would leave us lost forever as in the beginning. The LORD had to drive Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden lest they eat from the tree of life and live forever in their sins' separation from God. Yet God wants us close as His family for the eternal summer in heaven. *Pray the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into his harvest. Moved with compassion* – they teach us to love and respect in our families, to forgive as we have been forgiven by God. *"Surely he took up our sicknesses and carried our sorrows."* (Isaiah 53:4 TPA)

"Let us not become weary of doing good, because at the appointed time we will reap, if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9 EHV) Take courage and comfort from these same promises of God that are new every morning. Day and night Jesus never grows weary in doing good, showing **Compassion** for His sheep of all ages. Hymnwriter John Monsell (1811-1875; TLH 1863) caught the connection between Christ's lordship and **Compassion** in a hymn called, "Fight the Good Fight," this from the fourth stanza:

*Faint not nor fear; His arms are near. He changes not, and you are dear.
Only believe, and you will see That Christ is Lord eternally.*¹

¹ TLH 447; CW 457; CWH 876 – Text, Tune, Setting: public domain.

An elderly member was *downcast* and depressed in a nursing home as her ailing husband tried to visit her day after day. She wanted so much to be home with him. My comforting assurances didn't seem to help. Then one day, praying on the way for wisdom, I realized her sinful nature was getting the best of her. Hebrews 12 helped her as it helps me in such situations. The Lord's **Compassion** dried her tears and strengthened her resolve. She recovered in time to go home a few weeks with her husband until the Lord called him home to heaven. God's kind discipline grace on earth lifted her spirits at the foot of the cross: *"Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you ⁶because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."* (Hebrews 12:3f NIV84)

✠ Proclaiming Christ's kingdom (10:1-8)

Christ's kingdom came by proclamation from twelve strange characters. Peter who denied knowing Jesus, Judas who betrayed Him, the *Sons of Thunder* James and John who needed Jesus' rebuke for their lack of compassion. Only tax collector Matthew/Levi got it; he threw an "evangelism party!"

Literally, *"While going...."* (v.7, Matthew 28:19) your life is an evangelism excursion into God's mission field. One mission pastor described a restoration project as his "evangelism car." Neighbors would stop by to talk about cars and end up hearing the Gospel. A welder and a mechanic eventually took instructions and publicly confirmed their faith and confession. *"Let your light shine,"* Christ says. Even in your driveway our Savior opens hurting hearts to His healing touch and soul-saving skill.

Let's admit it. We are all sheep who love to wander, *"cast down"* unless our Good Shepherd comes looking for us. We stay stuck in cool, shady paths rolling back and forth in our personal comforts until our wool gets matted with filth and manure. Suddenly we've rolled over, belly up to the sun. Our Good Shepherd has to be out there in the field with us to hear His voice come calling. He lifts us up and holds us on our feet until circulation comes back. But we may need the treatment of one compassionate shepherd who broke the leg of a wayward sheep. It would be safer limping at the shepherd's side than wandering off to its death. Our Lord may keep us limping, but He will never leave us alone.

In Jesus' day the lepers were alone. Alfred Edersheim wrote that Jews were more likely to throw rocks at lepers than to get anywhere near them. But watch Jesus. He could heal entire cities from a distance. Instead, Jesus heals one-by-one, even touching the lepers who in their "unclean" quarantine probably had not felt human touch for years as their skin was eaten away by diseases called *"leprosy."*

At the gate of Thanksgiving Church in Wuhan, China, in 2005, lay the putrefying body of a leper. We asked the pastor what could be done, and were told a shocking story: "The family brings him here day after day. But whatever we give, the family keeps for themselves and does nothing for the leper. He is their money-maker. So we find other ways to help. It would be better for you not to give him money." Never before had I seen a human body covered with flies, much less the body of a living person. The stench was intense before you could realize what was lying there. For Jesus to reach out and touch such a victim, would be difficult in any society. But in Baptism and Lord's Supper, He still reaches out and touches each and every one of us, personally healing, kindly uplifting, steadfastly saving.

Christ's **Compassion** and **Kingdom** proclamation long to **Save the Harvest!** But empty talk is as useless as an empty tank on a shiny new tractor. Beautiful homes and church buildings, healthy bodies and bank accounts can still leave Christians stuck and immobile without fuel for our souls. So, our Savior keeps His ministers running back and forth from the field with the fuel trucks of Word and sacraments to keep the harvest coming. Don't go park over there somewhere out of sight to do your own thing while the souls of millions are dying. One-by-one help us to "make hay while the sun shines!" Then the *"sun of righteousness"* will rise in our hearts for the Lord. Rise and rally with Him to **Save the Harvest!** Amen.