

The Lakeview Lamp

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” -Psalm 119:105

October 24, 2004

Developing a Heart for the Harvest

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Much of our conversation about evangelism has to do with what is wrong with the harvest. “People are too busy” or “Folks already have their own religion” or “the world is so secular” - these are common excuses for why more evangelistic effort is not expended on our part. What folly! Perhaps instead of blaming the harvest we should spend a moment working on the harvesters – you and I. If in a world that is adverse to Jesus Christ (and it is) we are going to speak for the Lord anyway, something must happen within the harvester’s hearts that will move and motivate them to do a difficult task with joy. So I ask, “What can we do to develop a deeper concern for lost people, a concern that will motivate us to do all we can to tell folks of redemption in Jesus?”

First, consider the value of the soul. Isn’t it amusing how people will chase after reports of treasure or wealth? If a Spanish galleon loaded with gold is located dive ships appear from everywhere as everyone tries to get in on the find. When the lottery jackpot gets big people stand in line to play. People will do most anything for treasure, won’t they? But what treasure has more value than a human soul? Jesus said, *“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”* (**Mark 8:36**). Do we really understand that? Realize that Jesus came here and *did not offer* a cure for every physical illness and disease, or a financial remedy for the poor or a political solution to an oppressive government. Jesus came to redeem and save and rescue what mattered most: souls. Do I value souls like Jesus does? *He was willing to give His life on a cruel cross for souls.* What am I willing to do for souls?

Second, understand that hell is very real. Despite our current society’s loathing of the idea of eternal condemnation the Bible assures us that hell is real, and people are really going to go there and be there

without end. Usually we talk about that as a motivator to make sure our behavior is what it ought to be, because we don't want to go. But who you do love that you'd like to see go there? Can you imagine your spouse, your parents, your brother, your best friend, your co-worker in such a place for all eternity? It isn't imagination, it isn't fantasy or a bad dream. The disobedient will be lost. Jesus will come "in flaming fire taking vengeance on those *who do not know God*, and on those *who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*. These shall be punished with *everlasting destruction* from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (**2 Thess. 1:8-9**). If reading of hell motivates you to do right, then it ought also motivate us to try and save as many others as we can. I don't want anyone to go there, so I must do what I can to help everyone who will turn from such a place.

Finally, stop worrying about baptisms. Let's not play games and pretend Jesus was wrong. Jesus said "*few will find it*" (**Mt. 7:14**) and He was right. Of the hundreds of people you will meet and know in a lifetime comparatively few will ever be interested in the Gospel. Of the few folks you will form close association with even fewer of them will listen to your thoughts about religion, and only a small minority of that group will ever respond. That is overwhelmingly discouraging if we believe our task is to baptize people. Frankly, most folks define evangelism in terms of baptisms, they know that isn't going to happen so many say "why even try?"

There are a couple of answers to that line of thought. First, we might note that some do obey the Gospel that we never expect to do so. I have taught folks that I just knew were on the verge of baptism – and they never were baptized. Others I barely believed had any interest, much less any real chance of obedience became delightful Christians. The Scriptures have those too - Sergius Paulus, a governor, Justin a ruler of the very Jewish synagogue, and yes, a vicious persecutor named Paul. It all works together to say be careful who you cross off your list!

But more importantly, and what helps our heart, is to relieve the pressure. "I planted, Apollos watered, but *God gave the increase*. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but *God who gives the increase*" (**1 Cor. 3:6-7**). Who gives the increase? God does. How liberating! If I talk to someone about Jesus and they are unresponsive that isn't my fault, or my problem. I just do what Jesus commands. I teach the gospel, that is all. I need to care deeply about people, and I want

people to obey the Gospel, but I don't have to go through any sort of mental checklist to decide who will meet a quota, or get my annual baptism average up. I can just teach people.

This may be the most revolutionary and yet most under-rated idea of all. When we believe we should baptize we put pressure on ourselves and pressure on the prospect. It isn't enjoyable, and we are all tight and tension-filled. We can't wait for people to grow at their own rate. We aren't doing this for the joy of telling good news, we are flat out trying to bag another one, get another notch in our belt. Evangelism becomes being a high pressure salesman and manipulator for Jesus instead of a wonderful opportunity to speak of what is closest to our hearts. Try relaxing a little. You can do evangelism but you can't make people obey the Gospel. And praise the Lord, you just don't have to!

The fields are still white unto harvest. Millions are caught up in false religion and man-made counterfeit Christianity. Millions more are trapped in our secular society, with no religion of any kind. We cannot claim to have the heart of Jesus if we can passively watch people be lost without regrets. Let us develop a heart for the harvest - a heart that will move us to do the Lord's will and do all we can to speak for Him!

"O God, You have taught me from my youth; and to this day I declare Your wondrous works."— **Psalm 71:16**

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"This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it"
(Psalm 118:24).