

Preparing for Harvest: Provision and Philanthropy

When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands – Deuteronomy 24:19

Background

Jesus had just come from an encounter with the religious leaders where he exposed some of the inconsistencies between their message and their practice. Rather than accept his message, they looked for opportunity to catch him in a mistake. To this, Jesus told his followers to make sure they were not emulating the religious leaders in their greed and hypocrisy.

He continues his instruction, teaching on the type of life they could expect, the challenges they would expect, and how they should respond to situations that were sure to arise dealing with these leaders

When you are brought before synagogues, rules and authorities, do not worry about what you should speak... - Luke 12:11

Jesus was teaching his followers what was really important: life altering concepts. Yet, in the midst of this came a man with his own agenda:

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." – Luke 12:13

The fact that the man was close enough in a crowd of people for Jesus to both hear and respond meant that he had to have heard what Jesus was teaching. However his desire for what **he wanted** was more important to him than anything Jesus was offering. Had the man been patient and attentive, he would have heard the real thrust of Jesus teaching (*do not be afraid little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom – Luke 12:32*). Just as he did with the religious leaders earlier, Jesus exposed the man's heart, showing that he was not interested in justice or parity, but rather simply in the accumulation of possessions.

What's Yours is Mine / What's Mine is Mine

One of the most intriguing (and sometimes the most exasperating) things to experience is a child who has learned the concept of possession. Children can play with other people's items all day long, but as soon as someone comes close to an item that the child perceives as their own, everything stops. The child will move heaven and earth to keep anyone else from touching their thing. It wouldn't even matter

if the child had any intention of playing with the item. The only thing that matters is that “it’s mine”, and as long as “you are touching it”, somehow it feels like it’s not mine anymore and that cannot happen.

Jesus told a parable, not of a child, but of a man who had the same problem.

And he told them this parable: The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, “What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.” Then he said, “This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and goods.” – Luke 12:16-18

He had been blessed with a lot... too much, in fact, to the point that he had nowhere to put all of the grain he had harvested. So, what do you do when you have too much stuff and nowhere to put it? That’s right – you move heaven and earth to make sure that no one else can touch it. For the man, it meant tearing down his existing barns and building brand new, bigger barns so he could keep all that he harvested. On the one hand, it sounds reasonable. Had he not done that, the grain could have gone to waste, or been stolen. By building bigger barns, he was being a good steward of all that he had received. This happens in business all the time.

Was the man actually trying to be a good steward, or was there a different motivation to his action?

*I’ll say to **myself**, you have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry – Luke 12:19*

Think of the time, energy, effort and expense it took for the man to be able to **tell himself** that he had it made. How many people might have been alienated who probably helped in the work? Unfortunately, what the man did not know was that he would never get to see the “many years” he planned for. His life, his status, and his sense of blessing were not going to be secured by the accumulation of things.

*Then God said to him “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded of you. Then who will get what **you have prepared for yourself?**” – Luke 12:20*

The all important question. The man spent all that time taking care of no one but himself and in the end it was all for naught. Jesus contrasted this with the life that was to be desired – one that is “rich toward God”

Our goal in any harvest is to make sure our motives are right and that we are rich toward God

Laws of Harvest

One of the themes in the book of Deuteronomy is that of remembering where you came from. God wanted the Israelites to remember their time in Egypt, that He brought them out through no effort of their own, and that he blessed them with a land they did not labor for. He wanted them to remember this so that when the blessings of the new land came, they would not look at them like a child with a new toy. The blessings - the harvests that they would receive - were a gift. It was **provision**, not something that happened because of their righteousness or because they were so deserving.

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. This is why I command you to do this – Deuteronomy 24:18

As Moses gave instructions to the Israelites, he starts with family relations, then moves to secondary relations – those working for you for some reason. He finishes with **those we would not normally associate with**: the strangers, the fatherless and the widows. These were the forgotten people in society. Those with no advocates, no one looking out for them, no one to ensure they were honored as equal members of Israelite society.

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her “woman, you are set free from your infirmity”. Then he put his hands on her and immediately she straightened up and praised God. Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, “there are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.” – Luke 13:10-14

Just as the synagogue ruler was more concerned about order and protocol than with the plight and eventual healing of the woman, there were others in society that were overlooked, not because they had done anything to deserve it, but because life had dealt them a harsh hand, and **the society enforced that by not caring**. This is why not only here, but all throughout scripture there are commands to care for those who didn't have the means to care for themselves.

Not Handout – Invitation In

When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. – Deuteronomy 24:19-21

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God – Leviticus 19:9-10

The law of the harvest was simple:

- If you overlook a sheaf, leave it
- Don't go over everything in harvesting, but leave the edges for others
- When you have gathered olives or grapes, don't go a second time to see if you can get more

This is definitely a contrast to the person in Jesus' parable. Remembering that this harvest was the Israelites' livelihood, this was a major request: it would be like only getting a portion of your pay on payday, and letting other people get paid for your work.

We can associate this with giving to the poor, but this is actually different. It would be easy to get your entire harvest, and, seeing a poor person begging, take pity on them and give them what you felt was appropriate. While this may offer some sustenance, **it does nothing for the person themselves.**

Remember, as we look at harvest, we realize that we are all in this together, and that the harvest is much bigger than we could have imagined. We are community together, so our view of the forgotten/unfortunate is not to be one of burden – of “throwing them a bone” to get our conscience clear and get them out of our hair. The law of harvest was to **make the harvest not your own, and invite others into your harvest.**

In the passage from Luke earlier, Jesus was dealing with a religious leader who had his idea of right and privilege, but Jesus equalized the field:

*Then should not this woman, **a daughter of Abraham**, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her? – Luke 13:16*

Jesus identified the woman as a daughter of Abraham, basically saying that the woman was “one of us”, and should be treated as such. The command in Deuteronomy gave people who were willing, but without the means, the ability to harvest just like anyone else in society. They would no longer be considered outcasts, outsiders, or burdens on society, but would be dignified as valued, important and connected.

Inviting others into our harvest honors the person by demonstrating that they are one with us.

Questions

- What do you feel cheated out of that you want God to fix?
- How do you view “those in the third group” (the forgotten)? How do you respond to beggars?
- How can you invite others into your harvest?
 - Your financial harvest
 - Your emotional harvest
 - Your spiritual harvest
- Do you need to be invited into someone else's harvest? How would you accomplish that?