

Ready to Save Souls

One evening in the spring I planted several vegetable seeds. Having carefully placed each of them in the well-tilled soil, I stood back and admired my handiwork. The next morning I went out and harvested baskets full of cucumbers, beans, peas and more. It was a bumper crop and, best of all, it took only one night to grow!

You don't believe that, do you? Your skepticism is well founded. We all know that you don't plant seeds one day and harvest their produce the next. In fact, you experienced gardeners would consider me somewhat strange for going out the day after planting a seed and even expecting to see a plant, much less a garden full of vegetables.

In John 4:35 Jesus said, "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 unto harvest." From a physical standpoint, we know that there are times and seasons in which we can expect to harvest our crops. In north Georgia we don't expect to go outside and pick okra, corn, etc. in the spring. That's when we plant their seeds. This is what Jesus affirms in the opening part of the verse just cited. He makes it clear, however, that He was not talking about a physical harvest but instead was referencing a spiritual harvest. In the spiritual harvest, the Lord wanted (and wants) His disciples to be on the lookout for lost souls. He wants His disciples to plant the spiritual seed, the Word of God (Luke 8:11). But when should Christians start looking for the harvest of souls? Should we wait until a certain time or season of the year like we do with our vegetable or fruit gardens? No, the Lord insisted. The spiritual field is constantly white unto harvest. Day after day there are men and women who are lost and who need to be brought into the fold of safety (Luke 15:4-10). In our vernacular, there are souls needing to be brought to Christ "24/7/365."

After months of carefully tending to his plants, the gardener excitedly and with a great sense of accomplishment goes out into his plot and gathers the fruits of his labors. By the time the season of harvest arrives, he is ready, willing and able to get outside and start bringing in the produce that will grace his dinner table for days and weeks to come. Now let's open our eyes and, with the same sense of excitement, look around and see the spiritual harvest that is all around us. Men and women are lost and many of them are seeking salvation (Matthew 9:36-38). Let's be as thrilled about the potential of reaping the spiritual harvest as we are when we go to our gardens in summer and autumn to reap our physical harvests.

Are we as God's people ready to save souls? How many of us greet visitors to the worship and Bible classes? Such a seemingly small deed could open a door to a heart and eventually the door to their salvation.

Do we as God's people anticipate saving souls? I've been to congregations whose baptisteries were only prepared for use on Sunday mornings and evenings and on Wednesday evenings. The conversions to Christ of which we read in the New Testament happened any time of day or night (Acts 10; 16:19-40). The denominational world isn't concerned about the baptistery being ready around the clock because they incorrectly believe that immersion is not necessary for the forgiveness of sins (but see Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; et al.). The Lord's church on the other hand acknowledges the truth that one must be immersed into Christ in order to have his or her sins washed away. But are we ready for these conversions 24 hours a day?

Do we as God's people sow the seed that leads souls to Christ (Matthew 13:3-23)? Do we look for opportunities to teach and invite and study with our friends, co-workers and family? We don't have to know everything in order to lead the lost to Christ. Our starting point could be a simple invitation to "come and see" (John 1:46) as we invite people to come and experience worship according to the New Testament pattern.

The fact of the matter is that there is no such thing as a stagnant congregation of God's people. Either a congregation is growing or it is dying. There is no middle ground. To ensure growth, Christians must daily be ready to bring the lost to the Lord.