

Harvest in Israel

Matthew 9:35-11:24

Introduction

As we've followed Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount, we've seen him transforming lives with a touch. We've seen him (in the words of Hosea) "healing Israel." But along with those who are excited by what his arrival in Israel means, along with those who put their faith in him and follow him, there's another disturbing trend. The Pharisees have concluded already that he is a blasphemer, in league with the devil himself.

With the end of chapter 9, Jesus speaks of a huge "harvest" that requires lots of workers. If you've spent any time on the land, such a large, ripe harvest sounds like a good thing. But if we pause to think through what Jesus is saying, there's a mixed message. For some, the harvest is bad news!

Background

Read **Hosea 6**. (This is the chapter Jesus quotes in Matthew 9, and again in Matthew 12.)

- a. What harvest does Hosea have in mind? Why is it coming?

- b. Look back at Matthew 3:12. John the Baptist clearly has "harvest" in mind when he describes what Jesus has come to do. What does he mean?

Later, in Matthew 13, Jesus tells a parable of a harvest involving both weeds and wheat. Again, the wheat will be gathered... and the weeds will be burned. Harvest time is decisive time, when things will be shown up for what they are. Harvest time is "sorting time." *Getting Israel ready for harvest means getting them to make up their minds!*

Read 9:35-10:4. In the light of what we have just seen, what do you expect to see happening in chapter 10?

What is it that motivates Jesus in 9:36? What is Israel's problem?

Comparing 10:1 with 9:35 (and all the events of chapters 8 and 9) what is significant about the things Jesus gives his twelve apostles the authority to do?

Read through Matthew 10. For this first mission, Jesus has a special target audience in mind. Why do you think he gives the instructions he does in verses 5 and 6?

What reception does Jesus expect his "apostles" will meet?

What evidence do you see in these verses that a "sorting" process is taking place?

What is the basis of the "sorting"? (What will people have to do to be "in"?)



Sodom and Gomorrah...

Do a little research on the famous Old Testament towns of Sodom and Gomorrah. What is Jesus talking about in v16? Look ahead at Mt 11:20 - 24, where Sodom is mentioned again. What is expected of these towns where great miracles are performed?

From **Matthew 10 verses 11 to 42**, what range of responses does Jesus expect to the message that "The Kingdom of Heaven is near"?

What range of responses to the gospel have YOU experienced today? Are things any different?

Look at the advice Jesus gives his disciples in verse 16. Are we doing this? On which side do you think we fall down most?

Why shouldn't we be surprised if people mistreat us for being followers of Jesus? (Look at 22 to 33.)

Hard Words...

Read the disturbing words of Jesus in Matt 10:32-33. How welcome would these words have been a) in Israel, and b) to our world today?

Read the disturbing words of Jesus in Matt 10:34-38. In verses 35 and 36, Jesus is quoting from Micah 7. Micah criticised the sinfulness and dishonesty of Israel, whose "hands were skilled in doing evil." He warned that God was going to bring confusion and disarray, dividing houses against themselves as he judged the nation that was meant to be holy.

How do these words confirm our opening thoughts about the type of "harvest" Jesus is talking about?

How can our relationships with family members stop us from repenting, and being fully committed to Jesus? Can you give examples? *Pray for one another in these things!*

How should we handle situations where there are disagreements on this?

What does it mean to *take up your cross and follow* Jesus?

Does this challenge your own views of Christian discipleship? How?

Conclusion and Prayer

We're not "apostles" with all the authority Jesus gave the twelve for their first mission - but as the story of the progress of the kingdom unfolds, we're still called to spread the news of the Kingdom of God and call for a response to Jesus. That response will always be divisive, as some repent, and others reject. It's scary stuff, and we'd much rather avoid it.

What fears most often stop you from being effective as a harvest worker? Share these with the group (if you can), and pray together for:-

- boldness in the face of opposition
- shrewdness (practical wisdom)
- innocence (integrity)
- the right words to say



mmm... food for thought.

We didn't stop to think about verse 23. Jesus says the apostles "won't finish going through all the cities of Israel before *the Son of Man comes...*" If it's not the "*second coming*" that he's talking about, what could he mean? We'll come back to this question in Matthew 24.