

Sermon: Live with Urgency: Sowing Together for Harvest
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“If you have your bible with you, turn with me to John chapter nine. We’re going to be in John chapter nine and verse four. This has been a verse that we’ve used as a rallying cry to engage Southern Baptists in North American missions this year. It’s a scripture that we’ve been thinking about. Jesus says the following, ‘We must work the work of Him who sent me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work.’ This past year as I’ve had the privilege of leading at the North American Mission Board and tried to ask the question, how do we assist Southern Baptists in their task of fulfilling the Great Commission? You know that we are rallied around three objectives; sharing Christ, sending missionaries and starting churches. Do know what I’ve done most of this year? I’ve had the privilege of telling Southern Baptists that North America is a mission field. Now you can go to parts of North America like Hawaii and you know that it’s a mission field, don’t you? I can go to places like Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina and when I say North America is a mission field, for a moment people stop and look and say, ‘now what do you mean by that?’ But folks, North America has always been a mission field. North America is an increasingly lost mission field. I hope in everything you do you will be constantly asking the question, ‘How does this make a difference in making me more effective in reaching a lost North America?’

“You’ll hear me say, and I’ll say it often, that we have the privilege of a growing mission field. We are one of the few industrialized nations in the world that is growing. Both Canada and the United States have a growing population, legally and illegally. Canada admits 250 thousand legal immigrants every year. United States has a population of 303 million. In the next 35 years, it will be 400 million and over 100 million will be Hispanic. It’s a growing population. You’ve heard me say it’s a changing population. The ethnic diversity, you can hardly keep up with the numbers. In greater Atlanta I heard a few weeks ago we have 50 thousand Ethiopians. Someone corrected me today and said no, it’s closer to 100 thousand. I’m just painting a picture of these people groups. We have 80 thousand Nigerians in Houston and 166 thousand Armenians in Los Angeles. Now, here’s something interesting, in Toronto, you can call 911 in 150 languages! Now, how long does it take to get to your language if you’re 149, I don’t know how it works but somebody has got it figured out and they will plug you in your language. One hundred fifty languages to answer just a 911 call in Toronto! It’s growing, it’s changing and it’s becoming increasingly challenging. This is not your father’s North America. I wish it were. But this is becoming very challenging. It’s becoming more pluralistic. Many believe there are many ways to God; that Jesus Christ is not the only way to Heaven. It’s becoming more secular. Four dollars a gallon for gasoline is tough, but God may be using our economy to bring us to our knees. Lord, forgive us, we need spiritual awakening, we need revival. This is a challenging environment. I pray and I have prayed that God will take you back to, how does this make a difference with church members? Because if it doesn’t make a difference with church members then it really doesn’t make a difference. Do you hear me? We do believe the headquarters is the local church. Jesus died for the

church. I was hiring a guy in a state convention position I had in Virginia, he said, 'Now, if I work for state convention, where do I go from here?' I said, 'You go up to the local church.' And he looked at me a little disappointed because he thought he was coming from the local church to something better than that. Folks, there is nothing better than the Church of Jesus Christ. Jesus died for the church, Jesus loves the church. Jesus is concerned for the church. The church is the way that he has chosen to win this world.

"North America is a lost mission field, but you know it was a lost mission field that Jesus came to. Jesus himself came to a world that was lost and he said, 'The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.' And there's no better remedy for a lost world than Jesus Christ. In John chapter nine and verse four, Jesus Christ describes the passion that drives his ministry. If you take chapter nine of John's gospel you have to put it into context of John chapter eight, the two chapters run together. In chapter eight and verse 12, Jesus makes this incredible announcement, he says, 'I am the Light of the world.' I'm not sure everybody understood what he was saying but he came out and said, 'I am the Light of the world,' and he went on to perform a miracle in chapter nine where he brought physical light to a man that had spiritual darkness but he was going to teach him a lesson about bringing spiritual light into his life through providing him with sight that he had not had since he had been born. This man was born blind. He's quite a character. If you read chapter nine, he's just got all the answers, he's very open, and he's very transparent. When the religious leaders come and they challenge him he's like, 'I don't know, go ask him. I just found somebody who told me everything I ever did.' And right in the middle of that Jesus has a summary statement that I think sums up how Jesus lived his ministry and he is our model, he is our master and it is verse four of chapter nine. I can imagine Jesus there with his disciples, and he says to them, 'We must work the works of Him who sent me for night is coming when no one can work.' You know what the key word in that verse is? It's the word 'sent'. Do you realize that in John's gospel 'sent' is an important word? In fact, John uses the word 40 different times in John's gospel. He uses the word 'sent.' Jesus is conscious throughout his ministry that he has been sent by the Father. Now he is saying to his disciples as he stands around, 'we must work the works of Him who sent me.'

"Now, those original disciples are dead. The task is not finished and I believe, if visibly present tonight, Jesus would say to us tonight, 'we must work the works of Him who sent me.' Do you know when Jesus gave the Great Commission in John chapter 20 and verse 21 he expressed it differently than Matthew? He said, 'As the Father sent me, so send I you.' He lived with a compelling passion that God had sent him on a mission and then he said to his disciples, 'now just as the Father had sent me, I'm sending you to do what I have done to continue a mission.' We are sent by the Father for this Great Commission.

"Now, we talk a lot these days about calling. I have no problem with that. We talk about the day that God called us from such and such a place to the position that we're in right now. It's exciting. Some of you are sitting here tonight and you are actually hearing the call of God and wondering if He's calling you to a new opportunity. Pastors and staff talk about the calling of God. There's nothing wrong with that but we need to remember that in the calling there is a sending. Do you hear me? In the calling there is a sending. We

hear the call and then we respond to being sent. Remember Isaiah was in the temple and he saw the Lord being high and lifted up. He saw the Lord high and lifted up. He saw his own unworthiness and the angel came and touched his lips with tongs and he was cleansed. And he said, 'Who shall I send and who will go for us?' And Isaiah said, 'Here am I Lord, call me.' No, he didn't, did he? He said, 'Here am I Lord....' Have you ever figured out that you've been sent to do what you're doing? Have you ever figured that out? Folks, it's the anchor that holds you in the middle of your calling. Have you ever figured that out? I confess that it was only in recent years that I figured out that in the calling there was a sending. And we've been sent by the Father. And so where you are, whether you're in Montana or Ottawa, whether you're in Florida, in Miami, whether you're out in California, whether you're out in Illinois. Do you have a sense that you have been sent today? You know what it will do? It will keep you focused. When you know that you've been sent you will be focused on the Father's work. Do you know that the greatest danger in ministry is distraction? The greatest danger is doing everything but what we were sent to do. The idea that the Father sent us will keep us focused. The second thing it will do will keep us passionate. I've got work to do. We must work before the night comes because then nobody can work and the Father sent me to do this in Miami, the Father sent me to do this in New York. The Father sent me to do this in... It may change tomorrow but God sent you to that place. It will keep you focused, it will keep you passionate, and it will keep you persevering. You can't leave until God sends you somewhere else. When the going gets tough you say, 'I didn't come on my own but God sent me.' When you feel like quitting it's not yours to quit because God.... Do you really believe that God sent you to where you are? You'll be so passionate that you won't have time to grumble and complain and criticize. You'll be so passionate that you'll say, 'Lord, if you take me from here before I finish I will be standing in your presence naked, Lord, I didn't finish what you sent me to do.' We are sent by the Father. Yeah, you are called, you have a position, you have a title, and you have an office. You are sent by the Father.

“Secondly, we are sent to do the Father's will. Like the disciples in the original conversation we need to continually be reminded that this is His work. Now this is the tricky part. Did you hear me? This is the tricky part. Because we've got to the point as a denomination where we are seminary people. I've spent eight years of my life in seminary training. Seminary people. I believe in seminary education. We are an educated people. We are a dedicated people. We are a strategizing people. As Southern Baptists we have perhaps more than any other denomination but the tricky part is that if we're not careful we'll do our work and not the Father's work. I've been there friends, when I've had my plans over here and I've said, 'Lord, would you just come over and bless these plans.' And if I just play it a little bit harder, 'Lord, if you'd just come over and bless it I'd be more effective.' What he wants me to do is align with His plans. God says, 'Geoff, this is where we're going, would you make the change? Would you align your thoughts, your strategizing, would you open your mind, Geoff? Would you not be so narrow minded? Would you just align your thoughts with My thoughts so that your plans become My plans?'

“The other thing we have is experience and experience is great but experience can be the great enemy in aligning our work with God’s work. Often we make our plans, we ask God to come and bless our plans and we say, ‘Lord, if you’d just bless I’d be fruitful.’ But folks, fruitfulness only comes when we align our plans with His plans and we do His work. That’s why it’s so important, I believe, to find out where the Father is at work. I know He is sovereign. He’s at work everywhere but where is He at work in a harvest sense in terms of bringing people to a saving knowledge of Himself? People groups are moving, they’re changing, they’re not static and we have got to be aligning ourselves with the Father’s work. As we align ourselves with the Father’s work, we’ll see where He’s working and we can join Him in his work. Do you know why we have so much fruitlessness? Because we’re not doing what the Father has sent us to do. When we align ourselves with His work and He chooses to bless we’ll never complain about fruitlessness again.

“The disciples did not understand the urgency with which Jesus lived. If you’ll turn back to me to chapter 4 of the same gospel you’ll see Jesus going out of his way to speak to a Samaritan woman, someone who’s looked down upon. As he is speaking with this woman she receives eternal life and goes out to evangelize others and you say, ‘oh, I just wish it was always that way.’ And right after he gets through evangelizing the disciples have been off into the city and they come back in verse 31 and they say to him, ‘Rabbi, eat.’ See, they’re good Baptists, they were thinking about food. I mean, it was time to eat. And Jesus picked right up where they are. Look what he says in verse 32. ‘I have food to eat that you don’t know about.’ Now the disciples had no more clue what he was talking about when he said ‘food’ than the Samaritan woman did when He said ‘water.’ They’d been with him a long time. Look what he says. The disciples began to say, ‘Hey did you bring a picnic basket? Anybody got a brown bag that we can share? What happened, how come we don’t have some food here?’ And Jesus said, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work. My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work.’ My friend, is the position you’re in and the service you give to God today, is it food and energy to your soul? Are you in the wrong place? Then you need to move where it can be food and energy to your soul. Does what you do so carry you up in the privilege in doing it, in the sense that it’s food and energy to your soul, that you wouldn’t do anything else and if you could do it for free, you would do it for free. But you know what? We get so tied up in side-bar interests, don’t we? And some of them are good. There are other ministries. They are just not the position and the thing God has called you to do in your state convention or your association or your church. And sometimes they have nothing in the world to do with ministry. And I see people rush through ministry to get to an external interest that is the food and passion of their soul. It’s a temptation for every one of us. You say, ‘Geoff, if you just knew my situation, who I worked for, you’d want to get through in a hurry.’ No, not if God sent you and you’ve got an urgency about you. As I pray for my missionaries and our missions on the field I say, ‘Lord, give them an urgency so that the position they are in and the service they offer today will be food and passion for their soul so they couldn’t think of doing anything else.’

“Sometimes I get accused of working hard. I’m working hard for an important thing. I don’t want to be accused of working less. You know what consumes my thoughts? The privilege and the position I have to serve God where I am. That was true in Brazil, it was true when I was in England, and it was true when I was in Africa. That’s one of the signs of vocational calling to ministry. It’s all-consuming and you have to slow yourself down. You don’t have to wind yourself up, Amen?”

“Jesus had a busy day. The disciples had been pressing on him with questions and then he goes out and they are in a strange town and it’s time to rest but when he sees a woman who is ready and is ripe for harvesting he talks to her about her eternal destiny and he gets so exhilarated by the conversation that when he gets done he’s forgotten that it’s even time to eat. Do you wish you had more hours in the day to do what you do? Does five o’clock come too quick? Do you wish there were 26 hours in a day and 8 days in a week? I know some of you, you do. That’s because what you do is food and passion for your soul. Now, spouses, you’re the ones who would make us most honest in this room. You know whether your husband or your wife is really passionate about what he or she does. Perhaps you are not tonight, and just to be honest, I didn’t think everyone in this room would be. But if you are not, may I suggest that perhaps something is going on in your life spiritually. I pray God will help you in these next few days. Or maybe you are not where the Father sent you. Jonah had to figure that out. And life is miserable until you get where God wants you to be and it’s miserable for everyone around you. Or maybe God sent you to where you are but He wanted to send you somewhere else and you said, ‘no, I’m going to stay right where I am.’ That’s the fear of change, the fear of something new. And so, He has been sending you and you should be somewhere else but you’re where He sent you first but not where He sent you second. And sometimes He’s just getting ready to send you somewhere and so He sends a restlessness to your soul. But then look at the next verse. We forget the next verse; Jesus says, ‘Do you not say, there are four months and then cometh the harvest. Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the field for they are white and ready for harvest.’ I believe this verse revolves around two proverbs. The first is, ‘Hey man, there are four months to harvest, let’s take our time, there’s no problem.’ Jesus was quoting a proverbial phrase. And people were saying, ‘you know Rome wasn’t built in a day, take your time, there’s always tomorrow.’ I mean, why be urgent? There’s four months and then the harvest comes. We don’t need to be too concerned, do we? Now, where was Jesus when he was talking? You’ve all read MacArthur and he says it was December or January and he was standing in the green fields and he was talking about the harvest that would come in April or May and I can agree with that but he said, ‘look, the fields are white unto harvest. Now, I grew up on a farm and I know enough about wheat to know that when wheat is ready it’s not white it is golden. And if this was 4 months before harvest or 3 months before harvest it was not ready. So, what was Jesus saying? Well in the 1930’s, before the state of Israel was declared a nation a British journalist went to the Holy Land and he wrote a book called *In the steps of the Master*; it’s a classic. He has another one, *In the steps of St. Paul*. His name was H.V. Morton and he wrote the following, he says, ‘As I sat at Jacob’s well a crowd of Arabs came along the road from the direction in which Jesus was looking. And I saw their white garments shining in the sun. Surely Jesus was not talking of an earthly harvest but a heavenly harvest and as he spoke I think he likely saw as he

pointed to the road where the Samaritans were in their white robes they were assembling to hear his words.’

“I’m not sure what kind of Christian H.V. Morton was, but you know most commentators come down to that’s probably what Jesus was saying. Look at verse 30. The Samaritans were coming to hear him after this woman’s testimony. And he says, ‘look the fields are white unto harvest.’ He’s looking through the green wheat fields and sees these other people from Samaria coming and he’s saying, ‘look they’re ready to harvest. Don’t say they’re four months and then cometh the harvest. It’s time right now to harvest.’ We need to be about harvesting. And then verse 39 says, ‘from that city many of the Samaritans believed in him because of the word of the testimony of that woman; he told me all things I had ever done.’ So, here were people, disciples that were looking down on Samaritans and Jesus said, ‘no, no, no, don’t do that.’ No, no, no, these people are ripe, they’re ready for harvest. These people that are coming through the fields are receptive people. Don’t look down on them.

“Southern Baptists, God is doing a work among people groups in North America. We’re discovering receptivity where we didn’t realize there was receptivity, and my question to us is, are we ready to rejoice in that harvest? Lord, would you work in every people group? But don’t let us look down on any people group. Are we ready? Oh, there’s still four months until harvest. Let me just keep doing what I’m doing. I got comfortable doing what I was doing and it worked last year, let’s do it again this year. Susie, or whoever your secretary is, just change the dates and make them the same as last year. It will be a lot easier than trying to do all this again. Don’t say that if we keep doing the same things we’ve always done, we’ll keep getting the same results. You know why? We won’t. Now, they say the height of craziness is to keep doing the same things the same way and you get the same results; that’s only true if you believe in a static world. But in a world that is changing if we keep doing things the same way we’ll get diminishing returns. When we say, ‘oh, don’t worry, there’s four months until harvest,’ tomorrow will do. Jesus says, ‘see the harvest and go to work.’ In verse 36 he says the following, ‘already he who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life. So that the one who sows and the one who reaps we may rejoice together. In this case the saying is true, one sows and another reaps. I’ve sent you to reap that for which you have not labored, others have labored and you have entered into their labor.’

“Here’s the second proverb; one sows and another one reaps. In the life of that Samaritan woman Jesus sowed and reaped. Now, she was sowing and bringing the Samaritans to hear Christ and verse 39 says many would believe. Now, remember this is an agricultural picture. We don’t grow up in an agricultural society anymore. Some of you were raised on farms but it’s becoming more and more unusual and we have to remind Christians that sowing and reaping go hand in hand.

“I just want to remind you about some things about sowing and harvesting. First of all, we must sow to reap. We know that in the agricultural world. You can take the tractor out there and you can have the planter spinning but if you don’t have the seed in the planter, when you get through, there’s nothing going to grow in those furrows. But in the

spiritual world do we believe that we have to sow in order to reap? Yes or no? I really believe we struggle with that don't we? Because we really want to reap. We really want to reap and I don't mind that. I really want to reap. I mean, when I sow and I don't reap I'm not as excited as when I reap. But I have to sow in order to reap. Sometimes we sow and reap in someone's life and in an instant that person's life is changed. They come to eternal life in Jesus Christ. Sometimes we sow and years later we reap or somebody else reaps. We've got to sow in order to reap.

“Number 2: We reap where others have sown, Hallelujah? Amen? I mean, I'm just so grateful that I have reaped where others have sown. You know whenever I've shared my faith I think I'm the only person who has ever shared with that person. And then as I go along I realize there have been other testimonies to that person. And then when I hear their testimony later on and they tell me about how they got saved it's not just about Geoff Hammond it's a series of people who have been talking to them because I've reaped where others have sown. You know when Phillip went to Samaria in Acts chapter 8? He was credited with an incredible revival but we forget that he was reaping where Jesus had sown. We sow where others will reap. If I'm going to reap where others have sown then I've got to sow where others will reap. That's fair isn't it? I've got to sow and sometimes I may never see the reaping but I've got to believe that God's word will never return void and we will see a harvest. But I like to count those baptisms and so do you. Lord, don't let them go to another denomination. I mean, I want to sow and I want to reap for Southern Baptists. You know we'll be going across America as part of the national evangelism initiative in 2010, and I was excited and sharing this with someone recently and saying, 'we're going to take the gospel tract, we're going to take the *Jesus Film*, we're going to take a portion of the new testament to every home in every community in North America, if God will help us as we mobilize Southern Baptists. Some may said, 'well, we did that in our church. We took the *Jesus Film* to every person in our community, we took the gospel tract, we had hundreds of people come out but we only saw 2 or 3 baptisms.' And I said, 'So? Your theology is wrong. You really thought that in every case you would sow and reap in the same day? You still don't think that God could use that sowing for reaping?'

“Number 3: We will reap what we sow. Galatians 6:7, God is not mocked for what a man sows that will he also reap. If you're not effective in evangelism tonight it's because you're not sowing. The Holy Spirit knew we would be impatient so he said through the apostle Paul in verse 9, 'let us not lose heart in doing good for we will reap if we do not grow weary.' The greatest danger in North America is that we're getting weary as Southern Baptists. We're saying it's more secular, there's nothing you can do about it, we're worried about the economy, we're worried about politics, we're worried about our kids and we're worried about our future and we got weary about doing what we do best which is sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to Him.

“Number 4: 'They that sow in tears will reap with joy,' Psalm 126:5. When's the last time you sowed in tears my friend? When you sow in tears you'll reap in joy.

“Number 5: We must sow together for harvest. Do you realize in the United States someone dies every 11 seconds, and 3 out of 4 die without knowing the Light of the world? We have a missionary who literally weeps over his city; it’s a city that, it’s a tough city. It’s the iron man’s city. I want you to look into the eyes of Lamar Duke and look at the world he lives in and see as he cries over his city and say, ‘Lord, would they do a video like that about my city, my state?’ This is Lamar Duke. (video plays)

“Wow, don’t you just love it? Lord, give us lots of Lamar Dukes. We commissioned 135 missionaries in Chesapeake, VA recently and a girl came up to me and I didn’t know it but I had interviewed her about 4 years ago for a job at a church I was working at. In that interview process I just asked her about her salvation experience. She told me about her work experience, I remember that. I hadn’t remembered her name but I said, ‘You know, I don’t really think you’re saved.’ She went home and told her husband that I was the most unkind person in the world. About three years later they become good friends with my brother and my brother said to me, ‘Do you remember Jo and John?’ And I’m like, ‘No, I don’t remember them.’ And he said, ‘Well, they remember you.’ How do they remember me? They said you’re the one that helped bring Jo to Christ. Well, I don’t remember it. ‘Do you remember that interview with that girl? I said, ‘yes, I do.’ And then my brother went on and told me that one Sunday morning Jo was on one side of the church and John was on one side of the church and when the invitation was given they both went forward to give their hearts to Christ. I hadn’t a clue. I had sown and another person has reaped. I rejoiced in the sowing. They rejoiced in the reaping. She showed up at the commissioning service at Chesapeake and said, ‘We’ve been baptized, our kids are in church and we want to be a part of what God’s doing in North American missions.

“Sowing together for harvest. For a lot of us here tonight it’s going to be a real shift because we’ve been blessed to live in a culture where we can reap where others have sown. Some of you are in very receptive places where you sow and reap in an instant, it’s immediate. But there are many, many fields in North America where we need to sow in order to reap. I’m going to ask you, the Holy Spirit has been asking me and been asking you tonight, Will you make a commitment to sow together for harvest? Yes, even sowing where others where reap. Sowing in tears to reap in joy. Sowing in order to reap. And along the way Lord, help us to reap where others have sown. Just where you are seated, make that an altar tonight. Maybe you can just visually, symbolically do something where you are seated. Move forward in prayer. Say, ‘Lord, it’s me, here’s my hand.’ Lord, may we understand we’ve been sent by you. We’ve been sent to do the Father’s work. We want to commit to lead our people but starting with us let’s sow together for harvest.”