

Awake to the Harvest?

by Bob Young

The gospels record two occasions when Jesus declared the fields ready for harvest (Matt. 9:35-38; John 4:34-38). Almost 2000 years ago, Jesus declared the harvest plentiful and ready. Do we believe the harvest is ready now and that the world is waiting for the good news? I wonder whether we believe that Jesus' statements are still true today. I wonder because it appears that our awareness of, vision for, and commitment to the harvest—evangelism and missions—are too limited.

One thing has surely not changed—our world needs the gospel. In fact, the world perhaps needs the gospel more today than ever before. Further, my own experience says the world is hungry for and receptive to the gospel. We are training some workers, but too many go to fields already worked and potentially overharvested. We are not using wisdom. We are not sending workers to the receptive areas where the fields are white and ready for harvest. We are barely touching the urban areas of our world. We are not establishing self-sustaining, self-governing, self-duplicating missionary churches. In most parts of our mission work, we are not reaching and developing members who can sustain the church.

Why do we not send more workers to the real fields? There are not enough workers. In the U.S., we "use up" three or four preachers per congregation in larger churches, and hundreds of smaller churches go without a preacher. Further, what preachers are doing in the local churches is often everything but evangelism. In the mission field, we struggle to establish healthy churches with adequate foundations for future growth and the capacity to plant additional churches.

We are capable of doing more, but in order to do more we must reestablish our priorities and primary goals, we must rethink the essence of Christianity, and we must develop effective strategies. We must think about these three basic tasks. I encourage you to think about and pray about your answers: What are the most important goals for the church? What are the essential elements of our faith? What is the best way to take the gospel to the entire world?

I close by suggesting several things we must consider as we seek to renew the church and our commitment to sharing the gospel through evangelism and missions.

- The "bigger is better" thinking that seeks big numbers and superstore mega-churches is not the only strategy, and is often not an effective strategy.
- The latest wave of religious thinking or fads--third waves, Holy Spirit, better worship, etc.—is not the answer.
- We must rethink our own creeds, clergy, and coercive tendencies.
- We must seek a fresh look at scripture to understand principles and worldviews which are greater than culture. We must understand which changes are cultural and which are principle-based.
- We must hold fast the centrality and supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- We must count the cost.
- We must continue in prayer.