

ViralStJames Bible Study #15: Harvest

Harvest

This study leads us to look at several shorter passages in the Bible, so be prepared to hop around!

The Background

One of the many things that we are missing during this pandemic is the opportunity to celebrate special occasions together. If we are not careful, the days can blend into one another, losing their colour. We can also become depressed at the restrictions imposed upon us, and turn inwards. Whilst it is important to lament those things that we have lost, we must not lose sight of all that we have been given. At this time of the year, we would normally be celebrating the harvest, but if we cannot sing or share a festival meal together, we can at least pause to be thankful, reflect on its meaning and consider what actions we may hear God calling us to.

The Questions

- 1) **Read Leviticus 23:9-10. The Israelites are given instructions as to what to do with the first fruits of their first harvest in the Promised Land. Why do you think this was so important?**

Note whose land it was in the first place (v10). The offering of the first fruits was important to remind the Israelites that the land and hence the harvest from it, was not of their own making, but was a gift from God. The gift cements the relationship between the two parties – the Lord who gives the land and the people who tend the crops and steward it.

- 2) **Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-14 David is celebrating the gifts the Israelites have brought to help meet the costs of building the Temple where God will dwell. Try listing the words that David uses to describe and praise God. Do we lose sight of these in times of strain? Take a moment to praise God.**

Everlasting/greatness/power/glory/splendour/majesty/ruler/strength/power glorious

- 3) **Note the words in v14, which many will recognise from the words used at the offering during our pre-pandemic 9 am service. Where does David say that the gifts we offer to God come from?**

'Everything comes from you' or as we say in the response prayer at 9am 'All things come from you, and of your own do we give you' – Not just possessions, money – but our skills, gifts, ability to love and be loved. We are made in God's image.

- 4) **More than 30 years ago, at our previous church in North Lincolnshire, the front of the church at Harvest time was decorated not just with local agricultural produce, but with products made by local hands – including rope, and fertiliser manufactured in the town. Since then, the fertiliser factory has gone and the rope works are closed. Though we may not like it, change is a constant in our lives -**

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what objects or products would you give thanks for this harvest time? Would it be appropriate to bring up a broadband cable or laptop?

Without these modern methods of communication, how much more isolating would a covid-style lockdown have been like?

- 5) The Old Testament prophets were aware that giving thanks and praise to God was an empty gesture if it wasn't accompanied by a right attitude and actions (think of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4). Read Micah 6:6-8. What does the Lord require of us?**

To act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God. The attitude of humility is demonstrated by our actions – God loves justice and showing mercy – as we are being re-made in his image, these actions should be part of our lives.

In a society that purchases most of our food from supermarkets, and clothes from large chains, how can we demonstrate justice and love for others in our purchases?

Fair trade; buying clothes that are from workers that are not being exploited; Supporting foodbanks?

- 6) Harvest is also a time to celebrate giving and generosity, and to remember our duties to support others. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. What do you think Paul is referring to when he says that those who give generously 'will be made rich in every way' (v11)**

-Paul appears to be celebrating the fact that those who give generously will be blessed, not financially, but growing in grace. The implication seems to be that those who give generously because they realise that God, through Jesus, has made our lives richer, will abound in good works (as Micah called for). Furthermore, those who benefit from our generosity in meeting the needs of God's people are encouraged and praise God, and in turn pray for us and give thanks for our generosity. It's a virtuous circle.

Can you testify to the truth of Paul's words? Does being generous and helping to meet the needs of others help us to better understand God's generosity to us – the peace he gives, the ways in which the Spirit is working within us to transform our lives? How much do we value and pursue richness of life (or as Jesus calls it, 'life in all its fullness' rather than wealth and possessions?

- 7) In his first letter to the Corinthians (9:11-12) Paul reminds his listeners that those who work in 'sowing spiritual seed among you' should also have the right of support (reap a material harvest). Do we see the need to support Keith, Richard and the work at St James?**

All the work at St James is supported by ourselves (via the Diocese), with no external support. Salaries, housing and pensions all have to be paid for, as do the costs of keeping the church building in good order. Whilst some charities have generously

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supported the refurbishment of the St James Centre, the ongoing costs of running it will also require our support.

- 8) Although we can't sing it, reflect on the words of the final verse of 'We plough the fields and scatter'**

*We thank you then O Father
For all things bright and good
The seedtime and the harvest
Our life, our health, our food
Accept the gifts we offer
For all your love imparts
And what thou most desirest
Our humble thankful hearts*

*All good gifts around us
Are sent from heaven above
Then thank the Lord, Oh thank the Lord
For all his love*

- 9) Think about what actions you may be being called to as we thank God this Harvest time.**

The Space for notes
