

The Householder's Search

By
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“And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?” (Matthew 20:6)

[Editor's note: Padgett Robinson was an innovative pastor at East Rockingham Pentecostal Holiness Church in East Rockingham, NC, (part of the South Carolina Conference). Under his guidance the church experienced phenomenal growth and was one of the first P.H. churches, if not the first, to break the 1000 attendance barrier in the early 1950s. This message was delivered at a Sunday School convention held in the South Carolina Conference of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, probably at East Rockingham, and gives some of the details that contributed to their success.]

The most fascinating, compelling, challenging system ever developed by God or man is the scheme of redemption as set forth in the four Gospels of Jesus Christ.

Completely familiar with the human heart, its aspirations, ambitions, passions, and weaknesses, Jesus employed all of the major methods of appeal that he might tap the limitless resources of the man he had made to build the eternal kingdom of God on earth.

He opened his invasion on the world of men with a summons to good and bad alike to “come and follow me.” On one occasion his exact words were: If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Contrary to the most common opinion that all who come to Jesus may rest and relax in the security of the fold, the real overtones of his message and method were to action, to go. I think it is fitting that in these times of heresy and false teachings that this convention selected as its theme – Making the Bible Live. When the Bible begins to live in your heart, it is then that you are set afire with the compelling nature of its message to men. He stood on the Horns of Hatten, on the deck of a fisherman's skiff, in the shadow on the Temple porch, and cried, “If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink.” But no sooner had men walked

into the full orbbed light of his presence that he turned them around and said, “Go out into the world and make disciples of all men.”

He took them into the golden barley fields white unto harvest and said, “Behold the ripened grain. I want you to go out and reap men like you reap a harvest of grain.” He stood on the shore of Galilee and said to the discouraged fishermen, “Cast your nets on the right side.” They obeyed and came up with a net full of fluttering, flouncing, flipping fish. And then he said, “Leave those nets behind you and come with me and I will make you to catch men like you’ve caught these fish.”

He gathered a crowd of little children around him, took one up in each arm and called his disciples to him: “Gather around men. Do you see these little children. This is the nearest thing on earth to the kingdom of God. I want you to save them and tell men that of such is the kingdom of God.” They were inclined to push the children into the background as of little importance. But I think Jesus was saying, “I am going away, and I want you to come on up a little later. But when you come be sure and bring these children with you.”

How varied and beautiful were the appeals of Christ to men for service. He often used parables to get his points across. Said he, “My kingdom is like a feast, a marriage, a great supper, a vineyard, a field.” One of the amazing things about the people who make up each parable is the prominence of servants, the workers, the toilers. The men and women who served were not overlooked. In the case of the wedding feast when the water was turned to wine, John tells us that the governor of the feast didn’t know about the miracle. But the servants knew. In the parable of the great supper, the servants play an important role. They make the supper possible. They take care of the emergencies. They

do the work. Notice the trend in the message. First he bids, then he insists, and finally he says, “Go out and compel.”

There are a number of things that literally leap out at us from the parable in our text. The householder himself is a great study. He goes out early to hire laborers in his vineyard. He is persistent. He hires all he can as early as he can, but after making the rounds, he goes back and hires more. He goes back again and again. In fact, he is busy all day searching for laborers to work in his vineyard. He says, “I have many, but I need more. There is an abundance of work to be done. I will not be satisfied until everyone is bidden, everyone is asked, every man is employed. The work is large. It’s important. It must be done, and I must find more workers.

The most amazing part of the parable is seen in the great throng of idlers standing in the marketplace when there is a vineyard of ripe grapes ready to be harvested, and only a few people are toiling. Why don’t they ask for a job? Why don’t they volunteer? Instead, they just idle around. They didn’t consider the importance of the work and the tragedy of the job not done, the tragedy of a wasted harvest.

Another striking feature of the story is the time element. The householder kept his eyes on the clock. He went out early in the morning at daylight or before. He wasn’t satisfied. He went back at 9:00, back at 12:00, back at 3:00. Then, he saw the sun was going down, the shadows lengthening, but he couldn’t let the night fall on work not yet done. He went back again.

Men and women, we are in a race with time. It is no longer early in the morning. The old clock of time has long since passed 9:00. The old hands have already ticked off the noon hour. It is already past 3:00. The sun is hanging in an evening sky. It is the

eleventh hour, yet I hear the householder calling for more laborers: “Come quickly before the sun is set and the night falls. This is the summons into a vineyard that is already ripe unto harvest. The last moments are ticking off the clock. The shadows are falling. The night is coming on. The great Lord of the vineyard is calling for more workers. He wants you. He has one offer to every man, woman, boy and girl: “Whatsoever is right, I will pay thee.”

When Christ’s disciples were first commissioned, he sent them out on a trial run. They came in jubilant: “We’ve had success.” They were sent out again and again and for two thousand years he has been sending men out to work in his vineyard. But the early morning hour has long since passed. So, too, the noon hour and the mid afternoon hour. This is the last call, the final summons. It is now or never. It is a race with time. It is my prayer that we have not waited too long and that we won’t get there too late with too little.

This convention is one of the most inspirational things I have ever attended. I have been to the great national conventions where thousands gathered and listened to the specialists. But no where has it gotten down into me as this one has. This is my convention. These are my people. We are doing this and that makes a world of difference. Three years ago I sat in Cadel Tabernacle in Indianapolis and heard those Sunday School enthusiasts say with a conviction that I had never heard before, “This is the way we did it.” I saw that it had passed the experimental stage with those people. They were sharing knowledge that had come from experience. But still, I didn’t think I could do it. They talked in terms of thousands. That was unheard of in our church.

Then, a few months later, Lois and Karl Bunkley moved in on me at East Rockingham, NC. They said, “If others can do it, you can do it.” They pounded it into my head and heart until one night I finally believed it. Karl said, “Padgett, with this fine church and this town, you can have a thousand in Sunday School.” Lois said, “You’d better pray about that.” She is a bit more cautious than Karl. When Karl gets excited, he may say most anything. Lois on the other hand gets real practical. She said, “If you can get the people to praying and working, it can be done. Get them to pray five minutes a day.”

I announced my goal – 1000 in Sunday School – before I realized what that meant. Then, I started to plan and to pray. I wrote down one hundred names of workers and called a meeting. There, I told them what we had to do. The most amazing thing about it is that they came. A hundred people came and they believed that we could do it. I am not here tonight to tell you how you ought to do it. I can tell you how we did it and it worked. It can’t be done here at this convention, in the bright lights with blazing signs, with the wonderful inspiration and spirits running high. You have to build a Sunday School back there where discouragement faces you, where the problems are big, where the idlers stand in the marketplace; back there with the odds against you, in the grime and dust and dirt of the factory, without this conducive environment.

Back there where you have to use your own mind, your own hands, your own feet, your own voice.

Back there where you have to do everything from song writing to baby sitting.

Back there where you have to be everything from a diplomat to a sign painter.

We did everything from having a “funeral” in the church one night to riding the devil out of town on a rail. You may be sure that when you start to build a big Sunday School, you will have to have a few funerals.

We went to the radio and newspapers to tell the people we were in town.

We tore sheets out of the telephone book and gave them to workers and said, “Call every person on these pages and find out if they belong to a Sunday School.”

We put high school boys on the street carrying big signs about our Sunday School.

We put on a house-to-house canvas.

We had an airplane fly over town and drop leaflets.

We had a parade.

And then behind all of that, we worked and planned and prayed.

In that crowd of workers that day when I called the meeting, there was a county commissioner, a member of my Sunday School class. He was not a regular attender and was not very spiritual, but he joined the crusade. He became a tithe payer and very regular in his attendance. He took his car and hauled people to my Sunday School. He arranged with the superintendent of the county home to have all of the inmates ready on Sunday morning, and he brought them to Sunday School and many became members.

We worked until our dream became a reality. The day came when we went all out. On that morning when the count was made, we had not a thousand, but 1,125. Scores of people were turned away that could not get inside and were not counted. You may say that the big drives are not healthy. Some people are opposed to them. But I’ll tell you we

are still reaping the benefit of that drive. We have never dropped as low in attendance since that drive as we were before.

We had our thinking broadened, our vision lifted. We believed that we can do anything there now. Four years ago we were running about 350 in Sunday School. Recently, we have had 600, 700, and 800 in Sunday School. Our average is 520 and our enrollment is 800. It can be done neighbor. All it takes is workers, somebody God can use, vessels through whom he can pour the life giving water to a perishing world.