

John 4:27-45

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 August 2019

Preacher: Bing Nieh

[0 : 0 0] from John chapter 4, verses 27 to 45. It is found on page 985 of your White Church Bible.

Please stand for the reading of God's Word. Just then, Jesus' disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, what do you seek? Or, why are you talking with her? So the woman left her water jar and went away into town to see the people. Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did.

Can this be the Christ? And they went out of the town and were coming to him. Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus, saying, Rabbi, eat. But he said to them, I have food to eat that you don't know about. So the disciples said to one another, has anyone bought him something to eat? Jesus said to them, my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, there are yet four months and then comes the harvest?

Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already, the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here, the saying holds true, one sows and another reaps. I sent you to reap for that which for you did not labor. Others have labored and you have entered into their labor.

Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. He told me all that I ever did. So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, it is no longer because of what you said that we believed, for we have heard for ourselves and we know that this is indeed the savior of the world. After two days, he departed for Galilee, for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his hometown. So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast, for they too had gone to the feast. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

[2 : 3 4] It's a joy to be together this morning. And if you are visiting where I've just found your way to Hyde Park because of the start of a new school year at IIT or are just new to the neighborhood, thank you for choosing to spend your morning with us. As we get started, let's bow for a word of prayer. Father, we come together and the desire of our hearts is for you to speak to us. That in John's gospel, you say of your words, that the words that you speak are to us spirit and life.

And so for those of us who are in search of life and revitalization of our spirit, would you tune our hearts to hear you speak? We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Amen. We reenter the unfolding narrative in John chapter 4. It is a masterful narrative and it gets to the heart of the Christian faith. Up to this point, we've seen Jesus' conversational engagement with an unnamed Samaritan woman. And with her, Jesus establishes the primacy and the significance of Christian worship. Worship is no longer to be geographically focused. It is not confined to a single space or a sacred place. It has become, as some have said, decentralized. It does not revolve around a particular place, namely in those days, Jerusalem. Rather, the question that emerges from John chapter 4 is, where should worship happen?

And to that, we answer, everywhere. Everywhere. I learned this lesson as a teenage boy. I was traveling with my father in East Asia, namely in China, on the heels of an academic conference he spoke at.

And the conference was over and it was the Lord's Day, Sunday. My father told me we were going to a church service that day. But it was an underground church service. Being the naive teenager I was, I was like, what kind of church meets literally underground? For those of you who may not be aware, in China, there are two categories of churches. There are those who are three self, the number three and self, which are state-run churches. State-run churches. They are government-approved and monitored, teaching Christian ethics, but very little about a Christian king. The underground church is an opposition to that church. It is the church that assembles in secret, in defiance of the state. We were picked up by a single individual. We spoke nothing to one another. We traversed across the city by foot. We wandered through alleys and back passages. And we ended up at a storefront. And there, we walked into what I could best describe as if you took your home and transformed it into a beauty salon of sorts.

[6 : 37] We meandered through the rooms and we found ourselves settled in the back. Maybe a dozen of us, most of us on the floor. Being a guest, my father and I were actually given stools about ankle high. We were led in song.

And none of us were permitted to sing louder than a whisper for fear of being heard. We were given the word. And there, even there, a group of a dozen people gathered their faces.

I will not remember. I cannot remember the place. I cannot remember. But what emerged from that morning was an indelible lesson. God is worshipped everywhere.

And I don't journal, but in those days I did and dated. What's the date on this? I actually pulled it back. January 17th, the year 2003. I know some of you were not around then.

But I wrote this. In the daytime. About this experience. I wrote pages on this, actually. In the daytime, this place acts as a beauty shop adorning the outside of individuals.

[8 : 00] Yet on Sundays, it adorns the inside of people. Worship happens everywhere. It happens in the urban centers and the suburban sprawl.

It happens in the rural countryside and the overcrowded metropolis. That you can find the people of God, worshipping God, nearly everywhere.

Whether they're in the Saharan plains or the Himalayan foothills or the Polynesian islands or the Amazonian jungles or even Asian hair salons.

The worship of God happens everywhere. And how did this happen? Well, for John, he would have told you. It emerged from John chapter 4.

God is on the move. And he's seeking people to worship in spirit and in truth. Regardless of geography. Therefore, the end of our passage is able to blast out loud.

[9 : 03] Jesus is the Savior of the world. The whole world. All the world. Every place of the world.

And if the first segment of this passage establishes the essential premise that worship happens everywhere, then what follows this morning lays down an equally essential premise.

Witness happens everywhere. Worship happens because witness happens. Where witness goes, worship emerges.

And where worship emerges, witness ensues. John 4 is about worship and witness. The worship of God and the witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

These are the indispensable facets of the Christian life. They are, as Jesus teaches, they are both water and food. Both life-giving.

[10 : 03] Both critical. Both are necessary. And this morning, I want to propose to you that a Christian's work is to bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian's great work is to bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. For you and I, the great labor is to bring a resting attention to Jesus.

As my college pastor used to say, Bing, show off Jesus. Show him off. Flaunt him. Brag about him.

And to guide our time this morning, I want to give us four signposts. Yes, four. Four signposts that will direct us through this passage.

Confusion is followed by a clarification. And then a confirmation. And then lastly, a continuation.

[11 : 05] Confusion, verses 27 to 33. Verse 27 reintroduces the disciples to us. Who have been absent since the parenthetical statement in chapter 4, verse 8.

Chapter 4, verse 8 tells us that when Jesus and the disciples were proceeding from Judea through Samaria up to the region of Galilee.

They had to pass through Samaria. And they stopped at a well. And at that well, the disciples decided to leave and go into town. A Samaritan town.

Sychar. Sychar. Namely Sychar. To obtain food. So they are absent from verse 8 all the way through verse 26.

They had gone into the city, the Bible tells us, to buy food. And the disciples re-enter the scene in verse 27. Seemingly at the pinnacle of Jesus' conversation with the unnamed woman at the well.

[12 : 05] He had just disclosed to this woman that He is the Messiah. The promised one of Israel. And they are caught by surprise, the Bible tells us.

For Jesus has violated what was culturally appropriate for the day. They marveled that He was talking with a woman. Rabbinical teaching in the day forbid it.

Forbid from talking to any woman really in public. A man and a woman. Even to the extremity of a man speaking with his own wife in public.

John gives us the unspoken thoughts of the disciples. What they would have asked the woman is this. What do you seek? What they would have asked to Jesus.

Why are you talking to her? Social appropriateness has been transgressed. And we have already learned that there was a significant ethnic and racial boundary that had already been crossed in chapter 4 verse 9.

[13 : 08] Firstly, Jews don't associate with Samaritans. And now compounding the social transgression is men do not talk to women in public.

It's certainly a socially awkward scene. You can imagine it. If you're an onlooker, there would have been a little bit of confusion. You know, Jesus and the woman are at this well.

The disciples, in the middle of the day, the disciples return. The text gives us no verbal exchange. The disciples look at Jesus, look at the woman, look at one another. And probably did that a few times.

And off the woman ran. Presumably in haste. She leaves her water jar and returns to town. If the disciples aren't confused at this point, with just the encounter with the woman, they're certainly confused by the end of verse 33.

They had urged Jesus to eat. And Jesus responds in a manner as if he had already eaten. And now the disciples are baffled. What's going on with this woman?

[14 : 16] Wait, you already ate? Wait, we just went into town to get food. Did you give him food? No, I didn't give him food.

Did she give him food? I don't know. Confusion. Confusion. And like many, how John's Gospel often unfolds is with misunderstanding.

There follows clarification. Clarification. Verses 34 to 38. Sensing their confusion, Jesus moves to bring clarification to his statement, I have food to eat that you do not know about.

The disciples seek to interpret Jesus' statement literally. In the same way the woman earlier tried to interpret Jesus' statement about water literally.

They thought Jesus must have been talking about literal food. Yet it is here that Jesus presents his disciples with a brand new reality.

[15 : 24] Verse 34 reads, My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Jesus states that he is gratified and satisfied through service.

Service in doing what God has sent him to accomplish. For Jesus, sustenance was certainly derived from ingesting food. We know he was human.

But here he also illustrates the reality that humans don't live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

And let's pause here because it's worthwhile to linger. Jesus demonstrates for us that you and I simply cannot live off of food alone.

It is not possible. The Christians certainly must eat physically, as we do and we should. But there is more to the Christians' well-being than just physical food.

[16 : 32] It is more than what you can obtain at Aldi's or Trader Joe's or Hyde Park Produce. You and I are to feed off of food that falls under the category of the words that proceed from the mouth of God.

And for Jesus, in this passage, doing God's will and accomplishing his work. Now, if you were one of the disciples, you must be saying, What?

What? What? What is this? What is going on? What are God's will? What are God's will and God's work? And soon enough, they'll be caught up in the same labor, according to verse 38.

God's will and work will become the work of the disciples. And this is the work of witness. The work of witness.

And Jesus gives them this agricultural analogy. He says, this is how the analogy unfolds. Well, a farmer plants a seed. And this farmer waits four months.

[17 : 42] There's a period of waiting before the harvest. The period of time cannot be hastened or accelerated or sped up. The sower of the seed must wait. This is the experience of every farmer and harvester.

This is natural law. This is botany 101 or horticulture 101. Basic, foundational, irrefutable. And then Jesus says that's the case in the world.

But then, do you see what he says? Well, let me tell you this. There's an exception to that law. There's an anomaly that happens.

And it's demonstrated in the gospel. He says this. There are those who sow and those who reap.

And traditionally, based on natural law, you wait four months. But let me tell you this, disciples. In the kingdom of God, in the gospel, there's no waiting.

[18 : 53] The harvest is now. It's right now. Go and reap right now. The four-month waiting period has either passed or transcended in the spiritual harvest.

And Jesus surely is aware of what's happening now. He gives us a lesson. Elsewhere, he says the harvest is plentiful. The time of harvesting is now.

The disciples are going to reap the benefit of the labors of others. Whether it refers to John the Baptist and his work, or it refers to the work of the Spirit of God. The disciples, what they would experience is that there would be a harvest right now.

In other words, the disciples were to be kingdom harvesters. They were those entrusted with sowing and reaping. Sowing the words of eternal life and reaping the fruit of those who received it. The disciples would be entrusted with this work.

And surely during Jesus' lifetime and after Christ's ascension, they were to be witnesses. Beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

[19 : 58] And what they would see are people coming to faith. Harvesting. This work of the Spirit of God in the world of God.

And it's fascinating because... I mean, there are examples in this congregation. That someone walks in for the first time.

And in this service, they come to faith all of a sudden. Wait, was there like...

Like, oh, I always think, okay, I got to kind of... When I share my faith with someone, it's kind of like a slow... It's like fishing, you know? Like, you just got to... You can't just jerk up... I mean, you could, I guess, jerk the fish onto the boat.

But you kind of reel them in, reel them in. And one month passes. Two months passes. Fourteen conversations later. Eighteen conversations later. And then... I might be able to...

[21 : 04] Oh, do you get what I've shared? Do you want to follow Jesus? Like, oh, come on. But the passage... What the passage asserts...

Is that someone walk in that door. And in a moment... Come to faith. Because the harvest is now. It's crazy to think about.

Well, and that's exactly what unfolds. Isn't it? Because Jesus clarifies.

This is what I mean. This is what I mean about... My food is to do my Father's work. As Christians, we enter into the same work.

What is the will of God for my life, you may ask? To do God's will and to accomplish His work. What does it entail? I can tell you it entails at least this. Witness. Sow seed.

[22 : 04] Reap harvest. And... For Jesus... I spent a lot of time on verse 34.

For Jesus, a submitted life to God was a satisfied life. And I can't help but wonder... How many of our lives are dissatisfactory?

Is that even a word? Or unsatisfactory? Or unsatisfying? Why? Because we don't live submitted lives. Jesus said, I'm going to do my Father's will. And in doing so, that is my food.

That is my sustenance. That is my satisfaction. And often times, I think as Christians, we go, my life is terrible. I don't like this.

I'm discontent in this way. I envy in this way. And I think there is something in following Jesus' example that if the most satisfying life is a life in submission under God, then I have to pose the question to myself and to you.

[23 : 14] What is your best life? That you can enjoy. A life of submission. And what I mean by that, a life of obedience. That means when sin is sin, you get it out.

A life of faith. That means you live by faith or what is unseen. You live by promises, not by what is seen. Well, confusion followed by clarification.

Moving into confirmation. Confirmation. You can imagine John the writer thinking to himself, I have no idea what Jesus is talking about.

And while he's thinking that thought, what was all abstract and theoretical, he looks up, and the town that he had just left was coming toward the well.

The contents of Jesus' instruction were now being confirmed as reality. The unnamed woman who had departed from the disciples had now come back on the scene.

[24 : 28] She didn't come back for her water jug. She might have. But she had gone back into town and to borrow the language of the text, she had become a sower. She says to the town in verse 29, come see a man who told me everything that I ever did.

Can this be the Christ? Come and see. Incidentally, this is the same language that the disciple Philip used on Nathaniel.

Hey, hey, hey, Nathaniel, I think I found him. Come and see. She went back into her town, her relational sphere, and spoke up and made much of Jesus.

It certainly wasn't all that she said. It's unlikely it's all that she said. But it encapsulates the reality that she said something and summoned others to it.

Her testimony was compelling enough to interrupt the midday schedule of an entire town, urging them to make their way to the well. And at the well, they encountered the words of the Lord Jesus.

[25 : 39] And the harvest was now secured. And many more, the Bible tells us, many more believe because of His Word. This is one of those sermons you would want to play back in heaven's video room if there were a video room in heaven.

What did this woman say? In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, this woman received sainthood. From all appearances, this woman transcended all the social norms of the day and became a prototypical example of genuine belief in Christ.

Because when the Spirit of God seizes an individual, takes hold of a person, the person becomes a witness to the Lord Jesus. What is exceptional about this unnamed woman is that Jesus didn't give her an explicit call to discipleship.

Do you remember earlier in John when Jesus comes across Philip and Nathanael? Jesus says, Hey, you follow me. That doesn't happen here.

Jesus actually doesn't even give her an explicit command to, Hey, go into the village and tell everyone what Jesus did for you. No. The text actually lays out for us, it seems like the initiative appears to be all hers.

[26 : 59] And she's presumed to be a disciple. For she follows in the same pattern of discipleship as established in chapter 1.

John the writer is careful to show us that the woman is actually imitating the call of the orderly disciples.

In order to say to the reader, you and I, she is one of us. Imagine that. I mean, I'm sure the conversation happens, you know.

Oh man. Philip is saying to Nathanael, I brought you. It was because of me that you met Jesus. Or maybe Andrew looks at Peter and says, Oh, Peter, the only reason you're following Jesus is because I got you.

I come and got you. And I said, Hey, come and see. And then the woman goes, Bam! This whole town! This whole town! This whole town!

[28 : 01] Came to believe! Because of me. Well, actually not because of me. If it were a crowd gathering contest, the woman certainly won.

Well, she becomes for you and I a model. This woman? Yeah. The one with a maybe, possibly a questionable past? Yeah.

This woman, part of an inferior race? Yeah. This woman who belonged to the bottom of the social strata? Yeah.

This chapter demonstrates that God will and God can save anyone. And it demonstrates that God will and God can use anyone.

Anyone. She didn't return for her water jug. She returned to show her town her Savior.

[29 : 10] She herself, figuratively speaking, had become a well of sorts. That inside of herself, taking the language from chapter 4, inside of herself, eternal life had sprung up according to verse 14.

And there was now a spring that was flowing out of her. Picture that. The woman who went to a well in search of water now became a well providing water to her town.

The woman worshipped because she inherited eternal life. The woman witnessed because eternal life produced in her a spring of living water for others to drink.

She became a well of living water to others. Jesus' instruction was not only confirmed, but it continues. The text moves confusion to clarification, to confirmation, and lastly, continuation, verses 43 to 45.

Jesus, the Bible tells us, for two days confirmed the Spirit's working among the Samaritans. He stayed there for two days. And I can't help but wonder what was going on for those two days.

[30 : 36] And it's conjecture, and I know it's dangerous to do, but chapter 4, verse 1 tells us that Jesus himself never baptized, but his disciples were always baptizing, and there seemed to be a lot of them being, or people being baptized.

And I can't help but wonder, man, I wonder if the Samaritans were getting baptized. Well, two days he was with them, demonstrating the hospitality of the Samaritans.

The Samaritans had shown hospitality to a Jewish rabbi. However, he wasn't simply just a Jewish rabbi. According to the text, he was the Savior of the world.

He was the Savior of the world. And because he was the Savior of the world, the people believed in him. The Samaritans believed in him.

And incidentally, this is the only time another people is said to believe in Jesus. The first group from chapter 2, verse 11, the first time this phrase was used, that many Samaritans from that town believed in him, was of the disciples.

[31 : 44] And John is telling you, you want to know if they're legit? They are legit. Wait, even the Samaritans? Yeah, yeah, yeah, the Samaritans are legit. As legit, or as credible, or as authentic as the apostles themselves.

Because Jesus wants to establish early on that he saves the world. The world. Well, I'm lost now.

I don't know where I am. I got too excited because Jesus saves the world. Well, Jesus departs from Samaria and moves on.

And he continues on in verse 43. It actually, I think verse 43 is picking up the tail end of chapter 4, verse 3. Because Jesus had intended to move from Judea and to go north to Galilee.

And he's going back to Galilee now according to verse 43. He's resuming his itinerary, so to say. And he moves on. And Jesus continues on.

[32 : 48] And the question is, well, why? Because Samaria seems, man, he's already the Savior of the world. The title Caesar received.

The title Roman gods received. The Savior of the world. And the Samaritans now attributed to him the Savior of the world. Jesus, you should just stay in Samaria.

Man, it's going to be good. It's going to be great. And Jesus says, nah. Nah, nah, nah. Witness continues.

And he moves up into Galilee and the text gives us this parenthetical statement that he's going to a region that will eventually be hostile to him, that will reject him in chapter 6, verse 66.

He continues on. Why? Because in spite of opposition, in spite of rejection, in spite of dishonorable treatment, there is a relentless, relentless nature to witness.

[33 : 53] Isn't that how Jesus found his way into your life? Pause. Think about this. There is a lineage in how the gospel got embedded into you.

Was it mom and dad? Was it a televangelist on television? Was it a pastor? And beyond that pastor, that televangelist, or mom and dad, there was another individual, or set of individuals, that embedded relentlessly the gospel in you.

You know this as parents. It's not a single conversation that brings about the transformation of your children. It is not a single, well it could be, according to that, it could be sudden, but oftentimes it's relentless in spite of opposition, in spite of doubt, in spite of circumstance, in spite of experience, in spite of pain.

Someone along the way said, hey, I'm still going. I'm still going after that person in hopes that they would taste living water.

Wow. We are beneficiaries of the faithful witness of others. And the mission continues. This is the good work of the Christian, to bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[35 : 20] When Jesus saves, Jesus sends. When Jesus saves, Jesus sends. We worship and we witness.

And as I close, I'm reminded of a time, you know, I've done quite a bit of youth ministry. And we intentionally brought students to these conferences that were to equip them for witness.

And I'm going to take something out of their playbook as we close because I think it's worthwhile. In these closing moments, I want you to do something.

God, I'm going to be in your scripture journal that you take notes on John and whether it be in this morning's worship guide, whether it be in the notes app of your phone, this is what I want you to do.

I want you and I challenge and encourage you to jot down one name. One name. A name of an individual that you would like to say something about Jesus.

[36 : 29] You're like, Bing, that's so juvenile. Why are we going to do that? We're going to do that, one, because I think some of us actually never think about it.

One name. One name. A loved one. A colleague. A classmate. Someone you walk by on the street every single day.

One name. And as I close in prayer, you write that name down. And I'm going to give you a minute to not only write the name down, but to pray that name through.

And Jesus knows the name, of course. But I think as you do that, perhaps the Lord would open up a conversation conversation where you can say, come see a man who not only told me everything I ever did, but who can carry me through everything in this life on to the next.

let us close in prayer. Let me give you that minute. Let me Father, we come to You this morning.

[38 : 24] And our desire is not only that we're a worshiping community, but we desire to be a witnessing community. That we desire to bear faithful witness to the Lord Jesus.

That we desire not only to show Him in our actions, but we desire to speak of Him in our speech. Because that is a sure indicator that bubbling up inside of us is a well or a spring of living water.

And so, Father, for all these names that are in our minds, all these names that are written on pieces of paper, all these names that have been inputted into our devices, we ask for the days ahead that You would give us opportunity.

At the prayer of George Whitefield, loosen our stammering tongues that we would tell of Thy love, immense, immeasurable. So, Father, would You not only loosen our tongues, but open up opportunities and embed in us boldness for witness.

Because in our lives sits the Savior of all the world. To this end we pray.

[39 : 56] Amen.