

AM John 4:1-42 Jesus completes the work of God

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[0 : 0 0] parts and for the moment we'll read verses 1 to 18. John's Gospel chapter 4 reading verses 1 to 18.

This is entitled Jesus and the Woman of Samaria and really it should be Jesus and the Samaritans because he doesn't just deal with the one woman, he deals with the Samaritans in general.

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John, although Jesus himself did not baptize but only his disciples, he left Judea and departed again for Galilee and he had to pass through Samaria.

So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well.

It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, give me a drink, for his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

[1 : 2 5] The Samaritan woman said to him, how is it that a Jew asked for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

Jesus answered her, if you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

The woman said to him, sir, you have nothing to draw water with and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob?

He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons of his livestock. Jesus said to her, everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again.

But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water, welling up to eternal life.

[2 : 3 2] The woman said to him, sir, give me this water so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water. Jesus said to her, go call your husband and come here.

The woman answered him, I have no husband. Jesus said to her, you are right in saying I have no husband, for you have had five husbands. And the one you now have is not your husband.

What you have said is true. Just there for the moment and we'll read the rest later. Now let's sing another verse. John chapter 4, taking up where we left off at verse 19 and reading through to verse 42.

John chapter 4 and verse 19. The woman said to him, sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.

Our fathers worshipped on this mountain. But you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship. Jesus said to her, woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

[3 : 55] You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know. For salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here.

When the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. For the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

The woman said to him, I know that Messiah is coming. He who is called Christ. When he comes, he will tell us all things.

Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am he. Just then his 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 and said to the people, Come see a man who told me all that I ever did.

[5 : 06] Could this be the Christ? They went out of the town and were coming to him. Meanwhile, the disciples were urging him saying, Rabbi, eat.

But he said to them, I have food to eat that you do not know about. So the disciples said to one another, has anyone brought 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, then comes the harvest?

Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for the 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 that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured and you have entered into their labours.

[6 : 21] 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 believe, for we have heard him for ourselves.

And we know that this is indeed the saviour of the world. May God bless to us this word as well. Now we want to look at John chapter 4 and this section from verse 31 through to verse 38.

And we'll read again for the moment verses 31 and 32. The disciples were urging him saying, Rabbi, eat. But he said to them, I have food to eat that you do not know about.

Now if we just read this section from 31 to 38, we might think that this was special instruction given to the disciples.

[7 : 42] A sort of training session to equip them for the mission that was to be theirs. And no doubt if we looked at it in that way, there would be useful lessons for us.

But really, I don't think that's the way that we should see it, as a sort of one-off address about mission. Because this story, this incident, is embedded in the story of Jesus and the Samaritans.

He's dealt with a Samaritan woman. He's about to deal with the rest of the Samaritans. And in between, we've got this section, which speaks about his mission.

And he's not saying to the disciples, well, it's about time I gave you some training about mission. What he's doing here is explaining what's going on. It's part of the story of Jesus and the Samaritans.

It's his interpretation of what's going on. And therefore, it's to be understood against that background. And I think when we do that, we get a slant on this that we would miss otherwise.

[8 : 52] And we would see how closely related it is to Jesus' own circumstances. Now that perhaps makes it a wee bit more difficult to apply in our day and age. But nonetheless, it makes it truer to the Scriptures.

This is Jesus telling his disciples how they should understand his situation amongst the Samaritans. And there are three things that we can look at here.

This is the way that Jesus saw it. For himself, this was an occasion which renewed his strength. In regard to God, this was a step to the completion of God's work.

And in regard to the disciples, this was an example to them of the fields that were ready for harvest. So that's the three points that we're going to look at.

What did this mean? It meant for Jesus, first of all, that this was an occasion which renewed his strength. Now we see that straight off from the words that we've already read.

[9 : 59] Here is this situation. Jesus, at the end of a day's journey, was sitting down by the well, tired out from his journey.

And the disciples have gone into the village to buy food, which suggests that he's not only tired, but he's hungry as well. He's exhausted from the day's journey, wearied by it.

And yet, after this encounter with the Samaritan woman, the disciples bring food, and he doesn't want to eat the food. He doesn't need to eat the food.

Because all sense of weaviness, and all sense of tiredness and hunger, have been held in abeyance, because of what has happened to him.

And he says to them, I have food to eat that you do not know of. And of course, that's Jesus' typical way of speaking. He's not speaking literally.

[10 : 57] You know, he's got a hidden message there. And typically, the disciples don't understand the hidden message. And they say, has somebody brought them food to eat?

And they fail to grasp the inner spiritual significance of what Jesus has said. Just like the Samaritan woman had done. Jesus had spoken about the living water.

And she says, give me this water, so that I don't have to come to the well to draw water any longer. She hasn't understood the spiritual significance of him being the water of life.

And they haven't understood the significance of Jesus speaking here, I have food to eat that you don't know about. But here is what Jesus is saying to them.

Something has happened to me that means that I don't feel tired the way I was. And I don't feel hungry the way I was. I have food to eat that you do not know about.

[12 : 01] Now just think about this matter of eating and how it brings to us a sense of satisfaction. There's a Spanish saying, a full stomach, a happy heart.

And I don't think we've got an equivalent saying in English, but I'm sure that we understand what that means. A good meal makes us feel good. And a good meal makes us feel happy.

So food isn't just a matter of feeding the body. It's a matter of bringing satisfaction to us as well. And that's the line that Jesus is following here.

And he says, I've got a source of strength, I've got a source of satisfaction that doesn't come from eating natural food. And he's saying, this incident that has happened to me has given me the strength and this good feeling that a meal would have given to me.

And that's why I'm not hungry the way I was before. Because I've been feeding upon this food that gives me satisfaction. Now, this is something that we'll look at and what this food is we'll look at in a moment.

[13 : 17] But it's just this idea of a food to eat that is not merely, literally food. And of course, this is quite obviously the teaching of the scriptures.

Jesus, when he was tempted, referred to the passage in the Old Testament, man does not live by bread only, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

And if you feed on bread, you get satisfaction from it. And a happy heart, okay, a contented heart. But if you obey God's word, if you do what he commands, then you discover the same thing as well.

Because man does not live by bread only. You get well-being and satisfaction and strength from obeying God and doing what he asks you to do and fulfilling your mission in life.

And that's the first thing that Jesus found here. And that's an important thing for us. Is this our experience? Because it certainly is one way in which we can and should enter into the experience of our Lord.

[14 : 29] To feed the body is quite a biblical thing to do. To feel happy over it is, I think, too, a biblical thing to do.

But there's other ways of finding satisfaction and a sense of strength, too, for our lives. And that's the feeding that Jesus is talking about here.

So, a good spiritual experience, a piece of service that might have seemed difficult and was difficult, satisfactorily completed, should do for us what this incident with Jesus and the Samaritan woman did for him.

It set his feeding of his body on the back burner, we might say. It put it in abeyance because he was so exhilarated and strengthened by having given this testimony and seen this result in the life of the Samaritan woman.

And so, a time of Christian fellowship, a good time of personal Bible study, should do the same for us. A piece of service conducted, especially in difficult circumstances, in whatever capacity, should refresh us and invigorate us as well.

[15 : 50] because it's food to eat that many people know nothing about. And that's the way that we should see happiness and fulfillment coming to us.

Not just from feeding the body, but from participating of this spiritual food that comes through obedience and service. And that's something I think that is relevant to us and a challenge to us.

I think it's a way of witnessing to the world. I don't know if people do it nowadays, but they used to speak about Monday morning blues, which means that you came to work at the office or wherever after the weekend and you were tired out and you were listless and you couldn't be bothered to do it and it was an awful bore and an awful drag.

And, you know, Christians should be the very opposite of that. Quite apart from the rest that they have on the Sabbath, which makes them physically refreshed, they should have had a boost from the worship conducted and they should have a boost from the fellowship that they've enjoyed and they should feel happy and exhilarated and ready to go on a Monday morning because they had food to eat that other people don't know about.

And to my mind, this should be a witness where other people are dragging themselves to work on a Sunday and Monday morning. Christians are saying, I'm ready to go because I've had a good weekend, not just of rest, but of worship where I've been fed with a food that you do not know about.

[17 : 32] Happy the Christian that has that experience and that can say to others, maybe not exactly in these words, but can say to others what these words mean, namely, I have food to eat that you don't know about.

So, that was Jesus' first interpretation of this experience. It was for him an experience that refreshed and invigorated him and gave him strength so that he didn't feel immediately the need for feeding and for rest that he had had before.

The second thing is this in relationship to God. This is a step to the completion of God's work. Now, if we ask, what is this food that he's talking about?

Then we've got the answer. 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.

Now, this is the thing that buoyed Jesus up and exhilarated him. The sense of mission. He had been sent just as we were singing about.

[18 : 48] To do your will, I take delight. that was what Jesus' experience was. The Father had sent them into this world with a particular mission to fulfill and his heart was set upon it and when he gave himself to that task, he felt strengthened and refreshed by it.

That was the food that others did not know about. Doing the Father's will, accomplishing the purpose for which he had been sent. Now, this sense of mission is expressed in two ways.

It's doing the Father's will and it is accomplishing or completing the work. Now, doing his will is a very broad thing.

What did it include? And we would say, well, it included him going to the cross and dying for his people on the cross. It included him taking the sins of others upon him and giving himself for them on the cross.

And yes, it did include all that. But it also included a life of obedience because there too he was representing his people, giving obedience to the law on their behalf.

[20 : 01] Just as he did as he gave obedience to the broken law when he gave himself on the cross. So the whole of Jesus' life of obeying the commandments, of following the lifestyle that was appropriate for a Jew at that time as well as teaching and preaching and doing good and going to the cross.

All of this is included in doing the will of God. And then there's this other way to complete his work. Now, this is what I want to focus on because it seems to me that we can interpret this in two ways.

Does this mean that he wants to complete the work that he's already begun, the work that God has given him to do? And I'm not denying that it can mean that.

God's work means the work that God has given me to do. but also it can mean complete the work that God himself has begun.

God's work has begun and Jesus is here to complete it. And that's the way that we're looking at things here because I think it fits in well with the rest of this incident.

[21 : 21] Jesus is not saying, I've begun a good work and I'm going to go on to complete it. What he's saying is God has been doing a work and I'm here to bring it to a completion.

And if you think about it in that way, what Jesus is saying is this. You remember that way back at the beginning when people fell into sin, Adam and Eve fell into sin, the promise was given to the woman that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head well, I've come to complete that work.

Do you remember how God said to Abraham in you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed? Well, that work that God began there was doing there I've come to complete it.

Do you remember how God gave to Moses all these sacrifices that pointed to the wonderful idea that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.

Well, that work that God began there was doing there I've come to complete it. Do you remember how God spoke to David and said there will always be a king who will reign forever on your throne?

[22 : 42] That was a work that God was doing there I've come to complete it. Do you remember how Isaiah spoke about the suffering servant who would be wounded for our sins and bruised for our well that was a work that God was doing and I've come to complete it.

I suggest that that's the way that Jesus is looking at things. There's a mission in which he's been set and he's therefore to be obedient to God's will in that respect but it involves this a completion of what God has been doing throughout the ages God has been at work speaking to Adam and Eve speaking to Moses speaking to David and so on and demonstrating his plan of salvation and now says Jesus this is my big thing this is my food to bring to completion that work that God has been doing and that's the way that I think he sees things here now that's not two different most of us always believe that believe but nonetheless I just want to emphasize this you see this plan of salvation it goes back to the beginning it goes back before the beginning in fact it's an eternal plan it's not a temporary expedient you know to put it crudely

God didn't say oh the world has turned out badly what will I do I best send Jesus to sort things out it wasn't anything like that before things happened God knew that they would happen and had made due provision so that throughout the ages to Adam to Abraham to Moses to David to Isaiah and so on throughout the ages he'd been working and working and working out his plan and now Jesus comes to set the capstone on it as it were to bring it all together to bring it all to fulfilment and his food is to complete the work of God to complete the work that God has been doing throughout the generations and that's the way that we should look at this what a wonderful salvation we've got if you're resting upon Christ and no forgiveness of sins if you're looking to him as your saviour and Lord where did it all start not with your receiving him but with him giving himself for you and not just with him giving himself for you but with the plan that went before which Jesus was bringing to a completion in his life and ministry and death that's the way it begins what a wonderful salvation this is what a great plan of redemption from all eternity worked out in time through God's work throughout the ages completed in the work of

Jesus that's the perspective that we've got here and this is what is significant for Jesus in this this this is the way that he sees this event this Samaritan woman it's the part of the working out of God's plan in her life he's completing the work that God was doing throughout ages we'll come back to that in a moment but that's the way that he sees things and that's the meaning of this event as far as he's concerned he's completing the work that God had been doing and that brings us to the third thing it's an example to the disciples of fields ready for reaping now you can see how he's thinking you know everything has been done by way of preparation God has spoken to Adam Abraham Moses David Isaiah and so on the preparation work has been done and all that needs to be done now is that that work be brought to a completion now if you're then going to use an illustration of that and you're going to use an agricultural explanation about that illustration of that it's quite obvious what he's going to say the sowing has been done and the reaping is now here the sowing has been going on throughout the ages and the way that we understand things now is that it's a time of reaping and that you see is what he develops in the next verses verse 35 do you not say there are yet four months then comes the harvest look

I tell you lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest now some people think that this is to be taken literally there are yet four months to harvest and they think that this is a time reference and they say this must have happened in December because it was four months before the harvest and spring sowing winter crops harvest and spring that's what people understand this if you take it literally but I don't think Jesus is meant to be taken literally more and more he used to be taken figuratively he used illustrations and I reckon that this was probably something like a proverb that people used if they didn't think it was appropriate to do something they'd say it's four months to harvest meaning the time isn't ripe that's what we'd say the time isn't ripe they'd say there's still four months to harvest meaning it's not the right time to do things the appropriate moment has not yet come and that I think is what

[28 : 40] Jesus is getting at here don't say it's not yet the time for harvest the time isn't ripe look at the fields the time is ripe for harvest and you can see how he comes to that conclusion because all the preparations have been going on and he's simply bringing them to completion God has been at work throughout the ages and now Jesus is here to bring in the harvest after all the sowing that has been done and so he thinks about sower and reaper and the next verses develop that theme not altogether very curious but you can see the general ideas that he's getting at already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life so that sower and reaper may rejoice together so he's saying the reaping process has already started so you can't say there's still four months to harvest this is the situation reaping is now going on and that means that the harvest is ripe for reaping it's already to be reaped because the sowing has already taken place ages and ages ago and so this means you see that the sower and the reaper can rejoice together the sowing has been done and now the reaper is here and they can rejoice together in the harvest being brought in and so he gives due place to sower and reaper for here the saying holds true one sows and another reaps

Moses sowed David sowed Isaiah sowed and Jesus is reaping that's what he's saying here I think I sent you to and here then is the application I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour others have laboured and you have entered into their labours so he's saying this is now your task it's not a task of sowing it's a task of reaping it's not a task of sowing because the sowing has been done it's been going on for generations and things are ripe for reaping and your job therefore is to reap the harvest you didn't labour on it Moses did Abraham did Isaiah did David did others folks like that John the Baptist of course especially he did now you're reaping the results of all that and that's the sort of thing that he brings before them that's why he says the fields are white to harvest because all the sowing has been taking place and the time for reaping has begun in the providence of God and that's why he says we can see for the disciples this was an example of fields ready for reaping right now how does this impact upon us well we have to say you know this is especially about Jesus and his situation and it is not first and foremost about ourselves this is the historical situation in which

Jesus was living and this was his experience that he was there as a reaper when he says already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life what's he thinking about he's thinking about the Samaritan woman here she was and she was ready for reaping she had only the Old Testament scriptures up to Deuteronomy the first five books of Moses and that in a not very pure version but she had the word sown in her heart and in ten minutes of discussion she responded to it that's proof that the time of reaping is here that's what Jesus had done reap the harvest from the seed that had been sown in that woman's heart through the reading of the scriptures and that's the sort of thing he's talking about he's the one that's rejoicing with Abraham who rejoiced to think about the day of

Jesus he's the one that's rejoicing with David and Isaiah because he's the reaper and they're the sower and that's why you can say the time for reaping has come because he's experiencing it himself with these Samaritan people and that's the situation in which these disciples were going to minister they were going to come to people who knew about the seed of the woman bruising the head of the serpent and they could say this has now been completed and people that had that idea sown in their minds could be harvested because the seed had been there for generations and so on the other things that we mentioned Abraham had the promise in you shall all the nations be blessed Jesus Jesus is the seed of Abraham and his coming marks the time of fulfillment of that promise the sowing has taken place the reaping is now here that's the situation for the disciples and so you see he's saying to them look your job now is to enter into this process of reaping you don't have to sow the sowing has been done your job is to reap and that's why he says to them the responsibility is yours to go and reap the fields which are ripe to harvest so that's this passage in its historical setting and that's what makes us ask well what does it say to us because we're not in this historical setting we're in a different historical setting so what does this say to us well it certainly doesn't say to us no sowing is necessary it's all been done all you need to do now is reap that's what

Jesus is saying to them all you need to do now is reap but that just isn't the case with us because we're in a different historical setting sowing needs to be done and reaping needs to be done as well I think there's a slight tendency to despise the sowing these days you're there to reap you're there to gather a church you're there to plant a church you're there to bring folks to Christ and the ministries that don't do that are somewhat devalued they're not the same degree of importance because it's reaping that matters I don't think that that holds water in regard to the teaching of Jesus in our historical situation sowing and reaping are necessary so you may have a man who sows and sows and sows and doesn't reap anything but he's not going to be despised for that because that's the day in which we live it wasn't the day in which Jesus lived or his disciples lived but it is the day in which we live sowing and reaping must go on together so sowing is necessary now as well as reaping a harvest and we can't just say glibly all you have to do is reap because the fields are white to harvest we can't see it because we're living in different historical situations nonetheless we must acknowledge that there are areas in which the sowing has taken place and where the fields are ripe to harvest generally speaking that was the case in Jesus day speaking about

[36 : 24] Samaritans and Jews who had been brought up in the scriptures every one of them had received the seed and therefore their fields were ripe to harvest nowadays that's not the case but that are people today that have had the seed sown and that's why maybe you didn't notice but in my prayer this is something that I've thought about a lot how many youngsters in our communities were brought up in our Sunday schools and they're there around somewhere but not here and you know my feeling is this if we're going to try and make some application of this to our situation that's where the seed has been sown so that's the fields that are ripe to harvest people that heard the gospel in their earliest days but never responded to it they're in the same sort of position as the Samaritan woman she had heard the message in a very imperfect fashion but it was seed that was sown that Jesus reaped and I think we should think of people like that as a harvest field ready to be reaped people that have been brought up under the gospel but have not responded to it now that again is not the way that many people think about things it's a waste of time to chase free

Kirkers it's a common way of putting things or lapsed people don't bother they've had their chance let them be they've rejected it but I think there's this other way of looking at it that seed was sown when they were young who knows what harvest may yet be reaped from it so that's where we can look for from a harvest also another situation is this you know in Jesus' day it wasn't just the Jewish people that could be reaped for the harvest because they had had the scriptures there were also a lot of Gentile non-Jewish people Gentile people that had been associated with the synagogue and they hadn't become Jewish but they had learned about the scriptures and they had accepted that there was one god which was quite different from the prevailing opinion in those days where there was a whole pantheon of gods a whole lot of gods of any variety you wanted like a choice in a supermarket that's the way it was in regard to gods in those days there was such an abundance of gods and some people had become disillusioned with that and they had joined with the synagogue to the extent at least that they went there and heard the scriptures and that's where Paul and the apostles reaped the harvest amongst the Gentiles that's where the field was ripe to harvest amongst

Gentiles of that persuasion and who knows what God is doing in the world today there's no obvious movement in this direction but who knows how many people out there are disgusted with the way that things are going they're not Christian people they've had a Christian background but they're not Christian people and they're disgusted with things they didn't say so because it's not politically correct to say so but they're disgusted with the way things are going and maybe that is God preparing the hearts sowing the seed of disillusionment and discontent with the prevailing state of affairs and maybe there there's a field ripe for harvest so we can't say generally the fields are ripe for harvest in the way they could then but nonetheless here and there God has been at work preparing through a message given the Sunday school 50 years ago or through a sense of disillusionment with the moral situation of our country today who knows

God is at work and there is a harvest to be reaped there so to that degree we can hope and we can pray that indeed the fields are ready for harvest and we can expect a harvest to be reaped immediately otherwise it's sowing sowing sowing because that's what will ultimately reap a harvest but the bottom line which clearly applies however you may have understood or agree or disagree with what I've said up to this point the bottom line is it's the disciples responsibility I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour well I would say God sent us to engage in this process of sowing and reaping it's the church's task it's not that each individual should see his main mission in life to be a sower or a reaper but it is that the church as a whole should recognise its responsibility to be sowing and to be reaping

Jesus completes the work of God by fulfilling the promises and doing the work that was given him to do but then he hands over that task of making it real of bringing it out in practice to his people and he says all authority in heaven and earth is mine go therefore and make disciples of all nations and that's what Jesus is saying here I've come to bring a harvest to bring in the harvest you go and do the reaping that's what he's saying in other words he's employing the agency of God's people in this task now as I say I don't think people should be should all think oh how much sowing how much reaping have I done they should just go about their work and their witness and collectively as a body the work of sowing and reaping will be accomplished but that we should recognize our responsibility that's the lesson of this part of the story so here is Jesus and he's assessing what has happened and he's seen the

[42 : 31] Samaritan woman as somebody who's had the seed sown and he's reaped that and he sees that as typical of what's going on and this is the pattern of life for them to enter into that reaping process and that's what gives them strength and exhilarates them and makes them say I don't need food at the moment because this has been so stimulating a thing to me that I've reaped the harvest that I've been sent to reap that's the meaning of the story may God bless to us his word now we're going to sing in Psalm 126 which of course speaks like