

Greater Harvest, Greater Food

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Date: 08 March 2015

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you would like to take your Bible and open to John chapter 4, that would be great. John chapter 4, page 889.

This has to be one of the happiest chapters in all of the Bible. It began as a detour, Jesus and the disciples into Samaria.

It finishes up with a sort of a mini revival with the Samaritans, lots of them saying Jesus is the Savior of the world.

And it comes through the dubious testimony of a woman with a checkered career. And today we're doing the third installment of Jesus with this woman.

And it's really the result from verses 27 onwards. It's the result of Jesus' interaction as living water bubbles up and overflows out of her life into the lives of many.

[1 : 0 1] And we follow the progress of the gospel amongst the Samaritans. And at the center of the passage, Jesus opens up to the disciples and tells them what's really going on.

And he says to them, look, see. And all the categories are categories of joy and satisfaction and gratification and nourishment.

It's about joy and happiness and overflow and eternal life and a new moment in history and sowing and harvesting. And what is it that's at the bottom of all this happiness?

Where does this spiritual enjoyment come from? And it's very important, particularly if you might be someone who's tempted by spiritual grumpiness.

You know that temptation, the sort of creeping crankiness that sometimes happens to Christians after a few years? And we've left all that spontaneous joy behind in youth camps and crazy 70s songs.

[2 : 0 5] And I'm not, I remember some of the things I used to sing in the 70s. Oh, they were terrible. I can't believe I grew up on those.

But, you know, I've grown up now. Now I've settled myself into a grim grind of discipleship. And, you know, there is a temptation to be a Christian cranky curmudgeon.

And none of you here, of course. But if someone might be tempted by that, here are three spiritual refreshing realities for us. Gospel joy, gospel hunger, and gospel sight.

And I just want to take each of them for a moment. The first is gospel joy. The main flavor and feel of our passage is this overwhelming happiness and joy.

You can see it in the excitement of the Samaritan woman, verses 27 to 30. See, verse 27, the disciples come back to Jesus. They'd left him alone at the well, tired, hungry, from a long walk.

[3 : 0 7] And they'd gone off to town to get some refreshments. And the Samaritan woman had come out at midday to gather, to get some water, which is the wrong time to get water, unless you're trying to avoid contact with people.

And Jesus breaks all custom and speaks with her. In verse 7, he simply asks her for a drink. And from that point on in the conversation, it's the woman who takes the initiative.

Jesus is just answering. It's wonderful to watch. And you see, the way it works is that she asks a question, and Jesus' answers are stunning.

They are. He moves at her pace, but he takes her deeper each time, to the point where, at the end, he reveals that he is the Messiah. That's the situation.

And so the disciples return in verse 27. They can't believe he's talking to a woman. Verse 28. There is something disarmingly honest and natural about this woman.

[4 : 21] She leaves her water pot because she's discovered something infinitely more wonderful. And she races back into town to tell everyone she possibly can what's happened.

She came out with a jug to draw water. She returns to town with the well of eternal life in her own heart. As soon as she gets an inkling that Jesus is God's Messiah, she begins to drink the living water.

And as soon as she begins to drink the living water, she becomes a fountain of living water for other people as well. She doesn't even think about it. It just overflows. One of the best commentators says this.

It is the nature of faith that we want to bring others to share eternal life with us when we have become partakers of it. The knowledge of God cannot lie buried and inactive in our hearts and not be made known.

She's got an amazing energy and eagerness and enthusiasm to go to the town and she wants people to go out and meet Jesus. She doesn't stop for a moment to think about the massive uphill battle her witness is going to face.

[5 : 32] I mean, if she stopped for a moment, she might think about the fact that there's going to be a terrible reception to her witness. You know, she says, Hey everyone, I met a man at the well and they're going to say, Not again.

And she says, He told me everything I ever did and they say, Well, everyone knows what you've done. And she says, No, no, he might be the Messiah.

And they say, Yeah, right. The Messiah appears to you. But in verse 30, verse 30 tells us that what she said worked. And people continually stream out to Jesus.

Now, how did she do it? What's the key that makes her message so successful? I mean, if you look at a message, you're not going to find it in any training manuals. It's all a bit mixed up.

It begins with a bit of an exaggeration. Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah? In the original, it's like, Maybe. No. This woman needs to attend a semester at Regent College.

[6 : 35] It's clear to me. She knows her reputation. What's important is that instead of hiding her reputation, she leads with it.

It's as if something has happened to her that she doesn't care anymore about her reputation so long as people go out to Jesus. I think she's been gripped by the grace of God. At the same time, Jesus knew her very depths, but he keeps talking with her and offers her this life and accepts her and honors her and welcomes her.

And those two things together grip her heart and change her. And that grip of grace gives her this lovely, joyful freedom. The only possible explanation is that she is no longer controlled by the fear of exposure.

All her past mistakes with men, you know, all her fear of, you know, all the drinking from all the wrong places, it doesn't enslave her anymore. She's been drinking from the well of living water and it starts to spill over.

It's something you see when a person first becomes a Christian. It's something I wish would happen more in my own life. And there's something beautiful and liberating about the change.

[7 : 48] In just a moment, she moves from living a life to conceal her sin and foolishness to being perfectly free and open about it. She's playing a different game than the one she came out to the well with.

And suddenly she says, everyone in town needs to hear about this. And she goes into town and treats everyone as if they're exactly on the same level as she is.

No one above me, no one beneath me, there's no more class anymore. Everyone needs to hear it. She feels this, I think, instinctively. She's got, there's a new center in her life, a new resource, and she's speaking out of simple spiritual joy.

And she's a wonderful example to us, I think. She does what all of us should do. Nothing has changed in her outward circumstances. You know, she's still got, she's still got this trail of guys and she's shackled up with someone else.

Nothing's changed about that. But she's an example to us in this. She speaks about Jesus and she speaks of what Jesus has done in her. And I think if there's a cure for spiritual crankiness, for Christian miserliness, it's being gripped by the grace, it's returning to the grace and being gripped by the grace of God.

[9 : 07] Jesus knows you at your depths, but he loves you and welcomes you and embraces you and shares life with you. She doesn't stand on her own self-righteousness.

She does the opposite. She stands on Christ's. Was it yesterday? The video was released of that young Muslim extremist who went on a shooting rampage in Parliament Hill.

And I quote from the video. He says about Canada, it's a disgrace you guys have forgotten God and have let every indecency and things run in your land.

He says we don't. We don't go for this. We are good people, righteous people. That's not what we do when we testify. As you heard this morning, we're not testifying to our own righteousness.

There's nothing technique or self-conscious about this performance. A Christian witness isn't telling people to get their act together. The joy is not pointing to your self-righteousness.

[10 : 07] It's being freed from that. It's pointing to Christ, the source of living water. And I think that is the source of gospel joy here. Firstly, gospel joy.

Secondly, gospel hunger. So, the disciples are slightly scandalized when they come back in verse 27. As you notice, they're shocked that Jesus is talking to this woman.

The culture was a sexist culture. It was a racist culture, religiously divided. But they very wisely, for one of the only times in the gospel, they hold their tongues and don't say anything to Jesus.

And that's a very wise course of action if you find something in Jesus Christ that you're scandalized by. If you find something in the Bible that you don't agree with. We'll come to this when we get to chapter 14, for example, when Jesus says that no one comes to God except through me.

slicing every other religion out of the pie. It's a very good idea to keep listening because when we listen, it means that God is about to reveal something vital to us.

[11 : 13] And that's what happens here. The disciples don't have any time for this scarlet Samaritan woman. They are totally focused on food. Verse 31, they badger him.

Come on teacher, come on, eat something. We've gone into all this trouble to buy food for you. Now that we finally got rid of it, sit down, you're starving, I'm starving, let's eat. In verse 32, Jesus says, I've got food that you know nothing about.

And in verse 33, they go, what? And in verse 34, Jesus says, my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

Now think about this. Do you not find it amazing that Jesus refuses physical food when he's so hungry? That the conversation with this woman so pressed on him, he's so absorbed in this conversation that he cannot even think about physical food.

Jesus finds what he's doing so spiritually nourishing, it's more important to him than eating. And he's put so much energy and focus into leading this woman to living water, he doesn't really care about his physical thirst or hunger.

[12 : 29] He's not anti-food. Nobody thinks that, do they? He's not anti-food. He loves food. There's something more important, more satisfying, more nourishing to him.

It's doing the work of the Father and finishing his, doing the will of the Father and finishing his work, which I think is probably a reference to the cross. It's the same word where he calls out, it's finished.

This context, of course, it has to do with this amazing conversation of bringing this woman to a saving knowledge of the truth. And in doing it, Jesus is completely in line with the will of God, the God who seeks those to worship him in spirit and truth.

And nothing brings Jesus more soul satisfaction. Nothing feeds his heart more than this. And I think the idea is here that the woman herself has begun to enjoy that same food.

It's the heartbeat of those who are gripped by God's grace. It's the secret source of sustenance. It's to do the will of God. In the Old Testament, remember David says that your law is sweeter than honey.

[13 : 41] And Jesus takes us deeper. He's not just talking about knowing the will of God. He's talking about doing it. He says there's nothing like it. I can't live without it. He was so concerned for people to have living water.

It was his highest pleasure. That's gospel hunger. Gospel joy, gospel hunger, and thirdly, gospel sight. Now, at the heart of this passage, there are three commands by Jesus, and they all have to do with sight.

Verses 35, let me read 35 and 36 again. Do you not say there are yet four months, then comes the harvest. Here it comes.

Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see, three commands, 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. Jesus wants to raise our expectations. He wants to raise our eyes and raise our expectations not just to the urgent need of friends and family, but to the power of God's word and the immediacy that God's word, the reality of which God can make a change in us from light to darkness, from thirst to living water.

[15 : 07] This is a unique insight into the mind and heart of Jesus. What's he saying? He's saying, look around you. What's going on?

What's going on in the Samaritans as they come over the hill? Well, the disciples say, let's eat food, let's eat food. And Jesus says, you see the Samaritans, what you are seeing is fruit for eternal life and that the sowing and the reaping are coming together at the same time.

In other words, the time between sowing and harvesting is collapsed. I mean, the usual way it works in the world is there's a lag between sowing and harvesting, but as the Samaritans come down the hill, Jesus says that the word of God is so powerful, it doesn't need four months.

It can work immediately. Now, why am I talking about that? Why is this important? If you put your hand in John 4 and turn back to Amos chapter 9, please, for a moment.

It's a chance for us to dip into the Old Testament to a fairly unknown section, page 771, Amos chapter 9.

[16 : 24] The prophet speaks the word of God here about the day when Messiah comes and he says, verse 13, Behold, the days are coming declares the Lord when the plowman, who is the sower, when the sower shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes will overtake the one who sows the seed.

The mountain shall drip sweet wine and all the hills shall flow with it and I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel. Here is the promise of God that in the day of the Messiah, sowing, harvesting, and making the best wine in the world come together.

It's all going to happen together. It's not that the normal process is sped up. It's that there's something about this seed of God's word that's so powerful that it all happens in some sort of mix-up that we don't control.

So that as the sower takes the seed, before he puts it in the ground, it comes out a fully formed bottle of wine in his hand. See? It's the picture of overflowing life.

It's a picture of blessing. It's a picture of the gospel going out. Do you see that? I mean, do you have that sight? And the Samaritan woman herself has just received the seed.

[17 : 55] It's already flowered in her life and now she's planting seeds in others and her response to her lovely honesty and witness is the first group response in John's gospel.

All the rest has been individuals. Jesus says and she's earning wages, she's receiving wages, not just the harvest but she's entering into the joy that God gives in the overflowing living water as she sees people move toward Christ.

That's the way it works with God. Every word we speak, every prayer we pray, every attempt we make to reach out with the love of God to others participates in the joy of Jesus Christ.

It's the picture of witness in the New Testament. it's not forcing yourself to impose your views on others. It's an overflow of truth and grace.

It's being honest about who you are. It's being honest about your needs and your failures. I tell you, if you are someone who struggles with forgiveness as a Christian, tell someone who's a non-Christian that they'll be most interested.

[18 : 59] And I know if you've been a Christian for a while, you likely feel pretty inadequate about this area in your life. Likely if you've been a Christian for four or five years. Some of us feel that every time we've opened our mouth to speak to others about Jesus, we've put both feet in it.

And we do, don't we? We go too fast, we say too much, we go too slow, we don't say enough. We feel, we feel, we ought to be taking more initiative in this, and then we feel when we've taken initiative, we've been overbearing and impossible.

And with all those failed attempts in our lives and with the cultural animosity toward the Christian message, the temptation is to be silent. And it is a temptation from Satan.

A couple of weeks ago, my wife and I were walking through the graveyard over here, as you do. And we were in the Buddhist section and there was a man arranging flowers over his parents' grave.

And you would think that was a good place for a conversation, wouldn't you? So we fell into conversation and I asked him about his view of death. What happens after it? I said, I was a Christian.

[20 : 10] I didn't say him I was paid to be a Christian. I just told him... He didn't answer me and he just, he lamented all the violence in the world. He said, what are we going to do about all these terrible people and violence?

And I said, well, Jesus' view is that violence is inside me and inside you. And he happily told me a story of his own road rage. He was driving in Shonnes.

He's so angry with someone that he pulled them over, pulled them out of the car and beat them unconscious and left them there. Yeah, true story. I was quite surprised.

I said, I said, how do you deal with your guilt that you've done that wrong? He said, I'm a good person and I've atoned for it. So I started talking about Jesus and how he deals with this and how he died in our place.

He was completely disinterested. So I lamely invited him to church. I said, I knew the preacher there. And... He said he was too busy.

[21 : 18] Too many things to do. It was friendly, but it was a fiasco, really. And I've been reminded in preparing this passage again of the importance of responding.

There's nothing wrong with preaching. Some of my best friends preach. But the way of the New Testament, the basic Christian witness in the New Testament is not standing up and preaching or teaching.

It is responding to people's questions. And that's what Jesus does. Jesus himself does that here. Apart from opening the door by asking for a drink of water, the rest of the conversation is driven by the woman.

And I think there's a big load off for us in this. It's not grim, grinding guilt of getting the gospel out. It's the honest, joyful response when people criticize you or criticize Christianity or ask you a question.

The truth of your life and my life, it will come out with our friends. It comes out in the decisions you make in the attitudes you have. And then come questions and we've seen how Jesus beautifully answers the question.

[22 : 26] He takes it deeper each time until she receives the living water. And I know the feel of our passage is happy, but if you look over church history and you look over your own Christian experience, along with the joy of sowing and harvesting, the church and Christians face constant hostility and humiliation and ostracizing.

And I think in Vancouver, my conversation, people are not just bored with Christianity, they're a bit angry, they're a bit annoyed with it. That's the basic posture. Even if their view of Christianity is 180 degrees off center.

In Matthew's gospel when Jesus talks about that, he looks out at the crowd and he sees the crowd comprised of sheep and wolves. And he has compassion.

He says, they're harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. And he says to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few, therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest.

So the wonderful thing about this is there's a realism to Jesus because hostility and harvesting go together. opposition and opportunity go together and they always will.

[23 : 47] And we mustn't ignore or diminish the hostility and opposition. But why am I saying this? Because there is something here, I think, which is so wonderful. It will overcome and overwhelm our fear.

It overwhelms the temptation to be silent. It is the clear promise of Jesus. Actually, there are two promises. The clear promise of Jesus, number one, that there will be fruit, eternal, abiding fruit in the lives of others, apart from the wages we receive.

And just think about what's going on here. The Samaritan woman's witness was deeply flawed, but it gave Jesus great joy and it bore fruit.

And our imperfect, weak, and feeble attempts to witness to Jesus Christ, they're accepted by God through Jesus Christ. You don't have to get it right.

And there's reward in it, not if you're cleverer or braver than anyone else. it's because of the spiritually satisfying joy of being engaged with God. So number one, Jesus promises there will be fruit, and number two, Jesus promises that actually God has gone before us and is working.

[25 : 00] Verse 38, I sent you, actually it should be, I send you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored and you have entered into their labor.

The others could be John the Baptist or the Old Testament prophets, but I think it's most likely that the others here are God, the Father, God, the Spirit, who moves ahead of us, who seeks people, who speaks to people, who saves people.

It's not we who are seeking people, it's God the Father. He is working much harder for your friends or family or people in your life than we are. And if we testify to what God has done, and if we point to Jesus Christ, God has gone before, and we enter into his work, and we need eyes to see this, and that's spiritual sight.

So the passage finishes, the Samaritans ask Jesus to stay for two very fruitful days, and in verse 42 they say, it's no longer because of you, what you said that we believe, we've gone to the source, we've heard for ourselves from Jesus, and we know that this indeed is the saviour of the world.

That's great, isn't it? God worked through the ordinary and flawed witness of an ordinary and flawed woman to bring people to Christ. She doesn't convert the town, what she does is she points people to Jesus, and as they come to Jesus, they come to know living water and forgiveness and eternal life and salvation for themselves, miracles.

[26 : 39] And they then begin to experience this gospel joy and this gospel hunger and the gospel sight because they call Jesus saviour of the world. They're amazed that Jesus, God has included them in salvation, but they say, no, no, no, it's bigger, it's got to go beyond us for every person.

It's a conviction, I think, of true faith. And after Jesus rose from the dead, you remember, and the disciples were filled with the spirit in Jerusalem and many became Christians, persecution broke out.

And many Christians were scattered out of Jerusalem and the first place they go to in the book of Acts is Samaria. And before the apostles get the time to get there, nameless Christians have spoken the word.

And one of the guys who was on the set-up rosters down in Jerusalem finds his way to Samaria. And we read in Acts, the crowds with one accord pay attention to what he said.

So there was much joy in that city. And I reckon that joy is a great thing to happen in Vancouver. So let's kneel and pray God would do it for us.

[27 : 54] Amen.