

## **You Have a Mission (John 4:27-42)**

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In 1873, the *USS Juniata* left New York harbor in 1873 to search the western coast of Greenland for survivors from the *Polaris*, an American exploration ship which the Navy learned had become trapped in an ice flow. After sailing the *Juniata* 400 miles above the arctic circle with still no sign of the *Polaris*, Captain Daniel L. Braine decided it was unsafe to proceed any further. He asked for a half-dozen volunteers who were willing to thread the ship's 28' launch, the *Little Juniata*, another 400 miles north.

According to author Hampton Sides, "This secondary probe, which Braine estimated would take several weeks, was a dubious undertaking at best. The *Little Juniata* seemed a frightfully vulnerable craft, not much more than an open boat. Ice fields like these had crushed entire whaling fleets. Braine knew he could not order anyone to undertake this risky assignment; he had to rely on volunteers." George De Long, raised his hand first and Braine invited him to captain the vessel.

Stories like this are the stuff of legends. A mission with a minimal chance of success, poor equipment, limited food, and danger on every side. It makes for a gripping read. What do most people conclude after reading a story like that? Thank God I'm not on one of those missions, right? I'm just not the missional type. The work of daily life is enough for me. I'm happy to leave all that crazy, adventurous stuff to others.

Friend, if you're a follower of Jesus, the Savior himself has given you a mission. And it's not for a half-dozen uniquely gifted, specially trained, and exceptionally mature believers who eat danger for breakfast and get adrenaline highs from doing great exploits for God. It's a mission for all of us. Not in the sense that it's available to any Christian daring enough to volunteer, but in the sense that Jesus has already given it to every one of us. Illustrating, clarifying, and equipping us for our mission is what Jn 4:27-42 is all about.

The number of good social causes which Christian and non-Christian voices alike thrust in the church's face and say, "Do something," continues to multiply. Amidst the cacophony, it's easy to flip between a guilt-driven treadmill called "Do it all" and a cynical laziness that says, "Forget about it. I'd rather watch Netflix." The Lord beckons us down a different path in Jn 4, a path of faithfulness to the primary mission he has given us to gather souls for God.

### **1) WE FOLLOW JESUS BY URGING PEOPLE TO COME AND SEE JESUS (VV. 27-30)**



Jesus has just finished explaining to a Samaritan woman what it means to worship God. True worship is an inside-out sort of thing. It begins not with a change we make in our behavior on the outside but with a change the Spirit of God works in our heart on the inside. We worship "in spirit."

We also worship "in truth." We don't do whatever we think is right and pretend God is pleased. We look to Jesus, the Son of God who reveals the truth about God. Through his life, death, and resurrection, we learn we are both more sinful and more loved than we could ever imagine. Jesus is eager to cleanse us from the guilt of our sin and set us free to follow him in every area of life.

None of that happens automatically. A response on our part is required. It's the response the Samaritan woman makes in vv. 27-30. First, she repents. She leaves her water jar, representing a life devoted to satisfying her material desires. Second, she believes. A seed of genuine faith takes root in her heart as she confesses Jesus as the Christ, God's anointed Savior. She runs to her fellow Samaritans in the local village and says (v. 29), "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"

The Samaritan woman's words to her countrymen after she encountered Jesus echo the very words Philip spoke to Nathaniel in Jn 1:46 after he encountered Jesus. "Come and see." Heartfelt zeal to do good to others by telling them about Jesus, inviting them to come and see him for themselves, is a defining mark of a genuine faith. Jesus didn't force her to do it. It was the spontaneous desire and overflow of a heart that had just experienced his power and goodness. It was one of her very first acts of true worship.

Friends, personal evangelism, introducing other people to Jesus by explaining who he is and what he's done, isn't something we do after getting our spiritual act together for a few years and waiting for the perfect opportunity. It's what genuine Christians do from day one. We follow Jesus, we express our faith in Jesus, by urging people to come and see Jesus. And if you're not doing that at all you should ask yourself, "Have I lost sight of who Jesus really is?"

When my boys are in awe of something they saw or read that day, I can't get a word in edgewise. I don't have to guilt or pressure them into telling me. They can't help but tell me because they're so excited. Brothers and sisters, that's exactly what the Samaritan woman did. Her amazement and joy in Jesus overflowed like the Apostles in Acts 4:20, "...for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." 2 Cor 5:14, 20, "For the love of Christ controls us...Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us." We follow Jesus by urging people to come and see Jesus.

## **2) WE FIND LIFE BY DEVOTING OURSELVES TO GOD'S WORK (VV. 31-34)**

In v. 33 Jesus' disciples make the same mistake the Samaritan woman made a few minutes earlier. They only think in terms of physical realities and material needs. About the same time the woman leaves, they come back from grocery shopping and urge Jesus to eat something. It's been a long journey. Everyone's worn out. It's why Jesus was sitting next to a well outside of town in the first place.

When Jesus declines their offer, saying in v. 32, "Guys, I have food to eat you don't know about," they're perplexed. "Did a stranger give you a granola bar? What did you eat?" To which Jesus replies (v. 34), "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."

We tend to think that what is most life-giving is time spent tending to our physical needs and desires, don't we? It's not selfishness (so we say). It's "self-care" or "me time." After all, how can I love my neighbor as myself if I'm slacking off in loving myself? We know in our heads that participating in God's work is the right thing to do. But when push comes to shove, we talk ourselves into prioritizing our will over God's.

"It's been a long week. It's been a busy season. I think I need to stay home, sleep in, and get some rest. I feel like I need a break from reading my Bible, gathering with my Community Group, or going to church this weekend. I'm sure God understands. After all, he made us with physical bodies, right? The Bible says rest is a good thing.

I'm not saying tending to your physical needs is a bad thing, and nor is Jesus. V. 34 isn't some sort of masochistic rallying call to a life of asceticism. It's two things. First, it's a challenge to our priorities. What's more important to you? Doing God's work or satisfying your physical desires? The evil in our desires typically often isn't what we want but that we want it too much. The solution isn't to stop desiring food or sex or sleep or rest. It's making sure we don't allow satisfying those desires to become a higher priority than following Jesus.

But second (and just as importantly), v. 34 is a challenge to what we believe about the nature of the Lord's work in the first place. We think prioritizing our physical comfort above all else is the secret to an enjoyable and satisfying life. Jesus' example reminds us God's work isn't just right. Like good food, it's life-giving. It's strength to the soul and health to the body. Living for yourself will ultimately destroy you. Living for God is the path of life.

Friend, if you find that doing God's work, including talking with other people about Jesus, doesn't just make you tired, but seems to drain the spiritual life out of you, ask yourself a few questions. First, are you doing God's work? Is this something you *think* needs to be done or something you *know* God wants you to do? Second, are you doing it in God's way? Are you rushing the process or being patient? Are you doing it for your glory or his? Finally, are you doing it by God's power or your own strength?

When Jesus speaks of what he sought to "accomplish" he doesn't talk about "my work" or "my actions" or "my assignment." What does he say? He says my food is to accomplish "his work." He never forgot that his work was ultimately the Father's work. Is God's will for you to introduce people at home, at work, or at school to Jesus? Yes. But it's not ultimately your work. It's the Father's. He's the one who draws men and women to himself through even our feeblest words and actions. Take heart in that, friend. We find life by devoting ourselves to God's work.

### **3) WE EMBRACE OUR MISSION WITH CONFIDENCE AND HUMILITY (vv. 35-38)**

When you look around at the world, what do you see? A carnival of pleasures? Untold suffering and brokenness? A haunted house of spiritual dangers? Only when you see what Jesus sees will you be able to embrace our mission with confidence. V. 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. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life..."

As with the prior food illustration, Jesus is making a spiritual point. When a field of barley looks white, it's ripe and ready for harvest. Jesus says the souls of men and women around us right now are no different. The time of waiting is over. They are ripe and ready for harvest. They are ready to receive the gift of eternal life from Jesus as we invite them to come to him.

The arrival of Jesus, the Son of God who took on human flesh, turned a decisive page in redemptive history. Centuries of longing, years of waiting for God to deliver us from sin and death, came to an end through the person and work of Christ. His life, death, and resurrection ushered in a new age of spiritual fruitfulness, an age of abundant life in Jesus for men and women from every nation.

It's what the prophet Amos anticipated in Amos 9:13. "'Behold, the days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.'" The soil of the hearts of men would become so rich, fruitful, so



receptive to the word and work of God, that the time gap between sowing and harvesting would disappear.

Brothers and sisters, you are surrounded – in your neighborhood, in your school, at your work, and yes, even on Sunday morning – with men and women in whom the Spirit of God is mightily at work. They're asking new questions about God. They're wrestling with spiritual issues for the first time. They're hungry for the good news of the gospel. And God in his providence has purposed to use you to tell them.

To what end? V. 36, "so that sower and reaper may rejoice together." There is both a present and eternal joy in urging and leading men and women toward the obedience of faith in Jesus, in saying to them (kids included), "Come and see! Come and see how good and wise and powerful Jesus is." It's the joy of watching the Lord do what only he can do in taking a heart of stone that is cold to the things of God and making it a heart of flesh that sees Jesus for who he is and trusts him for who he is.

It takes work. It takes perseverance. A field of barley doesn't march itself into the barn. Nor should we expect non-Christians to march themselves into the church. The initiative lies with the harvesters. If you're a Christian, that's you! But don't reach out with the gospel because you'll feel guilty if you don't. Reach out for the sake of your own joy.

God has graciously chosen to use us that we might experience the joy of accomplishing his work and fulfilling his mission. The fields are ripe for harvest, friends. Does that mean every person you share the gospel with will come to Jesus? No. It does mean we can embrace our mission with confidence knowing the King himself has already surveyed the field and said the harvest is ready and waiting.

By the way, that promise of fruitful gospel ministry holds true whether God has called you to a work of sowing or a work of reaping. I love it when the Lord gives me an opportunity to personally lead someone to faith in Jesus or have a direct conversation about the gospel. I like reaping. But God also uses many opportunities to drop a seed of biblical truth into a conversation with a non-Christian friend or to explain a small part of the gospel. That's called sowing. Parenting is filled with those sorts of sowing moments.

In a season of sowing, humility means being content with the role God has assigned you and trusting him to bring the fruit. And in a season of reaping, humility means remembering the harvest you gathered would never have come to pass apart from the faithful work of other men and women whom the Lord has used in that person's spiritual journey. V. 37, "One sows and another reaps."

As the Father sent the Son, so too Jesus has sent every one of us. No one gets to observe, sit, or cheer from the sideline in the kingdom of God. It's an all-hands-on-deck mission. The question isn't whether you've been sent, but whether you're being faithful to sow and reap. No one who labors in the Lord's field ever labors in vain. So we embrace our mission with confidence and humility.

#### **4) WE TRUST THE POWER OF THE WORD (vv. 39-42)**

Look at v. 39 because this is both remarkable and incredibly encouraging. When the Samaritan woman said, "Come and see," what happened? "Many Samaritans from that town believed in him (Jesus) because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me all that I ever did.'"

Does that surprise you? A whole group of people believes in Jesus, they come to faith in Christ, even though they haven't yet personally seen Jesus or heard his teaching. She hadn't even been a Christian for a half day. She hadn't taken any apologetics classes or evangelism training programs. She didn't lay out a comprehensive, 4-point gospel presentation complete with illustrations.

No. She simply explained what Jesus had done for her. She shared her testimony. And through her account of experiencing the conviction of sin and seeing her need for a Savior, the Samaritans heard the truth about Jesus and trusted him as their Savior too. Friends, the word of your testimony is powerful, not because your words are powerful but because your words are a witness to the power of the Word Made Flesh. Expect Jesus to use your personal story of just how much he has done for you.

On multiple levels, the Samaritan woman wasn't your ideal candidate to evangelize an entire village. She was a social outcast. She still had a lot to learn about Jesus. But that's exactly the sort of person the Lord loves to use. I love how the Apostle Paul, one of the most well-educated men of his generation, recounts his ministry among the Corinthians.

1 Cor 2:3-5, "And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

The Samaritan woman's words brought people to Jesus. And when they came to him and heard his words for themselves, their faith was strengthened all the more. Ultimately, we want our words to send people back to God's Word, to the words of



Scripture, where the Lord will continue to show them the goodness and glory of Jesus. Trust the power of the word, friend.

## **CONCLUSION**

Follow Jesus by urging people to come and see Jesus. Find life by devoting yourself to God's work. Embrace our mission with confidence and humility. And trust the power of the Word. That's how we say "yes" to Jesus, obeying his command to gather souls for God. Engaging in that mission, our mission, is what true worship requires, friends.

Jesus is eager to satisfy your soul with the joy of worshiping the Father in the power of the Spirit. In order for that to happen, we must be willing to heed his call and speak as his ambassadors. John sandwiches Jesus' own teaching to his disciples in the middle of the Samaritan woman's example on purpose. It's not a mission for professionals. It's not a mission for experts. It's a mission for every man, woman, and child who has encountered Jesus and is willing to turn to the world and say, "Come and See."