

July 13, 2014
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© David J. Whitcomb

To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study John 4:31-45.

1. What does the disciples' response about food indicate about the state of their hearts?
2. How often have you sowed the "Seed" only to think that there was no response to it?
3. Explain how you respond when you hear someone's testimony?
4. What did Jesus mean by saying that a prophet was without honor in his own hometown, and is it a common principle?

SHARING THE HARVEST **John 4:31-45**

Recently, my wife has been going to the edge of the field behind our house to pick blackberries. We didn't plant them. They just grow there. Lots of them. And because she participates in gathering the harvest of fruit, we enjoy the resulting blackberry cobbler and blackberries on our cereal. In contrast to that story is the memory that several years ago we planted some nice thornless blackberries in the back yard. They are not to be found. They didn't make it. If I remember correctly, we harvested very few berries from those bushes.

Sometimes evangelism looks a lot like that. There are times when we create a relationship with someone, and one day out the blue that ask how to be saved. Generally that is because someone, at some time in the past (or often several someones) told the person the good news of

salvation. The truth never sunk in at the time. But one day God stirred up all those elements of truth and drew the person to Himself. And you get the joy of opening the door of Salvation through the Word of truth.

More often than not, we feel like we are the ones who keep telling the good news and there is no apparent response. We might get discouraged and think we should give up the task. However, Jesus taught the disciples and us a very important lesson about God's work of creating fruit for eternity. Our duty is to sow the seed of truth. God does what He deems best with that seed. Sometimes it is God's will for us to rejoice in gathering the harvest. Whether gathering or sowing, we should count it a privilege to be involved in God's plan for eternal fruit.

Physical Food and Spiritual Food (vv.31-38).

One undeniable common trait of humans is that we tend to think about physical food (vv.31-33). That is not to say that we think about eating all the time, though most of us enjoy doing it on occasion. The problem is that we think too much on the horizontal plain of the physical, mundane, and passing things. In that sense, we are a lot like the disciples who were thinking most about passing things. John pointed out, *Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat" (v.31).* By this time, they had returned from town with food. They were motivated by the fact that everyone needs food. It is an important part of life. Food is a staple of life so important that if we neglect it, we die. A person might feel quite satisfied to be in charge of procuring such a necessary staple of life. This would be especially true in a case where men expended much effort searching for kosher food.

They returned to the well where they had left Jesus just as this woman arrived at the most important intersection in her life. She had come face-to-face with Messiah. He had forced her to face her sin. He had given her the direct invitation to accept eternal life. And the disciples showed up and urged Jesus, "Rabbi, let's eat!" You have to be kidding! What was wrong with these men? Had Jesus not already told the leaders among this little band that He was making them to be fishers of men? What did they think He meant? Here was a perfect, living example of "fishing for men" taking place before their very eyes, and all they can think about is eating their meatball sub.

Let's not be too harsh on them. We are also plagued by human weakness like they were. We too have learned about the good news of

salvation. More than that, we believed the good news, God forgave us our sins, and now we are living eternal life. We rejoice in walking in fellowship with Christ every day. And yet opportunities to tell this wonderful news to very needy people pass us by regularly, and we never see the opportunities because we are so busy with “necessary” stuff.

Spiritual realities confuse mere humans. Jesus spoke of a different kind of food. *But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about” (v.32).* Jesus’ food was words of truth. Since literal food is necessary to sustain literal life, spiritual bread (the word of God) is necessary to sustain spiritual life. *And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, “ Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:3-4).* It was not that the disciples were unaware of Jesus’ teaching and ministry. The problem was that they did not grasp the contrast between physical food and spiritual food. Jesus’ food was the gospel, the good news that He Himself is the antidote to sin.

The disciples were hung up on literal food because they could only imagine food like they had experienced. *So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?” (v.33).* Still they were confused. The only kind of food they ever heard of was literal food they ate with their mouths. They were thinking literal food just like the woman had thought literal water.

Those disciples were as human as we, and everyone we know, are. Mention the idea of “the Bread of Life” to the average citizen of our culture and see what kind of response you get. You may hear something like the Samaritan woman’s response: “You have bread that sustains for a lifetime?” Why should we expect more from the disciples? In fact, at this point the disciples were very much normal, but uninitiated, people who followed Christ. But being good Jews, they should have caught on. All the way back at the beginning of the Jewish nation Moses informed the people, *And He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD (Deuteronomy 8:3).* That principle is still alive and well. But the disciples didn’t get it.

Jesus uncovers the mystery of spiritual food (vv.34-38). The real staple of life is to do God’s will. *Jesus said to them, “My food is to do*

the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (v.34). Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman was simply the work God sent Christ to do. He always did what was pleasing to the Father who sent Him (John 8:29). What pleased God was the testimony of Christ’s work that declared that He is equal with the Father (John 5:36). Jesus came for the express purpose of doing the Father’s work (John 6:38). Those works always displayed the glory of God (John 9:3). And the greatest display of God’s glory is the story of the gospel: Jesus Christ died, buried, risen again for the forgiveness of sins.

God’s will is about sowing truth and reaping souls. Therefore, Jesus told us, “Stop procrastinating!” He told the disciples, *“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” (v.35).* Typically farmers knew that a period of time needed to elapse between sowing seed and harvest. Jesus instead taught the disciples to be more alert to reality. He had just sown the seed. He had just sent forth the Word of God like showers that water the earth.

Because God’s Word never returns empty but always accomplishes something, there was already a response to the sowing. It is likely that Jesus indicated that the disciples needed to look up and see the citizens of Sychar walking toward them. Dressed in their white clothing, they looked like ripe grain ready for harvest. Indeed, Jesus knew exactly who among the approaching group would be harvested for salvation.

Is it possible that we sometimes hesitate to sow the seed of the gospel for fear that we will fail in the harvest? It isn’t our story, our news, our idea we are sharing. Sowing the gospel is God’s plan. It never fails but always accomplishes God’s purpose. Sinners who are not saved when they hear the good news are hardened in their sin— and that too is God’s plan. We cannot tell how long or how quickly a person might become ripe and ready for harvest.

Whether the harvesting is instantaneous or not at all, the Master has sent us to labor with the promise that the harvester harvests eternal fruit. Jesus told the disciples, *“Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life” (v.36a).* As Jesus and the disciples watched the people coming to them from the city, Jesus taught that the disciples were about to gather fruit. This is fruit for eternal life. These people were going to be born again. Even though the disciples were completely unaware of the miracle that was even then taking place in many hearts. God was graciously drawing these people to salvation,

and the disciples—who at the moment were clueless—were going to be involved in gathering fruit. It was not that they were going to be involved in inducting a group of people into a club or religious organization. They were going to usher baskets of fruit into the security of eternal life.

So it is with modern disciples. Each time we tell the good news of salvation to someone, we are pointing them to eternal life. Sometimes God takes that invitation and drives it into the heart of the listener so that the sinner trusts God, repents of sin, and enters eternal life. Many times the harvest comes later. In that case, it is almost always expected that the harvester harvests fruit from seed he did not sow. So Jesus said, *“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 labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”*

In this case, Jesus sowed the seed in the woman’s heart. The seed produced something—at the very least an impression on the woman that Jesus was special (v.29). As a result, she herself sowed the seed of truth: *“The man who told me all that I ever did.”* She gave an invitation: *“Come and see.”* She asked a penetrating question: *“Can this be the Christ?”*

Now the disciples showed up and helped gather fruit from seed that was sown while they were buying food. In the process, Jesus taught a very important lesson about soul-winning. For the disciples, Jesus taught that they were going to sow and sow and sow the seed of the gospel often with no results. They needed to learn that sometimes they were going to harvest fruit for eternity that came from seed sown by another. For us, Jesus taught that it is our duty to sow the seed. We are responsible to tell the good news of salvation. While we are doing that, we are also responsible to expose sin so that sinners will seek forgiveness from God. Paul wrote, *Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them (Ephesians 5:11)*. One of our chief focuses in life must always be to live the gospel and tell the gospel. Paul described the duty like this when he complimented the Christians in the church at Thessalonica: *For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything (1 Thessalonians 1:8)*.

We must continue to do this regardless of any response or result. Some of you, like me, have experienced the common failure of planting

grass in South Carolina. It was especially frustrating a few years ago while we were in that multi-year drought. We would put down bags and bags of the best grass seed we could buy. We would waste water on it daily. We would wait for it to take root and spring up nice and green. But the result was short lived. By next year there were brown spots all over the clay that we call “yard.” Finally, after a few years of this repeated frustration, a man I know said, “Next year I am digging up what little grass is in my yard and I am going with a desert theme by planting cacti and throwing stones all over the yard.”

That might be a description of your efforts to share the gospel. Unlike planting grass, sowing the seed of the gospel is going to have some kind of result some day – though we might not see it. Because the gospel works, it will be our privilege to gather fruit from seed others have sown. Sometimes people come to us and, seemingly out of the blue, say, “I need to be saved.” Sometimes after a short relationship, we share the gospel and the person responds. But often these same people have heard the gospel many times and God has been growing the seed in their hearts.

Evidence of Spiritual Feeding (vv.39-41).

Jesus gave out the spiritual food and sinners believed Jesus’ word (vv.39-42). Many believed because of the word Jesus spoke to the woman. Jesus’ intuitive knowledge convinced them that He was the promised Messiah. John recorded that *many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did” (v.39)*. Jesus knew all about this woman’s background. But in spite of her past, Jesus used her as a testimony to His person and character. She was not a trained theologian. She really didn’t even understand much about the gospel. The idea that this Messiah would die for the sins of the world, be buried, and rise again was not on her radar at all. But she believed that He was Messiah, and God used her testimony to that end to arouse the interest of many.

If we wait until we fully comprehend all the doctrines of grace before we ask someone to consider Jesus the Messiah as Savior from sin, we will never speak the gospel. No matter how much we study and contemplate the marvel of God’s work of salvation, it still eclipses human comprehension. That is why we are saved **by grace, through faith** (Ephesians 2:8). God’s grace gives us faith to believe, and that

faith grasps the simple facts that Christ knows my sin and as my Savior forgives. That is all we really need to know in order to tell others the good news.

Hearing good news, many of the Samaritans believed. How deep the “belief” of the many is open to question. At any rate, it is clear that the new believers wanted Jesus to stick around. *So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days (v.40).* This is a good illustration of the fact that people who believe in Jesus love His fellowship. They want to hear more; they desire to be taught. People who are merely religious (like the leaders in Jerusalem) do not care for fellowship with Jesus and certainly don’t want to learn from Him.

Many more believed in Jesus, beyond the woman’s testimony. They were convinced by Jesus’ word. *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 for ourselves” (vv.41-42a).* The woman’s testimony was good to stir their interest. It caused them to ask the important questions and search for answers. But ultimately, a universal principle of salvation is demonstrated here. Paul taught that *faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).* The evidence of multitudes of new books about Bible stuff indicates that people are very interested in the testimony of others who have learned something from the Master. However, I fear there are people who spend much time reading **about** the Bible but very little time reading and studying the Word of God. What profit is it for the farmer to chase the animals all around the barnyard, if he never goes into the barn to milk the cow? With all your interest about stuff outside the barn, be sure to take time to milk the cow twice a day.

These people from Sychar were convinced that Jesus is the Savior of the world! They concluded as a whole, *“And we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world” (v.42b).* Having heard the words of Jesus, the many people came to know something very important. The phrase translated, “We know” is a verb tense that means “we came to know and that knowledge has continuing results in our lives.” Of course this is early on in their fellowship with Christ. But the principle is obvious even here. When we truly believe Jesus Christ, it effects our lives forever. Many people believed certain truths about Jesus but then rejected Him and cared little that He was crucified.

True believers, those who have experienced the miracle of regeneration through faith, never get over the wonderful truth.

And what is the truth they believed? This is amazing! That Jesus, this man from Galilee who stopped at the well in Samaria to talk to a woman, *“is indeed the Savior of the world!”* David and the Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea) promised that God is the Savior of Israel, and that He would send the Savior in the person of Messiah. And yet the Samaritans did not accept this part of Scripture (only the Torah). Mary acknowledged God as her Savior, and the shepherds reported to her that the angels said that the promised Savior was Jesus. But they were Jewish. Paul referred to Jesus several times as the Savior (Acts 13:23; Eph. 5:23; Phil. 3:20; and multiple references in 1 Tim. and Titus). Three times Peter called Jesus the Savior (2 Peter). Jude did also (v.25).

But only John calls Jesus the Savior of the world. He made this same astonishing statement in his first letter. *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14).* The whole world includes a lot of non-Jewish people. How joyful these Samaritans must have been to come to this conclusion that, though salvation begins with the Jews (v.22), Jesus is the Savior for the whole world.

That is essentially the end of the Samaritan story. Now we come to a segue that marries this story with the next story in which we find religious people who believed Jesus’ signs (vv.43-45). Introducing that next lesson to us we learn that Jesus the Prophet was going to where a prophet has no honor. *After the two days he departed for Galilee. (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.)* Finally after staying with folks in Sychar for a couple of days, Jesus and the disciples continued toward their destination. He had accomplished this portion of His ministry on earth and now time to move on. They went to Jesus’ home area (not necessarily the town of Nazareth). This in spite of the fact that the people would not honor Jesus as Messiah and Savior the way the “unacceptable” people of Samaria did. But if a prophet has no honor in his own hometown (area), how do we explain what follows?

People who would not honor Jesus welcomed Him because of what they had seen. *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 (v.45).* Indeed, the people in Jesus’ home area welcomed Him. But they did not welcome Him as the Savior of the

world because they had faith in His Word. They were glad the healer and miracle worker was there. This connecting statement contrasts the faith of true believers from a sordid background with religious people who had their act together according to public opinion.

The woman told others about Jesus who went out and discovered from His own word that He is the Savior of the world. Sometimes we will have the privilege of gathering fruit like that that just seems to fall off the branches even when we did not plant the seed ourselves. Praise God for those opportunities and privileges. Many times we deal with religious people who think they already know all about Jesus, but they want a miracle worker who submits to their demands for more stuff. Regardless of the response, we keep sowing the seed of the gospel, presenting Jesus as the Savior of the world.