

John 4:27-42

Effective Evangelism

Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work – v. 34.

I have no doubt that Jesus Christ was the greatest preacher that ever walked the face of this earth. Every sermon He preached was fitly spoken. He always used the perfect text, utilized perfect illustrations and always made perfect applications. When young preachers think of the great preachers of the past they would love to emulate, they should think about Jesus Christ.

By the same token – Jesus Christ was also the greatest prayer warrior to ever walk the face of this earth. Who's prayer life comes close to the man who was accustomed to rising early to pray or who could go all night in prayer. Whoever set down such clear and concise guidelines for prayer as the Lord Jesus did when He gave us the Lord's prayer or as He exemplified in His high priestly prayer in Jn. 17?

I think He was also the greatest miracle worker even though He foretold that His followers would do even greater works than He did. We could add to the list that He was the greatest Pastor of all time, that He was the greatest Servant to ever live or that He was the greatest prophet to ever prophesy of things to come.

It is on account of His greatness in these areas that His life ought to be studied and His words ought to be cherished and His deeds ought to be emulated. And of course He Himself ought to be worshipped. He is, after all God manifest in the flesh. We should always keep the prologue of John's gospel in mind when we make our way through his gospel. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God (Jn. 1:1). And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (1:14).*

Now as look a little more closely as Christ's dealings with this woman at the well I think we're able to add one more thing to the list of things in which Christ was better than anybody. Just as He was the greatest preacher and prayer warrior and miracle worker and Pastor and prophet, so can we say now that He was the greatest evangelist that ever walked the face of this earth too.

I said in an earlier study that very often this portion of John's gospel is presented and studied because of the many lessons it teaches on evangelism. And those lessons are not restricted to what Christ says and does. This Samaritan woman becomes a pretty good evangelist in her own right when we read how she *left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? (4:28,29).*

Her success, so to speak is reported to us in v. 39 where we read *And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did.*

I've heard it suggested that when Jesus said to His disciples in v. 35 *Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest*, that the disciples may have been able to look up and see from a distance how many of the Samaritans at that exact moment were making their way across the fields to see and hear for themselves the man this woman had told them about.

And don't you find yourself reading this narrative with a longing in your heart to have the kind of impact for Christ that this Samaritan woman had, thanks to the way Christ had revealed Himself to her? If you know no such longing for souls then you'd do well to examine your own soul whether or not you're really a Christian. I don't know that a man can really gain a saving interest in Christ who doesn't gain at the same time a heartfelt burden for the lost.

When Paul wrote to the Romans he told him how he considered himself to be a debtor. *I am debtor* he writes in Rom. 1:14 *both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.* ¹⁵ *So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.* And later in Romans he would say to his readers *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors* (8:12). And in that case the debt would be to live after the spirit rather than the flesh. And if you're paying a debt of gratitude to God for so great salvation by being spiritual rather than carnal then a part of that spirituality will be to consider yourself indebted, like Paul to the Greeks and Barbarians, to the wise and the unwise, to give them the gospel.

So in this section in Jn. 4 we find Christ not only engaged in the role of an evangelist but we find him creating an evangelist out of this Samaritan woman that He met at Jacob's well. What I'd like to do, therefore, is to look at Christ as well as look at this Samaritan woman and in looking at them both, I'd like to ask and answer a simple question:

What do we Learn About Effective Evangelism in this Portion of John's Gospel?

I. Effective Evangelism Sees Great Potential in Evangelistic Effort

Christ taught His disciples what their outlook should be toward evangelism when He told them in v. 35 to *Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest*. And the meaning becomes very plain when you compare this statement to what precedes it. What precedes it is a statement that would excuse one from expecting immediate results from evangelistic effort. Look again at v. 35 and note the contrasting outlooks that set against each other:

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? There's the outlook that says *later*. Don't look for a harvest now but hope for one later. And while I'm not willing to altogether dismiss that outlook, I can't help but point out that in the instance before us that's not what Christ is teaching us to do. *Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.*

Perhaps the thing that keeps us from adopting this outlook is that it runs so contrary to our experience. How many of you have had such an impact for Christ that you've seen large numbers of souls come to Christ? I'm afraid that rather than seeing fields white unto harvest we tend to see a scorched earth that has been destroyed by easy believism methods of evangelism.

If you want to see the fields white unto harvest, then go to the large evangelistic crusades that put on shows and that utilize every manner of psychological techniques to get people to walk down an aisle. Based on the numbers that are cited by such crusades you might conclude that the reason evangelism seems hard in our day is because everyone has already been evangelized.

But when you look closer for the fruit that ought to at least in some measure manifest itself in such widespread evangelism campaigns you begin to realize that the harvest hasn't exactly been what it's purported to be. And now the task of real evangelism has been made all the more difficult, it seems, because of presumption that has been sown in the hearts and minds of many.

I think it's good to keep in mind, therefore, a larger context to the narrative of John 4. You remember back at the end of chp. 2 where we noted that there were many that seemed to gain a saving interest in Christ. They're actually said to believe when we read in 2:23 *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.*

It would seem, wouldn't it, that the scene in Jerusalem would be similar to the scene in Samaria but then we go on to read of the scene in Jerusalem *But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man (2:24,25).*

On the surface these scenes might appear similar but in fact there was a big difference between them. But what you should see from the account of the Samaritans in Jn. 4 is that the potential is always there, the potential for immediate and widespread effects from the gospel. Albert Barnes in his commentary on this portion of John's gospel sets forth a number of lessons that spring out of these verses. Listen to what he says. These are very concise yet encouraging statements:

1st. That there is as much encouragement to attempt to save souls as the farmer has to raise a crop.

2nd. That the gospel is fitted to make an immediate impression on the minds of men. We are to expect that it will. We are not to wait to some future period, as if we could not expect immediate results. This wicked and ignorant people — little likely, apparently, to be affected — turned to God, heard the voice of the Saviour, and came in multitudes to him.

3rd. We are to expect revivals of religion. Here was one instance of it under the Savior's own preaching. Multitudes were excited, moved, and came to learn the way of life.

4th. We know not how much good may be done by conversation with even a single individual. This conversation with a woman resulted in a deep interest felt throughout the city, and in the conversion of many of them to God. So a single individual may often be the means, in the hand of God, of leading many to the cross of Jesus.

5th. What evils may follow from neglecting to do our duty! How easily might Jesus have alleged, if he had been like many of his professed disciples, that he was weary, that he was hungry, that it was esteemed improper to converse with a woman alone, that she was an abandoned character, and there could be little hope of doing her good! How many consciences of ministers and Christians would have been satisfied with reasoning like this? Yet Jesus, in spite of his fatigue and thirst, and all the difficulties of the case, seriously set about seeking the conversion of this woman. And behold what a glorious result! The city was moved, and a great harvest was found ready to be gathered in! Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not (Gal. 6:9).

So effective evangelism sees the potential behind every evangelistic effort. Let's note next that:

II. Effective Evangelism Manifests Itself with Great Zeal

You see this zeal manifested by Christ and by the Samaritan woman. Remember what's been said in previous studies about this Samaritan woman. She has to come to the well to draw at an hour when others are not there. It was in the heat of the day that she had to come to draw water so she could avoid contact with others that would heap reproach on her and treat her with scorn on account of her immoral lifestyle.

She might avoid others altogether were it not for the fact that drawing water was an essential chore. You had to have water to live. You needed for drinking and cleaning and cooking. You simply could not go long without water so that the practice of drawing that water was very likely a daily chore.

And yet Christ spoke to this woman about a different kind of water. 4:14 *But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*

I think it would fair to say that before this woman was done she had drawn from that living water. And not only had she drawn from it but she had made it a priority that others needed to drink of it as well. There's a detail in this narrative, you see, that might be easy to overlook, especially by Christians in our day and age who have the blessing of running water in our homes to the point where we take such a blessing for granted.

If you knew what it meant to have to walk a certain distance with a large water jar, and then fill that jar and carry it back that same distance back to your home in order to have what was essential for the physical needs of your home – I say if you knew that kind of experience then you might find easier to marvel at the words of v. 28 *The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city,* She left her waterpot? Why do you suppose

she left her waterpot? Especially when you consider how important her chore of drawing water must have been – why did she leave her waterpot?

And the answer can be found by simply tracing what she did after leaving her waterpot. Look again at v. 28 *The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?* She had found the Messiah. And in finding the Messiah she had drawn from that living water. She had gained the soul refreshing water of salvation. She had come to know the blessing of being cleansed from sin.

And once she knew that blessing she made a very serious adjustment to her priorities. Now all of a sudden there was something that mattered even more than carrying her waterpot home, important though that task was. But here was something way more important. Here was the Messiah, and here was salvation, and here could found all the blessings that accompany salvation. Here was that pearl of great price that was worth selling everything she owned in order to have.

Can you imagine the impact she must have had on that city, especially when you remember how her usual demeanor would have been pretty much to avoid people because of her reputation. Now all of a sudden she's on fire. She must go and tell others about the Messiah. Verse 29 – *Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?*

Let me ask you a question this morning and may God help you to search your heart in order to answer this question before God. My question to you is this – what kind of evangelistic zeal do you possess? What kind of priority do you assign to telling others about Christ? If we could carry this scene from John 4 into our day and age, I dare say that the mindset that would most likely be manifested would be the mindset that would reason this way – first I must fill my waterpot and take it home. I must tend to my physical needs and the needs of my house before I concern myself with telling others about Christ. Only after I've tended to everything else will I concern myself with the gospel. And only if I feel up to it. After all it's hard work taking that journey, and filling my waterpot and carrying it home again.

Here was a woman, then, that found her zeal inspired when she met Christ. And in her manifestation of evangelistic zeal she was demonstrating how conformed to Christ she was becoming. For Christ Himself also showed evangelistic zeal. Look with me at v. 31ff *In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. 32 But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. 33 Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat? 34 Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*

Do you see what kind of priority Christ assigns to the task before Him? Doing His Father's will was more important than His necessary food. In fact this was His food. Now I realize you can take these words of Christ and apply them to a broader context of all that Christ was doing. He would eventually set His face to go stedfastly toward Jerusalem,

knowing as He did that His work would take Him to Calvary's cross where He would make atonement for our sins. And I don't think He ever lost sight of that mission. So that becomes a valid application or interpretation of His words *my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work*. And the time would come when from Calvary's cross He would make the announcement *It is finished*. And with that announcement redemption would be accomplished and the foundation for all true evangelism would be laid.

But when you look at the immediate context of what Christ says in these verses, I think He's making reference to the work of evangelism. It's right after He says *my meat is to do the will of him that sent me* that He then instructs His disciples to *lift up their eyes and look on the fields*.

Here was His meat – the lost multitude of Samaria coming to meet Him. His meat was to impart salvation to them. When you compare, then, our Savior's meat with the woman leaving her waterpot to go to her city to tell the men of the Messiah, then it makes it easy to conclude that Christ and the woman of Samaria knew the importance and priority of gospel ministry. And from both their examples we may conclude that effective evangelism manifests itself with great zeal – a zeal that is seen by the priority that's assigned to telling others of Christ who is mighty to save.

So we've seen the outlook that must be present in effective evangelism and we've seen the zeal that's manifested in effective evangelism. It remains for us to consider:

III. The Aim Behind Every Effective Evangelistic Endeavor

That aim must be the revelation of Jesus Christ. You remember what I've said in the last two studies we've conducted about this woman at the well. We find in this narrative what is perhaps the clearest and plainest confession on the part of Christ that He is the Messiah. Verse 25 *The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things*. And then Christ's very direct response to her, more direct than He had been with the Jews: Verse 26 *Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he*.

There's the culmination of effective evangelism – it's the revelation of Jesus Christ. *I that speak unto thee am he*. And based on her response to Christ's words of leaving her waterpot to head off to the city, I'm inclined to think that when Christ spoke that word to her it was accompanied by an inward revelation to her soul.

When the Apostle Paul shared his testimony with the Galatians he made reference to that inward revelation of Christ. Gal. 1:15f *But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood*.

In the case of Paul you could argue that there was an external revelation of Christ to him. We have the account of that blinding glory of Christ on the Damascus road. And it's worth noting that on that occasion Christ identified Himself to Paul just as He identified Himself to this woman of Samaria. *Who art thou, Lord*, he asks in Acts 9:5. *I am Jesus whom thou*

persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks, Christ says in the same verse. Paul certainly got the message because the next thing we find him doing following his baptism is preaching Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God (Acts 9:20). But the point I'm making now is that there was more than an external revelation of Christ's glory to Paul. There was also an inward revelation. Paul speaks of God revealing His Son *in me*.

And this is something every true believer has in common with Paul, and with the Samaritan woman, and with the Samaritans themselves. And this must ever be our aim in evangelism. We want Christ to be revealed to the hearts of our hearers. If you're in this meeting this morning without Christ, how I hope and pray that He'll be revealed to your heart. When He's revealed to your heart, you see, you gain salvation. You gain salvation because you gain Him. You don't merely know things about Him but you know Him.

It's worth noting in this respect how the Samaritans came to gain firsthand knowledge of Him. There were those who believed because of the testimony of the woman. There's no denying that. We're told that in v. 39 *And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did*.

But then we go on to note what they say in v. 41 *And many more believed because of his own word*. This leads to the cumulative effect of v. 42 *And (they) said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves*. That's our aim in evangelism. We want our hearers to hear Christ's own word. That's my hope and prayer for each one here today. Oh that you might hear that still small voice of His Spirit testifying to your soul the truth of His word.

You'll know it when you hear it because it will lead to the same confession that is made by these Samaritans: *Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world*.

There's effective evangelism – it leads to the confession that Christ is the Saviour of the world. What a powerful evangelistic meeting, then, took place near the city of Sychar in Samaria near Jacob's well. It began with Christ's conversation with this woman. And could I just say here that oftentimes this is where evangelism begins – it begins with a conversation. And it led to salvation not only for that woman but for a multitude of Samaritans as well.

May the Lord help us, then, from His word to see the potential, and manifest the zeal and know what to aim for in our every evangelistic endeavor. And may we hear it confessed what we ourselves as saved sinners have confessed that *this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world*.