

Sent to Labor (John 4:31–45)
By Pastor Jeff Alexander (7/11/2021)

Introduction

Three truths are set forth in the story surrounding Jacob's well at Sychar in Samaria:

1. Jesus came to this place to seek a sinful woman of mixed Jewish heritage and bring her salvation.

This woman came to the well to get water. She was not looking for Jesus; Jesus was seeking her. This story illustrates the word of Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 65:1).

2. Salvation unites people of all nations who will worship God in spirit and truth, not in place or tradition.

The woman is typical of the Lord's plan to seek a bride for His Son. John the Baptist hints at this venture when he reveals his place as "*friend of the bridegroom*" (3:29). Revelation shows the realization of this gathering of His people referred to as His bride, the church (19:7, 8), the identity of this bride (21:2, 3). As we have before considered, Paul defines the new Jerusalem in Hebrews 12:22 as the place to which Christians have come—Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the assembly (*ekklesia*, church) of the firstborn. Revelation closes with an interesting statement (22:17), which closely this statement reflects the incident at Sychar of Samaria.

3. The Lord is enlisting His own to labor with Him in seeking out the people that will form His bride.

We call this work *evangelism*, preaching the gospel to lost and inviting them to salvation in Christ.

I. Christ's Main Concern

1. The disciples, returning from their trip to obtain food, came upon Christ as He finished His conversation with the woman. They had two issues with which Christ had to deal: their prejudice and their false priorities.

- a. The disciples were troubled that Jesus was having a discussion with the Samaritan woman (v. 27). Jewish prejudice ruled their view of women, non-Jews, and particularly non-Jewish women. Three brief examples:

- 1) This Samaritan woman testified to this fact (v. 9).
- 2) See how the disciples treated a Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21–28, who sought Jesus to heal her demon-oppressed daughter.
- 3) Peter's prejudice carried over into his ministry to the point that Paul rebuked him openly. When Jewish workers came from Jerusalem to Galatia, Peter stopped eating with the Gentile believers because he feared the criticism of the circumcision party (Galatians 2:11–14). Paul called Peter and those who followed him hypocrites (see also Acts 10:28, 29; Acts 11:2, 3).

All prejudice must go since God's intention is to call a people for His name out of every nation. In the church, there is neither Jew or Gentile, male or female, bond or free. We are all one in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

- b. The disciples were troubled about Jesus' declining to eat the food they went to obtain (vv. 31–34). Their concern reflects the *natural* approach to life. Jesus would now pursue instructing them on what was important.

2. Our priority consists of two things: the *will of God*, and its accomplishment (v. 34).

- a. The *will of God* must be *our* priority because Jesus made it *His* priority (v. 34). Jesus taught His disciples to pray, saying, “*Your kingdom come, your will be done*” (Matthew 6:9, 10). Only after this priority are we to be concerned with food (v. 11; see Mark 3:35; Ephesians 6:6, 7; Hebrews 10:36; 1 Peter 2:15; 4:1, 2; 1 John 2:17).
- b. The will of God is fulfilled by accomplishing the Lord’s work. Christians often argue that the duties of life—job, education, family, and community—take precedence over church or Christian activities. Duties do not conflict. The will of God must be the priority.

II. The Process of the Harvest

1. Jesus was feasting on food that the limited thinking of the disciples could not imagine.
 - a. They urged Jesus to eat what they brought for Him. He replied to them, “*I have food to eat that you do not know about.*” The saving of the Samaritan woman was spiritual food that exceeded the satisfaction of any earthly fare. It was a feast, but He was about to enjoy a greater one.
 - b. The disciples could not think in two realms, the natural and the spiritual. They could think only in the realm of the natural. The meal that He now consumed involved the will of God and the task enjoined upon Him. So it must be with us.
2. It was necessary that Christ’s disciples learn to think in both the natural and spiritual realms and to prioritize the spiritual. He asked them a question regarding the harvest in the natural realm: “Is it not yet four months in the future?” But what of the spiritual harvest? (v. 35).
3. The joy of harvest is seen in the *shared responsibility* of all involved—the sower and the reaper. Here again, Jesus laid out an important principle that is often overlooked.
 - a. Many hands were involved in the harvest. The wages of each depended on all taking responsibility (vv. 37, 38). Yet, Jesus declared, “*Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together*” (v. 36).
 - b. Thus, the Scriptures focus on the shared *festive joy* by all who have taken any part in the work from the tilling of ground to the harvest of its fruit (Psalm 126:6; Isaiah 9:3).

Conclusion

1. The joy of harvest is something very few Christians have experienced; neither do they understand that the Lord desires His people to know His joy (John 17:13). His disciples would continue His gospel ministry in His absence and, in doing so, would experience *His joy* in seeing people saved and transformed (John 15:11; Matthew 25:21; Luke 15:10).
2. Evangelism and disciple-making are the main tasks of the church in this age as the Lord gathers a people for the kingdom (Matthew 28:18–20).
3. Our task is not to persuade sinners to be saved. That is the work of God, but we are His laborers (1 Corinthians 3:6–9). Each of us must examine his own heart. Are we like His disciples, fixed on earthly needs and temporal priorities, or are our eyes open to see the need to enter His harvest? (Matthew 9:37, 38).