

6. John recorded that Jesus' disciples returned at this point in the conversation and were astonished to find Him talking with a woman – and not just any woman, but a Samaritan. They were stunned by what they encountered, but none of them was willing to ask Jesus about it (4:27). John provided no explanation for their reluctance, but one thing is certain: Jesus' interaction with this woman was so beyond normal and accepted practice that the disciples had no category for processing it; even if they were not completely dumbstruck, they had no idea what to make of what they were seeing and what questions to ask.
 - a. Shortly after the disciples arrived the woman excused herself to return to her town (4:28). The awkwardness of the situation may have provoked her hasty departure, but two considerations argue for a different explanation. The first is that she left her water pot there at the well; after coming all that way to draw water from the well, she returned home without it. But more telling is what she did when she arrived in the town; John indicated that she didn't go to her home, but immediately sought out others to tell about her encounter with Jesus. He also hinted at her excitement by noting that she recounted her story to *men* as well as other women. (The noun rendered *men* in many English versions is the generic term for human beings, both male and female.) It seems that, in her enthusiastic joy, all decorum and social constraints went out the window. She wanted all who would listen to hear about this man Jesus.
 - b. The woman explained to these people the whole episode and the fact that this Jew had identified Himself as the Messiah. John's grammar indicates that she wasn't yet entirely convinced, though Jesus had certainly impressed her with His insight into her life and history. She requested that the group return with her to the well to meet Jesus and reach their own conclusion. Perhaps she was hoping that they could help her become convinced. Whatever she told them, it sufficiently captured their attention that they were willing to leave off their present business and follow her back to Jacob's well (4:29-30).
 - c. While this Samaritan party was making its way toward Jesus, He and His disciples were engaged in their own conversation. Once again Jesus employed a natural circumstance as the springboard for spiritual instruction: The disciples had arrived back at the well with food and were surprised to find Jesus not joining in the meal. He surely was as hungry as they were; why was He not eating? Jesus was abstaining, not because He wasn't hungry, but as a strategy for instructing His disciples in a matter that was critically important at that moment.

Utilizing the same approach He'd taken earlier with the woman (vv. 7-10), Jesus responded in a way that drew upon the circumstance at hand, but so as to capture the attention of His disciples and reorient them toward the subject He was concerned with: "*I have food to eat that you do not know about*" (4:32). Jesus employed the same instructional technique with His *Jewish* disciples and they responded with the same natural minds and perspective as the *Samaritan* woman: She questioned where Jesus was going to get this living water (vv. 10-11); the disciples questioned where Jesus could have gotten this other food (v. 33).

- d. Jesus observed the disciples puzzling over His statement and proceeded to explain it to them (4:34-38). No one had brought Him something to eat while they were gone; He was referring to food in a *metaphorical* sense, just as when He discussed living water with the Samaritan woman. And this metaphor, as well, had a scriptural foundation (cf. Job 23:10-12; Psalm 119:103; Proverbs 9:1-5; Jeremiah 15:15-16; Ezekiel 3:1-7; Amos 8:11-13; etc.). Most especially, Jesus' words echoed Deuteronomy 8:3, and this echo hints at the scriptural truth which all of the gospel writers affirm: *Israel – Yahweh's covenant son – was to find its fulfillment and embodiment in the Messianic Servant, and that design had now been realized in Jesus* (cf., for instance, Isaiah 42:1-4, 49:1-7 and 61:1-3 with Luke 3:21-4:21). And He had embodied Israel in order that Israel's identity and calling should not fall short; He would succeed as God's covenant son where Israel had failed; He would relive Israel's testing and triumph through it, thereby becoming fitted as "man of the Spirit" to accomplish His Father's will in the world (cf. Deuteronomy 6:1-19 and 8:1-18 with Luke 3:21-4:15). And Yahweh's will was that this *Son of Abraham* (Matthew 1:1; Galatians 3:16) and *Son of Man* (Genesis 3:15; 1 Corinthians 15:45-49) would banish the curse of alienation and death and extend His blessing of purging, renewal, reconciliation and ingathering to all mankind and, ultimately, the whole creation (Romans 8:12-22).

This is the lens through which verse 34 must be read:

- His Father's *will* was the food Jesus hungered for and by which He was sustained and strengthened. It was that will which had dispatched Him into the world and determined and prescribed the work He'd come to do.
- Jesus was fed by giving Himself to His Father's purpose and work, and that work was to accomplish the Father's design for His creation.

Without the above framework it's easy to interpret Jesus' statement *abstractly* as Him merely asserting His commitment to submit to God's authority and do what He was commanded to do. In particular, one might conclude that Jesus was speaking about His "active obedience" (*doing God's will*) in view of His obligation to make atonement (*accomplish God's work*); that is, He was devoted to God's will of living a sinless life in order to be a suitable sacrifice for sinners and so accomplish His saving work. But, not only is this view foreign to the larger context, it doesn't fit with Jesus' subsequent statements (vv. 35-38). Treated in context, it's clear that Jesus' intent wasn't to school His disciples in the process of atonement, *but to help them understand the puzzling circumstances of that day* – what they had already witnessed and what would soon transpire when the woman arrived back at the well with a group of Samaritans excited about Jesus and the possibility that He was *their* Messiah and so the Savior of the world (4:39-42).

Jesus implied His mission in the Father's will by alluding to Deuteronomy 8; here He illumined that mission and the disciples' role in it by noting their own words: "*You say, there are yet four more months, and then comes the harvest*" (4:35a).

This saying highlights the dynamic which exists between sowing and reaping – between the work of preparation in view of the day of harvest and the time of the harvest itself. Thus it speaks to the patient expectancy which follows upon diligent preparation (tilling, planting, cultivating, etc.) and which obtains its longed-for goal in the new and enthusiastic work of harvesting the crop. Both sowing and reaping involve painstaking labor, but the latter is characterized by unique enthusiasm and zeal because it is the work of *fulfillment*; reaping sums up all previous labor because it is the ingathering of the fruit of all that went before.

This is the imagery Jesus drew upon, but He did so to explain to His disciples the meaning of what they were witnessing that day in Samaria and what it portended for them as His servants. Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman was only a small taste of the religious and cultural upheaval that was occurring in Israel.

- Everything the disciples thought they knew and every expectation they had was about to undergo a monumental transformation. They, like many in Israel, were waiting for the time of harvest associated with the coming of Messiah – the time when God would redeem and gather in the faithful Israelite remnant and inaugurate His everlasting kingdom.
- But their expectation was misguided and this caused them to miss the significance of what they observed when they returned to Jacob's well. Rather than signaling to them that the long-awaited time of harvest was at hand (4:35-36), Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman left them astonished and befuddled (4:27).
- Jesus was attempting to reorient their thinking, especially in light of what they were about to witness when the woman returned with a group of her countrymen eager to know that this Jew was indeed the Messiah, the Savior of the world (4:25, 42). This company would come to believe in Him, but that was to be but the first fruits of Yahweh's harvest among the Samaritan people (4:41-42; cf. also Acts 1:6-8 and 8:1-25).

By this imagery Jesus was telling His disciples that the time of the eschatological harvest had come; indeed the reaping had already begun. They themselves were proof of this, and before the day was out they would see further evidence in the "ingathering" of *Samaritans* – in this case, a group of individuals brought to Jesus by a *woman* He'd had the temerity to engage in a conversation. These Jewish disciples would see that, as it had been with them, so it would be with the Samaritans whom they despised and denigrated: Jesus was going to harvest them for His Father as well by virtue of their faith in Him as the Messiah (1:35-51); and being gathered to His Father, He would embrace them as *brethren* (4:40). If Jesus shocked His disciples by merely *speaking* with a Samaritan woman – something *they* would never do, how He must have shattered their world by having them spend two days with Him enjoying table fellowship in Samaritan homes!

- e. Thus John closed this account by summarizing the outcome of Jesus' encounter with the woman (4:39-42). He'd been speaking to His disciples about their role in His mission even while the group of Samaritans was making its way back to the well. And when they arrived, enthusiastic to learn whether Jesus could indeed be the Messiah, the disciples were confronted with the significance of His exhortation: "*Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life.*" The disciples got to see firsthand the same fruit of faith produced in unclean Samaritans as had grown in their own hearts. And this lesson was reinforced and enlarged when they left the well that day and made their way into the Samaritan village to spend a few days in their homes eating at their tables while their Lord proclaimed His gospel to them and called them into His kingdom (4:40-42). This was a critical first lesson that they absolutely needed to grasp and master: *In the covenant household Messiah was forming around Himself, there are no distinctions among persons – not only Jew-Gentile distinctions, but any other distinctions characteristic of human social structures.* Jesus was building, not another natural human society, but an entirely new human community determined and ordered by His own life and intimacy with the Father and Spirit. In Paul's words, Jesus was forming a new kind of human being in Himself, and so a new kind of human community and culture (cf. Ephesians 1:22-3:11, 4:11-25, 5:1-30; Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:11-27, 15:35-49; Colossians 3:1-4:6).

Jesus hadn't come to reform the world, but to renew the human race (and so the whole creation) according to an entirely new paradigm. His mission wasn't to bring about a better world through men following His example, but to inaugurate a new creation having its origin and life in Him as God's new Adam. This obviously entailed a radical paradigm shift for the Gentiles who had no history with God or knowledge of His purposes as revealed in the Scriptures. But, perhaps surprising to some, it was equally radical for the Jews, as John makes clear in this context. For even though the Jews had the advantage of their covenant election, historical relationship with God and scriptural insight into His designs for the world (Romans 3:1-2, 9:1-5), they viewed all those things through the same natural mind employed by the Gentiles. Every bit as much as other men, the people of Israel had to undergo a radical rethinking and reorientation in light of Jesus of Nazareth, and this included how they understood the Gentiles' place in God's kingdom and household (cf. Acts 15:1-35; Ephesians 2-3; Galatians 1-4).

John recorded this episode because he recognized its critical importance – not just because Samaritans came to faith, but because of the episode's effect on the disciples' perspective and thinking. They were forced to rethink their Master and His mission, but equally importantly, their *own* mission as His servants and witnesses. Through His work in the salvation history, Yahweh had sown in view of the day of harvest. Jesus had come to reap the fruit of that sowing, but as *Himself* sowing in anticipation of the harvest to come when His work was complete: *Jesus would reap the harvest, but through those who shared in His life by His Spirit* (4:37-38; cf. 14:12, 15:26-16:11, 20:18-23 with Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:1-8, 2:1-41, 3:1-4:12, 6:1-7:60, esp. 8:1-25).