

## John 4:31-42 Fields White unto Harvest

**Overall Purpose:** Arguably, John wrote this Gospel to unbelieving Jews not living in the Promised Land.

ESV **John 20:30-31** Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

**Focus:** The key focus of John's Gospel concerns the question, *Who is Jesus?*<sup>1</sup>

**Application:** The key application of John's Gospel is for you to believe in Jesus, so that you too may have life.

**Review: John 4 records how Jesus, on his way from Judea to Galilee, met a woman at a well, and convinced her that He was the long-awaited Messiah (Christ). Who remembers what Jesus did to convince her that He was the Messiah? He told her "all that I ever did." She subsequently went into the town and excitedly told everyone about it. Read 4:29-30.**

### Insights into Effective Evangelism:

1) The woman did not boldly proclaim Jesus to be the Christ. Rather, she phrased it as a question: "Can this be the Christ?" She piqued their curiosity and let them come to their own conclusions. Many evangelists have commented on the effectiveness of asking good questions when witnessing, such as this sequence:

- 1) Do you have any kind of spiritual belief?
- 2) To you, who is Jesus?
- 3) Do you think that there is heaven or hell?
- 4) If you died, where are you going?
- 5) Why would God let you into heaven?

Then, after listening to the person's answers:

- 6) "If what you believe is not true, do you want me to tell you?"<sup>2</sup>

An effective campus ministry, TheGreatExchange.org, also has an excellent nine-question Gospel survey that can be accessed online. It is conversation, not confrontation,

2) The main reason this well woman was an effective witness may have simply been because she was *excited about Jesus!* God will use you if you've had a genuine encounter with the Lord and are excited about Him. If you yourself are personally not excited, you'd best try to figure out why!<sup>3</sup>

**Where were the disciples while all this was going on? They were grocery shopping! Read 4:8.**

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<sup>1</sup> Carson, *John*, 95.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Cole, "Lesson 24: The Witness God Uses (John 4:27-42), Bible.org. Accessed July 10, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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**\*\*\*What reason did Jesus give for not eating (4:31-38)?** Jesus mysteriously said his “food” was to do the Father’s will, 4:34. He said he already had some food—soul food!

**ESV Deuteronomy 8:3b** . . . man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

**Application:** *Is that your attitude?* We should desire to obey Jesus more than we desire to eat or drink. In fact, we should desire to obey Jesus more than we desire to live.

**Metaphysical Mistakes:** Jesus spoke to the woman at the well about metaphysical water and then He spoke to the disciples about metaphysical food. The disciples initially made the same mistake that the woman at the well made. The woman initially thought Jesus spoke of physical water and then the disciples mistakenly thought Jesus spoke of literal food (4:33).

**There is no doubt that Jesus was hungry, just as He had truly been thirst before (4:6-7).**  
**Why do you suppose He refused to eat (4:31-33)?** He likely refused to eat so as to create a *learning opportunity* for his disciples.

**Insight:** This shows Jesus’ priorities: He put obeying God above his own bodily comfort.

**Application:** Like Jesus, we need to have a harvest mind-set. It is far too easy to get focused on the natural as we go about our business (busyness), completely forgetting about the spiritual. Everyone we encounter in our daily lives is someone who is made in God’s image and we need to tune in to see if God wants use us to make an eternal difference in that person’s life.

**Example:** One time Muralee and I went through the drive-thru at a fast-food restaurant around midnight. I had just picked him up from the airport after he had been traveling for some 24 hours. Yet, after I took the food and began to pull away from the pick-up window he said, “Aren’t you going to give her a tract?” He was hungry, and far more tired than I was, yet he was focused on the spiritual needs of the fast-food worker.

**Jesus said that normally one would have to wait four months until it was time for the harvest (4:35).<sup>4</sup> It was like saying, “Rome wasn’t built in day.” What odd harvest declarations did Jesus make in 4:35-37)?** He said it was already harvest time (no need to wait four months), and that the sowing and reaping were going on *at the same time!*

**What spiritual lesson did Jesus want the disciples to learn (4:34-38)?** The lesson was that the *spiritual fields* were already ripe for the *harvest of souls* into God’s kingdom. The fruit was *eternal life*. Jesus Himself was already busy reaping (the woman at the well).

**Based on 4:36, what emotion should you feel with you engage in evangelism?** The word Jesus used was “rejoice”! Evangelism is something we should be excited about, not afraid of.

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<sup>4</sup> Neither Jesus nor John explained which plant turns white when it is time to be harvested (4:35). Perhaps it was wheat. The point is that there was no need to wait the normal four months; the crop was already ripe.

ESV **Luke 15:7** . . . there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

The travail we undergo in evangelism is worth the rejoicing that comes when a harvest is reaped. It is the same idea as:

ESV **John 16:21** When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.

*What do you get excited about? What do you rejoice in?*

**Reward Application (Pay Day Someday):** The wages of sin is death (Ro 6:23). Notice that the sower and the reaper also got “wages” (4:36). There is an eternal reward for participating in evangelism. As Jesus said,

ESV **Matthew 6:20** . . . lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . .

**Based on 4:38, whenever you see someone come to faith, what can you be sure has already been done before you got there?** Others have labored (sown seed, watered, pulled weeds), in preparation of the harvest. That the spiritual crop is always ready to be harvested, does not mean that sowing is unnecessary. We all need to purpose to be part of the process!

ESV **1 Corinthians 3:6** I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

**Application:** One important way to be involved is by praying. In a similar statement, Jesus said:

ESV **Matthew 9:37-38** The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

If you go without praying, you are foolish. If you pray without going, you are a hypocrite.

**What do you think? Is it still true today that the harvest is ready, or was it a first-century phenomenon?** This is a new covenant reality.

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**\*\*\*\*What specific harvest did Jesus want the disciples to witness (4:39-42)?** It was a harvest of Samaritans who came to faith in Jesus. This may have been a hard lesson for them to accept due to their low view of Samaritans.

**In the case of the harvested Samaritans, who were the “others” who had labored (4:38)?** Those who had labored beforehand to prepare the Samaritans included Moses, John the Baptist, and, most importantly, Jesus.

**What two factors persuaded so many Samaritans to believe (4:39-42)?** The woman's testimony, combined with Jesus' teachings, convinced them that Jesus is the Savior of the world (4:39, 41).

**Application:** The people initially believed because of the woman's testimony. She was a new believer. This woman had been married five times and was shacking up with a guy.<sup>5</sup> The power of an "ordinary" believer's testimony should not be underestimated.<sup>6</sup> God uses normal people who are excited about Jesus and who invite others to come to Him—even us!

**Why did the Samaritans refer to Jesus as the Savior of the "world" (4:42)?** They understood that His mission was greater than that of merely saving ethnic Hebrews.

ESV **Acts 1:8** . . . you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

**Progression of Faith:** In the course of John 4, the Samaritan woman first viewed Jesus as just another Jew, then as a prophet, then as the Messiah/Christ, and finally as Savior of the world.<sup>7</sup>

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**\*\*\*\*What type of reception did Jesus get when He finally arrived in Galilee (4:43-45)?** See also 2:23. They welcomed Him with open arms because they had seen all the things He had done in Jerusalem during the feast:

ESV **John 2:23** . . . when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.

**How does 4:44 tie into 4:43<sup>8</sup> and 4:45?** See back to 1:11, 2:23-24, 4:1-3, 4:48. It is obvious that there was a clear contrast between the responses of the Jews versus the Samaritans. The Samaritans saw no miracles, yet readily believed and honored Jesus as a true prophet. The Jews, in both Judea and Galilee, saw miracles and yet were still skeptical or had a faulty faith. They did not truly "honor" Jesus for Who He really was:

ESV **John 1:11** He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

**Flawed Faith:** Although the Galilean Jews did welcome Jesus (4:45), their enthusiasm was based on the things they saw Jesus do at the feast in Jerusalem, a type of faith that Jesus Himself did not trust:

ESV **John 2:23-24** . . . when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people.

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<sup>5</sup> God accepts us the way we are (even living with someone to whom we are not married), but He loves us far too much to leave us the way we are—He frees us from our sin and begins to conform us to the image of Christ.

<sup>6</sup> Carson, *John*, 231.

<sup>7</sup> Hendriksen, *John*, 177.

<sup>8</sup> "Hometown" (4:44) is from *patris*, which can also more generally mean country or fatherland (basis for "expatriate").

ESV **John 4:48** So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."

Sure enough, in John 6, we learn that Jesus' Galilean disciples left Him in droves (6:66).

- 1) It was a fact that Jesus was *not* honored for Who He really was in Galilee.
- 2) The difficulties lie with the word "for" (4:44), which indicates a reason why, and with "so" (4:45) which flags a cause/effect relationship. Stated another way, Jesus left Samaria to go to Galilee "because" a prophet has no honor in his own home. When He got there, He was "welcomed" because they had seen the signs, but not truly honored.

John informed his readers that Jesus left Judea when the Pharisees learned he had more disciples than John the Baptist. It has been suggested that He left Judea because it was not yet time to confront and clash with them. He went to Galilee because he knew that he would not be honored there and thus be able to continue to avoid a clash with the Pharisees.<sup>9</sup>

### So What?

**Why did John record this incident with the Samaritans? What point did he want to make to the unbelieving Jews who originally read this?** The take away is that God's plan for salvation is much larger than simply saving Jewish people. That even the despised Samaritans believed and received eternal life proves this.

ESV **John 4:42** [Samaritans speaking]: . . . "we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

ESV **John 1:9** The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

ESV **John 1:29** [John the Baptist speaking]: Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

ESV **John 3:17** God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

The application for the original readers is that they not miss out on salvation, as did the Jews of Judea and Galilee. Like Paul, John wanted to motivate them to salvation as they saw non-Jews coming to Jesus:

ESV **Romans 11:13b-14** Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.

**What secondary applications does John 4:31-45 hold for those who already believe in Jesus?**

- 1) We need to realize that we never know who God is going to save, especially among those we deem the least likely to be open to the Gospel. The woman at the well wasn't seeking Jesus; He sought her!

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<sup>9</sup> Hendriksen, *John*, 179-180.

ESV **Luke 19:10** For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

Ultimately, salvation requires a direct revelation from God, just as supernatural as the light that blinded Saul (though not as spectacular).

**2)** Eternal Life is a gift (4:10, 14).

ESV **Ephesians 2:8-9** . . . .by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

**3)** Realize that there is a process that most people go through in coming to Christ. There is human labor involved (sowing, weeding, watering), growth time (four months in the crop example), and harvesting (4:35-38).

**4)** We need to eat the same soul food that Jesus did. His food was to do the will of the Father and to be active to accomplish His work. The fields are white for harvest. We need to be active in evangelism.

\*\*\*\* = Ask this question before reading the text. This will engage people's minds and focus their attention.

You can hear this lesson being taught at [SermonAudio.com/NTRF](http://SermonAudio.com/NTRF).

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