

Called to Testify

John 4:25-42

SS Lesson for 02/07/2021

Devotional Scripture: John 1:37-51

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Key Verse: John 4:39

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Before the industrial revolution, 98 percent of people lived on farms due to the labor-intensive nature of the work. It's no wonder, then, that agricultural contexts, references, parables, illustrations, etc., are encountered so often in the pages of the Bible. That was their world—a world foreign to the large majority of people living in industrialized countries today. To grasp the truths of the Bible most fully, we need to step into that world. Why did Jesus decline a suggestion for lunch by speaking of sowing, reaping, and harvest? What connection did he see between fruit and eternal life? And what did all that have to do with an unnamed foreign woman with whom he had just spoken? Today's lesson answers those very questions.

Fuller understanding of today's text requires some insight into the relationship between Jews and Samaritans in Jesus' day. When King Solomon died in about 930 BC, the nation of Israel split into two parts: the northern 10 tribes were then often referred to collectively as Israel, while the remaining tribes to the south were called Judah (example: Jeremiah 50:4). King Omri of Israel built the city of Samaria to be his capital in about 875 BC (1 Kings 16:23-24). He ruled from Samaria as did his infamous son Ahab (16:29), establishing the city as a lasting site. Both kings aroused God's ire because of their idolatrous religious practices (16:25, 33). Ignoring warnings of the prophets led to judgment (2 Kings 17:13). The ultimate form of that judgment came when the Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel about 722 BC (17:5-18). Many Israelites were exiled, and outsiders were brought in to resettle the land (17:24). Israelites who were not taken into exile were left impoverished and without clear identity for many years. Eventually, the resulting mixture of people came to be known as Samaritans. They developed a religion that accepted the five books of Moses but did not recognize the other books that make up the Old Testament. When Samaritans offered to help rebuild the Jerusalem temple destroyed in 586 BC, the Jews refused (Ezra 4:1-5). This angered the Samaritans, and we see some of this anger come out when Nehemiah began to rebuild the city walls (Nehemiah 4:1, 2). About a century before Christ, a ruler of Judea destroyed the Samaritans' rival temple on Mount Gerizim. This and other things caused deep animosity between Samaritans and Jews. For the Jews of Jesus' time, Samaritans were not quite Gentiles but were definitely not Jews either (see Matthew 10:5; note the attempt to discredit Jesus in John 8:48). Our lesson begins after Jesus and a Samaritan woman discussed her marriage situation (John 4:16-18). Jesus' knowledge of her personal life astounded her. For this reason, she addressed him as a prophet (4:19). She changed the subject to the less personal but quite controversial topic of the proper site for worship. Jesus' answer cut through this temple-location controversy to get to the heart of worship: spiritual surrender to the Lord (4:23-24). Such truth telling had opened the woman to discuss matters of the heart as today's text opens.

Key Verse: John 4:39

And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I ever did."

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

4:1-3. In Greek these verses are one long sentence, introducing the reader to a second long interview by Jesus. The words, **When the Lord learned of this** (v. 3), are actually the first phrase in Greek in verse 1. The sudden prominence of **Jesus**, evidenced by the growth of His followers, caused **the Pharisees** to take special notice of Him. Since Jesus was working on God's schedule, He knew how His ministry would end. Until that appointed time, He must live carefully, so He withdrew from the conflict until His "hour" (7:6, 8, 30; 8:20; cf. 12:23; 13:1; 17:1). **He left Judea** (cf. 3:22) **and went back... to Galilee.** This second

interview is another illustration of the fact that “He knew what was in a man” (2:25). The Samaritan woman contrasts sharply with Nicodemus. He was seeking; she was indifferent. He was a respected ruler; she was an outcast. He was serious; she was flippant. He was a Jew; she was a despised Samaritan. He was (presumably) moral; she was immoral. He was orthodox; she was heterodox. He was learned in religious matters; she was ignorant. Yet in spite of all the differences between this “churchman” and this woman of the world, they both needed to be born again. Both had needs only Christ could meet.

4:4. He had to go through Samaria. This was the shortest route from Judea to Galilee but not the only way. The other route was through Perea, east of the Jordan River. In Jesus’ day the Jews, because of their hatred for the Samaritans, normally took the eastern route in order to avoid Samaria. But Jesus chose the route through Samaria in order to reach the despised people of that region. As the Savior of the world He seeks out and saves the despised and outcasts (cf. Luke 19:10). “Samaria” in New Testament times was a region in the middle of Palestine, with Judea to the south and Galilee to the north. Samaria was without separate political existence under the Roman governor. The people were racially mixed and their religion resulted from syncretism and schism from Judaism. Its center of worship was Mount Gerizim. Even today in Israel, a small group of Samaritans maintain their traditions.

4:5-6. The village of **Sychar** was **near** Shechem. Most identify the site with modern Akar but others point to Tell-Balatah. Sychar was between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. A well near Sychar today may be the same as **Jacob’s well**. **The plot of ground** which **Jacob** gave to **Joseph** is mentioned in Genesis 48:21-22. Jacob had purchased it years earlier (Gen. 33:18-20). **Jesus, tired** from walking, **sat down by the well**. **It was about the sixth hour**, which according to Roman time reckoning would have been 6 P.M. (See comments on John 1:39; 19:14.) Jesus being truly human, experienced thirst, weariness, pain, and hunger. Of course He also possesses all the attributes of Deity (omniscience, omnipotence, etc.).

4:7-8. With His **disciples** in the city buying **food**, Jesus did a surprising thing: He spoke to a **Samaritan woman**, whom He had never met. She was of the region of Samaria, not the town of Samaria. The woman was shocked to hear a Jewish man ask for a **drink** from her. The normal prejudices of the day prohibited public conversation between men and women, between Jews and Samaritans, and especially between strangers. A Jewish Rabbi would rather go thirsty than violate these proprieties.

4:9. Surprised and curious, the **woman** could not understand **how** He would dare **ask her for a drink**, since **Jews did not associate with Samaritans**. The NIV margin gives an alternate translation to the Greek sentence with the word *synchrōntai* (“associate” or “use together”): the Jews “do not use dishes Samaritans have used.” This rendering may well be correct. A Rabbinic law of A.D. 66 stated that Samaritan women were considered as continually menstruating and thus unclean. Therefore a Jew who drank from a Samaritan woman’s vessel would become ceremonially unclean.

4:10. Having captured her attention and stimulated her curiosity, **Jesus** then spoke an enigmatic saying to cause her to think. It was as if He had said, “Your shock would be infinitely greater if you really knew who I am. *You*—not *I*—would be asking!” Three things would have provoked her thinking: (1) **Who** is He? (2) What is **the gift of God**? (3) What is **living water**? “Living water” in one sense is running water, but in another sense it is the Holy Spirit (Jer. 2:13; Zech. 14:8; John 7:38-39).

4:11-12. She misunderstood the “living water” and thought only of water from **the well**. Since Jacob’s **well** was so **deep** how could Jesus **get this living water**? Today this well is identified by archeologists as one of the deepest in Palestine. **Are You greater than our father Jacob?** she asked. In Greek this question expects a negative answer. She could not conceive of Him as greater than Jacob. Her claim “our father Jacob” is interesting in light of the fact that the Jews claim him as the founder of *their* nation. That well had great tradition behind it but, she wondered, *What does this Stranger have?*

4:13-14. **Jesus** began to unveil the truth in an enigmatic statement. **This water** from Jacob’s well would satisfy only bodily thirst for a time. But **the water** Jesus gives provides continual satisfaction of needs and desires. In addition one who **drinks** His living water **will** have within **him a spring of life-giving water** (cf. 7:38-39). This inner spring contrasts with the water from the well, which required hard work to acquire. Jesus was speaking of the Holy Spirit who brings salvation to a person who believes and through Him offers salvation to others.

4:15. **The woman** could not grasp this dark saying because of her sin and materialism. All she could understand was that if she had a spring she would not **get thirsty and** would not have to work so hard.

4:16-18. Since she was not able to receive His truth (1 Cor. 2:14), Jesus dealt with her most basic problem. (Apparently she never served Him a drink. He forgot His own physical need in order to meet her spiritual

need.) Jesus suggested she get her **husband and** bring him **back** with her. This suggestion was designed to show her that He knew everything about her (cf. John 2:24-25). Her marital history was known to this Stranger, including the fact that she was living in sin. Thus in a few words **Jesus** had revealed her life of sin and her need for salvation.

4:19-20. Her response was most interesting! Jesus was not just a passing Jewish Rabbi. Since He had supernatural knowledge, He must be a **prophet** of God. But instead of confessing her sin and repenting, she threw out an intellectual “red herring.” Could He solve an ancient dispute? Samaritan religion held that the one place of divinely ordered **worship** was **on** top of nearby Mount Gerizim, whereas the **Jews** said it was on the temple mount **in Jerusalem**. Who was right in this controversy?

4:21. A time is coming (cf. v. 23) referred to the coming death of **Jesus** which would inaugurate a new phase of worship in God’s economy. In the Church Age, because of the work of the Spirit, **worship** is no longer centered in temples like those on Mount Gerizim and Mount Zion.

4:22. Jesus was firm in His declaration of the issues involved. The Samaritan religion was confused and in error: **You Samaritans worship what you do not know**. They were not the vehicle for the salvation of mankind. Israel was the nation chosen by God to have great privileges (Rom. 9:4-5). When Jesus said, **Salvation is from the Jews**, He did not mean that all Jews were saved or were especially pious. “Salvation is from the Jews” in the sense that it is available through Jesus, who was born of the seed of Abraham.

4:23. With the advent of the Messiah the **time** came for a new order of **worship**. **True worshipers** are those who realize that Jesus is the Truth of God (3:21; 14:6) and the one and only Way to the Father (Acts 4:12). To worship **in truth** is to worship God through Jesus. To worship **in Spirit** is to worship in the new realm which God has revealed to people. **The Father** is seeking true **worshipers** because He wants people to live in reality, not in falsehood. Everybody is a worshiper (Rom. 1:25) but because of sin many are blind and constantly put their trust in worthless objects.

4:24. God is Spirit is a better translation than the KJV’s “God is a Spirit.” God is not one Spirit among many. This is a declaration of His invisible nature. He is not confined to one location. **Worship** of God can be done only through the One (Jesus) who expresses God’s invisible nature (1:18) and by virtue of the Holy **Spirit** who opens to a believer the new realm of the kingdom (cf. 3:3, 5; 7:38-39).

4:25. The Samaritans expected a coming messianic leader. But they did not expect Him to be an anointed king of the Davidic line, since they rejected all the Old Testament except the Pentateuch. Based on Deuteronomy 18:15-18, they expected a Moses-like figure who would solve all their problems. The Samaritan **woman** now understood a part of what Jesus said. She wistfully longed for the messianic days when the **Messiah** would **explain everything**.

4:26. This self-declaration by Jesus Himself—**I... am He** (the Messiah)—is unusual. Normally in His ministry in Galilee and Judea (cf. 6:15) because of political implications, He veiled His office and used the title “Son of Man.” But with this Samaritan the dangers of revolt by national zealots were not a problem.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Testify about the Messiah (John 4:25-30)

25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things."

26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

27 And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why are You talking with her?"

28 The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men,

29 "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

30 Then they went out of the city and came to Him.

Messiah revealed (25-26)

As revealed at the transfiguration (Mark 9:2-3)

2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. 3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.

As revealed by Jesus Himself (John 1:51)

51 He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

As revealed by the blind man (John 9:1-3)

1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

As revealed by miracles done in Jesus' name (John 14:11-13)

11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. 12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.

Disciple's misunderstandings (27)

Misunderstandings because God's choices are based on His own criteria (Deut 7:5-7)

5 This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. 6 For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. 7 The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

Misunderstandings because God does things as it pleases Him (Jer 27:5)

5 With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please.

Misunderstandings because God hides certain things from man (Matt 11:25-26)

25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

Misunderstandings because God's actions do not depend on man's desire (Rom 9:15-16)

15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

Seeking to share the good news (28-30)

Sharing the good news through preaching (Rom 10:15)

15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Sharing the good news to make disciples (Matt 28:19-20)

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Sharing the good news to share truth (Col 1:3-7)

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. 7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf,

Sharing the good news through qualified teachers (2 Tim 2:2)

2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

Testify about Spiritual Needs (John 4:31-38)

31 In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat."

32 But He said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know."

33 Therefore the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?"

34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.

35 Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!

36 And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.

37 For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.'

38 I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors."

Spiritual food (31-33)

Spiritual food that comes from the word of God (Deut 8:3)

3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Spiritual food that is the bread from heaven (Neh 9:15)

15 In their hunger you gave them bread from heaven and in their thirst you brought them water from the rock; you told them to go in and take possession of the land you had sworn with uplifted hand to give them.

Spiritual food that is the bread of life (John 6:32-35)

32 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." 35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

Spiritual food that eternally satisfies (Isa 55:1-2)

1 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. 2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

Spiritual harvest (34-35)

Gathering of the elect (Matt 24:31)

31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Gathering of the scattered children of God together (John 11:51-52)

51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

Gathering by Christians to help gather God's kingdom (Matt 12:30)

30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.

Gathering to give thanks, praise and worship to God (Ps 106:47)

47 Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.

Gathering together of God's people into the assembly (Isa 43:6-9)

6 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth — 7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." 8 Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf. 9 All the nations gather together and the peoples assemble. Which of them foretold this and proclaimed to us the former things? Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so that others may hear and say, "It is true."

Spiritual reward (36-38)

Rewards that come as the result of the earnest seeking of God (Heb 11:6)

6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Rewards that come as the result of works done (Matt 16:27)

27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

Rewards that come as the result of inheritance (Col 3:24)

24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Rewards that are dispensed by Jesus (Rev 22:12)

12 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.

Results of Testifying (John 4:39-42)

39 And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I ever did."

40 So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days.

41 And many more believed because of His own word.

42 Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

Believing the woman's testimony (39)

A testimony giving the reason for hope (1 Peter 3:15)

15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

A testimony that is given by the Holy Spirit (Matt 10:19-20)

19 But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, 20 for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

A testimony that cannot be resisted or contradicted (Luke 21:14-15)

14 But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. 15 For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

A testimony full of grace (Col 4:6)

6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Believing through personal contact (40)

Personal contact because to hold on to instructions can result in eternal life (Prov 4:13)

13 Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life.

Personal contact because it helps to open our spiritual eyes (Luke 24:28-31)

28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. 29 But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

Personal contact between believers develops fellowship (Acts 16:15)

15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Personal contact because it can aid in the salvation of the whole household (Acts 16:29-34)

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole family.

Believing in Jesus ourselves (41-42)

Believing in Jesus' ability to do all things (Matt 9:27-29)

27 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" 28 When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. 29 Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you";

Believing is knowing that all things are possible for Jesus (Mark 9:23-24)

23 "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." 24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Believing is knowing that Jesus is God's one and only Son (John 3:16-18)

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Believing is having our eyes opened to the true identity of Jesus (John 9:35-39)

35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Step Five: Trusting Christ as the Answer (4:25-26)

25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (the one called Christ). Whenever he comes, he will tell us everything."

26 Jesus said to her, "I, the one speaking to you, am he."

The woman is neither ignorant of the Samaritan faith nor of the Jewish faith. She makes the connection between our Lord's words about worshipping "**in spirit and truth**" and the promised Messiah. She realizes that somehow when the Messiah comes, He will clear up these matters; He will reveal the truth about how men must worship God.

Would you not love to have witnessed this conversation, especially the words spoken in these two verses? The woman tells Jesus that she is waiting for Messiah, who will reveal the truth about true worship. Jesus says to her, "**I am the Messiah.**" I am reminded of Mary, weeping outside the empty tomb of our Lord. Her eyes are so filled with tears and her hopes so dashed that she pays little attention to the One who is speaking with her. But with that one word, "**Mary,**" comes the full realization of who is speaking, and what His being there means.

I would not assume that this woman is saved at this moment in time, but she is certainly "**not far from the kingdom of God.**" I do believe that by the end of our Lord's stay with these Samaritans, not only this woman, but most of the people of Sychar, believe in His name for salvation. At this point, I simply wish to emphasize that our Lord brings this woman to the point where she understands that she is a sinner, in need of salvation, where she understands that her (Samaritan) religious system cannot save her, and that salvation comes only through faith in Jesus as the promised (Jewish) Messiah. This leads us to the next and final step.

Step Six: Sharing the Good News (4:28-30)

27 Now at that very moment his disciples came back. They were shocked because he was speaking with a woman; however, no one said, "What do you seek?" or "Why are you speaking with her?" 28 Then the woman left her water jar, went off into the city and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Surely he can't be the Messiah, can he?" 30 So they went out from the city and began coming to him.

I am going to pass by verse 27 and pick it up when we see our Lord dealing with His disciples. For the moment, we will consider verses 28-30. These verses depict the final step in the process of salvation—the sharing of one's newly-found faith with others. The woman's original purpose was to draw water from the well, but now she forsakes her waterpot and hurries back to Sychar, where she tells the others about Jesus. She sees beyond our Lord's revelation of the truth about her marriages and sexual morality, telling them that a man "**told her everything she ever did.**" The woman speaks of Jesus as a possible Messiah. The way she phrases her question does not indicate her certainty on this point, but she at least regards Jesus as a possible Messiah. The effect may have aroused curiosity among those who heard her question. The whole city begins to make its way out to the well, along with the woman.

Dealing With the Disciples (4:27, 31-38)

27 Now at that very moment his disciples came back. They were shocked because he was speaking with a woman; however, no one said, "What do you seek?" or "Why are you speaking with her?" ... 31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." 33 So the disciples began to say to one another, "No one brought him anything to eat, did they?"

34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work. 35 Don't you say, 'There are four more months and then comes the harvest?' I tell you, look up and see that the fields are already white for harvest! 36 The one who reaps receives pay and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that the one

who sows and the one who reaps can rejoice together. 37 For in this instance the saying is true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ 38 I sent you to reap what you did not labor for; others have labored and you have entered into their labor.”

Let me attempt to paint this picture as I see it. Jesus and His disciples stop at the well. Jesus is tired and remains there while His disciples go into town to buy food. After they leave, the Samaritan woman arrives, and a conversation begins which John records for us. The conversation ends just as the disciples return from Sychar. The woman leaves her waterpot behind and rushes back to town. The disciples then urge Jesus to eat what they have just brought from town. In the background, just over the shoulders of the disciples, the people of Sychar are approaching en masse, to see and hear the One of whom the woman has testified.

The disciples arrive from Sychar just in time to observe the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman end. They are astounded that Jesus has been talking with her. This is not because she is a Samaritan, nor because she is a sinner (they don’t know about her moral life, as Jesus does), but simply because she is a woman. This is not so much a case of racial bias as a manifestation of gender bias on the part of the disciples. They cannot think of a good reason why Jesus would be talking to a woman. Morris helps us understand why, from the Jewish point of view:

Perhaps the greatest blot on the Rabbinic attitude to women was that, though the Rabbis held the study of the Law to be the greatest good in life, they discouraged women from studying it at all. When Ben Azzai suggested that women be taught the Law for certain purposes R. Eliezer replied: ‘If any man gives his daughter a knowledge of the Law it is as though he taught her lechery’ (*Sot.* 3:4).

In spite of their amazement that Jesus would talk to a woman, the Lord’s disciples do not bring it up. Perhaps they have put their foot in their mouth one too many times lately, so that none wishes to be embarrassed by being the one to ask another stupid question. They are at least beginning to learn that what our Lord does is always right, even if Judaism calls it wrong. Perhaps the disciples simply set their question aside because of a more important matter—lunch. It sounds silly, doesn’t it? But is it not the case? Are the disciples not preoccupied with getting our Lord to eat? Why would this be?

Several reasons come to mind, none of which are particularly pious. The best reading one could give the disciples’ words would be something like: “Jesus, You’re tired, and You need to regain Your strength. Please eat because You need the nourishment if we are to continue our journey.” There may be some of that here. It may also be that the disciples have been waiting to eat until Jesus can eat with them. They may wish that He would eat so they can eat also. (Or, perhaps Peter has already wolfed down half a sandwich, and with his mouth full, urges Jesus to do likewise: “Com’ on, Jesus, eat up.”) Finally, the disciples may be preoccupied with lunch because this is what they have worked so hard to provide, walking all the way into town and back. They went to town to purchase food. Having gone to all this effort to obtain lunch for our Lord, the least He can do is to take time to eat it. The disciples might have been a collective, male version of Martha (see Luke 10:38-42).

Once again, our Lord’s response to His disciples’ prodding is not what we expect. Instead of speaking of literal food, He talks of spiritual “**food**.” Our Lord’s response to His disciples sets down some very important principles, principles which not only governed His life and ministry, but which should guide His disciples as well—and we are to be included among such “disciples.”

(1) Our Lord’s most essential “food” is doing the Father’s will by completing His work (verse 34). Why does Jesus refer to His “work” as His “food”? I wonder if the answer is not suggested in the temptation of our Lord:

1 Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days; and when they were completed, he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” 4 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘**Man does not live by bread alone**’” (Luke 4:1-4).

Jesus is hungry because He has been fasting for 40 days. Satan seeks to persuade Him to command a stone to become bread. Of course, Jesus has the power to do so. But Jesus refuses, citing from Deuteronomy 8:

1 “Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers. 2 And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you *and* test you, to know what *was* in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. 3 So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 8:1-3, NKJV).

God allowed the Israelites to experience hunger as a test, to show what was in their hearts. Even Satan believes that men will worship God if He blesses them with everything they want (see Job 1:6-12). *The real test of men's faith and obedience to God comes in the midst of adversity and affliction.* Thus, God allowed the Israelites to experience hunger and thirst so that the condition of their hearts would be made evident, either by their obedience or by their rebellion.

Our Lord undergoes a similar testing in the wilderness, which involves His fasting for 40 days. Satan seeks to tempt our Lord to “create” bread to satisfy His hunger. Jesus refuses, pointing to this text in Deuteronomy, which parallels His circumstances. “**Man does not live by bread alone,**” Jesus reminds Satan, “**but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.**” *It is not just physical bread that sustains our Lord (or anyone else); it is God's Word, and specifically obedience to it.*

When Jesus is pressed by His disciples to eat, He refuses to do so, telling them that He has other “**food**” to eat, of which they are unaware. In so doing, He is expressing the same truth He spoke to Satan, which God, through Moses, spoke to the Israelites. *It is not just eating physical food that sustains us; it is doing the will of God.* If eating interferes with doing the will of God, eating must be set aside, not obedience to God. Fulfilling God's will—providing and proclaiming salvation (even to the Gentiles!)—was our Lord's primary purpose and calling. He would not allow a meal to keep Him from it. There is work to be done at this very moment—the people of the city are almost there. This is no time for lunch.

Is this not the truth that underlies the practice of fasting? I know some may make more of fasting than they should. Fasting is not magic; it does not manipulate God to do our will. It is our submission to His will, as evidenced by the fact that our time is better spent in prayer or in some specific ministry than in eating a meal. Is this not also evident on less frequent occasions, when a husband and wife voluntarily agree to abstain from sexual relations, so that they can devote themselves to prayer (see 1 Corinthians 7:5)?

I must confess that very few things keep me from a meal. Jesus subordinated eating to doing the will of God. Usually, we should eat, so that we have the strength to do His will (see 1 Samuel 14:24-30). But there are times when we must let nothing keep us from full devotion to our duty. Doing God's will is more important than downing a meal. I wonder what we are willing to do without so that the gospel can be shared with those who are lost and destined for an eternity in hell?

(2) Our Lord's mission was all the more urgent because His time on earth was short (verses 35ff.). Does Jesus not have the time to sit down and eat a sandwich? Jesus has a sensitivity to the proper time for things to be done (see John 2:4; 7:6)—His time really is limited. And because He has so little time, He will not take the time which eating a meal requires.

Surely the application to saints today is obvious. Do we realize how short the time may be? Do we have a sense of urgency about our mission? It is the wicked servant who feels there is much time, and therefore no need for urgency (Luke 12:35-48). The Word of God consistently challenges us to redeem the time, for our time is short.

15 Therefore, be very careful how you live, not as unwise, but as wise, 16 taking advantage of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 For this reason do not be foolish, but be wise by understanding what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:15-17).

29 And I say this, brothers and sisters: the time is short. So then those who have wives should be as those who have none, 30 those with tears like those not weeping, those who rejoice like those not rejoicing, those who buy like those without possessions, 31 those who use the world as though they were not using it to the full. For the present shape of this world is passing away (1 Corinthians 7:29-31).

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunities (Colossians 4:5).

You do not know about tomorrow. What is your life like? For you are a puff of smoke that appears for a short time and then vanishes (James 4:14).

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy aloud, and blessed are those who hear and obey the things written in it, because the time is near (Revelation 1:3).

The time for the harvest is now— not later. It seems that the statement, “**There are four more months and then comes the harvest**” is a way of saying that harvest time is still a ways off. That may be true for the grain harvest, but it is not true for the harvest of souls about to take place right there, within moments. There is no time to lose, no time to waste. Harvest time has come.

(3) Our Lord fulfilled His mission, but He has given us the task of proclaiming the gospel to a lost world before He returns. The time is short, and a team of workers is required to complete the task (verses 36-38). It would

seem that a different group of individuals had sown the fields than those who were to reap the harvest. I believe this is still true today. Where wheat is grown in the United States today, the farmers may plant their own crops, but the time to harvest is so short that a caravan of professional harvesters is often employed. Trucks and combines are brought in, and the fields are harvested within hours. If there is undue delay in the harvest, much of the grain is lost.

The disciples have no idea that a great “harvest” is about to take place, and that they are the harvesters. They have been so preoccupied with lunch, while others have been at work sowing the gospel. In the past, the prophets had sown the seed through their words and the Scriptures. Men like John the Baptist had also sown the seed of the gospel. And this very day the Samaritan woman has gone into the town, bearing testimony that Jesus is at the well, and that He has “**told her all she had done.**” She did the sowing; now it is time for Jesus and His disciples to reap. No wonder there is no time for lunch. The “**fields are already white for harvest.**”

In our country, individual effort is highly prized and rewarded. Competition seems more appropriate than cooperation. Jesus tells His disciples that they are about to reap a harvest, but He also reminds them that they are reaping where others have sown. It is not their work alone. They are completing what others have begun. Evangelism is not a one man-show, but a team effort.

Salvation Comes to Samaria (4:39-42)

39 Now many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the report of the woman who testified, “He told me everything I ever did.” 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they started asking him to stay with them. He stayed there two days, 41 and because of his word many more believed. 42 They said to the woman, “No longer do we believe because of your words, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this one really is the Savior of the world.”

What a contrast chapter 4 is to chapter 3. In chapter 3, Jesus speaks with Nicodemus, who is the most prominent teacher and leader of his day. This man recognizes something special in Jesus and confesses that God is somehow with Jesus; yet he resists everything our Lord tells him. There is no evidence that Nicodemus comes to faith during this first meeting with our Lord. This great “leader” finds it difficult to “follow” Jesus, and he leads no one to Him. The woman at the well seems much more perceptive and receptive to what Jesus has to say. She is well on her way to faith as a result of her first conversation with Him. More than this, she brings many others to Him as well. Who would have ever imagined how little Nicodemus would do for the kingdom of God, and how much God would use this Samaritan woman?

Look at the kind of faith these Samaritans possess, as reflected by their words. At first they took the word of the Samaritan woman, but having heard Jesus for themselves, they no longer relied on her testimony, but on what they heard Jesus say. We are told of no miracles (other than Jesus letting this woman know that He knew all about her life of sin), of no signs being performed by our Lord in Samaria (though of course there could have been miracles that John chose not to record). These Samaritans have a vastly superior faith than mere “sign faith.” Their faith is “Word faith,” faith in Jesus Christ, based upon His own words. They came to trust in Jesus as the Messiah, as the “**Savior of the world.**”

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/woman-well-john-41-42>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The story of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well serves several purposes in the book of John. It teaches the spiritual nature of true worship (John 4:23-24). It clarifies the identity of Jesus as the chosen Messiah, or Christ, from God (4:25-26). It portrays Jesus as fearlessly moving beyond the boundaries of orthodox Judaism to an awkward encounter with a Samaritan (4:9). And it demonstrates the influence a person of conviction and urgency can have when talking to others about Jesus (4:28-30, 39). She was both a part of the harvest and a farmer-sower. Her work contributed to a fruitful harvest, indeed. Many who read the Gospel of John can identify with her: a forlorn, rejected person, ostracized by her community. A woman who came to get water at a time of day when she knew others wouldn't be there—only to encounter Jesus and be transformed. The village's object of derision became the mouthpiece of the Lord to bring others to faith. It would be nice to know the name of the Samaritan woman. It makes us wonder about other women of faith whose names are lost to history. Many of them have spoken out to bring others to faith. Many taught their sons and daughters to pray. Many read Scripture to their children to plant seeds of faith. Some even have lived with unbelieving husbands who finally submitted to Christ as Lord after years of patient prayer by their wives. Their names may be unknown to us, but they are not unknown to God. He has written their names "in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27). Someday in Heaven, we may be able to look into that book and learn the Samaritan woman's name, the name of one whose testimony changed her community forever.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman - The history of the Samaritans I can be traced back to Israel's northern 10 tribes who flagrantly disobeyed God. Eventually, the Assyrians captured and exiled most people from these 10 tribes in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17). The remaining two southern tribes, Benjamin and Judah, hated and rejected their remaining northern brothers because the Assyrians moved Gentile people into the north, and those Gentiles intermarried with the remaining Israelites. That hatred lasted into Jesus' day. He, however, still cared for the Samaritans. By showing compassion to a Samaritan woman, Jesus drew a part of this hated group back to the Father. After one meeting with the Messiah, the Samaritan woman became one of God's precious vessels to pour out His love and truth to the Samaritans. Through her testimony, many became believers in Christ.

Jesus Revealed His Identity - In the course of the conversation with the woman, Jesus eventually revealed His true identity. He convinced her that He was the Christ, the anticipated Messiah. He told her personal details about her life. He spoke to those empty places within her heart and promised to fill them with Himself. She placed her faith in His words. She returned to her village and told the men about Christ. God used her testimony, and many people came out to the well to meet Jesus.

Do God's Will - After the Samaritan woman returned to the city, Jesus' disciples encouraged Him to eat the food they brought, but He replied, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of" (John 4:32, KJV). The men were puzzled. Where did He get food? Then He went on to explain that doing God's will was His nourishment.

Work in God's Fields - Jesus gave them a picture of harvest fields ready for reaping. In this picture, Jesus was referring to the Samaritans, who were an unlikely delegation to receive Jesus' message. The Savior demonstrated to His disciples, through His conversation with the Samaritan woman, that people are ready to listen. God has placed a vacuum in the heart of every person that only He can fill. They want to hear about the Lord. All God needs is a faithful worker to proclaim the truth. One woman sharing her testimony enlightened an entire city. One faithful Christian sharing the Gospel can make a huge difference in many lives.