OPEN YOUR EYES AND LOOK AT THE FIELDS!

John 4:27–42

Key Verse: 4:35

“Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”

Sometimes we don’t know what’s going on. We’re fixated on our problems or on our own desires. Even if something great is happening around us, we can’t really appreciate it or know what we should be doing. In this passage Jesus’ disciples are just like that. But he helps them see the bigger picture, what God was doing, and what God wanted them to do. In this passage we learn more of what it means to live as Jesus’ disciple. Through our Bible study today may God help us see how he wants to use us as workers in his spiritual harvest field.

**First**, the woman’s testimony (27–30). Look at verse 27. When the disciples got back from town, they saw the tail end of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman. The word “surprised” can be translated as “marveled,” “wondered” or even “shocked.” In their society, men never spoke to women in public. Jesus not only took them to Samaria, a place good Jews should never go, but also he was breaking the forbidden gender barrier. This tells us that reaching people often will break social rules. It also shows how easy it is to see things through the prism of our own prejudices, and how hard it is to understand what God is doing.

Look at verse 28a. Here the author makes it a point to tell us that when she went back, the woman left her water jar. At first glance, to us it may seem insignificant. But it shows she wasn’t thirsty anymore. She’d finally tasted the living water, the love of God. She had freedom, peace and joy. She’d finally found the one worthy of her worship. She was so excited she forgot her jar. Look at verses 28b–29. She bolted back and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” This lady who’d avoided everybody and lived in shame because of her sinful past was now announcing it in the streets, talking about the things she’d previously tried to hide. There was something in her voice, something in her face—she was really different. It’s hard to capture how shocking this must’ve been to her townspeople. Often we have to be forced to share our faith. But this woman couldn’t contain it. Her sharing sprang naturally from the fullness in her heart. She shows us that we don’t have to have the perfect words or the perfect answers for people, and we’re not even responsible for persuading them to believe. But what we can do is share our own personal story of what Jesus has meant to us, and what he’s done for us. There’s nothing better than that.

How did her townspeople respond? Look at verse 30. It’s hard to get people to move. People can be so cynical. These people could’ve tuned her out as a crazy lady. But after hearing her, they stopped what they were doing, came out of the town and made their way toward Jesus. They took action, based on what they’d heard about Jesus. They actually knew the woman, so her change was compelling. They wanted to get to know the man who knew all about her without having met her, yet still spoke with her and had such a powerful effect. Their coming out to see Jesus shows the power of an authentically changed life. Church programs and outreach can be useful, but there’s nothing like a genuine encounter with Jesus that changes our hearts and fills our souls. A sorrowful person becomes joyful. An angry person becomes loving. An anxious person becomes peaceful. A fearful person becomes courageous. Through seeing such authentic change, many more people come to know Jesus. It’s still happening. When people see real change, they’re much more apt to get interested in Jesus.

**Second**, “my food” (31–34). When the disciples got back, they were ready for lunch; they were really hungry. But Jesus surprised them again. Look at verse 32. They went through considerable trouble to go get this food, but he seems to be refusing it. They had no idea what he meant. Look at verse 33. Maybe they were thinking the Samaritan woman had shared some food with him. Read verse 34. Jesus wasn’t being anti-food. In fact, during his ministry he ate so much that the Pharisees accused him of being a glutton and a drunkard, and they blamed him for not teaching his disciples to fast. But in this situation Jesus taught his disciples something famous. He said that doing God’s will and finishing his work was his “food.” Here, “food” refers to what we truly crave. Jesus didn’t just feel obligated to doing God’s will and finishing his work; he really craved it (6:38; Ps40:8a). He wanted his disciples to learn how to crave doing God’s will.

Then what is “doing God’s will”? It isn’t a vague idea; it's very clear. The Bible says God’s will is that people would not stumble or perish, but be saved (Mt18:14; Jn3:16–17; 6:39–40). And what is God’s work that Jesus was sent to finish? Ultimately, it was to die on the cross (19:30). But along the way, it was also helping people believe in him (6:29). Here in chapter 4, doing God’s will and finishing his work was leading the Samaritan woman to the living water welling up to eternal life. She could drink the living water when she learned to put her trust in Jesus and really believe in him. This is how we can do God’s will and finish his work during our lifetime: helping people to believe in Jesus as their Messiah. To do God’s will and help her believe, Jesus put aside his own thirst and hunger after a long journey. He did his best to guide this broken woman out of her misconceptions, her misunderstandings and her denial, to find her real problem and its solution in his grace and truth. When she finally repented and received Jesus as her true object of worship, Jesus finished the work God led him to do with her. When he saw her soul restored, he was deeply satisfied. He was so satisfied he even forgot about being physically hungry. Jesus still wants us who believe in him to imitate him. But honestly speaking, do we really “crave” doing God’s will and finishing his work? Often we’re craving things other than God's will: maybe it's food, or pleasure, or sleep, or solitude, or attention, or money, or people’s admiration. May God help us learn from Jesus how to really crave doing God’s will and finishing his work.

**Third**, workers for the spiritual harvest (35–38). Read verse 35. At the beginning of this verse Jesus quoted a famous saying at that time: “It’s still four months until harvest.” What did that saying mean? It meant that there was still plenty of time now to do other things. It was like a popular mantra today, “Let’s do it *tomorrow*.” But Jesus said, “I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” He meant that the time to work for God was not in the distant future, but *now*. He emphasizes it again in verse 36 by saying, “Even now.” Sometimes we may think we’ll work for God later, when we have our own lives all settled. But God asks us to start working for him now, maybe even when it’s inconvenient, even when our human desire is to do something else.

Read verse 35 again. Jesus was telling his disciples that it was time to work for the spiritual harvest. He said the fields were “ripe for harvest.” What does it mean? It means that the Samaritan people’s hearts were wide open to listen to and learn from Jesus and to come to faith. Sometimes people are not at all “ripe for harvest.” Their hearts aren’t open right now. At the present they have no interest in spiritual things. It’s foolish to badger them. As followers of Jesus, we need to learn now to discern when people are “ripe for harvest.”

Then how do people become “ripe for harvest”? Read verses 36–38. What’s critical in becoming ripe for harvest is the work of sowers. In agriculture, sowers first went out and dug up the ground and did the backbreaking work of planting seeds. Spiritually, sowing can refer to sowing the seed of God’s word (Lk8:4–11). But this can be discouraging, because three-fourths of the time, even after much hard labor, the seed doesn’t even successfully produce grain; it’s destroyed by poor soil conditions, by the elements or by varmints. Sowers sow the seed of God’s word. They also sow seeds of God’s love and of prayer. For a long time there may seem to be absolutely no effects. But gradually, sowing helps people become ripe for harvest, ready to receive Jesus.

What is the work of a reaper? A reaper reaches out to take what’s already ripe. It’s relatively easy. But a reaper has to be ready. If it’s harvest time, but all the reapers are out doing other things, the harvest can rot on the vines. Spiritually, a reaper helps people who are ready to take that final step and make a commitment to Jesus. It seems that most of the time we’re called to be sowers, and on rare occasions we’re called to be reapers. In any case, God wants us to realize that he’s called us to be workers in his harvest field. Jesus once told his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Lk10:2). So often we see the world negatively. But Jesus didn’t see the world negatively. He saw that it was “ripe for harvest.” Through the Samaritan woman’s change, he saw that there were so many more people who were so thirsty and so ready to open their hearts to him, if only there were workers who knew how to talk to them and lead them to the truth. To Jesus, the tragedy of the world is not that people are resistant, but that there are so few workers. May God open our eyes to see his calling in our lives to be workers in his spiritual harvest field.

Jesus also taught his disciples a sense of history. Look at verse 38. During the harvest of these Samaritans coming, Jesus wanted his disciples not to bask in a glory moment and become proud, but recognize the sweat and tears of those who labored before them. We too need to acknowledge that whenever someone comes to Christ, there was a long history of people influencing that person long before we ever met. Apostle Paul understood this and wrote: “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow” (1Co3:5–7).

Look at verses 35–38 again. One final thing here is the seeming tension between sowers and reapers. Sowers do the hard work; reapers reap the benefits of their labor. So there was another saying, “One sows and another reaps.” But Jesus says that in God’s harvest field, sowers and reapers are glad together. Why? It’s because they have the same goal—an abundant harvest. Spiritually speaking, it means we can all work together joyfully, overcoming our differences, when we share the same goal of leading people to Jesus.

**Fourth**, “because of his words” (39–42). In this last part we see the progress of the Samaritans’ faith. They came first because of the woman’s testimony. But after coming to Jesus personally and spending two days listening, the basis of their faith shifted to the words of Jesus. Then they had independent faith, faith with real knowledge and conviction. In the same way, the only way we can be led to have such personal conviction is when we spend quality time in God’s word.

In this passage we mainly learned that disciples of Jesus are called to be workers in the spiritual harvest field. The first step in being a worker is to open our eyes. May God open our spiritual eyes to see the work he’s calling us to do.