“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.”

“Can’t you see?” We say this when we get frustrated with somebody who doesn’t understand something important we’re trying to show them. In any given situation, why don’t we see or understand? It might be because we’re stuck in our own ideas. Or we just can’t stop thinking about what *we* want right now. Or, we just don’t want to put in the time or effort. In today’s passage Jesus’ disciples can’t see what’s really happening. But the Samaritan woman does, and soon, so do the people from her town. What do they see? They begin to see who Jesus really is. He’s the Savior of the world. It’s amazing! Jesus sees something, too. What is it? He says it’s a ripe harvest field. He really wants his disciples to see it, and he wants us to see it, too. Why? If we miss it, we miss the chance to be useful, and the chance to experience an amazing joy. “I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields!” Through this passage may God help us to see Jesus, and, the ripe harvest fields all around us.

Jesus had just had this amazing conversation with a Samaritan woman. It was hard work to get through to her and help her see what he was offering. But after listening to Jesus, it was like a light went off inside her. Look at verse 27. Something beautiful had just happened, but sadly, the disciples couldn’t understand it. All they could see was that she was a Samaritan woman and that Jesus shouldn’t be talking to her. The disciples felt like they’d stumbled into a really weird, awkward situation, and they didn’t know *what* to say.

 And as soon as they arrived, the woman took off. Verse 28 says she left her water jar. It shows how excited she was—she even forgot why she’d come out to that well in the first place. It also shows that after talking with Jesus she was no longer thirsty spiritually. Now, she goes back to town and does something that, at first, seems like no big deal. She starts talking to the townspeople she’d been carefully avoiding. She wants them to come out and meet the man she just met. She’s pretty sure he’s the Messiah they’d all been waiting for.

But what stands out the most is what the woman says specifically about Jesus. She says he “told me everything I ever did.” Why is that so significant? The woman was shocked that this complete stranger knew all the details of her life. And those details were not pretty. She was so ashamed; she never wanted to talk about it. But now, after meeting Jesus, she’s talking about her messed up life freely, even announcing it in the streets! In that town this woman must’ve been notorious. In a small town, people know everybody else’s business. They all knew all the husbands this woman had had, because those men were their relatives and friends. They also know that she’s now just living with a man. Whenever they saw her they must have thought, “That woman! What a disaster!” But now she suddenly changed? She’s talking about her shame? She’s excited, and happy? Who is this stranger who knew all about her? And knowing all that, why did he even talk with her? Why is she so happy? We learn here the most effective way of helping people. It’s not preaching or arguing, but sharing genuinely what Jesus has done for me. A changed life is so powerful.

How did they respond? Look at verse 30. Usually it’s hard to get people to move, but these people all *moved*. They all acted on what they’d heard about Jesus. They stopped whatever they were doing and went out of the town to see him. It was like their first baby steps of faith. Faith isn’t just gaining some head knowledge or thinking about something; faith is about *action*. For faith to really be faith, it’s got to get into our hands and feet and mouth.

We saw earlier that the disciples had gone into the town to buy food (8); now they’ve come back to this well outside the town where they left Jesus (27). It’s been a long morning of walking many miles, it’s lunchtime, and they’re pretty hungry. They want Jesus to eat so *they* can start eating, too. But Jesus surprises them again. Read verse 32. Is he bragging about secretly keeping the best lunch for himself? No. He’s trying to help them understand something spiritual. He’s telling them there’s a satisfaction that’s deeper than eating food. But they don’t get it (33). They’re only thinking literally. Maybe they thought that woman had given him a sandwich. When they’re hungry, all they can think about is food.

Read verse 34. What an amazing statement that is! He’s not just speaking personally; he wants his disciples and us to learn how to live this way, just as he did. Doing God’s will and finishing his work can satisfy us way more than any meal or any other fun activity. If so, then what *is* God’s will and God’s work? And what does it mean to consider them our “food”? In this context, it’s Jesus helping the wounded, lonely Samaritan woman. It was hard for him, but he helped her experience the changing power of his grace and truth until she was full of joy and freedom. To do it, he had put aside his own hunger and thirst. But he did it because he saw it was what God wanted him to do. And when he saw that poor woman’s soul restored, he was deeply satisfied—so satisfied he forgot all about being hungry, thirsty and tired. Jesus wants us to crave doing God’s work in the same way. He wants us to share this amazing experience of actually helping others spiritually, seeing their souls heal and their lives change, even though we have to make personal sacrifices to do it. Is doing God’s work like my “food”?

Jesus went on to help his disciples even more. Read verse 35. The disciples were probably thinking, “Well, right now there’s not much for us to do here. It’s Samaria, and we’re on our way to Galilee.” But Jesus is saying, “No, the time to work for God is *right now!*” We’d prefer to do things when we feel ready, when the time seems right for us. But often God has things for us to do when we *least* expect it, and especially, when we don’t *feel* like it, when we’ve got *other* things on our minds, when we really want to be doing something *else*.

To help his disciples, Jesus talks about a harvest. In their agricultural society they all understood it well. Even with all our technology today, people still can’t control the harvest. Crops become ripe at a specific time due to many unique factors—the temperature fluctuations over the season, the amount of rain that fell, the amount of sunshine and clouds, etc. Farmers have to watch carefully, and when the day the plants have ripened finally comes, everybody has to get to work. Harvest time calls for intensive work, and there’s no time to lose. If we wait to get started, the crops can spoil. If we get distracted, the amount of harvest is affected. It’s all about timing, and doesn’t happen necessarily when we *want* it to. Harvest time is not the time to be focusing on ourselves or doing whatever we want. It’s the time to make sacrifices and work really hard.

 What we notice most here is Jesus’ words: “I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields!” In Greek, “open” literally means “lift up.” At this moment the disciples were looking *down*, at their lunch. But Jesus wanted them to “lift up” their eyes to see something way bigger. He was saying, “I tell you, look up!” Why do we look down? Sometimes we get engrossed in things that seem interesting to us, like our smartphones. But especially, problems in life tend to make us look down; they also make us narrow-minded. I remember as a child, when my next-door neighbor came back from the Vietnam War, he was always walking around looking down at the ground—he wouldn’t look at people. I wondered why. Later, I realized it was likely because of all the horrible things he’d seen in the war. Seeing bad things can make us all look down. We get discouraged. We think there’s no hope anymore.

But Jesus is saying to each of us today: “I tell you, look up!” Recently I saw the movie *Mary Poppins Returns.* In the movie, a man who has the tough job of sweeping coal out of chimneys should have been a grumpy guy, but he has such a positive outlook on life. He encourages people going through loss and discouragement to look up. When we look too much at the *problems* in our lives, we can’t see what wonderful things *God* is doing and wants *us* to do.

Look up at what? The stars? No. Jesus says, “Look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” In one sense it meant it was a very special time. Why was it so special? It was because God had opened the Samaritan woman’s heart, and now she was impacting all her townspeople. But in another sense, Jesus was saying the spiritual fields of the world are *always* ripe for harvest. How so? It means there are still so many out there in the world who are just like the Samaritan woman. So many are wounded, lonely, thirsty and feel trapped in a meaningless life. They may seem uninterested and even hostile to spiritual things. But what they really need is someone willing to break through the social barriers and just talk to them. When we hear the honest stories of people who’ve had their wounds healed and their needs met by Jesus, we realize the fields are still ripe for harvest. Jesus said in Matthew 9:37, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.” But are we *looking* at the harvest? Can we *see* it? Are we *ready* for it?

 In verses 36–38 Jesus goes on to talk about sowers and reapers. Right now, his disciples needed to be reapers with Jesus. But they also needed to appreciate the sowers who did the hard work ahead of them. Sometimes when we’re enjoying some success we forget about the people who did all the hard work to make it happen. The same is true in ministry. Jesus is teaching that ministry is a team effort. And it’s all about timing. Sometimes we’re called to be sowers, those who patiently sow the seed of the word, pray and show God’s love with no visible results. Sometimes we’re called to be reapers who gather people to come to Jesus, really believe in him and have eternal life. In any case, we shouldn’t be competing; we should be “glad together.” We can rejoice because our goal is the same, the spiritual harvest of people really meeting Jesus.

In verses 39–42 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, from the woman’s testimony to the words of Jesus. Now they have independent faith, faith with real knowledge and conviction. In the same way, the only way we can have personal faith in Jesus is when we spend quality time in God’s word. That’s when we can have the conviction to be harvest workers who lead others to Jesus their Savior.

 Today Jesus says to us, “I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” May God help us spend time in his word until we can really see Jesus as the Savior of the world. And may God open our spiritual eyes to look up and see the ripe harvest fields of needy souls all around us. May he give us the compassion, the courage and the great joy of being sowers and reapers in his harvest field right now.