

Jesus Really is the Savior of the World

John 4:27-42

Key Verse: 42

“They said to the woman, ‘We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.’”

In the previous passage Jesus offered a thirsty Samaritan woman living water welling up to eternal life. She admitted how she was waiting for the Messiah, who would explain everything. Jesus declared, **“I, the one speaking to you - I am he.”** That is where Jesus’ conversation with her ended, for then she darted back into town. It was the end of this short exchange with Jesus, but the beginning of a new life for her. In today’s passage, we can see the powerful, good influence of one person who has been changed by Jesus. We will hear Jesus’ words to open our eyes to the spiritual harvest. Above all, we can learn the importance of hearing and believing in Jesus for ourselves.

First, “Could this be the Messiah?” (27-30). Look at verse 27. **Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”** Jesus' disciples had gone into the town to buy food. After returning from the local grocer, they were surprised to see Jesus talking with this Samaritan woman. After all, she was a Samaritan and Jesus was a Jew. Also, she was a woman and he was a man. Not only that, she was a woman of questionable reputation. The disciples wanted to ask about it, but they held their words out of respect for Jesus.

The woman left her water jar and dashed back into the town. To fill her jar and take it home was no longer urgent. The urgent matter was to tell others about this man at the well. With excitement, she went to her townspeople exclaiming, **“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”** So the people came out of the town and made their way toward Jesus. Her words express joy, freedom and transparency. She was not afraid to talk about her past life. She said, “This man by the well knows all about me in detail, even though I've never met him before. Come meet him. I believe he is the Messiah!” What must have surprised them the most was her openness, joy and freedom. She was no longer the guarded, defensive and rude woman they had known. They saw a profound change in her. Joy and newness radiated from her face and in her words. It was as if she had been born again.

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Have you ever met someone like this, who claimed a personal encounter with Jesus Christ? In high school, I knew a girl who admitted to an immoral relationship with one guy. But she said, "Jesus Christ forgave me." Her words blew me away. I sensed she really meant it. It was as if she said, "Jesus Christ took away my sins and now I am a new person." I don't remember anyone ever saying that to me before. With my Christian upbringing I wondered, "If Jesus Christ forgave you, then you are surely forgiven, because he is right up there with God. But how do you know that? You speak as if it is a fact." Her personal testimony gave me curiosity to want to learn of Jesus. Six months later, on the campus of Northwestern University, an Asian man asked me, "Ah, excuse me. Would you like to study Bible?" I replied, "What religion are you?" He said, "Christian." I said, "No, like I'm a Catholic. What are you?" He said, "Just Christian." Then he repeated, "Would you like to study Bible?" I thought, "I believe the Bible, don't I? I should; I'm a Catholic." In this way, I cautiously started studying the Bible with Daniel Yoshiba and then with Pauline Park. The Bible studies gave me joy and peace. I was surprised by Daniel's testimony that he had found the meaning of his life, which I wasn't sure was possible. At my first Easter Bible conference, the living hope of Jesus' resurrection gave me life direction. Jesus saved me from the guilt of my sins of lust, pride, indifference, hypocrisy and selfishness. He saved me from my meaningless pursuit of wealth and human recognition. Since then, for 30 years, I've shared God's word through Bible studies with hundreds of people - some just one time (even on an airplane), some for four years of college study.

One person's testimony can have a powerful influence on a family, a campus, a work place, even a whole town.

The Navigators ministry (<http://www.navigators.org/us/aboutus/history>) began in the 1930s, when Dawson Trotman, a young California lumberyard worker, caught a vision after seeing the benefits of discipleship principles. He accepted, 2 Timothy 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."** Dawson taught sailor Les Spencer the foundations of Christian growth. They spent many hours together praying, studying the Bible, and memorizing Scripture. Les Spencer then shared the secret of his changed life with another person. Eventually, 125 men on their ship, the U.S.S. West Virginia, were growing in Christ and actively sharing their faith. By the end of World War II, thousands of men on ships and bases around the world were learning the principles of spiritual multiplication by the person-to-person teaching of God's word.

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The village of Sychar was powerfully impacted and influenced when one woman drank the living water from Jesus Christ. One to one Bible study looks small and ineffective compared with mass evangelism. But we must never despise or underestimate the power and influence of one person who has been changed by the grace of Jesus Christ. We see this through this Samaritan woman. We see it also through the Gerasene demoniac who impacted ten towns (Mk 5:20).

One young man had a dream to become a millionaire. A man of God took him along with him to visit and evangelize. On one such visit the young man had the privilege and joy of leading a person to Christ. His joy and excitement overshadowed his dream for worldly success and he began to give his time, money and effort for the kingdom of Christ. He is the great American evangelist, Dwight Moody (1837-1899), after whom Moody Church and Moody Bible Institute in Chicago are named. Moody said: "I may say with truth that there is only about one in ten who professes Christianity who will turn round and glorify God with a loud voice. Nine out of ten are still born Christians. You never hear of them." Like the Samaritan woman, those who have Jesus' grace in their hearts don't need to be told to tell others; they do so eagerly. One person's testimony of Jesus' saving and changing grace can be a powerful catalyst for revival. However, believing through someone else's testimony is not enough.

Second, "Look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (31-38). As the woman ran into town, Jesus and his disciples had a conversation about food. The disciples urged Jesus saying, "**Rabbi, eat something.**" It was after all their mission to bring back food from town. **But [Jesus] said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."** The disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?...Maybe that woman?" In John's gospel people often take Jesus' words too literally, missing the spiritual meaning behind them. "**My food,**" **said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."**

Why was Jesus' food doing God's will and finishing his work? As we know, food is one of the joys and necessities of life. Food gives us nourishment, satisfaction, strength, energy and power. For Jesus, his joy and strength came from doing God's will and work. We have all gone without food or sleep if we are dedicated to a task. Students regularly pull all-nighters studying for finals because they want to do get a good grade. Jesus' talk with this thirsty, open-hearted Samaritan woman gave him joy and new strength more than any steak dinner could.

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Let's ask ourselves: What is my heart's desire? What am I willing to sacrifice for? Sadly, some people have played video games to the point of death. Olympic athletes train themselves close to death. What are you willing to die or suffer for? We see St. Paul's heart's desire in his words: **"forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead"** (Php 3:13), **"I want to know Christ...and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death"** (Php 3:10), **"I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race"** (Ro 9:3), and, **"I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace"** (Ac 20:24).

Jesus shifted the conversation from food to a harvest. Look at verse 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."** Jesus used farmer terminology: **"It's still four months until harvest."** After planting, it takes some crops four months until the harvest. The harvest takes time. But Jesus challenged these words saying, **"I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."** Jesus said, **"Look! See! The harvest is right now!"** Ever since Jesus came, it has been harvest time on earth. It is harvest time until Jesus comes again. It is harvest time as long as we have life and breath to work. So what are we waiting for? **"Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."**

There is a story of two shoe salesmen who went to Africa. One came back and said, "The market is terrible - no one wears shoes!" But the other said, "The market is great - everyone needs shoes!" They saw the same thing, but they had very different perspectives. How do we see the world, our campus, our work place, our own family? Do we see these as dark and hopeless, and complain, and give up before trying to do anything, with many excuses. Or do we see the world with faith in God, knowing what God wants to do and what God can do. Do we have the conviction: **"For no word from God will ever fail"** (Lk 1:37) and, **"Everything is possible for one who believes"** (Mk 9:23). William Carey (1761-1834) had such a perspective. To inspire people to be missionaries, he spawned the saying, "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God."

Jesus said, **"Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."** How then can we open our eyes and have a right perspective or viewpoint? This requires faith and a right attitude. It requires believing Jesus' words. Jesus wants us to have vision for the world, that the world is ripe for

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harvest. We are sometimes blinded by our own unbelief or laziness or complaints. It's easy to look at the world and see darkness. Even the prophet Elijah complained to God, thinking that he was the only prophet left in Israel and they were trying to kill him. But God's word to him was, **"I reserve 7000 in Israel who have not bowed down to Baal"** (1Ki 19:14,18). Jesus doesn't want us to look negatively and see only darkness and sulk in self-pity. Jesus wants us to look with hope and faith, and see God's purpose and believe his promises. Time and again we need to pray that God may open our eyes to see the harvest. Lord, open our eyes to see the spiritual harvest!

Jesus had much more to say to them about sowing and reaping and the harvest. Look at verses 36-38. **"Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."**

When I was 15, I detassled corn in Nebraska, the Cornhusker State. Detassling is an important step in harvesting corn. Farmers hire many laborers at just the right time. From planting to reaping, it requires time and many workers. The sowers plant. The reapers harvest. They need each other to yield the produce. However, sowing is hard and tedious and not much fun. Seeing and reaping the harvest - collecting the fruit of labor, is much more fun and fulfilling. But the reapers might forget the hard work of the sowers.

Jesus sent his disciples as reapers. So who were the sowers? The Old Testament Hebrew prophets were sowers: like Elijah, Elisha, Amos and Hosea. Seed had been sown in Samaria for hundreds of years. How else could they have known about the coming Messiah? John the Baptist was another sower, who prepared the way for Jesus. Forgetful reapers might be tempted to take credit for the harvest. Sowers and reapers should give thanks and glory to God for the harvest and be glad together. Paul wrote, **"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"** (1Co 3:6-7). The Bible reminds us, **"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth"** (Dt 8:17-18).

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Sometimes we will sow seed: planting without seeing any visible fruit. Other times we will harvest what others have sown: guiding a person into life as a disciple of Jesus. As I said I have shared God's word with hundreds of people for 30 years. The discouraging fact is that except for a very few I don't know if any of them are following Jesus now. It is easy to get discouraged when I don't see any visible results. Galatians 6:9 has often encouraged me: **“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”** It is not for me to produce fruit, except the fruit of repentance and praise. It is for me to participate humbly and thankfully in God's harvest with Jesus and his harvest workers.

The ultimate Sower and Reaper is Jesus Christ, who sowed the seeds of eternal life through his death and resurrection. Jesus is the kernel of wheat who fell to the ground and died to produce many seeds of eternal life (Jn 12:24). To him be the glory for the harvest in us, among us and through us!

Third, “This man really is the Savior of the world” (39-42). Verses 39-42 conclude this story in Sychar, Samaria. **Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”**

The Samaritans were amazed at the woman's testimony that Jesus knew everything about her. What is just as amazing was that Jesus did not condemn her. Rather, Jesus saved her soul and gave her a new life. She was a changed person, and the people could clearly see that. Jesus saved her and made her a new person. Jesus doesn't only take away our sins and guilt and shame. Jesus gives us a new life. With this new life comes love, joy, peace, freedom, and holy purpose.

When the Samaritans came to Jesus, they urged him to stay with them. So he stayed two more days. It delights Jesus when we want to spend time with him and learn of him. Jesus gave them a 2-day festival of his teaching and fellowship. Wow, they had a 2-day conference with Jesus in their town!

Now we are prayerfully preparing our 4-day international festival with Jesus in Indiana, Pennsylvania. People are coming from all over this nation and all over

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the world to hear God's word, pray together and have fellowship with each other in Jesus' name. Our theme is "So Loved." We pray that all attendees may plunge deeper into the love of God and into God's hope and vision for the world. Lord Jesus, we urge you: come and teach us! Revive us. Renew us. Change us. Empower us. Amen.

What was the result of the 2-day retreat away from their jobs to spend it with Jesus? Look at verses 41-42. **"And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.'**" After hearing Jesus for themselves, their basis for belief went from second-hand knowledge to a first-hand encounter with Jesus. They no longer believed based on someone else's testimony. They heard Jesus for themselves and came to know that Jesus really is the Savior of the world. There are two important things to note here: the importance of personal confession and the content of that confession.

It is not enough to believe in Jesus based on someone else's testimony. We must each have a personal encounter with Jesus through his word. Faith comes from hearing the gospel message. We must each first hear to believe. A confession of faith comes through hearing and believing Jesus' words. Jesus said in John 5:24, **"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."** Paul wrote in Romans 10:9, **"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."**

The people of Sychar came to know that Jesus really is the Savior of the world. Though Jesus was only teaching them, they did not call him the Teacher of the world, but the Savior of the world. This expression "Savior of the world" is used also in 1 John 4:14. It reads, **"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world."** Jesus Christ came to save the Jews from their sins, and the Samaritans from their sins, and the whole world from their sins. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus Christ really is the Savior of the world. May we each know and testify that Jesus really is the Savior of the world.