

Ripe for Harvest

Partnering with the Lord in His Harvest Fields Part 1

Thesis: Our Triune God-- God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit-- is at work all around us. The fields are ripe for harvest (John 4:34-38). We are called to partner with the Lord in his harvest fields (Matthew 9:35-38). May we see what God sees, feel what the Lord feels, pray what the Lord leads us to pray, and go as he sends us in his anointing, empowering, and grace.

Text: John 4:34-38; Matthew 9:35-38

Today we are starting a new series-- *Ripe for Harvest: Partnering with the Lord in His Harvest Fields*. I pray that we will catch a vision of what the Lord is doing and that we will share the heartbeat of God for this world.

Our Triune God-- God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit-- is at work all around us. The fields are ripe for harvest (John 4:34-38). We are called to partner with the Lord in his harvest fields (Matthew 9:35-38). May we see what God sees, feel what the Lord feels, pray what the Lord leads us to pray, and go as he sends us in his anointing, empowering, and grace.

Let's read God's word together.

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. 37 Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. 38 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" (John 4:34-38).

What a privilege. Jesus is on mission and we get to join him in his mission.

1. **Jesus is at work in the world renewing, reconciling, and restoring all things to God.** This is the big picture of what the Lord Jesus Christ is doing.
 - a. Jesus ever lives to do the will of the Father.
 - i. Doing the will of God is Jesus' fuel and his fire. *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34).*

- ii. *"The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him" (John 8:29).*
 - iii. *"Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.'" (Hebrews 10:7).*
 - b. Jesus is a man on a mission; he is sent by his Father.
 - c. Jesus will finish what he has started-- in you, in me, and in all of creation.
- 2. **Jesus wants us to wake up and get in on what God is doing today.**
 - a. Every farmer knows that you sow first; then, in due time, like in four months, the crop becomes ripe and needs to be harvested.
 - b. **But, hear the word of the Lord to us today: *Open your eyes and look at the fields. The fields are ripe for harvest... today!***
 - i. The Lord Jesus is already at work all around us building the kingdom of God and touching people.
 - ii. The Father is already drawing people to himself.
 - iii. The Holy Spirit is already convicting and wooing people to the kingdom of God.
 - iv. Others have already been used of the Lord to plant seeds of God's word, good news, love, and forgiveness in those around us.
 - v. People are hungry, searching, and looking for God. Some of them are looking in all the wrong places, but they are looking.
 - vi. *Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. 38 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" (John 4:37-38).*
 - vii. **Open your eyes and look at the fields. The fields are ripe for harvest... today!**
 - c. **The Lord has set up divine appointments all around us where we live, work, and play.**
 - i. Let's repent and stop saying that people aren't ready.
 - 1. Listen to Jesus:
 - a. *Do not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest.'*
 - b. *The fields are ripe for harvest today.*
 - ii. Let's repent for our unbelief and cynicism.
 - 1. We are tempted to give up on people, on culture, and on this world.
 - 2. Rather, let's choose to believe what Jesus says: he is at work, people are ready, and the Lord has sent us into his harvest fields.
 - iii. Let's obey the Lord:

1. May we open our eyes and see people as those in whom God is already at work.
2. May we get in step with what the Lord is already doing in their lives and help them along in their spiritual journey.
3. May we look at people and see that some are ready to follow Jesus. They just need someone to help them get in action.

Let's look together at John 4 and the interaction between Jesus and the Woman at the Well.

The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, 2 although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. 3 When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. 4 Now he had to go through Samaria. 5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour (John 4:1-6).

Jesus had to go through Samaria (John 4:1-6).

Strict Jews, in order to avoid defilement, would bypass Samaria by taking a longer route to the east that involved crossing the Jordan and traveling on the east side of the river. The Samaritans were a racially mixed group of partly Jewish and partly Gentile ancestry, who were disdained by both Jews and non-Jews. Samaritans had their own version of the Pentateuch, worshiped at their own temple on Mount Gerizim instead of at Jerusalem, and had developed their own version of Israelite history. They even incorporated certain forms of idolatry into their worship of God. For these reasons strict Jews ostracized the Samaritans completely.

The phrase, "Jesus had to go through Samaria," can indicate that God led Jesus that way to fulfill a purpose.

Jesus was physically tired from the trip and sat down at Jacob's well near the Samaritan town of Sychar. It was noon, which was the middle of the hot day.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) (John 4:7-9).

What's wrong with this picture?

For a start, Jesus was known already as a holy man, leading a movement to bring Israel back to God. (John's readers know that he is more than that, but we must learn to think with the minds of his followers at the time.) In that culture, many devout Jewish men would not have allowed themselves to be alone with a woman. If it was unavoidable that they should be, they would certainly not have entered into conversation with her. The risk, they would have thought, was too high—risk of impurity, risk of gossip, risk ultimately of being drawn into immorality. **And yet Jesus is talking to this woman.** Later in the chapter John shows how startled the disciples were by this (4:27).

Second, the woman is of course a Samaritan. Ever since some of the Jewish exiles had come back from Babylon, to find that the central section of their ancient territory was occupied by a group who claimed to be the true descendants of Abraham, and who opposed their return, there had been constant trouble. Sometimes it had broken out into actual skirmishes, with bloodshed and murder. But mostly it was simply a matter of not mixing. The Jews wouldn't have anything to do with the Samaritans. They would, especially, not share eating and drinking vessels with them. **And yet Jesus is asking this woman for a drink.**

Third, compounding both of these problems, the woman is obviously a bad character. The normal time for women to visit the well, set as it was at some distance from the town, would be at a cooler time of day, most likely first thing in the morning or late in the afternoon. This woman has come at the time when she is least likely to meet anyone—at least, anyone who knows her, her past and her immoral lifestyle. The last thing she would want would be to rub shoulders with the other women of the town, and they would feel the same about her. Jesus will presently show that he knows all about this. **And yet he engages her in conversation**—conversation with a teasing, double-meaning flavour to it (New Testament for Everyone - John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10).

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." 11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" 13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I

give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water" (John 4:10-15).

Let's talk about the power of making your mission relational.

As he is on mission, Jesus talks with people and seeks to connect with them deeply. Again and again in John's gospel, these same people often misunderstand what he is saying. Jesus is speaking at one level-- about the kingdom of God and the reality that God intends to bring the life of heaven to earth. People are listening at the natural level, which is understandable.

Of course in John 4, when Jesus is talking about "living water," he isn't referring to physical water. He is referring to the new life that he is offering to anyone no matter their gender, their geography, their race, or their moral background.

What Jesus says about this "living water" makes it clear that he's talking about something different, something for which all the water on earth is just a signpost. Not only will the water he's offering quench your thirst so that you'll never be thirsty again. It will become a spring bubbling up inside you, refreshing you with the new life which is coming into the world with Jesus and which is the life of the whole new world God is making (John 4:14).

She doesn't know exactly what he's talking about, but she wants to know more. What other meanings she was thinking of, we cannot now fathom. But she's in for a shock—as is everyone who starts to take Jesus seriously. He has living water to offer all right, but when you start to drink it, it will change every area of your life (New Testament for Everyone - John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10).

This encounter highlights the power of building bridges and connecting relationally with others.

One expert in missions says, **"Make your mission relational."** That is the model of Jesus. "Make every expression of ministry relationally driven and every relationship ministry focused. This is how we bear fruit that lasts (John 15-16). The fruit of the Spirit is born out of our relationship with God and expressed in relationships with others. Deep, meaningful, and intentional relationships are hard to find. In a distracted and overstimulated society, I hope the church will lead the way in love, which requires intimate, sacrificial, and purposeful relationships" ([Sharing the Gospel in America and Intentional Relationships](#), an interview with CJ Davison by Ed Stetzer, 9/8/18).

Let's continue looking at this passage.

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." 17 "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." 19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." 21 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." 25 The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." 26 Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he" (John 4:16-26).

Proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel

The woman is intrigued by Jesus' offer of living water and she asks for some.

What she doesn't realize is that if she wants to take Jesus up on his offer of running, pure water, bubbling up inside her, then she will have to get rid of the stale, moldy, stagnant water which she has been living off all this time (New Testament for Everyone - John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10).

Jesus was paying attention to the Father and to the woman. He was aware of what the Father was doing. God gave Jesus a word of knowledge that unlocked this woman's heart. Her life was a mess. She knew her life was in a mess, and she knew that Jesus knew.

When Jesus touched the pain and issues of her heart, she sought to deflect and started to talk about something else. That often happens when God begins to touch people and speak to people.

And the best subject for distracting attention from morality is, of course, religion.

'I was brought up to think that this mountain, here in Samaria, was God's holy mountain. But you Jews think yours is the right one.' Implication: we can't both be right, maybe nobody knows, maybe nothing is that certain, and maybe (the hidden punchline of the argument) the morality we were taught is equally uncertain.

They are all excuses, and they're all irrelevant. God and the church aren't the same thing. God's claim on every human life—and God's offer of a new kind of human life for all who give up the stagnant water and come to him for the living

variety—is absolute, and can't be avoided by questions about which church people think they should go to, any more than Jesus' claim on this woman's moral conscience could be avoided by the debate, already hundreds of years old, as to whether Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, or Mount Gerizim, in Samaria, was the true holy mountain.

In fact, part of the point of Jesus' mission, to bring the life of heaven to birth on earth, was that from now on holy mountains wouldn't matter that much. This wasn't a new insight. When Solomon dedicated the Temple a thousand years before, he was quite clear that heaven itself wasn't big enough for God, so that one single building couldn't hope to contain him. Holy buildings, and holy mountains, are at best signposts to the real thing. If they become substitutes for it, you're in trouble. That way lies idolatry, the worship of something that isn't God as if it were.

Because, as Jesus emphasizes here, the true and living God isn't contained geographically or architecturally. He is spirit: not the kind of spirit that abhors the physical world (he made it, after all), but the kind that, as we say, transcends it, rather as the author and producer of a play 'transcend' the action on stage—even though, in this case, it seems as though the author has himself come to play the leading role.

All this is too much for the woman. She certainly wouldn't have enjoyed Jesus reaffirming that 'salvation comes from the Jews' (verse 22), but she probably couldn't make much sense of the idea that true worship would one day have nothing to do with territory and everything to do with spirituality and truth. (Come to think of it, a lot of people today have trouble with that, too.)

So she tries a different tack. Perhaps this will put the stranger off.

'One day the Messiah will come,' she says brightly. 'Why don't we wait till then? He'll make it all clear.'

[She didn't know the door that she opened for Jesus.]

'That's me,' says Jesus.

And he goes on saying it. Whenever people come round to the key questions, and say, 'If only someone would come and sort it all out!', then there he is.

'That's me.' Waiting to do what he does best (New Testament for Everyone - John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10).

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?" 28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" 30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him. 31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi,

eat something." 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." 33 Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" 34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. 37 Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. 38 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." 39 Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. 41 And because of his words many more became believers. 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" (John 4:27-42).

When you are on mission with the Lord, you never know the implications and impact which your words and deeds will have for the kingdom of God and in the lives of people.

God knew that reaching and redeeming this woman would touch an entire town. **Because Jesus was attentive, aware, available, and in action, God brought transformation to a woman and a town.**

The way the passage ends is worth pondering deeply. Here is a woman who, a matter or an hour or so before, had been completely trapped in a life of immorality, as a social outcast. There was no way backwards or forwards for her; all she could do was to eke out a daily existence and make sure she went to the well at the time of day when there would be nobody there to sneer or mock. Now she has become the first evangelist to the Samaritan people. Before any of Jesus' own followers could do it, she has told them that he is the Messiah. And then, as they have come to see Jesus for themselves, they have become convinced.

Indeed, they have given Jesus a title which, as they may have known, the emperor in far-away Rome had begun to use for himself: saviour of the world. John frequently shows us how people misunderstand what Jesus is saying, but he also shows us that sometimes they can break through, with little or no help, to a statement of truth so profound that it could stand as a summary of all that John himself is trying to tell us. Jesus is indeed the world's saviour. That is part of the task and role of Israel's Messiah. Salvation may indeed be 'from the Jews' (4:22), but part of the point of it is that salvation is designed to reach outside Judaism to embrace the world. Now, with this incident in Samaria, that process has begun (New Testament for Everyone - John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10).

Application: How about you? Calvary, let's step up in the Lord's harvest fields.

1. Will you pay attention to what the Lord is doing in and around you?
2. Will you practice growing in your awareness of the Lord and others?
3. Will you grow in your capacity to be available to the Lord and others?
4. Will you get in action around what the Lord is showing you and in the opportunities which the Lord places before you?

Response in prayer

1. As a congregation, we say "yes" to partnering with the Lord in his harvest fields.
2. We say "yes" to incarnating the presence of the Lord in our spheres of influence.
3. We say "yes" to being conduits of the kingdom of God coming in renewal, restoration, and reconciliation to our spheres of influence and beyond.
4. We repent and stop saying that people aren't ready.
 - a. We will listen to you, Lord Jesus:
 - i. *Do not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest.'*
 - ii. *The fields are ripe for harvest today.*
5. We repent for our unbelief and cynicism.
 - a. We will not give up on people, on culture, and on this world.
 - b. Rather, we choose to believe what you say, Lord Jesus: you are at work, people are ready, and the Lord has sent us into his harvest fields.
6. If you are a follower of Jesus, then your life is a missions trip.
 - a. May we open our eyes and see people as those in whom God is already at work.
 - b. May we get in step with what the Lord is already doing in their lives and help them along in their spiritual journey.
 - c. May we look at people and see that some are ready to follow Jesus. They just need someone to help them get in action.