

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The Soul Food Special John 4:35-38

We are presently studying **John 4:31-42**. This section of Scripture highlights Christ's work in God's harvest field. In highlighting Christ's work in God's harvest field, certain features of that work are particularly impressive. Hopefully, we will seek to incorporate those particular features into our own life of service.

This has led us to ask the following question: What are *four* major features of Christ's work outlined for us in John 4:31-42?

The first major feature of Christ's work is the proper *motive*. Let me read for you **John 4:31-34**. **"In the meanwhile (after the Samaritan woman had returned to the city of Sychar to share her testimony and encourage the men to go out to visit with Jesus) the disciples were requesting Him, saying 'Rabbi, eat.' (32) But He said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' (33) The disciples therefore were saying to one another, 'No one brought Him anything to eat, did He?' (34) Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.'"**

What motivated Christ to do what He did? What motivated Christ was doing the *will* of His Father and accomplishing His work. This is what motivated Christ.

Christ described the doing of this as His "food." Doing the will of His Father and accomplishing His work was Christ's *soul food*. He was not doing this occasionally; He was doing this continuously and hopefully we will also. Hopefully, we will be like "spiritual cows" continuously feeding on the will of God and seeking to accomplish His work.

If this is truly the driving force of our lives, one particular activity will become very important to us. This leads us to another major feature of Christ's work.

The second major feature of Christ's work is the *urgency* associated with reaping God's harvest (John 4:35-36). Hopefully, we will understand how important it is for us to share this urgency. I know that there may be some of you here this weekend who may think that you can successfully live the Christian life without becoming seriously involved in working in God's harvest field, but if this is how you feel then you are fooling yourself. The importance of us working in God's harvest field is continuously presented to us throughout the New Testament.

If we were to compare the Scriptures with a food menu, working in God's harvest field would be considered the "soul food special." It would be one of those items that would be particularly highlighted and highlighted so prominently that it would be impossible to miss. We will see an example of this soul food special being highlighted in **John 4:35-36** right after He had talked to them about His spiritual food which was doing the will of the Father and accomplishing His work.

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How do these two verses begin? Let us read the first half of **verse 35**. "**Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest?'**" The first thing we notice is that Jesus refers to something that the disciples themselves had been saying about the grain harvest.

The disciples had been saying, "**There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest.**" Some have suggested that this is a parable, but no such parable has ever been found and besides it would take significantly longer than four months to produce a grain harvest in that part of the world. This is not a parable; rather this is simply a statement of fact.

The disciples most likely had seen the short green stubble of recently planted grain fields and had been commenting as to when the Samaritans might expect to harvest their crop. In this case, as they discussed it among themselves, they concluded that the Samaritans might be able to harvest their crop in about four months.

Jesus, very likely having overheard this conversation, turns it into a teachable moment. Jesus contrasts what the disciples had been saying about the future grain harvest with the very present and pressing need to harvest souls (John 4:35).

How does He accomplish this? Let us continue to read **verse 35**. "**Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest?'** Behold, I say to you, **lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.**"

What a strange request but it is a request that I believe the disciples would have honored. I believe that they did in fact lift up their eyes to look out onto the fields. Now, let me ask you a question. What would they have seen as they lifted up their eyes? Would they have seen grain ready to be harvested? Absolutely not! The grain harvest was four months away, and just to complicate this a little further let me ask you another question. If the grain fields were in fact ready to be harvested, what would have been the color of those fields? You might think that the answer is "white" based on the present text, but when was the last time that you saw a grain field that was ready to be harvested that was white in color?

Let me answer this question for you. When grain is ready to harvest it is not *white*, rather it is *brown, golden brown, or yellow*. When Jesus told the disciples to lift up their eyes and look on the fields that were white for harvest, He was not talking about a grain harvest, but rather a harvest of souls.

How do we know this? Let us go back to the original question. What would the disciples have seen as they lifted their eyes and carefully looked out at the fields? They certainly may have seen the green stubble of the newly planted grain, but they also very likely would have seen the men of Sychar winding their way toward them based on **John 4:30**. How would these men most likely have been dressed? The disciples when they looked out over the fields in response to Christ's request may not only have seen green stubble but Samaritans coming toward them dressed in *white*.

Let me read an observation of a rather well known Bible scholar named H.V. Morton when he was visiting this historical biblical site:

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"As I sat by Jacob's well a crowd of Arabs came along the road from the direction in which Jesus was looking, and I saw their white garments shining in the sun. Surely Jesus was speaking not of the earthly but of the heavenly harvest, and as He spoke I think it likely, that he pointed along the road where the Samaritans in their white robes were assembling to hear His words."

The time to harvest the grain was still four months away, but the time to harvest the souls of these Samaritans who were coming to Jesus and His disciples was now! How would Jesus want the disciples to respond to the opportunity that would very shortly present itself? He wanted them to get involved. He wanted them to feel a sense of urgency in this matter of getting involved in the harvest.

How urgent was it for these disciples to get involved in this work? Let us read the next verse.

"Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal." Let us first of all look at how this verse begins. **"Already he who reaps is receiving wages."**

The normal procedure was for laborers to be paid at the end of each day. Therefore, when Jesus tells His disciples that wages are already being received, He is telling them time is running out. The time for them to become involved in the harvest is now. There must not be any delay. The sun is setting and darkness is approaching when we may not be able to take advantage of the opportunity to minister in this very important way.

How important is this work? Aren't there other better ways to spend our time and energy? No!

There isn't a better way to spend our time and energy. Let us continue reading **John 4:36**.

"Already he who reaps is receiving wages." Then what does it say? **"And is gathering fruit for life eternal."**

Why is this work of harvesting souls so important? Jesus brings out the overwhelming importance of this work by saying that the reaper gathers fruit **"for life eternal."** The task is not some insignificant one where it does not matter whether or not it is done. The eternal welfare of people is at stake.

There are many invitations continually being extended to people and for the most part it really does not matter whether people accept them or don't accept them. When I am invited to one of those three-day two-night timeshare getaways, at no or little cost, conditioned solely upon my willingness to sit through a 30-minute sales presentation, the way I respond will not greatly impact my life. If I choose to go I get a cheap vacation. If I choose not to go I am spared the potential strong-arm tactics of an aggressive sales person. The bottom line is that it really doesn't matter a whole lot whether I receive an invitation to visit such a timeshare under the stipulated condition of listening to a sales pitch or I don't receive such an invitation. My life will not be dramatically altered one way or another and neither will anyone else's life.

This is not true when it comes to the matter of getting people to come to Christ. It is vitally important that the followers of Christ get involved in harvesting fruit for life eternal.

We need to get involved in getting our mothers and fathers to come to Christ so that they might embrace Him as their Lord and Savior by a simple act of faith.

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We need to get involved getting our sons and daughters to come to Christ so that they might embrace Christ as their Lord and Savior by a simple act of faith.

When should we do this? Now! Not tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. Time is running out. What did Jesus say? **"Already he who reaps is receiving wages."**

I know that this work of harvesting souls can be time consuming and even at times difficult, but it is well worth it. Not only in terms of the person who receives the gift of spiritual life but also for the person or persons God uses to bring them to that point. This leads us to the third major feature of Christ's work.

The third major feature of Christ's work is joy (John 4:36). Some people when they think about getting involved in God's harvest field only think about the difficulties of that work and fail to think of its benefits. It would be like a pregnant woman choosing to think only about the pain of childbirth and not the joy of bringing a new life into this world and being a part of that life.

Better than thinking about the difficulties of working in God's harvest field is to think about the benefits. One of those benefits mentioned in the passage that we are now examining is joy,

Let us go back and finish reading **John 4:36. "Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together."**

The Scriptures make it very clear that when someone responds to the gospel of Christ there is incredible joy in heaven. Let me read for you **Luke 15:1-10. "Now all the tax gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him (2) And both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.' (3) And He told them this parable, saying, (4) 'What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? (5) And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. (6) And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' (7) I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (8) Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? (9) And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' (10) In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."**

Not only is there an incredible amount of joy in heaven but there will be a great amount of joy on earth. How do we know this? This is what the verse teaches us. What does the verse say? **"Already He who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together."**

Notice that it is not just the reapers who rejoice at the time of the harvest but those who sow as well. They share this joy together (John 4:36).

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We as the Disciples of Christ must not forget that a successful harvest is a cooperative effort between those who sow and those who reap. The work of one would not be worth much without the work of the other. If someone sows and no one comes along to reap, the sower has in a sense wasted his labor. If someone comes to reap where no one has sown, there may be very little that he can do.

I officially accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior when I was invited to a special youth activity at First Baptist Church in Compton California when I was 16 years old. The person who shared the gospel with me that night was a man that I had only just met, but there were others who had helped prepare the soil of my life and had planted seed within that soil before this man ever came into my life.

My first memory was being taken to a weeklong VBS club by a neighbor and singing the song "Onward Christian Soldiers" on the last day of the club. I wasn't a Christian at that point in my life, but I remember that entire week as a positive experience. My next memory was being taken to a United Methodist Sunday School class by my parents when I was perhaps in 4th, 5th or 6th grade. It didn't last very long, but I was fortunate enough not only to receive a Bible but it was the first time I remember being personally impacted by a specific Scripture.

The particular Scripture that impressed me the most was **Psalms 100. "Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth. (2) Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing. (3) Know that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His Pasture. (4) Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name. (5) For the Lord is good; His loving kindness is everlasting, and His faithfulness to all generations."**

A few years after this I remember being once again taken to a Sunday Class by my parents for a very short period of time but this time it was the First Baptist Church in Compton. During this class the teacher apparently shared the gospel and must have given me the opportunity to respond which I must have done. I know this because, when I left the class, he told a couple people outside the room that I had just been saved and the only feeling that I can remember was embarrassment. Was I actually saved at that particular point in my life? I don't believe so!

Certainly all of these experiences and the seed that was being sown in my life had an impact. So, what happened after this? I once again basically disappeared from the church until a friend who was playing on the same high school basketball team asked me to go to this special event at the church that I basically for all intent and purposes was no longer attending. It was at that special event that I once again heard the gospel but this time I truly responded and by faith made Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior. There was no embarrassment only excitement accompanied by a sincere desire to be what God wanted me to be.

Was there a shared joy when I made that decision? Yes, not only by the one who shared with me the gospel but also by the friend who had invited me. There was a shared joy by both the sower and the reaper. What about the others who had prepared the soil and sowed seed in my life over the years? Will they also share in that joy? I believe that they will. When? I believe that they will share in that joy when they see me in glory.

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Obviously there are times when the sowing and the reaping may be done by the same person but this was not the case with the Samaritans according to **John 4:37**. Let me read for you **John 4:37**. What did Jesus say? "**For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows, and another reaps.'**" The harvest of souls in the area of Sychar that the disciples will very shortly participate in had far more to do with others than themselves. This is made clear in the very next verse. Let us read **John 4:38**. "**I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.**"

The disciples will shortly have the joy of reaping a harvest in Samaria but "others" had done most of the work. Who are the "others" that Jesus is referring to? The "others" most likely refers to John the Baptist who had ministered in that area, to Christ and of course the Samaritan woman. These are the individuals who had recently labored among the Samaritans. Very shortly those who had sowed and those who had reaped in the area of Samaria will be rejoicing together.

CONCLUSION

Can you say that your food is to do the will of God and accomplish His work? If it is then becoming involved in God's harvest field, both as a sower and a reaper, will take on a growing sense of urgency. What will happen when you see the fruit of your labor? You will have this overwhelming sense of joy whether you are the sower or a reaper.

Where do we go from here? One life will soon be past only what is done for Christ will last.