The Gospel of John: *The Savior of the World*

John 4:25-42

This morning we will return for the last time to this incredible story of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4. If you recall, Jesus has broken through every cultural prejudice to engage this woman who has been married five times and currently lives with a man who is not her husband. He has offered her living water...He has offered her Himself, knowing full well that she is a broken and sinful person. As the woman sees herself in the light of Christ’s love and grace, she wants to respond to God, but she is confused due to her corrupted ideas about God and religion. So, Jesus gently instructs her to worship God in spirit and truth. Let’s pick up the end of their conversation beginning with vs. 25 and we’ll read what happens next. Please stand for the reading of God’s Word.

25 The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” 26 Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

27 Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” 28 So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 29 “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” 30 They went out of the town and were coming to him.

31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” 32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” 33 So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?” 34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. 35 Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. 36 Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37 For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

39 Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

The title of my message is *The Savior of the World*, and I have organized it around five subtitles: 1) Evidence of a Changed Life; 2) Kingdom Food; 3) Sowing and Reaping; 4) Basic Evangelism; 5) The Savior of the Cosmos.

I. Evidence of a Changed Life

As we pick up the story, Jesus has accomplished two things in His conversation with the Samaritan: 1) Jesus has revealed this woman to herself. The woman now sees herself accurately: as one who has a sinful past, yet one who is known and deeply loved by God. And 2) Jesus has revealed who He is. Jesus reveals in vs. 26 that He is the Messiah. The ESV renders his self-disclosure this way, “I who speak to you am he.” Cleary Jesus is identifying Himself as the Messiah that she just mentioned, but I want you to know that the actual Greek construction of vs. 26 would literally translate as, “The one speaking to you, I am.” There is no “he” in the sentence, so in this short sentence, Jesus is both identifying Himself as Messiah and pointing to Himself as God...the great “I AM” as God revealed himself to Moses.

Now, before we look at the woman’s response to her encounter with Jesus, I want to remind you that true, authentic stories of Christian transformation always include these two components: 1) God empowers us to see ourselves accurately...as sinners in need of grace; and
2) we see Jesus as the One sent by God who came to offer us forgiveness and eternal life at the expense of His perfect life that He laid down for sin-sick souls. When a human being has this kind of an encounter with the Lord...when they see their sin and they see Jesus accurately, that person’s life will be forever changed. That is, of course, exactly what happens here in John 4. We read in vs. 28, “So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, “Come, and see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”

I want us to take a minute and reflect upon the woman’s response to meeting Jesus.

John notes that the woman turns around and runs back to her people, leaving her water jar behind. What we see here is three indicators of a changed life. Let me show you…

1) She turns around and runs to her community. Remember that the very literal meaning of the word “repentance,” metanoia in the Greek, is to “turn around,” or to “change one’s thinking.” If you recall, earlier this day this woman came to Jacob’s well instead of the village well, and she came at noon rather than the morning, specifically to avoid people. This woman was running from her shame. She was conflict and people avoidant. Prior to her encounter with Jesus, the very last thing she would have ever considered doing was running into town and drawing attention to herself. And yet, following her time with Jesus, that’s exactly what she does. She is no longer thinking of her shame…she is thinking of Jesus. She is no longer afraid of the people in her village…she actually longs for them to know Jesus as well. This is a beautiful picture of repentance: she turns around…not in order to be found acceptable by Jesus…but exactly because Jesus knows her and offered her His living water.

2) Notice also that she leaves her water jar behind. Church, one of the indicators of a truly changed life is that which we leave behind. The water jar represents the driving motivation of the woman’s life prior to Christ. She was in survival mode…just getting from one day to the next. Her soul longed for that which not even Jacob’s well could provide. She carried her water jar every day, a slave to necessity, with little hope of satisfying the thirst of her soul. Upon her encounter with Jesus, she leaves behind the water jar because her heart has been transformed. As Pastor Doon Moomaw once said, “This is the story of a woman who came for water but went home with the well!” How do we know? Because as Jesus predicted, the woman is literally “gushing!” The spring of new life promised by Jesus is already pouring out of her every pore, so much so that she leaves the water jar behind to tell her community about Jesus!

I wish we had the time to hear from the people in this room about what they left behind after meeting Jesus. Just about every convert to Christianity has a “leaving behind” story. Many people leave their sinful habits or attitudes. Some people leave their jobs because their jobs required them to be dishonest or deceiving. Some people leave a gang; some leave an unhealthy relationship. Some people leave behind their prejudices and resentments. Take a moment and identify what you left behind when you met Jesus. If you have never left anything behind in your passion to tell others about Jesus, I think it likely that you have not yet met Jesus personally, because this enthusiasm that “leaves behind the water jar” is a predictable characteristic of those who have been transformed by Jesus.
3) Finally, she invites people to meet Jesus. Her message is simple: “Come and see this man!!!” Why? Because “He told me all that I ever did.” The most basic approach to evangelism is to invite people to meet Jesus precisely because of how He has impacted us personally. Everyone in Sychar would have known about this woman who had been married five times. Even if all five of those husbands died of natural causes, the village still would have thought this woman to be cursed by God. It is precisely because of her painful past that her testimony is now both compelling and magnetic to her community. Anytime we see a person leading with their brokenness for the purpose of telling people about Jesus, we know we are seeing a changed life, and that is exactly what we are seeing in this dear woman from Samaria.

II. Kingdom Food

As we pick up the story, we learn that the disciples have returned from their trip to town. They observe Jesus speaking with the Samaritan woman, and although they “marveled” at the boldness of Christ speaking to a Samaritan woman (which broke with all the Rabbinic prohibitions against such behavior), they did not question his integrity, nor did they risk rebuking the woman. They demonstrate significant restraint here, given their “Jewishness,” which says something about their progress as Jesus-followers. After the woman rushes off to tell everyone about her experience with Jesus, the disciples beckon their Leader to eat some lunch, saying “Rabbi, eat.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?”

I can’t help but smile when I read this interchange between the Jesus and the disciples. The disciples are so well intended, and they are legitimately concerned about Jesus. He was weary when they left Him, so they are eager to share the food they have purchased. Amazingly, when they return from town, Jesus does not look the least bit weary…still, the disciples bid him to eat. So Jesus teases them a bit when He says that He has food to eat that they don’t know about. The disciples, of course, take Him literally, and they’re all talking to each other quietly, trying to figure out who would have supplied Jesus with food while they were away. Now that Jesus has their undivided attention, He seizes the teaching moment and continues in vs. 34: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.”

The picture that Jesus presents is clear: being fully surrendered to the Father’s will and accomplishing that which the Father has instructed completely satisfies Jesus…mentally, spiritually, and physically.

Most of us probably have some passion or interest in our lives that so consumes our attention that we don’t even miss eating. I’ll give you one guess what that is for me (fishing!). For Jesus, it was accomplishing the will of the Father. And what is the will of the Father? Jesus will actually answer that question in John 6:40: “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” Jesus is on a mission to gather souls for heaven, and when He is fully engaged in the mission God sent Him on, He is deeply satisfied.

Let me take a minute to reflect on this Kingdom food concept. So, as you know, we often talk about the preaching ministry as “feeding the sheep.” In other words, we “feast” upon the Word of God almost like we eat a meal. The exposition of scripture “feeds the soul.” I think that
notion is both valid and biblical by the way, but I want to point something out to you: according to Jesus, the most satisfying meal is not “learning;” it is being fully surrendered to accomplishing God’s will. I say this only because many of us spend an incredible amount of time at the spiritual buffet, feasting upon sermons, Bible-studies, small group studies, and reading countless books. We love to learn…and that is not a bad thing at all. However, I suspect we would be far more satisfied with the Kingdom Food that Jesus is talking about: the 16-ounce Ribeye called “serving the Father and accomplishing His will!” As Dr. Kent Hughes writes: “We can hold the most reverent thoughts about God and the tenderest feelings, but if we do not surrender our will to God, we will receive little of the spiritual food he provides.” Now, I know some of you may wonder what God’s will is for your life in terms of your ministry or your vocation or who you are supposed to marry. But here’s where we always begin: we always begin by surrendering our will to what God has already revealed. The first step is to surrender to the Gospel…repent, believe, accept Jesus and surrender to His Lordship. Next, invite the Holy Spirit to fill your life and to direct your steps, and do that every day. And then finally, surrender yourself to being sanctified of all those behaviors and attitudes that are an offense to God. Your conscience will let you know what those things are. Start there. Surrender to what God has already revealed, and you will be served Kingdom food…and once you taste Kingdom food, you will understand what it means to have a spring of living water within you, and then adventure begins as you pursue the Father’s will into wherever He leads you next!

III. Sowing and Reaping

After this short lesson on Kingdom food, Jesus now shifts gears and leverages farming language to paint His next picture. Beginning with vs. 35 Jesus asks the disciples, “Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest?’ Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.”

Let me point out just a few things here. First of all, this saying, “There are yet four months, then comes the harvest” was equivalent to saying, “Rome wasn’t built in a day.” The point was that some things require significant time before they can be accomplished. In the world of farming, that is always the case, right? We plant seeds, we water the seeds, we weed the garden, but it takes months before we can hope to harvest the crop. That saying is true and reliable in the natural world, and I’m sure the disciples would have invoked that saying when it came to reaching the dreaded Samaritans with the Gospel. Surely these idolatrous heretics would be resistant to Jesus. But that’s not at all what Jesus is observing. “Look!” says Jesus, “I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life…”

In other words, Jesus just met this woman an hour ago, and in a matter of minutes, her life has been transformed, and even at this very moment, scores of villagers are rushing out to meet Jesus! Jesus is pointing to all the villagers that are approaching, and He is saying: Look! Given the right context, the Gospel can spread very quickly, and when the harvest is ready, it’s time to get to work! And the next thing He says is very revealing about the life after this life. Listen closely to what He says in vs. 36 “Those who engage in the harvest of souls are gathering fruit for eternal life.” The picture here is that the wage of the harvest worker is eternal fruit. I want you to think about that for a moment.
Let’s just say for a moment that when we all get to heaven, the only currency that will be credited to your account will be those souls that you personally invested in with the Gospel. In other words, the money you earned, the trophies you won, the boards you sat on, the businesses you sold, the video games you mastered, the fish that you caught, and even your hole in one…they all count for nothing at all. Imagine if the only thing that counts…your only currency and reward, will be determined by the people you influenced to come to Jesus…the people you served in His name…the mercy you demonstrated to those in need…the orphans that you brought in…the hope you distributed to the hopeless.

Let’s just say that’s how it works. I want to ask you: how much currency will be in your account? How often will your name be mentioned by those whom you invested in for the sake of the Gospel? What will the record show regarding the way you lived your life? What eternal fruit will be in your basket? Jesus just said that ETERNAL FRUIT accumulates for those who help in the harvest of souls for heaven. And guess what? That’s consistent throughout all four gospels. According to Jesus, there will be rewards in heaven for those who surrendered their lives and served God’s Kingdom agenda in this age…and those rewards are eternal! I can’t even imagine what eternal rewards will look like, but I suspect they will put your house, your best bonus, and your favorite vacation to shame! God knows how to lavishly bless and reward His people, amen? So be motivated church: the harvest work is hard, but Jesus just made a promise: there is eternal fruit that awaits all those who participate in the harvest!

OK, two more quick points to make here. Jesus says next, “The sower and reaper may rejoice together.” In the ancient world, sowers did not rejoice. Sowing was brutal grunt work…everyone hated it. Sowing required back breaking work to turn up the soil, and then hours and hours of spreading the seed. It was only when the harvest came in that the community would have a grand feast and celebrate. But here Jesus paints a very prophetic and beautiful picture: in Kingdom Farming, both the sower and the reaper rejoice together! The prophet Amos foretold of this very day when the Messiah would come: “Behold the days are coming, saith the Lord, when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed (Amos 9:13).” William Barclay writes:

It was the dream of that golden age that sowing and reaping, planting and harvesting, would follow hard upon the heels of each other. There would be such fertility that the old days of waiting would be at an end. We can see what Jesus is gently doing here. His words are nothing less than a claim that with Him the golden age has dawned; God’s time is here; the time when the word is spoken and the seed is sown and the harvest waits.

We still hear of amazing, life-transforming stories where the Gospel is proclaimed and almost instantly lives are changed, and these stories come from every side of the globe! When we are in that context where the sower and reaper rejoice together, we are in the supernatural economy of Kingdom Farming, and that’s just fun, amen?

However, that is not always the case, and Jesus acknowledges that reality. He states there in the end of this teaching (vss. 37-38): “37 For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”
The redemptive plan of God began immediately after the Fall that we read about in Genesis 3. All of the law, the prophets, and all those who loved God throughout human history played their role in sowing the seeds of the Kingdom. Even in the case of the Samaritan woman, we note that she already had a conviction that the Messiah would come. Somebody sowed that seed of faith into her when she was a child, but now that the Messiah has come, she is ripe for the harvest. Just as God led the Israelites to inherit a land flowing with milk and honey, with vineyards they did not plant and wells that they did not dig, so also Jesus calls His disciples to harvest where they did not sow…and to do so with appreciation for those who came before them.

Listen church: all those who have been saved by the blood of Jesus are called to participate in the sowing and reaping of God’s Kingdom fields. We are talking about human souls, and that is always the main interest of God. Some of us know what it’s like to sow the seed of the Gospel into people for years and never see one ounce of fruit from all of our efforts. Jesus is acknowledging your call and your role in this instance: you have been called to sow…someone else’s job will be to reap at just the right time.

We can all be fairly certain that if someone comes to faith on our watch, we are the harvesters, but there were likely many others who sowed into that person beforehand, amen? Sometimes we see that supernatural exception that Jesus observed where the sowing and reaping happen almost simultaneously, but often we must be patient in sowing, and aggressive in reaping when the time is right. Regardless of our role, what we know is that all saved people are Kingdom Farmers…we are all part of God’s plan to bring souls to Jesus.

IV. Basic Evangelism

As we come to the close of our passage, we see a report of what happened in the village. Beginning with vs. 39 we read: 39 Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

If you are paying attention, there are two basic elements we can observe about evangelism here in John 4: 1) people are drawn to a personal testimony. Because of who this woman was and the conviction of our testimony, many people were hooked. In other words, they were convinced something powerful had happened to change this woman’s life so dramatically, and that led them to believe that Jesus was responsible for that change. Then 2) those who were drawn to Jesus invited Him to stay, and they considered his WORD. They consulted Jesus directly, and they discovered for themselves who Jesus truly was…the Savior of the World! In fishing language, the testimony hooked the village, but it was personal interaction with the Word of Jesus and a personal encounter with Jesus Himself that brought them into the boat!

I think this is still true to this day. Our stories about how Jesus changed our lives are critical in attracting people to meet Jesus. Such is why we must be bold in sharing our testimony. However, every human soul must deal with Jesus directly and come to believe in what He has said, who He is, and what He has done. We can provide a context for that meeting, but ultimately people must invite Jesus to abide with them, and they must consider what He has said about Himself. We can’t do that work for another soul…that’s between them and Jesus.
So what is our role? We tell people about how Jesus changed our lives! We offer to make the introduction. We pass on the offer of Jesus to all hurting people: we tell them of the Living Water that satisfies the parched soul. And then we create a context where people can linger, where they consider what Jesus said, and they can meet Him personally. What comes after that is up to that person and Jesus.

But let me remind you once again: we have been saved for this very purpose. We have been saved to serve in God’s harvest work, so please take this work as a mandate for the rest of your time on planet earth. It is not optional, and there has never been a greater sense of urgency: people need Jesus, or they will not receive eternal life. Those who remain unforgiven…those who have no atonement for their sin against God, will get what they deserve…and that is something we would not wish upon our worst enemy. God would will that none would perish…but He has entrusted His harvest work to His church. Let us be faithful to do our part. Amen?

V. The Savior of the World

Let me conclude with one final thought. The Samaritan village perceived that Jesus is the Savior of the World. In the ancient world, that title was reserved for emperors and kings who made that claim about themselves. But the Samaritans rightly observed that there is only ONE who could possibly be the Savior of the World: and that is the Messiah of God. Jesus is not the Jewish Savior, He is not the Samaritan Savior…He is the Savior of the Cosmos…and He is alone in that category. Please do not be lulled into a passive assumption that all religions lead people to the same heaven, or that all religions have their own version of Jesus…that is a lie, it is not true, and any cursory study of world religions will make that exceptionally clear. Jesus is the ONLY SAVIOR. He is the only Son of God who came to save sinful people by satisfying God’s justice against sin. Such is why ALL people EVERYWHERE need to meet Jesus. You may think that’s unfair or unrealistic, but then you are editing God and assuming you could figure out a better plan. Trust me: you can’t, and you won’t. There is no other Savior, there is no other plan: Jesus is the Savior of the World. He accomplished our salvation on the cross, and then He showed His disciples how to love people in such a way that they would meet Him and be saved. That’s our job…that’s our call, and we need to step out of this church today with absolute conviction that we still have breath, and we still have a certain number of days left on this planet to accomplish our role in harvesting souls for heaven. I’m not saying that there are not other important things to do with your time; I am saying that there is NOTHING ELSE THAT WILL LAST for all eternity than that which God saved you to accomplish…and you were saved to serve as His harvest workers…period. Harvest workers at church, harvest workers in the marketplace, harvest workers at school, harvest workers on vacation, harvest workers at home, harvest workers at the bedside, harvest workers in the jails, harvest workers at the ball park, harvest workers in America, harvest workers unto the very ends of the earth. Let that sink in, right it down on your mirror in the bathroom…if you have been saved by the blood of Jesus, this is your call from this day forward: sow and reap, sow and reap, sow and reap until you breathe your last. Church, may we be found faithful in our service to the Savior in the days that remain. Let us pray.