

Virtual Worship Service for March 23, 2020

Text: John 4:31-43

Call to Worship: "Jesus Shall Reign Wher'er the Sun"

<https://youtu.be/XQ-VwVc5n5Y>

Song: "All Hail King Jesus"

<https://youtu.be/s2Ou-n490Gs>

Song: "The Days of Elijah" sung by US Marines

<https://youtu.be/0MtdyRDy4fU>

Song: "Come to Jesus"

[https://youtu.be/v37\\_uH\\_3MzU](https://youtu.be/v37_uH_3MzU)

John's Gospel focuses on individuals and several particular "signs," which the King James unfortunately translates in John almost universally as "miracles" (2:11, 23; 3:2; 6:2, 26; 7:31; 9:16; 11:47 12:37). Contrast John 20:30, which forms John's thesis for the gospel. The difference between the words is significant. The New Testament contains different words translated "miracle." Vincent in Word Studies in the New Testament observed, "The supernatural works of Christ and his apostles are denoted by six different words in the New Testament, exhibiting these works

under different aspects and from different points of view. These will be considered in detail as they occur. Generally, a miracle may be regarded:

1. As a portent or prodigy (τερα); as Acts 7:36, of the wonders shown by Moses in Egypt.
2. As a sign (σημειον), pointing to something beyond itself, a mark of the power or grace of the doer or of his connection with the supernatural world. So Matthew 12:38.
3. As an exhibition of God's glory (ενδοξον), Luke 13:17; glorious things.
4. As a strange thing (παραδοξον), Luke 5:26.
5. As a wonderful thing (θαυμασιον), Matthew 21:15.
6. As a power (δυναμις); so here [Matt. 11:20]: a mighty work.

What John stresses is the powerful signs, or indicators Jesus performed that pointed beyond the miracle itself, which is what a "sign" does. John 20:30-31 provides us with John's intention in writing: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." There the translators provided us with a literal translation, for John used the word for "signs." John wanted His readers (and us) to read his witness of the signs Jesus did with the result that we would believe in Jesus as God the Son, resulting in eternal life.

Some of you may be thinking, He's told us this before. Yes, I have, but I want to reemphasize it because the follow-up to the interview of the woman at the

well takes another tack entirely. The Samaritan men who came because of the woman's testimony said, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). The result was the same; the means were different. Some people come to faith because of some dramatic event. Others come to faith because of the testimony of another. Still others comes to Christ after hearing His words in His Word. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," Paul wrote in Romans 10:17. It is still true today.

Back to the story at hand, though. The woman left Jesus and her waterpot at the well and went back to the men of the town, saying, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is this not the Christ?" (John 4:30). The men then departed the town as a body ("went out") and trickled in ("came" is imperfect, noting progress over time) to Jesus' presence.

The Twelve were still focused on eating. Isn't it amazing how powerful hunger can be, how it can blind us to spiritual realities? They "prayed" ("were asking," another imperfect, here indicating a repeated process of asking) Jesus to eat. That transforms the scene: the woman and the men were in the process of approaching Jesus while the disciples were asking repeatedly for Jesus to eat. All this is going on at the same time.

Jesus' response to their repeated asking sounds cryptic. "I have meat to eat that ye know not of" (John 4:32). The natural response (and they were thinking naturally and physically) is Jesus has managed to get food from some other source: "Hath any man brought him ought to eat" (vs. 33). The original indicates an ongoing conversation and questioning because "said" is also imperfect: "were saying." Notice Jesus was kept out of this conversation: "to

one another.” Were they afraid to ask Jesus? Earlier, in verse 27, they were apparently afraid to ask the woman “What seekest thou?” or ask Jesus “Why talkest thou with her?” How often do we stumble in the dark because we are afraid of telling God what He already knows? Isn’t that kind of silly? Still, we do it. I love the old hymn “I Must Tell Jesus.” It is the cry of a humble heart that knows its own needs:

*I must tell Jesus all of my trials;  
I cannot bear these burdens alone;  
In my distress He kindly will help me;  
He ever loves and cares for His own. I must tell Jesus all of my trials;  
I cannot bear these burdens alone;  
In my distress He kindly will help me;  
He ever loves and cares for His own.*

Surely in our day, we need to be reminded to tell Jesus. Of course, Jesus heard the disciples and knew what was going on in their hearts. He explained: “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (vs. 34). This word “meat” is not the same word used in verse 32. There the word refers to the *act* of eating. We might talk of something as being “good eating.” Here the word refers to *what* is eaten. Jesus never doubted that the Father (“him that sent me”) had sent Him. His food, the thing that nourished Him (think of the forty days of temptation in the wilderness: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” [Luke 4:4; Deut. 8:3]) was to do the Father’s will and to complete the Father’s work (“his work”). “Finish” comes from τελειωω, a word that can mean anything from “make perfect, carry through completely, bring to an end, or bring to fulfillment. We will see the same word from Jesus on the cross when He declared, “It is finished” (John 19:30), using the perfect tense of the verb, which John also used in verse 28 of chapter 19 and our translators

render “accomplished”: “Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished.” The perfect tense always describes an event as having been permanently done.

Jesus was fully aware of His mission and His work as God’s Sin-Bearer, the perfect Sacrifice for sin, “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Liberal scholars and critics talk of Jesus’ Messianic awareness, wondering when He gained it, missing the whole point of the incident in the Temple when Jesus was twelve: “I must be about my Father’s business” (Luke 2:49). The “must” there is the same “must” John uses throughout his Gospel, the divine necessity that John mentioned early in this chapter when he told us, “And he must needs go through Samaria.”

Jesus redirected the disciples’ attention from their bellies and hunger to their eyes by contrasting the physical time of harvest, which was evidently “four months” (vs. 35) distant, making the time as December, and pointed their eyes to the horizon, where Samaritans in their robes, shining white in the sun, were advancing. “White already to harvest” refers to heads of grain that changed color as they ripened from golden to pale, almost white. The rabbis have many references to “white” fields of ripe wheat or barley. I do not think Jesus was speaking metaphorically in the sense that He was saying, “Open you eyes; there’s always a harvest.” I think He was speaking specifically and directly of the approaching Samaritan men as they worked their way to where He was.

His comment that “he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto eternal life” transforms the scene from the physical realm to the spiritual. They would not be mere physical harvesters. They would harvest spiritual fruit and rewards for obedience. Ryrie remarked, “The disciples would have the joy of

reaping souls, the seed having been sown by OT prophets and John the Baptist.” I think Jesus was also including the Samaritan woman in His commendation, because she had sown the seed by her testimony to the men, and now the disciples would reap the fruit of the seed she had planted when she told them, however briefly, about Jesus. Many times in spiritual reaping we are merely the laborers who happen to be on the scene when the grain ripens. We have an ever-human tendency to think, “Wow, I did a good job,” when we were only collecting the results of other people’s patient work. I can’t tell you how many times I have been privileged to baptize individuals who were put off the path to faith by a mother or father or friend. In Ohio I baptized 13 people in one day in a small church in a small town. How did that happen? It was harvest time. God has harvest times, and He has planting times. We are mere laborers. Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 3:6: “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” On a human level we tend to exalt one over another. Paul said he and Apollos were “but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man” (vs. 5). Sometimes our responsibility is to plant. Sometimes our responsibility is to reap. The time between planting and reaping lies in God’s hands—it may be short; it may be long. Don’t bruise fruit that isn’t ready to be picked, but don’t let it drop to the ground and rot. Take advantage of the opportunities.

Verse 38 seems to point to the heart of this particular event. Jesus had sent the disciples to Sychar to reap where they had not labored. They had planted no seed in Sychar. They had done nothing except purchase some food that would be Kosher (wet foods and water were not; dry foods and grain would be even if purchased from loathed Samaritans). The woman and Jesus had planted seed. Perhaps John the Baptist had. Perhaps some of the prophets had. We have no way of knowing this side of heaven. God knows, though. Jesus explained to the

disciples that by reaping, by doing their part, they were taking part, sharing their labors. Think of the situation in which we send out missionaries at home and abroad. We do not go with them. We support them with finances, sometimes (though not enough) with prayer. Yet in a very real sense, we share in their work. That is the blessing we get. One day will you and I meet people in heaven who were reached by missionaries we helped to support? I believe so. That is one of the reasons why we share in the Annie Armstrong Offering for North American Missions and the Lottie Moon Offering for International Missions. There are thousands of individuals out there, whom we do not know, who are there because of our gifts and prayers.

The result of the “must” (John 4:4) encounter with the woman at the well was that “many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did” (vs. 39). As we noted earlier in the chapter Jesus had not told her everything that she ever did. He merely shined the light of His presence on the darkest most shameful events in her heart. If you go to the doctor because you’re sick, wouldn’t you be disappointed if he treated only minor surface symptoms? Jesus always goes to the heart. Proverbs 4:23 reminds us: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life.” In Matthew 15, Jesus said, “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (vs. 19). David prayed in Psalm 51:10, “Create in me a clean heart.” The idea is we must become new creatures. We must have a heart transplant. That is salvation. “For” in John 4:39 translates a preposition that means “because of” or “as a result of.” Her word (“saying”) led them to initial faith. Do we realize the persuasive power of our testimonies, however inadequate? Hers was not profound, but it was powerful.

The Samaritans desired more time with Jesus: “they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days” (John 4:40).

“Besought” translates a word that means “asked.” “Tarry” is simply “remain,” and the same word is used for “abode.”

What was the response of the disciples? If you have ever been in a cross-cultural context (here Jews and Samaritans), you can get a feel for how they must have felt. They were strangers in a strange land. But their Master was here, and He was perfectly comfortable. It surely was a learning experience.

Note verse 41 says, “Many more believed because of his own word.” Jesus’ testimony as to who He is persuaded a lot more people during the two-day sojourn in Sychar. They went on to tell the woman, “Now we believe, not because of thy saying: For we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.” That’s quite a statement of faith. “Know” is a present tense verb that usually speaks of absolute knowledge (though some scholars would doubt John makes a distinction between the two different Greek words for know, *ginosko*, usually knowledge from experience, and *oida*, absolute or intuitive knowledge).

Literally they said, ““No more because of thy speaking do we believe; for we ourselves have heard and known that this is truly the Saviour of the world--the Christ”” (*Young’s Literal Translation*).

The disciples had no inkling the trip through Samaria would be so productive. They simple followed Jesus. They followed him through an area they probably did not want to go through, Samaria. Did they woman know her brief testimony (“Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I

did: is not this the Christ?") would totally transform not just her but her whole community?

God arranges divine appointments for us for His purposes, in His time, and for His glory. May we not be like the disciples, distracted by the needs of life, and miss the real blessings.

Song: "Fill My Cup, Lord"

<https://youtu.be/s4l2yY2r95g>