



John 4:27-41
So That You May Believe: John
“Food For Life”

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Just over two months ago we began a series going through one of the Biblical biographical accounts of the life of Jesus, and it is called “The Gospel According to John.” Near the end of his gospel, he writes that he has written this account “so that you [the reader] may believe.” He’s recording the life of Jesus for the purpose of encouraging and fostering belief in Jesus.

We haven’t really paused in this series to do a re-cap, so let me just remind us of some of the things that have happened. John begins with language that duplicates the opening words of Genesis, “In the beginning” connecting what he writes, and specifically connecting the life of Jesus, to the creation narrative at the beginning of the Bible (“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth/In the beginning was the word...”). So, Jesus is the word of God come to us in the flesh. John the Baptist plays a role in Jesus beginning his public ministry as John points Jesus out to others and encourages them to follow Jesus.

Jesus’ first miracle is turning water in to wine at a wedding party; He clears the temple courts in anger because of the unethical business practices going on. He meets with Nicodemus, one of the top Jewish religious leaders and in this portion of John we get the famous verse, **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).** At the end of John 3 we see John the Baptist again and his own followers who are concerned that Jesus is baptizing more people than John is, which was also picked up on in last week’s reading from chapter 4. But John isn’t concerned about this, and affirms that Jesus is the one they’re waiting for; John is not the Messiah. And he is not going to get dragged into a popularity contest with Jesus, and knows his role is actually to point people to Jesus.

Then last week we saw Jesus talking with a woman at a well outside her town in the region of Samaria, which I’ll re-cap in just a moment because today’s passage continues that event. So, several significant events have happened in these first few chapters that John highlights from Jesus’ life to help the reader

understand who Jesus really is, and to believe in him as the Messiah. And today we continue to find out more about Jesus and what it means to be his disciple...to be his follower...to put our trust in him.

Before we turn to our passage, there are a couple more things to review to help set the table for this passage. First, in 4:6 we're told that Jesus was tired from his journey that they'd been on that day, so he sat down by a well at about noon. And in verse 8 we're told that his disciples had gone into the local village to get some food for lunch. **So, Jesus is tired, and he's hungry.** And then this woman – who as a Samaritan woman was Jewish in her faith if not necessarily in her bloodlines – comes out to the well from town to get some water, and Jesus ends up in this conversation with her about spiritual matters, including Jesus saying that what he has to offer is “living water.” That peaks her curiosity, and the conversation continues. She mentions that she and others of the Jewish faith have been expecting the Messiah, and Jesus says in verse 26, “I am he.” He tells her that he's the Messiah. Let's pick up there with verse 27. We'll cover just a bit that I summarized in last week's message, but then continue on into new territory. **(John 4:27-41.)**

So, the disciples return, and as I commented on last week, we have this great miracle of the silent disciples, as they don't question why Jesus is talking to a Samaritan woman. It's at this point then that she leaves her water jar and goes to town. **She invites people to come and meet this guy who might be the Messiah and “told me everything I ever did.”** I want to focus on that for a moment. Last week we talked about how Jesus spoke to her in a way that kept her engaged in the conversation – he didn't embarrass her or make her feel small or insignificant, or like she had to be something other than herself in order for Jesus to talk with her. He doesn't shame her or shut her down. But, he does point out her relational history, which is a little on the promiscuous side, and doesn't live up to Biblical standards.

But here's the thing: she already knows all of that. She knows God's standards for sexual relationships. She's familiar with what Scripture says. Samaritans and Jews had common faith background even though they disagreed on some things. We see that commonality in the earlier part of their conversation in verses 21-26. Let's back up there for a moment. **Because of**

what Scripture says, and because of her familiarity with it, she knows her lifestyle choices have fallen short. She has that understanding of Biblical morality. And that's different than most of the people you and I talk to today. They don't see anything wrong with how they're living – whether that's in relationships, or attitudes toward money, wealth, and power, and so forth. Today, the idea that there are standards, and that the standards come to us from outside of ourselves, is mostly completely foreign to the world around us. Everyone just makes up their own standards. If we were to say to our neighbors, "God has standards about how we are to live." They'd be like, "God? There's no God, and therefore there are no standards other than what I decide and we collectively agree on as human beings."

That's why there's so much disagreement and chaos in the world around all kinds of things today: Everyone has their own standard and there isn't a lot of agreement. There's no acknowledged word from God that draws us together and gives us a standard by which we live by. But not for them. They've got a common understanding and a common framework within which they have this conversation. This is why Jesus makes the statement in verse 23: **"Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (John 4:23).** That's a picture of people being united in worship around their Heavenly Father, united by the Spirit and the truth of who God is and what he stands for. She understood that. But that common basis is totally missing today, and it makes it very difficult to have a conversation with someone about spiritual matters, or related topics. Everyone decides their own standards and defines their own spirituality and their own truth today. You can believe that north is south and south is north...that left is right and right is left...that up is down and down is up. And so, this lack of a common foundation and framework for understanding the world makes for a lot of conflict and divisiveness.

So, to tell someone, as Jesus essentially does here, "God has standards" is just completely foreign today, and we can't just call out someone's sin like Jesus did with her. She knew her life was not right long before Jesus said anything. And my guess is that when he pointed out her relational history, it was more of a statement of compassion than judgment, because he could see

on her face that she was already ashamed of her life. And Jesus has a transformative effect on her, as she goes into town to tell everyone about how Jesus knew all of this about her: “come see this guy who knows everything about me” and she invites them to come find out for themselves if he is in fact the Messiah.

Meanwhile, beginning in verse 31, while she’s off evangelizing the whole town and inviting them to come meet Jesus, the Disciples are like, “Hey Jesus: are you still hungry?” Remember, they’d gone to town to get some food. Then Jesus gives a spiritually-oriented answer when he says, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” And that is followed by a response of total spiritual dullness by the disciples, “Could someone have brought him food?”

Earlier in John 2, some Jewish leaders ask Jesus for a sign about his authority, and he says, “Destroy this temple, and I’ll rebuild it in three days.” Jesus is not speaking of the Temple building in Jerusalem, but his own body. It’s a resurrection prophecy. But they can’t think outside of the box at all, and the response is a spiritually dull one, “It’s taken 46 years to build this temple. How will you raise it in 3 days?” Or in John 3 when Jesus talks about being “born again,” and Nicodemus – this great spiritual leader of Israel – responds, “Huh? How can someone enter back into the womb to be born?” Even earlier here in John 4, the woman was spiritually dull in regards to Jesus’ comment about living water that he had to offer.

So here, once again, we encounter Jesus speaking on a different level than the people he’s engaged in conversation with, and they are pretty slow to come along. Jesus explains that his food – what fills him up, what satisfies him – is doing the will of his heavenly father and finishing his work. And then in the last few verses he’s letting them know that there’s a lot of work still to do. The fields are ripe for the harvest. In other words, there are people open to Jesus who just need to be led to him. In fact, I wonder if Jesus’ statement is at least partly inspired by the fact that this woman is off in town telling everyone about him, and before long she’ll be returning. Like when he says in verse 36, “Even now...” maybe he literally has her in mind as doing exactly what Jesus is saying.

But Jesus also clearly puts the task on the disciples: they are sent on a mission to harvest and reap, so that people would know Jesus. And Jesus has just been engaging in exactly this kind of work during his conversation with this woman, and this is the food that feeds him. This is not to say that Jesus didn't need physical food to eat, by the way. Probably after his speech to the disciples he then said something like, "So where's my Big Mac and Fries?"

The point he's making at that moment, however, is that the work he has done in his conversation with the woman, the work that she is now doing in town talking to all the townsfolks, and the work he's asking the disciples to do, is doing the work of God, and that's the work that matters. **That work is what satisfies him, and therefore it's what his disciples ought to focus on as well.** Too often, we're not that different than the woman and her relationships or the disciples and their focus on food: we, too, are focused on getting filled up on other stuff that the world says will satisfy, that the world says is of ultimate importance – like politics, the Kardashians, the NFL draft, and Elon Musk purchasing Twitter. Guess what: Elon paid the price for Twitter, but Jesus paid the price for your soul. And one matters a lot more than the other.

So, doing God's will, especially in light of what Jesus has done, is what we are to be hungering after. But too often we're not hungering for what God offers. We're not hungry for God's will. We're not hungry for God's way. We're not hungry for God's Kingdom. We're not hungry for more of Jesus, for deeper worship, for more of the Holy Spirit. We're not hungry for planting the seeds of faith, for watering them, for fertilizing them, for tending to them, and especially we're often not hungry for the harvest. But these are the things that are God's will, and they are what satisfy us. Jesus was so engrossed in his ministry to the woman that he forgot all about his hunger. That's how much his work mattered to him. And it's what we're invited into as well.

As if to prove his point, the woman then returns to the well. And lo and behold, she's got like the entire town following along. They can't get enough of Jesus, and ask him to stick around longer, so he does for a couple days.

Verse 40 tells us that right there many believed in him...and verse 42 tells us that after his two day stay in the town, many more believed as well.

Can you imagine being that woman, having led the better part of an entire village or small town to faith in Jesus? We're talking friends, family, neighbors...maybe people she's doesn't really know well at all or maybe even never met depending on the size of the town. Can you imagine being the one through whom God works to have that kind of impact? Maybe some of you don't have to imagine...maybe you've led a bunch of people to faith in Jesus.

That's what Jesus is talking about here when he says that his food is to do the work of his Father. This is food for life – this is spiritual sustenance. If we're not doing this kind of work, then we are missing an important ingredient in the Christian diet, and others are not hearing the good news of Jesus. Let's be feeding on this food for life that Jesus models for us and invites us to partake of. It'll take some patience, and a willingness to meet people where they are and start at their place of knowledge. And most people today don't have the head start that this woman did or that the 12 disciples did. But we can still meet them where they are and do the will of God...living out our faith. May your Bible study, your prayer life, your worship life, your relationships in the church...may all of it lead you not only to believe in Jesus, but to do the will of your heavenly father for His sake, His glory, and His Kingdom. Let's pray...Amen.