

“BRINGING IN THE SHEAVES”

John 4:27, 31-38

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

INTRODUCTION

I don't remember a great deal about chemistry; it was not my favorite subject. I do remember that certain elements have a greater density than others. In the natural world that is not a bad thing. However, in the supernatural—it is not good.

Jesus has already dealt with several people who were **spiritually “dense.”** In John 2:20 the *Jewish leaders* manifested amazing density when Jesus spoke of raising His body in three days and they thought of the literal temple instead. In 3:4, 9 *Nicodemus* confused natural birth with spiritual birth. In 4:11, 15 the *Samaritan woman* confused natural water with living water. Later in chapter 6 *the Jews* will confuse physical bread with Living Bread.

It is not unexpected that outsiders would be spiritually dense. But, should Jesus' own followers be spiritually dense? Here they confuse *natural food* with *spiritual food*, and they also confuse the *future harvest* with the *present harvest*.

THE HARVEST IS READY: LABORERS ARE IN SHORT SUPPLY.

I. THE AMAZEMENT OF THE DISCIPLES (27)

Notice the opening words: “And at this point.” These words show us “a glorious manifestation and illustration of God's providence for the furtherance of His kingdom” (Hendrickson). The disciples did not arrive sooner and interrupt Jesus' conversation with the woman; nor did they arrive later and miss the encounter of Jesus with the woman.

A. Their Concern—**For the humanistic laws of men, and not the souls of men [or WOMEN!]** Rabbi's were not to speak publicly with women—even with their own wives—due to the gossip that might ensue.

There are good reasons for some of these “rules” and “expectations.” But there are times when spiritual needs are even more important.

SOME OF THE REASON FOR THESE RULES WAS DUE TO MAN'S DEPRECIATION OF AND LOW REGARD FOR WOMEN.

e.g.: Much talk with women leads to Gehenna!

Women even discouraged from studying the law.

Women are inferior in everything.

The common prayer: “**Blessed art thou, O Lord, Who hast not made me a woman.**”

The person and gospel of Christ have done more to elevate the status of women than any other movement in history! This is not an overstatement!

B. Their (Unstated) Questions.

1. “What do you seek?”—i.e. did He need service from her?

2. “Why are you speaking with her?”—Did he wish to teach her?

If the questions had been asked, the answers would have been:

- 1) A drink of water. 2) To give her living water.

They had enough trust in Him and respect for Him that they never asked their questions.

II. THE CONFUSION OF THE DISCIPLES (31-34)

A. The Apparent Necessity of Material Food (31, 33)

“Meanwhile”—i.e. while the woman is recruiting souls for the master.

1. Persistence--“Were asking”. **After all, that was their sole purpose for going into town—to buy food.** They knew He was hungry, and they were concerned. “Rabbi”—“my master”, i.e. teacher. A term of great respect.

Compare His refusal here with the temptation narrative of stones to bread. Also, notice His later refusal to be made their king (6:15); and His refusal to do gratuitous signs (7:3ff).

2. Perplexity—“Were saying to one another” (v. 33). Before they were talking to Christ; now they talk with themselves. “No one brought Him anything to eat, did He?”

They did not understand why Christ was not hungry—or at least why He was not very anxious about satisfying His material hunger.

THEY REALLY DIDN'T GET WHAT WAS MOST IMPORTANT TO CHRIST. His most urgent task must not be postponed for even necessary food!

Note that they never anticipated that Christ would do a miracle to supply His own need; Christ never performed selfish miracles.

B. The Absolute Necessity of Spiritual Food (32, 34)

1. They have no conception of His Food (doesn't simply mean they are unaware of it; v. 32).
2. Jesus is Satisfied with Spiritual Food (34).

Note His emphasis: **MY food.**

- a. To Do the Father's Will—The Father “Who sent Him”—on His official work of ministry. Notice the emphasis in John of the Father sending the Son: 5:30; 6:38; 7:18; 8:50; 9:4; 10:37-38; 12:49-50; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4.

Cf. Jesus in the temple as a 12 year old—Lk.

2:19) and His reply to Satan in Lk. 4:4—“Man shall not live by bread alone.” *Doing the Divine will satisfies His hunger. Pleasing the Father (here winning lost souls!) is His highest satisfaction!*

This is His **Mission Statement**, alone with the next words:

- b. To Finish His Work. (To bring to a true end, to perfect.) The term is often used in John. **To accomplish its predetermined goal.**

Note in 17:4 Christ said that He finished the work given Him by the Father. In 19:30 Christ uses a related verb when He states concerning His Ministry—“**IT IS FINISHED.**”

III. THE BLINDNESS OF THE DISCIPLES (35-38)

A. The READINESS of the Harvest (35)

It is so amazing that the Samaritan woman recognized that the harvest was ready, and that she went into her town as an “evangelist.” **The disciples, who were being trained as evangelists, didn’t get it!**

1. The Saying concerning the harvest

Is this a parable or an actual time indicator based upon comments by the disciples? Commentators don’t agree.

Factors favoring a proverb: “Say ye not”—cf. Mt. 16:2-3; metrical form of the saying; no hurry to harvest—“Rome wasn’t built in a day.”; evidence of a 6 two month divisions of the calendar year—with four months between the end of sowing and the beginning of harvest (Morris), and similar evidence in the Gezer Calendar.

Factors favoring actual comments by disciples on the time of year:

The word “yet” doesn’t fit the proverb, but an actual statement;
The form of the statement isn’t like a usual proverb—which would better be worded, “From seedtime to harvest is four months; no proverb like this has ever be discovered; this time period well fits the chronology of Christ’s life—Late December or early January.
The usual time between seedtime and harvest is 6 months.

Could be a proverb, but was likely stated here by the disciples due to the actual time period remaining till harvest.

THERE WAS NO HURRY TO REAP; GROWTH IS SLOW, DON’T RUSH IT.

2. Jesus’ Disagreement concerning the harvest—“**The fields are already white.**”

a. Do you have eyes to see?—“Lift up your eyes.”

b. Do you have an evangelistic focus?—“Look on the fields”

“They are white for harvest.”

Now most crops do not turn white at harvest time—especially “golden wheat.” So what could Jesus be referring to?

Probably the large delegation of Samaritans with their white robes, streaming from the town to Jesus and His disciples. Jesus is speaking of the heavenly harvest.

The disciples’ assessment of Samaria would likely be: *NEEDY BUT NOT READY.* Is our assessment any better?

HOW BLIND AND LAZY WE ARE TO THE HARVEST AROUND US!

There is not necessarily a long interval between sowing and harvest!

Cf. Matthew 9:37-38—**Plentiful harvest; few laborers; prayer needed.**

Then, he appoints them in 10:1.

B. The REWARD of the Harvest (36) [“Already” goes with v. 36, not 35.]

1. Reapers are *already* receiving wages—SOULS (cf. Jesus and the Woman!)

2. Fruit is gathered unto **ETERNAL LIFE!** Results for eternity.

Eternal Life is the granary into which the fruit is gathered.

Jesus is likely thinking primarily of the situation at hand—not so much of other actual reapers elsewhere. They are currently reaping souls to eternal life! **The harvest won't wait; the reapers need to get busy!**

C. The REJOICING of the Harvest (36b)

Note that both the sower and the reaper rejoice together.

There is no competition! They are co-workers. One completes the work of the other. Note the words: “In order that.” This is God’s divine purpose!

Compare Psalm 126:5-6.

Is Christ the “Sower” or the “Reaper” here; commentators disagree again. Why not both? Also includes other “sowers” before His time, and during His time.

D. THE REAPING of the Harvest (37-38)

1. “One Sows, another Reaps.” (37)

This saying is true—contrary to the one in v. 35 (supports the proverb view).

“One sows; another reaps.” Here the general truth could apply to the disciples as reapers over that which they have not sown. It could also apply to past reaping of the disciples in places like John 4:2 etc.

2. You Reap the Labors of Others (38)

The others could be Christ and the Woman.

The others could also be John the Baptist, his followers (who had worked in this very area prior to Jesus coming there and had likely prepared the way for Jesus and His disciples), and the other OT prophets.

[Morris argues that the disciples don't reap here. But, we can't simply argue from silence; Jesus seems to say that they do!]

NOTICE THE LAYERS OF REAPERS HERE:

1) The woman—the Samaritans

2) John the Baptist and the Prophets—Jesus' and disciples' work

3) Jesus' mission--the apostolic gospel to the world (See Acts 8—in Samaria!)

4) Jesus and the apostolic generation—the harvest in the days of John the author of this book.

CONCLUSION

Why should we be amazed that Jesus would witness to a woman, or a person of another race, or a person of a different economic status, or a person from another country? **Shouldn't we?**

Why should we be so caught up with physical food, that we can't feed on the true spiritual food of **doing the will of God and fully accomplishing His work?**

Why should we be so blind to the fact that the Harvest is **ready**, The harvest has its **reward** unto eternal life, there is great **rejoicing** among the reapers, and the **reapers** work together to do the job? **WHAT DO YOU SAY THAT WE GET TO WORK?!!**