

April 17, 2011

# *Living Out The Gospel In Real Life*

## *Lift Up Your Eyes*

John 4:27 – 38

This week we are still in Sychar, at Jacobs well with Jesus and this woman of Samaria with whom we have been for the last two weeks. We've seen in the previous verses a remarkable picture of the way in which Jesus meets broken sinful people, exposes their need, points out the sin that separates them from God, and leads them in worship. He grants them revelation of who He is which causes them to give Him ultimate value and invest everything in Him. When Jesus said to her, "*I who speak to you am He.*" John 4:26 revelation dawned on her. Here was the living water that would satisfy her insatiable thirst. Here was the reality of all that life was about sitting beside a well in her home town. At this point, the woman drops her water bucket and runs into the city and immediately begins telling people about this man. I believe she got it. Jesus had led her from the point of acknowledging her need, to confession of her sin, and into worship and I think she suddenly saw who He really was. That inspired awe, and joy that led to a change in behavior that ultimately led to her investing everything in this One, and she immediately had to tell somebody. **The overflow of authentic worship will always result in evangelism.**

Evangelism is a scary word to some and to others it is simply distasteful. To some it conjures up scenes of tongue-tied awkwardness, thrusting tracts into the hands of strangers while mumbling a quick, 'Have a nice day and God bless you'. To others it evokes nightmares of loudmouth street preachers on the corner of the block with a bull horn telling people to 'Repent or perish!' But whether you are just afraid of evangelism or you hate it; the fact remains that it is a central part of this thing we call Christianity. In fact, if you are a Christian you are commanded to do it. There are those who say, 'Christianity has some good points and great moral teachings and even if I don't agree with it, that would be fine – except for this one thing – evangelism. Everything else is okay, but there's just this evangelism thing that spoils it – because you Christians are all the time trying to get people to convert. That's bigoted, narrowminded and insensitive. Everything else is fine -it's just this one thing – get rid of that and everything's good.'

But as Pastor Tim Keller notes: '**To change that one thing is to change everything.** It is like saying, I like ice cream, I love ice cream, I like everything about ice cream – except for the fact that it's frozen.' But if you take away the frozenness, what do you have? You have something – it's pudding or desert, it's still sweet, still tastes okay – you've got something – but it's not ice cream. If you take away evangelism, you have something, but it isn't Christianity. The word evangelism is problematic for those who are looking in on Christianity and equally problematic for many of those participating in Christianity. But here in this passage Jesus goes right after both groups. This is all about evangelism, or harvesting as Jesus calls it here. You can't understand the Christian faith without it – you can't enter the Christian faith without it. A Christian faith that doesn't have evangelism or harvesting at the center is something – but it's not Christianity.

Here in this passage we will see mainly two things: **The gospel generates evangelism and evangelism is food for our souls.** Last week we saw that the overflow of authentic worship always results in missions. That is another way of saying the gospel generates evangelism. Missions is evangelism – evangelism is missions – and **hearts that have been stunted by sin and then stunned by grace open full flower with the overflow of joy in the good news of salvation.** The word evangelism comes from the Greek word *euaggelion* (*yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on*) which means 'Good News'. What Jesus was doing at the well was good-newsing.

What did He do? How did evangelize? First of all **He revealed her need.** She was coming to the well because she needed water – but she didn't recognize her most essential need. There's a story of a young salesman who was disappointed about losing a big sale, and as he talked with his sales manager he lamented, "I guess it just proves you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink." The manager replied, "Son, take my advice: your job is not to make him drink. Your job is to show him he's thirsty." What Jesus did was expose this woman's soul thirst that could only be quenched by putting her bucket down another well – the well of living water. Secondly Jesus exposed her sin that kept her coming to the same old well with the same old results. And we see the woman accepts the assessment of her life because she drops her bucket and runs off to tell people, '**Come see a man that told me all the things I have done**' and she thinks that's wonderful.

But what did Jesus tell her? **He exposed her sin.** He he exposed the fact that she had had multiple sexual partners and instead of being offended and put off by that she has embraced it. You cannot come to Christ without first realizing your need and then understanding the sin that separates you from tasting living water. And in confessing her need and her sin she is able then to embrace the Savior. Because then **Jesus disclosed the provision – Himself.** He confronts her with the reality that He is the provision for her need and the way to the Father. It's not the temple in Jerusalem, or the temple on Mt. Gerazim, not any other way but through Him. Jesus uses an expression that would have resonated with this woman who knew something of the Jewish scriptures. When she says, *"I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us."* Jesus said to her, *"I who speak to you am He."* John 4:25-26 In the Greek you don't see the pronoun **He**. It is implied, not written. Essentially Jesus said '**I Am**'. She was saying, 'I want this Christ who is coming' and Jesus says, '**I Am**'.

This particular expression '**I Am**' is always reserved in Scripture exclusively by God to reveal His essence. As God revealed Himself to Moses from the burning bush, and Moses asked Him what He should say to his brothers in captivity when they asked him who sent him, God said, *"Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel 'I AM has sent me to you.'"* Exodus 3:14 Jesus was telling her that standing before her was the very Lord and Redeemer she was longing for. And this truth explodes on her heart and soul, she has dipped her bucket in the well of living water and she is forever changed.

*At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?"* John 4:27 No doubt the Lord had sent the disciples away for this very reason. You see, for a Jewish man to speak to a woman, especially one with the uncertain reputation that this woman had, was not only unthinkable – it was scandalous. And had these guys been there for entire encounter they would have mucked it up. But as it was, the work was done by the time they got back. And something about the way in which the woman was responding to Jesus and possibly by the very words they may have heard as they returned, '**I who speak to you am He**' prevented them from speaking their minds. They wanted to say something, but they didn't dare say it.

It was at this point that the woman drops everything to go good-newsing: *So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men, "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?"* John 4:28 -29 She leaves her bucket at the well because she is no longer thirsty – she now had a spring of living water welling up in her soul that satisfied every longing, that quenched every soul thirst she had known. And she begins to do evangelism – good-newsing. The gospel, the good news implies that there is something you do not know – it is **news**. If we are giving news to someone, it means that they have an ignorance about whatever reality we are expressing. Otherwise it is not news; it is history. It has been said that knowledge is power and news is information that gives someone power. For example, if I have news that the orange crop in Florida was frozen out yesterday and there will be no oranges from Florida this year, that news empowers me to go ahead and buy up all the oranges in circulation today so that I can corner the market on oranges this year. News is power. If I am ignorant of this news – I lose.

But the gospel is not just news – **it is good news!** That is this is news that brings joy, brings power, brings satisfaction, brings relief and dissipates anxiety. 'You got an A on your chemistry final' – that's not just news, that's good news! 'The cancer is in remission' – that's not just news, its good news! 'Mr. Sandberg, what you thought was a blown transmission was actually just a bad shifter cable' – that's not just news, that's good news! Anyone who has any good news at all is compelled to share it with others. That is the nature of good news. **The gospel generates good-newsing – the gospel generates evangelism.** And so the woman drops her bucket and runs into the city and starts telling people two things: 'Come, see a man who can tell you all about yourself – He told me everything!' And secondly. 'He is the answer to all your questions – He's the One who can make sense out your life – He's the Christ – He's the Savior.' The gospel is the spontaneous outflow of the springs of living water. C. H. Spurgeon once wrote: ***The saving of souls, if a man has once gained love to perishing sinners and his blessed Master, will be... an all-absorbing passion to him. It will so carry him away, that he will almost forget himself in the saving of others...*** C.H. Spurgeon

This woman, whom everyone probably knew as the loose woman of the town and probably went out of their way to avoid or shun, this woman who probably bore the scorn of the proud and highminded people of that village, this woman who no doubt avoided them as well, was suddenly transformed by the gospel. She didn't care what anyone thought – she didn't care that her life was a public shame – she didn't care that her multiple husbands and live-in boyfriends were the subject of much salacious gossip – she had good news! When we embrace the good news of the gospel it changes and transforms our lives – utterly. And it then flows out of us like springs of living water to change and transform others.

Look what happened. John says that in response to the woman's testimony: *They went out of the city, and were coming to Him.* John 4:30 The change that had come over this woman whom they all thought they knew was so profound, so electric, so transforming, that these men said to themselves: 'We gotta go see this guy.' So here is this crowd, surging out of town, coming to the well to see for themselves. Actually, the tense of the verb indicates that there was a continual coming. That is, there was probably a continual stream of people who were coming out to see Jesus. As this woman went around town telling her story, the people who heard her were compelled to go see what was going on.

And then John contrasts the woman with the disciples. *Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat."* John 4:31 Notice the difference: this woman who had only just met Christ, goes into the village and holds an evangelistic meeting and people come streaming to meet Jesus. The disciples who had known Christ for a much longer time, go into the city and return with bread. Give your head a shake! It is passages like this that convince me that the Bible must be a true and accurate account because no one who was trying to make up a story in order to create a following would ever include details like this. If you are trying to convince people to believe in Christ, you are going to leave out stuff that make His followers look like clowns! But in the pages of Scripture, His disciples are always looking slow of heart and sometimes foolish and just not getting it.

This is all too often the story in the Christian church. We see people who have been professing Christians for years, and have never spoken to anyone about the gospel; and then we see this new believer who just found Christ telling everyone he knows about Him. Several years ago, Dr. James Stewart, professor of New Testament at the University of Edinburgh, was asked what he thought was the greatest threat to the modern church. The questioner wanted to know whether it was communism, atheism, or materialism. He said, ***"It is not communism, atheism, or materialism; the greatest threat to the church is Christians trying to sneak into heaven incognito without ever sharing their faith."*** Do you believe that what you believe is really true? Do you believe that without Christ men and women are doomed to an eternity in hell? Do you believe that the gospel is the good news that Christ has absorbed the wrath of God against sinful man and offers the free gift of life eternal with the Father in heaven?

The good news not only generates evangelism – as Christians we need to be good-newsing to be healthy. **Evangelism is food for the soul.** *But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples were saying to one another, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?"* John 4:32-33 They said, 'Here, have some food' and Jesus said, 'No thanks, I already ate.' And they looked at each other and said, 'Where did He get food – did we just make an unnecessary trip?' This is probably the reason Jesus got them out of the way in the first place. And then He told them: *Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."* John 4:34 They were talking about food – and Jesus was talking about **food!** There is a food that satisfies and strengthens that doesn't come from earth, and is enjoyed only by those who do good-newsing.

I believe a majority of Christians, particularly in the United States, are undernourished. Many of you in here are likewise undernourished. But that's not the worst part. The worst part about this undernourished Christianity is that most Christians don't know they are starving. Of course it's not that you don't eat enough Whoppers or Big Macs, and it isn't that you aren't feeding on the word of God on a regular basis. The reason many of you are undernourished is because you are failing to obey the elemental command of Christ to those who belong to Him. In short, you are not regularly engaged in good-newsing, in evangelism, and as a result your Christian life is anemic and in danger of starvation. I am convinced that many of the issues we struggle with in our Christian lives, issues of character and sins of the flesh and our thought life, would cease to be an issue if we simply feasted on the food that comes from good-newsing. For one thing, when we are engaged in the gospel, we simply don't have time for self-indulgence, or pity parties. We don't have time to spare for being offended or hurt by others. We refuse to waste time in trivial pursuits that sap our appetite for the things of God. Instead we are altogether engaged in the great work of God for the triumph of the gospel in the world.

***If you are yourself saved, the work is but half done until you are employed to bring others to Christ. You are as yet but half formed in the image of your Lord. You have not attained to the full development of the Christ-life in you unless you have commenced in some feeble way to tell others of the grace of God; and I trust that you will find no rest to the sole of your foot till you have been the means of leading many to that blessed Saviour who is your confidence and your hope.*** C. H. Spurgeon

And in that work is heavenly food for our souls. 'My food', Jesus said, 'is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work'. And what is the work in which the Father is engaged – then, as well as now? It is the work of redeeming fallen humanity. And when we are engaged in His work we find our thirst for the things of this life is gone, our appetite for the world altogether overridden by an appetite for the things of God. You see, Jesus left us with only three things to do in this life – love God supremely, and love our neighbor as ourselves. And in the outflow of our love of God and love for our neighbor comes the Great Commission: **Go and make disciples**. We don't have another mission. We don't have another job. Peter tells us what we should be about: *But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light* 1 Peter 2:9

**Our lives should be all about this one consuming passion – to go and tell people**, 'Come, see a man who has told me all I have done – is this not the Christ?' And at this point, Jesus gives the disciples a living illustration of what He is talking about: *"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.* John 4:35 Now this was probably about December in Samaria, and the crops had been planted in November. By this time the grain was growing and green. But it was not ready for harvest, in fact it wouldn't be harvested for four more months until about mid April. But Jesus said, "Well, there's four months till harvest, guys. But don't say there's four months to harvest." Why? Look at the rest of the verse: *'...lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest'* And the disciples looked around and all they saw was green grain waving in the breeze. In fact, in Palestine at that time there were no crops that turned white at harvest time.

So what did the disciples see? What was the white Jesus was talking about? It could only be the streaming multitudes of people from the village who had heard the woman and were coming to see Jesus for themselves. What they saw when they lifted up their eyes were the white robes that the Samaritans typically wore coming thru the green fields of grain. 'Here comes a crop of Samaritans ripe for the harvest men – see the white fields? – its time to get out there and go to work.' He had sown the seed in the Samaritan woman and she had in turn sown the gospel seed in the village, and now it was time to harvest the crop.

Jesus continues to teach: *"Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.'* John 4:36-37 Jesus is saying that this is the work to which I have called you. There is great need of sowers and reapers, but especially reapers. In Luke 10, Jesus tells his disciples: *The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest* Luke 10:2 Jesus didn't call the disciples to follow Him so that they could be better people, or great teachers, or merely miracle workers. Jesus called His disciples and He calls us today to be reapers in the harvest of God. The fields are white – the harvest is plentiful – get out there and reap.

Not only that, but there is great profit in working in the harvest: *he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal*. What are the wages of reaping? What does it mean to gather fruit for life eternal? Some of the wages of reaping is what the Lord told the disciples - 'I have food to eat that you do not know about'. His sowing of the seed in the woman bore fruit that was food to Him. Part of the wages of being a reaper is that we are no longer undernourished and famished – we have food to eat. Good-newsing feeds our soul in a way that mere food could never do. We also have the very real reward of the ultimate satisfaction in engaging in the purpose of God in the world. We were built not to loaf, but to work, and good honest work fills our souls with a sense of satisfaction and purpose. But the real work to which we are called is the work of reaping, and there is no greater sense of fulfillment or satisfaction or purpose than when we are engaged in the great work of the harvest. That is to gather fruit, the souls of men, for life eternal. Proverbs 11:30 says: *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who is wise wins souls*. Proverbs 11:30

And finally Jesus said, *"I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."* John 4:38 Here Jesus points out that salvation is the result of the sovereign work of God. He tells the disciples that they are the beneficiaries of the work of God even before they get to the fields. He orchestrates the sowing – and He orchestrates the reaping. We heard last week the story of Robert J. Thomas who went to Korea in 1866 to bring Chinese Bibles to the Korean people and was clubbed and stabbed to death on the banks of the Taedong River as he was thrusting Bibles into the hands of his killers. And we learned that nearly 30 years later Sam Moffit came to preach the gospel in Korea. And in one of his very first classes for new converts, a Korean man came up to him holding a Chinese Bible. His father had picked it up on a very bloody beach 30 years earlier.

And we also heard the story of another man who had been one of the ones who clubbed and stabbed Robert Thomas to death. Haunted by the memory of the man he had killed, convinced by Thomas' face that seemed to radiate light, (he described it as 'beaming'), convinced that he had killed an innocent man, this guy took one of the Bibles from that massacre and wallpapered his house with its pages. People came from all over to read his walls and eventually a church grew up there and one of this man's nephews became a pastor. Today nearly one-third of South Korea's population is Christian and this small nation is second only to the U.S. in the number of missionaries sent to other people groups. *"I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."*

If you are here this morning and you've never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, I want to invite you to believe Him, the source of living water, the Savior of the world, of Jews and Gentiles and Samaritans and Washingtonians. Come to Christ and let down your bucket in this well, believe in Him, rest your life on Him, trust Him and start making your food the doing of the will of God and let your life begin glorifying God in good-newsing.

For those of you who have trusted Christ, let me ask you a question. If Jesus saw the fields white for harvest when He walked on the earth – how much whiter are they today? Is it possible that the reason you struggle so in your Christian life is because you are weak from hunger – you are missing out on the food that can only come through proclaiming the excellencies of the One who saved you? We are beginning on Monday a week of prayer for the lost to come to Christ. And we must pray. But I want to challenge you to speak this week as well. Let the Father lead you to a certain well in a certain city to meet a certain person to share the good news of the gospel.

*Our good and gracious God,*

*Thank you for the stunning, staggering good news of the gospel. That on the cross Christ was cast off that we might be invited in, stripped that we might be clothed, wounded that we might be healed, made thirsty that we might have rivers of living water, endured the shame that we might inherit glory, surrendered to hell's worst that we might have heaven's best. You spared not Your only Son that You might spare us. How we rejoice in this glorious good news. Let it so fill our hearts and minds that the overflow becomes a well of life springing up to eternal life to the thirsty souls around us. Forgive us Lord, for drinking our fill and letting others thirst. Cause us to lift up our eyes to the fields white for harvest all around us and grant that we would so delight in You through Jesus Christ that the joy of the gospel would spill out of us in ever-increasing rivers of living water to all people we pray in the precious, life-giving name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*