

Food You Know Nothing About

John 4:27-42

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.¹

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.²

¹ I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food. (Job 23:12 ESV); the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. (Psa 104:13 ESV); How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psa 119:103 ESV)

³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.'³

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." (Joh 4:27-42 ESV)

² "Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. (Amo 9:13 ESV)

³ if my step has turned aside from the way and my heart has gone after my eyes, and if any spot has stuck to my hands,

⁸ then let me sow, and another eat, (Job 31:7-8 ESV); You shall sow, but not reap; (Mic 6:15 ESV); Aristophanes, *Equites* 392: "You reap an alien harvest."³

The Sower and Reaper

The book of Amos is eight and a half chapters of judgment followed by one brief glimpse of restoration and hope. It is hope for Israel, but not only for Israel, but for “all the nations who are called by my name” (Amos 9:12). Its hope extends to the world. It predicts a time when the fallen tent of David will be repaired and raised up from the ruins (9:11). Tents are temporary structures, and so the image of David’s kingdom as a temporary structure foreshadows a day when his kingdom will become permanent with a king that will reign eternally.

The prophecy then says, “The days are coming ... when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seeds; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it” (9:13). In that day God will restore the fortunes of “my people Israel” (9:14). The picture is then one of rebuilding ruined cities, planting of vineyards, making of gardens, eating their fruit, and permanently being established in this kingdom that will never fade, because its king no longer dwells in temples made by human hands.

It is the plowman overtaking the reaper that interests me this morning. This is farming imagery. It tells us of the planting of crops and the reaping of their harvest. As any farmer will tell you, planting comes early in the year. Then comes much waiting (and a lot of praying that the weather will

cooperate). Only at harvest time, when the crop is fully formed, can the reaping commence. Today, the same farmer sows and reaps his whole field. We see farmers sitting atop luxury tractors and combines that cost more than our homes and think that's a pretty easy job. But back then it was extremely hard labor. Often, one person would sow and another would reap. One would plow the field and drop the seeds, then a group would come with sickles and baskets to gather in the full grown crop. I think of Ruth, for example, who went out with many others at the harvest.

Sowing and reaping becomes a metaphor in the Bible. Sometimes it is viewed from a perspective of **judgment in relation to the law**. **Micah 6:15-16** says, "You shall sow, but not reap; you shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; you shall tread grapes, but not drink wine. For you have kept the statutes of Omri, and all the works of the house of Ahab; and you have walked in their counsels, that I may make you a desolation, and your inhabitants a hissing; so you shall bear the scorn of my people." And Job in his misery said, "If my step has turned aside from the way and my heart has gone after my eyes, and if any spot has stuck to my hands, then let me sow, and another eat" (**Job 31:7-8**).

Sometimes it is used a metaphor **for church planting**. The Apostle Paul asks, "**Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the**

milk” (1 Cor 9:7)? Or he says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1Co 3:6).

And sometimes Scripture takes this metaphor and applies it to **redemptive history**. You can view biblical history from the perspective of farming. Seeds were sown throughout the OT by Moses and the Prophets. But many of these sowers never got to reap the harvest, except for a harvest of scorn and anger, as they were persecuted and killed for the message. But their messages went out anyway, into fields near and far. They prophesied to Bethel and Babylon, Nazareth and Nineveh, Jew and Gentile. All of this is important background information for our passage today.

The Disciples Return

John 4:27-42 is the final chapter on our three week look at the story of Jesus talking to the woman at the well. For the most part, the woman now moves off center stage and Jesus’ disciples come on it. “**Just then his disciples came back**” (John 4:27). You may recall the parenthetical note back in **vs. 8**, “**For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.**” Now they are returning to their master with that food in hand.

When they see him, he is standing next to a Samaritan woman, and he is talking to her. To give you just one more feel for how this was sometimes viewed, consider the words of two early Rabbis. **Rabbi Jose ben Joḥanan** of Jerusalem said, “**Talk not much with the wife [He said it concerning his own**

wife; much more concerning the wife of his associate. Hence the Wise have said: So long as a man talks much with the wife he causes evil to himself, and desists from words of Torah, and his end is that he inherits Gehenna]” (*Pirke Aboth* 1:5). If that is how they felt about their own wives, how would they feel about women on the street, much less outcast, sinful, Samaritan women! **Rabbi Nathan** tells you, “One does not speak with a woman on the street, not even his own wife; and certainly not with another woman, on account of gossip.”⁴

As products of their time, the disciples may have shared some of these sentiments. Given this possible view, take note that **John 4:27** continues, “They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, ‘What do you seek?’ or, ‘Why are you talking with her?’” Why they didn’t say anything to Jesus, we don’t know. They were in public, and perhaps they didn’t want to embarrass Jesus. He was their Rabbi after all, their master, and they all considered him to be the Messiah. So they kept their mouths shut; a wise move that we all ought to heed when our Lord says things in Scripture or does things in our lives that cause us to seriously question or wonder “**What is he doing?**” He is God, and he knows precisely what he is doing. He is about to tell them, though they will, like everyone else in this book thus far, be oblivious to his teaching.

⁴ Cited in Ernst Haenchen, Robert Walter Funk and Ulrich Busse, *John : A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 224.

At this point, the woman leaves her water jar and goes away into the town (John 4:28). We could speculate all day as to why she left at that moment, but that would serve no useful purpose. We could ask questions about why she left her water jar, but what would be the point? Instead, let us stick with John's point, for he tells us what she goes to do. "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" (John 4:29). She tells anyone who will hear her.

What is remarkable is that many *do* hear her, and they heed what she said. "They went out of the town and were coming to him" (John 4:30). The woman has become an evangelist. She is telling others about a man who told her everything she ever did. This is obviously **hyperbole** (exaggeration), but it serves a purpose. Jesus did know the darkest part of her life, perhaps a part that she did not tell anyone else, that she was living with yet another man, only this one was not her husband. How he could have known this is beyond her. It can only be explained by a person that reads minds or knows hearts.

In light of her expectation that the **Taheb** (their version of Messiah) was coming, that she has confessed him is a prophet (Samaritans only knew one prophet after Moses: Messiah), and that he knows her darkest secrets though he never met her before, she begins to tell others about this mysterious man, using the term Messiah to grab their attention. By the end of the story (vs. 42), the confession of those who listened to her is

that he is, “**the Savior of the world.**” This woman is doing something that neither the Jews nor Nicodemus have done. She is telling others about Christ, in a good way. Only the disciples have shown this kind of response towards Jesus (**John 1:41**, “We have found the Messiah”). I’ll come back to this later.

Are You Hungry?

Now we pick up the discussion with the disciples. Seeing that it is high noon and very hot, the disciples were urging him, saying, “**Rabbi, eat**” (**John 1:31**). Just as he did moments earlier with the woman and the water, the Lord seizes the opportunity to teach his disciples a lesson. He is their *teacher*, after all.

He said to them, “**I have food to eat that you do not know about**” (**John 1:32**). Honestly, if you are reading this story for the first time, after having just read the account of Jesus telling the woman about water that he has, you know what the disciples are going to say. “**Has anyone brought him something to eat?**” (**vs. 33**). It is predictable, and I think it’s pretty funny. No one in this book has any idea what Jesus ever talks about. It makes me wonder what we would be thinking if he were standing here today giving us some lesson. We think we’re so smart. He would know just how to speak to us in a way that we wouldn’t be able to forget.

Jesus changes the subject, just as he did with the woman, from the physical to the spiritual. Jesus was the master at realizing that the physical creation is the doorway into the unseen spiritual reality. Part of its purpose is to teach us about unseen truths by way of analogy. Why, in this book alone, in only what we have seen thus far, baptism is a picture of spiritual washing; weddings are a picture of Christ's love for the church; wine is a picture of the giving way of the law; the temple is a picture of Jesus; physical birth is a picture of spiritual birth; water is a picture of eternal life; and now we have food.

Jesus tells them about his food, but like all the rest, they are dense and can't grasp it. "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 1:34). Let us stop here and think about this. Later in this book Jesus will start talking about food from heaven. He talks about himself, "My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink" (John 6:55). He talks about the Holy Spirit, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you" (John 6:27; see John 6:63; 7:39; 14:26 etc). Right now, he is talking about different spiritual food. He is talking about "doing the will" of the Father and "accomplishing his work."

What does this mean? Again, later in this book, Jesus will tell us about how the Father sent him to perform a work (John 5:23, 36; 6:29; etc). Jesus is referring to a couple of related

things. First, Jesus was sent by the Father to the earth as a man on a mission. This sending was planned long ago in ages past before God even created Adam and Eve (**Rev 13:8**). Later he will refer to himself in these contexts as the “son of Man” or as the Hebrew translations of the Greek put it, “*ben adam*” (Son of Adam). Jesus is the second Adam. The work of this second Adam is to obey the Father in all things, so that he might obey where Adam failed. He was sent here so that might offer himself as the only True Food that can satisfy us. But his food is the Work of God.

Where does this idea come from? I think that question is worth asking. Jesus loved the **Scripture** and almost everything he says is related to it somehow. Job says, “**I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food**” (**Job 23:12**). So he compares obedience to food. The Psalm does the same thing, “**How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!**” (**Ps 119:103**; cf. **Ps 19:10**). Scripture obviously compares obedience to food.

Probably the most well known of these passages is **Deuteronomy 8:3**, “**Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.**” This verse is quoted directly by Jesus in the temptation with the devil (**Matt 4:4**; **Luke 4:4**). He seems to echo it here. The work of God was completed at creation, and yet God continues working to this day. The work of Christ is to do the will

of the Father, and the will of the Father is obedience in all things.

Now, these Scriptures here are talking in general terms about obedience to God's word, hence, obedience to God's will. God's revealed word, his law, is his revealed will to humanity. If you want to do God's work, then obey God's word. Do what he says to do. If you do, then it will be like honey and other savory food.

But Jesus gets more specific. And it is crucial to keep our focus here, and not on ourselves. Right now, he doesn't have in mind all the law, but one specific aspect of it. He refers to his coming to bring people into the kingdom by preaching the gospel to them. This is *his* work; this is what *he* came to do. In a few verses we see that he expands this work to his disciples; but just here you must see that first and foremost, this is the work of Christ. This is HIS work.

So Jesus continues, “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 the wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps’” (John 4:35-37). Now you can see why I began the sermon as I did. You see, he connects the “harvest” to “doing the will” of the Father. What is this harvest he is referring to?

Jesus is giving them an answer to their unasked question (Jesus knows what they were thinking). “What in the world are you doing talking to this woman, this Samaritan woman? Don’t you know Jewish Rabbis are not supposed to do that? What are you seeking? Why are you talking with her?” This, now, is his answer. “I have come to do the will of my Father.” Or as he says later, “My Father’s will is that I should lose none of those the Father has given him” (John 6:39). The woman may be an evangelist, but it is because Jesus is The Evangelist.

This woman, you see, is a stalk of grain, ripe for the harvest. Jesus is reaping that harvest now. This is the point of the Samaritans believing in him at the end of the story. Others have gone before him, sowing the seed into this land of Samaria. Moses told them to expect a coming Prophet, and they believed him. Most of the prophets spoke directly to Samaria of both judgment and restoration. But now, the Messiah himself has come to them. He is both planting (the gospel) and reaping (the harvest) of souls. This is new. This is why he came. This is why he was sent. He is here to gather in a host of souls to his new everlasting kingdom. The tent of David is being made into a permanent house.

It is a remarkable correlation between the word of God and the harvest of souls, between obeying the Father and seeing people come to Christ. It is a Messianic expectation, given by Amos and others, which is now being fulfilled in Samaria. The reaper overtakes the sower. The two acts merge

together in one person. “Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.” Never before had this happened, because never before had Messiah come in the flesh.

Jesus calls this work his “food.” That is, it satisfies his soul to do this work of gospel sowing and reaping. Anyone who has ever known what it is to tell someone about Christ, knows the great satisfaction that comes with knowing you’re offering someone living water and eternal food. Anyone whom God has been pleased to use as a vessel of reaping, that is of actually seeing someone come to Christ personally through the things that they said, knows that few things in all of life are as satisfying: A mother who prays with her child a prayer of repentance and faith; a young person who says to their VBS high school helper, “I want to know how to be saved;” a close relative whom you have prayed for who, on their death bed, after years of rebellion, asks how they can know Jesus. A co-worker, a neighbor, a person you met on an airplane, someone sitting in a worship service whom God brings under conviction ... God uses all of these means to draw people to himself. And, oh, the joys of knowing that someone is coming into the kingdom to have eternal life. Is it any wonder that the Lord calls this his food?

Jesus said to them that this is a food “that you do not know about.” This is partly because they were off at the market and didn’t know the purpose of his visit with this woman. But it is

more profound than that. This is in part, because the Holy Spirit had not yet been sent to them. For now, this is *his* work, and it must be so, for unless God does this work, no one will ever see the harvest. Messiah brings people into his kingdom. He calls them to walk through the pearly gates. He walks them to streets made of gold. It is also in part because he had not yet sent them out. But soon, the joy, the food, would be theirs too! He allows us to partake of this food.

This starts with the disciples, “I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor” (John 4:38). Some take this as a reference to John looking back on the early days after Pentecost, especially the stories in Acts 8, when the disciples return to Samaria to preach the gospel and have great success. Others translate the verb (an aorist active indicative) as “send,” thus referring to the soon commissioning of the disciples which will then turn outward towards the discipleship of Jerusalem, Samaria, and all the world.⁵ It seems to make sense that it would be “send” rather than “sent” (despite the overwhelming translation “sent” in English bibles), because it is not clear that Jesus has sent the disciples out for this labor yet.

But they *will* be sent. And they will reap a harvest that the prophets, not even John the Baptist, could personally relate to,

⁵ See Köstenberger, *John*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 163, note 79.

though they knew it would come. What joys they would know? How jealous might the prophets have been after all they went through to have been part of this reaping? What blessings Christ bestowed upon them? How glorious was the outpouring of his grace upon them to give them such food as this, when 2,000 would come to Christ in the first sermon preached after the giving of the Holy Spirit.

But they did not understand this yet. That is the purpose of the final verses of this narrative. “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘he told me all that I ever did.’” The woman gets to experience a small taste of it too. But still, it is Christ’s food, for he spoke to her first. “So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with him, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word” (John 4:39-41). These verses let the reader know that the harvest has come, that Jesus is satisfied in his work, that many unsuspecting people are coming into the kingdom of God.

Receiving this Food

We should now ask, what is it they believed? Vs. 42 supplies the answer. “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 Saviour of the world.” They believed, personally, because they saw with their own eyes and heard

with their own ears that indeed he knew all things ... they believed that he was the Saviour of the world.

“World” is a word picked back up from chapter 1 where Jesus is said to be the Lamb that takes away in the sin of the world ([John 1:29](#)). It is also picked up from chapter 3 where God is said to have “so loved the world” that he gave his son that whoever believes might have eternal life ([John 3:16](#)). You will notice that “eternal life” comes up here in [John 4:36](#). Jesus is reaping the wages and gathering fruit for “eternal life” so that all who have been involved in the crop might rejoice. Remember the parable Jesus told of the lost sheep? The conclusion was, “I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” ([Luke 15:7](#)). In fact, Moses and the prophets are not jealous, for now they are seeing the reward of their own labors, as *Christ* begins ushering people into his eternal kingdom. Living, unbelieving, humanity (including Samaritan half-breeds) are being called by his Name. Amos was right.

Thus, to receive this food, [one must do as the Samaritans did](#). You must believe, *yourself*, that he is the Savior of the world. Do you believe that? Many commentaries pick up on this phrase “Savior of the world,” noting that in those days Isis and Serapis, Zeus and Asclepius, were given this title, as, later, were Roman emperors like Hadrian. The effect is thus apologetic in nature. John is saying those gods and emperors are not

the saviors. Jesus Christ, and he alone, is the savior of the world. "This is the work of God [for you], that you believe in him whom he has sent" (John 6:29).

Giving the Food

Only after you see the food here as being Jesus' food, should you then even begin to apply this outside of him. And even then, those it applies to are those who are "in Christ." Yet, both the woman and the disciples, we are told, end up eating of this same food, for it is a food Jesus has given them, and they have more than enough to share.

When you are in Christ, you now want to do the will of the Father. The will of the Father is his bread that he gives us. This bread is to obey him in all things. But this food is also telling others of Christ and the eternal life you have found. Have you come to see that Christ indeed knows everything that you ever did? I have been unable, my entire life, to escape that feeling. I know he knows me. I know he forgives me because of Jesus.

If this is you, then know that Christ has sent out his disciples to reap a harvest. Know that the harvest is still white and ready to be reaped, despite all you see with your eyes that tell you otherwise. The Great Day of Judgment has not yet arrived. Spread this knowledge, for it is good news. The mountains are dripping with sweet wine. The hills are flowing with it. The tent of David has been established forever. Its

king has been given an eternal body in resurrected life, and he rules over all his creation. Today, he beckons any who hear to come and eat with him and drink with him in the great halls of his heavenly temple.

Today he gathers in his harvest. Tomorrow the angels will separate the wheat and the chaff. One will be thrown into a lake of fire. The other will be rewarded with eternal life so that the sower and reaper may rejoice together.