

WHO ARE WE: EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS
(SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2012)

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 67; JOHN 4:27-38

INTRODUCTION

Ed Young Jr. is a Southern Baptist pastor of a megachurch somewhere in Texas. In theology, in some respects he would be orthodox, in practice he like many others shows the prevalence of entertainment, celebrity, financial extravagance, and the appeal to the flesh that plagues the visible church in our nation. I mention him because of comments he made not long ago attacking Reformed theology and claiming that most Reformed churches do not reach the lost.¹

The attack on one level shows Mr. Young's ignorance of history and theology. But I do believe that one of the weaknesses of Reformed churches today is in evangelism. The fault is not our theology. The fault is that we don't believe our theology and God's Word as much as we should.

As we continue the series, Who are We and What Should That Mean, I want to address the subject of evangelism and missions. I want us all to be both convicted and encouraged as we think of this important area.

Who are we?

We believe in evangelism and missions as means God uses to bring people to saving faith and into His kingdom.

What should this look like?

We must have a greater intention in witnessing to lost family and friends; we also need to make sure we are sincerely supporting our missionaries through prayer and giving.

I have chosen John 4:27-38 for our main consideration. After looking at this text, we will consider other points of application.

¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBauxH6hB-I>

It is Jesus Christ who gives to you the greatest example of missions and evangelism as well as the greatest encouragement that as a local church and families we seek to be faithful witnesses of the gospel message.

John 4:27-38 is part of the familiar account of Jesus and His witness to a Samaritan woman at a well which led to an even greater witness and the salvation of many other Samaritans. I would like to look at our text in three parts.

1) Context – verses 27-30

John 4:27 And at this *point* His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, “What do You seek?” or, “Why are You talking with her?”

John 4:28 The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, **29** “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” **30** Then they went out of the city and came to Him.

At the beginning of this chapter we find details important for our text. Verse 2 gives information found only in John’s gospel concerning the ministry of Jesus in Judea. The disciples were part of this ministry; they were the ones who baptized the growing number of disciples.

Then in verse 3 and following we read that Jesus left Judea and departed north to Galilee. In going to Galilee, Jesus chose to travel through Samaria. He and his disciples came to the city of Sychar, which was near the land that Jacob had given his son Joseph. This city was about 30 miles north of Jerusalem. It was about 12 p.m. Jesus was tired from his travels, and so He rested at a well outside the main part of the city of Sychar while the disciples travelled into the town to buy food.

Verses 7-26 record the conversation that Jesus had with a sinful Samaritan woman while the disciples were away in getting food.

Verse 27 introduces the disciples back into the account. As they returned they began to marvel that Jesus talked with a woman.

I am sure many of you are familiar with the cultural context shared by many Jewish people at the time of Jesus. D. A. Carson writes,

Some (though by no means all) Jewish thought held that for a rabbi to talk much with a woman, even his own wife, was at best a waste of time and at

worst a diversion from the study of Torah, and therefore potentially a great evil that could lead to Gehenna, hell. (Pirke Aboth 1:5)²

Other Jewish writings gave a similar view.

“It is forbidden to give a woman any greeting.”³

Women at that time in Jewish culture were generally viewed on a lower plane, which is why the testimony of Jesus stands out so powerfully.

The disciples were certainly men of their own time. Jesus would not be bound by such man-made traditions and views.

The disciples were filled with astonishment and yet they remained silent. No one said, “What do you seek?” or “Why are you talking with her?” These two questions are what you would expect that they might ask. The only words attributed to the disciples are found in verses 31 and 33.

In verse 26, Jesus identified Himself as the Messiah or Christ. Earlier Jesus had proclaimed that He could give to this woman something much greater than physical water. Jesus could give living water. This is what the Samaritan woman should have asked Jesus for even as He asked her for a drink. Jesus then exposed the sinful lifestyle of this Samaritan woman. She was living in sin with another man who was not her husband. She previously had been with five husbands.

The Samaritan woman was not yet fully assured that Jesus was the Messiah, but she had been with Jesus long enough to know that she needed to tell others about Jesus. She had been at the well to fill her waterpot, but leaving her waterpot she went into the city to call others to come to Jesus. Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ? This is a question not necessarily expecting a negative answer, but giving a cautious or tentative opinion.⁴

In verse 30 we read that her witness was successful. Men, we are not told how many, went out of the city of Sychar and started coming to Jesus.

² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel of John*, 227.

³ *Qidd. 70a*, cited by Philip Barton Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 39. See also the Word Biblical Commentary on John where this same statement is given in the form that appears here.

⁴ GNT Key, s.v. John 4:29.

Daniel Wallace in his Greek grammar discusses the scene presented in verse 30. The verb **came** would be better translated as **began coming** to Jesus.⁵ We are not told how far they had to travel, but it is the coming of these men that Jesus will point to in verse 35. And it is now as the Samaritan men made their way to Jesus that Jesus and his disciples talk in verses 31-34.

2) Jesus and His Food, vv 31-34

John 4:31 In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.”

John 4:32 But He said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.”

John 4:33 Therefore the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought Him *anything* to eat?”

John 4:34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.

John now focuses on Jesus and His disciples who in had returned with food for lunch. Not surprisingly they encouraged Jesus, “Rabbi, eat.”

Jesus used this situation as an opportunity to instruct His disciples about Himself and His work.

I have food to eat of which you do not know. The same word for food used in verse 32 is found also in John 6:27.

John 6:27 Do not labor for the **food** which perishes, but for the **food** which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.

Not surprisingly the disciples did not understand what Jesus was saying. They were only thinking about physical food and so they said to each other, “Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?”

Matthew 16:5-12 is another example where the disciples did not understand Jesus’ words which used the metaphor of food. In Matthew 16, Jesus warned his disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees. The disciples thought that Jesus was talking about the fact that they did not bring any bread with them.

⁵ Wallace, 545. The verb is imperfect. The NET Bible brings this out well in its translation, “began coming to Jesus.”

Similar to John 3 where Nicodemus' lack of understanding became an opportunity for instruction, the disciple's lack of understanding was used by Jesus to give a powerful statement of His person and work.

“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.

Jesus, of course, needed to eat, drink, and sleep as much as you or I do. Jesus did not live the life of an ascetic. We often find Jesus eating and drinking in the gospels. He was slandered as being a glutton and winebibber.⁶ But our Lord and Savior was not controlled by His physical needs and wants. His most important food was in doing the will of His Father who sent Him.

This is the first of at least 20 references in John where Jesus speaks of being sent by the Father. Jesus also would later speak of the Holy Spirit using this same verb.⁷

Jesus also here speaks of finishing the Father's work. Similar language is found in three other places in John.⁸ What does it mean to finish the Father's work? I think the best understanding is that Jesus determined to complete the work given by His Father.

John 17:4 I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.

The words of Jesus should be connected also with Deuteronomy 8:3, a passage that Jesus used in defeating Satan's first temptation.⁹

Deut. 8:3 So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

It is the testimony of our Lord which is given also for your encouragement. What strength you will also find when your focus is set on doing the work that God has given to you and specifically on being a witness of the grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

What is it that motivates you each day? Are you more driven by routine and basic needs and urges or what Jesus so powerfully states in verse 34?

⁶ Matthew 11:19.

⁷ John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7.

⁸ John 5:36; 17:4; 19:28.

⁹ Carson, 230.

It is not that you are to seek some higher plane of living or live a life of constant fasting. No, Jesus sets before the truly purpose-driven life, a life that seeks obedience and determination to do the will of God. May this be your food and your strength!

3) Jesus and Our Work as Witnesses, vv. 35-38

John 4:35 Do you not say, “There are still four months and *then* comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! **36** And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. **37** For in this the saying is true: “One sows and another reaps.’ **38** I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”

Jesus in these verses uses two proverbial statements (v. 35a and 37) along with comments on both of the statements. These verses first must be understood in terms of Jesus and His work. It is only after this that we make application to our own work.

The first statement in verse 35 is based on the generally expected time between the last planting and the first harvesting. It is possible that Jesus was also literally referring to the upcoming harvest of barley in the month of March, which made the fields white.¹⁰

Jesus used this reference of agriculture to call His disciples to see the Samaritan men who were now coming to Jesus. Some think that the men may have been wearing white garments, but that is not even necessary. The point is that Jesus wanted His disciples to see the harvest He was now reaping in Samaria. The fields are literally white for harvest in terms of souls.

John 4:39 And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all that I *ever* did.” **40** So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. **41** And many more believed because of His own word.

¹⁰ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), s.v. John 4:35.

Verse 36 then speaks of the rejoicing together of the one who sows and the one who reaps. Think about the significance of this statement. When do those who plant the crops rejoice at the same time with those who harvest the crop? The words point to something special that is taking place.

The words of Jesus in verse 36 should be connected with Amos 9:13.

Amos 9:13 “Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, And the treader of grapes him who sows seed; The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, And all the hills shall flow *with it*.”

The imagery of Amos 9:13 points to an incredible, a miraculous fulfillment. The word eschatological is often used to describe the language of Amos 9:13.

Jesus declared the age of Amos 9:13 was being fulfilled in His present ministry. The great blessings of peace and salvation were found in His present work.¹¹ The context of Jesus’ ministry in despised Samaria is significant in light of this verse.

The words of verse 36 point to the incredible joy that comes to those who God uses to bring in the harvest. In verse 14, Jesus declared that the water He gives becomes in the one who drinks a fountain of water springing up into everlasting or eternal life. Here in verse 36 Jesus speaks of fruit for eternal life.

When we are faithful in the work of being a witness, sharing the gospel message with others, we are seeking for fruit that will last an eternity. Now it certainly must be said that all work done for the glory of God is a holy and special calling. Verse 36 is not saying that some work is more important than other work. If you are not a pastor then you somehow must be lower on the scale of importance. Not at all.

All believers can have part in this fruit for eternal life. This is for all believers the greatest work that God gives to us. What other work will literally bring eternal fruit?

The words of Jesus also in verse 36 importantly point out that there are those who sow and those who reap. This is the main focus of verses 37 and 38.

The proverbial saying of verse 37 is further explained and applied in verse 38.

In making a distinction between those who sow and those who reap, Jesus is making a very important point. There are two aspects of evangelism. There is the planting the

¹¹ See Carson, 231. Hedriksen also believed this was fulfillment of Amos 9:13.

seed, the sowing. There is also the reaping. Not everyone is privileged to see both aspects.

The distinction of reaping and sowing likely has reference to the OT prophets and in a special way to John the Baptist. John 3:23 speaks of John the Baptist's ministry in an area around 15 miles away from where Jesus was now ministering. John's ministry was especially a ministry of sowing, of preparing the way for the coming of the Lord.

Richard Phillips in his book *Jesus the Evangelist*, which Jil let me borrow quite a while ago, recounts the story of the great missionary John Paton (1824-1907). Paton brought the gospel to the New Hebrides Islands in the South Pacific, what today is known as the country of Vanuatu. He travelled about as far as you can go from Scotland for his ministry. These islands are about 1200 miles east of Australia. Before seeing really any fruit, Paton spent several years on the island of Tanna. The work on Tanna was very difficult. Both his wife and son died and Paton was driven away. He went to the nearby island of Aniwa where the Lord richly blessed his ministry. It was later that believers from Aniwa were sent to Tanna. Those witnesses enjoyed a rich harvest of conversions that had been sown through Paton's tears and trials.¹²

Jesus reminds the disciples even that the blessings they were enjoying now in their ministry with Jesus was because of the labor of others. Both aspects of evangelism are vital; both must be kept in mind lest we be discouraged or filled with pride.

APPLICATION:

Are all Christians to be evangelists? In the strict meaning of the word no. Evangelists strictly speaking are those who have been given the gift and the special calling to serve in that capacity. But all Christians do have the calling to be witnesses for Jesus Christ and the gospel message. If you have been born from on high by God's mighty power and have come to saving faith in Jesus Christ, then you do have the great duty of pointing other people to Jesus Christ. This is not always an easy task. It is made difficult because of our own sin, our own lack of boldness, and the work is ultimately not a work made successful through man. It is a work of faith and trust. True evangelism is a spiritual work requiring determination, prayer, and reliance upon Jesus Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit. Anyone who says that you can easily learn how to witness or evangelize I think is not being honest.

¹² Richard Phillips, *Jesus the Evangelist*, 164-165.

But be encouraged by the fact that the message of the gospel is no less popular today than it was 2,000 years ago and yet God's people faithfully witnessed to the truth of Jesus Christ, crucified, buried, and raised again. Be encouraged by the fact that the gospel message is still the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.

I think there are things we must learn how to be more effective in our sharing. We have some good books that can encourage you. There is a place for reading and re-reading books on evangelism.

Friendship is certainly a place to begin but not end in evangelism. But friendship with unbelievers Lord willing can be a place to start.

I have included on a separate handout you should have received today, a place for you to specifically identify friends and family that you will regularly pray for and seek for opportunities for witness. We also have available some simple contact cards you can pass out to people you meet in stores and restaurants. We have booklets and plenty of books in our Book Room that you can share with people.

Why not consider inviting people to attend a worship service? I realize we are not a congregation that is the best suited to people coming in off the street who know very little about the Christian life. But preaching is a central means, not the only means, that God uses to save sinners. Not every message I preach is a basic salvation message, but I encourage you invite people to come for a service. I would be happy to talk with any friends or family if you also could setup a time for a meal or opportunity for conversation.

I believe there is much as a local church for us to grow in our zeal and witness to the lost. At the same time, I do believe God has used this congregation with all our faults in ways sometimes greater than we realize. Just on Friday, I received an email from a CLA student who left the school almost 40 years ago who still looks back with gratefulness to his teachers and to my dad. I know through the multifaceted ministry we have, we have touched the lives of countless thousands, many I think coming to salvation through God's sovereign use of the message we seek to share. I think sometimes we end up doing more sowing of seed as a ministry and think we are not as privileged as those who do the reaping.

Commitment to Missions also vital.

One of the first major conflicts in our church was the determination of my dad and others to give 50% of the budget to missions. There were those who thought if we did

that we would never have a building of our own. I think God has taken care of that problem.

One danger of missions today is the disconnect we have with most of those that we support. We don't have very close relationships with most of our missionaries. They haven't been life-long members and friends who decided to then go off to the mission field. Rather in God's Providence we have come to support the 9 works listed in your bulletins.

For a small congregation, I think we still give a good amount to support mission's efforts. I would like to say that we are in many ways generous. We have given and helped even those not directly part of our mission's support.

There is a need that don't become disconnected from this aspect of our mission.

Rom. 15:30 Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in **prayers** to God for me,

Col. 4:3 meanwhile **praying** also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains,

If we are going to continue to have any significant support or efforts in missions it will only come if there is a true commitment by everyone in this congregation that we make this a priority in both prayer and giving.

It is Jesus Christ who gives to you the greatest example of evangelism as well as the greatest encouragement that as a local church and families we seek to be faithful witnesses of the gospel message.

Prayer

Hymn 386

BENEDICTION – HEBREWS 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.