

# The Gospel of John

## Chapter 4:31-54

February 16, 1997

- **The Gospel of John Outline:**

- Chapter 1 Our Lord is the Word, the Light and the Life
- Chapter 2 The Lord of the Wedding Feast; Zeal for the purity of the temple
- Chapter 3 Spiritual Birth, Belief and Salvation vs. Unbelief and Condemnation
- Chapter 4 The Ministry in Samaria, The Harvest, The Faith of the Nobleman

- **Review and Introduction**

In the first half of this chapter, Jesus leaves Jerusalem heading for Galilee. On his way He journeys through Samaria where He ministers to the woman at the well who in turn takes the message of the kingdom of God to others in her town. In this second half of the chapter, we will conclude Jesus' ministry in Samaria just prior to His return to Cana in Galilee where earlier we studied His miracle at the wedding feast.

- **Exposition**

### John 4:31-54

*31 In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat."<sup>32</sup> But He said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know."<sup>33</sup> Therefore the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?"<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."*

- After the long journey down from Jerusalem, the disciples were concerned for Jesus' well-being and urged Him to eat. Jesus takes the opportunity to teach them that His sustenance is not simply bread and water but is to do the work of His Father. This is saying that the very purpose of His existence is the complete the Father's work. Notice that what Christ is doing is the Father's work. Jesus does not act independently as seems right to Him in an autonomous manner. Rather, He is carrying out the will of the Father who sent Him. The disciples obviously don't completely understand this point.

*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."<sup>36</sup> "And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together."<sup>37</sup> "For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.'<sup>38</sup> "I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors."*

- In light of the fact that the disciples didn't understand His comments yet, Jesus responds by using what is perhaps a common proverb of the day regarding the preparatory work that occurs before one can expect a harvest. The principle that Jesus is conveying is that before one can expect a harvest he must labor in sowing. Once the seed is sown, the farmer can by faith expect a harvest. Obviously this agrarian analogy is speaking of the harvest of men and women who have been prepared for entrance into the kingdom of God.
- The whitening of the harvest is accomplished by the Father. We should not think that it is within our capacity to make the fields white—this is accomplished by the Father. Notice that Paul experienced the same thing in 1 Cor 3:5-8 where Paul and Apollos together worked in the white fields. The increase of the labor was provided by God. This is the way that the Father chose to build the world. He could have seen fit to design things some other way but it was in His eternal wisdom to include us both as reapers and sowers.
- In some sense Christ had already sent the disciples out to reap for Him in a ripe field that they had not labored in. It makes no difference whether someone is a sower or a reaper. The important thing is to do the will of the Father knowing full well that it is His field, His work and the fruit, while being of eternal benefit to us, is for His glory.

*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."<sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days.<sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of His own word.<sup>42</sup> Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."*

- While Jesus is teaching the disciples, the villagers, having been initially persuaded by the testimony of the woman whom Jesus spoke with at the well, are coming out to hear him teach (vs. 30). As they are approaching, it may be them that Jesus points to when he asks the disciples to look upon the whitened field.
- Jesus spends an additional two days in Samaria and teaches the people many things. The result is the completion of their faith provided by the additional instruction. Notice however, the wonderful evangelism present in this scenario; the woman herself is ministered to, she declares that which she has taught, the villagers are pointed to Christ and once they

see Him, they too rightly declare that Jesus is the messiah. The woman needed no authority of her own to declare the message; in fact, her reputation was probably one of disrepute. Regardless, the power was in the message of the Kingdom of God not in her reputation.

*43 Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee.<sup>44</sup> For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.<sup>45</sup> So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast.*

- o Jesus' remark is somewhat curious but is probably best understood as being the reason that He avoids going in to Nazareth. As is common in many ways, those who grow up with you and remember you in various stages of life, will have the most difficult time accepting a wholesale change in who you are. In Jesus' case, the stubbornness of the Nazarenes was a great detriment to them because Jesus passed over the city to go where the Father would send Him.

*46 So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum.<sup>47</sup> When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.<sup>48</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."*

- o Having returned to Cana where He performed His first public miracle, Jesus is confronted by a nobleman pleading for Him to come and heal his son who is near death. The man had heard about Jesus but there is no indication that he had ever actually seen Him. Even at this early point in the public ministry of Christ, word of His ministry is spreading rapidly throughout the regions. This would have been especially true, given those that may have put their trust in Him after the events at the wedding feast.
- o Jesus' response again is difficult to understand. However, I believe that the remark is really a rebuke of the crowds that most likely surrounded Him rather than a rebuke of the nobleman. It appears that the man comes to Jesus in faith believing that He could, if willing, make his son well again. Jesus' comment is a rebuke of the people who had already seen and heard Him down in Jerusalem and some of them still may not have faithfully followed Him. Although the purpose of the great signs and wonders were to testify to the authority of Jesus, the miracles are not the foundation of our belief.

*49 The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!"<sup>50</sup> Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.<sup>51</sup> And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!"<sup>52</sup> Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." <sup>53</sup> So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household.<sup>54</sup> This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee. NKJV*

- o Apparently unfazed by Jesus' remark to the crowd, the man begs Jesus to come down and heal his son. Jesus declares that the boy is well and places the nobleman in an interesting position of faith. If the man returns empty-handed, his son may be dead by the time he returns and if he stays and demands that Jesus come down to see the lad, he has demonstrated that he does not believe Jesus' promise. The man's actions manifest his faith and show it to be genuine for he selects the former branch of the dilemma and returns to his son based on the promise of Jesus.
- o Many times we think that faith is the response needed when we have nothing to stand on. This completely contrary to biblical Christianity. Faith in God is the only appropriate response to the perceived faithfulness of God. As we see more and more clearly how faithful our Father in heaven is, the only feasible response is faith. Faith is also the response when God has given us promises. When God promises something, as Jesus promised the life of the nobleman's son, we can stand firm upon the promise by faith because we know God to be true. There are many things however that we have no promise from God and we should not act as though we have that assurance. We can pray and God many times will give us the desires of our heart. But this is not the same as God faithfully responding to one of His promises.