

## UNEXPECTED EVANGELISM

What if there are unexpected opportunities for evangelism in this unusual time we're living in?

I know what you may be thinking. "Evangelism in a pandemic? Blake, don't you know we're supposed to be keeping our distance?" or "Evangelism's not my thing, I'll mute the sermon and check Facebook until the offertory."

Or you may even be thinking, "You have no idea, Blake. I am so broken right now, so messed up, so weary. I'm barely hanging on, much less able to think about evangelism." If you're thinking any of these things, you're in good company.

For one, a lot of that describes my feelings about evangelism at times. But there's more. There's a woman Jesus encounters in our text this morning who was coming from so much brokenness, shame, and loss, that she was the *last* person you might expect to be an evangelist. By "evangelist" I mean someone who points other people to Jesus.

You see, earlier in chapter 4, Jesus, weary from a journey, stops at a well outside a town of Samaria while his disciples go into town to buy food. Why does he stay at the well? Up walks a woman with her water jar, alone. Was she purposely avoiding the other women? Jesus asked her for a drink. She is confused, as Jews and Samaritans were deeply divided. He replied that if she knew who he was, she would have asked him for "living water," to which she says, "give me some of that." He asked her to go invite her husband. "I have no husband," she says – True, Jesus says – "you've had five of them and the man you're with now is not your husband." "You must be a prophet!" He tells her he's the Messiah.

This woman is our unexpected evangelist. This morning, we will see that **Jesus is making us unexpected evangelists who delight in his unexpected food, and who enter into his unexpected harvest.**

### I. The Unexpected Evangelist (27-30)

#### A. An unexpected choice (27).

This woman is not the person I would have chosen to bring the gospel to her town. We can see it in the disciples' reaction to seeing Jesus talking with her – “They marveled (wonder) that he was talking with a woman.”

In her day, she had two things against her right away – she was a woman, and she was a Samaritan. For a Rabbi (teacher) like Jesus to speak with a woman was viewed by some as a waste of time.<sup>1</sup> And it was not proper for a man to speak in public with a woman he was not related with.<sup>2</sup>

Not only that, but she was a Samaritan and Jews and Samaritans had deep religious-historical divides.<sup>3</sup>

**But Jesus relates to people differently than the cultural norms around him.** Isn't that the way he works today? He uses the weak, the unlovely, the unexpected.

[Like God choosing Israel out of all the nations to bring his blessing to the world. We read in Deuteronomy 7: “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples,<sup>8</sup> but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers...”

[There was once a man who lived over 200 years ago. Having a sea captain for a father, he was born with ocean-water in his veins. As a young man, he became captain himself of a ship in the greed-driven Atlantic slave trade. You've heard the saying, “cursing like a sailor”? This captain called himself “a ringleader in blasphemy and wickedness”<sup>4</sup> – he was known among fellow-sailors as especially wicked. Then God rescued him. He later penned a biographical hymn called “Amazing Grace” and served in pastoral ministry for 4 decades. John Newton was an unexpected evangelist.

**What if every Christian is an unexpected evangelist? Rescued by grace and brought into a life of showing Christ's blessing to others.**

#### B. An Unexpected Move (28)

Jesus knows this woman's deepest shame and doesn't run.

Experiencing the grace of Jesus leads this woman to make an

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> The Reformation Study Bible, p. 1860.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Lee-Thorp, ed., *John* (Navpress), p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Reinke, *Newton on the Christian Life*, p. 34.

unexpected move – she leaves her water jar on the ground and runs into town to share her experience with the very people she was trying to avoid earlier. Like last week – “Go” – she took a risk.

### C. Unexpected Message (29)

And she brings an unexpected, simple message (v. 29) – “Come, see Jesus.”

Why? “he told me all I ever did.” – Did he? He revealed her deepest place of shame, brokenness, and sin. If he knew this, surely he knew everything else.

This impacted her – that Jesus *knew* her. She experienced what David did when he said, “O LORD, you have searched me and *known* me!” (Psalm 139:1).

What might this tell us about evangelism? As Al Dayhoff says, the image of God in people loves to be researched, to be known.

[He tells the story of an art exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in NYC where an artist named Marina Abramovic made herself the piece of art by sitting motionless while spectators took turns sitting opposite her. It broke attendance records. Dayhoff says “Many began to cry after just a few minutes – maybe because, for the first time, they felt valuable enough to have another person look at them, directly and deeply, examining the story in their eyes and exhibiting no fear...”<sup>5</sup>]

Jesus knew this woman’s story and didn’t run away. And the result was unexpected:

(30) “They went out of the town and were coming to him,” and as they come, the disciples are confused.

## II. The Unexpected Food (31-34)

### A. Jesus’ Unexpected Response (31-33)

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<sup>5</sup> Al Dayhoff, *Church in a Blues Bar*, p. 32-33.

As this is going on in the town, the disciples are concerned about their Master. Having gone into town to get food, they lovingly urge him, “Rabbi, eat.”

This makes sense – earlier in chapter 4 (vv. 6-7), we see that Jesus was sitting beside the well because he was weary from the journey, and then he asked the woman for a drink. He has still had nothing to eat or drink.

So his response is unexpected – “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” This scene is humorous to me, but also masterful on Jesus’ part. The humorous part is that the disciples take him literally, wondering if anyone had secretly brought him food. Is Jesus saying that he always kept a chunk of bread tucked away in his sandal strap?

No, and here’s the masterful part – By their misunderstanding, he draws them in for a teachable moment:

“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.”

Jesus speaks of a physical object, food, to illustrate a spiritual truth. Think about it – what does food do? Nourishes, restores energy, satisfies, it gives pleasure and delight.

So here’s the spiritual truth – Jesus is saying that **what fills him up, what energizes him, what gives him delight and pleasure, is to do the will of God and accomplish his work.**

And what is the will and work of God? “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life” (6:40) – to accomplish salvation for his people.

It’s what he said when he was tempted after 40 days of fasting and Satan said, “make this stone into bread” and Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 (about Israel) – “And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna,... that he might make you

know that man does not live by bread alone, but...by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

See Jesus’ example: this whole time, he has not eaten or had anything to drink, but he is spiritually filled – his soul is overflowing with delight in seeking the heart of this woman.

See the woman’s example: She left her water jar behind – she cannot keep from telling about Jesus. She comes to the well seeking water and leaves overflowing with living water.

**[Have you tasted this food?** Danielle and I have been energized and filled by the opportunities we’ve had at building friendships with our neighbors and of seeking gospel conversations. Yesterday, a guy was moving into our building and I said, “What if I asked if he needs help?” And Danielle said, “Get your shoes on now!” I was scrambling to get out as fast as I could and got to say hello as he passed by with their washing machine.]

It doesn’t have to be impressive – ask Michael about the beauty of taking “baby steps” in evangelism. I’ve learned a lot from him.

**Once you’ve tasted this food, you’ll want more.** And Jesus knows that, so he invites his disciples and us to share his food by entering with him into his unexpected harvest.

### III. The Unexpected Harvest (35-42)

Jesus uses another masterful image – “the harvest” – Think about gathering in a crop and the joy that comes with that. Now think instead of a crop, gathering men and women into the kingdom of God.

Let’s look at a few characteristics of this unexpected harvest:

#### 1. The Now-ness of the Harvest

The saying/proverb in v. 35, “There are yet four months, then comes the harvest,” has the basic meaning that there is no real hurry, things take time.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> David Guzik, Blue Letter Bible app

Instead of this mentality, Jesus says, “Look, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest” – i.e. No need to wait! The harvest is now! The fields *are* white (fields of grain would take a whitish tint when ready to harvest).

As Jesus said, “Look,...lift up your eyes,” I wonder if the disciples looked out over the field and saw men and women from the town walking towards them.

[So I say to you, “Look, lift up your eyes in Bham, AL and see that the fields are white for harvest.”]

2. Rewards for harvesters – “receiving wages”
3. The Forever-ness of the harvest – “fruit for eternal life,” and
4. Joy of the laborers – “so that sower and reaper may rejoice together” – there is a deep joy that comes from seeing someone come to faith.<sup>7</sup>

[On February 28<sup>th</sup>, a friend I have not talked with in years who I knew as an agnostic messaged me to say, “Sup bro, I’m a Christian.” I cannot describe my mixture of shock and joy at this.]

Also a taste of heavenly joy – notice, sower and reaper rejoicing together – implies superabundance – someone sowing seed, someone walking right behind reaping the fruit – back to Eden. Because of Jesus.

5. Many Jobs, One Task - v. 37 – “One sows and another reaps” – points to the diversity of gifts that go into a good harvest – every job is essential<sup>8</sup> – sanitizing the bathrooms, building relationships of trust with neighbors/co-workers at Starbucks, discipling your kids.
6. Invitation to Enter into the Harvest – v. 38 – reaping that for which you did not labor – Others have labored and you have entered into it – OT writers/prophets, then John the Baptist, then Jesus...

[I have felt this coming to Altadena – have gotten to reap from the labor of so many of you who have poured into one another years before I got here].

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<sup>7</sup> ESV Study Bible, p. 2029.

<sup>8</sup> Carson, p. 230.

**Then we see it...the Unexpected Harvest – v. 39**

“Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all I ever did.” – “He knew me and he didn’t run.”

Jesus stayed two days, and many more believed because of his word.

And “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.’”

Their faith had deepened – “Savior of the world.” The woman got them to Jesus, and Jesus did the rest. How do we bring people to Jesus? Knowing them, stopping to listen, share what Jesus did in our lives...

Who would have thought that this woman would be an evangelist to her entire town?

Because Jesus did the will of him who sent him – even after wrestling in the garden – and because he did accomplish his work – “It is finished.” – **he is now making us unexpected evangelists, who delight in his unexpected food, and who enter with Jesus into the unexpected harvest until one day, when we enter into the full joy of our Master when the harvest is complete.**