

Carrying on His Work

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[0 : 00] Well, morning everyone. It's lovely to have you with us. Do keep that passage open in John chapter 4 as we get into this final section in Jesus' encounter with this Samaritan woman.

And it's been so good to hear the things that God has been teaching us by his Spirit as we've spent time in this little section of John's Gospel over the last number of weeks. So spending time in this section this week for me has reminded me of my friend Ollie.

So Ollie lives with his family in a place right down at the bottom of the UK called St. Agnes in a place called Cornwall. If you've ever been there on your holidays, it's always a nice place to go, Cornwall.

But last time we visited Ollie and his family, Ollie had a go at teaching me some Cornish slang. I don't know why I ever thought I would use that in my life, but here we are and I'm using it today. So it's come in handy. He said, down here folks use this word directly. Right? I'd probably say it better than that, directly or something.

[1 : 08] And I said, Ollie, you've got to give me this in a sentence, but why would a local use the word directly? And he said, okay, if you were to ask somebody if they have finished a job or not, and they responded with the word directly, what they are telling you is that that job is one that they're going to get to later.

Right? That they'll get to it. It's coming. They'll get to it. And the subtext of directly is that there are more important things to me right now. So somebody answers you that word in Cornwall, that's what they mean.

The thing that you're asking me to do is not a priority. And here's why Ollie and this one word came to mind this week. Because this is about the one thing that's the most important to Jesus.

This is about his focus. This is about his heartbeat. This is about his desire. And this is about the one thing that he's engaged in, not later, but the thing that he's engaged in now.

And if you come with me to the text, you'll see it at verse 34. So this is the key verse in this section of John's gospel this morning. Jesus says, speaking to his disciples, My food, and by food he means the thing that sustains and satisfies him, the thing that he wakes up every day determined to do.

[2 : 35] My food, says Jesus, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

So carrying out the will of his father is to Jesus his number one priority. Do you see him state it? What is his father's will?

Well, we saw it in chapter 3 and verse 16. And there's a reason that people often refer to this verse as Christianity in a nutshell. Because it's so good.

What is the father's priority? Well, here we have it. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life.

The two W's there. The world. Remember the world that rejected God? God's enemies. This is a world that God loved. And the second W, whoever.

[3 : 37] Wide open to come and put your trust in Jesus and have life in his name. So Jesus' joy is carrying out the will of his father, which is saving people from the just condemnation of God and flowing from that the eternal separation from him that hangs over every human being out with of Jesus.

Jesus' number one aim is to rescue people from that. And more than that, reconcile them to God. Make them right with their creator.

And make a way for them to be adopted into the family of God. That's the gospel in a nutshell. That is the core thing of Christianity. Maybe you're here today and this is new to you.

Here is the very crux of our faith. The Evangelion. The gospel. A word that when William Tyndale translated the Bible from Latin into English, he said of this word, it's a word that means news, that makes a person's heart glad and makes him sing, dance and leap for joy.

That's the gospel. And everything Jesus does has as its goal the finishing of that work.

[4 : 50] And the next time you see that word finish come up in this gospel is from Jesus' lips as he hangs there suspended on the cross.

With his final breath, his final words, it is finished. Jesus dying on the cross is the event that will open up the wonder of the Father's plan to the peoples of the world to respond.

And that's what's most important to Jesus. And that's his heart as he lays out here in this section for his disciples. Why does he put it out there? He puts it out there for them to catch.

Right? Catch it. Get it in their lungs. This is what he's about. Those who follow him, he wants them to make this their mission. And so as we consider this passage today and what God is doing in the world today, here's three things that this passage invites us not to do.

Not to do. Here's the first. Not to underestimate the power of our witness. Remember, all this comes in the context of Jesus' encounter with this Samaritan woman.

[6 : 08] Scan your eyes back over the first two sections of chapter four if you want. Jesus, the man who knows every skeleton in her closet. Jesus, the man who has invited her to become a worshiper of the living God.

Look what she does. Verse 28. She hears that news and she leaves her water jar. Do you see all these details in the text here? She leaves her water jar. Remember, this is noon.

This is the height of the day. This is when you're most thirsty. This is the whole reason that she's come out in the first place. But why would you leave your water jar? You leave it because something bigger has happened in your life, right?

And she heads back into town. And notice these two surprising details in the text here. I love thinking about this week. Who does she speak to? Do you see? Fair enough. You run back home.

You go to your own room and you meditate sweetly on that thought that you've just met Jesus.

No, who does she speak to? She speaks to the people. Do you see it? Who are these people?

Well, these are the people in her community who had shunned her.

[7 : 14] And these are the people who she was avoiding at all costs. And so maybe even for the first time in years, she speaks to them.

And what does she say? She says, come and meet them. A man who told me, do you see there, everything that I've ever done. Everything that's happened in my life.

And you think to yourself, honestly, everything? He's told you everything? That this woman's life was a mixture of regret and mistakes and pain and hurt.

And you think to yourself, you want people knowing that? Do you know what? If somebody knew everything about me, the last thing I'd want to do is to broadcast that fact to the world.

And then even more than that, invite people to come and meet the person who knows every single thing about me. Right? That's not what I would do. I would either silence that person who knew everything about me, or I would do what the 12 powerful men that apparently Arthur Conan Doyle, author of Sherlock Holmes and lover of a practical joke, did when they received a telegram from him that simply said, flee, all has been discovered.

[8 : 33] So he sends this to 12 of the most powerful men in his society. Flee, all has been discovered. And the story goes that within 24 hours, all 12 of those people had legged out of the country. That's what I would do.

I would silence him or I would get out of the country. The thought of people finding out everything about us is terrifying, is it not?

Which makes this woman's vulnerability here even more remarkable. That she's okay with that. And more than that, she's wearing it.

She's embracing it. Which shows us what about the grace of Jesus? That the grace of Jesus liberates us from pretending we're sorted.

There is no freer place to be than to live our lives in light of the grace and knowledge and love and forgiveness that is in Christ Jesus.

[9 : 35] He is the strong tower that the righteous can run into and be saved. And that's not massively attractive.

In our world right now where many of us struggle with imposter syndrome. That we think we think we don't deserve to be somewhere.

That we think if only they knew. We feel so out of place. We feel like we're not good enough. Do you see how this woman shows us that there is no freer place to be than to live our lives in light of the grace of Jesus?

And do you see how we get it again at verse 39? I mean this must have been the standout feature for so many. Do you see how that's repeated twice here in these verses? He told me everything. The people realize they have told her everything. Everything? Her? Him? Everything? Everything? But you see how when many heard that and saw the difference, the transformation that's gone on in this woman's life, they believed.

[10:42] And is it not so beautiful that the first Gentile evangelist in John's gospel, God's plan since before the foundation of the world to gather a people from the ends of the earth to himself, who is the first person beyond the border of Israel who is invited to become a worshiper of God and go and tell everyone else who is it?

It's this despised, shunned, Samaritan woman. Oh, how God can powerfully use the story of just a simple, transformed life that says, Jesus saved me from my sin and there's joy and there's life in knowing him.

And this is the Sam Albrey quote on the screen. I think this is so wonderful. Sam Albrey's a Christian apologist from down south. He's now over in Nashville in the States, but he just writes some wonderful stuff.

Here's what he said, and I love this. I don't need to look good so that Jesus can look good. Feel the weight of that off your shoulders. I need to be honest about my colossal spiritual need so that he can look all sufficient.

First thing we've not to do is to underestimate the power of our witness, how the Lord can use that to bring people to himself. You think you've not got a story? You think you've not got a dramatic story?

[12:13] Let me just say it wasn't a dramatic stories of conversion and people doing wonderful things in far off lands for Jesus that convinced me that Christianity was true. Do you know what it was? It was seeing people for whom I could tell that knowing Jesus made a difference to every single detail of their lives.

The way they went to work. The way they did the dishes at night. The way that they enjoyed time with their children. The way that they were honest about falling out with their spouse. The way that they went out of their way just to love people in simple ways in our church congregation growing up. Those were the things where I could see that they knew Jesus. Don't underestimate the power and how God can use your simple witness.

Here's the second thing not to do. It's not to overlook the people around us. Back in the text you see verse 35. How the camera almost pans back to the disciples.

And I love this right? I kind of love slapstick comedy. I wonder how this is kind of how it went. Maybe they even witness her drop her bucket. Smash. And off she runs.

[13:21] And they come into the scene wondering what on earth has gone on here. But they come back to the scene. The camera moves from the woman. She's run back into town. The camera moves to the disciples. What's on their minds? Do you see?

What are they thinking about this whole time? They're thinking about food. Jesus, have you had something to eat? They're wondering if he's got some kind of secret stash that he's drawing on. Has somebody given him something to eat? Why is he not answering this question? And he so wonderfully, masterfully uses that desire for bread to teach them about his priorities.

And to get them thinking about harvest time. See verse 35. He says, don't you have a saying that it's still four months until harvest?

Do you see it? It's probably just something that the locals said to each other at a certain point of year. Kind of like the way, and I was thinking about it this week.

[14:18] Kind of like the thing that we're all saying in Scotland at this time. If you've grown up here, if you've been here for any length of time, here's a saying that we always say in November. What do we say about the knights? What are they doing?

They're fair drawing in. We always say it in November time in Scotland. Have you said that one recently? Yeah? Try not to clock anyone in the eyes. I've said that many times. Something that we

say at a certain time of year.

I think this is what's going on here. Is it not four months until harvest time? And yet Jesus says, way out of harvest time, lift up your eyes and see.

Which begs the question, doesn't it? What would they have seen? So what would they have seen? They would have seen brown, empty fields.

And that makes what Jesus says next really strange. He says, look and see that the fields are white unto harvest. They are ripe for harvest.

[15 : 14] So the disciples who were previously thinking of bread are now probably thinking, this guy is a few sandwiches short of a picnic. What is he talking about? What's on the horizon?

Rather, flip the question, who's on the horizon? As he likely, and many commentators point this out, as he likely directs their gaze back towards the city where they've just come from and where the Samaritan woman has ran to.

That's where their gaze is. And Jesus says, look, what do you see? I'm telling you that the fields are white unto harvest. So what do they see? They see people from that Samaritan village coming out of the Samaritan village on their way to meet Jesus.

Because if he has transformed this lady's life, this woman's life, then we need to kind of see who this guy is and what he's about. And as they're making their way across, Jesus is saying, do you see the harvest?

Do you see the people? He's talking about a soul harvest. Now here's why I think I'm so like the disciples in this scene. I like to picture them this week.

[16 : 25] Remember, they've just come from that Samaritan village, right? They went in there to buy bread and they've come back out to Jesus. Remember this whole Jew, Jew, Israelite, Jew, Samaritan thing that's going on, the hostility between the two.

Can you imagine the scene when they're in that village trying to get bread? Right? Twelve of them thinking, where's the shop? There's the shop.

Tell you what, two of you come in, ten of us will stand outside, but we'll keep a lookout just in case things kick off out here. Can you imagine saying to the person who's selling you the bread, can you have bread?

He's very aware of your Galilean accent. He knows you're not from here. All of them are panicking. And what's their only thought? Their only thought is we want to get in and we want to get out and back to Jesus.

as quickly as we can. Their tunnel vision on that. Not even for a minute did it cross their minds that Jesus actually might have things to do in the lives of these people, that Jesus might actually be interested in the lives of these people.

[17 : 29] I do that all the time. Tunnel vision on my to-do list. Autopilot in the mornings because I've got things to do. And do you know what?

I fail to stop and look at the people who are in my path. I just take the time to listen and to look. I tried to do it the last few days this week.

Have a look. It's the lollipop lady there today. The guy on the tills in Aldi. The dentist. I got no feelings.

The fellow parents who are on the school run. The barista who makes my drink. All of these people who are in our lives on a day-to-day basis. That we speak to. That we interact with.

If we believe in the sovereignty of God, and we do, then that means that no one who's in your path today is there by chance. You know, there was a Greek goddess who people worshipped in the first century because she was thought to oversee the fortunes of the city.

[18 : 29] That goddess's name, when translated roughly into English, you know what it was? What it is? Luck. Luck doesn't control your day.

Luck doesn't control your day. Fortuna, who was the Roman goddess, she doesn't control your day either.

Fortuna, fortune. Right? Fortune cookie. You see where we've derived all of our language from. No, no, no. This God is so sovereign that he controls your day. And we think about it.

If this is the game that this God is in, and he uses us as we take his word to the peoples of this world, and as he speaks through that word, if he uses us as the means to reach people, then it's game on when we look at the people around us every single day.

So let's allow what Jesus is saying here to transform how you and I see the people around us every day. The people who you will go to tomorrow, and who you'll be sitting next to in your lecture hall. [19 : 36] And the people who you go tomorrow, or this week, and you're sharing a room with in your office. The person in your office who you have to go and visit to get their signature in something, or their input in something.

The person who you sit next to on the Christmas night out. The person who buys the house next door and moves in. The people who, in your stairwell, will invite you to the Christmas mulled wine and mince pie party that goes on.

The new kid that joins your class. All of these different things. If this God is sovereign, and he wants to reach the peoples of the world, we have to understand that he's put people in our paths for a reason.

Let's not overlook the people around us. And lastly, let's not lose heart as we sow the seed. Sticking with the harvest metaphor, do you see verse 36?

The disciples get a lesson in sowing and reaping. As people come to faith from this Samaritan village, Jesus wants them to understand that they are reaping the produce of someone else's labor. [20 : 47] Verse 38. And in the context, I had never really appreciated it before until I got into it. In the context, John the Baptist, when he's baptizing back at verse 23 of chapter 3, I'd never appreciated before that he's doing that in Samaria.

Not too far, actually, from where this encounter is happening. So he's been speaking about the kingdom of God in Samaria already. He's been calling people to repent. He's been telling people, do you remember those opening chapters about the Lamb of God?

And clearly not only has his message had an impact in the moment, but his message is clearly still doing the rounds in the region, do you see? So he's been faithfully sowing.

And Jesus is helping them understand that they are about to reap what John the Baptist was sowing. I love that. Do you imagine that this woman runs back to this town and says, this man met Jesus.

Could he be the Messiah? Could he be the Christ? And people think, do you know what? I've heard that name before. I've heard about the Lamb of God. I think I've heard of something like that before. And so they're intrigued.

[21 : 56] They're curious. And out they go to meet Jesus. So he's been faithfully sowing John the Baptist. They're about to reap. For a new age is dawning as Jesus arrives in the world.

An age that means, because of his death on the cross and his ascension into heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit to apply that work to people's lives, to open their eyes to the all-surpassing beauty of Jesus, that means that it's harvest time.

As the old hymn puts it, many of us would have grown up loving this song, and I think it captures it so well, talking about Jesus, who yielded his life and atonement for sin and opened the life gate that all may go in.

This is this new age that Jesus is talking about. He's done the thing that's going to draw us back to God, forgiven, ransomed, restored, reconciled, loved, chosen, called.

He's justified with a future. The Spirit sent. That it's harvest time. That God is going to bring in people from all over the world. And that's the truth, and that's the mindset that he calls his disciples to embrace.

[23 : 22] And so as we stand in this new age that will culminate one day in Jesus returning, sowing and reaping are going to be going on all the time. Do you see? All the time. And so here's the question, really simply.

Are we sowing the gospel into all sorts of places and into the lives of all sorts of people? And here's the thing.

We'll see a few examples of this in a moment. We've got no idea how God is going to use that down the line. Absolutely no idea how he's going to do it.

But he will. His word will never return to him empty. And our labors for him are never in vain. So we sow faithfully, knowing that the Lord will use it.

And so two quick fire questions to get us thinking about this. First of all, are we sowing gospel prayers? Are we praying about things? You know, one of my favorite stories here, and this is before probably 80% of us, well before my time, probably before 80% of us here, before any of our time.

[24 : 26] There was a lady here called Sheila McBride. And I never met Sheila, but I've heard all about her. Ruth Aird was telling me recently that the two of them used to meet up on a regular basis just over there and pray.

And pray. And in the days when the church was struggling numerically, maybe growing a bit older, they prayed, she was telling me, that God would raise up the next generation who would carry on this gospel work and who would continue to be a witness in this community.

Isn't that incredible? If you're here, look at us here today, you are here and we are an answer to that prayer. How God has answered that prayer. I love it, just sowing prayers.

It was not an amazing thing to think about this week as I thought about it. Wouldn't it be great to pray for the Brunswick congregation who meet here in 30 years' time? Right? The things that we would love God to do in this community in 30 years' time, that there would continue to be a gospel witness here and there would be a generation here who would continue to be on fire for Jesus and witnessing to the people here.

Would that be a great thing to pray? That babies would be born, that teens would come to faith, people would come to faith. The whole multi-generational thing would continue to carry on here as a witness to what God has done in our midst.

[25 : 43] So if you're here today and you're before Sheila's time just like me, we need to understand that we are standing on the shoulders of prayer warriors. Are we praying, friends, for the next generation?

Are we praying for our friends? Are we praying for our neighbours? Are we praying for our family? And I love to think we can tell the generations to come that during COVID, we met every night to pray on Zoom.

And they'll say, what was Zoom? And we'll be able to tell them. Met every night to pray on Zoom. And every Monday, I love that, that every Monday people meet to pray. Please do come and join if you haven't done that before.

Another thing I invite you to do, email my address on the website with things that you would love us to pray about. And we'll make sure that they're prayed about on Monday, particularly people. As you think about Christmas invites, speaking to friends, if you email in with things and people you want to get prayed for, we'll make sure that they get prayed for on Monday, eight o'clock on Zoom.

Are we sowing prayers as a church generation here today? Are we sowing gospel words to our non-believing friends? Yes, but maybe just broaden it out a little bit.

[27 : 00] To our non-believing friends as we think about them. Question, how many of us became believers when put up our hands because of the witness and words of a friend or parent? Just put up your hand if that was you. Somebody told you about Jesus.

Right? That's how you came to faith. Whether they were in a church, whether they were at school, whatever, they just told you about Jesus. Do you see how this works? That God would use means to reach us? Be encouraged by that.

That this is how God works. Are we sowing gospel words into people's lives? Non-believing friends. But just broaden it up a little bit. Are we sowing gospel words into our children?

Parents, I get that it's hard, right, to keep on being faithful and sowing into their lives. Honestly, every night I have that inner wrestle in the chaos of family dinner time.

WrestleMania happens on the couch over here and you're running about thinking, honestly, could we not just get through this night and we'll just get the kids down and we have a free evening? Right? Don't underestimate the spiritual battle of that.

[28 : 02] Why it's always the most difficult time of day at that point. But are we sowing the gospel seed into the lives of our children? And that's not just a parent's thing.

All of us. Are we helping with this next generation? Right? It takes a community to raise a child, so goes the saying. Are we sowing gospel words into their lives? Are we encouraging Peter in his work?

Don't underestimate what God can do as we continue to sow. Friends, to those who are suffering, going through hard times just now. Are we sowing the word of God into their lives?

Sowing not cliches, but are we sowing verses, thoughts that we've really thought about and are praying for them? You know, there was the lady who we stayed with in the States over the summer. Her husband died slowly and I'm pretty sure it was of MS.

And she said when it happened, the years of my pastors and my friends who for years before had been sowing the word of God into my life and into my heart and that moment for both of us, her husband and I, she said it really kicked in.

[29 : 11] Friends, are we sowing God's words, faithfully sowing into those who are suffering? And are maybe the last group as we think about, are we sowing into the lives of those who we might understand one day might move on?

Right? It's one of the challenges of being a city centre church where there's a high turnover of people and I know that we're feeling it right now as people come and as people go and it's so hard to say goodbye to people that you love.

But what a privilege is it not that God brings us people for a season for us to love and for us to care for, for us to invest in and that those people go.

I get that it's hard. I get that it's hard. But let's view it like this. Do you know what? I want to encourage you this morning because I hear the other side of it and I speak to the pastors and church leaders of churches where people are going to move on to and they say to me just thank you so much as a church family for being faithful and investing in them for that season of their lives because they've come to us and they're such a blessing.

I think I said we've got to think with this stuff, isn't it? We've got to think kingdom. Are we sowing faithfully into people's lives who we know might one day move on? We're not holding back from that.

[30 : 32] We're investing in people because this is an age to see where the reaper and the sower will rejoice together. In other words, this is not tribes. They realize that they're on the same team.

Here is the thing that's most important to Jesus. Here is the Father's will. The Father's will to save and gather a people from all corners of the earth and gather them to him.

And if you take one thing from this today, and I hope you take more than one thing, but if you take one thing, just remember that nothing is going to stop him doing this. Just as we close, let me tell you this one example of this that encouraged me that this is true.

Last Sunday, after the service, last Sunday, I went to speak at Grace Mount Community Church. And I noticed this lady who was sitting right on the front row.

And so I went up to her and I started chatting to her and introduced myself and she said back to me, she said, Hi, I'm Marion. I'm the one that used to spy on them. Now, I've heard many a first line from somebody when I've introduced myself.

[31 : 43] I've never heard that one. But this was Marion. Marion used to spy on them. So I've got the backstory. Here's the backstory. The church, when it first started, used to meet in a care home.

Now, if you know Grace Mount, you know the leisure centre there. Opposite the leisure centre is the care home, right? So they used to meet there when they first started as a church plant. And as I understand it, the care home, we're happy for them to meet.

But as you understand in our climate, a little bit nervous as to who they are and what they're about to teach. Okay? Underlying thing, are they a cult? So what they did is they sent along a cleaner who was about to clean after they'd left.

Sent along the cleaner. Can you go just a little bit early and can you spy on them? Can you suss them out? What are they about? And Marion was that cleaner. So Marion turned up every week just a little bit early.

Her suspicion turned to intrigue, turned to interest, turned to questions, turned to conversations, turned to coffees, turned to repentance and faith in Jesus and turned to baptism today.

[32 : 55] Isn't that cool? I loved it as well because during the notices they said, we've got a Christianity Explored course that we're running. Who's planning on coming? Marion's hand was straight up.

And I don't mean like that. I mean like that. And she turns around to the rest of the congregation as if they say, come on guys, am I the only one? Am I the only one coming? Am I the only one going to invite friends?

Love it. And I think that encouraged me so much because this is hard and let's not kid ourselves that this is not hard in the world in which we live. It's just hostile to the things of God.

And again, this is what we expect as we read through Scripture. But let's be just as fortified and strengthened by the truth that Jesus is bigger. And this is true today ever as it was then that this is the business that he's employed in.

