

# John's Gospel - Food That Fills a Need

by John Vissers

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of genuine Christian witness, sharing one's experience with others, and doing the will of God as the driving passion of Jesus' ministry.*

**Duration:** 40:35

**Scripture:** John 4:27-28, John 4:39-42

**Topics:** "Gospel Of John"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the two simple principles of Christian witness found in John chapter 4. The first principle is to align oneself with the will of God, which gives purpose and power to one's life. The second principle is illustrated through Jesus' conversation with his disciples, where he explains that his food is to do the will of God. The speaker also mentions the agricultural proverb of 'four months more, then comes the harvest' to emphasize the interval between sowing and reaping. The sermon encourages listeners to find fulfillment in feeding upon Christ and sharing that nourishment with others.

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## Transcript

Good evening and welcome to our service tonight. Our Bible reading is from John's Gospel tonight, from the fourth chapter, as we continue in our study of John's Gospel, chapter 4, and reading verses 27 to 42. This brings us to a conclusion this evening of the story of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well, where we've been for a few weeks now.

And we pick up the story as, at verse 27, the disciples rejoin Jesus, and the story continues at that point. So let us hear the Word of God. Just then his disciples returned, and were surprised to find him talking with a woman.

But no one asked, What do you want? or Why are you talking with her? Then leaving her jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ? They came out of the town and made their way toward him. Meanwhile, his disciples urged him, Rabbi, eat something.

But he said to them, I have food to eat that you know nothing about. Then his disciples said to each other, Could someone have brought him food? My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work. Do you not say, Four months more, and then the harvest? I tell you, open your eyes, and look at the fields, they are ripe for harvest.

Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying, One sows and another reaps, is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for, others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. He told me everything I ever did. So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days.

And because of his words, many more became believers. They said to the woman, We no longer believe just because of what you said. Now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.

So far, the reading of God's word tonight, and may he follow it with his blessing, the presence of his spirit, as we look at this passage together. Let's pray, shall we? Lord, we thank you tonight for your word, and we thank you for this marvelous story, this encounter between our Lord Jesus and the woman at the well. We thank you for what you've been teaching us through this story, and we pray tonight again that you would speak to us, help us not only to understand in our minds, but help us to feel deeply in our hearts the presence of your word and your spirit, and help us to live out practically that word in obedience in our lives day by day.

So speak to us, we pray this night, in the name of Christ, amen. There's a wonderful story about a young novice in a monastery. The abbot of the monastery called him into his office and announced to him that he was to give the homily, the short message or meditation, the next morning in the chapel.

The novice pleaded to be released from the assignment. He said he was too frightened, he was too inadequate, he was too inexperienced to speak to all the brothers in the monastery, and the more that he pleaded, the more, however, the abbot was convinced that the novice indeed needed to fulfill this assignment. So early the next morning, as all the brothers gathered in the chapel, the novice stood at the chapel pulpit, his knees knocking together and his hands shaking, and his voice was simply silent from fear.

All of the brothers sat there in quiet anticipation, and the abbot sat there in frustration, just waiting for him to say something, and at last the frightened novice spoke, and he said, Do you know what I'm going to say? The brothers shook their heads back and forth, No. Then the novice said, Well, neither do I. Let us stand for the benediction, Pax Vobiscum. Well, of course, the abbot was a little annoyed and even upset, so he ordered the frightened young man to give the homily again in the next day's chapel.

He wasn't going to let him get off that easily. So the next morning, if you can imagine, the whole scene was repeated again. The brothers gathered, and here stood this young novice, frightened, terrified, trembling silently before the community again.

And finally he spoke, and he said, Do you know what I'm going to say? And this time all of the brothers nodded their heads up and down, Yes. Good, he said, then there is no need for me to tell you. Let us stand for the benediction, Pax Vobiscum.

Well, by this time, of course, you can imagine the abbot was absolutely furious, and he warned the novice that he was giving him one more chance, and that if he didn't fulfill the task on this occasion, he would be

in real trouble, perhaps isolated in a cell and put on bread and water. So tomorrow he would speak or else. So on the third morning, as the novice stepped to the pulpit, tension mounted even more in the usually peaceful chapel, and after a long pause, he stood there silently, and he finally asked, Do you know what I'm going to say? Well, about half of the brothers nodded their heads, Yes, and about the other half shook their heads, No.

And so he said, Well, good, those of you who know, tell those who don't. Let's stand for the benediction, Pax Vobiscum. Well, one can only imagine in your mind what happened to that young novice.

But I want to suggest to you this evening, as we begin to think into this passage, that in fact he gives us one of the simplest definitions of personal evangelism, those who know, telling those who don't. Those who know, telling those who don't. The great missionary statesman, the great Indian Christian leader D.T. Niles, once defined evangelism as one beggar telling another beggar where to find food.

And as we come to this passage tonight, what we discover is that the woman at the well had come to know Jesus. She had met Jesus, and she was willing, in fact she was eager, to share her experience, to share her encounter, to share this knowledge with her fellow Samaritans who didn't know Jesus. She had discovered the living water.

She had found the bread of life, and she was going to tell her friends where to find it. And so as we come to this passage tonight, what we discover is that it brings to a stunning conclusion, really, the story of the woman at the well. Because the woman now becomes a witness.

She tells others about Jesus. Here she's been engaged in this rather intense conversation with Jesus. Jesus met her, as you'll recall from earlier in the story, at Jacob's well near Sychar.

This has not been an easy conversation. It's not been a conversation simply about the weather. Jesus reached out to her, and he broke ethnic and gender and religious barriers by speaking to her.

She misunderstood what he was talking about at first when he spoke about the living water. Jesus confronted her about the reality of her own life. He forces her to face the truth about herself.

And he shows her that she, a Samaritan woman with a shady past and a life on the margins that she can become a true worshipper of God. Someone who can enter into the spirit of true worship, to worship God in spirit and in truth. And as we saw at the conclusion of our message last week in verse 26, Jesus reveals his identity as the Messiah to her.

I who speak to you am he, Jesus says. And it's at that moment then in verse 27 that the disciples returned. You'll remember that they had gone into town to buy food.

They had left Jesus beside the well at Sychar, beside Jacob's well, and they had gone off into the town to buy food for lunch. And they come back, and the fact that they were surprised to see Jesus talking with a Samaritan woman reflects something, I suppose, of their own sexual and ethnic prejudices that they've, reflects their conformity to the prejudices of their society. But interestingly enough, at the same time, they don't question Jesus about it.

And John makes a great point of this, but no one asks, what do you want? Or why are you talking with her? Perhaps they had come to understand by now, as disciples of Jesus, something about what his ministry was all about. They had seen Jesus push the envelope. They had seen Jesus in John chapter 2

cleanse the temple, a rather radical undertaking.

And perhaps they were beginning to get used to Jesus' rather unorthodox style of ministry. And here they come back from going into town to buy food for lunch. They had left Jesus to rest.

And here they come back and he's engaged in what is obviously a very serious and a very intense conversation with this Samaritan woman. And so they don't make an issue of it, although I'm sure they wondered what Jesus was up to. And then the rest of the passage, really, as we look at it and as we think into it, the rest of the passage really lets us in on three conversations, or puts before us a series of events as these conversations unfold.

There are three little vignettes which really bring this story to a conclusion. First, there is the witness of the Samaritan woman to the other Samaritans in the town in verses 28 to 30. This is followed then by the dialogue, a rather cryptic conversation, really, which Jesus has with his own disciples.

And we want to take a look at that this evening briefly as well. And then the final section of this passage describes the response of the Samaritans to the witness of the woman at the well and their response to Jesus' own teaching and the words which Jesus spoke to them when he stayed with them for two days. So let's look at each of these vignettes and each of these conversations and try to draw out, if we can, some of the applications, some of the principles that are here for us this evening.

First of all, then, there is the witness of the Samaritan woman, particularly in verses 28 to 30. It says the Samaritan woman left her water jar and went back to the town. But she leaves and she's not discouraged.

She's not disappointed. In fact, one can almost imagine there's a spring in her step at this point, that she's almost eager to get back to town to share this experience with her friends. She leaves her water jar, an empty water jar, but her life now has been filled with the living water of Jesus.

And when she arrives, she does two things, and I want you to notice this, because her witness takes two forms, really. First of all, she says, come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. I mean, think about who this woman was.

And think about, then, what she's saying. Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. She invites her fellow Samaritans to come and see Jesus.

She wants the others to meet this prophet who claims to be the Messiah. She has touched her life. She has really uncovered her life in a very real and in a profound way, and yet she wants others to see him and to meet him.

She shares something of her experience with them, even though she's made vulnerable by this. She's willing to share that experience with them. And then secondly, she asks a question of them.

Could this possibly be the Christ? Could this be the one whom we are expecting? Could this be the Messiah whom our leaders and our teachers have been speaking about? Is it possible that this man that I met by the well, by Jacob's well, is the Messiah? Could it be really true? Come and meet him and tell me what you think. And I want to suggest to you that here we find, really, two very remarkable and two very important and yet two very simple principles of Christian witness. I have been a Christian since I was a teenager.

I was raised in a Christian home, and I can't probably tell you how many seminars on personal evangelism and on Christian witness that I've taken over the years. I've taken a lot of courses and seminars on how to share my faith. But I have yet, really, to find one that is as simple and yet as profound as the principles that are uncovered for us in scripture.

And here in John chapter 4, we really find two basic principles for Christian witness. First of all, an effective witness is someone who speaks out of a genuine encounter with Jesus Christ. You see, it's one thing to have all the information right.

And it's important to have all the information right. And it's one thing to learn all of the things that need to be shared, and there are various models and various pamphlets that have been developed over the years. Some of you will be familiar with the Five Steps to Peace with God through the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association or the Four Spiritual Laws, which Campus Crusade has used for many years, or other kinds of material.

It's important to have that information. It's important to have that material of whatever model you use in sharing the gospel. But it is meaningless unless it emerges from and arises out of a genuine encounter with Jesus Christ.

You see, we must be able to speak about what Christ has meant to us. What Christ has done for us. How Christ has changed our lives.

And we're living at a time when people are looking for authenticity in Christian faith. When they're looking for authenticity among Christians, they want to see that it's genuine. That it's not just someone talking the talk, but also walking the walk.

It's emerging out of a real, living experience with Jesus Christ. The most compelling testimonies of God's grace are those that are genuine, those that are honest, those that are real, those that are simple, and those that come out of a real meeting of Jesus Christ in a straightforward way. Let me tell you what the Lord has done for me.

Come and meet someone who told me all that I ever did. What words can you put in your own life, in your own witness, in your own testimony at that point to refer to Jesus? What has Christ done for you? And how are you able to share that with somebody else? And then the second principle is that she asks questions, or she asks a question. Jesus himself, of course, was the master at this.

He often, in his encounters with people, would ask them questions. And he would often respond to questions put to him with another question. And asking questions is a very effective way of inviting someone into a conversation about Jesus Christ.

We're living in a world today which is increasingly being described as post-modern. That's a big word, and it means all kinds of different things depending on who's defining it and who's giving meaning to the term. But one of the things we're discovering is that baby boomers and the next generation, Generation X people and baby busters, are often suspicious of people who come across as having all of the answers all of the time.

And what I've discovered is that it's often more effective, rather than simply laying something on somebody, to ask questions by means of Christian witness. It's an effective way of getting people to think about Christ, to talk about Christ, especially, of course, if they've initiated the conversation. And so

sometimes, rather than giving an answer, the best thing is to respond with, well, what do you think about that? What do you think about Christ? What do you think about this or about that, about the Christian faith or about the Christian church? And people will often respond to questions in a way that they won't respond simply when information is put before them.

We're living at a time when one of the most effective ways of sharing our faith is in conversation, is in dialogue, and it provides a non-threatening way to share the gospel, a more indirect approach, but in very real ways, a more effective approach. Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Do you think this could be the Christ? Could this be the Messiah? And so here we have these two principles, really, of Christian witness which emerge in this text.

And then the second vignette is the dialogue which takes place between Jesus and his disciples. And I've described it as a rather cryptic conversation because it's one of those conversations which Jesus often has with people. They don't really catch on at first what he's talking about.

While the woman is busy talking to people in the town, the disciples of Jesus want to take care of him. After all, they left him beside the well. Presumably, this text says, he was tired.

He may well have even been exhausted from the journey. It's the middle of the day. He's probably hot.

He was thirsty. He was hungry. They had left him there, and they had gone into town to buy food.

And now they've come back, and they find him preoccupied in this conversation with a stranger at the well. And so they urge Jesus, once she goes, they urge Jesus to eat something. But he replies that he has already eaten.

Or at least it comes across that way. He says, I have food to eat that you know nothing about. I mean, a rather strange reply.

And they're probably thinking, I mean, did he get some food somewhere while we were in town buying lunch? Was he able to find some food? Did he have food that we didn't know about? And so they're confused, and they wonder among themselves what's going on. And in a very real sense, the misunderstanding of the disciples at this point parallels the misunderstanding of the woman at the well earlier in the story. The Samaritan woman didn't understand what Jesus meant when he spoke about living water.

Now the disciples don't understand when Jesus speaks about food. The Samaritan woman didn't understand what it was that could really satisfy a thirst, a spring of living water welling up to eternal life. And now the disciples don't seem to really understand what would restore and renew and replenish the life and ministry of Jesus.

And he makes it clear to them what that is, doing the will of God his Father and finishing the work that the Father had sent him to do. Verse 34, my food, said Jesus, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Verse 34 is a marvelous summary statement of the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels.

Spurgeon describes it as the golden sentence which emerges in the Gospel of John. It is the key to understanding the life and ministry of Jesus. Because if you want to understand what Jesus was about, what motivated him, what made him get up in the morning to do what he did day in and day out, even though he was exhausted, even though he carried a great burden, it was because he sought to do the will

of God his Father and to finish the work that the Father had called him to do.

His driving passion was to see that that work be completed. A few chapters later, in John chapter 6, verses 35-39, Jesus is described as the bread of life. Whoever comes to him will never go hungry and whoever believes in him will never be thirsty, Jesus says, and he says he came not to do his own will but to do the will of his Father in heaven.

And that's why in John chapter 17, in that great high priestly prayer, he can pray to his Father in heaven, I have completed the work that you have called me to do, that you sent me to do. And then in John chapter 19, it's in John's Gospel that we have those words on the cross of Calvary, it is finished. One word in Greek, tetelestai, it has been accomplished, it has been finished, the work has been done.

And that reference is not simply to the fact that Jesus' life has come to a conclusion, it's not a cry of despair, but it is in fact a cry of victory, I have completed the work that the Father sent me to do. The Apostle Paul in Philippians chapter 2, in a marvelous way, really unfolds the reality of that ministry that the Lord had come to undertake. He came as a servant to serve the will of God his Father.

And Jesus lived his life with the conviction, with the passion that doing the will of God his Father sustained him. That obedience to the will of God gave him purpose and fulfillment. That that's what would enable him to go on, that that's what would nourish his own soul and fill his own life in ways that would enable him to move forward.

And if that is true of our Savior and our Lord Jesus Christ, it is true for the believer. For the believer who grows in Christ, who is united to Christ, that's what ought to mark his or her life. Not just knowing the will of God, and of course many of us get tripped up at that point.

We spend all our time trying to discern, trying somehow to understand, trying to figure out the will of God, but most of the will of God for our lives in fact is laid out very clearly in scripture. And the challenge is always doing it. Not just doing it, but as Jesus did, willing it, wanting to do it, not doing it sort of gritting your teeth and saying, well I guess I have to do this, but doing it with a joyful heart and joyful obedience, giving your will over to the will of God the Father.

You know, we live in a culture and we're living in a time where everything militates against this kind of an understanding of the Christian faith. The Canadian philosopher George Grant describes our time as people living with the triumph of the will, where the phrase is, I want to do what I want to do, when and how and where and why I want to do it. And the assumption is that's how you find fulfillment.

You just let the ego run wild. And as you let the ego run wild, you fill yourself, you're fulfilled in that way. But the Bible describes that not as freedom, but as bondage.

And the Bible describes that not, in fact, as fulfillment, but as spiritual starvation. You see, Jesus ate the food that filled his life. And it was obedience to the will of God his Father.

And that's the food that believers are called to eat day in and day out. If you want to find fulfillment in your life, if you want to find that sense of purpose and direction and meaning, and if you want to have a reason for getting up in the morning that will give you power to live throughout the day, it is to be found in the will of God. And then the second part of this conversation between Jesus and his disciples gets even a little more confusing, because the disciples may have brought food for Jesus from town, but his food is to do the will of God, and then he uses two agricultural proverbs to illustrate the work that he's involved in.

Two proverbs, really. The first one is, four months more, then comes the harvest. This was a pithy proverb, a statement well-known in the first century, one that has continued through the ages.

It simply means that there's an interval between the time of sowing and planting and the time of reaping. After sowing, the farmer usually waits patiently for the harvest, usually four months until the harvest is able to be gathered in. And Jesus then contrasts this with what is happening.

And what he's really saying to his disciples is, the time of waiting is over. There is no more waiting. The fruit of eternal life has been planted among the Jews, but now it's being harvested among the Samaritans.

It's being gathered in, and God's timing is so different from our timing. What he's really saying is the harvest is here, the time has come, the kingdom of God is at hand. Today is the day of salvation, and in the surprising ways of God, it's happening among these Samaritan people, the least that you would think.

Where you think God might not be at work, there he is at work. And then the second proverb is simply this, one sows and another reaps. Now in its original context, this proverb usually was cited to describe life's injustices.

Someone would do something, and then it would have consequences for somebody else. But Jesus uses it here to make the point that the disciples are now part of something that is bigger than they are. They are going to have the privilege of being involved in a ministry, of reaping the harvest that they weren't involved in planting.

They're going to see now the fruit of a ministry that has gone before them. Jesus may be referring to the prophets, he may be referring to John the Baptist, he may be referring to his own ministry. The point is, what he's saying is God is at work, and you now as my disciples are entering in to the harvest which is to be gathered.

The work of Jesus is to bring people into that kingdom, to see people born again, as he said to Nicodemus in John 3, to see people receive the living water, he says he said to the woman at the well, and not simply for the Jews, but for the Samaritans as well. And Jesus comes across with a sense of urgency here. He wants his disciples to refocus their attention, to get a sense of God's timing, to get a sense of what was going on.

That's what makes this such a marvelous missions text. Because it's a text with urgency. It's a text with a sense of purpose.

It's a text which points to the sovereignty of God, that God is at work in ways that we may not always understand. It's a text that reminds us that we must work while it is day, for the night is coming when no one will be able to work. Urgency to the task of missions.

It's a text which has motivated the great missionaries down through the history of the church, and it's a text which ought to motivate us in our witness for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus helps his disciples to see the Samaritans, to use the common contemporary language as an unreached people's group. As a group to be reached for the kingdom of God.

As those who formerly might have been beyond the pale and now being brought in in the purposes of God, being gathered in. Where are the harvest fields today? Where is Jesus pointing us as a congregation? Where should we be looking for the harvest? Where are the opportunities? Where is the

urgency? Where are we being called to serve? And then finally, notice that the episode concludes with the description of Jesus' ministry among the Samaritans in verses 39 to 42. The woman at the well spoke to the people of Sychar about Jesus.

It was a testimony. It was a piece of good news. It was a report concerning Jesus.

This prophet had told her everything she did. Most of the townspeople no doubt knew her, knew about her life. She was no doubt looked down upon.

A woman who had been beaten up by life, abused and marginalized. But she becomes the one in the purposes of God, by the sovereign grace of God, to be the voice of witness in that town. What a marvelous story.

She is touched by Jesus. And she becomes the voice. She becomes the person.

She becomes the means through which the ministry of Jesus touches that whole town and that whole community. And isn't it a reminder, in a marvelous way, how God uses sometimes perhaps the most unlikely unsuspecting people for the purposes of accomplishing his purposes, accomplishing his salvation, his saving purposes. Jesus made a difference in her life.

And she was able to speak about it. And others took notice of it. Jesus stayed, it says, in the town for two days at the invitation of the Samaritans.

This is kind of amusing when you think about it. Remember at the beginning of the story, why did they go through Samaria in the first place? Because they were in a hurry. Most people went around Samaria so that they wouldn't have to go through it.

Most of the Jews went to the other side of the Jordan and up the other side. But that took longer. Jesus was in a hurry to get home to Galilee.

But here, in the sovereign purposes of God, he spends two days there because there's an incredible opportunity for ministry. It says many of them became believers in Jesus. And as Jesus taught them, many more believed.

And it says their faith became grounded, not simply in her testimony. As important as that testimony was, it was a bridge. It was a touching point.

But their faith became grounded in their own experience of Jesus and their own understanding of his words as he spoke to them. They say, we no longer believe just because of what you said, but now we have heard for ourselves and we know that this man really is the savior of the world. And notice the last phrase there of that paragraph.

This man really is the savior of the world. Do you know, and I was astonished really when I looked at this in greater detail, that this is one of the few places in the Gospels where Jesus is referred to as savior. Jesus is called savior many times in the book of Acts.

He's called savior many times, many times by the apostle Paul. But in the Gospels, Jesus is usually referred to in another way. But the point is here that the Samaritans came to see Jesus as savior, not just as Messiah, although he was, but as the savior of the world.

And this is a theme which comes through again and again in John's Gospel. Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. And now, at the end of this encounter, Jesus is the savior of the world. The Gospel which is proclaimed to the Samaritans is a Gospel for all.

And one of the things this story, this encounter, reminds us of is that Jesus came not only to the lost sheep of Israel, but indeed to be the savior of the world. And as I was thinking this week, you know, it gives a tremendous new sense of meaning to what Jesus says to his disciples in Acts chapter 1 and verse 8. Do you remember when he commissions them? He says, you will be my witnesses where? In Jerusalem, in Judea, where else? In Samaria, and to the very ends of the earth. You see, the saving purposes of God are unfolding here.

And through the witness of that one woman, salvation came to many people. People who were thought to be beyond the pale, beyond perhaps the reach of salvation. The woman at the well found living water.

The other Samaritans found words of life. And they all found food that truly satisfied them. The bread of life, Jesus Christ.

Where are you tonight in your journey of faith with the Lord? Where are you in terms of your own purpose, your own sense of fulfillment? Where are you in terms of your own witness, your own personal faith and witness to others? Where are you in terms of feeling a sense of fulfillment? All of these themes come to the forefront in this marvelous story in the fourth chapter of John's Gospel. And may we all tonight sense in a new and in a deeper way what it means to feed upon Christ the living bread. And to drink from the water of eternal life.

And having eaten, and having taken that water, then being nourished and sharing it with others. Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for this marvelous story.

This encounter between our Lord Jesus and the woman at the well. For all that it has to teach us. And it's such a rich story.

And there's so much more even there than we've even been able to consider tonight. But Lord, we pray that you would speak to us tonight. That you would fill our lives, our aching hearts.

And use us for your purposes, Lord. You have a will for us. Help us to be obedient to that will.

To walk the way that you want us to walk. And help us to feed upon you day by day. Be with us this week, Lord.

And help us in some way perhaps to put into practice, to apply some of the principles discussed tonight. We might be more faithful as your disciples. In the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen. Amen.

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