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JOHN 4:28-38

John Series: Get a Life in Jesus

Open your Bibles with me please to John 4. If you didn't bring a Bible, I'm going to show you the passage on the screen so you can see where we are today because I want you to be able to follow along right from the text in John 4. We study the Bible verse by verse each week, so we happen to be going through John 4. We come to a particular passage and it's that passage that's going to drive us deeper and convinces us that God has some really good things for us to learn today from this passage. A really good reminder from John 4.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Father, I thank you that we can learn more about love and what it really is as we gather together and have a commitment to each other and checking back with each other and asking how it's going, and that fellowship is so special and sweet. So thank you for your church and your design for it. We also know that your church is a place where we can practice worship. Practicing not only for eternity, but practicing for our daily lives and knowing how to worship you in the course of the rest of our week. The church is a place where we can open your word and learn more about it. I pray that you'd inspire us today. You remind us of who you are and the importance of following you. Lord, I pray that you'd speak to each of us. Give us what we need this morning. Draw our attention to you in a new way. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Today our lesson is about priorities. We're going to learn about Jesus' discussion with His disciples. And it's a good reminder. Every once in a while the Lord takes us to a passage of scripture that just confirms this idea of what's important. That's what's going to happen today as we look at John 4. If you remember the story in John 4, it's the story about the woman at the well. We've spent a couple of weeks already in this story, but it's so rich. Every time Jesus speaks, it's worth pondering and considering.

There's this little nugget of truth hidden away in John 4 that I want to spend our time today looking at. I trust that the Lord will use it for you to be a reminder. A reminder of what's important in your own life. It's in this passage and it is a story about the woman at the well, so I want to take it in context. I've given you the verses so you can see where the story takes place in the passage. It will just remind you of where we were, where we've been, or maybe if you haven't been with us and you know the scriptures, you'll know where the story fits. So would you please stand with me as I read this passage of scripture in honor of God's word.

John 4:28 – *Then, leaving her water 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 Messiah?” 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. Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a 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.”

You may be seated.

Jesus is using this opportunity to talk to His disciples and He’s using this idea of food to illustrate something spiritual for them. In the bigger story here, He’s used the idea of water, thirsting for living water, to draw attention to his wellspring inside of us that we all have a need for. This well of living water that God provides for us that satisfies that longing, that purpose, that meaning, that thing that we need. We all need it. And we all come to that place every once in a while where we just feel the deep need. Sometimes we can mask it, sometimes we can hide it, sometimes we can get ourselves busy, but we all come to that place every once in a while at least, sometimes very regularly, where we feel that deep need inside. And so Jesus uses the word water to describe that well, that filling, that living water that this woman wanted, and of course she received. She goes out and talks to the townspeople and then they come out, as the first verses in our passage say.

Now Jesus is going to use another idea besides water. He’s going to use the idea of food now to talk about what’s most important. He’s going to share with us some ideas that help us understand priorities. I would suggest that the biggest enemy for us is allowing the urgent to crowd out the important in our lives. The urgent things to crowd out the important things. And so that call back to priorities is, I think, a good one for us. I trust that the Lord will use this.

Now He’s going to speak specifically to the disciples about spiritual priorities, which I think is great. But I think as we shake our world a little bit, we sift it out, the most important things need to be there and we need to look at those things, and they become those key ingredients that will help us to make decisions. Probably one of the greatest things priority does for us is allow you to say no to other things.

Well let’s dig into our passage a little bit and see what it has to say for us. In John 4:31 it says *meanwhile*. Because if you picture the scene, the woman has gone into town and the other people are all coming out to see who this guy is, Jesus. Then we have the *meanwhile*. In other words,

here's what's going on on the other side. So the disciples see the people coming and they see this opportunity for Jesus to get some food before ministry starts. They've been with Jesus for a while. They know that when ministry starts it goes on for a while.

So they're saying to 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?"

I mean did somebody bring Him a Happy Meal or does He have a bar hidden away in His robe or something? Where is He getting this other food? Jesus is trying to help them understand this very important lesson about what's important. He's going to use this idea of food. They don't get it right away, but they're going to get it as we continue on in the passage.

Notice it says – *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."*

So Jesus had this mission-oriented view of life. It determined what He would do and how He would do it. He wants His disciples to know that there's really important things that we need to focus on, we need to do. When you understand the priorities, then other things seem to fit around those. Urgent gets in the way of important.

Let me give you a practical example that I think most of us face. You're with someone you like, you're talking to them, whether it's your spouse or your family, maybe it's around the dinner table, and your phone rings. That's the urgent versus the important. What are you going to do? Are you going to answer that phone? I'm not saying you can't answer your phone when you're talking to somebody. All I'm saying is there's a battle right there in that moment between the urgent and the important that we must wrestle with. Do we take that notification, or do we look at that text message, or do we focus on what we're doing? That's the wrestling that we all have to do sometimes. Because sometimes the text messages are important. Sometimes we are waiting for an important phone call. And so we have to tie all that together. What's important is going to help us sift out our actions and what we're going to choose to do.

I've just come through probably the busiest month or six weeks of my life. I just can't believe how busy things have been. I had a lot of things planned for September. You know we had the birth of our granddaughter and then we had the wedding planned. But then there was the hurricane in North Carolina, so my grandchildren came up, my son for a few days, and then the week before the wedding my other grandchildren came up. So my head was just swirling with all of the things that I needed to do. I really committed during that time to hey my grandkids are here. So I decided that was going to be a priority for me. Let these piles develop. Let the to-do list grow. I'm going to spend time with my grandkids. That seemed to be fine. I was working on all of that.

Seventeen days before the wedding of my daughter, Megan had scheduled dance lessons for us so we could dance together at the wedding. I've always wanted to learn how to dance and going to dance lessons sounded like a great idea to me. I really wanted to do that and be part of this dance thing. But here's what I learned. When you go to dance lessons, you don't learn how to

dance. What you learn is what you're supposed to practice one hour a day for the next thirty days so that you can dance. Okay? It's not easy to learn these dance steps and so on. So now I've got seventeen days to do thirty days worth of work. So morning, afternoon, and evening I'm practicing my dance steps. I'm going over to my daughter's work, her dog grooming place, and dancing up and down the aisles with the groomers all doing their thing. It was just...oh my goodness.

But for me what happened in that period of time was that there were two priorities for me that rose to the top. That was spending time with my grandchildren and dancing with my daughter. Because those things rose to the top, a lot of other things had to go by the sides. I'm picking up those pieces now, trying to get caught up in my life, but it's those kinds of priorities that dictate where we're going. They help us decide what we're going to say no to and they give us direction.

Jesus has this mission that He's on to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work. It's a spiritual path that He's taking. And that becomes His mission. When we get the idea of how important spiritual things are, it dictates our actions. We start saying no to other things because we really want to keep this sense of our spiritual vitality or sharing the life of Christ with other people high on our importance list. Jesus practiced this.

One time there was a bunch of people on the roads all looking because they knew Jesus was coming, this one who heals people and does these other things. And there's one man who was short, the Bible says, and he climbed up a tree because he wanted to see the Lord pass by. His name was Zacchaeus. But Jesus, as He was walking down the roads, He saw this guy up in the tree and He goes through the crowds and goes under the tree and says to this man, "Zacchaeus (He knew his name), you come down. I'm going to have lunch with you today. I'm going to your house and eat."

He went to Zacchaeus' house and Zacchaeus had this whole change. He was a tax collector. Nobody liked him because he would cheat people. He came to a realization in the midst of that moment that he needed to do something. He needed to repent, if we could use that word, have a change of heart. That he needed to be a different kind of person. So he stood up in the meal and he said, "For every person I've cheated, I'm going to return plus more to those people. I'm going to give away money to the poor." He was organizing his finances, his priorities around his new life in Christ. Jesus had a mission and His mission knew about Zacchaeus. And so He's able to say no to other things.

The story that we're looking at, as you remember from last week, is a story that takes place in the town of Sychar in the province of Samaria. I want to tell you another story of something that happened in Samaria.

This story happens a few years later after Jesus Christ had died. The church had started. It was a threat to the leaders and so there was persecution on the church and people started leaving Jerusalem and going other places. One of the places they went was Samaria. So now the word of God is coming to Samaria and the Samaritans now are accepting the Lord. In fact there's a revival going on in the midst of this story. There's a revival going on in the story and Philip is right in the middle of it. Great things are happening. People are coming to Christ, demons being

cast out, their lives are being changed, people are getting healed, the lame are walking, the Bible says, and Philip is in the middle of that. Right when he's in the middle of all of that spiritual victory and excitement, God takes him out of there. Right in the middle of what appeared to be a spiritual mountain, the Holy Spirit has Philip move to another place for a moment.

He now finds himself on the road south of Jerusalem on his way to Africa on this road. There's this African executive actually going to Ethiopia back home who'd come to worship in Jerusalem. He's on the road reading the Bible. He's reading the book of Isaiah, but he doesn't have any idea what he's talking about. So God uses Philip in that moment. Philip runs alongside the chariots. "Hey do you understand what you're reading?" The guy says, "How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?"

Philip gets up there and starts explaining how Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of what we read in the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. The man is just overwhelmed. He just says, "I want to be saved." In fact he's so overtaken by this understanding now of how powerful God is and who God is and how His scriptures all come together, he says, "What do I need to do to be baptized?" Remember, they're on the road south of Jerusalem, heading down to Africa. But they came to some water and Philip baptized him there.

The priority for Philip was not to be in this mountaintop experience in Samaria, but the priority was for him to be somewhere that God had designed for him to share Christ with someone on the road. He was willing to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and allow the Holy Spirit to take him there. Wow. Priorities.

Let me tell you another story about Peter. You know Apostle Peter was a Jew. Jews have really strict rules about what they would eat and what they wouldn't eat. Peter was up on top of the roof where the porch was at one point and he was resting. While he was resting there, he had a vision. This vision was a big sheet came down and inside the sheet were all these animals that Jews would not eat. They were against the dietary laws of the Jewish customs it was pretty strict about. And God says, "Here, Peter. Eat." Peter goes, "God, I cannot eat those things. Those are not kosher. Those are not the kinds of things that we can eat." God used that vision. He says, "I want you to know that I have some more plans for you. I'm going to take this message of Jesus Christ, this living water, this salvation (however you want to describe it in that moment), and I want to offer it to the Gentiles." The Gentiles! You mean this isn't just going to be a Jewish thing? This is something that's offered to non-Jews.

God says there's going to be a knock on your door in a moment. And sure enough, there was a knock on the door of someone who needed help. Peter went with them to meet Cornelius. The Bible tells us that Cornelius and all his families, the whole household got saved, non-Jewish people. Gentiles. God said, "Peter, I'm going to change your priorities here. I want to give you a vision for something bigger I can do in the midst of this." There's something that happens in our lives when we have this mission-oriented view of life.

Now you know I work with young people and their parents. One of the things I help parents understand is this: There are three stages of adolescence. The first stage of adolescence is between the age of twelve to sixteen and it's characterized by emotionally driven decision-

making. This is when these young people tend to eat junk food because it feels good. They maybe text in the middle of the night because that's what they want to do. They don't get a lot of sleep, or they don't do their homework, or they have a bad attitude. A host of different things that happens between twelve and sixteen because there's a sense, usually, of emotionally driven decision-making.

But significant shift takes place or needs to take place somewhere in there, but usually between the age of sixteen or twenty, give or take two years, where a person makes a change in their thinking. Now some people don't. They're in their late twenties and still living at home and playing video games. But the point is there's usually a shift that takes place in a young person's life where they now say, "I'm going to go to college. Therefore I'm not going to text in the middle of the night. I'm going to go to sleep so I can do well tomorrow and pay attention in class because I want to get good grades." Or "I'm going to be healthy and not going to eat junk food." So there's this switch that takes place about a mission-oriented... I'm going somewhere. I want to be something. So it moves them a particular direction.

I think in a similar way, there's a spiritual maturity that takes place in all of our lives. As Christians we sometimes take God and we say, "Okay God, I've got all these plans here. Would you kind of bless my plans and fit into my plans?" But there's a big shift that takes place spiritually for us when we make God the center, the mission of our lives. When we're interested in doing His will and finishing His work, as Jesus said, then the Father becomes really important. Following the Lord becomes this actual mission. There's this shift that takes place spiritually and when it does, then it just transforms who we are. We're a different kind of person. That needs to take place in each of our lives. And that's what Jesus is trying to communicate to His disciples.

There's a really important mission that we need to do and He's going to elaborate on that. He starts by saying I just want to comment on this word *finish*. I'm thinking I don't understand what Jesus... Jesus isn't going to finish the work. He's going to start the work. Really the church just grows out of what happens and part of His work still. But that word *finish* is the same word used when Jesus was on the cross. Remember there were seven statements on the cross that Jesus made? One of the statements He made was, "*It is finished.*" It comes from the same Greek word as this word.

What happened on the cross is that Jesus finished something. He provided for us salvation by dying on the cross. Jesus knew where He was headed. He knew where He was going. He knew He had a task to do. He was on a mission. And He needed to finish the work that God had laid out for Him. That's what He's referring to here as He's saying God has given me this purpose.

So here's these guys now. They're shopping while Jesus is leading this woman to living water. They're interested in food and making sure food is here while He is going to share the gospel with a whole townspeople. It doesn't mean Jesus doesn't eat, because we know He ate. But He's trying to make a point here about what's important... I think a point that we all need to have because we need to evaluate our time and our finances and our energy. We need to evaluate what we're going to do with our lives every day. When we have a mission-oriented view of life it changes where we're going.

So let's see how Jesus develops this idea for the disciples. He says in verse 35 – *“Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”*

Now I'm sure you don't recognize that saying. We don't make that statement. “It's still four months until harvest.” Does anyone know what that means? We just don't make that statement. But here's what's going on in the passage. If you think about agriculture and try to imagine this, because it even happens today, when the harvest happens, it comes and everybody is on duty. It is urgent. The urgent and the important come together at the harvest time. That's what happens. Not urgent versus important. They are together when harvest time comes.

So early in the morning the farmers get up. They start running their tractors nowadays, and they start harvesting because they're trying to capture that crop when the sugar is the best, if they're getting grapes or strawberries. They're trying to capture that head of grain when it's just at its ripest or that corn when it's sweet. They're trying to get it right at the right time. And there's only a certain length of time that they have to do that. So they wait up until the latest point they can to catch their harvest, then they go to work. And they're working hard. They're up in the early morning until late at night and they're just working every day because the harvest is here. They want to beat the storms that might be coming. They want to get as much of that crop in.

There's an opportunity window that exists during harvest time. Jesus is going to talk about that opportunity window. If we understand that there's an opportunity window, it drives us to think differently about our lives. He's referring to the harvest to talk about this opportunity window and He talks about the saying it's still four months until the harvest. You see, if you were not at harvest time, you might say, “Oh we've got four months to the harvest.” In our terminology we might say, “Well what's the hurry? What's the big deal? It's not that important. We've got plenty of time.” You see that's what someone might say. And Jesus is saying no, you need to think about what we're doing right now. We are in a place where urgency and importance come together and I want you to see that. So that's why He's talking about this food and the work that He's doing.

He uses these words – *Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.* Open your eyes and see the opportunities that exist right now. If you're so busy with food, you've got your head down, you're just going this direction, you're missing something. *Open your eyes* is the idea. And this communication here is about opening your eyes to the spiritual harvest that's out there. I would suggest that this idea of opening our eyes to the spiritual growth that can take place in our lives.

There's another word that *open my eyes* is mentioned. This is in Psalm 119:18. He says these words: *Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from your law.* That's why it's so important for us to just open God's word every day. Lord, I'm going to open your word. Just open my eyes to what you have to say to me.

If we're in God's word regularly, then He speaks to us. I encourage you, get into God's word. Have a way to do that. Maybe it's an app that you have that has a verse on it. Maybe it's reading the Bible ten minutes a day, or something where you're regularly getting into the word because it

just opens our eyes to spiritual things in the course of the day. Right? If you're reading God's word and you're thinking about the truths that come out of it, then it affects how you live. Your priorities change. It helps you solidify the things that are most important and not all the urgent to creep in and get in the way.

If you're looking for a place to start reading, start reading in the book of Proverbs. Read a chapter. It will take you ten minutes probably to read a chapter (maybe even less than that) every day. Read the gospel of John, the book we're in, where people are meeting Jesus. It's just really exciting. So the psalmist here is saying a similar thing. Lord, open my eyes. Open my eyes to the opportunities, to the ways that you think, and so on.

So when we come back to the passage that we're in now and He says – *“Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”* I used to think what that meant was the story took place during harvest time. When He's saying do you see the fields all out there? Look. They're ripe for harvest. See all the grain? It's ready to be harvested. But I realize that's probably not what He's talking about. If we take this back into the context of the passage, remember the first verse said the woman had gone into town to tell them, *“This man knows everything about me.”* It says that the people were coming out of the town. So when Jesus was saying open your eyes and see the harvest, He's referring to the people that are coming out that are ready for something.

Every person we come in contact with has this need deep inside their hearts for meaning and satisfaction, this longing for purpose, for identity. God has the answers for that.

Here's an artist's rendition of this idea of the wheat and the people. I like this because we're looking at the wheat in the front, but then there's all these people that really need the Lord. There's a harvest waiting for that to take place. Maybe you're saying to yourself, *“You don't know where I live. Where I live, we really can't...we're not getting anywhere. I try to live for Christ or if I say anything about Jesus then I get persecuted, or people start ignoring me, or they think it's trivial or ridiculous. I'm not looking at a harvest.”* If you're thinking that way, great. Because Jesus wants to talk about that very problem in the next verse.

So let's go back to our passage here. He's saying in verse 35 – *“I tell you the truth, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a 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.”*

You may be one of those people that's doing the hard work, breaking the ground. If you think about planting something, digging up that hard soil, and putting the fertilizer in, mixing it up a little bit, planting your seeds. That's a hard task and in that place in your home, your neighborhood, people you come in contact with, your extended family where you feel like you're doing that plowing, that hard work, I want you to know that's part of what it means to be part of the harvest. You're sowing. Just look at the words. *Hard work.*

There are times when living the Christian life is hard work. It's not just all easy. It's hard to take a stand for what's right. It's hard to figure out how to handle a relationship where there's some

tension in that relationship or to confront someone who's doing the wrong thing, or maybe not confront them because you want to love them. It's hard to know how to handle some of those things in our lives. But when we know where we're going, as Jesus did, when we have this mission, when we recognize that there's spiritual opportunities around us, it makes that process a little bit easier because we know where we're going. We know what the truth is. We're not sidetracked by all kinds of other things. We're going in a direction. We have a mission.

Jesus was on a mission and He's called us to be on a mission too, a mission to grow spiritually, to share that message with other people, and that becomes a priority. So every conversation that we're in becomes an opportunity. Whether we say anything in that conversation or not requires wisdom. Sometimes we just be quiet and that's the best witness that we could be. But other times we do take advantage of conversations and try to draw them to spiritual truths. Sometimes we do take opportunities with children to talk about God's grace and what He's doing in our family's life. Sometimes we do have those conversations in marriage that draw us deeper. How do we know? How are we going to be sensitive to that? We're going to have a mission. We're thinking about what God has for us.

That's Jesus' message for His disciples. Guys, don't just think about the food. Don't just think about the temporal things. Think about the mission that I have for you. That is the most important thing. There is spiritual growth waiting for you. There are people who need to hear.

I think we get that idea, we've gotten that idea that God has for us in His word today. Something that will challenge us deep in our hearts to think, to just allow God to do some rearranging, some maybe even shaking of our lives to sort out the things that are most important and not allow the urgent to get in the way.

Would you stand with me? Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Father, I pray that your Holy Spirit would just rain down on us now and touch us. Just work through our priority list to raise to the top the most important thing. Lord, help us as we make decisions about our time and our money and our energy to do so in terms of your priorities. Give us such an impact that we're able to touch others in ways that draw attention to the spiritual growth, the spiritual understanding of who you are. Lord, do that in our own lives today. Remind us of what's most important. We just come before you as needy people. We know, Lord, that sometimes we need for you to make us humble people first before we can be people that receive you. So we're inviting you to do that deeper work in our hearts to make us to be the people that you want us to be. In Jesus' name, amen.