

Harvest and Healing

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[0 : 0 0] evening to open up God's Word with you. As we come to this passage from John's Gospel, it would be great if you could have it open in front of you. Please do use your pew Bibles. It would be great if you could follow along. Before we come to look at this passage, let me pray using the second collect for Advent. Blessed Lord, who caused the Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may so hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that through patience and the comfort of your holy Word, we may embrace and forever hold fast the joyful hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well, I wonder if you've ever noticed how words can have power, how they can captivate, how they can warn, how they can bring forth a reaction. We might think of Martin Luther King's famous speech, I Have a Dream. Or we might think of one of Winston Churchill's famous wartime speeches, you know, when that phrase, we'll fight them on the beaches. Heartwarming, stirring stuff.

But of course, not everybody's words captivate, do they? When I speak to my two-year-old son, I'm often not listened to. I have to repeat myself over and over again. And there are very few things that he will listen to immediately. And thankfully, one of the few things that has a guaranteed reaction is the word stop. And I shout at him as he's running down the pavement. If I shout stop, he will stop. And I am wonderfully thankful he does listen to me on that rare occasion.

Maybe you've had similar problems with your children. Or maybe if you're a teacher, you've got pupils that you can imagine who don't listen to your voice as you wish they did. But if my words or your words often fail to have real power, some words are very obviously powerful, aren't they? We could think of a courtroom and a judge declaring judgment. We could think of a minister declaring a man and a woman to be husband and wife. We could think of a king or queen making a binding legal declaration. These words have real power. And in our passage this evening, we'll see that Jesus' words have real power. They had real power 2,000 years ago, and they have real power today.

They have real power because of who Jesus is. And who Jesus is and how we should respond to him is central to John's purpose in writing his gospel. Now, if you've read John's gospel, you may have noticed this emphasis in the opening verses of chapter 1. And then right at the end of the gospel, in verses 31 and 30, sorry, 30 and 31 of chapter 20. Now, it may be worth turning to those verses in chapter 20, so we can all be on the same page as to what John wants to do with his gospel. You'll find it on page 1090 on the Pew Bibles. John chapter 20, verse 30. John is writing and he says, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

[3 : 3 5] But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. This is what John wants to happen to his readers as they read his gospel. Whether you've read this little book more times than you can remember, or this is the first time you've ever opened John's gospel, this is what John hopes for you.

He wants you to know who Jesus is. He wants you to trust in him so that you might have life. Now, of course, that implies that life is something that you need.

And the reason we need that life that Jesus can give us is because each of us stands under God's judgment. We've not lived the way God wanted us to live, and for that, we each face death. And John summarizes that rather beautifully in that wonderfully famous verse from John chapter 3, verse 16, where he says, For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, i.e. die, but have eternal life. So believing and receiving life from Jesus is not just life coaching. It's not about self-improvement, about having a better life now.

Rather, it's a matter of life and death. As John presents Jesus in these pages, he is not, I suppose, what many would imagine as he presents his narrative of Jesus.

John presents a man who is bold and counter-cultural. He goes to the center of religious life, the temple, and quite literally turns the tables over. He does many miraculous things, but he's not interested in people who are only interested in the stuff he does and not him. He tells one of the highest-ranking religious leaders in the country that he just doesn't get it. He's willing to break cultural prejudice and speak to a non-Jewish woman. And it's to that conversation with a Samaritan woman that we are turning to this evening. Jesus has had a long and detailed conversation with a Samaritan woman in the first part of John 4. Now, if you don't know much about Samaritans, they weren't Jewish people, but they had a sort of certain similarity of beliefs in common with Jewish people.

[6 : 00] And as the conversation she has with Jesus comes to a conclusion, Jesus makes it clear that he is the one that both Jews and Samaritans have been longing for. He is God's promised king. He is the Messiah. Verse 25 and 26. And as we break into this scene, we'll see two things from our passage this evening. Firstly, in verses 27 to 42, we'll see that Jesus' word brings forth a living harvest. Jesus' word brings forth a living harvest. Now, I wonder if you've ever had an experience like this Samaritan woman. You're having an interesting conversation with someone, but then suddenly all their mates turn up. They are hustling and bustling. They've come back with lunch. Your conversation understandably breaks up. But these returning friends want to get to know you as well. They ask you to stay and have lunch with them. Obviously plenty to go around. Maybe you've had a situation like that. But the thing is, and that's not what happens to this woman, is it? Jesus' friends return with the food, but they don't speak to her. They don't ask Jesus what he was talking about with her. In fact, if you look at verse 27, it seems that they basically ignore her and the existence of the conversation that's been happening. But not only that, but they're surprised that Jesus was speaking to her. Doesn't that sound strange to you and I? It should, because I think most of us would never dream of acting like this.

We wouldn't dream of being so rude. But the disciples were not, at least from, I suppose, their perspective, being rude. For in their culture, hard as this may be to hear for us, a woman wasn't worth talking to. I wonder how would you react to this sort of treatment. I imagine you'd have been less than impressed. Maybe you would have been irate to have been ignored. Maybe all the things that captivated you about Jesus would have been forgotten at such shoddy treatment. But not so for this woman.

She departs. She leaves her water jar, the very reason she came to the well, and she goes to the town of Sychar. And as she does so, she tells those she meets about Jesus. She says, verse 29, come see a man who told me everything I've ever done. Could this be the Messiah?

What Jesus has said to her is what she tells to others. And what Jesus has said about her points to who he is. And people listen to her, even though with her background, she's probably not the most impressive of messengers. But they come out towards Jesus nonetheless. This woman sharing her limited experience of Jesus has gathered a crowd that wants to know more. And before we find out what happens next with this crowd, John pulls us back to lunch in verse 31, where Jesus' disciples are trying to get Jesus to eat. But instead of eating, Jesus takes an opportunity to give his disciples some instruction.

He tells them that he has food that they don't know anything about, verse 32. Now, understandably, they're confused. They say to each other, verse 33, could someone have brought him food?

[9 : 41] I wonder if this is a common experience for you. Someone says something, maybe in work, maybe in a class at university or college, and you just silently sit there, hoping that somehow things will be made clear in due course. Because you just are not understanding what is going on. And it's something that happens to me far too regularly. And although the disciples don't say as much, it's pretty clear that they're not catching Jesus' drift. They don't understand what he is talking about. So he explains verse 34. Do look down there. What gives Jesus his sustenance, what keeps him going, is doing the will of the one who sent him, God the Father. And John has made it very clear in his gospel what it is, what that is, in verses 17 to 18 of chapter 3. Let me read them to you.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. So Jesus has come to save.

And people are saved from God's judgment by believing in Jesus. If they don't believe, they stand condemned. What Jesus has come to do is starting to be seen. And this is what he talks about in the next few verses. Now these aren't the clearest verses in the Bible to get what Jesus is meaning. You may have been a bit puzzled as you read them earlier, as they were read out to us.

Well, in verses 35 to 38, Jesus uses the image of harvest and sowing and reaping to talk about what is beginning to happen as he carries out his Father's work. He starts with saying it's still four months to harvest. In other words, this saying is the crop's not ready yet, is it? It's four months to harvest. That's what we would normally expect in the world. There is a period of time for the harvest to come. But because of Jesus and his words, his message, there is a harvest that is ready. He tells his disciples to look to the fields. They are ready. And of course, as the people came out of that town out of Sychar, maybe they could have been seen coming towards Jesus. The harvest was ready and it was walking towards them. That was why Jesus could speak about the one who reaps getting a wage. There was a harvest.

There was no need to wait four months. It's no longer the time of waiting for harvest, but instead, the sowing and reaping happen almost at the same time. So the sower and the reaper can be glad together, verse 36. And this is what is now happening as Jesus' word goes forth. It is bringing an almost immediate and plentiful harvest. And not only is Jesus' word bringing forth a harvest at his hands, but it will bring forth a harvest by the hands of the disciples, verse 38. They too, as we know from the book of Acts, take Jesus' words to the nations. But Jesus is clear they only reap because of the labors of others. Probably the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist and Jesus himself, they always stand on other people's shoulders. Even the first disciples have very little to boast about. And as the disciples were considering these words of Jesus, maybe while still confused, we don't know, the harvest arrives, verse 39. Many have believed because of this woman's testimony.

[13 : 32] So they want Jesus to stay. And because of his word, many more become believers, verse 41. They believe in him and confess that he is the savior of the world, verse 42. They recognize what he has come to do and what sorts of people he has come to save. People like them, outsiders, but now found to be saved by Jesus. This is the living harvest that Jesus and his word has brought forth. These are the sorts of people that Jesus' disciples would ultimately go to with Jesus' word in the book of Acts. As they went with his word, his gospel, they went to harvest all sorts of people for eternal life.

When Jesus' word goes out, it brings back a harvest for eternal life because it is the word of the king. It is the word of the son of God. Maybe the harvest isn't always quite as remarkable as this scene, but the word never comes back empty-handed. This is because the message about Jesus is his message. It is his word. And because it is his word, it has power to bring forth a living harvest. It tells people who Jesus is and what he has done. And because of who Jesus is, this word had power and still has power to bring forth a living harvest today for eternal life. Indeed, that is what John in his gospel is seeking to do, isn't he? He wants us to hear Jesus' word and respond to it in faith. And if we respond to it in faith like this woman, we will want others to hear and respond as well. We will be sharers of the good news in which we have believed. Now, I don't know you all here at all well. I don't really know any of you. But I would imagine if you're a Christian here this evening, you'll find it hard speaking about Jesus to others. It is not an easy thing to do. And I suppose one reason that we often find it hard is because we tend to think that people won't believe, that the message we will take will not have a harvest, that it's foolish what we're saying to people. But I think the good news of this passage is that the message about Jesus, who he is and what he's come to do, it brings forth a harvest. As Jesus spoke to that woman about who he was, she then went and told others and they too believed. Now, we are many years removed from these events and we've not just spoken to Jesus in person, but our job is very similar to the disciples of Jesus. We too are to take the good news about Jesus to those round about us. And we don't need to fear or worry because the message of Jesus will bring a harvest because it's his message, the message about him, the promised king, the son of God.

And it will bring all sorts of people to believe in Jesus. Maybe surprising people to you and I, but God will gather his harvest through his word.

It is great news of a great savior. It's a word that will bring forth a harvest to eternal life. And we, like those disciples, don't need to be arrogant. For like them, we too will reap the benefits of others' hard work of gospel sharing. How many people come to faith through the activity of just one person sharing the gospel? Often it is multiple people over many years sharing the good news of Jesus with somebody. But will we take Jesus' word out to our friends, our family, our neighbors, our peers? Will we follow the example of the Samaritan woman? Will we follow the example of the disciples that we see in the book of Acts? Well, if Jesus' word brings forth a harvest, it's a harvest of people who know him and believe in him. But of course, we should ask ourselves, what does believing in Jesus look like? What is true faith and what is not? Well, that takes us to our second heading from our passage. Verses 43 to 52, Jesus' word brings life from certain death. Jesus' word brings life from certain death. Now, the heart of these verses is a plight of a helpless father with a dying son.

And for those of us here who are parents this evening, or maybe have young children in our family, we're going to answer uncles too. We know what we would do if a child lay dying that we could help.

[18:23] We would do all we could, wouldn't we, for our children. We wouldn't let distance or obstacles put us off. We wouldn't let money get in the way. And we see that today, don't we? We hear stories of people who have emptied bank accounts, sold houses, traveled to the other side of the world to try to get that help for their child. And that's what this man does. He's a fairly important man, a royal official.

But having heard that Jesus has come into his area, he travels a fair distance to go and see him. He obviously knows that Jesus can do miracles because when he gets there, gets to where Jesus is, he begs him to come and heal his son. Verse 47. Which, of course, can't have been easy, would it?

He was a royal official, and I doubt he would have been used to begging anybody for anything. Least of all, a traveling preacher like Jesus. But beg he does, just as each one of us would.

But what comes next is not really part of our expected script, is it? Jesus says to him and others who could hear, verse 48, Unless you people see signs and wonders, Jesus told him, you will never believe.

Well, what, you might be thinking, is that all about? Well, to understand what Jesus is saying, we need to go back to verses 43 to 45. So having spent some time with these Samaritans, Jesus goes to Galilee.

[20 : 02] And they welcomed him because they had seen what he had done in Jerusalem. Most likely, what is recounted in John chapter 2. They were obviously impressed, but was it the reception or faith that they should have shown?

Do turn back to John chapter 2 with me. I'm going to read just briefly verses 23 and 24. Now, while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name.

But Jesus would not entrust himself to them. For he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind. For he knew what was in each person. So clearly, there is believing.

And then there is believing. And it seems that these people in Galilee, Jewish people, Jesus' own people, his own countrymen, were welcoming him in the same way as those people supposedly believed in John chapter 2.

John hints at this with his comment in verse 44. You see it in brackets there. And also that the people were impressed with what Jesus had done in Jerusalem. Not necessarily with who he was.

[21 : 20] And not necessarily that they trusted in him. They no doubt were the sort of folk who wanted more signs, more wonders. But they failed to put their trust in Jesus.

I suppose to put it rather crudely. They wanted Jesus' stuff. But they didn't want him necessarily. I wonder if that's a good description of you here this evening. You might like church.

You might like the Bible. You might think these are good things for society. When the church is good, society is good. When the Bible is known by people, society is better.

And that may well be true. But do you trust wholeheartedly in Jesus? Because Jesus wants you to believe in him, not the stuff.

If this is the case, then what Jesus says to the royal official, I suppose, makes a bit more sense. Maybe that royal official was just like those people. He needed Jesus to do a miracle for him.

[22 : 22] But he really didn't trust in Jesus. What would you do if that's what Jesus said to you? I suppose some of us might feel quite rebuked.

We might walk away in shame. But this man, in quiet desperation, appeals again. He begs again that Jesus would come and save his child from death.

This man knows he can turn nowhere else. Jesus is the only one who can save. And surely we see here the first shoots of faith.

In response, Jesus merely says, go. Your son will live. And at this, the man took Jesus at his word. He gets home the next day. And his servants come out to him.

And tell him that his son got better. At what turns out to be the exact moment that Jesus said, your son will live. Verses 51 to 53.

[23 : 25] Jesus, by simply saying, makes it so. Disease and well-being are subject to his command. This miracle is a further sign.

Like the turning water into wine in John 2. In which Jesus reveals his glory. Verse 54. In other words, this event shows people who he is. The promised king.

The son of God. For who else with but a word can restore health? And if we come to the realization that this is who Jesus is.

That he is the king. That he is the son of God. That he's not just some bloke who does miracles. As if they were entertaining tricks. Then the only thing we can do is cast ourselves upon him.

Believe in him. And that's exactly what happens. The royal official and his whole household believe in Jesus. Instead of being those who are interested in the stuff.

[24 : 30] They now knew a painful cost. That only Jesus can save. That he is the promised king. The son of God. And that he must be believed in.

And the question then I suppose comes for every one of us here. Will we believe in Jesus? We can see that with a word he restores life.

We see that by speaking his word he can bring forth a harvest. Who could do such things? Who can have such power? Such grace?

Such kindness? Well as John in his gospel wants us to know. It is Jesus. The promised king. God the son. He is the one who is able to do things.

And if he can do these things. Then he can surely save. All who trust in him. If we realize who Jesus is. We must do as these people.

[25 : 27] Before us have done. As the Samaritan woman did. As those Samaritans did. As the royal official and his whole household. We must believe in Christ Jesus.

For there is no salvation. Only judgment. Unless we do so. He alone is the one who can save. Who can bring life.

Whether you have trusted in Jesus your whole life. Or if you are considering Jesus for the very first time. This evening. The response you must have.

Is to believe in him. And if you do so. If you do believe. If you seek to rest on him alone. Then you will want others also.

To hear about Jesus and his word. You will want others to come. And to believe in him as well. So as we go forth this evening from this place.

[26 : 29] Let us trust in Christ. And let us tell others. About the wonderful life that we can have. If we put our trust in Jesus. Let's pray. This man really is the savior of the world.

Heavenly Father. We rejoice that you have given us such a savior. The Lord Jesus Christ. By whose word harvest is gathered. By his very words bring life.

We pray that we would see in these pages. In these words. Who Jesus is. Maybe for the first time. Maybe. Seeing it again.

With fresh eyes. After many years. And that we would again. Put our trust in him. That we would rest upon him alone. For salvation.

That we would be those. Who believe. So that we will not die. But we'll have eternal life. In Jesus' strong name we pray.

[27 : 44] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.