

A New Season Of Ministry  
John 4:31-38

As we begin our study of these precious words of scripture today, may I confess that in my many times of reading this portion of scripture I have not fully understood what our Lord intended with these words. They just don't seem to fit well with the other words and the circumstances that are taking place at this particular moment.

But this confirms the value of an expository manner of studying these scriptures. Sometimes it's easier to just read right on past some of these words when we don't know how they fit the circumstance that we expect. But because we know that all of these words have great meaning, we'll ask the Lord to give us the understanding He wants us to have about them today.

And we need always to be careful to never imply any meaning into these scriptures that hasn't been put there by God's Holy Spirit.

With that being our desire, let's move ahead with our study.

First, as we consider these words, I am reminded once again that our God is not limited in any way as we, His creation, are limited, especially in the matter of time, "time". We are finite, He is not. And because that is true, the plans that He has for us can and do span vast ages of time.

And may I reaffirm a truth about our God that we seem often not to take into account. And that is that God is very intentional in all that takes place, that random coincidences are not a part of the plans He has for us.

And no He doesn't often tell us ahead of time what those plans are and how He will work them out within our daily lives, He just does.

But when He does choose to make some of His plans known to us, He will often use prophecy, "prophecy". But as we know, prophecy is not always easily understandable. For a person to be able to understand God's prophecies, we must be one of His beloved children, with the Holy Spirit abiding within our spirit. And even then, only if we are in surrendered fellowship with Him.

But when we are fully surrendered to Him, He freely tells us things He doesn't tell anyone else. He quietly reveals His secret and hidden wisdom and plans.

My mind goes to a passage given to us in the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 2, a portion that I have quoted for us at earlier times, one that is so appropriate for us on so many occasions, and it speaks about His secret wisdom. Those words,

<sup>6</sup> . . . among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. <sup>7</sup> But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. <sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. <sup>9</sup> But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—

<sup>10</sup> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:6-10)

I love what God calls here the “secret wisdom” that is revealed throughout the pages of these scriptures, words that we can read over and over throughout the years. And each time that we read them new and dynamic truths are suddenly opened to our understanding, truths that are appropriate and needful for the moments at hand, truths that were not revealed at an earlier time simply because they were not needful and necessary then.

But now, as we read them, those words become to us an exact answer for the circumstance that is taking place.

This understanding gives me a special confidence that our God is present and attentive to every matter of life that is taking place at every moment, and He gives us the appropriate answers and help in our immediate time of need.

And the “timing” of God's revelations to us is so very important. While our hearts and minds cry out for immediate answers to all the questions of our lives, our Lord knows that most all things and occurrences of life need the time and the opportunity to mature within their own process.

And again, we need always to understand and to accept that our God and His plans for us are never restricted to the timeframes that our small minds are comfortable with. Some of the occurrences that we have seen taking place in

years past were part of His long-term plans spoken about in these scriptures. And yes, some occurrences that are taking place today are part of those plans that He put into place long ago.

And still other parts of His plans are yet to take place many years from now.

And because our Lord has some really long term plans, we might only get to see the beginning stages of some of them, the tilling of the soil and the planting of the seeds. It will only be the future generations that will witness the harvesting and the reaping of what God has planted today.

And He knows the weakness of our minds in such matters, our inability to understand and to grasp many of the true and deeper meanings of so many of the prophetic words and the resulting occurrences as they take place.

And so He often will use people and nature and seasons to give us a clearer and more visual explanation of a matter He wants us to understand, as He does using the process of the planting and the harvesting of the crops of the fields.

Recall the occasion in Luke chapter 13, when Jesus gave His disciples the Parable of the Sower, there using planting and sowing, maturing and reaping as a visual example, some seed was sown on a pathway, hard ground, with the birds coming to eat up all the seeds. Some seeds were sown in amongst rocks, and unable to take root, and they failed. Other seeds were sown in amongst weeds and thorns were overtaken by their surroundings and they also failed, while only the seeds sown on fertile ground were able to survive and flourish.

This Parable was, of course, not intended to explain some agricultural process involving wheat or some other seed. But was instead intended to give a spiritual understanding about the planting and maturing and harvesting of God's words of truth within the hearts of men and women like you and me, sometimes with success, but at other times not.

And again, our Lord knows us well and He knows that we oftentimes need a simplest of explanation for our minds to comprehend some of His spiritual truths. And so He uses those things that we can easily see in our natural surroundings, the crops that we plant in the fields, and other familiar products of nature, even the stars in the heavens, to be visual examples of His hands at work. And by those examples help us to better comprehend His more complex Spiritual truths.

But even then, with the simplest of explanations, many who read and hear the truths given within these precious words of God are still left without understanding. And strangely, sometimes that is by God's own design.

That was so in the account we read about in Matthew chapter 13, where Jesus had told His disciples that He Himself intentionally had kept some people from understanding His parables. There speaking about some people within the great crowd that had gathered to hear His preaching that day, He said to His disciples,

<sup>11</sup> . . . "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. (Matthew 13:11)

Here, Jesus clearly did not want some of the people to hear and to understand His plans. We don't know why, and He doesn't tell us why, but we know He was intentional. Yes, perhaps later He would reveal His meanings to them and to others. We don't know.

But thankfully, we know that yes, God does want most all people to hear and to understand His truths. Oftentimes the present moment is just not the appropriate timing.

As we know from other of our Lord's explanations, He often uses timing He calls "seasons" to train up the souls of men, "seasons" of life and of circumstances in which some of us will struggle to understand things that are happening to us, struggles that are painful, struggles even to survive some of the circumstances we are involved in, seasons of life that God will use as learning opportunities for those who will be trained by them.

In today's study, the Lord Jesus gives another of His examples, given in "figurative language", not exactly a parable, but much like one. Another example in which He uses nature, ordinary planting and maturing and harvesting to give us a visual understanding of what He is doing "spiritually" within the hearts and souls of men and women like you and me to bring about salvation within their souls.

Let's pause here for a moment and again read these words that we have been studying in John chapter 4.

Recall first that while His disciples had gone into the village of Sychar to find food for their meal, Jesus had taken the opportunity to minister to a Samaritan woman as she was about to draw water from the town well. And though it was unclear to the disciples, that conversation was the beginning of a new season of ministry, a very important change in the mission that Jesus was bringing with Him as He brought His mission of salvation to the souls of mankind.

And then as Jesus had just finished talking with the woman, His disciples arrived back, and there in verse 31 we read that,

<sup>31</sup> . . . the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." <sup>32</sup> But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." <sup>33</sup> So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. <sup>35</sup> Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. <sup>36</sup> Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. <sup>37</sup> For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' <sup>38</sup> I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." (John 4:31-38)

As I mentioned as we first began our study of these words today, I know that I still don't have a full understanding of all that God wants us to know in them. But it seems that the most important message that Jesus wanted to convey to us is one that I spoke about a moment ago, this my dear friends, is some of the "secret wisdom of God", that within the words of His conversation with this Samaritan woman was the beginning of a "new season" of ministry, the beginning of the fruition of a plan that He had put into place long ago.

Oh dear Christian, God's plan from the beginning of time was not just to save the souls of His people Israel. It was to save them yes, but it was to also save all of mankind, Jews and Gentiles alike.

That truth can be read in both the Old Testament and the New Testament alike, especially in the words of the Book of Isaiah and in the Book of Romans, it was ever and always "Jews and Gentiles" alike, all people.

And here, as Jesus ministered to this Samaritan woman, He was bringing all the past many years of the history of the Israelite people into focus, pulling the

Israelites of the Old Testament into close company with the Israelites of the New Testament, declaring that what was planted into the souls of the Israelites of the Old Testament was now coming into fruition, into maturity within the hearts and souls of the Israelites of the New Testament, their "seasons" being brought together.

The planting of the truths of God in the days of the Old Testament, were now maturing in these New Days of the Lord Jesus, and it was now time to begin the Harvest.

And part of that harvest would require the bringing back together all of the Israelite peoples.

Recall that shortly after King Solomon died, the Israelite nation had split, with the northern ten tribes becoming known as Israel and the southern two tribes becoming known as Judah. Then as God led both of the nations into captivity and exile, the division became even worse with some of the Jews who remained in the land intermarrying with the local heathen population. And those intermarriages creating the people groups like this Samaritan woman was a part of the mix.

But though the exile was difficult and the exile left many of the Jews without their pure identity, God had made a covenant with the Israelite people that He would someday bring them back to their land and restore them to Himself.

And the arrival of John the Baptist, and then the Lord Jesus was the beginning of that restoration.

And note also the precious truth that Jesus was revealing within these words. This Samaritan woman, this half-breed Jew, though in many ways a wayward sinner, she still had some Jewish blood flowing through her veins and she still had some of the Jewish teachings about God imbedded within her mind. She knew that a Messiah would someday come.

Those words that the woman spoke and also that the townspeople were responding to, proved that words of truth had been planted sometime within the "season" of the Old Testament days and passed along to the descendants of Abraham, to even within many of the half-breeds like these Samaritans.

And now Jesus was saying that those seeds planted over the hundreds of years before His arrival were now maturing and were “white for harvest”.

And no, as these words tell us, these disciples did not plant those seeds, someone else did well back over the many decades and centuries past. But those disciples must now take part in the harvest, and that harvest would be plentiful.

Let's read these words again,

<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, (to His disciples) “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. <sup>35</sup> Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. <sup>36</sup> Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. <sup>37</sup> For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ <sup>38</sup> I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.” (John 4:34-38)

The seeds of God's Holy plan for all people, the Israelite nation, the Samaritan nation and for all the Gentile nations of the world were planted in the many generations past, but were just now being brought to maturity through this new Gospel that the Lord Jesus was bringing to the world and bringing their souls into maturity and “white for harvest”.

Yes, the seeds had first been planted by the nation of Israel, through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but now the Lord Jesus was declaring that His salvation was intended for the whole world, that the “Gospel” that He was preaching would now extend on out to all the peoples of the earth, again, first to Jews, then to the half-Jews, the Samaritans, and then out to the whole world.

As we will see in the soon coming years that would follow these, God would draw many, many more people into His plan, men like the Apostle Paul and others, men who would spread His truths out into all the nations of the world, bringing many sons to glory.

As these words that we are studying here reveal, seeds that were planted in centuries past were here now ministering to the Samaritans of Jesus' day. But also, seeds that the disciples of Jesus day would sow then and in the future days

to come, would germinate and flourish into fields that would also be white for harvest.

And even now, we can see those fields growing and maturing and turning white for harvest in our generation. And now it is you and me who are being called to go out into the fields, fields that others before us have planted and begin to reap and harvest the fruits that others before us have been blessed to plant. An honor that we must not let pass us by.

Oh dear fellow Christians and fellow laborers, our Lord has fully satisfied us, you and me, with all that we will need for ourselves. So now, you and I need to get about the next step of life He has called us to fulfill, the “new season of ministry” that the Lord Jesus was beginning there with this Samaritan woman, the ministry of taking the “Good News” of His salvation out to all the peoples of the world. And He tells us,

Look, . . . lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.  
(John 4:35)

Pray with me!