



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Jesus' Answer for Life's Purpose (John 4:31-38, 43-45)

Brent Alderman / (240) 818-3053 / www.capitolcom.org / brent.alderman@capitolcom.org

Hamsters are amazing. They are colorblind and can only see things closer than six inches away, but they can recognize relatives. They can be trained to come when called or ring a bell when hungry. But the thing we usually think of regarding the hamster's life is that wheel. Great for exercise, it's not unusual for a hamster to run six miles in one night on a wheel.

Caged hamsters may love running in a wheel, but have nothing to show for it distance-wise. After a running session, they must be satisfied with only the activity itself, still finding themselves among the woodchips on the floor of their cage.

This picture serves as a metaphor for too many humans who fill their days with much activity with little to show for it in actual progress toward the most important things in life. How many of us go through motions of what others expect from us with little or no thought as to why we spend our time doing what we do? It's tragic that a person could regretfully come to the end of their busy life only to realize they lacked real purpose or vision.

In our text today, let's learn from Jesus, the One who serves as the ultimate example of understanding a purposeful path and maximized His efforts to reach the most meaningful goals.

I. PINPOINT FOCUS (4:31-34)

John 4:31-34 — Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples were saying to one another, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."

The disciples responded to Jesus the same way Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman had – with confusion. Jesus again uses outward, physical terms to illustrate a spiritual reality. While the disciples are concerned with lunch, Jesus has a much more important lesson for them. His “food”, the thing that strengthens and keeps Him going, the impetus that motivates His thoughts and actions, is to please and glorify His Father in heaven. Jesus was keenly aware that He had a specific purpose in life and would not be distracted from it by the multiple “satisfiers” found in the world.

Later in the book of John, Jesus specifies what His Father wanted:

John 6:38, 40 – For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.

This begs a question for each of us. What is it we live for? What is our purpose, that which drives us in life, work, relationships, money, time, marriage, parenting, leisure, values, entertainment and a thousand other things. It's so easy to be mesmerized by the world around us and the satisfaction it promises. We can decide what makes us happy with little evaluation if it is truly meaningful. God clearly shows in His Word what our purpose should be, if we would only hear it and obey.

We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.¹

Surely, this Old Testament verse informed Christ's view:

Deuteronomy 8:3 – ...man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.

When we look at the focus of Jesus, the lack of vagueness, the absence of equivocation, is stunning. He operates with an unambiguous guiding compass and needs no reminder what life is truly all about. He lived life to do God's will. You and I need to respond two ways to that truth. First with gratitude, because God's will was for Him to die in our place so our sins could be forgiven. He accomplished all that His Father planned for Him. Second, we should pray for a desire to follow His example and adopt this same mindset and purpose for life.

WHEN JESUS SAYS, “MY FOOD IS TO DO THE WILL OF HIM WHO SENT ME”, HE IS SHOWING US A PERFECT PATH, NOT JUST SUGGESTING AN OPTIONAL PURPOSE FOR LIVING.

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: THURSDAYS AT 12:00PM, HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 153

STAFF: MONDAYS AT 11:30AM, HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 218

Maryland

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II. PRODUCTIVE FIELDS (4:35-38)

John 4:35-38—“Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor.”

This expands Jesus' words about His purpose (and what His followers' purpose should be). Recall that the Samaritan woman ran to the people of Sychar to tell them about this incredible conversation she had with this compelling man. Verse 30 then says, “They were coming to Him.”

A. ILLUSTRATION OF THE HARVEST (v. 35)

Can you imagine what the disciples saw? The crowd coming toward Jesus to hear from this One who impacted the Samaritan woman so much must have been quite a sight. Jesus took this teachable moment to point out that there are people all around who are seeking for purpose in their lives and this “harvest” was ripe to pick.

The image of the harvest is a familiar one in the Bible and is often applied to the ministry of winning lost souls. Both the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:1–30) relate to this theme, and Paul used it in his letters (Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 3:6–9; Gal. 6:9). We plant the seed of God's Word in the hearts of people who hear it, and we seek to cultivate that seed by our love and prayers. In due time, that seed may bear fruit to the glory of God.²

This scene probably took place in December or January since the mid-April harvest was still four months away, so Jesus' teaching that the harvest is ready again pointed his hearers to a spiritual reality. There must have been some surprised faces among the disciples since they probably thought that they wouldn't be received well in a Samaritan town.

B. OCCUPATION OF THE HARVESTERS (vv. 36-38)

Continuing His word-picture, those who sow and reap the harvest are followers of Christ who share the seed of His Word and trust Him to grow the “fruit”, which are hearts that respond rightly to the gospel. This clearly declares that the Word of God is life-changing

and the gospel is the power that saves, not the labor of the gatherer. What farmer would take credit for growing his crops? His responsibility is to plant, water and wait. Followers of Jesus can only be faithful to plant the seed (present the gospel), but can't depend on themselves to be the ones who ultimately persuade someone to trust in Jesus. That is His work. The Samaritans who believed Him heard His words and in yet another declaration of Jesus' deity, called Him the Savior of the world. Only people with spiritual eyes opened by God Himself could make that statement.

III. PRAGMATIC FOLLOWERS (4:43-45)

John 4:43-45— After the two days He went forth from there into Galilee. For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves also went to the feast.

These verses continue the commentary of the hearts of Jews who saw Jesus' miracles back in chapter two (John 2:23, 24). After the feast time in Jerusalem, he had returned to His home area (via Samaria) and the buzz started all over again from those who wanted to see more signs of His power. The passage says He was received, but the reception was much different than in Samaria. These crowds wanted entertained, not changed or forgiven.

We must carefully learn from their mistake. Jesus must be followed on His terms, not ours. Spending time with Him in these Scriptures, observing and getting to know His teaching and priorities will take us toward that goal of following well. It's a lifelong pursuit, but necessary to the growth of understanding we need to know what His terms are.

As we learn from these Galilean crowds, believing that Jesus is powerful is not enough. Being amazed is not enough. Knowing things about Him intellectually is not enough. He calls us to repentance, obedience and giving our lives and futures to Him. The rewards cannot be compared to what our world offers. This is purpose as God has designed us. He is worthy of following and committing our lives to Him.

¹ C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory" in *The Weight of Glory and other Essays* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp.1-2.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Jn 4:31). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.