

OPEN YOUR EYES

John 4:35-38

Key verse 4:35

“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.””

Good evening. My name is James Wood. I am a blessed man. I live in London with my wonderful wife Francesca and two children Helen and Michael and I am blessed to be a bible teacher for students at University College London. I have received all of this because twelve years ago someone invited me to study the bible and through that Jesus changed my life.

In John chapter 4 Jesus challenges and inspires his disciples to have vision. He challenges them not to think negatively but to open their eyes. Then he inspires them to see that, now is the time for harvest. The disciples had their fields from which to reap a spiritual harvest. How did they see them? Were their eyes open? What about us? What fields do we have today? How do we see our fields? Are our eyes open? May God help us to open our eyes to look at our harvest fields and see, wherever we are, it is ripe for harvest.

Jesus’ words in these verses follow on from his encounter with the Samaritan woman. For Jesus to talk to this woman was really unusual; Jewish men did not speak to Samaritan women. Yet through this conversation this woman was completely transformed. She had been lonely, dark, cynical and ostracized by her community but now she was a woman with a heart for God. Because she had found Jesus as her true messiah and the object of her worship, this outcast woman now preached the gospel to the very people who had judged her. Therefore, as Jesus spoke to his disciples, in the distance he could see the people of the town coming out to meet him. In the Samaritan woman, Jesus saw the impact one person turned to Christ could have on a whole community.

Look at verse 35; **‘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.’”** This verse is about looking. Let’s look at it again. Jesus asked his disciples; **‘Don’t you have a saying, “It’s still four months until harvest”?’** All of us have sayings. For example in England people used to say; ‘the sun never sets on the British Empire’ but then the British Empire ended, the sun set. Sayings make us blind and make us think in a particular way. We don’t say; **“It’s still four months until harvest”**, but the disciples did. The meaning of this saying was; there is no point in harvesting crops before they are ripe.

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But what was Jesus saying? Jesus was not talking about crops. Jesus was using this phrase to describe the disciples' attitude to a spiritual harvest in Samaria. As Jews the disciples looked down on the Samaritans. In their view the Samaritans were treacherous, spiritually impure and completely unsuitable to believe in Jesus. To the disciples the thought of a Samaritan accepting Jesus was unimaginable.

And yet, look again at verse 35; **'I tell you open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.'** Jesus told his disciples to open their eyes and look at the fields. Look at that sentence in your bibles. Can you see at the end there is an exclamation mark which really emphasizes this point? Why would Jesus be so keen for the disciples to open their eyes? The answer is very simple, their eyes were closed. Because of sayings, because prejudice the disciples could not imagine the Samaritan woman changing. In truth, we've probably all felt this way about someone. Recently I saw a guy at the university in a pink skirt, riding a scooter, I did not think he looked the type to study the bible so I avoided him. Like me the Jews had a prejudiced attitude. Because the disciples' eyes were closed they could see no hope for a spiritual harvest in Samaria.

Look again at what Jesus said to them; **'I tell you open your eyes.'** These are words of challenge. Jesus wanted to challenge but also to inspire his disciples. He wanted them to look with eyes of faith and see Samaria as he saw it. When Jesus looked at these Samaritans, he could see people who were spiritually hungry and desired the truth. Human nature is to look for people like us. But Jesus calls us to open our eyes and see the hope of God working right now. What do we see when our eyes are open? What did Jesus see? Jesus saw the living God bringing revival to people the disciples had dismissed. Jesus saw change in people who could not change. Jesus wants us to change our attitude and see our nations with the hope with which he sees them.

Americans are so optimistic and positive. The English are very different. In the nineteenth century when the great evangelist Charles Finney came to London he discovered this. When Finney said he needed a room to preach to 1500 unbelieving people, the reply was; "Mr. Finney, remember you are in England. You might get people to attend such a meeting in America, but you will not get people to attend here." But when Finney preached, the hall filled night after night and a great revival began.

Alas, that was over 100 years ago and since then, Europe has fallen further than ever into godlessness and materialism, where very few people ever go to church. Europeans are pluralistic and increasingly young people are

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attracted to the new atheism. Therefore it can seem pretty hopeless and when I hear the news about the USA it sounds as if here too it is becoming more like Europe.

Yet there is hope. When we look at Africa today we see that there is a great revival going on. In 1900 there were 9 million African Christians compared with over 380 million today. Why has Africa changed so much? The answer is the hope of faithful men and women of God. Charles Studd for example was an English missionary to the Congo in 1913. He was a multi-millionaire, Cambridge graduate and an internationally famous sportsman, the David Beckham of his day. He had everything and yet, he gave it all away, dying as a missionary in a hut in the Congo because he feared for the souls in a part of Africa which had not heard the gospel. Studd gave up everything to preach the gospel in a place for which no one else had hope. As a consequence of the gospel, thousands came to faith. Today through African disciples and missionaries millions are coming to faith in Jesus across the continent. The point is that wherever Jesus is preached there is hope. There was hope for the Samaritans, there is hope because just a few men preaching the gospel changed Africa. If Samaria can change, if Africa can change then there is even hope for Europe; there is hope for the USA and there is hope for all the nations of the earth.

There is hope because the living God is at work in people's hearts and can change anybody. I am an example of this. I was a dark, cynical, miserable man without hope. I didn't like church and I had problems with my family. There was no way that a person like me could change. Yet Jesus changed me through his living word. In Jesus I became a joyful, hopeful man with a real sense of purpose for my life. Because of Jesus my relationship with my family was completely changed and I was blessed with my own family. Now I enjoy the word of God, I enjoy going to church and I enjoy teaching the bible to students so that they also can meet Jesus. I have a completely new life in Jesus. This all happened because 20 years ago a relatively young missionary called Moses Yoon came to London. For two years he invited students to study the bible with no result. Then he met Ian, a young art student who because of Moses' care began to study with Paul, a convinced atheist, who was completely changed by God's living word. Ian's father, Stanley was so impressed by Paul's change that he also studied the bible. Through Ian and Stanley, Darren and I also met Jesus and a great harvest has begun in London. In preparing this I message I realized what a great blessing I have received to be called to serve God's work in London. In London we pray to be a loving spiritual community. We struggle to grow through sharing our lives of faith together in daily bread, personal reflections, outreach and sharing meals together and having a lot of

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fun! Our mission is not always easy. We are often rejected by students. However, when we look at the fields with eyes of faith we can see God is using us to create a loving community through which a great harvest can continue to be reaped in the UK.

Verses 36 and 37 say; **‘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.’** Jesus says now is the time. Jesus wants us to trust that he is working through us now. God wants us to be both sowers and reapers, now. Jesus wants to use us to harvest the crop for eternal life and be glad together, now.

Jesus wants us to open our eyes to see Europe, Africa and the world as he sees it. There are people in all our nations who are desperately hurting and in need of Jesus. Are we always going to put them off? Jesus says; **‘Open your eyes, now is the time for harvest.’**