

INTRODUCTION

Most of you will recognize that I have switched the words in the title of my message from a 1989 movie called "Field of Dreams" starring Kevin Costner. If you remember the storyline, Costner plays the role of Ray Kinsella a rookie corn farmer in Iowa. As he walks through the tall stalks of corn he hears a voice that says, "If you build it, he will come." (Many people misquote it to say "they will come.") Finally, he plows up a huge part of his corn field and puts in a baseball diamond. Everyone thinks he's crazy, but soon these ghosts of baseball players from the Black Sox Scandal of 1919 start appearing from the corn.

It turns out that Ray has unresolved issues with his dad who played baseball during the same period. And toward the end of the movie, Shoeless Joe Jackson says, "If you build it, HE will come." Meaning, his dad.

Suddenly Ray recognizes one of the players as his dad, as a much younger man. As his dad starts to walk off, Ray says, "Hey, dad. Want to have a game of catch?" Then Ray and his younger dad have a game of pitch and catch. And as the movie ends with them playing pitch and catch in the dark, the camera pans away and there are hundreds of headlights of cars lined up making their way to the field.

Thirty years ago, when Cindy and I were watching the movie, I burst into tears at the closing scene. My dad had died a few years earlier at the age of 58 after a short battle with cancer. When he died I had to make all the funeral arrangements, and even preach his funeral. I was so busy trying to take care of my mom and young family that I really never had a chance to grieve properly. I kept it all bottled up. But one of my greatest memories of my dad was when I was young and we would play pitch and catch in the backyard. And when that scene came on in Field of Dreams I started sobbing like a baby. It was the movie's ending that allowed me to finally grieve.

Great movie, but sometimes fiction becomes truth. The ballfield used in the movie was carved out of a cornfield in Dyersville, Iowa. It's still there and today over 65,000 people still visit the actual baseball field each year. The voice said, "If you build it he will come." That was a field of dreams.

But in this passage of scripture, Jesus had a vision, or a dream, of fields. He said, "Open your eyes and look at the fields because they are ready for harvest." And Jesus wants us to have a dream of fields ready to harvest. But as we shall see, these aren't harvest fields of corn or wheat: They are fields of people.

John 4:27-42. Just then his disciples arrived, and they were amazed that he was talking with a woman. Yet no one said, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar, went into town, and told the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They left the town and made their way to him.

In the meantime the disciples kept urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said, "I have food to eat that you don't know about." The disciples said to one another, "Could someone have brought him something to eat?"

"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work," Jesus told them. "Don't you say, 'There are still four more months, and then comes the harvest'? Listen to what I'm telling you: Open your eyes and look at the fields, because they are ready for harvest. (He was talking about a dream of fields.) The reaper is already receiving pay and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap what you didn't labor for; others have labored, and you have benefited from their labor."

Now many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of what the woman said when she testified, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. Many more believed because of what he said. And they told the woman, "We no longer believe because of what you said, since we have heard for ourselves and know that this really is the Savior of the world."

As we talk about a dream of fields, I want to focus on two aspects of this amazing story. First, I want us to look again at the Samaritan woman and see how her life was changed after she drank the living water that Jesus offered. Then I want you to hear and understand the challenge that Jesus gave to His disciples. And as followers of Jesus today, this challenge is for us as well.

I. A CHANGED WOMAN

When we first met the Samaritan woman she was a lonely, desperate woman who was looking for love in all the wrong places. Then she met Jesus and everything changed. Notice three things that changed.

A. She left her water pot

Verse 28 says she left her water jar, went into the town and told the people. So why did she leave her jar there? That was the only reason she had gone out that day, to draw water. That was her priority. There's nothing wrong with that; we all need water to live. But now, she had a different priority. She discovered there is more to life just living.

There are many theories about WHY she left her jar. I asked that question on Facebook and got a variety of answers. There were some great spiritual answers. Some suggested it symbolized leaving her past behind. Or letting go of worldly things. Or now that she was satisfied with the living water that she no longer felt the need for liquid water. There were practical answers: Some said she left the heavy jar there because she knew she would be right back. Or maybe she was so excited about her new life that she just forgot it. Someone pointed out that it's hard to run with a heavy jar full of water.

Truthfully, we don't really know why she left her jar behind. We can ask her when we get to heaven. But perhaps here's a reason you've never considered, nobody mentioned it in my Facebook survey. Maybe she left it there for Jesus to have a drink. Their conversation began with Jesus asking her for a drink of water and she pointed out that he didn't have anything to use to draw water. After meeting Jesus, she was so changed, her attitude was, "Here, Jesus, whatever I have, I give to you. What's mine is yours." But for whatever, the reason, everything changed for her that day.

B. She shared her experience

After her encounter with Jesus, the first thing this woman wanted to do was to go tell her neighbors about Jesus. She said, "Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could he be the Messiah?"

Apparently, they talked about much more than John recorded. Because at the end of the conversation, this woman was convinced that Jesus was more than a prophet. He knew everything she ever did, yet He still offered her living water.

One of the most important things we can do is to share our faith story with others. How often do you talk about how Jesus has changed your life? Of course, people expect me to talk about Jesus—I'm the professional salesman. But when you talk about Jesus, you are the satisfied customer. Someone once said Christianity is just one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread.

When I was in my twenties and thirties, I suffered from mouth ulcers inside my cheeks and gums. They were very painful and made it difficult to speak, which is an occupational handicap for a preacher. I went to medical professionals and dentists to seek help. We tried different remedies, but nothing helped. Then someone mentioned to me that they used to have mouth ulcers until they started using baking soda toothpaste. So, I got some original Arm and Hammer Baking Soda toothpaste and tried it. Guess what? It worked. They went away and I've been using it ever since.

So imagine if someone is talking to me and they say, "I'm sorry. It's hard from me to talk because I have a moth ulcer." What am I going to say? "Hey, that's too bad. I hear those mouth ulcers can be painful. I'm so sorry." No. I'm going to say, "Hey, I've got something for you to try. I used to have mouth ulcers, but since I've been using Arm and Hammer Baking soda toothpaste I don't have them anymore! You should try that."

And that's what the Christian life is all about. We are surrounded by people who are living miserable lives. They have no peace, no joy, and no hope of life getting any better. It's our job to tell them, "You know, I used to be like that, but what a wonderful change in my life has occurred since Jesus came into my heart." If you've been changed, you'll want to share your story.

C. She brought her neighbors to Jesus

But she wasn't satisfied to just tell her story. She said, "Come with me and see a man who told me everything I ever did." I'm so glad that she didn't say, "Hey, you need to go out to the well to meet a man named Jesus. He can help you." She said, "Come on, I'll take you to Him." And when our lives have been changed we will want to bring people to Jesus. Jesus is no longer physically present, but He is alive and well in His body, the church. And when you bring your friends, relatives, neighbors, and coworkers to church, it's like bringing them to Jesus. So don't just say, "You ought to GO to church to check out Jesus." Instead say, "Come with me, I want you to meet the man who changed my life."

Jesus taught us that the Christian life is like a man who threw a big party and invited everyone to come. But some people turned down the gracious invitation. That irritated the man who was throwing the party. Jesus said: Then in anger, the master of the house told his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the city, and bring in here the poor, maimed, blind, and lame." "Master," the servant said, "What you ordered has been done, and there's still room." Then the master told the servant, "Go out into the highways and hedges and make them come in, so that my house may be filled." (Luke 14:21-23 CSB) God loves a full house—and we're not talking about poker. He wants us to bring people so that His house/the church can be full.

When it comes to evangelism, some people have a Field of Dreams mindset. They think, "If we just build a building, they will come." That never works. God has blessed us with wonderful facilities. But in the 28 years that I've been the pastor how many times do you think I've heard someone tell me, "You know I was driving by and I saw all these big buildings and I decided I needed to seek the Lord." Zero.

But I've had hundreds of people who told me. "I'm here because someone cared enough to tell me about Jesus and they BROUGHT me to church."

Have you been changed by Jesus? You will leave your past behind, and offer Jesus everything you have. You'll share your experience and you'll be actively bringing people to Jesus.

II. THE CHALLENGE FROM JESUS.

When the disciples returned with sacks of take-out food, Jesus told them He wasn't hungry any more. They asked him if someone had given him something to eat. He replied that his food was to do the will of His Father. There is something more satisfying than a good meal, it is introducing someone to a relationship with their Creator. In other words, souls are more important than supper. Then Jesus issued a challenge. He said, "Open your eyes and look on the fields." He was saying we should have a Dream of Fields. There are at least three things we can learn from this challenge.

A. See the possibilities!

Jesus wasn't talking about agricultural fields. He was talking about people. When the disciples looked up they didn't see a field of wheat, they saw a crowd of people approaching them. And they were led by the Samaritan woman.

Now, remember that the disciples had left Jesus at the well to go into the town to buy food. On the way in they passed the woman walking all alone toward the well. Do you think they saw someone who was a potential disciple? No, because she was going to the well alone in the middle of the day, they suspected what kind of woman she was. They probably moved to the other side of the road to avoid being contaminated by this sinful woman. But Jesus saw someone who could be transformed by the living water.

When the disciples were in the village they didn't invite the Samaritans to come out and meet Jesus. They didn't see them as potential Jesus-followers. Instead, they saw dirty, filthy Samaritans. They just wanted to buy their food and get out of town as quickly as they could.

When we look at people we should see them as potential disciples. Don't rule anyone out. Did you hear the story about the shoe salesman from Chicago who was sent to Africa? After about a week he contacted his company and said, "Bring me home. These people over here don't even wear shoes!" They sent another salesman and a week later he contacted his company and said, "Send me all the shoes you have, I've never seen so many prospects!" It all depends on your outlook.

B. Plant as many seeds as you can!

Jesus wasn't talking agriculture, because He mentioned gathering fruit for eternal life. Whenever you share the gospel or perform an act of kindness in the name of Jesus, you are planting seeds. Jesus said that some seed falls on hard ground, and some seed falls on shallow ground. Other seed falls on soil that is full of weeds and briars. But there is always some seed that falls on fertile soil and produces a bumper crop. It's not our job to evaluate the hearts of people. Our job is to just plant all the seeds we can. The more seeds we plant, the greater the harvest.

Almost everyone in East Texas knows Dr. V. She has written a wonderful book about her life called *SEEDS*. Dr. V. was born in Yugoslavia during communist rule. She and her mother spent time in a refugee camp. Today she is one of the most loved oncologists in medicine. And she is passionate about her faith. Let me read and excerpt from her book so you will know how Jesus changed her life.

"One day, a patient came to tell me he was stopping further treatments for his cancer. Usually, patients just call to tell me that, but he insisted on coming to see me in person. When I walked into the room, he said to me, 'I know I'm dying, but I'm worried about my doctor.'

I raised my eyebrows, surprised at his candor. 'You're worried about me? You're dying, and you're worried about me? Now, why is that?'

He looked me square in the eye. 'I know where I'm going, but I can't leave just yet because I am not sure where my doctor is going.'

Where was I going? I couldn't forget his question and his genuine concern for me that day. More and more, I seemed to keep running into people like him who lived with purpose and peace despite the news that they had cancer. It reminded me of finding wildflowers in the spring that you never knew were there. You didn't plant them, but these unexpected backyard discoveries are beautiful in their own way.

I realized this was a picture of the spiritual dimension of my life. All the people and experiences from my past had planted a tiny seed in me along the way. The seeds that I thought were scattered rather haphazardly had come together, taken root and flourished underground. And one day, they unexpectedly and mysteriously took on a life of their own and came to the surface where I could see them—really see them—for the first time."

Dr. V. gave her heart to Jesus and she has been planting seeds ever since. I don't think I've ever met anyone who is as passionate about planting gospel seeds as Dr. V. She's still planting seeds. Will you?

C. Trust God for the harvest!

Jesus said some plant and others harvest, but both will be able to rejoice together. Many people planted seeds in Dr. V's life. Our job is to plant as many seeds as we can, and God is the one who gives the harvest. He talked about those who reap the harvest will enjoy the labor of those who planted. In other words, when someone comes to Christ, it is a team effort. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3 that he had planted, Apollos, had watered, but it was God that gave the increase.

Jesus had a dream of such a great harvest that the reaper would be overtaking the planter—they would rejoice together. We are seeing an amazing spiritual awakening happen around the world as hundreds of thousands of people are coming to Christ daily. That's the challenge from Jesus. Will you ask Him to give you a dream of fields?

As we come to the end of this section, there's a take-away truth about the stages of conversion. Most of the members of this Samaritan village became followers of Christ. We learn from their testimony that there are three stages of conversion. Where are you on this scale of three stages?

1. The curiosity stage

"Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of what the woman said when she testified, 'He told me everything I ever did.'" This is more than the story of the Samaritan woman. It is the story of the Samaritans, plural. When these people heard the testimony of the woman, they were curious enough to go out and meet Jesus. It may be that you are listening to

me and you're at the curiosity stage. You're not too sure about this whole Jesus and church thing. But you are interested in learning more. Good for you. That's a great place to start. But don't stop here. There's another stage.

2. The confirmation stage

Next the people said to the woman, "We no longer believe because of what you said, since we have heard for ourselves." Jesus stayed in the city for two additional days teaching the people. They moved from curiosity to confirmation. They heard His words and started to believe in what He said. It was no longer second-hand truth. It was first-hand truth.

Many of you grew up in a Christian home and you heard your parents' testimony. But you aren't a Christian, because you were raised in a Christian home. God has no grandchildren; only children. That's why a lot of teenagers or college students have a crisis of faith. We must all come to a point where it's not enough to believe just because our parents or pastors or Sunday School teachers told us, we have to believe for ourselves. That's the confirmation stage. But there's one final stage for salvation.

3. The certainty stage

The people said, "We KNOW this really is the Savior of the world!" Do you KNOW that you KNOW that Jesus is your Savior? And do you KNOW that He is not only your savior, but He is the Savior of the World. When I was in India last Sunday, I told them that Jesus wasn't just the Savior of the Jews or the Savior of the Americans, or the Savior of the British, or the Savior of the Indians: He is the Savior of the world. And they broke out into cheers. Have you got that idea yet? Let me give you a mulligan to cheer for. Jesus isn't just the Savior of the Jews or the Savior of the Americans, or the Savior of the British, or the Savior of the Indians: He is the Savior of the World!

CONCLUSION

There is a field around us; it's a field of people who need Jesus. Can you see the possibilities? Many of you know David Stiles who graduated to Heaven a few weeks ago. David had a heart for the Lord. When he was first diagnosed with cancer, his first concern was that he might die without sharing Christ with all of his neighbors so he did something about it. He wrote a letter and hand-delivered it to all his neighbors within several blocks. He gave them the letter and a New Testament. I read the letter at David's memorial service and I got Rayla's permission to share it with you today:

My name is David Stiles. I am your neighbor! I have just been diagnosed with lung cancer and God has impressed on my heart to share with you the love of Christ, the way to receive forgiveness for your sins and salvation through Him.

Please earnestly read the verses below on how to become a Christian. I would love to talk to you in more detail if you have questions or if you would like to pray together. If you are a Christian,

please pass this on to someone else who needs to know about the saving grace of our Heavenly Father.

May God Bless You,
David Stiles

Please accept this New Testament as my gift to you.

Then after the letter there was a simple, but thorough explanation of how a person can become a Christian.

David had a desire to share Christ with his neighbors, do you? Jesus said we should have a dream of fields—a heart for people around us who don't know Jesus. So I'm praying that you'll catch the vision and share the good news of Jesus with those who live around you. Let's plant as many seeds as we can and trust God for the harvest!

OUTLINE

I. A CHANGED WOMAN

- A. She left her water pot
- B. She shared her experience
- C. She brought her neighbors to Jesus

Then in anger, the master of the house told his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the city, and bring in here the poor, maimed, blind, and lame." "Master," the servant said, "What you ordered has been done, and there's still room." Then the master told the servant, "Go out into the highways and hedges and make them come in, so that my house may be filled." *Luke 14:21-23 CSB*

II. THE CHALLENGE FROM JESUS.

- A. See the possibilities!
- B. Plant as many seeds as you can!
- C. Trust God for the harvest!

TAKE-AWAY TRUTH: THE STAGES OF CONVERSION

1. The curiosity stage

"Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of what the woman said when she testified, 'He told me everything I ever did.'"

2. The confirmation stage

"We no longer believe because of what you said, since we have heard for ourselves."

3. The certainty stage

"We KNOW this really is the Savior of the world!"

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
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