

Text: John 4:1-42

Title: "Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because the Samaritans did"

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Introduction: In the time of Christ, Western Palestine was divided into three regions. Jerusalem was located in the southern region called *Judea*. Jesus's home was in the northern region called *Galilee*. Between these lay the middle region of *Samaria*. When one traveled from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north, as did Jesus and His disciples in our passage, he typically did so through Samaria.

An alternate route avoided Samaria crossing to the east of the Jordan River, headed northbound through the district of Herod called *Peraea*. It may have been necessary for Jesus to avoid that route because Herod had already imprisoned John the Baptist (v. 4). One commentator estimated that they had traveled 20 miles on foot that day. Now they came to rest around 6pm at the foot of Mount Gerazim next to Jacob's ancient well, about a half-mile away from the Samaritan town of Sychar.

Unlike Galilee and Judea, Samaria was not strictly Jewish. *Samaria* was the name given the capital of the northern ten tribes of Israel, which had rebelled against the house of David in the days of Rehoboam. In 722 B.C., the sin of these tribes had ripened to the point that God allowed Assyria to conquer them and deport many of the Jews living there, while transplanting other foreigners into the region. Some Jews had remained.

Years later, when Ezra and Nehemiah returned to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, the Samaritans, led by men like Sanballat, endeavored to disrupt those efforts. Unsuccessful, the Samaritans built a rival temple on Mt. Gerazim, and when the brother of a Jewish high-priest named Manasseh refused to annul his marriage to the daughter of Sanballat, he was forced

to flee Jerusalem, after which he became the rival high-priest of the Samaritan temple. The Samaritans edited their own Pentateuch to match their religion, and they denied the authority of any other books of the Old Testament.

During the turbulent times of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, the Samaritans sided with the Romans against the Maccabean led Jews, and they dedicated their temple to Jupiter. The temple was finally destroyed in 130 B.C., but the Samaritans continued to worship among its ruins. Travel through Samaria was never easy for Jews. Pilgrims on their way to and from Jerusalem were easy targets for would-be thieves and worse.

For all these reasons and more, Jews viewed Samaritans with nearly as much contempt as they did the Gentiles. They called Samaritans *Cuthim*, a derisive term that meant *half-breed*. A generation after Christ, their Mishnah would record that Samaritan women are 'menstruants from their cradle' and therefore perpetually unclean (Carson, 217/218).

John writes in that same generation of a conversation between Jesus and one such Samaritan woman. Just like the Jewish Rabbi Nicodemus of chapter 3, this pagan woman of chapter 4 needed a Savior. Jesus came to seek and to save those who are lost, and John writes that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in His name, just like Nicodemus and now these Samaritans did. We must believe what they came to believe. John tells us about some requests and questions that led to salvation for the Samaritans.

I. Jesus asked for a drink, but He really wanted to give one (vv. 1-10).

Illustration: Our word *left* can be used in a number of different ways. If I tell you that the missionary left his Baptist Mid-Missions jacket at my house, you would think that we can easily correct that. But if I told you that the missionary left his

wife, you would know that I was referring to the tragedy of divorce, which is a cause for much greater concern.

Application: In verse 8 of our passage, we are told that Jesus's disciples left to buy some food in Sychar for their supper. We know that they would be back soon. The woman will later leave her water jar behind (v. 28). She would be back for it. In verse 3, however, we are told that Jesus left Judea, and the word John uses to tell us that is what one commentator called "remarkable." He explained, "The general idea which it conveys seems to be that of leaving anything to itself, to its own wishes, ways, [or] fate" (Westcott, 66-67).

So, Jesus left Judea behind, not to return for some time, and this kind of leaving is a cause for some concern. He left because the Pharisees wanted to put an end to His ministry (v. 1). Judea would soon get rid of John the Baptist too. Religious leaders, the colleagues of the Nicodemus of chapter 3, no longer wanted these men making disciples. So Jesus journeys to a place He hopes wanted Him more, His home in Galilee. Along the way, weary from His journey, He asks a Samaritan woman for a drink. She is surprised by His question, understandably so, but also for all the wrong reasons.

Jesus explains in v. 10 that His real reason for asking her for a drink was that He wanted to give her one. If only the Samaritan woman knew with Whom she spoke. If only she knew His generosity. If only she knew how He was weary that day, and would suffer much more, so she could be saved. If only she understood His love. When Jesus asks something of us, it is always because He really wants to give to us. What has He asked us to give to Him? Have we held it back? Jesus asked for a drink, but He really wanted to give this woman one.

II. The Samaritan woman asked about a bucket, but really she needed eternal life (vv. 11-15).

Illustration: I am told that the idiomatic expression, *a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*, comes from medieval times and the sport of falconry. The idea is that the falcon you have on your hand is more valuable than two birds of prey, so do not release your falcon to catch those birds if it involves risking your falcon's safety. What we mean today is that we should not give up a sure thing for two unlikely things.

Application: That adage seems to underlie this question from the Samaritan woman. She has come for water from a great well – the well of Jacob, where he drank along with his children and cattle. Now a stranger with no bucket says He has better water to offer, and the woman wants to know where this water would be coming from. Could its source possibly be better than what she already has in hand from Jacob's well?

Jesus assures her that His water is better. Jesus's water causes eternal life to bubble up inside a person who drinks it. The word translated *springing up* in v. 14 is used two other times in the NT, both times of lame persons who leap up after being healed (Acts 3:8, 14:10). Drink this water, and eternal life is going to leap up inside of you like a healed lame person. In addition, once that happens, you never have to take another sip again, for you will never again become thirsty. This one drink will meet your need for all eternity. The woman continues to miss the truth Jesus speaks, so Jesus makes another request.

III. Jesus asks about a husband, but really He already knew (vv. 16-26).

Illustration: In the previous chapter, Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about what happens when a person is born of the Spirit, comparing the experience to the effects of water and of wind. Describing the second of these, Jesus said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest *the sound* thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and wither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (3:8; emphasis mine).

Application: The word *sound* in that verse is the noun form of the verb Jesus uses when He asks the Samaritan woman about her husband. He says literally, "Go sound your husband." I think this request is a literary echo of the truth Jesus taught about the sound of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus said, "Go sound your husband," the woman for the first time in her life heard the sound of the Holy Spirit speaking to her heart and convicting her of her sin. She was defensive at first, "I have no husband." Then Jesus explains that He cannot be fooled. It is as though He is the omniscient cancer doctor with the 100% accurate x-ray machine. He sees all and misses nothing.

As their conversation continues from this important start, Jesus goes on to explain three more things to her – God, worshipping God, and God's Messiah. Believing this truth would cause eternal life to spring up within the Samaritan woman.

1. Jesus explains God (v. 24). God is spirit. A sinner who needs salvation must have God, who is a Spirit, save her. Our sin cancer is a spiritual need, not a physical need, but even when it comes to his religion, man gets stuck thinking only in terms of physical things and the material world.

We see this in the woman's thoughts about Jesus's eternal-life-giving water in v. 15. She is still looking for a well with H<sub>2</sub>O in it. We see the same focus on the material world in the disciples' thoughts about Jesus's special food later in v. 33. They think someone brought Him something to eat.

But H<sub>2</sub>O and groceries and other material things do not comprise everything that is real. There is much more to reality than materialism. Mathematics is an example. Math is spirit, in the sense that math is something real that is not physical or material. Math has no molecules. God the Father (v. 24) is Spirit, Someone real who is not physical. So in order to cure our spiritual sinfulness, we must understand that much of what is real about us and our God is spiritual. We must not

get stuck in the mundane physical world, where all reality is the natural world—mere physics, chemistry, and biology.

2. Jesus explains worshipping God (vv. 19-24). It must be done in spirit and truth. In Greek, the phrase *in Spirit and truth* is constructed to refer to one thing with two names, not two different things. In other words, to worship truly in the Spirit is also to worship spiritually in the Truth. Jesus further explained in John 6:63, “It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are life.” To worship God acceptably, we must find the right words, not the right mountain or building. Worshipping is laying prostrate before the right Words, which point us to the Word Incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Jesus explains God’s Messiah (vv. 25-26). Jesus is God’s Messiah. The woman described the Messiah literally as the One who would “proclaim to us all things.” Jesus, the Messiah, describes Himself simply as “I am the one talking to you.” It is one thing to believe that Christ proclaims all things to us. It is quite another to believe that Christ is talking to me about specific needs in my life. The Messiah came to die for the Samaritan woman with her trail of husbands and non-husbands. He did so for her one-on-one. She believed, and drank life eternal. She never thirsted in the same way again.

IV. The disciples ask about food, but they were missing the harvest (vv. 27-39).

Illustration: We find here not only the question the disciples asked each other (v. 33), but also the questions they were unwilling to ask out loud (v. 27). Whereas the Samaritan woman thought a bird in the hand was better than two in the bush, these disciples are very quiet about *the elephant in the room*.

That phrase goes back to a Russian poem about a man who visited a museum, noticing many details in its exhibits, but

never seeing an elephant in the room. The idiom refers, of course, to ignoring a problem that is not easily ignored.

Application: The disciples thought they saw clearly the elephant in the room, and they marveled that Jesus could not see it. The elephant they saw was His talking to a woman. No Jewish Rabbi was allowed to do that. "How could Jesus have missed this obvious problem?" they wondered.

And yet, it was they who could not see the real elephant in the room. It was the whiteness of the harvest field. Jesus explains that they needed to lift up their eyes and look on the fields and see that they were white already to harvest. Undoubtedly, the neighbors of the Samaritan woman could be seen coming. Now is the time of salvation. Now is the time to reap the sown fields. Now is the acceptable year of the Lord, the moment of grace and gospel good news. Today is the day of salvation.

Yes, there is always difficult sowing to be done too, for Amos 9:13 describes blessed days of harvest as including planting, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt." Our day requires sowing and reaping to be done in this season together, and both sowers and reapers rejoice together when the harvest comes in.

Illustration: I found a year-round crop rotation guide for gardeners. The guide claimed, "With strategic crop rotation, you can maximize your garden's productivity and ensure a steady harvest season after season. . . . From planning your planting schedule to implementing effective crop rotation techniques, we'll equip you with the knowledge and tools needed to transform your garden into a year-round food paradise."

This is the food Jesus wanted His disciples to taste. This was the work that He finished perfectly, and this is what He meant

when He said, “As the Father has sent Me, so send I you” (John 20:21). He wants us to know about this food of year-round sowing and reaping. The Samaritan woman joyfully found out what this food tastes like (v. 39). So can we.

Conclusion: A final request comes from the Samaritans. They ask Jesus for more, and Jesus willingly gave them more (vv. 40-42). Do we want more of Jesus and more from Him? Do we want Him to tarry among us that we might hear Him? Do we believe because we have heard Him ourselves? Has He fed us the food of sowing and reaping? Have we rejoiced this way?

This chapter of John’s Gospel tells us that we must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in His name, simply because the Samaritans believed. Reading it, we are left with a final question, “Who will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in His name, because they learned that we believed?”

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*