

John Chapter 4

THE PERFECT WITNESS

Jesus and the Woman of Samaria

In John 4 Jesus gives His message to a number of people in a variety of different cultural situations: the sinful Samaritan woman, His own disciples, the many Samaritans who trusted in Him, and finally, a nobleman and his household.

How do you want to live your life? Do you want to serve God and other people, or be like most people in the world today and serve yourself? You can close your eyes to the pain, need, and ugliness of the world and you may get by rather comfortably without a lot of major difficulties. But you will miss out on the true joy and fulfillment that comes from a life of serving your Creator and those He has created. Such people for the most part never contribute anything of lasting value to people and those generations that follow them. Those who decide to spend their lives serving God and others will, however, find what can be described as true joy both here and now and in Heaven for eternity. Such people often leave some pretty large footprints on the world. The selfish, self-serving person will never see lives changed

by the power of the Holy Spirit. What a pity! The servant of God on the other hand will often be blessed by seeing great things happening by the power of God.

Do you think there is much of a need in the world for a ministering heart? Just look at the numbers. How many people in the world are on their way to Hell because they believe the teachings of Islam? How many people are on their way to Hell because they believe in the teaching of Mormonism? How many people are on their way to Hell because they believe the teaching of Buddhism, Shamanism, ancestor worship, the occult, and hundreds of other off-the-wall religions? How many people might be saved if someone was willing to go where there are no Christians and tell the people there about the salvation that God offers through Christ? People that are willing to go where others have not gone before to tell people the Good News of Christ make great personal sacrifices, but the satisfaction is the kind that only can be known by those who have done it. The story of Jesus and the woman at the well gives us a good illustration of a ministering heart.

As John 4 opens we see that Jesus has decided to conclude the baptizing ministry that His disciples have been carrying on in Judea and move on to

Galilee by way of Samaria. Now Jews had a tremendous prejudice against Samaritans and often would travel around the country rather than through it. But Christ chose to walk through this country. As Jesus and His disciples were traveling through **Samaria** they came to a town called **Sychar**, which was near parcel of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was close by so Jesus, who was exhausted from His long walk, sent His disciples into town to buy supplies and then sat down by the well to rest. It was about the sixth hour [12 noon (John 4:5-6)]. You will find some difference of opinion among scholars on this issue of time. Some contend they started counting their day from 6 A.M., others counter that they started counting from 12 noon. Studying a number of passages where this term is used leads us to believe starting at 6 A.M. is the best understanding.

But first, let us get an overview of this passage.

John 4:1-10 ESV:

*1 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John
2 (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples),*

3 he left Judea and departed again for Galilee.

4 And he had to pass through Samaria.

*5 So he came to a town of Samaria called **Sychar**, near the field that **Jacob** had given to his son **Joseph**.*

*6 **Jacob's well** was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.*

7 There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

8 (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

Now we will walk through the passage verse by verse.

John 4:1-3 ESV:

1 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John

2 (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples),

3 he left Judea and departed again for Galilee.

Jesus was rapidly becoming very popular in the province of Judea causing the Pharisees to become more and more concerned about the number of followers He was attracting. Jesus could sense the conflict that was developing and in order to prevent a confrontation He *left Judea* because He would likely have been persecuted to the point of death, as He eventually would be, because of the hatred the Pharisees held for Him. As this was not yet the time God had in mind for this to occur, Jesus withdrew from Judea on what we could consider a missionary trip to **Samaria** and **Galilee**.

Do you remember what John said about Jesus in John 2: 24-25? “*But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.*”¹ Jesus also knew what was in a woman as we are about to see in His encounter with the **Samaritan woman**. This interchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman “contrasts sharply with

¹ *New American Standard Bible*: 1995 Update. LaHabra, CA : The Lockman Foundation, 1995, S. Jn 2:25.

Nicodemus. He was seeking; she was indifferent. He was a respected ruler; she was an outcast. He was serious; she was flippant. He was a Jew; she was a despised Samaritan. He was (presumably) moral; she was immoral. He was orthodox; she was heterodox. He was learned in religious matters; she was ignorant. Yet in spite of all the differences between this ‘churchman’ and this woman of the world, they both needed to be born again. Both had needs only Christ could meet.”²

We read about Jesus coming into the land of Judea (John 3:22), after he had kept the Passover at Jerusalem (John 2:13). Jesus then left Judea four months before harvest time as we are told in John 4:35. If we do the math this means that Jesus stayed in Judea for about six months. There are no accounts of His teaching or miracles in the Judean countryside.³

John 4:4 ESV:

4 And he had to pass through Samaria.

In Jesus’ day the Jews, because of their hatred for the Samaritans, normally took the eastern route in order to avoid Samaria. But Jesus chose the route

² Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:284.

through Samaria in order to reach the despised people of that region. As the Savior of the world He seeks out and saves the despised and outcasts (Luke 19:10).⁴

Jews avoided Samaria because there was a long-standing hatred between them and the Samaritans. The Samaritans were a mixed race of people who were part Jew and part Gentile as the result of the ten northern tribes being driven from the northern kingdom of Israel in 727 B.C. Because they claimed a Jewish ancestry but were unable to prove it, the Jews in Judea came to hate them for claiming to be something that a true Jew could not accept. No true Jew could have mixed parentage. But the Samaritans did not give up their claim easily. They built their own temple and established their own religious services on **Mt. Gerizim**. This made the Jews even more angry. When His enemies wanted to insult Jesus they called Him a Samaritan (John 8:48).

Jesus knew, however, how carefully God had planned out His life and ministry so that specific people would be in the right place at the right time so that Jesus would be able to minister to them. I cannot recall the source of

³ *Preaching The Word*, John 4:3.

this story but it illustrates very well in modern day terms what happened in Samaria between Jesus and the Samaritan woman:

“I have not forgotten the frustration of traveling 250 miles across the Mojave Desert to take some young people witnessing. When we got there, we could not find a place to camp. We drove up and down that stretch of river near Parker, Arizona, trying to find a place, and it was getting dark. Finally we pulled into a camp and found a place to pitch our tent — right next to five boys who eventually trusted Christ. Three of them are in the ministry today. I came to realize that my frustration was a prelude to God's sovereign appointment.”

Stuart Briscoe has shared a story that is even more dramatic. When he was at Caper Wray Bible School, he and his wife were separated from each other for a day. He had left her the car, but he had accidentally taken the keys with him. After a couple of hours, Jill borrowed another car, and as she was

⁴ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:284.

driving down the road she saw some girls hitchhiking, so she picked them up. They turned out to be three German girls visiting England. She managed to persuade these girls to come with her to a conference for German Christian young people, and one of them was marvelously saved there. Afterwards Stuart Briscoe told that girl's story:

“She was a theological student in Germany. She had come under the influence of some teaching that, instead of leading her to an intelligent worship of God, had filled her with much doubt and confusion. She had delivered an ultimatum to the God whose existence she doubted. She told God that if he was there he should show himself to her in some way. He must do this within three months. If he didn't, she told him, "I'll quit my schooling, quit theology, quit religion, and I *think* I'm going to quit living because there's nothing to live for."

“After explaining this, she turned to my wife with great emotion and said, ‘The three months end today.’”⁵

John 4:5-6 ESV:

5 So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

6 Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

Jesus, tired from walking for many miles, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour, which according to the way time was kept in the synoptic gospels, would have been 12 noon (John 1:39; 19:14). Because Jesus was fully human as well as being fully God, He experienced all the feelings that you and I feel in our humanness. Things such as pain, hunger, thirst, and tiredness.

So just imagine how tired you might be after walking perhaps 10 miles on a hot, dusty road. You would probably just want to sit back close your eyes and completely relax. But then He either saw or heard a woman approaching. As tired as Jesus must have been He knew that this woman needed to be witnessed to. Perhaps there is a message here for those of us who get so weary we do not think we can carry on. But just as Jesus did, so should we do (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 11; John 4:28-29).

⁵ *Preaching The Word*, John 4:3.

Luther said he worked so hard that when he went to bed, he literally fell into bed. In fact, one account says he did not change the sheets on his bed for a year! Now that's tired! Moody's bedtime prayer on one occasion was, "Lord, I am tired. Amen." Calvin's biographers marvel at his output. John Wesley rode horseback sixty to seventy miles a day and on an average preached three sermons a day. When Alexander Maclaren went into his study he took off his slippers and put on working men's boots because he knew that a minister of God is to be a workingman! Jesus' example calls us to open wide our hearts and by doing so to be vulnerable to pain and disappointment as we reach out in love to others.⁶

John 4:7-9 ESV:

7 There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

8 (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.).

⁶ *Preaching The Word*, John 4:5-6.

As this woman approached she must have been shocked when Jesus spoke to her. She must have been shocked even further when this Jewish man asked her for a drink. The custom of the day in that part of the world did not permit public conversation between men and women, between Jews and Samaritans, and especially between strangers. A Jewish Rabbi would rather go thirsty than violate these customs.

She must have been panicked over the fact that this man spoke to her and asked her to give Him a drink. A Rabbinic law of a.d. 66 stated that Samaritan women were considered as continually menstruating and thus unclean. Therefore a Jew who drank from a Samaritan woman's vessel would become ceremonially unclean.

So here we see Jesus going against not only racial prejudice, but also against gender prejudice or sexual bias.

Jesus calls us to reach out and across to others regardless of the gender and cultural barriers. Have you allowed such barriers to prevent you from sharing Christ with people you see frequently because they are different than you? Perhaps Jesus is asking us to step out of our comfort zones.

John 4:10 ESV:

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

We have a situation here in which Jesus is saying, “You may be shocked by the fact that I, a Jew, asked you, a Samaritan woman, for a drink. But if you knew who I really am, your shock would be ten times greater, and instead of my asking you for a drink, you would ask me for a drink of living water.”

What would your reaction be to someone who spoke those words to you? I bet you would wonder just who this guy is to say something like that, what this gift is that He is talking about, and what in the world is living water?

“Living water“ is the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 2:13; Zechariah 14:8; John 7:38-39). The Samaritan woman’s interest was obviously stimulated because she was willing to continue the conversation. We are about to see how the greatest witness of all time dealt with various kinds of people.

Jesus does not even respond to the issue she raises about the prejudice Jews

have for Gentiles. Jesus will bring this woman to an understanding of salvation through faith by showing her that she does not understand those things that are truly meaningful in one's life, that her behavior has been immoral, and that she needs a Savior. A Savior who willingly will provide her what she needs most in life—forgiveness and salvation. She will also learn that it is offered as a gift. She need do nothing to earn it.

He will show her that He, Jesus Christ, is the gift of God, and that it is a great honor and privilege to have this gift offered to us. And in spite of this truth there are many who are unaware that God is calling them to come and receive the gift. God had been calling people for thousands of years, first through the spoken Word and then through the written Word of the Old Testament.⁷ Jesus will provide salvation and give the Holy Spirit to all who ask Him.

⁷ Isa. 12:3; 35:7; 44:3; 55:1; Zec. 14:8.