

Jesus seeks true worshipers by breaking every kind of social and spiritual barrier, redeeming worshipers who are eternally satisfied in him and who joyfully share their satisfaction. You cannot help being a worshiper who spiritually thirsts. Only Jesus can quench that thirst forever, so drink of him.

Introduction – When it comes to life’s big topics, there’s no better place to start than the primary cause of our deep desires. God tells us that cause is our unending need for worship and sanctuary.

Background – Jews and Samaritans hated and rejected each other. Samaritans were descendants of the ten northern tribes of Israel who intermarried with foreign pagans. But for several historical and theological reasons (which the Bible does not affirm), from their perspective Samaritans were the true worshipers and Jews were imposters. On the other end, the Jews had their own reasons justifying their hatred of their racial half-brothers. Both religious groups excommunicated each other and avoided any intimate contact with the enemy. Such hatred led to a customary geographic segregation.

I. Our Compulsion to Worship

A. Jesus “had to” pass through Samaria (vv. 1-6)

Why did Jesus “have to” go through Samaria (the region, not just the city)? Logically, it was the most direct route between Judea and his destination in Galilee. But spiritually speaking, going to spread the gospel to a people group who have not yet been introduced to Jesus is part of God’s commission for him. “Had to” is literally “it is necessary” which is a Greek word that always indicates divine necessity or requirement elsewhere in John (3:7, 14, 30; 9:4; 10:16; 12:34; 20:9). Jesus is compelled to take a certain road because mission is directing him, not geography. His travel itinerary is controlled by obeying his heavenly Father. For Jesus, even where he walks is an act of worship.

B. The Samaritan woman’s first question for a prophet (vv. 19-20)

1. An immoral woman, an outsider in every way, is compelled to worship. But not at first. See how Jesus gently leads her to feel the desire to worship. First, he stirs her hopes by using words that can have two meanings. “Living water” contrasts with still water. But living water can also refer to the grace of God that eternally satisfies. Jesus speaks of this kind of living water, helping her move from thinking of the physical to the spiritual, which he knows she doesn’t have but desperately needs (**Jeremiah 2:13**). Second, in a sense he puts his finger on what she “worships” instead of God. He’s not changing the subject, but helping her evaluate her “broken cistern”—the thing she has put her hope and trust in that is not satisfying.

2. Once she is convicted of her particular broken cistern (having a man) and understands Jesus has prophetic insight into her life, she wakes up to her spiritual need. And so the next thing she asks about is worship. Who are the true worshipers and where is the true place to worship and offer sacrifices? Where to worship was the big question because the stakes were high for a Samaritan who desired to rightly worship the LORD. They were unwelcome at the Jerusalem temple, so if the Jews were correct about the proper worship place, then Samaritans are spiritual outcasts. She is excluded from truly worshipping God.

II. Our Corruption of Worship

A. Idolizing your past: cultural pride (vv. 7-12)

Look how the Samaritan woman does this. (1) She elevates her own ancestors while demonizing other races. But for her, it’s not merely her ethnicity that is superior, it’s the ideals her people stand

for. This is usually the way racists justify their cultural pride. Not only that, she also (2) adopts as inherently right her own traditions and social prejudices. While Jesus is ready to break down the barriers of traditions and taboos that prevent him from having a conversation with her about living water, she persists with excuses why she can't help Jesus. Why? Because (3) the inherited religion that grips her heart and mind prevents her from seeing how the Samaritans are wrong about worship.

B. Trusting your judgment: selfish pride (vv. 15-18)

1. This kind of pride is at play when the Bible says people “do what is right in their own eyes” (cf. Deuteronomy 12:8; Judges 21:25; Proverbs 21:2). When Jesus begins speaking to her, she thinks she's in control. She's probably the kind of person who says, “I know what I'm doing, and I don't need you.” And when Jesus starts talking about living water, this woman jumps at the opportunity to cut out of her schedule the daily trip to the well.

2. There is another way to trust your judgment. Rather than insisting you're right, you can admit you're worshipping a broken cistern—but tell yourself that God understands your decisions. We see this response when Jesus asks her to bring her husband. It's possible she's thinking Jesus is her next man. But Jesus doesn't take the bait because he's drawing her away from her corrupted worship (serial monogamy) to himself as the spiritual, eternal Bridegroom.

III. Our Redemption for Worship

A. Invigorated by living water (vv. 7, 10, 13-14)

Do you long for the living waters of God's grace welling up inside you in never-ending satisfaction? Gaze in wonder at the one who not only offers but also gives—he is thirsty! He experienced thirst so you can be quenched. Jesus redeems you by first awakening your thirst and then planting a wellspring of eternal life in you that will never run dry. How patient Jesus is to lead the ignorant and discontented to eternal life! Have you drunk deeply from Jesus' living water?

B. Renewed in spirit and truth (vv. 21-24)

Do you long to worship the Father in spirit and truth? Look by faith at the one who knows God intimately—he can direct and energize your worship. Jesus redeems you by redirecting your heart to worship in spirit and truth—in other words, according to reality and the glory of the Triune God. How accepting Jesus is to clear the way for whosoever to believe and be redeemed for worship! God has removed the Jerusalem temple made with hands to clear the way for the final temple, the eternal dwelling place of God, who is Jesus.

C. Revealed by the Messiah (vv. 25-30, 39-42)

Who is this Jewish rabbi who promises living water, who reorients corrupted worshipers to worship in spirit and truth? The Samaritan woman learns one step at a time he is the Prophet and more. He is the long awaited Messiah. Jesus redeems as I AM (the LORD): the Anointed One of God who is the Savior of the world. How gracious Jesus is to reveal his identity so clearly, and to such a nobody as this immoral Samaritan woman!

Conclusion – Your deep soul longing for worship—connecting to the God who is grander than anything or anyone else, and also nearer and more real than everything else—is according to the way you are designed. God planted that inside you so you would seek him, drink of Christ's living water, and worship him knowing you are acceptable to him. Why? Because God sought you first. On the cross Jesus experienced the excruciating soul-thirst for his Father so that you would be filled full. He broke down all the barriers preventing your worship from being acceptable so that you might come near in spirit and truth. Come and drink. Come and worship.