

July 6, 2014
Community Baptist Church
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study John 4:1-31.

1. Why were the disciples surprised to find Jesus talking to the woman?
2. What principles or ideas for presenting the gospel do you garner from this story?
3. Was the woman born again?

CAN THIS BE THE CHRIST? John 4:1-31

What is the best way to share the gospel? There are many different methods, many different manuals, and many who would loudly proclaim that their method is most effective. How do they know? Well, look at the number of professions of faith. Professions of faith should never be confused with God's work of salvation. Changed lives are the best evidence that God has done the miracle of regeneration.

Maybe it is good for us to stop to consider how the author of eternal life communicated the need of eternal life. In Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well, we discover that the critical issue in sharing the gospel is that sinners need a Savior because they are sinners, and Jesus is the Savior.

A Prearranged Meeting (vv.1-6).

On the heels of John straightening out his disciples about the supremacy of Christ, the Apostle wrote that it was necessary for Jesus to return to Galilee (vv.1-3). The word necessary highlights the fact that in Jesus' ministry human weaknesses entered the picture. What else would we expect. *Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples) (vv.1-2).*

If we know the story of Jesus, we know that contention between Jesus and the religious leaders (Pharisees) was unavoidable. It was far too early in the divinely planned ministry of Jesus for the sharp conflicts that would lead to them delivering Christ to be crucified. The implication from this statement is that they would be concerned with Jesus' popularity just like they were with John the Baptist's. John had been preaching repentance of sin and baptizing those who repented. Now Jesus was preaching the same thing and His disciples were baptizing. In the opinion of the religious leaders, John and Jesus were "encroaching" on the Pharisees' system and "stealing" away followers.

But it was also true, and sadly so, that contention was developing between John's disciples and Jesus. Those disciples expressed to John their teacher a certain agitation or jealousy about disciples going to follow Jesus (3:26). So what should Jesus do? He was certainly innocent. He was not trying to steal followers away from John. So should He stay and fight or move on?

This is but a reminder that human weakness is the bane of all ministry. True ministry is about teaching and representing God and His truth. Human nature is opposed to God's character and truth in so many ways. It is a sad day when we adjust the teaching and representation of God's character to appease human weakness.

Then is God's work and planning subject to and deterred by humans? Not at all. Regardless of circumstances caused by human weakness, God's work and timing continued as planned. We read that *He left Judea and departed again for Galilee (v.3)*. This is not a case where Jesus was running away from trouble. Rather it was a case much like the Paul and Barnabas split that was due to human weakness. They went their separate ways, but God used it to double the impact of ministry. So it was time, in the plan and purpose of

God, for Christ to move to Galilee where He would do the bulk of His work. Again it would have been dangerous for Jesus to continue working in an area near Jerusalem which was the hot bed of Phariseism. And besides that general need to move out to the rural area, there was a pressing, specific need.

It was necessary for Jesus to travel through Samaria (vv.4-5). Jesus had to go to a particular place in Samaria. *And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there.* This is not a “*had to*” of no other choice. It was a serious matter for a Jew to pass through Samaria. Jesus had been preaching and baptizing south of Samaria in the Judean countryside (3:22).

Consider the fact that Jesus was going to Galilee, and the most logical route would be straight north up the Jordan valley, through Samaria, up the Plain of Esdraelon to Galilee. But that would not be the expected route for a Jew. Jews seldom passed through Samaria. Instead, they would cross the Jordan River and then go north, bypassing Samaria. Why? The Jews despised the Samaritans because they were a mixed race of people. The Jews who had been left in that part of Israel when the Assyrians overthrew the nation (722 BC) had intermarried with the Gentiles who the Assyrians imported to the area. This was unacceptable in the thinking of Jews who were proud to maintain the purity of their race. Devout Jews despised Gentiles but despised Samaritans more because they were a Jew/Gentile mix. It would take a very serious matter to force a Jew to think he “had” to pass through Samaria.

This was a serious matter. This was a “*had to*” of divine sovereignty. Christ had to keep an appointment that He had made in eternity. He needed to confront a single soul about the truth of Messiah. He needed to use this opportunity to teach a very important lesson to the disciples about the full work of Messiah. He needed to leave us with a very important principle about the breadth of the gospel: it is for every person, of every race, of every class in the world, yea, in human history.

When Jesus arrived at the right place for the meeting, Jesus displayed human limitations. John wrote, *So Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth*

hour (v.6b). Jesus and the disciples had come to the outskirts of the town of Sychar. This town was located on the slope of Mt. Ebal which sat across a small valley from Mt. Gerizim. Probably Sychar was very near where the ancient city of Shechem had been. You will remember that Shechem is where Jacob's sons had brought a blemish on the family when they destroyed all the men of the city. Maybe the most significant historical event of that area is that these two mountains are where the nation of Israel gathered when they were taking the Promised Land to renew the covenant of God according to Moses' instruction before he died (Deut. 11:29; Josh. 8:30).

In that area, near a field Jacob had given to Joseph, was a well. It was a well Jacob and his people had dug. That means it was a well 1900 years old, which does not compute for people who live in a nation that is only 250 years old. Joseph's bones were buried in this place (Josh. 24:32). Obviously this particular area was full of significant history regarding God and His relationship with His people. It seems that the townspeople were well aware of the past.

Coming to Jacob's well, Jesus sat down beside the well because He was tired. It was about noon, the sixth hour. Jesus and the disciples had probably been walking for several hours now, possibly between ten and fifteen miles. That he was weary is a good reminder that God the Son was tested in every way like we are. He knew how to suffer thirst, hunger, weariness of body. He knew what temptation to sin was like. The writer to the Hebrew believers reminded us how important that matter is. *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).*

Our Lord's human weakness would be the means He used to open the door for the gospel. He sat at the city well which would be one of the most expected places for social interaction. The picture would be equivalent to us sitting at the local coffee shop in order to create an opportunity for the gospel.

A Discussion About Water and Thirst (vv.7-26).

In that setting, Jesus simply asked a woman for a drink of water (vv.7-9). It was actually quite an awkward situation according to normal expectations. *There came a woman of Samaria to draw water.*

Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) A woman coming to the well to draw water was not uncommon at all. However, a woman coming to the well alone was a bit out of the norm because the women usually came in groups for protection and fellowship. Furthermore, a woman arriving at the well at noon, in the heat of the day, was also unusual. Maybe her reputation in town forced her to be a loner.

Whatever the circumstances behind this woman's arriving at the well at noon, when she showed up, Jesus asked her for a drink. This was striking because it was not the custom of Jewish men to speak to women in public, especially women they did not know. It was not the custom for a Jew to speak to a Samaritan. And it was not at all acceptable for a devoutly religious Jewish man to speak publicly to a woman with this woman's reputation.

We should be so thankful that our Savior is not bound by social taboo that is unfair or discriminatory. We learn later in Jesus' ministry that one time the Pharisees sent spies in an effort to trap Jesus in His words. At that time the spies were exactly right when they concluded, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances" (Matthew 22:16). If Jesus was swayed by popular opinions, He never would have talked to this needy woman. Worse is that if Jesus did only what was politically correct or publicly acceptable, none of us would have received His grace unto salvation.

Jesus' question caused the woman to be surprised. *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.) (v.9).* John points out that Jews and Samaritans had few dealings with each other. Though that conclusion is somewhat at odds with the obvious fact that the disciples were in town buying food from Samaritans at that moment. Apparently, the Jews associated with the Samaritans only as much as necessary. Nevertheless, this woman recognized how odd it was that Jesus the Jewish teacher asked her for a drink.

Almost certainly implied in this picture is the fact that Jesus would have to drink from her vessel. Try to picture a businessman dressed in a suit sitting alone on a park bench in Selma, Alabama.

The year is 1955. Along comes a black woman carrying a lunch bag. The man sitting on the bench says to her, "Excuse me ma'am. Would you sit down on the bench with me and share your lunch?" In the circumstances of that day, such a picture would have been unheard of. Or it would be like an American man dressed in shorts and a tank top, trying to strike up a conversation with a very devout Muslim woman on the streets of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. That isn't going to happen. But, Jesus is never bound by social custom whereas we, His servants and messengers, often are.

By opening the conversation, Jesus opened the door to eternal truth (vv.10-15). He told the woman that she was actually the one who was thirsty. *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" (v.10).* The conversation started with Jesus asking for physical water because He was physically thirsty. Suddenly He turned the conversation to point out that the woman was spiritually thirsty for salvation from sin.

God uses water as a picture of salvation, spiritual cleansing, throughout the Bible. Israel, like nearly all religious people, forsook the God of salvation and made for themselves faulty cisterns that could not hold the water necessary for spiritual cleansing. God argued, *For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jer. 2:13).* Again, God promised the future salvation of Israelites with this picture, promising, *With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation (Isaiah 12:3).* That same theme is found in God's invitation, "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters" (Isa. 55:1). It is only expected then that we would find the same theme of water representing salvation repeated in the last days. John wrote regarding Jesus' message to him, *And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment" (Rev. 21:6).* *The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price (Rev. 22:17).*

Jesus' offer of *living water* is the offer of salvation. In response, the Samaritan woman manifested confusion. She was confused

because, like most humans, she was focused on the physical. *The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" (v.11).* She could not fathom the idea that this Jewish man was greater than Jacob, who was a forefather and founder of her people. So she asked, *"Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock" (v.12).*

In response to the woman's doubt and confusion, Jesus patiently explained eternal life. *Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

The Savior pointed out the very important reality that physical satisfaction is short-lived. Yet most people who sense a guilt of sin attempt to blot it out through physical efforts, personal works, maybe continually trying harder to remove the blemish. Most people try to cover the guilt of sin by heaping up more and more physical stimulants.

Physical issues are not the problem. Salvation is a matter of the spiritual, and spiritual satisfaction is found in Jesus Christ who gives the water of salvation. Salvation results in an ongoing thirsting for righteousness. Jesus promised, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matt 5:6).* While Jesus promised hungering and thirsting, it is most important to see that He also promised that His provision will satisfy that thirst. Only a saved person is able to identify with that provision. Only a saved person can sing the testimony John Peterson penned.

I thirsted in the barren land of sin and shame,
And nothing satisfying there I found;
But to the blessed cross of Christ one day I came
Where springs of living water did abound.
Drinking at the springs of living water,
Happy now am I, My soul they satisfy.
Drinking at the springs of living water,
O wonderful and bountiful supply. (John Peterson)

But this poor woman was still stuck in the earthly, physical realm. *The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water" (v.15).* She was like the people who wanted Jesus to be king only because they wanted free bread (John 6). Unless the Holy Spirit applies the miracle of saving grace to an individual, that person will be forever as blind as this woman. People like that always think of heaven as a wonderful place full of mansions, streets of gold, plenty of joy, and no work! Even salvation is presented by such people as a life without stress, but of prosperity and good times as you embrace God's wonderful plan for you. That is not the gospel story that leads to true salvation but an expression of abject selfishness. That is the sin of Satan.

It was okay that people in need of salvation appear to be confused about the matter because it is Jesus' ministry to expose the eternal need (vv.16-25). That exposing is not always comfortable as is illustrated in this case when Jesus brought up a specific sin (vv.16-18). Knowing the woman's situation, Jesus bluntly requested an audience with her husband. *Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here" (v.16).* The woman confessed that she was not married. *The woman answered him, "I have no husband."* (v.17a). In reply, Jesus pinpointed her sin. *Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."*

Modern professing Christians recoil against Jesus' method of exposing the woman's sin. They complain that it quite likely that He made her uncomfortable. They would argue that no one will ever be saved if we make them feel uncomfortable. Therefore, according to a popular confession, they are "attempting to redeem the culture by becoming like the culture." A simple truth to remember in light of that claim is that no one ever redeemed a slave by embracing slavery!

The ministry of Jesus, like John's, was preaching repentance of sin. There is no salvation until there is acknowledgment of sin. There is no understanding of the need of salvation until it is clear that sin results in eternal judgment. Salvation, the joy of eternal satisfaction from God's spring, is the ultimate fellowship with God. There can be no fellowship with God until sin is confessed and dealt with. That is what John wrote in his first letter: *This is the message we have heard*

from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:5-9).

Jesus turned the spotlight of truth on the woman's need and she immediately changed the topic to religion (vv.19-26). Yes, we have experienced that. Indeed, it was just like the modern professing Christians conclude—the woman was uncomfortable. People can talk about religion much easier than they can talk about their sins. So this woman, realizing that Jesus was not from around there and didn't know her reputation from experience, *said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet"* (v.19). And since He is a prophet, let's talk about religious stuff.

The woman's rabbit trail was *Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship* (v.20). It is obvious that she understood the conflict of worship between Jews and Samaritans. Samaritans focused only on the first five books of the Old Testament and claimed that God should be worshiped where Abraham worshiped and where the Israelites confessed God's blessings and cursing—at Mount Gerizim. Conversely, the Jews, who accepted all the Old Testament, argued that God should be worshiped at the temple in Jerusalem. Getting into an argument about religious preferences is always an effective way to turn the spotlight off from sin. This is often the response when we ask a person if he or she has ever confessed sin to Christ and embraced His sacrifice by faith for salvation. The response might be, "Actually, I was reared Methodist, but I became a Baptist" or "I guess you must be a Presbyterian?"

Jesus forced the woman back to the important issue. *Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father*

is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Jesus' last words in that response shape the critical argument in salvation. He said, "I am the Christ!" He gave the woman no options. There is only one true way of worship. True worship of God the Father is only possible through a relationship with God the Son. And no, Samaritans and Jews were not simply two different sides of one coin. Salvation is of the Jews because, as God promised, He sent the Christ, the Savior through the lineage of David. But true worship is not about Jewish traditions or Gentile traditions. True worship of God is not about the proper setting, the proper ritual, the proper creeds or confessions. True worship is about a right relationship with God that is possible only by humbly confessing sin and accepting the sacrifice the Messiah made for sin.

People Marvel at Jesus (vv.27-31).

The disciples marveled at what Jesus was doing (vv.27, 31). They were surprised that Jesus was talking with a woman. *Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?"* (v.27). They knew this was out of the norm. But no one asked because they realized that Jesus was unique. In fact, they were as focused on temporal, physical satisfaction as the woman was. *Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat"* (v.31). It appears that the disciples missed the whole point of the conversation. They seem to have concluded, "Oh wow, that was kind of weird. Let's eat."

The woman and the townsfolk marveled in a different way (vv.28-29). The woman was impressed by Jesus' knowledge of her. *So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"* She admitted that Jesus knew all about her past. Instead of becoming preachy and trying to sound better than the

men of the city, she simply posed a question. Questions can be very convicting. Questions often allow sinners to find themselves guilty.

The people wanted to see for themselves. *They went out of the town and were coming to him. (v.30)*. This should be the result if we have had an encounter with Jesus Christ. This woman had apparently been knowledgeable of religious matter for a long time. But her religious opinion didn't impress anyone. That Christ knew about every intimate detail of her life got their attention. That she was willing to face her past got their attention. They wanted to know more about this "Man."

How have we impacted the "community" where we live regarding Christ? Sure, it's easy to claim that everyone knows Christ in our community. That is not altogether accurate. Nearly everyone in our community know **about** Christ. But do people know what Christ has revealed to you about yourself? Do people understand how and why Christ saved you from sin?