

Bible Study May 24, 2023

JOHN 4 (NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION)

- ***28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”***

Jesus Talks With a Samaritan Woman

1 Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John— 2 although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. 3 So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

Already opposition was rising against Jesus, especially from the Pharisees. They resented Jesus' popularity as well as his message, which challenged much of their teaching. Because Jesus was just beginning his ministry, the time was not yet right to confront these leaders openly. He left Jerusalem and traveled north toward Galilee.

4 Now he had to go through Samaria.

To go from the territory of Judea to Galilee meant passing through a central territory called Samaria. Most Jews did everything they could to avoid traveling through Samaria. The reason goes way back into their history.

After the northern kingdom, with its capital at Samaria, fell to the Assyrians, many Jews were deported to Assyria, and foreigners were brought in to settle the land and help keep the peace (2 Kings 17:24). The intermarriage between those foreigners and the remaining Jews resulted in a mixed race, a people who were impure in the opinion of Jews who lived in the southern kingdom. Thus, the pure Jews hated this mixed race, called Samaritans, because they felt that their fellow Jews who had intermarried had betrayed their people and nation. The Samaritans had set up an alternate center for worship on Mount Gerizim (John 4:20) to parallel the Temple at Jerusalem, but it had been destroyed 150 years earlier. While there was long-standing prejudice between Jews and Samaritans, Jesus did not live by such restrictions. The route through Samaria was shorter, and that was the route he took.

5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?”

Jacob's well was on the property originally owned by Jacob (Genesis 33:18-19). It was not a spring-fed well but a well into which water would seep from rain and dew, collecting at the bottom. Wells were almost always located outside the city along the main road. Twice each day, morning and evening, women would come to draw water. This woman came at noon, however,

probably to avoid meeting people who knew her reputation. Jesus gave this woman an extraordinary message about fresh and pure water that would quench her spiritual thirst forever (John 4:13-14).

⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

This woman was (1) a Samaritan, a member of the hated mixed race; (2) known to be living with a man but not married; and (3) in a public place. No respectable Jewish man would talk to a woman under such circumstances. But Jesus did. The Good News is for every person, regardless of his or her race, social position, and past sins. We must be prepared to share the Good News at any time and in any place. Jesus crossed all social, cultural, and political barriers to share the Good News, and we who follow him must do no less. What barriers do you need to cross?

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

What did Jesus mean by “living water”? In the Old Testament, many verses speak of thirsting after God as one thirsts for water (Psalm 42:1; Isaiah 55:1; Jeremiah 2:13; Zechariah 13:1). God is called the fountain of life (Psalm 36:9) and the fountain of living water (Jeremiah 17:13). In saying he would bring living water that could forever quench a person’s thirst for God, Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah. Only the Messiah could give this gift that satisfies the soul’s desire.

¹¹ “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

¹³ Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Many spiritual functions parallel physical functions. As our bodies hunger and thirst, so do our souls. But our souls need spiritual food and water. The woman confused the two kinds of water, perhaps because no one had ever talked with her about her spiritual hunger and thirst before. We would not think of depriving our bodies of food and water when they hunger or thirst. Why, then, should we deprive our souls? The living Word, Jesus Christ, and the written Word, the Bible, satisfy our hungry and thirsty souls.

The woman mistakenly believed that if she received the water Jesus offered, she would not have to return to the well each day. She was interested in Jesus’ message because she thought it could make her life easier. But if that were always the case, people would accept the Good

News for the wrong reasons. Jesus did not come to take away challenges but to change us on the inside and to empower us to deal with problems from God's perspective.

16 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

17 "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

When this woman discovered that Jesus knew all about her private life, she quickly changed the subject. Often people become uncomfortable when the conversation gets too close to home, and they try to talk about something else. As we talk to others, we should feel free to gently guide the conversation back to Jesus and what he has done for us. Jesus' presence exposes sin and can make people uncomfortable, but only he can forgive sin and give new life. We must recognize and embrace this tension that we will often experience when we share our faith with others.

21 "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.

When Jesus said, "Salvation comes through the Jews," he meant that only through the Jewish Messiah would the whole world find salvation. God had promised that through the Jewish people the whole earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). The Old Testament prophets had called the Jews to be a light to the other nations of the world, bringing them to a knowledge of God and showing them God's way to live and how to treat others. They had also predicted the Messiah's coming. The woman at the well may have known of these passages and been expecting the Messiah, but she didn't realize that she was talking to him!

23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

The woman brought up a popular theological issue—the correct place to worship. But her question was a smoke screen, a diversion, to keep the conversation from becoming too personal and vulnerable. Her lifestyle had most likely brought much ridicule and rejection from others, and she probably expected this from Jesus as well. Jesus directed the conversation to a much more important point: The location of worship is not nearly as important as the one whom we worship. Jesus knew that once the woman recognized him as the Messiah, her life choices would change as she was transformed into a person constantly refreshed with living water.

“God is Spirit” means that he is not a physical being limited to one place. He is present everywhere, and he can be worshiped anywhere, at any time. Where we worship is not what counts but how we worship. Is your worship genuine and true? Do you have the Holy Spirit’s help? How does the Holy Spirit help us worship? The Holy Spirit prays for us (Romans 8:26), reminds us of the words of Jesus (John 14:26), cleanses our minds and consciences (Titus 3:4-7), and tells us we are loved (Romans 5:5).

25 The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

26 Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

The Disciples Rejoin Jesus

27 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,

29 “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”

30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

33 Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

34 “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

The nourishment Jesus was speaking of was his spiritual nourishment. His spiritual nourishment came from doing God’s will and, in this case, helping to bring his work of salvation to this woman. For us, it includes more than Bible study, prayer, and attending church. We are nourished not only by what we take in but also by what we give out for God. Later, Jesus referred to completing God’s work on earth (17:4).

35 Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

Sometimes Christians excuse themselves from sharing their faith by saying that their family members or friends aren’t ready to believe. Jesus, however, makes it clear that around us a continual harvest waits to be reaped. Don’t let Jesus find you making excuses. Look around. You will find people ready to hear God’s Word.

36 Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. 37 Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. 38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”

The wages Jesus offers are the joy of working for him and seeing the harvest of believers. These wages come to planter and harvester alike because both find joy in seeing new believers come into Christ's Kingdom. The statement "others had already done the work" (4:38) may refer to the Old Testament prophets and to John the Baptist, who paved the way for the Good News.

Many Samaritans Believe

39 Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."

The Samaritan woman immediately shared her experience with others. Despite her reputation, many took her up on her invitation and came out to meet Jesus. Perhaps you have past sins that make you ashamed. But Jesus changes us. As people see these changes, they become curious. Use stories of your experiences, including your past mistakes, as opportunities to introduce others to the new life Jesus offers.

40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. 41 And because of his words many more became believers.

42 They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

Jesus Heals an Official's Son

43 After the two days he left for Galilee. 44 (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) 45 When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, for they also had been there.

46 Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. 47 When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

48 "Unless you people see signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."

This miracle was more than a favor to one official; it was a sign to all the people. John's Gospel was written to all humankind to urge us toward faith in Jesus. Here a government official had faith that Jesus could do what he claimed. The official believed; then he saw a miraculous sign.

49 The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

This government official was probably an officer in Herod's service. He had walked 20 miles to see Jesus and addressed him as "Lord," putting himself under Jesus even though he had legal authority over Jesus.

50 "Go," Jesus replied, "your son will live."

This government official not only believed Jesus could heal but also obeyed Jesus by returning home, thus demonstrating his faith. Merely saying we believe that Jesus can take care of our problems isn't enough. We need to act as if he can. When you pray about a need or problem, live as though you believe Jesus can do what he says.

The man took Jesus at his word and departed. ⁵¹ While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living.

Jesus' miracles were not illusions. Although the official's son was 20 miles away, he was healed when Jesus spoke the word. Just as he had mastered physical elements to create wine, Jesus now overcame space. Distance was no problem because he has mastery not only over disease but also over time and space. We can never put so much distance between ourselves and Jesus that we are beyond his reach.

⁵² When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him."

⁵³ Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and his whole household believed.

Notice how the official's faith grew. First, he believed enough to ask Jesus to help his son. Second, he believed Jesus' assurance that his son would live, and he acted on it. Third, he and his whole household believed in Jesus. Faith grows as we use it.

⁵⁴ This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.