

JOHN 4:1-42

WEEK 1



Historical Context & Background

There was a long-standing conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans. It's kind of a long story, but basically the Jews rejected the Samaritans because they had intermarried with non-Jews 500 years before when huge amounts of the Jewish population had been relocated by the Babylonians. When the exiled Jews returned home, they accused the local Jewish population of being half-bloods—"mud bloods" so to speak. The mixed blood group eventually settled in Samaria which is north of Judea and they picked Mt. Gerizim to replace Mt. Zion as their worship place. The Judean Jews added insult to injury by labeling Samaritan worship as improper, so there were long-standing high levels of resentment on both sides.

And Jesus intentionally steps into this. The standard Jewish custom would have been to go the long-way around to avoid the Samaritans. But Jesus chose to take the most direct route from Judea to Galilee, straight through Samaria. As Jesus and the disciples pass by the town of Sychar, Jesus stops to rest by a well about a mile out of town while the disciples go in to buy lunch at the local McDonalds. Jesus usually got the Happy Meal so he could give the toy to a child. As He sits by the well, tired from the morning travel, a solitary woman approaches with a water jar. It is unusual that she would be coming at that noon hour because most of the women in the village make this an early morning group chit-chat event. Is there a reason this solitary woman might not be welcomed to join the other women?

What follows is the longest recorded conversation Jesus has in the New Testament. As you read it again, make it a conversation in your mind. Hear the voice of Jesus wooing her, drawing her, challenging her then revealing Himself to her until she is overwhelmed with the realization that God loves her, accepts her and wants her to be with Him as no man ever could or would. Is it possible that Jesus wants to have this conversation with you, too? Do you hear His voice?



Related Passages

- John 3:3 - Jesus calls us to be born again.
- John 8:21-30 - Jesus isn't of this world.
- John 9:35-37 - Jesus the Son of Man
- Luke 10:38-42 - Jesus with Mary and Martha



Key Terms

Messiah: (Hebrew) Means “The Anointed One,” a future king, descended from David who would rule when God freed Israel from the rule of others. Most Jews assumed this would be a political ruler establishing a physical kingdom.

Christ: (Greek) Translation of messiah, “the Anointed One.” (Not Jesus’ last name.)

The Spirit: The Holy Spirit, is spoken of by Jesus in this Gospel more than in any other Gospel.. Savior of the world: Term usually applied to the Roman Emperor as deity, here in John it is more appropriately applied to Jesus!



Key Themes

Crossing Divides: Jesus is willing to cross barriers of gender, theology, race, geography, prejudice and public opinion to seek and save even the least likely. Jesus even shares a vessel with this woman—which is a pretty intimate act in any time and place (imagine sharing a fork with a stranger) but bears extra significance in a culture considered with ritual purity and uncleanness. The takeaway is simple, one that shaped the course of the early church and turned the ancient world upside down: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female – for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Racism isn’t Jesus. Sexism isn’t Jesus. Tribalism isn’t Jesus. Who are the people we exclude, in principal or in practice, from the gospel?

Sin is a Dam: The exchange is weird. Jesus asks for water, then offers her living water. Then when she asks for *his* kind of water, he talks about her adultery. His response to “How do I get this living water” is laying bare her deepest secrets and transgressions. It’s easy to think of Jesus as this super cushy dude who just wants to love everyone the way they are. While he’s totally cool with talking to her as she is, he doesn’t want to leave her that way. He flat out tells/ shows her that if she wants to live, then she needs to take care of that sin which defines her life. Sin is a dam to life. Where God designed us for life to flow abundantly as we walk in His ways, sin impedes that life fully alive in Him. Christ came to break that damn dam and give you new life—but he does so by tearing down what gets in the way of life fully alive in Him. He asks the worst question the woman could imagine, but it’s the only way she came to realize who he was.

Note: Don’t err the opposite direction. Jesus doesn’t come to condemn her. He sits and drinks with her. He offers her life before asking about her sin. And he doesn’t berate her. He lays it bare.

Interrogating Jesus: When the disciples enter into this scene, they provide a stark contrast to what Jesus is doing. They’re suspicious of this woman: “What do you want?” They’re confused by what Jesus is doing: “Why are you talking with *her*?” While Jesus is concerned with bridging divides and bringing this woman who is *outside* the Jewish world *into* God’s kingdom, the disci-

ples are too hung up on the way they've been taught to see an outsider when they see Samaritans and taboo when they see a woman.

The disciples need to learn that they cannot take their lead from the opinions of culture—that in the eternal scheme of things all people have value and the fields are ripe for harvest! How is this relevant to students today? What are the cultural assumptions we make? Where are we asking “Jesus why are you doing that?” These are the things you need to get your students thinking about. Jesus doesn't do life the way UK culture says do life.

The Ripple Effect: After this conversation with Jesus, she leaves her jar behind and returns home to tell people about this mysterious and meaningful encounter. As a result, many people from the town “made their way toward [Jesus]” (v. 30). In other words, she had an encounter with God, told others about that encounter, and that drove them to seek out Jesus for themselves. It's interesting, however, that while the Samaritans begin by believing her testimony (v. 39), John reports that they go on to a deeper understanding (“we *know* that this man really is the savior of the world” [v. 42]) only by encountering Jesus—meeting with him, hearing his voice—themselves.

True Worship: Like said above, there's a HUGE divide between Samaritan and Jew because of worship. Both think the other worships incorrectly. But Jesus here erases the feud in verses 21-24. It's not the Jewish form of worship, or the Samaritan form of worship. But the Jews *do* know (v. 22). If the Jews are know, then why aren't they the true worshipers? He contrasts both Samaritan and Jew with those who “worship the Father in spirit and truth.” The Samaritans and Jews fought about God: What is the proper mountain, what is the right way to do things for him, etc. Jesus talks about life with God. True worshipers will worship God in the Spirit and with the help of the Spirit (Romans 8:14-16). And the truth they worship in isn't some distant truth about God, it is God. Jesus said, “I am the Truth” (John 14:6).

The nuts and bolts of it is this: the more we argue about God and obsess over living lives about God, often the more we step away from life with God. Indeed the Samaritan (and the disciples!) were with God—Jesus—and still focused on differences about God. When Jesus shouts, “Open your eyes!” we shouldn't miss the extremely literal meaning: God is right here, stop arguing about him and live with him. Direct your students to ways they can live life *with* God, and to explore ways in which life *about* God distracts them from this. (Note: This does *not* mean all religious differences are meaningless. They are extremely meaningful. Any worship which denies the Truth, aka Jesus, is false worship.)

And here's the frightening reality: going to CSF three times a week doesn't necessarily translate into actually living life with God. You can check all of the boxes of crap you're “supposed” to do and never be *with* God. That doesn't mean those things are bad (they're great!), but they're not *enough*.



Three Main Points

1. True worship is worship of *Jesus*, and it's a life marked by being *with* God, not just being

about God, even if that life about God is 100% religious-focused (but don't think life with God will anything short of 100% focus on Him).

2. Jesus cares little for cultural differences; he cares for people, and he invites *all* in, even knowing their sin.
3. Sin blocks the flow of living water. What sin is that for us?

📖 Quotes & Illustrations

"Why does Jesus seem to suddenly change the subject from seeking living water to her history with men? The answer is—he isn't changing the subject. He's nudging her, saying, 'If you want to understand the nature of this living water I offer, you need to first understand how you've been seeking it in your own life. You've been trying to get it through men, and it's not working, is it? Your need for men is eating you alive, and it will never stop'"

TIM KELLER

"You are no longer faced with an argument which demands your agreement, but with a Person who demands your confidence."

C. S. LEWIS

❓ Discussion Questions

- Why do you think God inspired this story to be included in Scripture? What do we see most clearly in this chapter that we might miss elsewhere?
- What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? What do we learn about people in this passage?
- What are other stories of Jesus' conversations like this are in Scripture?
- What was the effect of this conversation with Jesus? In the woman's life, in particular? What about beyond her own personal life?
- What people do you connect with in this passage? Why? Who are the people of this story now, on this campus, in this city, in 2018?
- It's interesting that Jesus specifically addresses the sexual brokenness in this woman's life. Surely this woman had other sin, too. What about sexual brokenness specifically makes it a sin that looms so large? Consider the sexual brokenness in your own life and what Jesus might speak into that?
- Jesus doesn't do life the way UK culture says do life. What are some things about Christianity and Jesus that make you uncomfortable? Where do you question why Jesus (or the Bible) says that? How do you deal with that tension?
- Read verses 31-33. What's going on when Jesus doesn't eat? Is Jesus fasting for this woman, as a means of interceding for her? Is he doing something else?
- Why does the Living Word by which all things were created (John 1:1-5) begin by asking the woman for a drink? Is this a conversation or a sparring match? Just how far will Jesus go

with this and why?

- We know from the Genesis 1 and John 1, that God speaks the Universe into creation. And here beside Jacob's well, Immanuel (God with us) speaks hope and acceptance in a conversation with one of His lost creation. How has God been speaking to you lately? Are you having inner conversations with Him? About what?
- The woman comes to the well for water, yet leaves her water jar and goes back to town empty handed. Why is that detail included? What is it that really happened in that conversation that changed her life?
- Why did the woman say "He told me everything I ever did?" Had Jesus told her everything she had ever done? What did he tell her? Why is this significant enough to get that response out of her? How's that relevant to you (is there a sin that defines your life)?
- If the Jews do know what they worship (v. 22), then why does Jesus say that true worshipers will be different from them?
- Jesus uses the image of "living water" to describe life with God—to describe Himself, really. Why might Jesus have chose this image? What is it about water that helps us understand who Jesus is and what He does in our lives?
- What did the disciples think when they came back and found Jesus talking with a woman? Why did they not say anything? Do you think they just looked at each other? Did any of them roll their eyes? What were they thinking?

Application and Practice

Praying Across the Divide: Spend some time in reflection and prayer considering who are the "others" in your life—people across the boundaries that mark out your life; people that don't quite fit in with your vision of life. Maybe they don't believe in Jesus, or maybe they just seem weird to you. Make a physical list of these people and commit to praying for them daily this week.

With God: This week, make a list of the things you do that are about God (examples: go to Synergy, pray before meals, talk about theology, etc.). Honestly evaluate whether these things come from a spirit of being with God or about God. Practice spending time with God. Take 1 hour this week and pray the Jesus prayer in solitude. Find a place where nobody else will bother you, turn off your phone, and sit with your eyes closed (preferably don't fall asleep). Ask the Lord to help you be still to know that he is Lord. Pray a Psalm or two. Then, practice praying this prayer: "Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on your humble servant, a sinner." Repeat this prayer, focusing on making space for God. If you don't hear him speak, it's cool. Being with him is the point.

Cross the Church Divide: Attend a Sunday worship service at a church whose cultural demographic is different from yours. A black church. A Catholic Church. A Chinese church. Pray for that church, that it will worship Christ in spirit and truth. Pray that Christ will bless that church as they worship him.

Break the Dam: This week take 1 hour at home and pray for God to reveal to you one place where you've got entrenched sin. Write that sin out, then write out this prayer (from Psalm 51) on the same piece of paper while praying it:

*"Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin...
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight...
Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me."*

Now burn it as a sacrifice to the Lord (don't worry, he loves burnt things). After this, tell at least one person what you wrote down, and ask them to help keep you accountable for lessening the presence of that sin in your life.



Going Deeper

The Screwtape Letters by C. S. Lewis - Understanding sin and how it blocks living water.
http://www.samizdat.qc.ca/arts/lit/PDFs/ScrewtapeLetters_CSL.pdf

"Hatred Between Jews and Samaritans"
<https://bible.org/illustration/hatred-between-jews-and-samaritans>

Desiring God John 4 Sermons
<https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/john/4/messages>

For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church by N. T. Wright
<https://www.amazon.com/All-Gods-Worth-Worship-Calling/dp/0802871763>