

Different, but the Same

Lesson for March 19, 2023

Unit I: Called from the Margins of Society

Scriptural Background: John 4: 1-42

Printed Text: John 4:7-15, 28-30,39-41

Key verse: *Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."* (John 4:39, NIV)

"Dodie Gadiant, a schoolteacher for thirteen years, decided to travel across America and see the sights she had taught about. Traveling alone in a truck with camper in tow, she launched out. One afternoon rounding a curve on I-5 near Sacramento in rush-hour traffic, a water pump blew on her truck. She was tired, exasperated, scared, and alone. In spite of the traffic jam she caused, no one seemed interested in helping.

"Leaning up against the trailer, she prayed, 'Please God, send me an angel . . . preferably one with mechanical experience.'

Within four minutes, a huge Harley drove up, ridden by an enormous man sporting long, black hair, a beard and tattooed arms. With an incredible air of confidence, he jumped off and, without even glancing at Dodie, went to work on the truck. Within another few minutes, he flagged down a larger truck, attached a tow chain to the frame of the disabled Chevy, and whisked the whole 56-foot rig off the freeway onto a side street, where he calmly continued to work on the water pump.

"The intimidated schoolteacher was too dumbfounded to talk. Especially when she read the paralyzing words on the back of his leather jacket: 'Hell's Angels -- California'. As he finished the task, she finally got up the courage to say, 'Thanks so much,' and carry on a brief conversation. Noticing her surprise at the whole ordeal, he looked her straight in the eye and mumbled, 'Don't judge a book by its cover. You may not know who you're talking to.' With that, he smiled, closed the hood of the truck, and straddled his Harley. With a wave, he was gone as fast as he had appeared."

Given half a chance, people often crawl out of the boxes into which we've relegated them."

Our America, Larry D. Wright

Key Terms

1. **Disciples** (verse 8) – A personal follower of Jesus during his life, especially one of the twelve Apostles. Learners; pupils.
2. **Gift** (verse 10) – Something given willingly to someone without payment.
3. **Give** (verse 7) – Freely transfer the possession of (something) to (someone); hand over to.

4. **Living** (verse 10) – Experience God’s gift of life; alive.
5. **Water** (verse 7) – Waters. Water has the power to purify, to provide deliverance, and it can also destroy evil and enemies as in the accounts of the Flood (Genesis 6:17) and the flight of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 14:1-15:21). Cultures around the world equate water with healing and energy. People travel great distances to drink or bath in water from mountains, wells and springs that are imbued with special energy.

Lesson Background

The title of the fourth gospel continues the pattern of the other gospels, being identified originally as “According to John”. Although the author’s name does not appear in the gospel, reinforcing early church tradition strongly and consistently identified him as the Apostle John.

John and James, his older brother (Acts 12:2), were known as “the sons of Zebedee” (Matthew 10:2-4), and Jesus gave them the name “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). John was an apostle (Luke 6:12-16), and one of the 3 most intimate associates of Jesus (along with Peter and James, compare Matthew 17:1; 26:37), being an eyewitness to and participant in Jesus’ early ministry (1 John 1:1-4). After Christ’s ascension, John became a “pillar” in the Jerusalem church (Galatians 2:9). He ministered with Peter (Acts 3:1; 4:13; 8:14), until he went to Ephesus (tradition says before the destruction of Jerusalem), from where he wrote this gospel and from where the Romans exiled him to Patmos (Revelation 1:9). Besides the gospel that bears his name, John also authored 1, 2 and 3 John and the book of Revelation (Revelation 1:1).

The overall message of the gospel is found in 20:31: “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God”. The book therefore, centers on the person and work of Christ. Three predominant words (“signs”, “believe”, and “life”) receive constant reemphasis throughout the gospel to enforce the theme of salvation in Him.

In addition, John provides the record of how men responded to Jesus Christ and the salvation that He offered. Summing up, the gospel focuses on:

1. Jesus as the Word, the Messiah, and Son of God;
2. Who brings the gift of salvation to mankind;
3. Who either accept or reject the offer.

An outline of the first three chapters of the book show:

- I. Incarnation of the Son of God, 1:1-18
- II. Presentation of the Son of God, 1:19-4:54
 - A. By John the Baptizer, 1:19-34
 - B. To John’s Disciples, 1:35-51
 - C. At a Wedding in Cana, 2:1-11
 - D. At the Temple in Jerusalem, 2:12-25
 - E. To Nicodemus, 3:1-21
 - F. By John the Baptizer, 3:22-36

John 4:1-42 is an account of Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman.

In 4:1-3, John gives us the reason why Jesus left Judea and headed toward Galilee, namely, to avoid any conflict with the Pharisees, who were closely monitoring the ministries of both John the Baptist and Jesus. Jesus was never one to avoid conflict if it was in the Father's will, but He knew that the time was not yet right for direct conflict, so He left (the Greek word means "abandoned") Judea in the south and headed north toward Galilee until He knew that it was the hour for the cross.

Lesson In Depth

I. Confronting Societal Barriers (John 4:7-9)

A woman of Samaria came to draw water: This woman came for water at an unusual hour, and she came alone. Typically, women came for water earlier in the day and they came in groups. Perhaps there was a sudden need, or perhaps she was a social outcast, shunned by other women in the community.

"Women usually came to draw water in company, and at a cooler time of the day." (Bruce)

The disciples **had gone away into the city**, perhaps passing her on their way into town. "We can be certain at this stage of their lives Peter and the others would never have moved off the path for any woman, much less a Samaritan. Perhaps she had been pushed aside or made to wait while the body of Galileans marched by." (Boice)

Jesus said to her: By tradition, a rabbi would not speak with a woman in public, not even with his own wife. It was also *very* unusual for a Jewish person of that time to ask a favor or accept a drink from a Samaritan's cup. Jesus' request genuinely surprised the woman. The disciples were also surprised that Jesus spoke to her (John 4:27).

"The strict Rabbis forbade a Rabbi to greet a woman in public. A Rabbi might not even speak to his own wife or daughter or sister in public. There were even Pharisees who were called 'the bruised and bleeding Pharisees' because they shut their eyes when they saw a woman on the street and so walked into walls and houses!" (Barclay)

Give Me a drink: Some people imagine that God is most glorified when human participation is most excluded. Yet Jesus did not diminish His glory one bit by asking the help and cooperation of the Samaritan woman. As it worked toward the accomplishment of the divine purpose, the Father and the Son were *most* glorified in this display of love and goodness to the woman.

Give Me a drink: "He is not unaware that the way to gain a soul is often to ask a service of it." (Godet)

In all this, we see many of the seeming ironies of Jesus' work.

- He who gives rest is weary.
- He who is Israel's Messiah speaks to a Samaritan woman.
- He who has living water asks for a drink from a well.

“He felt that his miraculous power was to be used for others, and in His great work; but as for himself, his humanity must bear its own infirmity, it must support its own trials: so he keeps his hand back from relieving his own necessities.” (Spurgeon)

There is every reason to believe that she gave Jesus what He asked for, and she asked the question of John 4:9 as Jesus drank the water, or after Jesus drank the water from the well.

How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? Immediately, the woman was impressed by the friendliness of Jesus. It was unusual for her to hear a kind greeting from a Jewish man, for generally speaking, **Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.**

John felt this was so well understood in his day that he needed no further explanation. “The deadly hatred that existed between these two nations is known to all. The Jews cursed them and believed them to be accursed. Their most merciful wish to the Samaritans was, that they might have no part in the resurrection; or, in other words, that they might be *annihilated*.” (Clarke)

For many reasons, this woman would have been despised by most of the religious leaders in the days of Jesus. She was a woman and a Samaritan. Yet, in the interview with Nicodemus (Chapter 3) John showed us, *Jesus has something to say to the religious establishment*. In the meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well John showed us, *Jesus has something to say to those despised by the religious establishment*.

II. Confronting Spiritual Blindness (John 4:10-15)

Jesus answered and said to her, If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, “Give Me a drink”: Jesus drew the woman into conversation, making her curious about several things.

- He made her curious about the things of God (If you knew the gift of God).
- He made her curious about who Jesus is (who it is who says to you). He made her curious about what He could give her (He would have given you living water).

He would have given you living water: In ancient times they called spring water living water because it seemed alive as it bubbled up from the ground. At first glance, it might seem that Jesus told this woman about a nearby active spring. But Jesus made a play on words with the phrase “living water,” because He meant the spiritual water that quenches spiritual thirst and gives life.

“In the Old Testament living water is sometimes associated with Jehovah. He is called ‘the fountain of living waters’ (Jeremiah 2:13, 17:13).” (Morris)

The Old Testament prophets looked forward to a time when “living waters will flow out of Jerusalem” (Zechariah 14:8; Ezekiel 47:9).

Additionally, the Old Testament metaphor spoke of the knowledge of God and His grace which provides cleansing, spiritual life, and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

John applies these themes to Jesus Christ as the living water which is symbolic of eternal life mediated by the Holy Spirit from Him (verse 14; 6:35; 7:37-39). Jesus used the woman’s need for physical water to sustain life in this arid region in order to serve as an object lesson for their need for spiritual transformation.

The gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ. We see from this that it is necessary to know who Jesus is before we can receive eternal life from Him. This water that springs inside of us never stops flowing. Jesus is telling her to ask and she will receive if she believes.

You have nothing to draw with: Going into town, the disciples probably took with them the leather pouch used as a bucket to draw water. This woman, like so many of our modern-day church members, can only see the physical. She rationalizes that the well is deep, and He has nothing to draw the water out with.

Are you greater than our father Jacob: She is claiming to be a descendent of Jacob. Jacob through Joseph, through Ephraim, would have been the chain. What she doesn’t realize is that Jesus was before Jacob and, in fact, is Jacob’s God. It is hard to tell if the woman asked a sincere question, or if she was a cynical critic. All depended on the tone of her voice. The fact that she came to belief at the end of her encounter with Jesus may suggest it was an honest question.

Jesus answered and said to her, Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again: Jesus knew that this woman – and everyone in the village – had to come to this well daily to satisfy their natural thirst. Jesus used thirst as a picture of the spiritual need and longing that everyone has.

Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst: Jesus made an amazing offer. What he offered – to this woman and to anyone who would drink – was something to give lasting satisfaction. The key is to drink of the water that *Jesus* shall give.

It’s common for people to try and satisfy their God-created inner thirst through many things, or through anything except for what Jesus gives. People are thirsty – they want, they long, they search, they reach; but only what Jesus gives satisfies to the deepest levels of man’s soul and spirit.

Drinking and thirst are common pictures of God’s supply and man’s spiritual need. Drinking is an action, but an action of receiving – like faith, it is doing something, but it is not a merit-earning work in itself.

“What does a thirsty man do to get rid of his thirst? He drinks. Perhaps there is no better representation of faith in all the Word of God than that. To drink is to receive – to take in the refreshing flow – and that is all. A man’s face may be unwashed, but yet he can drink; he may be

a very unworthy character, but yet a draught of water will remove his thirst. Drinking is such a remarkably easy thing; it is even more simple than eating.” (Spurgeon, Good News for Thirsty Souls)

But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life: The effect of this water does much more than simply satisfy the thirst of the one who drinks it. It also creates something good, something life-giving in the heart of the one who drinks it. It becomes a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.

Sir, give me this water: The response of the Samaritan woman was logical, yet not spiritual. She wanted to avoid the work of coming to the well every day. It was as if she responded, “Jesus, if you want to make my life easier and more convenient, then I’m all for it. Give it to me!”

III. Hearing, Seeing, Believing (John 4:28-30, 39-41)

In the intervening verses between the last segment of the lesson and this one, Jesus asks the woman to call her husband. The woman claimed to have no husband – which was technically true, but Jesus knew – supernaturally – that there was much more to the story of the woman’s marriage history (verses 16-19). Jesus’ knowledge of her life indicated that He had supernatural inspiration. After this exchange, the woman perceives that Jesus is a prophet. In verses 20-26, the Samaritan woman and Jesus discuss worship.

She knows something about the Scriptures because she knows Messiah is promised. It even appears that she realizes more about Him than many others do. She knows that He won’t just tell them where to worship but will reveal to them the will of the Father as well.

The Samaritans also anticipated Messiah’s coming. Jesus forthrightly declared Himself to be Messiah, though His habit was to avoid such declarations to His own Jewish people who had such grossly political and militaristic views regarding Messiah. Jesus literally said “I who speak to you am.” The usage of “I am” is reminiscent of (8:58). This is really the first time Jesus has come right out and said who He was with nothing hidden. Jesus knew that He was not to reign as King at this time. He had hidden from others just exactly who He was because He knew that was not to be His job this time on earth.

The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city: Perhaps sensing the silent awkwardness of the disciples, the woman left her conversation with Jesus and went back into the city of Sychar. She left so impressed by her time with that she **left her waterpot** at the well. The left-behind waterpot is the kind of small point remembered by an eyewitness. As one of the disciples to see this, John remembered this event clearly.

Come, see a Man who told me all the things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ? Jesus so impressed this woman that she was compelled to tell those in her city that *they* should come to the well and meet Jesus. Jesus impressed and attracted her, *even though* He confronted her with her life (**all the things that I ever did**).

The Samaritan woman was so impressed by the love of Jesus that she now sought out her fellow villagers, even when they had treated her as an outcast before. “If she had avoided the company of her fellow-citizens before, she was a changed woman now; she must seek them out and share her news with them.” (Bruce)

The Samaritan woman was so impressed by the love of Jesus – even as He confronted her – that she forgot that she would rather everyone else forget **all the things that I ever did**. “This pardonable exaggeration indicates the profound impression that Jesus’ knowledge of her private life had made on her.” (Morris)

Jesus displayed so much love and such a sense of security that she felt safe with Him even when her sin was exposed. It’s important for the followers of Jesus to give people today a safe place to confess their sin, repent, and put their trust in Jesus.

iv. The whole interaction with Jesus did not leave her with the impression, “He hates me” or “He judges me” or “He doesn’t want me around.” It left her with the impression that quite possibly, Jesus was who He claimed to be: the Messiah, **the Christ** (*I who speak to you am He*, John 4:26).

Told me all things that I ever did: “The Jews believed that one essential characteristic of the Messiah would be, that he should be able to tell the secrets of all hearts. This they believed was predicted, Isaiah 11:2, 3.” (Clarke) It isn’t unreasonable to think that some among the Samaritans believed similar things about the Messiah.

Then they went out of the city and came to Him: The woman’s invitation was *effective*. The people came when she told them who Jesus was and how He had impacted her life with their brief conversation.

Many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him: At that moment they did not know enough to trust Jesus and His work on the cross; but they could most certainly **believe in Him** as the Messiah of God. They did believe, and **because of the word of the woman who testified**.

He told me all that I ever did: The woman was amazed not only that Jesus knew the facts of her life, but that *He loved her* even knowing the facts of her life. We sometimes fear that if someone knew **all that I ever did**, they could not love us, but Jesus loved this woman.

He stayed there two days: This was remarkable in light of the opinions of most of the Jewish people of Jesus’ day regarding the Samaritans. They regarded Samaria and the Samaritans as a place and people to avoid if possible, and if it were necessary to go through Samaria it should be done as quickly as possible. Yet Jesus **stayed there two days**.

“That Samaritans should invite a Jewish teacher to stay with them, with no fear of a rebuff, shows how completely he had won their confidence.” (Bruce)

“During the stay His reasoning and discoursing added greatly to the number of the believers and supplemented the woman’s work.” (Trench)

Many more believed because of His own word: In the days Jesus spent among the Samaritans He taught them, and **many more believed.** These people came at first because of the testimony of the woman, but now they believed because of the words Jesus had spoken.

Lesson Summary

One of the wonderful things about the good news that Jesus brings is that it meets the basic need that all people have. Since all people are sinners who need to be reconciled to the holy God, the same gospel applies to all: Jesus saves sinners who trust in Him.

The Gospel of John frequently uses contrast as a teaching tool. In chapter 2, there is a strong contrast between the joyous, secretive miracle at the wedding and the angry, ostentatious cleansing of the temple. Chapter three presents another contrast, moving from the loud, public, confrontational temple incident to a quiet, private, instructional conversation with Nicodemus.

Chapter 4 once again presents meaningful contrasts. Nicodemus was a man of power and prestige, well educated, and one who sought out Jesus of his own free will. The Samaritan woman of chapter 4 is poor, outcast even among the outcast Samaritans, and not expecting to meet the Lord at all. Nicodemus needed to be reminded that his knowledge was incomplete (John 3:9–10). The Samaritan woman needed to be confronted with her sin (John 4:17–18), but also lifted up and given value (John 4:23). These contrasts help demonstrate how the gospel of Jesus Christ is not only for all people, in all times, but that it will reach each person wherever they are, spiritually speaking.

We all have a longing in our soul. Some call it anxiety or a lack of fulfillment, but what if this longing had a purpose for good and not for harm? That is the purpose of Living Water – to be a home to come and get filled. There are a number of lessons we can learn from the woman at the well, here are a few.

1. Jesus alone is the Living Water that fills our void.

Just as the Samaritan woman was looking to men to satisfy her soul, we also look to things outside of Christ to give our hearts meaning and purpose (John 4:14). However, as Jesus revealed Himself to her, he sought to show her that He was the never-ending water she was so thirsty for (John 7:38).

Jesus is the living water that we need. When we put our faith and trust in Him as the Living Water, we can bank on the fact that the well will never run dry (Psalm 37:4). He will never tire of us. He will never dissatisfy. He will never turn us away. He is the unending source of peace, joy, love, self-control, truth, hope, and satisfaction (Galatians 5:22-23). Abundant life can only be found in Him (John 10:10).

2. Jesus is not fazed by our sin.

The woman perceived Jesus as a prophet because He gently called out her sin and “told me everything I ever did” (John 4:29). Jesus is sovereign and sees the sin within our hearts (1 Timothy 5:15). He knows our desires, and yet He still pursues us and loves us (Romans 3:23). He is not surprised by our evil desires, but rather He seeks to reconcile us to the Father in spite of them (Hebrews 7:25).

Jesus saw our sin and was willing to shed His blood and endure immense suffering for the sake of our satisfaction and eternal life. *“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:8)

3. Jesus is our Savior-King.

Just as the Samaritan woman did not fully understand who Jesus was at first, we also need Jesus to open our eyes to the reality of who He is (Psalm 146:8, Ephesians 4:18). It is only in Jesus that we will be saved from our sins and made new in Christ (Titus 3:5, Galatians 2:20). Jesus puts our sin and shame to death on the cross and calls us to walk in His light (John 8:12, 1 John 1:7, Psalm 27:1). He gives us new desires and a new purpose, that will not be found in any earthly thing, but only in His kingdom (Colossians 3:4-10, Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:28).

4. Our life should overflow into the exaltation of the Messiah.

When Jesus is our Messiah, He becomes the Lord of our life. We are called to daily take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24-26). We submit our desires, gifts, talents, time, and money to Him (James 4:7).

Because of His magnificent sacrifice, our life should exalt His name (Matthew 5:16). The living water that is given to us so freely in Christ becomes the well-spring of our life (John 4:13-14). We come to Christ to be filled, to be forgiven; and the void that is filled by Christ in our life overflows so that we desire to proclaim His excellencies (1 Peter 2:9) and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus becomes such a treasure to us, as He had become to the Samaritan woman, that we can't stop ourselves from telling others about the joy He has bestowed in our life (John 4:28-30). We no longer need the next best thing, because Jesus is the greatest thing that will ever happen to us.