

John 4.1-42 / COB / 03.09.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** You might want to turn in your Bible to John 4. Last week, it took about thirty-five minutes to teach through fifteen verses. We have almost three times as many verses to go through today! Y'all didn't make lunch plans, did you?

- † We'll keep it moving today, but there is a lot of good in today's passage: we have historical and theological Old Testament connections, we have John's ironic wit and Jesus' witty wordplay, we have metaphors, we have racial and religious tensions, we have stunning revelation about Jesus and salvation, we have insight into our own response to Jesus, we have a great Spielberg-ready script, we have scandal, and we have pretty pictures... so let's pray and then we will get started...

[Slide 2: 4.1-3] John 4.1-3 [NET]: Now when Jesus knew that the Pharisees had heard that he was winning and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were), he left Judea and set out once more for Galilee.

- † We don't know why this information led Jesus to leave Judea. Perhaps he didn't want a confrontation with the religious leaders yet, and figured Galilee was more remote from the religious hierarchy.

[Slide 3: 4.4-6] John 4.4-6: But he had to pass through Samaria. Now he came to a Samaritan town called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, so Jesus, since he was tired from the journey, sat right down beside the well. It was about noon.

- † Jesus was tired. We will see in a moment that he also was thirsty. Jesus was a real person with physical needs just like you and me.

- † Genesis 48.22 talks about Jacob giving this land to his son Joseph. There is still a functional well here today, about a hundred feet deep, fed by an underground spring.

- † Jesus and his disciples were taking about a three days walk. If they had been over near the Jordan River, where last we saw them, they could have gone straight north, before cutting left at the Sea of Galilee. Instead, they took the route through Samaria, which would have been shorter if they already had returned to Jerusalem.

- † Samaria at this time was the region located between Judea and Galilee. Judea and Galilee were primarily Jewish, but the people in Samaria were of mixed race.
 - When the Assyrians conquered the northern Israelite kingdom in 722BC, they deported most of the Jews and imported foreign settlers from Babylon and Media. The foreigners and remaining Jews intermarried over the next several centuries and thus created the Samaritan race.

[Slide 4: 4.7-9] John 4.7-9: A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me some water to drink." (For his disciples had gone off into the town to buy supplies.) So the Samaritan

woman said to him, “How can you— a Jew— ask me, a Samaritan woman, for water to drink?” (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.)

- † There was racial tension between the mixed race Samaritans and the Jews, who were of purer heritage because they had been exiled later from Judah by the Babylonians and then allowed to return intact as a Jewish community. There also was some bad history between the two groups. You can learn about that history as you go through the sermon-based devotion this week.
- † Beyond this racial and historical tension, Jews also considered contact with Samaritans to be defiling, making you spiritually unclean. The disciples might have been ok buying some dry goods, which were considered harder to defile, but contact with the bucket certainly would have been viewed as defiling, and Jews also held Samaritan women particularly to be unclean.

[Slide 5: 4.10-12] John 4.10-12: Jesus answered her, “If you had known the gift of God and who it is who said to you, ‘Give me some water to drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” “Sir,” the woman said to him, “you have no bucket and the well is deep; where then do you get this living water? Surely you're not greater than our ancestor Jacob, are you? For he gave us this well and drank from it himself, along with his sons and his livestock.”

- † As we see so often with Jesus, especially in John’s gospel, we have a misunderstanding due to some wordplay here. The term “living water” in this culture could mean flowing water, which was preferred to stagnant water sitting in a well or cistern.
 - The woman thinks this is what Jesus offers: a better kind of natural water. She is skeptical: if he has to ask her for use of her bucket, how can he offer any water let alone better water?
 - Their ancestral patriarch, Jacob, had to dig to bring this flowing spring water to the well, so does Jesus think he can supply water without digging, without even a bucket? Her indignation is ironic: Jesus indeed is greater than their shared ancestor Jacob! But she doesn’t know this yet.
 - **[Slide 6: Jeremiah]** What does Jesus really offer her? Let’s look at a prophecy from Jeremiah. Have you noticed that whenever we are talking about the New Testament, we have to refer to the Old Testament to fully understand it? The opposite is true too: the Old Testament informs the New and the New clarifies the Old.
 - Jeremiah 2.13 [NIV]: [God speaking] “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”
 - In the time between when the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians and when Judah fell to the Babylonians, the Jews in Judah were guilty of two things: they turned away from God, their source of living water, and tried to be self-reliant even though they were incapable of keeping even stagnant water. We’ll figure out what that means in a moment.

[Slide 7: 4.13-15] John 4.13-15: Jesus replied, “Everyone who drinks some of this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks some of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again, but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life.” 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.”

- † What is Jesus really offering? In both Hebrew and Greek, the term “living water” also could mean “life-giving water”! In Jeremiah, God lamented that his people had stopped depending on God, their source for true spiritual life, and tried to be spiritually and physically self-reliant though they were incapable. Jesus is offering true spiritual life with God.
- I don’t usually like to jump forward in our narrative, but let’s peek ahead at something Jesus is going to say somewhat later: **[Slide 8: 7.37-39]** John 7.37-39 [NET]: On the last day of the feast, the greatest day, Jesus stood up and shouted out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. Just as the scripture says, ‘From within him will flow rivers of living water.’” (Now he said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were going to receive...)
 - **[Slide 9: 4.13-15]** In Jeremiah, God was the spring of living water; in John 7, the Holy Spirit was rivers of living water¹; so in both, God – either the Father or the Spirit – was the source of the living or life-giving water. Jesus offers the Holy Spirit’s provision of life-giving water, which will spring up within believers and result in eternal life!
 - A couple of weeks ago, Jesus taught the religious leader Nicodemus that he had to be born again from above, born of water and spirit by the Holy Spirit, if he was going to experience eternal life in God’s kingdom. Now Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that he could give her the Holy Spirit who would regenerate her to eternal life. She still misunderstands.

[Slide 10: 4.16-18] John 4.16-18: He said to her, “Go call your husband and come back here.” The woman replied, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “Right you are when you said, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the man you are living with now is not your husband. This you said truthfully!”

- † It was unusual for a woman to come alone to draw water, and also for anyone to come from the town in the heat of the day to draw water. Her lifestyle might have caused her to be considered wayward among her people, and thus not considered an acceptable companion.
- † Why is Jesus changing the subject? Actually he is not. He has offered her living water, true spiritual life, but now he needs to make her see her real need for what he has to offer.

[Slide 11: 4.19-20] John 4.19-20: The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you people say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”

- † Now why is she trying to change the subject? Perhaps she is uncomfortable talking about her sin. I see that a lot when I try to talk with people about sinful issues. I feel that a lot myself when people want to address my sinful issues.
- Perhaps she just is excited about the opportunity to talk with someone about a serious spiritual issue. We know she is a loner, perhaps a pariah among her people. Now she has a prophet willing to talk with her about spiritual things, and this is exciting, so she comes out with what is to her the most important issue, especially as pertaining to Samaritans and Jews.

¹ Jesus probably refers to Isaiah 44.3. The parallelism shows that the water that brings life to the land equates with the spirit that brings blessing to people. Thus God is the source of the Holy Spirit who brings life.

- † The Samaritans only believed in the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses. They did not recognize the other history, prophecy, or wisdom books of the Old Testament.
 - Because they had only the books of Moses, they did not recognize the need to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. They noted from Genesis [12.6-7] that Abraham first built an altar at nearby Sechem and from Deuteronomy [11.29-30; 27.2-12] that the blessings were to be shouted to the community after entering the promised land from Mt. Gerizim, so on this mountain they built their temple. The Jews had destroyed this alternative temple a while back, but the Samaritans continued to worship there [and a few still do today!].
 - Because they had only the books of Moses, they also did not recognize any of Israel’s prophets after Moses. They were waiting for the greater prophet Moses said would come. So we might wonder at this woman calling Jesus a prophet: did she mean he was the long anticipated savior? Maybe, but they used the term for people with a variety of giftedness or insights, so maybe not.

[Slide 12: 4.21-24] John 4.21-24: Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, because salvation is from the Jews. But a time is coming– and now is here– when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers. God is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

- † The Samaritans did not have all of the Old Testament, so they did not fully know God, though they tried to worship him. Whatever else is wrong with Judaism in Jesus’ day, the Jews did have the full revelation of God in the Old Testament, so they did know the true God.
 - Salvation would come from the Jews both because the gospel of grace was revealed in the Old Testament and because the savior, the Messiah/Christ, would come from among the Jews.
- † But the differences between the Samaritans and the Jews would soon be irrelevant. The place of worship and one’s heritage would soon no longer matter.
 - The time “is coming” for Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, which will usher in the New Covenant and change everything. The time “now is here” because Jesus is now standing before her and – though she doesn’t realize it yet – all true worship goes through him.
 - In Revelation 21.22, the apostle John has a vision for worship in the eternal kingdom: he says [NET], “Now I saw no temple in the city, because the Lord God– the All-Powerful– and the Lamb [Christ] are its temple.”
- † What matters for worshipping the true God under the New Covenant is not place or heritage. What is important now is that we worship God in spirit and truth. We must worship sincerely, with every aspect of our being which has been made alive in Christ! And we must worship based on the true revelation of who God is, particularly as revealed in the divine Son of God, Jesus the Christ. God is seeking such people to worship him. Are you willing to be one of them?

[Slide 13: 4.25-26] John 4.25-26: The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (the one called Christ); “whenever he comes, he will tell us everything.” Jesus said to her, “I, the one speaking to you, am he.”

- † It is amusing that the Samaritans assume the Messiah will explain everything to them. We assume this today, don't we? We say, "I can't wait to get to Heaven so I can ask God..." like these questions will be foremost on our agenda or God's when we get to Heaven.
- † The Greek text has no quotation marks. The NET assumes that the woman would not refer to the "Christ," because this is a Greek term and she and Jesus would have been talking in Aramaic, so they make that a parenthetical comment by the apostle John.
 - But why would the woman refer to the Messiah at all? The Samaritans didn't have the Old Testament texts that referred to the Messiah overtly. They were waiting for the Greater Moses Prophet, whom they called "the Restorer." Today we know that Christ is the one Moses predicted would come, we have learned that in this gospel over the past couple of months, but how does this woman know that? And if she could make that connection, why couldn't she also know that the Greek speakers referred to this person as Christ?
- † The bigger issue is that Jesus tells her that he is the Messiah, the Christ! The one the Samaritans have been awaiting and the one the Jews have been awaiting are the same, the gift from God, the Messiah/Christ, the one who would restore people and the world, and he stands before this woman at the well!

[Slide 14: 4.27-30] John 4.27-30: Now at that very moment his disciples came back. They were shocked because he was speaking with a woman. However, no one said, "What do you want?" or "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar, went off into the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Surely he can't be the Messiah, can he?" So they left the town and began coming to him.

- † As we said, it would be unusual for a Jew to talk to a Samaritan, even stranger for a Jewish man to be talking with a Samaritan woman. But the disciples didn't ask about it. They didn't ask Jesus what he wanted. Of course, what he wanted, what he was seeking was the same as God the Father: true worshippers who would worship God in spirit and in truth!
- † The woman was so excited by this conversation that she abandoned the project of getting water and rushed back to town, where she went about telling people about the amazing Jesus. She struck up enough interest that people started walking toward Jesus. While they were walking from the town to the well, Jesus had an interesting conversation with his disciples about that question they didn't ask, about what he was seeking...

[Slide 15: 4.31-35] John 4.31-35: Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." So the disciples began to say to one another, "No one brought him anything to eat, did they?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work. Don't you say, 'There are four more months and then comes the harvest?' I tell you, look up and see that the fields are already white for harvest!"

- † Can you see what Jesus is doing? As he finishes this last sentence, he lifts their eyes to look out at the people coming from the town, at the fields ready for harvest! This is the Spielberg moment: great directing.

- † Jesus is thirsty, probably hungry, but he forgoes earthly sustenance to create another teaching opportunity: just as the woman thought literally of flowing water, so the disciples think literally of physical food. But Jesus says that he finds fulfillment in doing God’s work, in the gospel mission.
 - Moses taught the Jews who were about to enter the promised land in Deuteronomy 8.3 [NIV]: “He [God] humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD [Yahweh].”
 - Jesus was living out his mission, the commands of God the Father. And he was trying to help the disciples catch that vision. God is seeking true worshippers, Jesus came to bring the gospel of grace and truth so people could become true worshippers, and now was the time to start the harvest in Samaria.

[Slide 16: 4.36-38] John 4.36-38: [Jesus continued] “The one who reaps receives pay and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that the one who sows and the one who reaps can rejoice together. For in this instance the saying is true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap what you did not work for; others have labored and you have entered into their labor.”

- † Jesus might be referring to a prophecy in Amos [9.13; NIV] about the future kingdom: “‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills...’” In the future kingdom, the harvests will be so plentiful that planting and reaping will overlap.
- † But Jesus also is referring to the work at hand. John the Baptist and his disciples, other true believers in this day, and the previous prophets and Old Testament authors all had taken part in sowing seeds of faith among the masses, and now Jesus and his disciples would reap the harvest.
 - Notice both sowing and reaping are important; in fact the emphasis in Greek is on the sower rejoicing! So if you share spiritual truth with people, but someone else leads them to faith, don’t feel bad, instead rejoice! I have told you about my friend Matt, who came to Christ as a high school senior at a retreat, after I had spent three-plus years trying to lead him to Christ. I did feel bad, but that was silly: I had sown, and someone else reaped; that is God’s sovereignty.
 - If you do get to reap, know that someone sowed before you, and it is God who does the saving work. I have told you how LeeAnn and I led her grandmother Phyllis to Christ just before she died. God gave us the thrill of reaping, but we know others in the family and in the local church had been sowing seeds for decades, and it was God who did the saving work, not us.

[Slide 17: 4.39-42] John 4.39-42: Now many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the report of the woman who testified, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they began asking him to stay with them. He stayed there two days, and because of his word many more believed. They said to the woman, “No longer do we believe [just] because of your words, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this one really is the Savior of the world.”

- † The Samaritans arrive at the well. Even the woman was successful in sowing seeds of interest, and so many came out to talk with Jesus. They were so impressed with him, that they asked him to stay with them, even though he was a Jew! This is a sure sign that many were convinced right away that he could be the Greater Moses Prophet, the Restorer and Messiah.

- In contrast to the unbelieving Jews, for whom he had done many miracles and taught many things over several weeks, among the Samaritans he stayed two days and his teachings inspired many to believe that Jesus is the savior of the world!
- † A few weeks ago, Jesus was talking with Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a pure Jew, one of God's people, and he was one of the top religious leaders. Now Jesus is talking to this woman who is a despised Samaritan, very sinful, not in good standing even with her own people. Yet both needed the same thing: God's grace for salvation, life-giving water. And though neither was worthy of his attention, Jesus accepted both and offered them that grace. That should tell us something!
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Conclusion

- † **[Slide 18: graphic]** Today we see that Jesus declared that he is the Christ, also known as the Greater Moses Prophet, the Messiah, the Savior of people and the world.
- † What Christ gives is the Holy Spirit who brings true spiritual life. True spiritual life is to be forgiven and cleansed in God's sight, to have assurance that you are saved from the condemnation you deserve and will be with God in this life and after death, actually to be regenerated in spirit so that you are spiritually alive and connected with Christ.
- If you are spiritually alive, you will desire to walk with God now, walking in the light of life, not in the darkness like a dead person; walking by the top line of God's revelation, not by the flesh like a dead person. If Christ gives you grace – a free gift of life – then you will want to embrace it.
- † What Christ desires is true worshippers who will worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. Last October, we had a sermon on what true worship is: it is not just singing praises, but being completely devoted to God, completely dependent on God, and completely submitted and obedient to God. This is what worship looks like from a spiritually alive person. Spiritual life will lead to worship of the source of life.
- † Spiritual life and an attitude of worship together will lead to evangelism. If you knew the cure for cancer, you would want to share it. If you had a personal relationship with Billy Graham or the governor, you would want to introduce your friends and family to him. If you know the Savior and the cure for sin, death, and condemnation, of course you would want to shout out the good news! And in doing so, you will help reap the fruit of eternal life!
- If you are intimidated about sharing the gospel, I understand and I can help you with that. If you simply are not interested, I would say you better consider that Jesus came to offer the gospel; he trained up his disciples to understand that just as Jesus received this mission from God the Father, so too Jesus was giving this mission to them. We see this here as they stood in Samaria, we see it in the Great Commission Jesus gave them before he ascended to Heaven, indeed we see it throughout the entire New Testament.
- † So every one of us should share the gospel. I am not aiming to guilt you into it. Rather, I am hoping that what I have taught here will bear fruit in you: that you experience true spiritual life with Christ, and this leads you to true worship of God and to eagerly calling others to be blessed in the same way. Let's pray...