

John 4:1-30

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman.

Since I began studying Scripture, whenever I came across John 4, I had to toss my hands up and admit that, aside from the obvious aspects of the story, I had no idea what was going on. Jesus speaks to a Samaritan Woman (which he shouldn't have done, according to Jewish custom), tells her some things that he shouldn't have known about her and she arrives at the conclusion that he is the Messiah. Other than that, I really couldn't come up with anything from this text.

Oh, and she goes and tells people about Jesus. Evangelism.

So other than THAT, what's going on here?

Let's find out!

The Context!

Jesus has just spoken with Nicodemus (a "conqueror of people"), a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council... a somebody. He has laid out the gospel to Nicodemus and shown that he alone is Israel's Rabbi. Then (in the section of John that we aren't covering on Sunday morning) John focuses our attention on John the Baptist. John confesses that Jesus is greater than he is and must increase, while he must decrease. The baton has been passed. The spotlight is not entirely on Jesus.

4:1-3

The baptism spoken of here is a continuation of the baptism of John, one to prepare people for the coming Messiah. Since Jesus is the Messiah, it makes sense that he would not baptize anyone to prepare them for his coming. Too late.

The baptism that his disciples did is different from the one he commissions them to do at the end of the gospel of Matthew. Much different.

Why do you think Jesus waits for the Pharisees to find out what he is doing (making disciples through the work of his disciples) before he leaves for the north country?

We are not told why Jesus goes to Galilee; for the text this week, it does not matter.

4:4

Jews were known to avoid Samaria, taking the long way whenever they traveled north to south... or south to north (as is the case of Jesus in our text). The animosity between the two groups was either created or reached its peak several times during the history of the nation of Israel:

- The Samaritans built a temple on Mt. Gerazim c.400 B.C.; refusing to worship at the temple in Jerusalem
- In 128 B.C. the Jews burned this temple to the ground.
- The Samaritans refused to believe that anything but the Books of Moses were authoritative Scripture.

The Samaritan people came to be as a result of the Assyrian empire conquering the area, deporting a large number of the inhabitants, and moving a large number of their people into the land. Over time the Assyrians and the local (Israelite) inhabitants intermarried and created a race of people known, in Jesus' day, as Samaritans.

4:5-6

No record of this happening is found in Scripture, so there's no reason for us to go rooting around in Genesis.

It is interesting that John includes details that link the Samaritans to God's people (in this case Jacob and Joseph).

Also interesting is the hour of the day: the 6th hour, probably noon. Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night; Jesus comes to the Samaritan woman by day. By indicating the time of day, John allows us to link Nicodemus (for whom time is also given) and this story. To cut to

the chase (even though we haven't been introduced to her yet), she is the opposite of Nicodemus.

The Samaritan Woman

Nicodemus

A Samaritan
council

Not given a name
meaningful name

Sees Jesus at noon
at night

5 husbands + 1

Ends up "getting it"
questions.

Jewish ruling

Given a

Comes to Jesus

A Pharisee

Ends up asking

4:7

We are introduced to the woman. And the first thing Jesus does is break a social custom: men didn't speak to women, let alone women with histories. Let alone Samaritans.

4:8

Again, nothing in John's gospel is there accidentally. This explains why the disciples are not there to give their two-cents about the unconventional behavior of their Rabbi. But there's more to it than that (not surprising). Jesus is not afraid to speak with a Samaritan woman. In a similar vein, the disciples are not afraid to engage in commerce with the Samaritan people. What does this say about the behaviors and attitudes of Jesus' disciples today?

4:9

She gives voice to what a Jewish audience would have asked. (They are thinking the same things! And this, of course, is intentional.)

John includes information that a Jewish audience would have known. He includes it here for readers not familiar with Palestinian customs. Who is the intended reader? (Check out 1:38, 41, 42.)

4:10

Jesus starts off here the way he started off with Nicodemus: confusing the person who initiates a conversation with him. “Living water”? Last week we heard Jesus talk about a “water and the spirit” birth. Now he talks about “living water.” Several questions come from this: what is the “gift of God”? And what is “living water?”

4:11

Proof that, like Nicodemus’ response to Jesus’ statement about being born again (“he can’t enter into his mother’s womb a second time to be born”), the woman has no idea what Jesus is talking about.

4:12

The answer is “yes.”

And just as Jacob gave the people a well for water, Jesus will give people a spring of living water. (We still need to figure out what this “living water” is, though. Nothing in the context has given us enough information to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion.)

4:13-14

Jesus draws a distinction between water and living water. Regular water provides life for a while. Living water provides life forever.

Living water creates eternal life. But what IS living water? (And is it equivalent to the “birth of water and the spirit” Jesus talked about with Nicodemus?)

4:15

And, like Nicodemus, she still doesn’t get it. She doesn’t get it because she likens the water Jesus speaks of to the water she has

come to draw out of the well. She sees it as a never-ending supply of what she has come to rely on. Not something new.

Since we're half-way through, let's take a break from the verse-to-verse work we've been doing and look at the steady progression of the terms the woman uses when referring to Jesus. (Taken from Culpepper, 143)

Vs.	Title	Response
4:9	NONE	How is it that you, a Jew, as a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?
4:11	Sir	Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob?
4:15	Sir	Give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty.
4:25	Prophet	Sir, I see that you are a prophet.
4:29	Prophet	He cannot be the Messiah, can he?
4:42	Savior	<i>Townspeople</i> We know that this is truly the Savior of the world.

4:16

And now the fun begins.

4:17-18

There's some reason to believe that John is using a double-meaning here.

Not only did this woman either have the curse of the black widow or a very short attention span when it came to keeping her commitments, but these "5 husbands" could refer to something that happened to the entire area of Samaria.

"And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel. And they took possession of Samaria and lived in its cities. And at the beginning of their dwelling there, they did not fear the Lord" (2 Kings 17:24-25a). It is possible that the "husbands" Jesus speaks of are foreign gods, brought by the peoples who inhabited Samaria. And that the god

worshiped by the Samaritan woman currently is not really God. Only Jesus will do.

4:19

Getting... closer...

4:20

Well, Jesus has already addressed worship in Jerusalem. Remember back in chapter 2? He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and people who sold animals so that, when the dust settled, he was the only thing in the temple that could make atonement for sins. So the temple is no longer necessary, as Jesus embodies everything that made the temple the temple. The woman at the well is correct when she says that the Jews believed worship in Jerusalem was compulsory.

However, Jesus does not think that it is, as his answer to her will attest.

4:21

The “hour” when this will happen has already come (in a sense) as a result of what Jesus did when he was in Jerusalem. It will happen in its fullness when Jesus’ “hour” comes and he is lifted-up. Notice how John will go out of his way to show that Jesus was crucified outside of Jerusalem (19:20). From that time on, the worship of God will be wherever Jesus is!

There are some in the church who say that the temple will be rebuilt and that worship will take place within its confines yet again. This theology is part of dispensationism. It claims that salvation is given to people who are obedient to the dispensation God gives to their generation. They believe there have been six dispensations, with one more to go. One of these dispensations is faith in Christ. It is essential for dispensationalists to have a rebuilt temple. Their theology crumbles if the temple stays forever destroyed. Verses like this in John are the undoing of dispensational theology.

4:22

A tricky verse!

It probably has to do with the god of the Samaritans being different from the God of the Jews. Since he did not exist, being a false god, he was “not known.” The God of the Jews, being real, and being the one who sent Jesus, is known... in that he is the true God.

To say that the salvation is from the Jews is another way of saying that the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah were correct.

You can see how this is offered as a corrective for the clearly anti-Jewish-establishment tone set in the previous verses. Jesus has said the temple is no longer necessary. This could lead some readers to question the relevance of Israel. In quoting Jesus here, John is saying: “just because the temple no longer matters, doesn’t mean that Israel is not important. Israel IS important... the salvation (that is, Jesus) is FROM the Jews!”

4:23-24

Jesus makes the claim that location no longer matters when it comes to worshipping God. Why? Because God is spirit; not a temple, not a city. What matters is that the worship of God is true, that is, the true God is being worshiped. WHO your God is is more important than where (or even how) you worship him.

Notice that God is seeking people to worship him in this way. This is not saying that God is waiting for people to worship him in spirit and truth and then jump into their lives, seeking them out after he is worshiped by them. What Jesus is saying is that God is seeking out people so that they will worship him in spirit and truth. Remember, the world and all who are in it live in darkness. Jesus came to bring light. This light (the revelation about himself as one sent from the Father) is the seeking work of God. Without Jesus, it is impossible for people to worship rightly because their God is false. (This theme will be brought up again later: only Jesus reveals the One True God. Everything else are idols.)

4:25-26

The woman believes that, one day, what Jesus is saying will come true. ONE DAY. Jesus clearly tells her that THAT DAY is today. She has been sought out by God. She has been found. Notice what her act of worship in spirit and truth is... in the following verses!

4:27

Again, “marveled” can also mean disturbed or stressed. They didn’t like what they saw. It defied convention and made his identity as an accepted Rabbi suspect. Why do you think none of the disciples said anything?

4:28-29

Notice how her approach is similar to that of Philip when he went in search of Nathanael. “Come, see...”

Do you think she is really asking the question, or is she getting her townspeople to think?

4:30

The end result of her work is the same as that of Philip with Nathanael.

And just when it gets good... a whole town coming out to Jesus... we leave off.