

The Savior of the World

John 4:1-42; December 20, 2015

Page: 888

Illustration: When is the last time you went up to someone, anyone, and said, “You’ve got to come see this!” This is what I was like after Christmas as a boy.

A. The Background (Read 4:1-3)

- Jesus’ ministry was increasing just like John the Baptist said (4:1; cf. 3:30).
- Because of the attention that this would’ve brought to him and the potential that some might seek to polarize their respective ministries (so Carson), he decided to depart and head for Galilee. He knew his “time” had not yet come and there was much still to say and do before his death and resurrection.

B. The Setting (Read 4:4-6)

- Samaria was right in his path as he traveled from Judea to Galilee (see the map). In Samaria, he came to the town of Sychar (4:5).
 - The usual route to Galilee would be right through Samaria.
 - On the other hand, strict Jews would bypass Samaria by opting for a longer, less direct route, traveling on the other side of the Jordan River (as a sidebar, NYC is my Samaria when I’m traveling home for Christmas. I do everything in my power to avoid the George Washington Bridge).
 - Why would they do this? John 4:9 gives us a clue that Jews didn’t deal with Samaritans. The Assyrians captured Samaria in 722 B.C. Most of the Israelites were sent out of the land but the ones that remained intermarried with the foreign Assyrians. Thus, the Jews viewed Samaritans as a) children of political rebels and b) racial half-breeds whose religion was tainted by various unacceptable elements. They based their religion solely on the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) and didn’t accept the other books of the Hebrew Bible.
- In this town there was a field that Jacob had given Joseph (cf. Gen. 48:1-22; Josh 24:32) and Jacob’s well was there (4:6).
 - ◆ Jacob’s well is both a dug out well but it is fed by an underground spring.
 - ◆ This sets the scene for Jesus’ dialogue with the Samaritan about “living water” and “true worship.”
- Jesus was “weary” from his journey.
 - Jesus had probably been traveling for around six hours if they departed around daybreak and it was now around noon, the heat of the day.
 - We see Jesus’ full humanity on display here (cf. 1:14).
- It was about the sixth hour (noon).
 - This is significant not just because it was the heat of the day and provided a great setting for discussing “living water,” but because the chore of fetching water was normally done in the morning or in the evening (see R. E. Brown). This leads us to ask, “Why was this woman fetching water at noon?”
 - She was there at noon because she was a “notorious sinner” and this public shame contributed to her isolation. Not only was she probably looked down upon by her

community, she probably wanted to avoid conversation with others as well. But as we will see, Jesus knows what's in all of our hearts and he knew what was in her heart.

- What also may be going on in this narrative is a contrast between Nicodemus (learned, powerful, and respected) and the Samaritan Woman (unschooled, without influence, and despised). They both needed Jesus.

Transition: the stage is set for Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman about living water, true worship and his real identity.

1. Come, you thirsty, and drink from Jesus (4:7-18).

- Jesus initiates conversation with the woman (Read 4:7-9)
 - By doing this, Jesus broke all rules of Jewish piety and could've even been accused of acting in a flirtatious matter.
 - It's interesting that he didn't begin the conversation by highlighting her odd conduct of drawing water at noon but rather with the request for water.
 - The Samaritan responds with puzzled why Jesus, a Jew, would be asking her, a woman and a Samaritan, for a drink of water. She was well aware of the gulf between men and women and Jews and Samaritans. She was probably thinking, "Is he aware that even my water jar would've been considered unclean to fellow Jews?"
- Jesus introduces the concept of "living water" (Read 4:10-15).
 - The "gift of God" is probably the eternal life that only Jesus can give.
 - Jesus uses the analogy "living water" to allow two levels of meaning.
 - ◆ On one level, it refers to fresh, running water from springs.
 - In an area with such a dry and hot climate, she would've keenly been aware of her need for physical water and of the blessing it provides.
 - ◆ On another level, it is being used metaphorically.
 - The most obvious background is the OT:

"...they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13).

- The Jews had rejected the the fresh and running supply of God and his goodness and had rather turned to idols, described as broken cisterns that can hold no water, with no ability to sustain life and blessing.
- ◆ In this chapter, living water refers to "the satisfying eternal life mediated by the Spirit that only Jesus, the Messiah and Savior of the world, can provide" (D. A. Carson). See John 7:37-39:

"If anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

- We see pretty quickly through the woman's response (cf. 4:11-12) that she knows neither about God's gift nor Jesus' true identity. She completely misunderstands Jesus and hears him solely on a physical level: How will you draw this water? Where will it come from? You aren't greater than Jacob are you?
 - ◆ The irony of her response is that Jesus' living water doesn't from an ordinary well and he is in fact greater than Jacob (though she sees neither of these yet).
- Jesus responds by bringing clarity to the living water metaphor.
 - ◆ Physical water, provided by the patriarch Jacob, only quenches thirst for a short while.
 - ◆ Living water, provided by Jesus, quenches thirst forever. This thirst is a thirst for God. D. A. Carson notes, "and the thirst is met not by removing this aching desire but by pouring out the Spirit."
 - ◆ Again there are OT promises ringing in our ears, with Isaiah 55:1-3 most clear:

"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live."

- We all thirst and seek to fulfill our thirst through many broken cisterns. Jesus came as the one sent by God to satisfy the thirst of our deepest longings. Come and drink (both the nonbeliever and the believer). He is able to satisfy because he is also God, the source and giver of life; the fountain of living water. You can't just add Jesus as another cistern in your stash. It doesn't work that way. You must crush all of your other cisterns.
- Jesus lays her heart bare before him (Read 4:16-18).
 - The reason Jesus addresses her sin is because she has already failed to grasp the nature of the living water that he was offering. Primarily, she misunderstood the true dimensions of her own need and the nature of her self-confessed thirst.
 - Jesus is not trying to simply be self-revealing. He's trying to help the woman come to grips with the nature of the gift he is offering her. These immoral relationships are her attempt to quench her spiritual thirst, and yet they are all broken cisterns not satisfying her.
 - The woman's situation: this could refer to five husbands or simply five men. If husbands, they have all either deceased or divorced her (but Rabbinic law would've disapproved more than three marriages), if men, they have all been immoral sexual relationships.
 - Jesus is seeking to make clear for her: you, of all people, need to come and drink. I came for people like you.

II. Come, you worshipers, and worship Jesus (4:19-26).

- The woman responds to Jesus' probing by switching to a safer topic (Read 4:19-20).
 - I'm sure the woman was hurt by the revealing of her secret but liberated from the

- need to continue concealing it (application: there is great freedom in confession).
- She then steers the conversation to that of worship, not because of her interest in worship, but because of her desire to avoid discussing her immoral relationships (application: you'll never be in a position to drink from the fountain of living water until you squarely face, own up and admit your own sin. Jesus didn't come for the righteous, but for sinners).
- Background: Mt. Gerizim was where the Samaritans worshiped and it was a significant site because that's where God blessed Moses (Deut. 11:29; 27:12). But, Jerusalem was where the Jews worshiped.
- Jesus responds to the woman with instruction on "true worship" (Read 4:21-24).
 - First, Jesus notes that soon geographic locale won't even matter so there's little to gain from debating Jerusalem or Mt. Gerizim.
 - ◆ With his reference to "the hour," Jesus is initiating something entirely different in how everyone, Jews and Samaritans, relate to God. Jesus is leveling the playing field for all. How?
 - ◆ We've already seen that Jesus is the true tabernacle (1:14) and the true temple (2:19) and now it's explicit that he fulfills the ideal of the holy mountain where God can be encountered. Jesus is now the "place" God is to be worshiped. He is the "place" where all the nations will come to worship the one true God. Everything in the OT was a shadow pointing to Jesus. He is the lamb, the temple, the priest.
 - Second, the worship of the Samaritans wasn't according to truth, because they did not accept the entire OT canon. In that sense, "salvation is from the Jews" because they are they instrument by which God's redemption will be mediated to others.
 - Third, true worship must be "in spirit and in truth."
 - ◆ Jesus shifted the conversation from the *place* of worship to the *manner* of worship.
 - ◆ Since God is spirit, non-material, proper worship of him is also a matter of spirit rather than physical location. Worship is not simply something we do in a building, or in a certain posture, or with certain liturgies, it is a matter of the heart of the Spirit.
 - ◆ Worship is in truth because it must always be according to the truth of Jesus Christ. He is the way, the truth and the life. He is the new temple. He is the one who reveals the character of God and his purposes. True worshipers must relate to God through Jesus Christ. Jesus made this explicit for her in 4:25-26 (READ).
 - ◆ You always worship something. From the very beginning, God's vision was a vision of global worship. Now with the coming of Jesus, this message of the gospel can spread to the ends of the earth because worship isn't centered in Jerusalem, it's in spirit and truth empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- Summary: "New-covenant worship is essentially the engagement with God that he has made possible through the revelation of himself in Jesus Christ and the life he has made available through the Holy Spirit" (David Peterson, Engaging with God).

III. Come, you followers, and imitate Jesus' mission (4:27-42).

- The disciples marveled that Jesus was talking with this woman (Read 4:27).
 - As discussed previously, Jesus broke custom in speaking with her.
- The woman abandons her original purpose of drawing water to tell her townspeople about Jesus (Read 4:28-30).
 - The fact that she left her water jar may have symbolic overtones. Leaving one's occupation to tell others about Jesus seems to be a mark of a disciple.
 - What did she tell them? "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did."
 - The beauty of the gospel is that Jesus knows everything and still willingly laid down his life for us (enemies, not friends). And, God gives this salvation to those who willingly confess their sin and believe in Jesus. You don't have to hid anymore.
- Jesus instructs his disciples concerning his mission (Read 4:31-38).
 - Fulfilling the mission of God was more important than food to Jesus.
 - Jesus, in his reaching out to the Samaritan, serves as the "sent one" whom we are to imitate.
 - Jesus describes the roles of the sower and the reaper. Normally, these two roles are separated by up to four months, but with the spiritual harvest, Jesus says they are now happening simultaneously. They both rejoice together. Sometimes we sow. Sometimes we reap. It's God who gives the growth. Almost always, there have been laborers before us laying ground work. Be faithful sowers. Be faithful reapers.
 - Do you find similar satisfaction in doing the will of God?
- Many Samaritans believe and even confess that Jesus is the "Savior of the world."
 - This last phrase is the punchline of this whole narrative. Jesus came for all people (Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman). We all are sinners who thirst for satisfaction and Jesus is the living water. Come and drink. Come and worship. Go and tell.

Concluding application:

- Who's your Samaria? Who are you avoiding sharing the gospel with?
- Where's your town? Your network? Who can you go and tell?

The Point: Come and bring others to Jesus, the savior of the world, for complete satisfaction and true worship.