

March 19, 2023

“Jesus Talks With a Samaritan”
Lesson 3

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

Intro

Social barriers have always existed. There are economic distinctions, class distinctions, ethnic distinctions. Those who are in favored / more acceptable of these group distinctions can sometimes have a tendency to disregard or be repulsed by those in the other less-favorable groups.

In Jesus’ day, the Samaritans were definitely a less-favorable group as far as the Jews were concerned. They were a mixed-race group of Jews and non-Jews from Babylon, who followed some of the practices of Judaism but also some from other religions. When the exiles returned from Babylon and were going to rebuild the temple, the Samaritans offered to help. But the Jews rejected their offer, because of their mixed marriages and mixed religious practices. When the Jews later start to rebuild the wall, the Samaritans actively oppose them. Hostility reigns between the two groups from this time on.

The area of land called Samaria is north of Jerusalem, but south of Galilee. Jews travelling to Jerusalem for festivals would choose to cross the Jordan River and travel farther east then south in order to avoid traveling through Samaria. In today’s study passage, Jesus and His disciples have left Judea to head to Galilee. But instead of going around Samaria, Jesus chooses to go through it. The story takes place in the Samaritan town of Sychar.

Read John 4:7-15

1. vs. 7: A Samaritan woman comes to the well to draw water. This doesn’t seem unusual.
 - Vs. 6 says the time was the sixth hour, meaning about noon, a hot time of the day
 - Women usually came to draw water in the morning or the evening, not at midday
 - The woman comes alone
 - Women usually came in groups to do this work together
 - Both of these factors indicate that the woman is an outsider, an outcast, in this community
 - Jesus asks her for a drink of water—again this doesn’t seem an unusual thing to do
 - When we get to vs. 9, we’ll see why this is more complicated than it first appears
2. vs. 8: The disciples are not with Jesus, having gone to buy food.
 - Sometimes they carried food with them, sometimes money to buy food along the way
 - They would have been cautious about buying food from a group like the Samaritans
 - Ancient Jewish tradition says they would not have accepted a gift of food from them
 - The disciples would, however, buy food from the Samaritans
 - Their food buying task has left Jesus alone
3. vs. 9: The woman’s response to Jesus’ request (vs. 7) shows why it was so unusual
 - “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How do you ask me for a drink?”
 - Women were viewed as “less than” men in the Roman world
 - This would be especially true of a Jewish man toward a non-Jewish woman

The animosity between the Jews and Samaritans was referenced in the intro
The 2nd half of the verse alludes to this: “For Jews do not associate with Samaritans”
But Jesus has a pattern of associating with outcasts and sinners
The sinful woman who uses her tears and hair to wash Jesus’ feet (Luke 7)
Eating a meal with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2)
Jesus doesn’t treat people according to their social stereotype
He sees the person before Him
He values them and treats them all the same, no matter their circumstances

4. vs. 10: Jesus answers her question in vs. 9 with a statement about Himself

“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink...”

The “gift of God” refers to the Holy Spirit

If she had the Spirit, she would have discerned who Jesus was

She then would have known to ask Him for “living water”

“you would have asked him and he would have given you living water”

Jesus uses the image of water here, the element surrounding their current situation

The water from the well might be good, but it’s not the best

It allows the body to live, but Jesus’ water is “living water”

5. vs. 11: As is usual in encounters with Jesus, the woman sees the immediate and physical

“You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?”

It’s a fair question; she doesn’t see any way he can provide water without the tools

He did ask her for a drink in vs. 7, after all

6. vs. 12: The woman also asks about who Jesus is with a comparison to Jacob

The well is associated with Jacob, as he purchased the land and deeded it to Joseph

The Samaritans trace their lineage through Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh

They had great respect for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the original patriarchs

How could this man be as great as one of the patriarchs? Or greater??

7. vs. 13-14: Jesus begins to answer how he could be “greater” by making an analogy about water

Drawing water from the well meets a physical need, which will need to be met again

Drinking the water Jesus gives means never being thirsty again!

He is obviously referring to spiritual life

Once we receive this life, we don’t need to seek it again and again

We need to grow it, refine it, improve it

But we don’t need to get it again, as do those seeking physical water

8. vs. 15: The woman asks for this water “so that I won’t...have to keep coming here to draw water”

She is still thinking literally

However, Jesus has engaged her so that she wants to keep seeking information

Vs. 16-27: Our text moves from vs. 15 to vs. 28. The verses left out show Jesus and the woman deepening the woman’s knowledge of who Jesus is, as Jesus reveals He knows about her personal life to who to worship and how. The woman says that the Messiah is coming and will explain everything, and Jesus responds in vs. 26, “I who speak to you and He.”

9. vs. 28-29: After hearing Jesus' words in vs. 26, the woman leaves to tell others
She leaves her water jar, showing it has much less value than what she has to report
The text says she went "back to the town"
This indicates that the well is not in the town, but near it
Her words indicate her excitement and confidence in who Jesus is
"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did."
Jesus doesn't use her background to shame her
He uses it to help her understand more who He is
This is a woman who has been shunned by others for her lifestyle choice
Her reputation would seem to make her a witness not to be believed
Now she loudly uses those events to tell others to come meet this man
She finishes with the hook, "Could this be the Messiah?"
10. vs. 30: The people do come to see this person the woman has told them about
"They made their way toward Him."
The disciples went to town to get food; the woman went to town to get people!
Both were doing what they were supposed to be doing, but it's an interesting contrast
11. vs. 39: Because of this woman's report, "many" believed in Jesus as the Messiah
People living on the margins of acceptance sometimes make the biggest influence
Zaccheus in Luke 19
In Matthew 9: a paralytic, the woman with the bleeding issue, two blind men
12. vs. 40-41: They are so thrilled to hear Jesus that they ask Him to stay there
He stays for 2 days
This is huge; Jews avoided Samaritans—Jesus stayed there 2 days
Because He stayed, "many more became believers"
So there were those who believed from the first day
Now there are "many more"
In Acts 8, Philip the evangelist went to Samaria to continue Jesus' work

Application: This story reminds us of how Jesus treated people. He did not set any limits on them based on typical human barriers and stereotypes. Romans 3:22 and 10:12 both use the phrase, "There is no difference", referring to how God sees all of humanity. All are called to come to Christ and find their identity, their life, their "living water" in Him. When we are in fellowship with Jesus, we can be the extension of His hands, offering mercy and grace to those we meet. Just like the woman, when we tell others about the Jesus we have encountered, who knows how many lives it could impact?

Prayer: Father God, forgive us for the times we have allowed human barriers to prevent us from inviting others to see You. Help us see others around us the way that You see them; help us demonstrate Your love and holiness to them. We ask this in the name of Jesus, Amen.