

John 4 – Woman at the Well

[John 4:1](#) ¶ Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John

[John 4:2](#) (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were),

[John 4:3](#) He left Judea and went away again into Galilee.

[John 4:4](#) And He had to pass through Samaria.

- John 4 opens with Jesus in Judea preparing to leave for the Galilee
 - Jesus is leaving we're told because the Pharisees had heard Jesus was baptizing more than John the Baptist
 - In reality, it was Jesus disciples who were doing the baptizing, but the way the Pharisees had heard it, it was Jesus doing the baptizing
 - John 3:24, we're told John had not yet been thrown in prison, but by the time we get to the beginning of John 4, Herod Antipas has imprisoned and murdered John
 - So when the Pharisees heard that Jesus was even more successful at baptizing followers, it was logical for Jesus to assume they would come after Him next
 - So, Jesus depart for the Galilee
 - Jesus was probably near John in a place called Aenon, at the Jordan river near Jericho, NE corner of Judea
 - Now He must travel NNW to reach Galilee
 - And this route takes Him through a region called Samaria
- No doubt most of us have heard the term Samaritan in times past
 - Most of us had heard the name with the prefix "good"
 - The good Samaritan from Luke 10
 - The real power of that parable – and this story - comes from an understanding of the historical relationship between Jews and Samaritans

- The Samaritans take their name from the region of Samaria
 - They trace their origins to the time of the Babylonian captivity
 - When Nebuchadnezzar took the southern nation of Jews (Judah) captive in 597 BC, he forced them to leave Judea in chains,
 - About 120 years earlier, the Assyrians had taken captive the northern Jewish kingdom of Israel
- Left behind in the northern kingdom were a few ragtag refugees of Jews
 - They largely remained separate from their Jewish brethren in the south
 - But after the southern kingdom was taken captive, these last remaining Jews began to intermarry with Gentiles sent into the region by Assyria
 - They settled in Samaria
- By intermarrying with Gentiles, these Jews polluted their Jewish bloodline
 - They also adopted gods from other cultures
 - They were no longer truly Jewish yet they saw themselves as Jewish
- Meanwhile, after 70 years of captivity the southern Jews began to return to their land and to Jerusalem
 - When these Samaritans heard the Jews were returned from captivity, they traveled to Jerusalem and tried to join the rebuilding of the temple

[Ezra 4:1](#) ¶ Now when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the LORD God of Israel,

[Ezra 4:2](#) they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' *households*, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here."

[Ezra 4:3](#) But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of fathers' *households* of Israel said to them, "You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves will together build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us."

- So the Jews turned their backs on Samaritans, since they were not true Jews any longer
 - The Samaritans responded by separating themselves from the Jews and laying claim to the title of true Jew
 - While the Jews rebuilt their temple on the Mt Moriah, the Samaritans built a counterfeit temple on Mt. Gerizim in Samaria
 - They took the five books of Moses and deleted any reference to Jerusalem and changed Mt. Moriah to Mt. Gerizim
 - They eliminated all other books of the OT, since they refused to recognize any of the prophets sent to the other Jews
 - They created their own priesthood
 - They developed their own theology
 - You could draw parallels from the Samaritans to Mormons, JWs, or any false man-made religion that attempts to supplant the truth
- Samaritans they had a fierce hatred for the Jews and the feeling was mutual
 - They often wouldn't comfort Jews traveling through Samaria on the way to Jerusalem to worship

[Luke 9:51](#) ¶ When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem;

[Luke 9:52](#) and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him.

[Luke 9:53](#) But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem.

[Luke 9:54](#) When His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

- So it was a bit of a risk for Jesus to go through Samaria rather than around, which was more customary
 - But Samaritans were often more friendly to Jews wishing to leave Jerusalem
- What's so striking about the Samaritans is despite how obviously wrong they were in their beliefs, they felt SURE they had the truth
 - They were sure their beliefs were right, and what they had been taught was accurate

- Samaritans knew the truth, and the Jewish people in Jerusalem were wrong
- All their deeply held convictions and traditions were getting them somewhere with God, and they were convinced God was pleased
 - But they were sincerely wrong
- Can we be dead sure about something, and yet be completely wrong?
 - Of course we can. Especially if we believe we think are allowed to make up our own version of truth

A Barna Research Group survey on what Americans believe asked, "Is there absolute truth?" Amazingly, 66 percent of American adults responded that they believe that "there is no such thing as absolute truth; different people can define truth in conflicting ways and both still be correct." The figure rises to 72 percent when it comes to those between the ages of 18 and 25. - Christianity Today, October 26, 1992, p. 30

- But there is a difference between truth and error, right and wrong
 - There is a Truth that never changes and can't be bent to fit the desires of an evil heart
 - It is God's truth, the only truth,
 - If the Samaritans in Jesus' day wanted to know the truth, they could have found it easily enough
 - They could have researched the history of their traditions and teaching
 - They could have read the Jewish scripture and compared them to their own
 - But they weren't interested in doing such a thing
 - Like many people today, they would rather be right than know the truth
 - They were content with their own counterfeit version of truth
 - Paul says this is the state of every man's heart before God opens the heart to His truth

- We prefer to believe what suits us, never seeking an alternative
- That was certainly the state of one woman's heart on this day in Samaria
 - But on this day, Truth appeared and spoke with her

[John 4:5](#) So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph;

[John 4:6](#) and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

[John 4:7](#) ¶ There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink."

[John 4:8](#) For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

[John 4:9](#) Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

- When Jesus reaches Sychar, he's just outside the city of Shechem
 - As John's gospel says, it was near the land that Jacob gave his son Joseph Gen 48
 - This spot was within sight of Mt Gerizim, the Samaritan temple
 - And there was a well at this spot, and Jesus stops to rest
 - The well was called Jacob's well because the Samaritans had concocted folklore concerning the location
 - They knew the land had once been in Jacob's possession, so they began claiming that this well was one that Jacob actually used
 - No evidence that was actually true, but here again, who cares?
 - But if they say it's true, then it might as well be true
 - That's how a culture of unbelief decides what's true
- Things really haven't changed much, by the way
 - Today, men still prefer relics and folklore to truth
 - For example, did you know that today, a number of the designated NT historical sites within the land of Israel are wrongly
 - There is little evidence to suggest that some of the places famously declared to be associated with Jesus are legitimate

- In several cases, the places can't possibly be accurate because various geographical details don't align with scripture
 - Doesn't seem to bother the hordes of tourists that pay homage to the places every year
- Does it really matter if some of these sites are wrongly identified?
 - It depends
 - If you're asking does it matter if we know the precise location Jesus fell while carrying the cross or the place of His burial tomb, probably not
 - On the other hand, if we allow these physical relics to take on spiritual significance
 - If in our hearts they become a kind of idol, and begin to supersede or substitute for true faith in God's word, then absolutely it matters...it's false manmade religion
 - God never allowed the Jews to learn the location of Moses burial so they wouldn't turn it into an idol
 - The Samaritans were guilty of the same kind of idol worship
 - They weren't true followers of God. They followed a counterfeit faith
 - And when you depart from the truth of God's word, what's left?
 - Relics. Buildings. History. Folklore.
 - You have an empty shell of human religion
 - You worship your religion rather than the Father in Heaven
 - You worship according to the precepts of men while convincing yourself you are the custodians of the truth
 - And we can feel quite comfortable with our counterfeit style...until we encounter the Truth
- In v7 Jesus asks a Samaritan woman who comes to draw water to give Him a drink
 - And she is clearly surprised by His request

[John 4:11](#) She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?"

[John 4:12](#) "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?"

- She says why are you, a Jew, asking a Samaritan woman for a drink?
 - The Jews were so troubled by the Samaritans polluting of their faith and heritage, that Jews had been forbidden by their leaders from ever becoming indebted to a Samaritans
 - So a Jew couldn't ask a Samaritan for any service or favor without offering payment in some way
 - So, as John's comment in verse 9 indicates, the woman is probably a little surprised that Jesus even spoke to her, much less asked a favor
- Now as this scene plays out, we quickly see that there are actually two conversations taking place
 - The woman is having one conversation, while Jesus is having another conversation
 - Husbands?
 - It's like two ships passing in the night

A mature-looking lady had an appointment with a marriage counselor, and told him flat out: "I would like to divorce my husband." To this, the counselor replied, "Well, do you have any grounds?" She answered, "Why yes. We have almost an acre." The puzzled counselor asked her, "You don't understand. What I want to know is do you and your husband have a grudge?" The lady answered, "Actually, we don't, but we do have a nice carport." At this, the counselor shook his head and said, "Ma'am, I'm sorry, but I just don't see any reason why you should divorce your husband." The lady looked at the counselor and said to him, "It's just that the man can't carry on an intelligent conversation."

[John 4:10](#) 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,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

- After the woman, somewhat disrespectfully, responded to Jesus' request for water by asking why He dared make such a request of her

- Jesus responds by raising an entirely different topic
 - He says if you knew the gift of God
 - And if you knew who was speaking to you
 - Then you would have asked for living water
- Jesus is turning the discussion to spiritual issues, spiritual truth
 - He's addressing a woman who is captive of a false system of worship
 - A false religion
 - And He's inviting her to know the true God, to seek the truth and put aside the myths and false creeds
- Let's look again at the two things Jesus says she could have known but didn't
 - First, he says if she knew the gift of God
 - What is the gift of God?
 - Consider what Paul says in Eph 2

[Eph. 2:8](#) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;

[Eph. 2:9](#) not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- If she had known the grace of God manifested through the gift of faith
 - She could have known the true faith that leads to salvation rather than a counterfeit religion that leads to death
- Ironically, she had just mocked Jesus because He had asked her for a gift of water from the well
 - Then Jesus says she should have been the one asking for a gift, a spiritual gift she lacked
- Secondly, Jesus says if she had known who was speaking with her
 - If she knew Jesus, her Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God

- This answer is also ironic because her first concern had been over Jesus' Jewish identity...His earthly identity as a Jew
 - But all the while she remained ignorant of Jesus eternal identity – The Son of God, the Messiah
 - She lacked a knowledge of and a faith in the Messiah
- You see Christianity isn't a religion of traditions, relics or rules or doctrines
 - Yes, we have our cherished traditions, and a few historical artifacts
 - And we teach guidelines for living a godly life and we profess certain doctrines to help us guard the truth
 - But none of those things save men souls
 - We are saved by the person of Jesus Christ
 - By His obedient life, by His sacrifice in our place, by His blood shed to cover our sins
 - By His Spirit who quickened us to faith and indwells us to eternal glory
 - Christianity is about a true faith in the person of Jesus Christ and a trust in His work on the cross
 - And if this Samaritan women's spiritual eyes had been open
 - If she would have faith in the truth
 - And know Jesus as the Messiah
 - Then she would could be a different person
 - She would have been thinking different thoughts and been concerned with different needs
- Jesus says she wouldn't have been distracted by physical water in a well, she would have asked Him for living water
 - Living water is a spiritual term
 - If refers to eternal life found only in following the true living God

[Jer. 2:13](#) "For My people have committed two evils:

They have forsaken Me,
The fountain of living waters,
To hew for themselves cisterns,
Broken cisterns
That can hold no water.

- But she still isn't on the same wave length...look at the woman's response

[John 4:11](#) She said to Him, " Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?"

[John 4:12](#) "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?"

- Back to her conversation
 - She's noticed that Jesus has nothing to draw water with
 - So naturally she is perplexed about where He expects to draw this living water
 - Since she isn't done with her insults yet
 - She mocks Him again saying you're not greater than Jacob are you?
 - Jacob was one of the most important figures in Samaritan thinking
 - Even higher than Abraham or Moses
 - So she implies that if Jacob and his family found the water in this well acceptable, then who was Jesus to suggest that He had a better water source?
- There's a certain degree of pride that accompanies the thought that you have the truth, isn't there?
 - Like a true Samaritan, this woman is always ready to defend herself against the accusations of a Jew
 - Every relic, every acre of sacred land, every symbol in her day had its meaning and was worthy of defense
 - Isn't this the heart of every man prior to faith?
 - I can remember my years growing up in a Catholic family

- No faith, no knowledge, but I defended the practices
 - True faith never (or shouldn't) think that way
 - Once God brings His truth to our hearts, we no longer project a prideful self-knowledge, but rather humility that grace requires

[2Cor. 4:3](#) And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, [2Cor. 4:4](#) in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

[2Cor. 4:5](#) For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.

[2Cor. 4:6](#) For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

[2Cor. 4:7](#) ¶ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;

- The woman isn't talking about real things, meaningful things, spiritual things
 - She's still talking about man-made institutions and petty rivalries
 - She hasn't yet begun to see with spiritual eyes and to hear truth with open ears
 - What's missing? She's looking directly at Jesus the Christ, but she's blind
 - She's hearing God's words, but she's deaf
- But then Jesus responds, and again He turns the conversation to the truth

[John 4:13](#) Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again;

[John 4:14](#) but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

- Jesus points to the water in her well, which she seems so proud of
 - And He says everyone who comes here to have their thirst satisfied will only find temporary satisfaction
 - No matter how often she drinks of this water, sooner or later she will be thirsty again

- No matter how often she sacrifices at her temple on Gerizim, she we still walk away carrying the guilt of sin only to return over and over again
- No matter how often she prays or sings or tithes or whatever she might do, it will only ease her guilty conscience for a time
 - Eventually her doubts and fears of what death may bring will return
 - Her sense of loneliness and spiritual emptiness will come back to haunt her
- Nothing in this world will ever satisfy because none of it can address the spiritual need all men and women share
- But then Jesus announces a better way
 - Take note of how the solution is offered
 - First, the one who seeks must come to Him
 - They don't come to the water, in a well or to some other relic or through a ritual
 - They come to the person of Jesus, because our faith must be in Him
 - Then, Jesus says, faith will take hold inside us, as a wellspring that brings forth eternal life
 - The indwelling of Christ's Spirit becomes for us a source of eternal life that works from within
 - Eternal life simply can't be found in the world
 - Nor in our own efforts or magic words
 - Eternal life is a gift of God accomplished in the heart through the work of the Holy Spirit
- The ships are still passing, because look at her response

[John 4:15](#) ¶ The woman said to Him, " Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw."

- She is still looking for an earthly solution
 - Why? Why hasn't she understood Jesus words properly? What's missing?
 - In a word, repentance
 - The woman hasn't yet come to repent of her present circumstances
 - Repentance is a turning away, but not from some specific mistake
 - It means a turning away from a life lived according to man-made religion toward obedience to the Truth
 - Repentance means seeing ourselves the way God sees us and being just as troubled
 - The Bible says a person must repent before truth faith can enter into the heart

[Mark 1:14](#) ¶ Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God,
[Mark 1:15](#) and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

- Repentance will always precede true faith because you can't add God's truth to an existing pile of false religious beliefs and dead works
 - The truth can only be received by broken heart
 - Jesus takes aim at her hard heart and prepares to break it open

[John 4:16](#) He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here."

[John 4:17](#) The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband';

[John 4:18](#) for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."

[John 4:19](#) The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet."

- Jesus says go get your husband, but she responds I have no husband
 - Because of shame, she lies to hide the true nature of her marital situation
 - But God knew her heart, and so Jesus announced her sin plainly

- Oh how Jesus' retort must have shocked her and stung deeply at the same time
 - This woman had lived a life of shame and sin, marrying and remarrying many times, which is adultery
 - And to compound her sin, she was now living with a man outside marriage
- Her behaviors were merely symptoms of a disease common to us all
 - She had lived a life of hypocrisy
 - She claimed to know God, to worship Him
 - But her life reflected none of His goodness
- When the gospel is presented, we must also present the truth of our sin...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
- In a few words, Jesus had exposed this woman for who she truly was
 - She responds by saying I perceive you are a prophet...you think?
 - Suddenly she's seeing herself – and Jesus - differently, and the whole conversation changes

[John 4:20](#) "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

[John 4:21](#) Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

[John 4:22](#) "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

[John 4:23](#) "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

[John 4:24](#) "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

[John 4:25](#) The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us."

[John 4:26](#) Jesus said to her, " I who speak to you am *He*."

- Obviously, she doesn't want to talk about her past
 - Quickly changes topics away from her past marriages or her live-in lover

- But it's interesting where she goes instead
- In sensing He speaks with God's authority, she turns to spiritual matters
- She asks Jesus to settle the dispute of who has it right: the Jews or the Samaritans
 - Where do we worship, here or in Jerusalem
 - But that wasn't her real question
 - She asked about which mountain was the right place to worship
 - But what her heart wanted to know was where do I find God?
 - Where do I go to truly worship? Where do I go to cut through man's nonsense and find God truly?
- Jesus understood this was her question, because it's the question on the heart of every man
 - Who is God and where can He be found
 - First Jesus answers her question directly
 - Samaritans are not the true people of Israel
 - But then Jesus deals with her real question
 - Where do I find God
 - Jesus says it's not where you stand that matters
 - It's your standing before God that matters
 - Because an hour was coming – and is here now - when true worship of God won't depend on rituals and relics located on earth, but rather it resides in the hearts of God's people
 - A time when true worship will be by the Spirit living the hearts of God's people
 - And the basis of their worship will be a Truth revealed from God and not manufactured by men

- And that faith will be centered on the man, Jesus Christ
- Jesus spoke words of life to this woman
 - And the hour He spoke about is now
 - It's the hour of Church, the time following the arrival of the HS at Pentecost and it continues to today
 - It's our time
 - Believers are answering the call of the Spirit, having come to faith and then reaching out to others as His witness in a lost and dying world
- Just like the Samaritan woman
 - As she experienced conviction over her sin, she turned to God for answers
 - He then directed her to Himself
 - Then He she took the message to others...look at verse 39...the woman left a believer and became an evangelist to many in that city
 - Truly she was a source of living water to others, as Jesus promised