

- Having finished the story of Nicodemus last week, we still have the latter half of chapter 3 to finish followed by the start of our next vignette in chapter 4
 - Many Bible students are familiar with the story of Nicodemus and with Jesus' response, especially because it includes [John 3:16](#)
 - And as we saw last week, there is a lot going on in that exchange
 - On the one hand we had the Pharisee who teaches that works are the means to a man being born again
 - But as Jesus explained, entering the Kingdom comes not from the work of men, but the work of God in the heart
 - That exchange ended with Jesus stating that God must bring a person out of spiritual darkness and into the light of the knowledge of the Gospel
 - Jesus said that those living in darkness do not enter into the light for fear it will expose their evil deeds
 - Paul echoes this truth in 2Corinthians

[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.

- Therefore, we asked last week how can anyone be saved?
 - Jesus answers that those walking in truth are the ones who come to the light
 - God changes hearts to bring people into the light of salvation
 - So that their obedience can be shown to be a work of God
 - That's the definition of God's grace
 - Thomas Constable sums up this story in a helpful way:

Fallen man generally views human beings as neutral if not good. Therefore the fact that God sent Jesus, and Jesus came to save sinners, seems only interesting at best. If man is good and not in need of salvation, he can applaud God's love as admirable. If man is neutral, he can take salvation or leave it. If he leaves it, God appears unfair for condemning him.

However, man is not good or neutral—but bad! He already stands condemned and destined to experience God's wrath. Therefore faith in Jesus becomes a necessary way of escape from that dreadful destiny. The Incarnation is a manifestation of divine grace, not just divine love.

- Now as well-known as the first half of John 3 may be, the second half is probably less familiar
 - John returns to chronicling Jesus' return north to the Galilee
 - And he focuses one again on the ministry of John the Baptist, as John continued baptizing men and women

[JOHN 3:22](#) After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing.

[JOHN 3:23](#) John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized —

[JOHN 3:24](#) for John had not yet been thrown into prison.

- Jesus and his disciples move north into the land of Judea
 - The land of Judea refers to the region around Jerusalem
 - He's moving toward the Galilee beginning in the Judea countryside
 - Then Jesus will pass through Samaria, a region generally unfriendly to Jews traveling to or from Jerusalem
 - Finally, He will enter the Galilee
 - So as Jesus moves out of Jerusalem and into Judea, He's bringing His disciples with Him
 - We don't know who they are specifically, except for the few mentioned in chapter 1
 - They are not yet called the Twelve, for Jesus didn't select the twelve apostles until after John the Baptist's death, according to the synoptic Gospels
- They arrive at a place called Aenon along the Jordan River
 - The exact location is unknown and could be located anywhere west of the Jordan river valley between the Galilee and the northern end of the Dead Sea
 - The name means springs, and as John describes it's a place of abundant water
 - Obviously, Jesus has stopped at a spring because in the wilderness of Judea, finding enough water to be baptized is an issue
 - By the way, this fleeting reference to abundant water is another indication in scripture that the only proper form of water baptism is by immersion
 - If a Christian baptism could be accomplished merely with a sprinkling of water on a forehead, then Jesus wouldn't have needed to find a deep spring of water to conduct His baptisms
 - Just a jar of water would have been enough
 - But John says specifically that Jesus and the disciples stopped to conduct baptisms in this location because they found an abundance of water
 - They needed the abundance, because they were going to be immersing people
- We've explained in past studies why immersion is so essential to the purpose and message of water baptism

- Time doesn't permit a lengthy discussion on that topic today
 - But briefly, the water of baptism serves as a picture of the grave, and our immersion pictures the death of our old self with Christ through faith
 - And our coming up out of the water pictures our hope of resurrection
 - Only by immersion can we portray those pictures as Christ intended
- Also, this is the only mention in the Gospels of Jesus' baptism ministry
 - Though later in chapter 4, John clarifies that Jesus never baptized anyone Himself
 - It was His disciples who were baptizing followers
- It makes sense that Jesus would step back from baptizing personally, just as Paul did in his own ministry
 - They were operating in a culture where people sought associations with powerful people and wore them like badges of honor
 - So it would have been a huge problem to have early Christians running around claiming to have been baptized by Jesus personally
 - Paul says something similar about his own ministry

[1COR. 1:12](#) Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."

[1COR. 1:13](#) Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

[1COR. 1:14](#) I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,

- Considering how believers in Corinth were willing to make too much of getting baptized by an apostle, can you imagine how they would have responded to being baptized by Jesus?
 - It would have been an unhealthy influence on immature fleshly Christians
- In v.23 we learn that John the Baptist was also ministering in this area of Judea
 - John has evidently moved some distance north of his previous location near Jerusalem
 - This suggests that John migrated north to separate his ministry from Jesus
 - He was avoiding competing with Jesus' ministry, as we'll understand shortly
- John says that John the Baptist continued in his ministry of baptizing followers even after Jesus had been revealed as the Messiah
 - We learned in chapter 1 that John's purpose was to be a forerunner to the Messiah
 - So once the Messiah arrived, we assume that John's ministry would give way to Jesus
 - And this John did, but initially John continued ministering and baptizing and directing believers to their Messiah
 - He was Jesus' downline, so to speak
 - So as John baptized, he directed them to follow Jesus instead of himself, so that they could on

from repentance to faith in Christ

- And all the while John made great effort to avoid competing with Jesus' ministry
- John continued in this ministry until he was murdered by Herod, as John indicates here
- At this point, John's disciples engage in a conversation with an Jew about the baptism ministry that John was conducting

[JOHN 3:25](#) Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification.

[JOHN 3:26](#) And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him."

- Some unidentified Jew came out to the springs where John was baptizing, and he starts to discuss Jewish theology with John's disciples
 - We don't know what they discussed, but we can guess
 - Jewish teaching had a well-developed system of ritual washings in various forms and for various purposes
 - For example, there were the ceremonial washings prescribed by God's Law, particularly for the priesthood
 - But beyond that, the Jews had developed additional purification requirements of their own, based on various schools of Jewish thought and rabbinical traditions
 - And beyond that, new rabbis or leaders would come along from time to time proposing new washing requirements
 - This was part of the never ending expansion of Jewish ritual, custom and commentary on the Law
 - So this Jew probably came out to understand where John's baptism ritual fit within the larger context of Jewish teaching on washings
 - Was John performing a washing required in the Law?
 - Was he following a particular rabbinical tradition?
 - Was he establishing some new ritual?
 - What was John's authority to do so?
 - And how did John's baptism compare to the one Jesus' disciples were now conducting?
- We're not sure exactly what they discussed, of course, but it appears that something like my last point caught their attention
 - John's disciples learned that Jesus was also baptizing, and that His ministry was growing rapidly
 - In fact, they come to John and tell him that all the people are going to Jesus
 - He's baptizing all the people
 - The implication is that John's baptism ministry was diminishing as more people begin to follow Jesus instead of John

- This is exactly as we would expect, since John's been encouraging his disciples to follow Jesus
- For this is the very purpose of John's ministry!
- But there are still some men who remained with John
- And for them, this development was troubling
- So they raise this concern with John, suggesting that he should be concerned about this competition
 - This is simply professional jealousy
 - Like a merchant upset that customers are flocking to a competitor's store across the street
- This comment tells us a lot about the heart of these remaining disciples of John
 - They were more interested in building an audience for themselves than they were in serving the purpose of John's ministry in glorifying the Messiah
 - Notice also they don't refer to Jesus as the Messiah
 - They refer to Jesus as the one John testified concerning, but they don't say what John testified about
 - And they certainly give no indication they agree with John's testimony
 - What's more, the fact that they continued following John even after he told them to follow Jesus tells us everything we need to know about their hearts
 - They have remained with John in the wilderness for reasons other than faith
 - This is a career move for them
 - They are approaching this ministry in a manner typical for rabbis and their disciples in this day in Israel
- Rabbis in Israel were a cross between pastor and lawyer in the culture
 - These were respected men who had authority to teach and adjudicate over the people
 - Becoming a rabbi was a stepping stone to greater power in the nation
 - Today, the key to a good start in law or politics is to be admitted to the right university, so it was in their day
 - The key to becoming a successful rabbi was to be accepted as a disciple by a prominent rabbi and eventually to collect your own students
 - Aspiring rabbis recruited the best disciples in much the same way that universities covet high school valedictorians
 - Likewise, aspiring religious leaders sought to become disciples of respected rabbis just as straight A students today apply to the best universities
 - In short, a disciple's credibility was based on the reputation of his rabbi, while a rabbi's reputation was built by a legacy of excellent disciples
 - For example, Paul gave evidence of his superior Jewish training by reminding his audiences that he was a student of Gamaliel, the most honored Pharisee of the day
 - These disciples of John had come to John not for repentance and the anticipation of the

Messiah

- Instead, it appears they came seeking religious training as a career move
- And so they are working to protect the reputation of their rabbi
- And by extension, they're protecting their own reputations as disciples
- No one wants to hitch their wagon to the losing train
- This is the way that the flesh thinks, and though it's typical of an unbelievers perspective on religion, it can also become the attitude of believers working in ministry
 - We have to guard our hearts against becoming disciples of a denomination, or movement for selfish interests
 - We aren't followers of a certain congregation or pastor
 - Or of a certain Bible teaching or ministry
 - We are not called to advocate for the success of these things
 - We aren't saved to merely become cheerleaders for the First Church of Whatever or for Pastor Bob or Brother Joe or whoever
 - And their success or failure is not a reflection on us in any case
 - Of course, there's nothing wrong with holding respect and admiration for our teachers or leaders or church communities
 - But never let their earthly success – or our own success by affiliation – become the motivation for our association or contribution
 - More importantly, we don't want to develop a career mentality as we serve the Lord
 - Once opportunity to serve in ministry is not a stepping stone to another
 - As far as we are concerned, it's the only thing the Lord has for us
 - Now and perhaps forever
 - John's ministry had no second step, so to speak
 - Once Jesus arrived, his ministry came to an end
 - But if John had listened to His disciples, he might have thought he should have more than that
 - He might have put out his resume expecting entitled to move up to a mega ministry baptizing 20,000 people in Jerusalem
 - Careerism is a serious cancer in the church, and it's hurting the flock
- In this case, I believe we're seeing something even worse, that is a group of unbelievers posing as disciples and displaying envy
 - These men didn't come to John in true repentance, but only for personal ambition
 - After they received his baptism, they were accepted as one of John's disciples
 - And they saw this as a ticket to future employment
 - So when John pointed out the Messiah to them, they weren't interested, since they already had the rabbi they wanted

- And now they've become bothered by the competition, and they want their rabbi to up his own game to compete
- We can see their hearts even more clearly when we look at John's response

[JOHN 3:27](#) John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.

[JOHN 3:28](#) "You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.'

[JOHN 3:29](#) "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full.

[JOHN 3:30](#) "He must increase, but I must decrease.

- John's response is humble, wise and convicting to anyone serving in ministry
 - First, he says that men receive nothing unless it's given by heaven
 - First, John is speaking about receiving success in ministry
 - As we work in ministry for the Lord's sake, our results will be determined solely by the Lord Himself
 - Hard work and diligence is His expectation for us, but nevertheless the results are entirely in His will
 - So when you look upon another's work in ministry and see it blossoming perhaps more than your own, you must consider that their success is directed from above as well
 - God causes the growth
 - So there is no place for jealousy
 - Jealousy among those working in ministry is tantamount to doubting God's judgment
 - We're suggesting God got it wrong when He chose to increase another's ministry over the one we favor
 - But John's comment goes much deeper than ministry; it's a universal truth that God gives everything to everyone as He desires
 - Whatever we have has come from God
 - And by that same token, whatever we lack is also decreed by God
 - We need to guard against a mindset that lacks contentment and continually seeks for what we don't or can't have
- Then John begins to explain to his disciples the proper perspective on this situation
 - He reminds them in v.28 that he has always said that he is not the Christ
 - John has never been coy or ambiguous about his mission
 - He was sent by God ahead of the Christ so that he could testify to the Christ when He appeared
 - And so it only makes sense that when the Messiah did appear, that John's mission would have

been fulfilled

- And as it is fulfilled, it will naturally fade away
- John uses a familiar parable to explain his relationship to the Christ
 - In a wedding ceremony, the bridegroom and his bride are the focus
 - It's all about them and naturally they experience the greatest joy among all who attend
- But standing next to the groom is the friend of the bridegroom (the word in Greek means *attendant*)
 - Today, we might say the Best Man
 - He is a friend of the groom and therefore he shares in the groom's joy as a friend would
 - He is privileged to watch the Groom and the bride united
 - And he is fully satisfied in that role, having done his assigned part in the wedding
 - No true friend would feel jealousy for the groom
 - Nor would he dream of stealing away the bride
- This is the relationship between John and Jesus
 - Jesus is the Groom and those believers who are coming to Him are His bride
 - Today we say that the Bride of Christ are those believers who have come to follow the person of Jesus following Pentecost
 - At the time John spoke these words, Paul had not yet revealed the mystery of the Gentile Church
 - So it's likely that John was referring to Israel as the Bride
 - Of course, John plays the role of the attendant, because he attended to the Groom as the marriage began
 - John says he rejoices greatly at hearing the Lord's voice, at coming to know Who the Messiah would be
 - And so His joy is complete in knowing he fulfilled the mission the Lord assigned Him
 - He would no more wish to compete with Jesus than a Best Man would desire to flirt with the Bride
 - So John says Jesus' fame, power and authority must grow
 - They must grow because that is the Father's purpose in bringing His Son
 - And therefore, John's role must necessarily decrease
 - John's role was to precede the Messiah, not compliment or compete with Him
 - Once the Messiah arrives, anyone with a mission to precede Him is automatically going to diminish
 - In fact, every servant of Christ should seek for the same goal, to magnify the name of Christ
 - Not to magnify our own prominence or importance as a Christian
- The fact that John's disciples had heard this from John yet remained with him anyway tell us they didn't have faith in the Messiah

- So naturally, John begins to preach the Gospel to them, using concepts and even words that are virtually identical to what Jesus said to Nicodemus

[JOHN 3:31](#) “He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.

[JOHN 3:32](#) “What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.

[JOHN 3:33](#) “He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true.

[JOHN 3:34](#) “For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.

[JOHN 3:35](#) “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.

[JOHN 3:36](#) “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

- John says the one who comes from above is above all
 - John is preaching that Jesus’ origins were heavenly
 - He was born of a woman, but He had no earthly father
 - He is God coming to Earth
 - When he describes of a birth from above, he’s saying the same things Jesus did when He spoke of being born again
 - The two terms are synonymous
 - They both refer to a spiritual rebirth made possible by God, Who does this work from above
 - John is merely a man from below, so he could only share with the world what can be known from an earthly perspective
 - That is, John repeated the promises of scripture concerning the Messiah and the forerunner
 - God revealed to John that he was the forerunner, of course
 - But that was a confirmation of knowledge already given in scripture
 - Only the Christ Himself can bring new revelation from Heaven, because He alone knows Heaven from personal experience
 - So Jesus supersedes all prophets that came before him, including men like John
- Finally, John repeats Jesus’ words saying that even though Jesus came testifying of Heaven, no one receives that testimony
 - Once again, why do some receive the testimony of the Lord when we’re told that no one receives it?
 - In v.33, John says that the one who receives Jesus’ testimony has sealed or guaranteed that

God the Father is true

- In other words, the one who receives the Son is giving evidence that the truth of the Father has been given to them
- So that the one who accepts the Son is himself showing evidence that he is accepted by the Father
- By the Spirit of God dwelling in the Son, the fullness of God is present and all the mind of God is available to Christ
 - So Christ can relate all things men need to know concerning Heaven
 - The Father have given His Son all things because He love His Son
 - Not only has the Son all knowledge but also He has been given all Creation
 - All things exist for Christ, Paul says in Colossians
 - So how can any mere man compare to the fullness of God in Christ
 - To the God Man Who receive all things from the Father?
- The answer is so obvious it would be ridiculous for a disciple to even hesitate to abandon John and follow Jesus, right?
 - And yet here these disciples remain with John
 - Complaining because Jesus is stealing their sheep
 - It's no wonder that John preaches the Gospel to these unbelievers
 - As John finishes, again with words that sound like they came directly from Jesus' mouth, restating [John 3:16-18](#)
 - The one who believe in the Son has eternal life
 - But the one who does not believe, who does not obey Christ, will not see life
 - The wrath of God abides, or remains, on that person
 - For any person who has not obeyed the Gospel, they are essentially walking around carrying the wrath of God
 - They haven't seen that wrath poured out as yet, but they are storing it up for the day of judgment
 - And that's John's point to his disciples
 - They may perceive themselves as having found what they are looking for, but John wants to open their eyes to their jeopardy
 - They are only a heartbeat away from judgment
 - So they need to become disciples of Christ too
- Leon Morris summed it up this way:

“The wrath of God is a concept that is uncongenial to many modern students, and various devices are adopted to soften the expression or explain it away. This cannot be done, however, without doing great violence to many passages of Scripture and without detracting from

God's moral character...we should not expect it [God's wrath] to fade away with the passage of time. Anyone who continues in unbelief and disobedience can look for nothing other than the persisting wrath of God. That is basic to our understanding of the gospel. Unless we are saved from real peril there is no meaning in salvation."

- With that John the Baptist fades from John's Gospel, but for a few brief mentions of John's past ministry by Jesus
 - John doesn't record the end of John the Baptist's life, since he knew that the other Gospel writers had covered it sufficiently
 - Instead, John continues north with Jesus as He enters into Samaria on his way back to the Galilee
 - This opens the door in chapter 4 for the appearance of the next of our character studies
 - And for another conversation between Jesus and a woman of questionable character
 - The encounter and its aftermath requires most of chapter 4, and though I would prefer to cover the entire encounter in one sitting, time requires I split it up
 - Tonight, we'll look at opening of the encounter
-

[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.

- The chapter picks up at the end of the events in chapter 3, 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
 - As we mentioned earlier, it was Jesus disciples who were doing the baptizing, not Jesus
 - But regardless, the Pharisees were increasingly worried about Jesus' growing popularity and they were becoming a danger to Jesus
 - So, Jesus picks up the tent stakes and set out for the Galilee
 - Jesus was near John in Aenon, probably near Jericho
 - Now Jesus must travel N-NW to reach Galilee
 - 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"
 - Specifically, from the Good Samaritan story in 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 region were a few ragtag refugees of Jews
 - They largely remained separate from their Jewish brethren in the south, since the northern and southern kingdoms remained enemies
 - But after the southern kingdom was taken captive as well by Babylon, those northern refugees were all alone in the land
 - And over time they began to intermarry with Gentiles sent into the region by Assyria
 - They settled in a region called Samaria, just north of Judea
 - By intermarrying with Gentiles, these Jews polluted their bloodline and forfeited their Jewishness - they became Gentiles
 - They were no longer truly Jewish, and over time they abandoned many of the orthodox traditions of Judaism
 - Yet they continued to see themselves as Jewish
- Meanwhile, after 70 years of captivity the southern Jews return to their land
 - When these Samaritans heard the Jews had returned, they traveled to Jerusalem expecting to join their rebuilding of the temple
 - Ezra records what happens when they first meet the newly returned Jews under the leadership of Zerubbabel

[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."

- In short, the Jews told the Samaritans to get lost
 - And of course the Samaritans took it personally

- Thus began a centuries-long feud between Jews in Judea and the Samaritans directly north
 - The Samaritans responded by separating themselves from the Jews and challenging them for the claim 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, JW's, or any false man-made religion that attempts to supplant the truth
 - They are false religions that counterfeit the broad outlines of Christianity
 - Yet they lack the truth of it in their hearts by God's Spirit
 - Remember, the truth of God is granted by God alone, not found by men through their own efforts
 - So when men lack the true knowledge of God, they create their own, distorted version to suit themselves
- This rivalry produced a fierce hatred between Jews and Samaritans
 - Jews saw Samaritans as only slightly above Gentiles
 - The only reason they placed Samaritans one rung higher on their social ladder was owing to their heritage and willingness to keep the dietary rules of the Law
 - For their part, Samaritans hated Gentiles as well but reserved their greatest anger for Jews
 - They typically refused comfort to Jews traveling through Samaria on the way to Jerusalem to worship
 - This is why Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan helping a Jew is so surprising

[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?"

- You can clearly see the rivalry between Jew and Samaritan reflected in the disciples' ridiculous comments

- They were practically begging Jesus for the opportunity to wipe all Samaria off the map
- I would give a lot to have seen Jesus' expression in response to their request
- Clearly, there is no love lost between these two groups
 - Because of the hatred between Jews and Samaritans, there was some risk for a Jew to pass through Samaria
 - It would have been customary for a Jew to walk around this region rather than through it
 - But Jesus walks directly into the heart of Samaria
- What's so interesting about the Samaritan culture is their certainty they were the ones with the truth while Jews were deceived
 - But all the facts told an opposite story
 - The scriptures spoke of Jerusalem, not Samaria, and the history of how Samaria came into existence was not in dispute
 - Yet they were sure Samaritans were truly Jewish while the Jewish people in Jerusalem were wrong
 - And they believed that their deeply held convictions and cherished traditions were pleasing to God
 - But they were sincerely wrong
 - Can we be absolutely certain about something and still be completely wrong?
 - Of course we can
 - Especially when we 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 we can come to understand the difference between truth and error, right and wrong
 - The Truth never changes and won't bend to fit the desires of an evil heart
 - If we change the truth to suit our desires, it's no longer the truth
 - A 99% truth is a 100% lie
 - 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 because 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 brings the truth to us by His Spirit
- As John showed us in the previous chapter, we are terminally self-deceived from birth
- So dead hearts invent their own ways to reach God
 - The Samaritans had contrived a false religious system modeled after Judaism
 - But ironically, so had the Pharisees of Israel
 - All men prefer to believe what suits us
- With that background, let's meet one of these Samaritans

[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 in 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?
 - If they say it's true long enough, then it might as well be true
 - That's how a culture of unbelief decides what's true
- Once again, things really haven't changed much
 - 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 wrong?
 - There is little or no evidence to suggest that many of these 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

- That doesn't seem to bother the hordes of tourists that pay homage to the places every year
- We might ask if this Disneyland theme-park religious experience is really so bad
 - Does it really matter if some of these sites are wrongly identified?
 - Well the answer depends
 - If we're asking does it matter if we know the precise location Jesus fell while carrying the cross
 - Or the precise place of His burial tomb
 - Then the answer is no, we don't need to know those things
 - On the other hand, if we're asking does it matter that we hold such places in high regard and allow these physical relics to take on spiritual significance, well then the answer is an emphatic yes
 - It matters very much if in our hearts they become a kind of idol
 - If these places supersede or substitute for faith in God's word or for true worship of the living God, Who cannot be contained in buildings built by human hands
 - Then absolutely it matters...
 - it's become a false man-made religion
 - A counterfeit for true worship
- Consider what it means that God never allowed the Jews to learn the location of Moses burial location in the desert
 - Obviously, the Lord didn't want Israel to turn it into an idol or relic
 - But 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 do you have left?
 - Relics. Buildings. History. Folklore.
 - You have an empty shell of human ritual
 - You worship your religion rather than the God in Heaven
 - You worship according to the precepts of men and convince yourself you are the custodians of God's truth
 - And we can feel quite comfortable with that counterfeit style
 - Until we encounter the truth
 - And on this day, this woman will encounter the Truth