
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read John 4.1-9. Sycher was near Mt. Gerazim, about halfway between Jerusalem and Nazareth. Jacob's well is still there and it still provides water, being fed by an underground spring. It is remarkable that Jacob built a well in an area of many springs, but perhaps he saw value in controlling a water source for himself or God desired the well for his own purposes. The Bible records the purchase of the land [Genesis 33.19], the gift as part of a larger tract to Joseph [Genesis 48.22], and the removal of Joseph's bones to that place [Joshua 24.32]. It is possible Jesus returned to Galilee to move away from the center of Pharisaic influence in Judea, to avoid a pharisaic attempt to disrupt the unity between efforts of John the Baptist and Jesus, because John the Baptist had just been arrested and Jesus knew it was not his time yet, or for some other reason. There were other routes available to Galilee without passing through Samaria, but this was the shortest route and perhaps Jesus had it in mind to spread his message there.

The Samaritans were a mixed race of native Israelites not deported after the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria in 722BC and foreigners from Babylon and Media who had been deported to there by the Assyrians [2 Kings 17.24-41]. Though idolatrous in the beginning, they eventually came to worship the true God for the most part, though they only acknowledged the first five books of the Bible as scripture, not any of the later history, wisdom books, or prophets. When remnants of the Judean exile returned from Babylon and began to rebuild the temple, they spurned the offer of help from the Samaritans, who in return did their best to stop construction [Ezra 4.1-5.17]. Eventually, around 400BC, the Samaritans built their own temple on Mt. Gerazim. When the Jews obtained political independence a couple of centuries later, the Samaritans helped their enemies. The Jews retaliated by burning the Samaritan temple in 128BC. Thus, with ethnic, religious, and political conflict between them, by Jesus' day the Samaritans and Jews shared a widespread and bitter mutual animosity. This is why the Samaritan woman cannot believe Jesus is asking her for a drink. Most Jews would consider themselves to become unclean if they shared eating utensils like a water bucket with a Samaritan. Jesus sanctifies what he touches, rather than being defiled by what he touches!

Reflect: What does Jesus' disregard for this conflict suggest about the relative importance of ethnic, political, or religious differences and problems compared to the work of sharing the gospel? What does that suggest about Christian mission efforts in your hometown or around the world? What does it suggest about your own prejudices and your need to share the truth in love with people who are different from you?

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read John 4.7-15. The term for "living water" in both Greek and Hebrew can also mean "flowing water," which gives rise to the woman's misunderstanding. Flowing water to the woman probably meant spring water, instead of stagnant water from a cistern. Jesus probably had in mind more something like Jeremiah 2.11-13; 17.12-13. The woman probably would not have known these passages, as they are not from the books of scripture which her people recognized. However, the Samaritans had a tradition based on the prophecy in Numbers 24.7 that the Greater Moses Prophet to come [whom we know as the Messiah or Christ] would have water flow from his buckets, which is perhaps why Jesus used this approach. Read John 7.37-39: what was Jesus really offering?

At first, to the Samaritan woman, Jesus looked like just another weary traveler, and she did not immediately get his allusion to living water. Jacob was the local hero and founding father for the Samaritans, so when she thought Jesus was offering better water than that from the well of Jacob, she was offended [4.11-12] and confused [4.15]. We saw earlier that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the need to be born again [3.3-15]. Now we see an expansion of this idea, that there is new life by the Holy Spirit. We are not just saved instead of lost, we are born into abundant and eternal life [See John 10.10!] with the Holy Spirit inside us [4.14]!

Reflect: If you are a believer but do not feel like you have abundant life, perhaps you need to change the way you think about the Christian life or perhaps there are other issues in your relationship with God or your lifestyle that are preventing you from realizing this abundance. Pray and think about this, then seek wise counsel! You do not want to miss the blessings available to you right now from knowing Christ and being indwelt by the Holy Spirit!

Want more? Contrast Jesus' talks with Nicodemus and with the Samaritan woman. Nicodemus was orthodox, educated, powerful, respected, theologically trained, male, Jewish, and of the ruling class. The Samaritan was despised, unschooled, without influence, a moral outcast, capable only of folk religion, female, Samaritan, and a commoner. Two people could not be more different. Yet, Jesus not only spoke with both – breaking social conventions – he also told each that they needed the same thing to draw close to God. Reflect on that.

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read John 4.13-26. There was no conversational reason for Jesus to ask the woman to get her husband: Jesus was pointing out her need for what he was offering. Her shameful life might be why she went to the well alone and at midday, instead of with friends and at sunset, as would have been more usual. Notice how she tried to avoid the subject, first by being curt [4.17], then by deflection [4.20]. Jesus also forced her to realize he is special. Her calling him a prophet could be significant, since the Samaritans only acknowledged two prophets: Moses and the Messiah-like prophet Moses mentioned [Deuteronomy 18.15-19]; she might have been edging toward realization that Jesus is the Messiah-prophet Moses mentioned. Her openness to this idea would augment her response when Jesus confirmed he was the Messiah [4.26].

The woman mentioned “our fathers,” by which she meant Abraham and Jacob, who built alters at this site [Genesis 12.7; 33.20]. Jesus pointed her to the true Father, God. Jesus asserted that the Samaritans did not know God [4.22], because they had rejected God’s revelation of himself in most of the Old Testament books. While the Jews were right in the disagreement about where the Temple should be, as described in books the Samaritans did not honor [2 Chronicles 6.6; 7.12; Psalm 78.68], Jesus said genuine worship would be independent of place in his new covenant. There would be a new way to worship, so this dispute was moot, for neither pattern of worship would continue. Instead, what was important was that worship *must* be in spirit and truth: it is not just external, it is having a right attitude and sincerity in spirit, it is worshipping with *every* aspect of our being *which has been made alive* in Christ! Our worship must be focused on God, in fullness of the life he gives through the Spirit, and on the basis of his incarnate self-expression in Christ [truth].

Reflect: Does this describe your worship? If not, how and why do you differ, and how can you begin to worship as one truly alive, truly worshipful, and truly focused on our awesome God? Are you clear on why you need Jesus? What are the remaining issues of either willful sin or repeating sin that are hurting your relationship with God?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read John 4.27-38. The disciples were surprised to see Jesus talking with a Samaritan woman. Besides all the aspects of her being Samaritan [discussed earlier], most Rabbis did not speak to women [some not even to their wives!], because they thought it was a waste of time and a diversion from study. Jesus said several important things to the disciples. First, he found sustenance in obedience to God’s divine will [which reflects Deuteronomy 8.3]. Second, the prophesied end-times harvest had begun! In contrast to the wait of four months between planting and harvesting food in Israel, the times of spiritual sowing and reaping were close now [perhaps referring to prophecies in Amos 9.13; Isaiah 9.1-3]. Third, this work of sowing and harvesting has an eternal impact! When we help someone come to Christ, we change history forever! and we change that life forever! This is great cause for rejoicing! Fourth, that rejoicing is for all who do God’s work, for it is a team effort. John the Baptist and his disciples had done much sowing, and now the disciples of Jesus could reap the harvest; they worked together toward the goal of bringing people to Christ, and the joy belonged to all of them.

Reflect: Read Matthew 28.18-20. Do you recognize that the prophesied time for harvest is here? What are you intentionally doing to help with it? How could you be more intentional about fulfilling this command of Christ? Do you rejoice in the work and in the results? If so, praise God! If not, pray about these things.

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read John 4.25-26; 39-42. The woman either left her bucket for Jesus to finally get his drink or she totally forgot about it. In any case, she abandoned her original purpose of getting water and rushed to spread the news about Jesus, even to those townspeople she had reason to avoid. Her witness brought many to the point of meeting Jesus, and the words in 4.42 point to the success of her witness for Christ. As a result of her efforts and of Jesus’ teaching, many came to believe. They believed strong enough to invite this Jewish rabbi to stay with them, evidence they certainly thought of him as the Messiah/Savior.

Reflect: Are you prepared to witness for Christ? What would you say? Can you give in three minutes a great witness of the work he has done in you and how you came to faith? Can you sow and reap through sharing the gospel message clearly and effectively? Spreading the gospel was the essential ministry mission of Christ before the cross, it was the essential ministry mission he gave to the disciples, and it was the essential ministry mission he asked them to pass along to their disciples, the church. Is it essential to you? Pray about your heart for sharing the gospel and being a witness for Christ, pray about having opportunities to sow and reap for Christ, and pray about practicing your witness and sharing of the gospel, so you will be prepared for those opportunities. You can find a sample gospel presentation and discussion of what comprises the gospel message at www.groben.com [see the evangelism page: www.groben.com/evangelism.php].