

**The Gospel of John (23);
“Jesus and the Woman of Samaria” (1)**

Introduction:

We arrive to John 4 in our study of this fourth Gospel. Before us is one my personal favorite accounts within the Gospels. It records our Savior going outside the arena of Judaism to reach Samaritans with the gospel. We read of our Lord Jesus interacting with a fallen woman, a woman who had ruined her reputation and had been living a very sad and, it would seem, lonely existence, to whom our Lord imparted the promise and hope that a new life was before her, if she embraced Him in faith as her Lord and Savior. In this episode we are also instructed in the nature of the true worship of God. There are other principles here before us that may encourage and direct us in the service of our Lord toward others. We will attempt to point out some of these. My own philosophy of ministry and understanding of the nature and form of our corporate worship are drawn from this passage.

This is a rather long account, beginning with verse 1 and actually continuing through verse 42. But we will break the account into smaller units for our spiritual consideration and digestion. And so, let us read **John 4:1-26**, which the Lord has given us in His holy, inspired, and inerrant written Word:

Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John ²(though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), ³He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. ⁴But He needed to go through Samaria.

⁵So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give Me a drink.” ⁸For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

⁹Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

¹⁰Jesus 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.”

¹¹The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? ¹²Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?”

¹³Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

¹⁵The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.”

¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.”

¹⁷The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.”

Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.”

¹⁹The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.”

²¹Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²²You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true

worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.
²⁴God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

²⁵The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will tell us all things.”

²⁶Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

There are those commentators who have organized this Gospel according to the “seven signs (miracles) of Jesus” and to the “seven (major) discourses of Jesus.” We considered the first sign when Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11). The second sign is recorded later at the end of this fourth chapter in which Jesus healed a nobleman’s son (4:46-54). With regard to the discourses of Jesus, the first was the engagement of Jesus with Nicodemus regarding “the new birth” (3:1-36). They would point to this passage before us as the second discourse of Jesus recorded in this Gospel in which the major theme is “the water of life.”

With regard to the larger context beyond verse 26 that we just read (vs. 1-42), we may consider this general outline:

- I. Jesus arrived in Samaria (4:1-6)
- II. Jesus met and engaged a Samaritan woman in conversation (4:7-26)
- III. Jesus instructed His disciples of the great evangelistic opportunities before them (4:27-38)
- IV. The faith placed in Jesus by the Samaritans (4:39-42)

I. Jesus arrived in Samaria (4:1-6)

We read in **verses 1 through 3** that Jesus left Judea for Galilee when Jesus learned what the Pharisees had heard regarding Him. “**Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John** ²*(though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples),* ³**He left Judea and departed again to Galilee.**”

The ministry of John the Baptist had continued even while the ministry of the Lord Jesus had begun and was expanding. John’s ministry was not decreasing; rather, our Lord’s was greatly increasing. But the time came when our Lord’s ministry became more prominent than John’s. He was baptizing more than John, and He learned that the Pharisees had heard and taken notice of this fact. And so, Jesus and His disciples left for the north country, which was Galilee, about 90 miles north of Jerusalem in Judea.

Here we see that the Pharisees were a major threat to Jesus at this stage of His ministry. Had He remained in Judea, perhaps the conflict would have precipitated hostile actions toward Him before the time that was in God’s purpose. We see that there are times when it may be advisable for Christians to take action to avoid the evil that others would perpetrate upon them. David had fled from the presence of King Saul on more than one occasion. The Apostle Paul escaped the enemies of the gospel who were seeking him in Damascus (Acts 9:25). And here our Lord departed Judea for Galilee when He heard that the Pharisees were beginning to regard Him and His ministry as a greater threat to them than John and his ministry. And we pointed out last week, although Jesus baptized disciples as John had done so, it was actually His disciples who baptized disciples on His behalf.

We read in verse 3, **He left Judea and departed again to Galilee.**” We have already discussed that John’s Gospel records a number of journeys of Jesus to and from Judea from Galilee. This is the second occasion in John’s Gospel that Jesus travelled northward toward Galilee (Cf. 1:43, 2:1).

We then read in **verse 4**, “**But He needed to go through Samaria.**” If you were to look at a map of Palestine of the early first century, you would see that the region of Samaria lie directly between Galilee

in the north and Judea in the south. To travel directly from Judea to Galilee would require one to cross through the land of Samaria. Josephus, the Jewish Roman historian, declared that this was the shortest and preferred route for pilgrims traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem. One might assume that is the logical explanation of verse 4, ***But He needed to go through Samaria.***” However, although geographically it might be true, that does not fully account for what is written in verse 4. First, it was not unusual that Jews would purposely travel the longer and more difficult route of the Jordan River Valley from Judea to Galilee in order to avoid passing through Samaria which lie to the west. Moreover we should remember that Jesus and His disciples were not raveling from Jerusalem to Galilee, but from the Jordan River Valley northeast of Jerusalem. They had earlier departed Jerusalem to go into the wilderness of Judea to the general vicinity of where John had been baptizing. We read in John 3:22-23:

²²After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. ²³Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.

For Jesus and His disciples it would not have necessarily been shorter or easier to travel westward out of the Jordan River Valley into Samaria and then turn north toward Galilee. The point is this, they did not have to go through Samaria for geographical reasons. And yet, John records in verse 4, ***“But He needed to go through Samaria.”***

Now it had bothered His disciples with their Jewish prejudices to go through that region of Samaria, but it was not a problem for Jesus. “Such prejudices in regard to Samaria, as those which affected the ordinary Judean devotee, would, of course, not influence the conduct of Jesus.”¹

Some think that Christ *must needs* go through Samaria because of the good work he had to do there; a poor woman to be converted, a lost sheep to be sought and saved. This was work his heart was upon, and *therefore*, he *must needs* go *this* way. It was happy for Samaria that it lay *in Christ’s way*, which gave him opportunity to call upon them.²

Or as **Leon Morris** explained:

The necessity for Jesus to pass through Samaria was not absolute. Strict Jews, like the Pharisees, disliked the Samaritans so intensely that they avoided the territory as much as possible. Their route from Jerusalem to Galilee lay through the region beyond the Jordan. This was considerably longer, but it avoided contact with the Samaritans. Those who were not so strict went through Samaria. For those in a hurry the shorter way was a necessity. Josephus uses exactly the expression rendered “must needs” when he says, “for rapid travel, it was essential to take that route (*i.e.* through Samaria)”. John may possibly wish us to take the expression in this fashion. More probably the necessity lies in the nature of the mission of Jesus. John often uses the word “must” of this mission (3:14; 9:4; 10:16; 12:34; 20:9). The expression points to a compelling divine necessity. Jesus had come as “the light of the world” (9:5). It was imperative that this light shine to others than Jews.³

Jesus “needed” to go through Samaria because He had a ***divine appointment*** with that woman of Samaria and through her with the Samaritan inhabitants of Sychar. I like the way in which the KJV translates this verse: “And ***he must needs*** go through Samaria.” Jesus would one day say to Zacchaeus of His divine appointment with him due the decree of God, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for

¹ Alfred Edersheim, **The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah**, 3rd edition, vol. 1 (E. R. Herrick & Company, 1886), p. 395.

² Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 899f.

³ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 255f.

today I *must* stay at your house” (Luke 19:5). And here we read that *Jesus must go through Samaria*, for on this day He had an appointment with this woman and the people of her town.

This meeting of this rather secular and immoral woman with Jesus Christ was in the decree of God. On this day God had determined that through Jesus Christ this woman’s life would forever be transformed. It was an encounter determined in eternity to come to pass on this day.

Once more it is when the true Humanity of Jesus is set before us, in the weakness of His hunger and weariness, that the glory of His Divine Personality suddenly shines through it. This time it was a poor, ignorant Samaritan woman, who came, not for any religious purpose—indeed, to whom religious thought, except within her own narrow circle, was almost unintelligible—who became the occasion of it. She had come—like so many of us, who find the pearl in the field which we occupy in the business of everyday life—on humble, ordinary duty and work. Men call it *common*; but there is nothing common and unclean that God has sanctified by making use of it, or which His Presence and teaching may transform into a vision from heaven.⁴

God has a set time in His eternal purpose when He calls every one of His elect unto Himself. Paul wrote of this regarding his own salvation:

But *when* it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, (Gal. 1:15f)

The “preacher” (Solomon) declared that in God’s purposes,

To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born,
And a time to die. (Ecc. 3:1-2)

And the Scriptures also reveal that to every one of God’s elect there is a time to be born again. For this woman, who had no thought this day other than her regular chore of fetching water, this was to her the day of all days, when she would come to know savingly Jesus Christ.

We then read in **verses 5 and 6** of the arrival of Jesus to Jacob’s well that was in Samaria near the town of Sychar.

⁵So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

This “plot of ground” had some history. We read in Genesis 33:19 that when Jacob had returned to the Land of Promise after 20 years with his uncle Laban in Paddan-Aram, he bought a field from the children of Hamor for “100 pieces of money” (Gen. 33:19). It was here that he dug a well that refreshed many in that region and travelers through that region. Later Jacob gave this land to his son Joseph. We read of this in Genesis 48:22, in which Jacob said to his son, “Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow.” Later, when Joseph was about to die in Egypt, he gave instruction regarding his body:

⁴ Edersheim, **The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah**, vol. 1, p. 408.

Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.” So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. (Gen. 50:25f)

We read later in Joshua 24:32 that the children of Israel fulfilled Joseph’s desire:

And Joseph’s bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph’s descendants.

And so, for the Jew of the first century, this was nearly sacred ground, located just outside the ancient city of Shechem. But it must have troubled them greatly that these Samaritans had control of this land that had for so long belonged to Israel.

We read in **verse 5**, “*Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.*” Here we see the humanity of our Lord on display. He was weary from his journey. Jesus and His disciples who accompanied Him would have traveled all morning climbing out of the Jordan River valley to the hills of Samaria. It was the 6th hour, which was noon, as figured by most commentators.⁵

...The setting of this scene creates a powerful image. In the middle of the day, on soil upon which God had already worked, the Christ set at the well of Jacob. The sun of the day was beating down on the Son, who himself is light in a world that is overtaken by darkness. As much as this “piece of land” was significant for the Jewish people, the impending encounter would make this property significant to the whole world (v. 42).⁶

Others believe that this “sixth hour” should be understood as in the early evening at 6 PM rather than noon.⁷ This difference in time is due to different opinions as to whether John wrote his Gospel using Roman hours of the day, which would be the same as ours, or Jewish time reckoning. The Jews would regard the sixth hour as the sixth hour from sunrise, or about noontime. **Alfred Edersheim** believed this meeting between Jesus and the woman was later in the evening. He wrote, “It was about six o’clock in the evening, when the travel-stained pilgrims reached that ‘parcel of ground’ which, according to ancient Jewish tradition, Jacob had given to his son Joseph.”⁸ But I think that noon is the best understanding. As **Donald Carson** wrote, “Jesus arrived at Jacob’s well *about the sixth hour*, almost certainly about noon (beginning the count about sunrise) when the heat of the day and the progress of the journey explain Jesus’ thirst and tiredness.”⁹ This was also the view of **John Calvin**.

And Jesus, fatigued by the journey. He did not pretend weariness, but was actually fatigued; for, in order that he might be better prepared for the exercise of sympathy and compassion towards us, he took upon him our weaknesses, as the Apostle shows that we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, (Hebrews 4:15.) With this agrees the circumstance of the time; for it is not wonderful that, being thirsty and fatigued, he rested at the well about noon; for as the day, from sunrise to sunset, had twelve hours, the sixth hour was noon. When the Evangelist says that he sat thus, he means that it was the attitude of a man who was fatigued.

⁵ Some commentators argue that this should be understood to be at 6 PM rather than noon. See William Hendriksen, **John**, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1953), p. 157f.

⁶ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 236.

⁷ William Hendriksen, **John**, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1953), p. 157f.

⁸ Alfred Edersheim, **The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah**, vol. 1 (E. R. Herrick & Company, 1886), p.405.

⁹ Donald A. Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 217.

We may receive consolation from the fact that our Savior was “wearied.” Here are the words of **Alexander Maclaren**, who was a London preacher contemporary with Charles Spurgeon:

How precious it is to us that this Gospel, which has the loftiest things to say about the manifest divinity of our Lord, and the glory that dwelt in Him, is always careful to emphasize also the manifest limitations and weaknesses of the Manhood. John never forgets either the term of his great sentence in which all the Gospel is condensed, ‘the Word became flesh.’ Ever he shows us ‘the Word’; ever ‘the flesh.’ Thus it is he only that records the saying on the Cross, ‘I thirst.’ It is he who tells us how Jesus Christ, not merely for the sake of getting a convenient opening of a conversation, or to conciliate prejudices, but because He needed what He asked, said to the woman of Samaria, ‘Give Me to drink.’ So the weariness of the Master stands forth for us as a pathetic proof that it was no shadowy investiture with an apparent Manhood to which He stooped, but a real participation in our limitations and weaknesses, so that the work to Him was fatigue, even though in Him dwelt the manifest glory of that divine nature which ‘fainteth not, neither is weary.’¹⁰

As suggested by Calvin above, here we witness Jesus in His human nature who is at times very much like us—He was *wearied*. The Bible sets forth Jesus as the High Priest of His people, the Israel of God. Under the Old Testament economy, when Israel was constituted an ethnic, physical people, the high priest was from the tribe of Levi, even the family of Aaron. But under the New Testament (covenant) economy, in which Israel is constituted a spiritual people, our High Priest, Jesus Christ, is from the tribe of Judah. Jesus was qualified to be our High Priest although He was not from the tribe of Levi because His priesthood was of a different order. His priesthood was according to the order of Melchizedec, not Levi. The writer to the Hebrews wrote of the qualifications that enabled Jesus to serve us in this capacity. We read in Hebrews 5:1ff.

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. ²He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, *since he himself is also subject to weakness*. ³Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. ⁴And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

Here in John 4:5 we see our Lord’s qualification for high priesthood displayed for us, in that He was “wearied from His journey.”

Are you weary from your “journey” as you are traveling to our heavenly Jerusalem? Perhaps you have been enduring hardship for some time, having to bear a great burden upon your soul, and you are wearied. Take heart, as a Christian you have a sympathetic High Priest who can help you. He sympathizes with you for He knows experientially what it is to be wearied. He knows, therefore, the weakness of your frame, the inability for you to travel further. So sit down on the well beside Jesus, for He was weary too, and He will be able to draw water to refresh and revitalize you for the next segment of your journey. He is able and willing to give you grace to help you in your time of need (Cf. Heb. 4:16). The One who declares to any and all, “Come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28, NASV), can do so, for He Himself was weary on occasion, and knows how to give rest to His exhausted people.

II. Jesus met and engaged a Samaritan woman in conversation (4:7-26)

¹⁰ Alexander Maclaren, **Expositions of Holy Scripture. St. John, Chapters I to VII** (Baker Book House, n.d.), p. 189.

Now in **verses 7 and 8** we read, of His divinely appointed meeting with this woman. ***“A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give Me a drink.”⁸ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.***

Women normally came to a well in groups rather than alone. They also would either come to the well earlier or later in the day, not during the heat of the midday. This would have already suggested to Jesus that she was a woman with little or no regard by others of her community. She had been a sinful woman. Her behavior betrayed the fact, and that she knew it to be so. She must have felt ashamed to be among the other women of her society. She needed water, as all did so, but she would come to the well when she would not have to be seen or interact with other women. But on this occasion she found this Jewish man sitting on the edge of the well, who requested that she draw water so that He might be refreshed from His journey. It surprised her, greatly so.

That this Jewish man spoke to her and that he asked to drink from a vessel of hers would have been quite unconventional, even perhaps shocking to her.

Although some Jews could imagine eating with Samaritans (Mishna, *Berakoth* 7:1), doubtless many a Jew would not eat with a Samaritan on the latter’s home turf for fear of incurring ritual defilement. Probably this fear was intensified when the Samaritan was a woman...

The Samaritan woman’s surprise is therefore entirely understandable: Jesus was a Jew and she was both a Samaritan and a woman. From her perspective, she dismisses him as a Jew; later on, Jews will dismiss him as a Samaritan (8:48)¹¹. But if Jesus cannot be other than alien, he nevertheless wins some Jews and some Samaritans. At this point, however, the woman is not about to be won: she cannot fathom what would possess a Jew to ask her for a drink. She does not know that, far from being defiled by what is unclean, Jesus sanctifies what he touches. Others who touch lepers become unclean; Jesus touches a leper and brings healing (Matt. 8:3).

Some have drawn attention to the stark difference between Jesus in chapter 3 conversing in Jerusalem with Nicodemus, a leading teacher of the Jews, and Jesus speaking in chapter 4 with this Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well.

A religious, male, Jewish aristocrat like Nicodemus, or an untrained, female Samaritan peasant who had made a mess of her life – Jesus converses frankly with both, and happily breaks social and religious taboos to do so.¹²

The contrast between these two people could not have been greater. We first read of Jesus dealing with a self-righteous, educated, formalist in Nicodemus. We then read of our Savior’s dealing with an “ignorant, carnal-minded woman, whose moral character was more than ordinarily bad.”¹³

Jesus and this Samaritan woman were alone, or it seems that they were, for His disciples had left Jesus there in order to purchase food for them. They would have gone into one of the local Samaritan towns to purchase food, probably Sychar, which lie just ½ mile from the well. But perhaps Jesus and this woman were not entirely alone. Some have suggested that the young Apostle John was there also, as this Gospel account before us betrays a first-hand witness of the happenings. Besides, it would not have been likely that His disciples would leave their Master entirely alone in such a place.

¹¹ John 8:48 reads, “Then the Jews answered and said to Him, ‘Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?’”

¹² Carson, p. 218.

¹³ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 203.

In **verse 9** the woman expressed her surprise toward Jesus, perhaps with a measure of indignance. **“Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.”**

Let us consider for a moment the nature of her response to Jesus’ request. He asked for water from her. And she seemed to rebuff Him, perhaps revealing her own prejudice. But our Lord was patient with her, for He cared for her soul. I appreciate what **Charles Spurgeon** said regarding our Savior’s example before us:

I could not help saying, in the reading, that the woman’s answer to our Lord was, at least, somewhat brusque, if not really rude; but, with great meekness, Jesus took no notice of it so as to blame her for her tone, or for her unkind manner. He was too intent upon saving her soul to care about a little rudeness on her part. Learn a lesson from your Lord’s conduct. When you are dealing with souls, do not always expect them to yield to you at once; do not expect them even to receive your expostulations with thankfulness. Be prepared to be repelled, and even to be ridiculed; and when it so happens, do not be put out of temper, or out of heart, but go straight on with your work whichever way they may go. Our Savior, instead of being vexed at the rudeness of the woman, said to her, “If thou knewest.” “Ah, poor soul, thou dost not know to whom thou art speaking thus rudely!” “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” Oh, that we might have a passion for the souls of men! May we be vehement in our desire, with a love that burneth like coals of juniper! May we not be put off by any discouragements; but let us resolve that, before we have done with any poor sinner, we will do all in our power to bring him to Christ, so that, if men are lost, it shall not be our fault; and if they are saved, we will, at least, have this part in it, that we have set Christ plainly before them as their soul’s only hope.¹⁴

Now most of the English translations are quite similar to one another respecting this last sentence, **“For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.”** But actually there may have been a more specific idea being conveyed by John’s words. **F. F. Bruce** provided his own translation, “Jews do not use the same vessels as Samaritans.”¹⁵ He also placed this expression in parenthesis, indicating more directly that this was the Apostle John’s own explanation for her comment. Here was his explanation:

The Evangelist’s explanation of her surprise – another of his typical parentheses – is not simply that (as the older versions have it) ‘Jews have no dealings with Samaritans’ but more specifically that (as the NEB renders it) ‘Jews and Samaritans, it should be noted, do not use vessels in common’. If the woman complied with Jesus’ request, he would have had to drink from her vessel, since he has none of his own. This would have involved a risk of ceremonial pollution for a Jew even if the owner of the vessel had been a male Samaritan, but the fact that she was a woman made the risk a certainty, from the standpoint of a strictly observant Jew. No wonder that Jesus’ request astonished the woman; by asking such a favour from her he had shown most unexpected good will.¹⁶

Donald Carson agreed with F. F. Bruce on the meaning of this parenthetical statement. He wrote:

Meanwhile John parenthetically explains why the woman is so suspicious: *For Jews do not use dishes Samaritans have used* (NIV fn.). That is probably the meaning of the Greek text (as Augustine understood), and as Daube, pp. 373-382 has recently argued): although the verb *sunchrasthai*

¹⁴ Charles Spurgeon, **The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit**, vol. 38 (Pilgrim Publications, 1970), p. 481.

¹⁵ F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 103.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

(συγγρῶνται) can mean ‘to associate with’ (cf. Schnackenburg, 1. 425n. 19), it more commonly means ‘to use together with’, the object being understood from the context.¹⁷

Now it would help us to understand the animosity between Jews and Samaritans by considering their history. After King Solomon died in about 960 BC there was civil war in Israel, resulting in two nations, the northern kingdom of Israel, which was comprised of ten tribes of Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah with its two tribes. It was King Omri who first named Samaria as the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 16:24). Many times in the Scriptures, however, the name of Samaria was applied to the entire northern region of Israel, as well as its capital city. Eventually due to Israel’s apostasy and breaking covenant with God, God sent the Assyrian Empire into the land to judge and conquer this people, taking the bulk of the 10 tribes of Israel into captivity and exile from the land. Assyria forced people from other conquered lands to immigrate and settle in Samaria. These people intermarried with some Jews, adopted a measure of the Jews’ religion as their own, but with significant corruption. Although they viewed the Torah, the first five books of the Bible as Holy Scripture, they had their own separate religious system which in many points was distinct from the practice of the Jews in the south. The Samaritans built their own temple in about 400 BC on Mount Gerizim. The mountain was in plain sight of Jacob’s well on which Jesus was sitting. The Samaritans had their own priesthood and their own sacrificial system. It was in 108 BC that the Jewish Hasmonean leader, John Hyrcanus, destroyed this temple, forever cementing the hostility between these two peoples. It was no wonder that the woman wondered at Jesus speaking to her and requesting water from her, with the ruins of her temple on the mountain side just above them. But with this initial request of Jesus, the interaction began in which Jesus soon was holding forth hope to this woman of a life filled with joy, peace, and complete satisfaction and sense of well-being.

Here, therefore, we may see the manner in which we might initiate presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ to strangers that we encounter in our day to day walk with our Lord. I appreciated what **J. C. Ryle** wrote regarding this:

We should mark, firstly, *the mingled tact and condescension of Christ in dealing with a careless sinner.*

Our Lord was sitting by Jacob’s well, when a woman of Samaria came thither to draw water. At once He says to her, “Give me to drink.” He does not wait for her to speak to Him. He does not begin by reproving her of her sins, though He doubtless knew them. He opens communication by asking a favour. He approaches the woman’s mind by the subject of “water,” which was naturally uppermost in her thoughts. Simple as this request may seem, it opened a door to spiritual conversation. It threw a bridge across the gulf which lay between her and Him. It led to the conversion of her soul.

Our Lord’s conduct in this place should be carefully remembered by all who want to good to the thoughtless and spiritually ignorant. It is vain to expect that such persons will voluntarily come to us, and begin to seek knowledge. We must begin with them, and go down to them in the spirit of courteous and friendly aggression. It is vain to expect such persons will be prepared for our instruction, and will at once see and acknowledge the wisdom of all we are doing. We must go to work wisely. We must study the best avenues to their hearts, and the most likely ways of arresting their attention. There is a handle to every mind, and our chief aim must be to get hold of it. Above all, we must be kind in manner, and beware of showing that we feel conscious of our own superiority. If we let ignorant people fancy that we think we are doing them a great favour in talking to them about religion, there is little hope of doing good to their souls.¹⁸

¹⁷ Carson, p. 218.

¹⁸ Ryle, pp. 203f.

Our Lord Jesus broke through the extreme prejudice that existed between these two peoples. This kind of barrier between people exists today, and in some ways it appears that they are much worse today than a few decades ago. We are to have a Christian world view, a biblical world view of humanity. Every man, woman, boy or girl is the image of God. Yes, this brings responsibility to every individual, but it also conveys a dignity for a human being, irrespective of ethnic or national origin. Please do not misunderstand, this does not translate into the spirit of globalism that is very prevalent today, the idea that the world should not be divided into nations with borders. God has ordained nations and it is the existence in history of more noble and free nations to defend and sometimes conquer oppressive nations to set people free and to secure our own freedom. Every nation must have ethical and legal standards of immigration and citizenship. But regarding the worth and regard for human beings, the Christian should see no borders. The Kingdom of God is not a matter of physical borders. It is in the will and purpose of God that the Kingdom of God is populated with people from every tribe and nation on the face of the earth. Whenever we see a human being, no matter what race or gender, or no matter what kind or degree of sin in which that soul has degraded himself or herself, we should desire and work toward restoring them to realize and enjoy the purpose for which God made them, to live before God in faith and fellowship, glorifying and enjoying Him forever. Every soul should be seen as a mission to win him or her to the kingdom of God through repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ.

When Jesus made this request to this woman, she immediately knew there was something different and unique about this Jewish man, and she was apparently intrigued and at least willing to converse with Him on this occasion. And her life would never be the same. She came out of the city of Sychar that day fallen and hopeless woman. She returned to her city with a glorious testimony. Her entire outlook on life was changed. She had found the Messiah, and she believed on Him, and she would tell others of Him.

We next read in **verse 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.”*

Here we see the heart of her problem. She was spiritually ignorant of who Jesus Christ was. Jesus Christ sets Himself forth as *“the gift of God.”* Now every good thing we receive and enjoy in this life is a generous gift of God to us. James wrote, *“Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning”* (James. 1:17). But among the multitude of gifts that God gives, *“the gift”* is Jesus Christ Himself. Through Jesus Christ every good and perfect gift is made an eternal reality and possession of all His people.

But the full nature of the gift of God to us in Jesus Christ is truly incomprehensible to us. Yes, we can understand it in a measure, but only if God enables us to do so. Paul prayed that the Christians in the church at Ephesus *“may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:8f).*

Charles Spurgeon wrote of this unspeakable gift:

The text uses the definite article, *“If you knew **the** gift of God,”* setting Christ as God’s gift beyond all other gifts. True, the light of the sun is the gift of God to us. There is not a piece of bread we eat, nor a drop of water we drink but what it may be called the gift of God. But *the* gift which comprehends, excels, and sanctifies all other gifts is the gift of Jesus Christ to the sons of men! I wish I had the power to speak as I should of this gift, but I am reminded by God’s Word that it is *“unspeakable.”* *“Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift”* (2 Cor. 9:15). I can comprehend God’s giving the earth to the children of men—giving to Adam and his seed dominion over all the works of His hands. I think I can understand God’s giving Heaven to His people, and permitting them to dwell at His right hand forever and ever. But that God should give the Only Begotten, *“very God of very God,”* to take upon Himself our nature, and in that nature actually to be *“obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross”*—this we cannot understand, and even the angels

with their mightier intellects cannot grasp it fully! They look into it, but as they gaze they desire to see more, for even they feel they cannot search this out to perfection. A depth unfathomable of Divine love is there in the condescending loving kindness which gave Jesus Christ to die for us when we were yet sinners.¹⁹

We will close here, but as we do let us ask our God to grant to us great grace that we can comprehend more fully all that He has given us who believe in Jesus Christ. May we be filled with this knowledge that we would be impacted greatly and that we would more greatly desire that those around us may come to know Him who has so wonderfully revealed Himself to us.

Lastly, may the Blessed Holy Spirit give each of us a fresh and full look into the face of Jesus Christ as we “sit beside Him” in our daily devotions and “walk beside Him” throughout each day. And May He enable us to know Him enable others to know Him, that they may come to know the blessed rest and glorious destiny that He has set before them.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think,
according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church
by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:20f)

¹⁹ Charles Spurgeon, **The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit**, vol. 13 (Pilgrim Publications, 1970), p. 651.