

**The Gospel of John (28);
“Jesus and the Woman of Samaria” (6)**

Introduction:

We have been in this passage for quite some time. But there is a spiritual richness and beauty to this account that we dare not miss by passing over it too hastily. There are actually three major themes treated here in John 4 of this account of Jesus and the woman of Samaria. First, there is emphasis given to the gift of Jesus of “living water.” Second, the account sets forth the true worship of the Father in spirit and truth. And third, this episode emphasizes Jesus’ mission to non-Jews. This third theme is the one to which we give our attention today.

The entire episode is conveyed through our Lord’s interaction with this Samaritan woman. Our Lord’s conversation with her and her spiritual growth through this passage enlivens the narrative before us and to us. Here is an ancient description of the spiritual development of this poor woman.

Almost certainly the Fourth Evangelist will have viewed this breaking down of the walls between Jew and Samaritan as Luke viewed Philip’s evangelism of Samaria: a major step in the Church’s advance to mission to the world... The spirit in which it should be undertaken was marvelously captured by an early commentator on Tatian’s *Harmony of the Gospels*¹, Ephraem the Syrian: “Jesus came to the fountain as a hunter... He threw a grain before one pigeon that he might catch the whole flock... At the beginning of the conversation he did not make himself known to her, but first she caught sight of a thirsty man, then a Jew, then a Rabbi, afterwards a prophet, last of all the Messiah. She tried to get the better of the thirsty man, she showed dislike of the Jew, she heckled the Rabbi, she was swept off her feet by the prophet, and she adored the Christ.” That imaginative description grasps the essential burden of the chapter, namely to reveal the Christ in action and the growth of faith responsive to the revelation. We do well to go and do likewise.²

We left off last time reading of the return of the disciples to Jesus at Jacob’s well. Let us read again **John 4:27-33**.

²⁷And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, “What do You seek?” or, “Why are You talking with her?”

²⁸The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, ²⁹“Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” ³⁰Then they went out of the city and came to Him.

³¹In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.”

³²But He said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.”

³³Therefore the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?”

The disciples were surprised and perhaps somewhat indignant when they found Jesus speaking with a Samaritan woman. And yet they had followed and observed Jesus long enough that they knew not to challenge what He said or did. They were troubled by His conversation with the woman, but no one asked Him to explain His behavior to them. They would let the matter pass, for they had obtained food in the nearby town. They had left Jesus in a state of weariness sitting on the well (cf. 4:6) and they were

¹ This work is better known as Tatian’s *Diatessaron*, which was an early effort to harmonize the four Gospels, written between 160-175 AD.

² George R. Beasley-Murray, **John**, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Thomas Nelson, 1999), p. 66.

concerned for His physical well-being. And so they urged Him. “Rabbi, eat.” But He said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.” Here we see another example of Jesus employing something in the physical realm to express and illustrate spiritual truth.

The disciples were clueless as to His reaction to them. Verse 33 reads that the “disciples said to one another, ‘Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?’” As is common in John’s Gospel, those who are with Jesus are initially confused and misunderstand Him, but their perplexity sets the stage for some word about Jesus or His teaching. Here we see that their confusion led to an explanation of...

I. Jesus’ passion to save sinners (4:34-38)

³⁴Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. ³⁵Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! ³⁶And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. ³⁷For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”

When we began our study of the Gospel of John last April, we spoke of the unique way in which John presents the person of Jesus to his readers. The Synoptic Gospels³ set forth the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth as He was viewed and perceived by His disciples, or apostles. Over the course of time, His closest followers came to understand His deity and the nature of His mission as the Messiah, the promised Son of David, who would initiate and inaugurate the promised Kingdom of God. But the perspective of John’s Gospel is quite different. It is not so much the perspective of the disciple of Jesus who observed and learned from His Master; rather, John’s Gospel is a revelation of the inner life of Christ, of His eternal, divine nature as well as His temporal, human nature. It is a perspective not so much from the viewpoint of the disciples, as it is a self-revelation of the Son of God Himself, even as it is related by the “beloved disciple”—the apostle John. We see this trait of this fourth Gospel here in our Lord’s words, in which He pulls back the veil that hides His inner life from all but His closest disciples, and He reveals His heart, what most moved Him and motivated Him in His life. As weary and hungry as He was as He sat waiting for His disciples to return with food, He was satiated and invigorated with His fulfilling of the mission which His Father had sent Him.

We read in **verse 34**, “*Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.’*” Our Lord revealed that His greatest enjoyment and satisfaction in life was to bring sinners to a saving faith in God, even as people believed on Him. Several aspects of our Lord’s character are suggested by our Lord’s words.

1. Notice *how our Lord was careful in the use of His time*. He seemed to take every occasion to use His time wisely so that He could accomplish further the will of His Father. When the disciples had left Him to buy food, He had occasion to speak with this woman. He gave Himself wholly to help this poor woman, to bring her to experience life everlasting. He spoke to her wisely and appropriately. He spoke the truth to her. He spoke to her regarding her sin. He spoke to her of the true life she could experience and enjoy through faith in Him.

And upon the return of His disciples and her departure to her town, Jesus continued to minister to His disciples. He spoke to them regarding important spiritual lessons that would enhance their knowledge of Him and His work. He would better equip them to enter further in their labors on His behalf, to experience and enjoy the same delight and sense of satisfaction He experienced by doing the will of His Father. He has spoken to the woman in a manner suitable to her spiritual need. He then spoke to His disciples according to their spiritual need. He made perfect and full use of His time.

³ Matthew, Mark, and Luke

May our Lord help us to be wise and diligent in the time that He gives us. Let us take advantage of every opportunity to further the cause of Christ in the lives of others. “It were well if we could *thus* gather up the fragments of time, that none of it be lost” (Matthew Henry). We are exhorted in the Word of God, “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time” (Col. 4:5, NKJ). Or perhaps more clearly translated in the English Standard Version (ESV), “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders (non-Christians), making the best use of the time.” There is a somewhat parallel statement in Ephesians (for there are a number of similarities between these two epistles). Ephesians 5:15 reads more generally of the use of our time, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (NKJV). Or again, worded slightly differently in the ESV, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” As Christians we should be concerned about squandering our time. We are stewards of all that God has given us, including the time that He has given us to use wisely. As the wise man (Solomon) once wrote,

To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven. (Ecc. 3:1)

There is a time for work. But there is also a time for pleasure. There is a time for diligence. But there is a time for rest. Here our Lord would rest, but He would redeem His time, and so He would invest His time and effort to win this woman to Himself and then afterwards, to instruct His disciples in how they should think and live.

2. Notice *the great pleasure that our Lord experienced as He saw Himself fulfilling the will of His Father*. In another place Jesus declared that He came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus delighted in His work. Jesus had been weary and hungry, but it is as though He had a great feast, for He was invigorated with the opportunity to bear witness to this woman, and through her, bear witness to the larger Samaritan community. May the Lord give us a similar desire and delight in the service of our Lord. And let us be as our Lord. “Let us learn hence a holy indifference even to the needful supports of life, in comparison with spiritual things” (Matthew Henry). Here we see that He had become so unconcerned about the food that His disciples brought to Him, that they thought that He must have been already fed by someone other than themselves.

3. Notice that *Jesus speaks of His Father as the Sender of Him into the world on a mission to save the lost*. Again, Jesus said in verse 34, “My food is to do the will of *Him who sent Me*, and to finish His work.” When we began our study in the Gospel we identified several major themes that are found throughout. The idea of God the Father having “sent” His Son is one of these. **Richard Lenski** wrote of the importance of this theme in this passage:

Here, for the first time, Jesus speaks of his great Sender whom he will mention again and again, always using the substantivized aorist participle, which names this Sender according to the one past act of sending. As such he has a will, namely regarding a specific work, even called “his work,” the possessive being emphatically forward. The sending or mission of Jesus is “to do” this will, “to finish” this work, and the aorists⁴ state actual doing and finishing. Doubling the statement thus makes it decidedly strong. Compare 17:4, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do,” where the same verb is used. Also 19:28 and 30, “Jesus, knowing that all things are now finished,” etc.... he said, “It is finished. The double clause is thus a description of Jesus’ entire Messianic work. This “will” of his great Sender is his good and gracious will regarding the sinful world, the will of his comprehending and purposeful love; this “work” is our redemption from sin and all things belonging to it. The will and work were done, finished completely, when Jesus died on the cross.⁵

⁴ Aorist is the name of a tense in the Greek language, as present, past, and future are other tenses. The aorist tense describes the action of a noun taking place in past time.

⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel** (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), p. 332.

Indirectly the deity of our Lord Jesus is expressed by these words of Jesus: “My food is to do the will of Him *who sent Me*, and to finish His work.” The Father sent His Son *into* the world in His incarnation. He was the eternal Son of God, but the time came when the Father sent Him into the world. Jesus was sent on a mission. This mission of Jesus to save sinners was a mission to save His people, those whom the Father in eternity elected unto salvation. It was in God’s eternal decree that He sent His Son. It was a mission to which He was sent. The Father had sent His Son into the world in order to redeem His people from sin and death, to bring them into a saving relationship with the Father.

The fact that God the Father “sent” His Son into the world distinguishes the Son (as well as the Holy Spirit), from the Father. Through this idea of being “sent”, the Father is distinguished from the other two persons of the Holy Trinity. The Scriptures never speak of God the Father being “sent.” But that the Father “sent” the Son is set forth in many places in the Bible.⁶

John, the Gospel writer, sets forth the Lord Jesus as having totally different and spiritual desires than His disciples. It is clear that at this point in the life of His disciples they did not yet possess a great love for souls and desire to see them saved. Jesus sought to raise their aspiration and enflame their desire for the great work of saving souls. We read Jesus’ words in **verse 35**, *“Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!”*

Here again He used the physical realm to illustrate the spiritual reality. Before them were fields that would one day be harvested. But even now, there are spiritual fields of human beings that were in need of harvesting. But it seems to be a sad thing that our Lord would need to direct His disciples to see the opportunities and the responsibility that was before them. It is as they were looking down, failing to see the broad panorama of God’s kingdom set before them and the glorious privilege and opportunity which was theirs. He said to them, “Lift up your eyes and see the possibilities before you.” May our Lord enliven us to the great harvest that is before us. May He grant us grace that our eyes might be lifted to see what potentially lies before us in expanding His kingdom in our fallen world.

And let us be as our Lord. We are to foster a true desire and delight in seeing souls converted to Jesus Christ, being rescued from their sin and its penalty, to experience fullness of life here and an even fuller life in the hereafter. But it is sad that even among ministers there is a need for an awakening to these matters. **J. C. Ryle** wrote these words:

The utter unlikeliness between Christ and all ministers of the Gospel who perform their duties in a mere perfunctory way, and care more for the world, and its pleasures or gains, than for saving souls, is strikingly brought out in this and the preceding verse. How many professing teachers of religion know nothing whatever of the spirit and habits of mind which our Lord here displays! It can never be said of hunting, shooting, ball-going, card playing, farming clergymen, that it is their meat and drink to do God’s will and finish His work! With what face will they meet Christ in the Day of Judgment?⁷

We should be hopeful and labor with anticipation that God will do a great work through us in reaching souls for Jesus Christ. We should desire the well-being of people, longing for their conversion, hoping for their transformation into brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. We should be earnest, always praying, and ever-expectant of what the Lord can and might do. The Lord will bless our efforts, for He has promised to do so. The Psalmist wrote of a certain harvest to those who sow in sincerity and hope: “

He who continually goes forth weeping,
Bearing seed for sowing,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,

⁶ See John 3:34; 4:34; 5:23f, 30, 36-38; 6:29, 38-40, 44, 57; 7:16, 18, 29, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44f, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 20f. See also 1 John 4:9, 10, 14.

⁷ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 245.

Bringing his sheaves with him. (Psalm 126:6)

The opportunity is there, but the laborers tend to be few. We are to pray to the Lord of the harvest that He might send forth more laborers to perform this great harvest work (cf. Matt. 9:38).

The Lord Jesus also spoke to His disciples of *the great reward* that will be theirs if they are faithful in harvesting souls for the kingdom of God. We read **verse 36**, “*And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.*” The Lord declared that God compensates those who enlist in serving in this harvesting business. There will be rewards given by the Lord unto His faithful servants. Jesus said, “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Rev. 22:12). The rewards that He will bestow upon us will far outweigh what bit of service we might render unto Him in this life. The richest reward that we will receive, however, is the pleasure that we will have knowing that we have brought honor and pleasure to our Lord whom we serve. **Charles Spurgeon** wrote of this:

But the richest reward lies in pleasing God, and causing the Redeemer to see of the travail of His soul. That Jesus should have His reward, is worthy of the Eternal Father; but it is marvelous that we should be employed by the Father to give to Christ the purchase of His agonies. This is a wonder of wonders! O my soul, this is an honour too great for thee! A bliss too deep for words! Listen, dear friends, and answer me. What would you give to cause a thrill of pleasure in the heart of the Well-beloved? Recollect the grief you cost Him, and the pangs that shot through Him that He might deliver you from your sin and its consequences; do you not long to make Him glad? When you bring others to His feet, you give Him joy, and no small joy either. Is not that a wonderful text,—“There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth”? What does that mean? Does it mean that the angels have joy? We generally read it so, but it is not the intent of the verse. It says, “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God,”—that is, joy in the heart of God, around whose throne the angels stand. It is a joy which angels delight to behold,—what is it? Is the blessed God capable of greater joy than His own boundless happiness? Wondrous language this! The infinite bliss of God is more eminently displayed, if it cannot be increased. Can we be the instruments of this? Can we do anything which will make the Ever-blessed glad? Yes, for we are told that the great Father rejoices above measure when His prodigal son that was dead is alive again, and the lost one is found.

If I could say this as I ought to say it, it would make every Christian cry out, “Then I will labour to bring souls to the Saviour;” and it would make those of us who have brought many to Jesus instant, in season and out of season, to bring more to Him. It is a great pleasure to be doing a kindness to an earthly friend, but to be doing something distinctly for Jesus, something which will be of all things in the world most pleasing to Him, is a great delight! It is a good work to build a meeting-house, and give it outright to the cause of God, if it is done with a right and proper motive; but one living stone, built upon the sure foundation by our instrumentality, will give the Master more pleasure than if we erected a vast pile of natural stones, which might only cumber the ground. Then go, dear friends, and seek to bring your children and your neighbours, your friends and your kinsfolk, to the Saviour’s feet, for nothing will give Him so much pleasure as to see them turn unto Him and live. By your love to Jesus, I beseech you, become fishers of men.⁸

Our Lord took care to teach His disciples that they were all working together for the furtherance of the kingdom. He declared in **verse 37**, “*For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’*” Not everyone who sows seed is involved in the harvest that comes later. It would seem that our Lord was teaching His disciples that every worker in the kingdom should understand that he is simply building on the work of others, and that there will be others who come after him who will build upon what he has done.

⁸ Charles Spurgeon, **The Soul Winner** (Eerdmans, 1963), p. 200f.

No one person can or should take credit for the whole work of the harvest. The Lord uses many different servants in His field.

Jesus then said further in **verse 38**, *“I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”* In verse 34 Jesus spoke of the Father having sent Him into the world. Here Jesus speaks of sending His disciples into the harvest of souls, bringing them into the kingdom. He has called upon us to reap where others have labored. It is common for us in our witness to others to find them to have already been influenced by other Christians before us. Perhaps we find a soul to be interested in learning more of teaching of the Bible. But when you inquire why it is that he has developed this desire, he may relate to you that he was influenced by a godly friend, a godly parent, or some witness he received through a radio preacher or through a gospel tract. It is a rarity to meet someone who has not been in some way prepared by the Lord through someone before us.

Now after we have considered Jesus’ passion to save sinners (4:34-38), we next read a declaration that

II. Jesus is the Savior of the world (4:39-42)

³⁹And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all that I ever did.” ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of His own word.

⁴²Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”

This woman was not very well-trained in the art and practice of evangelism, but the Lord used her quite effectively. **Verse 39** reads, *“And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’”* Basically she gave these Samaritans her personal testimony; she related how the Lord had revealed Himself to her, *‘He told me all that I ever did.’* Now I think that it is important to underscore this reality. When the Holy Scriptures tell us we are to go into all the world to preach the gospel, that is not a command to go into all the world to share our testimony. Your testimony or my testimony is not the gospel. A personal testimony might include the gospel, but it may not. The gospel is not relating “What God has done for me.” The gospel is relating what God has done and is doing through Jesus Christ to save people from their sin.

Now clearly this woman testified of the remarkable manner in which Jesus exposed her sin to her, sin that she thought was quite private and unknown to most. And God will often do just that in the process of bringing a soul to saving faith in Jesus Christ. We read in 1 Corinthians 14 that this was one of the results of the spiritual gift of prophecy in the early church era. The Holy Spirit enabled some within the churches to have supernatural insight into the secret, sinful life of strangers. The one with the gift of prophecy would expose specific sin to that sinner, resulting in a sense of personal guilt and shame of exposure. It conveyed to the sinner that God was fully aware of his sins and that he was not going to go unpunished by God. Peter’s exposure of Ananias and Saphira seems to have been a manifestation of this spiritual gift (Cf. Acts 5:1ff). This would often lead that sinner to repentance. We see this set forth by the apostle in 1 Corinthians 14 when he was contrasting the benefit of the gift of prophecy as greater than the gift of speaking in tongues, or foreign languages, unless someone was present to interpret that language into the language of the people in the church. Here is what Paul wrote:

Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. ²³Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? ²⁴But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. ²⁵And thus the secrets of his heart are

revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. (1 Cor. 14:22-25)

What Paul was describing was the work of the Holy Spirit through some in the local church. That spiritual gift is no longer present in the church (Cf. 1 Cor. 13:8). It was a foundational gift that the Lord gave to early Christians in order to establish the early church in throughout Gentile world. But it was quite a gift! Could you imagine the result if I had the ability to walk up to someone in the church and say, “I knew what you did last week. You did such and such, and unless you repent of your sin, you will die in your sin and be damned in your sin.” I suspect that would give some weight to my witness. And yet sometimes the Lord will produce that kind of work in people through the instrument of preaching. It is not that I am given supernatural knowledge of a person’s behavior or condition, but the Word of God finds that soul out and convicts that one as truly as if someone had specifically identified and exposed his sin. And it has not been that unusual for a wife to tell me that her husband accused her of informing me, the pastor, of something about him because I spoke so directly to him of that sin in a sermon. He thought that I was intentionally addressing him. The point is this: what this woman declared about the Lord Jesus to the Samaritans is not all that uncommon, ***“Come and see the One who told me all that I ever did.”***

The woman’s testimony had perked the interest and desire of these people to have Jesus stay with them.

The living water which the woman received from Jesus had certainly become an overflowing fountain in her life, and others were coming to share the refreshment that she had begun to enjoy. Let us not grow weary in well-doing; the most unlikely soul may prove the most effective witness.⁹

We then read **verse 40**, ***“So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days.”*** The Lord Jesus granted their request, and He must have spent much of the following two days proclaiming the Word of God to them, for we read in **verse 41**, ***“And many more believed because of His own word.”***

Later we read in the book of Acts of the Lord bringing a great awakening of salvation to the Samaritans through the preaching of Philip, a deacon in the church at Jerusalem. We read that after the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7 that great persecution arose against the church. Let us read this account of **Acts 8:1ff**:

Now Saul was consenting to his death.

At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ²And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

³As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

⁴Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. ⁵Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. ⁶And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. ⁷For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸And there was great joy in that city. (Acts 8:1-8)

We will not read the following account of Simon the sorcerer. We will drop down to **verse 14** and following:

⁹ F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 115.

¹⁴Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, ¹⁵who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-17)

Then there are further words about Simon the sorcerer. But then we read the summary statement of **Acts 8:25**:

“So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.”

Here we read of a great work of salvation that God performed in the region of Samaria. We might suggest, however, that the fruit that Philip and the apostles gathered was the result at least in part of what the Lord Jesus Himself had worked among them several years before. Others have proposed this:

We may wonder if this was the same ‘city of Samaria’ as was evangelized by Philip a few years later; if it was, the events that took place at this time could explain the ready credence which great crowds gave to Philip when he proclaimed to them the Christ(Acts 8:5). This might be a further fulfillment of the principle of verse 38; others had toiled and Philip entered into their toil.

As Jesus said in verse 38 of John 4, “I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”¹⁰

The Samaritans spoke to the woman, as recorded in **verse 42**. “*Then they said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.’*” It is difficult to point to the specific time of the conversion of these Samaritans. Were they saved when they believed the woman’s witness? Or were they converted when they heard directly the words of Jesus. I do not know. Some have suggested the latter. Here is the view of **F. F. Bruce**, for whom I have great respect:

But for the woman’s witness, her fellow-townfolk would never have come to know Jesus; but they could not rely on her witness alone: they must know him for themselves. Second-hand acquaintance with Christ of hearsay belief in him cannot be a substitute to personal knowledge and saving faith. Now they were able to prove for themselves that all that she said about him were true. He was not only the prophet like Moses, but also the Savior of the world.¹¹

It has been suggested that the witness of this woman to the Samaritans is somewhat like the witness of parents to their children or even preachers to their congregations in the things of the Lord. We can only bring people so far, pointing them to Jesus. But in order to be saved, people need to come to Jesus directly and be convinced by Him through the Holy Spirit that His claims are true. This was the view of **Matthew Henry**:

These Samaritans, for the sake of the woman’s saying, believed so far as to *come and see*, to come and make trial. Thus the instructions of parents and preachers, and the testimony of the church and our experienced neighbours, *recommend* the doctrine of Christ *to our acquaintance*, and incline us to entertain it as highly probable. But, faith *comes to its growth*, strength, and maturity, by hearing the

¹⁰ The account of Philip evangelizing Samaria in Acts 8 was written by Luke perhaps 20 years before John recorded this account of Jesus and the woman at the well. It has been suggested that John might have had the event of Acts 8 in view when he penned the account of John 4.

¹¹ Ibid, 116.

testimony of Christ himself; and this goes further, and recommends his doctrine *to our acceptance*, and obliges us to believe it as undoubtedly certain. We were induced to look into the scriptures *by the saying* of those who told us that in them they had found eternal life; but when we ourselves have found it in them too, have experienced the enlightening, convincing, regenerating, sanctifying, comforting, power of the word, now we believe, *not for their saying*, but because we have searched them ourselves: and our faith *stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God* (Cf. 1 Cor. 2:5; 1 John 5:9; 1 John 5:10).¹²

And so, Matthew Henry did not think that the Samaritans were truly converted through the witness of the woman only, but rather only after they heard from Jesus and believed on Him directly. I think that the Puritan commentator, **Matthew Poole** (1624–1679) was the most accurate and thorough in his assessment of the work of God among these people. [This may be too much for some, but in the interest of thoroughness, I include these words.]

Several things may be the occasion of faith, which neither the principal efficient causes, nor the proper instrumental cause of it. The principal efficient cause of the faith of these Samaritans was, undoubtedly, the finger of God upon their souls, enlightening their minds with the saving knowledge of the gospel, and bowing their wills to the obedience of it. The proper instrumental cause was the hearing of the words of Christ; but the occasion of this was what the woman told them: so as, though they in a sense believed because of what she had said, because that was occasioned their coming out to see and hear Christ; yet the proper instrumental cause was their hearing Christ, God upon their hearing him working in their hearts an ability and willingness to receive and close with Christ. Thus the church gives us the first occasion of receiving the Scriptures, and believing them to be the Word of God: we, having them put into our hands by the church, read them, and find such impresses and stamps of Divinity in them, that we conclude, from our reason very probably, that they are more than human writings; but never firmly and fixedly receive them as such, until persuaded of it by the Holy Spirit. These Samaritans do not only own Christ as a prophet, nor do they only suspect that he must be the Messiah, but they profess to *know* that he was *the Christ, the Saviour of the world*.¹³

However, others believe that these Samaritans were truly converted but that their faith was but strengthened upon hearing Jesus directly. They also make a comparison between these two degrees of faith and the faith that parents are often the cause of an immature faith in their children that later matures when they see and hear Jesus for themselves. Here are the words of a Lutheran, **Richard Lenski**:

Two kinds of faith are distinguished: one, based on the true testimony of others; the other, based on one's own personal experience and firsthand acquaintance with the Word. The former is that of many beginners, especially of children taught by parents and by others. It is true faith and has saving power but stands below the other and is more easily to destroy. This kind of faith should grow into the second kind, which believes without human mediators, by direct contact with Christ and His Word, and is thus far stronger than the other type of faith.¹⁴

By way of application we could call upon our young people those of you who believe on the Lord Jesus, a faith we would not question. But let us consider the nature and quality of your faith. At some point, hopefully sooner than later, you will resolve to believe on Jesus Christ not merely due to your parent's witness, or your pastors' witness, but because you are convinced in your soul by the Lord Himself that He is true and that you believe on Him wholly and fully because of His witness to your soul. And then

¹² Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 914.

¹³ Matthew Poole, **Commentary on the Holy Bible**, vol. 3 (Hendriksen Publishers, 2008), p. 300.

¹⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel** (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), p. 345.

take that stand and perform that action that He commands of all of His disciples, confess Him openly and unreservedly before Him and His church in baptism.

Let us move on.

The Samaritans called Jesus “the Savior of the world.” This title for Jesus is used twice in Scripture, both in the writings of John. It is here in John 4:42. It is also in 1 John 4:14, which reads, “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be *the Savior of the world*.” The contexts in which this expression is used defines for us the meaning of the word, “world.” It is not a statement that (1) Jesus will save the entire world, as the universalists teach, believing all humanity will be saved by Jesus. Nor is it (2) a statement that Jesus died paying for the sins of all humanity, and that only those who believe receive the benefits of His death to save them from their sins. That is the view of Arminians. But rather, (3) that Jesus is the Savior of the world means that He is the Savior of people from all the nations of the earth, not just those from the Jewish nation. This is the historic Reformed understanding, which is the true teaching of the Word of God. As one rightly stated,

This *world* consists of elect from every nation: from the realm of heathendom (in the present context, from the realm of the Samaritans) as well as from that of Judaism.¹⁵

Jesus is the Savior of His people who are from all over the world. The salvation of the Samaritans in John 4 is to be understood to be movement and fulfilment of the purpose of God that the kingdom of God would encompass people from all over the world. What we have in John 4 is a kind of preview of what would take place later in the days of the early church. In Acts 1:8 we read Jesus’ words to His disciples:

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

The conversion of these Samaritans in John 4 is a preview and foreshadowing of the expansion of the kingdom of God into the Gentile world.

Now we read elsewhere that Jesus was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, in other words, to the elect Jews that would constitute His people. We read of this in the account of Jesus healing the daughter of a Gentile woman. Here is the account in **Matthew 15:21-28**.

²¹Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²²And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.”

²³But He answered her not a word.

And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, “Send her away, for she cries out after us.”

²⁴But He answered and said, “*I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*”

²⁵Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, help me!”

²⁶But He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.”

²⁷And she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

²⁸Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

And so, Jesus was “sent” only to the Jews as their promised Savior. Why is it, then, that we read in John 4 of Jesus going to the Samaritans? Wherever Jesus went, He was a Savior of sinners. We had read

¹⁵ William Hendriksen, **John**, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1953), p. 176.

that He must go through Samaria, and therefore, He would be revealed as the Savior to them. Here is a good statement of the matter:

These words with which the whole story ends unmistakably convey the thrust of the story: salvation is not only for the Jews. The Samaritans understood this from the manner in which Jesus had made Himself known to the woman (this woman) and had spent two days with them. They do not call Him by the name which was typical for the future expectation of the Jews, “Messiah,” or by that of their own, Taheb, but by a name in accord with universal salvation. The theme of universal redemptive significance of Jesus’ coming keeps returning in the Fourth Gospel (e.g., 1:29; 3:16; 6:33; 12:47; see also 1 John 4:14; 2:2). Still, the story in chapter 4 is the only place where that salvation is actually effected – and that only among the Samaritans, Israel’s nearest neighbors, perhaps also the neighboring people most hated by the Jews (cf. 8:48). The gospel was to go to the Gentiles only later (cf. 12:20-23), when Jesus’ glorification, his return to the Father, had begun (cf. 12:32). But now already, in his lifetime, Jesus could not, as it were, go beyond the Samaritans. He “had to” pass through Samaria. And by that token the geographical “had to” acquires in retrospect a deeper meaning. And wherever He had to go He was the Savior, even among the Samaritans, and that is consequence of his encounter with this one woman. The fact that God loved the world in Him could hardly be more clearly evident than here; and this was undoubtedly the compelling reason that the Evangelist took so much care to include among the deliberately selected encounters between Jesus and people this encounter with a Samaritan woman.¹⁶

III. Jesus returned to Galilee (4:43-45)

⁴³Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee. ⁴⁴For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. ⁴⁵So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast.

This paragraph actually begins an entirely new section of this Gospel. Some have regarded it as an interlude between that which we just completed considering and that which follows. John the Evangelist establishes the time and occasion for our Lord to depart Samaria and arrive in Galilee.

Jesus had stayed two days with the Samaritans. Not only were the Samaritans most certainly influenced and affected spiritually, but we should think that His disciples also experienced quite an adjustment in their thinking about the identity of the people of God and of God’s plan to expand His kingdom beyond the borders of Israel.

The statement of **verse 44** seems to be somewhat out of place. It reads, “*For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.*” The sentence is set forth as an explanation, but it is not clear exactly what it explains. The expression itself is found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 13:57, Mark 6:4, Luke 4:24). In each instance, however, it was our Lord’s comment upon His rejection by the inhabitants of His home town of Nazareth. But here it is placed prior to His entrance into Galilee. Some have suggested that John’s reference is suggesting that “his own country” is Judea, not Galilee, and this was His reason for going into Galilee, for His ministry in Judea had not been received by most.

Some, it is true, argue that “His own country” refers to Judea which He was just leaving. “Both by fact and the current interpretation of prophecy, Judea alone could receive that title” (Westcott). Similarly Hoskyns maintains that Jerusalem was the home of every Jew. Preeminently must it be so in the case of the Messiah. It is often added that only this interpretation accords with the circumstances. Jesus had been rejected in Judea, His own country, so He turned to another region, Galilee.

¹⁶ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John; A Theological Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 172.

The problem with this view is that the Gospel does not portray Jesus as having been rejected by the people of Judea; they had actually responded greatly to Him and His message. And John records that it was not due to difficulty or rejection of Jesus that He left Judea for Galilee, but because He had been so successful and His fame had spread widely (cf. 4:1-3). It is probably more likely that Jesus was stating that He did not anticipate a great welcome when He arrived in His “own country” of Galilee. This would, then, be consistent with what was declared of Him in the Synoptic Gospels.

When Jesus arrived in Galilee He discovered some, perhaps many, many Galileans, who had witnessed firsthand His teaching ministry in Jerusalem, which had been accompanied with the performance of miracles. We read in **verse 45**, ***“So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast.”*** Large numbers of Galileans would travel to Jerusalem to observe the major feasts. The one mentioned here was probably the feast of the Passover, which had been mentioned in John 2:23. And so, there had been many Galileans who had seen and heard Jesus while there. Many Galileans welcomed His arrival, which was perhaps somewhat of a pleasant surprise. However, although they in a sense received Him, it was not with full honor. “They gave Him honor of a sort, but it was not the honor that was due Him.”¹⁷

Next week we will consider the second sign that John had recorded in his Gospel.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen. (1 Cor. 16:23)

¹⁷ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 287.