

John sermon #5

Receiving and sharing Jesus

(John 4)

We continue journeying with Jesus as he reveals himself as Son of God and Messiah. In chapter 4 John describes for encounters with Jesus for nonbelievers come to faith and new believers grow deeper and faith in Jesus. Here we learn how Jesus invites all kinds of people to trust in him.

As we read this, we are challenged to join with Jesus, the Lord of the harvest, in reaching out in the most unlikely places, to the most unlikely people, to share God's unlikely saving love through *eternal CPR*: cultivating, planting and reaping.

1. The Samaritan woman (John 4:1–30)

¹ The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, ² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. ³ When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. ⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

Because the Pharisees were exciting competition between Jesus and John the Baptist (3:25-30), though their claims were unfounded, Jesus left Judea and headed for Galilee — straight north through Samaria. Orthodox Jews typically avoided Samaria because of a long-standing, deep-seated hatred between Jews and Samaritans — a mixed-race part two and part Gentile, that grew out of the Assyrian captivity of the ten northern tribes. Rejected by the Jews because they could not prove their genealogy, the Samaritans

established their own temple on Mt. Gerizim. This only fanned the fires of racial and religious prejudice.

Why then did Jesus go to Samaria? John continuously reminds us that Jesus was on a divinely appointed schedule—led by the Spirit. What is on the divine schedule here? Showing that salvation in Jesus is open to **All**—Samaritans and all other outcasts included!

Jesus arrived at Jacob's well in the heat of the noon day sun—not the usual time for a woman to draw water. This, and John's other hints about her, suggest that she was a social outcast. The disciples went into town for food while Jesus deliberately waited at the well. He was weary, hungry, and thirsty. John not only presents Jesus as the Son of God but also as true man. Our Lord entered into all the normal experiences of our lives and is able to identify with us in each of them.

Here Jesus meets and converses with this outcast woman. And as he does, note the progression in how she relates to him. It involves four steps in a journey from doubt to faith:

a. Jesus "a Jew" (9–10)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans). 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

It was not considered proper for a man, especially a rabbi, to speak in public to a strange woman (4:27). But our Lord set social customs aside and reached out to her. It certainly surprised her when he asked for a drink of water. What was he *really* seeking?

The information in John's parenthesis at the end of verse 9 was for the benefit of his Gentile readers. Since the disciples had gone into the city to purchase food, it is obvious that the Jews did have *some* "association" with the Samaritans; so John was not trying to exaggerate. The phrase can be translated "Jews ask no favors from Samaritans" or "Jews use no vessels in common with Samaritans." Why would Jesus, a Jew, want to use her "polluted" cup to get a drink of water?

Jesus' request was a way to 'cultivate' a relationship—to start a conversation so that he might then 'plant' truth about himself as the "living water", her real need. Jesus was the Master at *eternal CPR* (cultivating, planting and reaping), and we can join him in that process of inviting people to faith in our Lord.

Jesus pointed out to her that she was ignorant of three important facts: who he was, what he had to offer, and how she could receive it. Here was eternal God speaking to her, offering her eternal life! The Samaritans were as blind as the Jews (1:26). But our Lord's words had aroused her interest, so she pursued the conversation.

b. Jesus "greater than Jacob" (11–15)

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" 13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus was speaking about spiritual water, but she interpreted his words to mean literal water. Again, we see how easily people confuse the material

and the spiritual. Furthermore, this woman was concerned about *how* he would obtain this water, instead of simply asking him to give her a drink.

Of course Jesus is greater than Jacob—and greater than the well itself! To paraphrase his reply: “Whosoever *continues to drink* of this material water (or anything the world has to offer) will thirst again. But whosoever *takes one drink* of the water I give will never thirst again!” Jesus freely gives the living water (salvation) to those who ask for it in faith.

The woman’s immediate response was to ask for this gift, but she did not know what she was saying. She had made progress, but still had a long way to go; so Jesus patiently dealt with her.

c. Jesus "a prophet" (16–24)

16 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." 17 "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." 19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." 21 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Here Jesus is *planting*—holding up before her the reality of who he is (a Prophet like no other) and the reality of her life. Jesus was convicting her of his omniscience and of her sin. But at first she evades the issue—

acknowledging him only as a ‘prophet’, and evading a guilty conscience by turning the conversation to the differences between Jewish and Samaritan religion (it is much more comfortable to discuss religion than to face one’s sin!). However, Jesus again revealed her spiritual ignorance: she did not know who to worship, where to worship, or how to worship. In this way Jesus leads her to not another *religion* but to true *faith*—faith in the one who indeed is of Jewish origin (Jesus was, of course, a Jew)—yet one who transcends religion—including that of the Jews.

To a Jew, Jesus’ implication that worship would no longer be limited to the Jewish temple would be unthinkable. This shocking statement ties in with John 2:19–21 and Stephen’s statement in Acts 7:48–50. John’s Gospel reveals that in Jesus there is a new sacrifice (1:29), a new temple (2:19–21; 4:20–24), a new birth (3:1–7), and a new water (4:11). In Jesus the Old Covenant Law (the Law of Moses) is fulfilled and set aside. And now, for Jew or Samaritan, or Gentile, the way of Jesus—the *true* religion—is in the spirit of Jesus and according to the one truth that is Jesus. Worship is not about days, or places or rituals. It’s spiritual and is centered on Jesus.

d. Jesus "the Christ" (25–30)

²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he." ²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

In spite of her ignorance, there was one truth this woman did know: the Messiah was coming and would reveal the secrets of hearts (the Samaritans referred to the Messiah as ‘the revealer’). This seed of understanding had

been buried in her heart until that hour, and now it was going to bear fruit. Our Lord's response was, literally: "I that speak to thee, *I Am!*" He dared to utter the holy name of God ('I Am'), thus clearly stating that he was God. It is at this point that the story reaches its climactic point. Here the woman comes to faith – she surrenders to Jesus and believes in him. He indeed is the Christ (the Messiah) of God.

Immediately (verse 28) she wanted to share her new understanding and faith with others, so she returned into her village and told the men she had met the Christ. Her knowledge and faith were limited, but God used her simple testimony, and many came out to the well to meet Jesus. Jewish rabbis of Jesus day said, "It is better that the words of the Law be burned than be delivered to a woman!" But Jesus did not agree with that narrow prejudice. Here a woman (and a Samaritan woman at that!) is used of God as an evangelist.

2. The disciples (John 4:31–38)

31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." 33 Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" 34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. 37 Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. 38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

When the disciples returned from obtaining food, they were shocked that Jesus was conversing with a woman, and especially a Samaritan; but they did not interrupt. They were learning that their Master knew what he was

doing and did not need their counsel. But, after the woman left, they urged Jesus to share the meal with them, because they knew that he was hungry.

“I have food to eat that you know nothing about” was his reply and, as usual, they did not understand. They thought he was speaking of literal food, and they wondered where he got it. Then he explained that doing the Father’s will—in this case, leading the woman to salvation—was true nourishment for his soul. The disciples were satisfied with bread, but his satisfaction was in accomplishing the Father’s work. “I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy Law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:8).

Jesus then changed the image from food to harvest, the source of the food. He quoted a familiar Jewish proverb about waiting for the harvest, and then pointed to the villagers even then coming out to the well to meet him, thanks to the testimony of the woman.

The image of the harvest is a familiar one in the Bible, often applied to the ministry of winning the lost. Both the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:1–30) relate to this theme, and Paul used it in his letters (Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 3:6–9; Gal. 6:9). It involves *eternal CPR*: We *cultivate* by our love and prayers; we then *plant* the seed of God’s Word in the hearts of people who hear it; in due time, we will *reap* the fruit of a follower of Jesus who has come to faith.

No doubt the disciples had said, as they approached the city of Sychar, “There can be no harvest here! These people despise us Jews and would have no use for our message.” But just the opposite was true: the harvest was ready and only needed faithful workers to claim it. For some reason, when it comes to witnessing for Christ, it is always the wrong time and the wrong place! It takes faith to cultivate and to plant, and we must do it even when the circumstances look discouraging. Remember Ecclesiastes 11:4 and be willing to extend God’s love through eternal CPR even when circumstances don’t seem favorable.

John 4:38 hints that others had labored in Samaria to prepare this harvest. We do not know who these faithful workers were, nor do we need to know; for God will reward them. Some archeologists believe that “Aenon near Salim” where John baptized (3:23) was close to Sychar and Jacob’s well. If this is the case, it may have been John the Baptist who cultivated and planted, and Jesus and the disciples reaped. The Samaritan woman had a big part too.

Jesus’ disciples were learning a valuable lesson that would encourage them in the years to come. They were not alone in the work of the Lord, and they must never look on any opportunity for witness as wasted time and energy. It takes faith to cultivate and plant, but God has promised a harvest (Ps. 126:5, 6; Gal. 6:9). In a few years, Peter and John would participate in another harvest among the Samaritans (Acts 8:5–25). Those who sow may not see the harvest, but those who reap will see it and give thanks for the faithful labors of the sowers.

3. The Samaritans (John 4:39–42)

39 Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. 41 And because of his words many more became believers. 42 They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

Many of the Samaritans believed because of the testimony of the woman, and many more believed when they heard Jesus personally. So excited were they that they begged him to stay and he stayed for two days. During that short time, his word produced fruit in their lives. “Now we know!” was their happy testimony. And note too that they proclaimed Jesus to be “the Savior of the world”. They had been converted only a few days, but they already had a missionary vision! In fact, their vision was wider than that of the Apostles! Here John is telegraphing the scope of the great commission:

“And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

4. The nobleman (John 4:43–54)

43 After the two days he left for Galilee. 44 (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) 45 When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there. 46 Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. 47 When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. 48 "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." 49 The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." 50 Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed. 51 While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. 52 When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour." 53 Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed. 54 This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.

Our Lord continued on to Galilee his home. There he visited Cana—perhaps to continue planting where previously he had cultivated through the miracle of turning water to wine. Jesus was met there by a nobleman from Capernaum, some twenty miles away. The man had heard about Jesus’ miracles and came a long distance to intercede for his son who was dying. The first miraculous ‘sign’ at Cana came at the request of Jesus’ mother, and this second miracle at Cana at the request of a father.

Was this ‘royal official’ a Jew or a Gentile? We do not know. Nor do we know his exact position in the government. He may have been a member of Herod’s court; but whatever his national or social standing, he was clearly at wit’s end and desperately needed the help of the Savior. He “begged him” to travel to Capernaum to heal his son.

Verse 48 is not a rebuke of this nobleman. Rather, it was our Lord’s lament at the spiritual condition of the people in general, both in Judea and Galilee. “Seeing is believing” has always been the “pragmatic” philosophy of the lost world, even the religious world. The nobleman believed that Jesus could heal his son, but he made two mistakes in his thinking: that Jesus had to go to Capernaum to save the lad, and that if the boy died meanwhile, it was too late.

However, we must admire the nobleman’s faith. Jesus simply said, “You may go. Your son will live” (4:50). And the man believed Jesus and started to return home! Both the Samaritan woman and this nobleman must have rejoiced the heart of Jesus as they believed his word and acted on it.

The boy was healed the instant Jesus spoke those words; so the man’s servants started out to find him so they could share the good news. (Again, it is the servants who know what is going on. See John 2:9; 15:15.) When the father and the servants met the next day, their report confirmed his faith. This man began with *crisis faith*. He was about to lose his son and he had no other recourse but the Lord Jesus Christ. Many people came to Jesus with their crises, and He did not turn them away. The nobleman’s crisis faith became *confident* faith: he believed the Word and had peace in his heart. His confident faith became *confirmed* faith. Indeed, the boy had been completely healed! And the healing took place at the very time when Jesus spoke the Word. It was this fact that made a believer out of the nobleman and his household. He believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God; and he shared this faith with his family. He had *contagious* faith and shared his experience with others.

Conclusion

What a journey. What a Savior! He is the Son of God, the Messiah—the Savior of **all** men and women, Jew and Greek – from the least to the greatest. **All** are invited to receive him in faith as fully God and fully human, the Son of God sent for our salvation. Receive him; worship him in spirit and in truth. And share him with others. The harvest is ready to reap.

Sermon Series is provided by Ted Johnston via the Senior Pastor Team of Tom and Alberta Ecker to assist ... in Bible studies in series covering books of the Bible.

This issue continues a series in the gospel of John with material from *The Bible Expository Commentary* by Warren Wiersbe, *The New Bible Commentary*, *The Parable of Joy* by Michael Card, and *The Gospel of John* by F.F. Bruce.

GROWING in our RELATIONSHIP with the TRIUNE GOD

Relate ... Ask (or compare) ... Pray

John 4:1-5 "Jacob's Well"

What time of day was the sixth hour?

John 4:7-10 "If You Knew the Gift of God"

What is the "gift of God"?

John 4:11-15 "Give Me This Water"

Compare with Matthew 5:6.

John 4:16-26 "Worship in Spirit and Truth"

What does this tell you about worship?

John 4:27-42 "Ripe for Harvesting"

Compare this with 1 Corinthians 3:6-9.

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John 4:43-54 "Your Son Will Live"

How far is it from Cana to Capernaum?

Please see the Sermon Series Study Guide: John #5

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