

**Lessons for Our Lives from
Jesus' Encounter with the Samaritan Woman
Sermon based on John 4: 4-26, 39-42
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
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Introduction: We Can Use Direction Telling Others About Jesus

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Amen.

Dear fellow earnest Christian souls:

It's been a few years now – more than an eighth of a century anyhow – that I've been privileged to preach to you, to serve you, and to get to know you. It's long enough for me to know that very generally very many of you are very serious Christians. It shows when you are regularly at worship, and it shows in your day to day lives. It also shows in the fact that you really do want to tell others about Jesus—their Savior, too.

That's hard, though, isn't it? I mean: you don't know whether your efforts will meet with "success". You don't know what the reaction will be. You're not sure you're expressing things exactly rightly. You maybe hardly know where to begin. So, you can use some direction, and we need a lot of extra motivation to overcome our anxieties.

God's Word to us today provides exactly such direction and motivation. It's the account of Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman in John chapter four. The story is rather long, and the time is quite short; so, we'll get started right away....

Part One: The Samaritan Woman Was Sinful, and So Are We

It was early in the three years of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was, with his disciples, down in Judea, near the Jordan River. And then, we read – and this is God's Word to us today – ***Now he had to go through Samaria.*** Samaria was the area between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north, where Jesus would do most of his ministry. And actually, geographically, he didn't have to go through Samaria. But for the sake of lots of Samaritan souls, he did.

So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar – kind of right in the middle of the ancient land of Israel – ***near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph*** – the tribe of Joseph's son, Manasseh, had settled right there long ago. ***Jacob's well was there*** – they've identified it; it was about a hundred feet deep; and in a land like Israel, where it was dry much of the year, these wells were absolutely critical for the life of the people. ***And Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.*** I want to say that this was Roman time, rather than Jewish time. And so, it was six in the evening, and Jesus had traveled all day long.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water – probably with a clay jar and a rope – ***Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)***

The request – ***"Will you give me a drink?"*** – seems ever so understandable. But it wasn't, and the woman knew it. ***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.)*** And rabbis didn't usually bother with women either. You see, the Jewish people rightly considered the Samaritans to be of an entirely different religion—really, a lot like the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses are to us. And rabbis wrongly didn't consider women to be worth bothering with. Jesus, of course, was different. He treasured all people of both genders—& has taught us well to do the same.

So, Jesus addressed this woman's soul. *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."* Both Jeremiah and Zechariah had described the true Lord and his gospel in terms of living water—as Jesus was doing here.

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" she scoffed. *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?"* she scoffed still further.

But he persevered, and *Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again – because it quenches physical thirst – but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst – because the good news of rescue through Jesus quenches spiritual thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life"* – because that's what a relationship to Jesus Christ means to a person.

And she was convinced – still a little clueless – but convinced. *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."*

And Jesus proceeded to give her the living, lifegiving water of his gospel message. But first, he had to get her thirsting for the right thing. He had to get her to understand her sinfulness and how parched her soul was for a Savior.

So, *He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." – "I have no husband," she replied. – Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 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."*

Whoa! Does that ever tell us a lot! First, Jesus is God, and knows all things, right? Second, what he knows about this woman is that she had run herself through five husbands; clearly, something was wrong: her commitment to marriage, or her impossibility to live with, or something. And now, she's living with a guy who is not her husband. And all sex outside of marriage is sin, and continually living in such a relationship is wallowing in sin, and it's kind of a constant rebellion against God and a rejection of his Word—a very dangerous practicing oneself in unbelief.

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." The woman is changing the subject. She doesn't like to hear about her sinful failures. So, she changes the topic, but Jesus doesn't get off subject; he uses the new topic to show her anew her sinful failures.

You see, the Samaritans had sinfully chosen their own way to please God. It included worship on nearby Mount Gerazim. But God had chosen his way righteously to meet with people—especially the people of Israel. It took place on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, *Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem."*

And he further explains: *You Samaritans worship what you do not know – that's why you worship here – we worship what we do know – that's why we worship God where he said we should – for salvation is from the Jews.*

And he continues: *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. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."* On the one hand, Jesus is setting up God's present way of doing things in the New Testament—that people don't need to go at set times to a temple in Jerusalem to worship the Lord, but rather can worship him at all times and in all places on the basis of his Word. On other other hand, Jesus is still showing the woman that she needs to thirst for his rescuing gospel message, because she has been clueless in regard to it.

Now, all of that is the first big chunk of today's account, and it does a good job giving us motivation to reach others with the gospel. We want to tell others about Jesus, because we – and they – need him as desperately as did this Samaritan woman.

This Samaritan woman was a foreigner to Jesus; we are, by nature, foreigners to God. This Samaritan woman was utterly clueless—about the living water, and about the true Lord; by nature, we're in exactly the same predicament. This Samaritan woman was an obvious sinner; in her case, she trashed God's holy institution of matrimony. We also are obvious sinners; probably, in our sinful souls, we trash marriage and sin sexually; certainly, in our sinful souls, our sinfulness raises God's wrath. And this Samaritan woman was idolatrous; she had her own, self-chosen way to get right with God. And by nature, you and I would think ourselves good enough to find his favor also.

And by the way, finally, that's what we've got to share with anyone to whom we'd like to proclaim the Savior. They're failures, too. At least, they're going to die. At least, they don't feel perfect. Probably, they've got some obvious sins. And possibly, there are some of those they're not even attempting to hide, which you could point out.

Part Two: Jesus Is Savior of the World, and Also Our Savior

Of course, the story doesn't stop there. So far, the woman and we and others are condemned. Now, Jesus has got to get us recovered...

The woman may have been getting frustrated that she couldn't "defeat" this man in conversation. She may have been showing her desperation, when we read: *The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."* The woman might have been trying to conclude the conversation by saying, "Jesus, these things are simply too difficult for people like you and me to resolve. Maybe the Great Teacher, the Messiah or Christ, will explain them.

She must have nearly fainted, when *Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."*

...Well, the woman runs off to tell the townspeople that they've got to come and meet Jesus. And: *Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days—long enough for God himself to do some serious instructing, anyway. And because of his words many more became believers.* Jesus must have explained to these Samaritans that everything they believed from the first five books of the Bible was true and fulfilled in him. Jesus no doubt explained to them that they needed to trust the other thirty-four books of the Old Testament. Jesus needed to explain to them their sins, also—and the fact that he wasn't simply a teacher, but rather the Savior.

As a result: *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."*

And he's our Savior, too, and the Savior of every living soul these days, too, and that gives us great motivation to tell others about Jesus.

You see, there's not a sin of ours for which Jesus didn't die. For our adultery and for our idolatry, for our cluelessness and for all our wickedness, Jesus suffered the penalty God had issued upon us. Jesus went through hell and died. And there's not another soul for whom that's not true. In fact, even for our inherited inborn inclination to evil, right inside our very chromosomes and genetic structure, Jesus suffered the penalty. And that's true also for every other soul.

And when he rose from the dead, Jesus promised to make this flawed body & soul a perfectly holy body & soul eternally—a promise which you have to offer also to others.

Conclusion: We Have Received Direction to Tell Others About Jesus

And that's the end of the account.... So, how does this help you to tell others about their Savior? Well, chiefly, you have all the motivation you need to get over the possible rejection or uncertainty that you feel.

Besides, you have a great example in your Savior here. First of all, obviously, Jesus was an expert in God's Word. And although every Christian knows enough in order to be a witness for Christ, the more you know – the more expert you become! – the more comfortable you will be in proclaiming Jesus. So, learn his Word!

Secondly, you need to strike up a conversation, as Jesus did. Bad news from the television or newspaper may be your opportunity to say to a friend, “Yep, it's our reminder that there's sin in the world—sin for which Christ will judge the world, and sin from which Jesus will rescue us.” Or an acquaintance's death may be your opportunity to say, “Yep, it's our reminder that we need to be ready – through faith in Jesus Christ – when God calls us home also.”

Third, like Jesus, you need to focus on God's Law against our sin and God's Gospel to overcome our sin. And you've got to connect people regularly to God's Word. Church and Bible Information Class are excellent opportunities to do that.

And then, finally, be prepared to be surprised at the results of your witnessing. Sometimes – wonder of wonders! – God the Holy Spirit reaches the most unreachable people: through us. I mean: who'd have thought that a very sinful woman in Samaria, along with her townspeople, were good prospects for Christ...?

Then again, who'd have thought that wretches like you and me would get to know Jesus either? And thank God: we have! Amen.

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.