

LESSON 11

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

In John 4, we have the story of Jesus teaching a woman from the city of Samaria. This city is located between Galilee, where Jesus did most of His teaching, and Jerusalem. The Jews in Galilee needed to make this journey when attending feasts at the temple. However, the Jews hated the Samaritans, and they would bypass Samaria, if at all possible. They wanted no contact with these people.

The history of the Samaritan people is a possible clue to why they did not get along with the Jews. The city of Samaria was captured by Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria. The people were put into captivity. People from various countries were placed in Samaria, and they brought idolatrous worship with them. The rich and strong people were carried away from Samaria, and that left the poor and weak to inhabit Samaria along with the heathens. The people intermarried, and they became a mixed race with a mixed religion. The city became a refuge for any Jew who was dissatisfied with life among the Jewish people. In time, the hostility grew and still existed during Jesus' time on earth.

John 4 begins with Jesus learning that the Pharisees were becoming aware that His disciples were baptizing more than the disciples of John. John makes it clear in verse 2 that Jesus did not baptize anyone Himself. Seeing the problem, Jesus left to return to Galilee. He did not go around Samaria, as most of the Jews did, but rather went through Samaria.

Located, probably at the edge of the city of Sychar, was Jacob's well. Jesus was tired from His trip, and He sent His disciples to buy food in the city. It was the sixth hour of the day, about noon. He sat down beside the well to rest.

As Jesus was resting, a woman came to draw water. Because she was a Samaritan, she did not expect this Jewish man to speak to her, much less ask her for a drink. However, that is just what Jesus did. The woman did not hesitate to respond in a very straightforward way. She said, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" Imagine her surprise when Jesus said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." She responds with the fact that He has nothing with which to draw water. Then she wants to know where He might get living water. The woman's continued response is a defense of her people's heritage and their descent from Jacob (the one who dug this well). She, in

this way, claims kinship with Jesus because He is offering water (which she still thinks of as physical water) just as Jacob provided it by digging the well.

Jesus then begins His explanation of this water. He tells her that if she drinks this water, she will never be thirsty again. It will be a spring of water that will become a fountain building up to eternal life. The woman's response is, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to draw water."

Jesus gives her the first "drink" of this living water. He tells her to go bring her husband. She tells him that she has no husband, and Jesus replies that she is correct. She does not have a husband; the five men she has had were not her mates; and the man she is living with is not her husband. In other words, she has been married five times and is now living in an adulterous relationship; she also had no right to her previous relationships.

It appears that Jesus has touched this woman. She cannot lie to Him. She is standing before Him convicted of her sins. We can almost see her drop her head and say, "I have no husband." There is another possibility. She might have said she did not have a husband to try to deceive this Jew. After all, what business was it of His concerning who she might have lived with or was living with at the present time?

The Samaritan woman then declares that Jesus must be a prophet. She relates how her ancestors worshiped in "this mountain," and she knows that the Jews say Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship. Mount Gerizim was the mountain to which she referred. There is much we could say about this mountain and the Old Testament history, but for this study we can simply say that the Samaritans believed one thing about the place to worship, and the Jews believed another. Jesus' answer to this is that in a short time, neither will be the commanded place of worship.

Just as a point of interest for this lesson, the Samaritans did not accept the writings of the prophets. They lived by the Law. Here Jesus is giving her information that will put aside both the Jewish view and the Samaritan view of worship, completely discounting the beliefs of both about the necessity of worshiping in a particular place.

Jesus, in verse 24, gives this woman the truth about worship. He tells her that God is spirit. Those that worship God, the spirit, must worship him in spirit and in truth. In this statement, Jesus emphasizes that God is to be the object of worship and the

only acceptable object. This verse shows that not all worship is acceptable to God. When we worship in ways that are not commanded, we are not worshipping in truth. When we worship something or someone other than God, we are not worshipping in spirit. We cannot worship an image, another being (such as angels), a doctrine, another human, or any creed and be acceptable to God. This verse says it all.

The Samaritan woman then reveals that she knows about the coming of a Messiah, one called Christ. This Messiah will tell all things. Imagine her surprise when Jesus reveals, “I that speak unto thee am he” (verse 26).

At this point, the disciples return and interrupt the conversation. They were surprised that Jesus was talking with this woman, but none of them had the courage to ask Jesus about her.

The woman took advantage of this interruption, left her waterpot, and went into the city. She started relating to anyone who would listen that they should come with her and see a man “which told me all things that ever I did.” She then suggests that this man is the Christ. The people follow her back to the well.

While the woman was in the city, the disciples were trying to get Jesus to eat. Jesus declares to them His purpose. He says, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (verse 34). He also declares the field is white to harvest. Jesus wants them to look around and see souls everywhere that need to be taught.

The harvest was certainly white in the city of Sychar. Many of the Samaritans believed Jesus based on the things He said to the woman. Many believed because of what Jesus said. They begged Him to stay with them, and He stayed two days.

In future lessons, we will see the mention of Samaritans. The story of the Good Samaritan and the Ten Lepers are two events that the Lord used to show that the Samaritan people were worthy to receive His teaching and His miracles.

FOR DISCUSSION: WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THE LESSON?

1. Discuss how Jesus’ conversation with this woman sets an example for us in dealing with someone who has committed the sin of adultery.
2. What does the church have to offer someone who is *living in sin*?
3. What do you think made the Samaritans return with the woman to the well?
4. What is significant about Jesus staying two days with the Samaritans?

5. How can women serve the church without taking leadership roles?