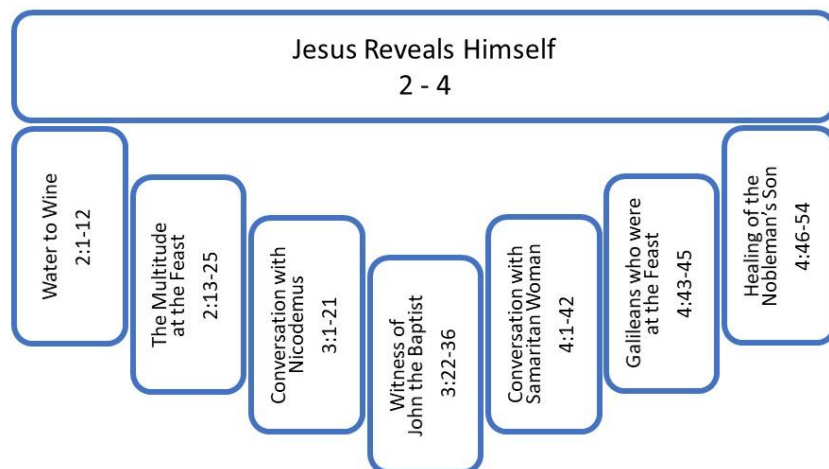


Lesson 7: John 4:1-26 Conversation with a Samaritan Woman, part 1

Introduction



“There came a woman of Samaria to draw water.” That is our introduction to the woman who became famous because of her conversation with Jesus at a well in her hometown. John sets this woman in contrast to the man we encountered at the beginning of chapter 3, “Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to him by night.”

There is significant similarity between the two stories. Both stories describe Jesus dialoguing with a single person. In both, Jesus introduces the topic of internal, spiritual regeneration. And in both Jesus uses water as a metaphor for regeneration. Those are the similarities. The differences are striking.

The gender of the two persons is different. The race is different. The religion is different. The moral position is different. The social behavior is different. And the response is different. In all of these differences, but one, Nicodemus has the advantage over the woman at the well. Let’s consider each of these six differences briefly to get the full impact of the contrast.

Gender

Starting with gender, Jesus should not be talking with the woman. “He who prolongs conversation with a woman brings evil on himself, ceases with the words of the Law and receives on himself Gehenna [which is Hell].” That’s from a rabbinic source. The strictest Pharisees would walk with heads down to prevent looking at a woman. Jesus consistently breaks this prejudice, clearly he breaks it here with the Samaritan woman and also, later in the Gospel in conversations with Mary and Martha and Mary Magdalene. But from the accepted cultural point of view, advantage number one goes to Nicodemus, simply because he is a man.

Race

Nicodemus is also a Jew. The Samaritans are not fully Jew and not fully Gentile. They are mixed blood. In the 8th century B. C., the Assyrians demolished the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In accordance with their strategy to disorient subjugated peoples, the Assyrian conquerors deported the majority of the Jewish population from the North and imported other defeated peoples into Israel. These peoples intermarried with the poor remnant of Jews left who were left, so the Samaritans of Jesus day were looked down on by Jews as mixed race.

Religion

Jews also looked down on Samaritans for their religious adaptation. Samaritans practiced a form of Yahweh worship, accepting the first five books of the Jewish Bible but only the first five books. Along with other religious beliefs and practices developed on top of these select biblical books, the Samaritans also built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, that was around 400 BC. Jewish animosity against Samaritan religious innovation was exemplified by the Jewish leader John Hyrcanus who destroyed that Samaritan temple about 150 years before this conversation Jesus was having with the

woman. In contrast to the woman, Nicodemus is by race a member of the chosen people and by religion a highly committed Jew, a Pharisee. He is very well educated in Bible and theology. He is a teacher. The woman is at best only familiar with the folk religion of her misguided people.

Moral

There is also a moral difference. As a Pharisee Nicodemus is presumed to be highly religious not only in his beliefs but also in his moral behavior. The Pharisees were respected for putting into practice the law of Moses. Whereas, this woman has been married five times and is living with a man who is not her husband. D. A. Carson writes, “Rabbinic opinion disapproved more than three marriages, even though they were legally permissible; no body of religious opinion approved common law marriages.”¹

Social

Finally, concerning social position, Nicodemus has it and the woman does not. As a member of the ruling counsel in Jerusalem, Nicodemus is at the top of society both politically and probably also monetarily. The woman is towards the bottom of society. This is probably suggested by John when he points out she came to the well alone in the heat of the day. She draws her own water, nobody helps her, at a time when no one else would be there.

The contrast between the two is huge and every factor lies on the side of Nicodemus. Jesus has every reason to talk to him. Jesus has no business at all speaking to the Samaritan woman. Nicodemus could enhance Jesus’ reputation. With the woman, he is in danger of staining it.

Considering the influence and position of Nicodemus, something that stands out to me is that Jesus did not make any apparent attempt to win Nicodemus over politically or religiously. Jesus’ challenged Nicodemus in regard to the core issue of the gospel. If Jesus had come to set up the Davidic Kingdom on earth, why would he not work to develop positive relationship with insider, somebody like Nicodemus. He is not hostile. He could be of use to Jesus. But in his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus shows no thought about doors Nicodemus could potentially open. And he is also not worried about doors Nicodemus might potentially shut. Jesus seems to be quite free from any allure of Nicodemus’ political and religious influence. Jesus does not treat Nicodemus as a means to a greater end. Jesus sees Nicodemus as a man in need; a man who needs to see God; a man whose religion has left him in the dark; a man who needs to be born again.

And here in Samaria at the well, what does Jesus see here? Does he see an untaught, unworthy, morally lacking Samaritan woman unable to understand, unworthy of his great teaching? No. He sees a daughter who needs to come home; an immortal soul who needs to drink from the waters of eternal life; a precious woman made in the image of God, worthy of his time and attention. Jesus saw Nicodemus as he truly is. Jesus sees this woman as she truly is. And in the end, considering all of these piled up differences, all in the plus column for Nicodemus, we come to the most startling difference of all. While Nicodemus is unable to go where Jesus leads, this simple, Samaritan woman with shaky morals and no religious training, sees and believes and immediately becomes a witness for Jesus Christ. She does more work of eternal lasting value on this one day, than Nicodemus had done in his entire life.

Let’s walk through the story. I am going to focus only on the conversation with the woman in this lesson. We will leave the response of the disciples and the villagers for our next lesson. I will read the introduction to the passage first, and then, after that we will read the dialogue. The introduction is 4:1-6.

Transition and Context (4:1-6)

¹ Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ² (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), ³ He left Judea and went away again into Galilee. ⁴ And He had to pass through Samaria.

¹ D. A. Carson. *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel according to John*. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991) 221.

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

The first two verses transition us away from the ministry time in Judea. Not only were John's disciples aware of the growing movement surrounding Jesus, the Pharisees were, too. Several times in the Gospel we get references to this balancing act Jesus so wisely conducts. At the wedding he cautioned his mother about pushing him into public action. We have also commented on Jesus' avoidance of using the terms Christ and Son of God for himself, preferring instead the ambiguous term Son of Man. Jesus is not afraid of conflict with Jewish leaders. Jesus is not afraid of death. He is maintaining control of his ministry, not allowing the opposition opportunity to act against him. Jesus is in control.

Jesus decides now to move away from the center of power in Jerusalem and go back to his home area of Galilee. To do so he must pass through Samaria. Samaria was the capital city of the former Northern Kingdom. It is still a city, but also the name of the whole region right at the center of the ancient Israel. And John is simply stating the geographic reality in verse 4 when he comments that to move from Judea in the South to Galilee in the North Jesus had to pass through Samaria. I have heard preachers say that a good, religious Jew would refuse to travel through Samaria. I think I have even said that myself. They would instead go around it. But I have not been able to verify that claim, as I have been looking into it for this lesson. I don't know of any contemporary sources from the day of Jesus that confirm that. D. A. Carson quotes Josephus to indicate that, though the antipathy between Jews and Samaritans was strong, Jews still preferred to take the shorter route through Samaria just as Jesus does here.²

On his way through Samaria, Jesus comes to Sychar, a town by Mount Gerizim. It is the sixth hour which, counting from six in the morning as the first hour, is 12:00. It is noon. Tired from the journey, showing his humanity, Jesus sits by the village well as his disciples go into Sychar for food. Now we are ready to pick up the conversation. Let's read it in full and then go back through it. This is John 4:7-26.

The Conversation (4:7-26)

⁷ There came a woman of Samaria to draw water.

Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." ⁸ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

⁹ Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

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."

¹¹ She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? ¹² You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?"

¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw."

¹⁶ He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here."

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

Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."

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

² Carson, 216.

²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

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

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

I am going to consider this conversation from the perspective of gospel witness. What do we notice about how Jesus communicates the good news to this woman? There is a lot to notice here. I am going to be emphasizing four points.

- 1) Jesus took the initiative.
- 2) Jesus was more concerned with the woman than with his own image.
- 3) Jesus showed her the respect of human dignity.
- 4) Jesus told her the truth.

We start with the fact that Jesus took the initiative.

1) Jesus took the initiative (4:7-8).

You can imagine a situation where you are alone and someone approaches, something about the person makes you uncomfortable. They are from a different racial group. Or they speak a different language. Or they are wearing some kind of foreign clothing. Or they are from a poorer class. You don't feel completely comfortable with their presence. Do you initiate a conversation with them?

Jesus does. And he does not just say, “Good afternoon.” Or, “God be with you.” Or any standard greeting. If he did, he would likely have received a look, a nod, or a formal response with no expectation of any further conversation. Interestingly, Jesus initiates conversation by asking for something. He puts himself in the place of need. He needs something from the woman. She understands his need. He is tired and thirsty and has nothing to draw water with.

The question does not strike the woman as odd, but the questioner sure does. She immediately points out the incongruity of Jesus' request. He ought not be speaking to her. It is not appropriate. And that brings out my second point. Jesus was more concerned with the woman than with his own image.

2) Jesus was more concerned with the woman than with his own image (4:9)

She says, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?” We have already made a whole list of reasons Jesus should not be talking to her at all from a cultural point of view. She sums it up with two words “Samaritan woman.” Jews consider Samaritan's unclean like Gentiles, but even worse, they have perverted the Scriptures to affirm their own cultural aspirations. Jews do not deal with Samaritans.

And a good, religious Jewish man should not be speaking with a woman by himself in a public place. Yes, maybe he has a valid reason, wanting water and having nothing to draw with. But cultural convention should prohibit such a request. Jesus can wait for his disciples to return. He cannot be that thirsty. This is just inappropriate.

What is the woman supposed to think? What would she think? If you are a woman, what would you think? Let's say you are walking up to a bench in a public place, a square, or a park, or a bus stop, and no one else is around except this one man, about your own age, sitting there. You come up, obviously minding your own business. And the man speaks to you. What do you think? What thought comes to mind? Why is this man breaking social convention to initiate conversation with you?

What do you think is the first thought that came to the Samaritan woman's mind? Remember, she has had five husbands and now lives with a man not her husband. She has experience with men. What do men want from her? What has been her experience? What do imagine she thinks this Jewish man wants?

I can't help but think there is some sexual tension here from her point of view. It may be quite low at this point, but she has to wonder about a strange Jewish man initiating conversation with her.

Not only does Jesus not seem to be concerned with how anyone else might view him when he initiates this conversation, Jesus does not seem concerned at all with how the woman might view him. He is not going to stay quiet just because she might misjudge his intentions, just because there might be some uncomfortableness or weirdness. He is not asking for water for his sake. He is asking for water for her sake. He is giving her an opportunity to hear truly good news.

To be honest, this is a huge obstacle for me against sharing the good news of Jesus with other people. What will they think of me? And I know it is irrational. I have words of eternal life to share. What does it matter what somebody thinks of me? What does it matter if they think I am a little impolite or a little odd or they wonder what I am doing striking up a conversation? I mean, really, why does it matter if they think I am strange, talking about Jesus. It should not matter. I know it shouldn't matter. And still, there is this significant emotional barrier in me that resists initiating conversation with people I do not know. And I do not see that here with Jesus when all social convention would tell him, "Just pretend she is not there. Just ignore her." Jesus doesn't ignore her. Jesus ignores all the social convention about gender and race and religion and moral behavior and social standing. He is not concerned with his own image. He is concerned with this woman's need for a Savior.

I also see Jesus in his concern treating the woman with respect. That's my third point. He showed her the respect of human dignity.

3) Jesus showed her the respect of human dignity (4:10-15)

Human dignity is grounded in the belief that all men and women are created equal in the image of God. Jesus knows this to be true. And so, he enters into back and forth conversation with this Samaritan woman in very much the same way he did with Nicodemus. Jesus chooses different themes to fit the person he is speaking with. But I cannot discern that he treats one with any more or less respect than the other.

After she says, "How is it that you ask me for a drink?" Jesus responds, "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."

Jesus is not talking to this woman about the Kingdom of God or about being born again. That language spoke better to a Pharisee. Jesus talks to this woman about water to drink. His metaphor fits the person and the situation around the well. In the end, it is the same message. Both Nicodemus and this woman need internal spiritual regeneration which comes as a gift of God through belief in Jesus. It is the same message. It is just communicated with different terms appropriate to the person who needs to receive the message.

Jesus' statement is intriguing and a little enigmatic. He does not start right off preaching to the woman. The statement he makes draws her into conversation.

Similar to how Nicodemus took Jesus' metaphor literally and asked Jesus how a person can be born again from the same mother, so also, this woman takes Jesus' metaphor about the water literally, responding to him with the question,

Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?

Notice that Jesus did not first say that he would give her eternal water or eternal life. He said, "living water." And we probably hear that as something spiritual. But living water has a very literal meaning. It can just mean running or moving water, a stream or a river, very valuable in this part of the world as opposed to well water or a cistern. Living, running water is preferable to well water, which can be stagnate or can be used up. The well can go dry. The woman takes Jesus as saying he has the ability

to provide better water than this well. In a dry, agrarian society that is a pretty impressive even audacious claim. Water is valuable and hard to come by.

Showing some local pride, the woman points out the value of this particular well, which happens to be famous. Jesus must not know where he is. He needs to be educated. She is suggesting something like this, “The well you see here was dug by Jacob himself, 1800 years ago. Jacob’s sons, the fathers of the twelve tribes, and all their livestock drank at this here well. It did not run dry for them. It has not run dry for 18 centuries. And you claim to be able to give me something better?” I like how, in her retort to Jesus, she emphasizes the importance of her hometown well and in doing so also points out that Samaritans have a claim that goes all the way back to the patriarchs. “You Jews may look down on us, but our lineage and history goes as far back as yours does.” There is a bit of ethnic pride in her response. There is also a bit of irony since the true answer to her question is, “Yes. As a matter of fact, I am much greater than Jacob. Supremely greater than Jacob.” But Jesus does not say that. He keeps that in. He does not judge her or treat her with contempt.

Instead, he answers her by pressing on with his metaphor,

Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.

Now that is something new. Jesus is not claiming to provide a better source of water. He is claiming to provide better water, something on a different order. He is talking about removing that thirst down in the soul. And this woman certainly thirsts. She has had five husbands and is living with a man not her husband. She knows that life leaves you wanting. There is a yearning in the heart of every person, a craving for satisfaction, a sense that there must be something more, a God-shaped vacuum, a thirst for eternity. Jesus speaks to the thirst that he knows to exist within her.

The woman either is not able to follow Jesus, yet, or she does not want to give him any outward indication that she is following him. She responds literally again, as though Jesus is still really talking about water, even though he said eternal life, “Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw.”

Jesus then changes direction. He does something both painful and merciful. He presses his finger onto the wound in her soul. He forces her moral failure into the light to bring her need to the surface.

This is tricky in evangelistic conversation. To need a savior, a person must admit their own failure. And it is not always easy to help them see that. If you have no need, you need no help. My next point is going to be that Jesus told her the truth. But I am not yet ready to leave this point that Jesus showed her the respect of human dignity. We need to recognize the connection between the two, between respect and truth, because it is possible to speak truth with respect but also possible to speak truth with disrespect.

Jesus speaks truth. And it is painful truth. But it is not spoken with judgment or condescension. Jesus speaks truthfully about the moral failure the woman needs to own before she can see her savior. I believe this is an act of respect for the dignity of this woman as a human being. Jesus treats her as a moral agent created in the image of God. He does this both speaking to her about her moral failure and speaking to her later about her incorrect religious views.

He respects her enough to correct her, to disagree with her. And that may sound like disrespect to you, but if so, that is probably because modern culture takes the wrongheaded opinion that disagreement is somehow also disrespect. In Jesus’ day, a religious teacher was not supposed to spend his time teaching women. Women could not grasp moral and theological truth like a man. Their place was to obey what their husband told them. Teach the husband, and he would tell the woman how to behave and what to believe.

We see Jesus rejecting that idea of women here in his conversation. He treats her with dignity as though she has the potential to discern right from wrong herself, both in regard to morality and in

regard to doctrine. Jesus is giving her the opportunity to take responsibility for her own moral behavior and her own understanding of truth. He treats her as a moral person with her own intellect and her own will.

There is a difference between someone who disagrees with your ideas and someone who scorns you as a person. You can hear in the words and voice when someone communicates to you with sarcasm and condescension and judgement. I don't detect that hear in this dialogue from Jesus. He is not putting the woman down. He is not putting the woman down. He is disagreeing with her and giving her a chance to respond to his claim about truth. Recognizing the respectful way that Jesus speaks leads us to the fourth point. Jesus told her the truth.

4) *Jesus told her the truth (4:16-26).*

As I have said, Jesus reveals both moral truth and doctrinal truth. We start with moral truth. Jesus presses in on her woundedness to get her to pay attention to what he is telling her. Jesus brings her need to light. It is truth about her. At the same time, Jesus' statement also helps her to see something of the truth about him. He is no ordinary man. He sees things he should not see. He knows what he should not know.

¹⁶ He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here."

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

Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."

Quite understandably, the woman first tells Jesus, "I have no husband." She does not want to volunteer her life situation to this stranger. Why would she admit to him her failing? She does not lie. She also does not tell the whole truth. No matter. Jesus does not need her to. He knows what is in the heart of man and woman.

Whatever her life story it has contained much sadness, too much sadness and loss. It would be wrong to assume the woman is responsible for the failure of all her earlier marriages. We do not have enough information to go on. All four husbands could have died. Or she could have been divorced. Or a mix of the two; some could have died, some could have ended in divorce. We do not need to know all that. We know it has been hard. And we know that she is currently living with a man outside of marriage. We expect she is living under the shame of her situation. It seems that is why John points out she came to the well alone at noon. She seems to be avoiding people. And the other women are probably fine with that. It saves them the trouble of avoiding her.

Though the woman recognizes something special about Jesus and acknowledges him as a prophet, she quickly turns the conversation away from her personal moral failings to religious disagreement.

¹⁹ The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

This is not uncommon in evangelistic conversation. When it gets personal, it is safer to change topics, to move to something more impersonal, to theological or worldview differences. She is putting up a roadblock. "We say this. You say that. You might recognize something about my need or brokenness, but what good does that do? You believe one thing. I believe another thing. You are from your faith. I am from my faith. That's the way it is."

Jesus goes on to do something considered inappropriate in our day. He tells her, "We may have differences, but that is because your religious beliefs are wrong." He has told her moral truth. Now he is going to tell her spiritual truth. He loves her too much to leave her in spiritual darkness without at least pointing her toward the light. She will have to choose. Jesus is going to give her the chance to make that choice. She is responsible to question the religious tradition she was raised in. It is not a valid excuse before God to say, "Well, you know, it is what I was told. It is what my people believe. I guess, I guess, that's all, I guess I'm stuck. I have to accept it." No.

²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

This is what some today would call intolerant. And it is intolerant, though it is not at all intolerant of the woman. Jesus shows love and respect for the woman. Jesus is intolerant of the false belief system that keeps this woman chained to eternal death. And he tells her so. He tells her straight out.

Jesus first claim probably does not stand out so much to us from our vantage point. He says, “An hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.” We have seen the gospel spread all over the earth. So, this makes sense to us. But it is a very strange thing for a Jewish Rabbi to say. What is he saying? The Jews have it all wrong thinking their truth is the only way? That God will accept all religions on all mountains? No. That is not what he is saying at all. Jesus is talking about a major change coming between the Old Covenant God made through Moses and the New Covenant established through his death and resurrection. Under the Old Covenant, the locus of the people of God is geographic. The central point is the temple in Jerusalem. To worship God means connecting yourself with the God of the temple of Israel. That is the source of true knowledge. That is the focal point of worship of the one true God.

Under the New Covenant, after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will indwell believers. This is one of the truly new things about the New Covenant. It is spoken of in the Old to be realized in the New. This is the new heart. This is God putting his law into people’s hearts that the prophets spoke about. The locus of the people of God will shift from being geographic, the temple in Jerusalem, to being spiritual. Jesus will be the center. Faith in him will be the defining mark of those who are the people of God. That is the reality to be made clear later in the ministry of Jesus and in the teaching the Apostles. That is what he is talking about when he says, “An hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.” That is possible by the gospel reality which enables the church of God to spread to every culture. It is not a validation of all religions or all claims on truth. And that is indicated in the further words of Jesus, when he claims straightforwardly, “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.”

This is a truth claim based on concrete historic reality. The Jews have received the Holy Scriptures. And through the Jews will come the Messiah. He will be a Jew, a son of David. Jesus tells the woman that her belief claims are not accurate. Her worship is lacking. Her claims to knowledge are wrong. Jesus claims knowledge.

Jesus connects faith with truth. Faith must acknowledge and yield to the truth of the gospel in order to produce worship that is acceptable and pleasing to God. This is the truth that Jesus did not hold back from the Samaritan woman.

²³ An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

The Christian religion, when it is truly Christian, follows Jesus Christ in making a strong truth claim. There is one Savior. He is Jesus Christ. There is one way to God. Faith in Jesus Christ. Worship based on false claims about God is not acceptable to God as worship. God requires two things. God requires internal regeneration by the Holy Spirit, new birth. And God requires recognition and submission to the truth revealed in Jesus Christ. Spirit and truth. Those who worship must worship in spirit and in truth.

Those are the kinds of worshipers God is looking for. And we might think that Nicodemus is the perfect potential representative. God is looking for worshipers like Nicodemus, certainly not like this

Samaritan woman. If we were to think that we would be so wrong. In the earlier conversation with Nicodemus, the conversation faltered. Nicodemus just fell out of it. He could not follow Jesus. He did not understand. He was not yet able or not yet willing to yield to the truth.

What should we expect from this simple, uneducated, foreign woman? Certainly, she will not be able to follow Jesus' revelation if Nicodemus could not. She is not a picture of the type of worshiper that God is seeking? Well, is she not? What is God seeking? Worshipers who will worship in spirit and in truth. And she is beginning to follow what Jesus is saying about himself. She remembers something she has heard. She says, this is from her Samaritan religion, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." It is an interesting, it is an interesting connection. It is something jumbled up in Samaritan religion that comes to her mind and God uses that to open up her heart.

If the Samaritan woman was referring to the Samaritan Messiah, then she was thinking of a second Moses figure called Taheb. According to Carson, "Samaritans pictured the Taheb as one who would reveal the truth, in line with his role as the ultimate prophet."³ That thinking matches with what the woman has just said. "He will declare all things to us." And it just happens that Samaritan idea matches the truth of who Jesus is. He is the Light who comes into the world to open eyes to the truth of who God is. No matter how grand a stage or how worldwide that scope will be for Jesus, his care for the whole world, he is dying for the whole world, he is the light for the whole world, and he still takes time to show love for this one insignificant woman. For this one moment, he has directed all his attention on this struggling lady that came to the well just to get water.

And something happens to her. Something clicks in her heart. Her eyes start to open. She is as one who has been in a long, long sleep, who is just starting to wake up. She says, "I know the Messiah will tell us all things." And Jesus says to her, "I who speak to you am *He*." A more literal translation of the Greek is, "I am who speaks to you." This is the first "I am" statement of John. And it is said to this woman who does not get it at all at this moment. We are later going to see that this is a claim to divinity. And John is going to build on this. There is going to be seven "I am" statements like this where Jesus just says, "I am." And there are going to be seven where Jesus says "I am" plus an object. "I am the bread of life." "I am the light of the world."

I do not think that the woman picked up on this at all here. Having our eyes open to Jesus does not mean we immediately get everything about Jesus. It means we get enough. She sees him. In that moment, the eyes of her heart are open, and she sees him. And then she runs off to tell the village.

I love this story on so many levels, the love Jesus shows for one individual; the way he speaks truth with respect; the way he begins with his own need, but then he leads her to her need; the way he uses language that just matches the situation. Jesus is clearly the master.

Conclusion

And we are disciples. A friend of mine recently told me that he likes the term apprentice better than disciple. Because the word disciple can imply passive learning, just sitting at the feet of the master. An apprentice is more active. An apprentice learns, not only by listening to the master, but also by watching the master and imitating the master, doing what the master does until he or she acquires the ability to do those things for themselves.

In the gospel of John, the primary role of the disciple or apprentice is witness. That is what we see disciples doing. They are the ones who point to Jesus. How do we learn to be a witness? Well, by being an apprentice of the master. And here he is modeling for us in this conversation with the Samaritan woman how to witness. I have suggested four principles. Let's sum those up in our conclusion.

³ Carson, 226.

(1) First, as Jesus took the initiative, we take the initiative. We do not wait for others to ask us for living water to drink. They might not even know they are thirsty. Or they might not connect us with any possible solution to their thirst. We take the initiative to share the good news about Jesus with others.

(2) Second, as Jesus was more concerned with the woman than with his own image, we have to be willing to put aside our fear of what others think about us for their sake. We need God to somehow increase our love for lost people such that our concern for them overcomes our concern for our own reputation. Jesus models for us that it is okay with God if people misunderstand our motives and thinks we are a little weird. God knows our heart. And God knows what we are about.

(3) Third, as Jesus showed this woman the respect of human dignity, we ought not pre-judge any person, no matter gender, race, clothing, smell, social standing, Jesus reaches across culture. He reaches across class barriers. God is at work. He is ready to surprise us. You never know who might be ready to believe.

(4) And fourth, as Jesus told her the truth, if we are to witness to Jesus, we also have to tell the truth. We have to be willing to disagree; to say with humility and respect, "I think you are wrong about that. I believe Jesus is the only way. There is no other way. And this is why I believe that..."

It is our task to proclaim the truth. It is not our task to change the human heart. We cannot argue anyone into true faith. A Nicodemus will take years to believe. For this woman, it took one unexpected moment, one conversation. Faith is spiritual sight. It is something God must bring about in the human heart. And that is not our part. Our part is to share what we know with love and respect in the power of the Holy Spirit, entrusting the results to God.

Reflection questions

1. Read John 4:1-26 as though for the first time. What are some things that stand out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing?

2. Evaluate the four suggested evangelistic principles given in this lesson, answering the following three questions for each principle.

- 1) Jesus took the initiative.
- 2) Jesus was more concerned with the woman than with his own image.
- 3) Jesus showed her the respect of human dignity.
- 4) Jesus told her the truth.

a. How do you see this principle represented in the dialogue with the Samaritan woman?

b. Do you agree or disagree that this principle is something we Christians should put into practice in gospel conversations?

c. What could the application of this principle look like applied by you and by members of your Christian community to people around them? Can you offer an example from your own experience or the experience of someone you know?

3. Would you add to these four principles any other principle to witnessing that you see modeled by Jesus here in this passage?

4. What do you think about the last statement of this lesson as a definition for witnessing? Does this sound right to you? Is there anything you would add or change?

"Our part is to share what we know with love and respect in the power of the Holy Spirit, entrusting the results to God."

5. Consider two or three people in your life that you could help know more about Jesus. Pray that God would give you opportunity and courage to share with them your belief in Jesus. And pray for God's work in them to open their eyes to see Jesus.