

We Must Go to Samaria

John 4:1–5 • Part One

Everything that Jesus Christ does in his pursuit of sinners leaves me stunned. There is no run-of-the-mill offer of salvation. Because God doesn't owe anyone anything. He is holy, we are sinful. He has made us for his glory; we pursue our own. He made us to live in communion with him and experience his life; we reject him, hide from him and embrace what produces death. Any kindness or mercy offered us by God is breathtaking. That he gives those who defy him even one more breath is astonishing— but the offer of unmerited grace, unmerited salvation is something else altogether. In this encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4 we begin to see how long, how wide, how high, and how deep is the love of Christ for those he comes to save. This will be the first of three or four sermons in this passage. My goal today is to introduce what is happening, and begin to put pieces of the story in place. We'll hardly scratch the surface, but we will begin to unfold what is revealed about Jesus the Messiah, and his redeeming love. I pray we will be stirred to follow the Master on his mission. He has called us to do exactly that. John wrote these things under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name. His very life is produced in this woman. May God do the same this morning. Let's read and pray.

John 4:1–26 — Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ² (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³ he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴ And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ A woman from Samaria came 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 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "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." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The

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water that I will 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 will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” ¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” ¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on 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 the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 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 he comes, he will tell us all things.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

PRAY — Holy God, you alone are our salvation; You are our strength and our song. Lord Jesus, you have become our salvation, so that with joy we draw water from the wells of salvation so that our very souls are satisfied in you. Please work in every heart here so that we turn from what cannot satisfy to you, and drink deeply of your living water. May everyone who hears these words of yours give thanks to you, and call upon your name. Let your saving grace be displayed in your glorious salvation. Prove yourself great in our midst, O Holy One of Israel. We ask in the name of Jesus and for his glory.

In **vv 1–3** Jesus is governing the time of his earthly ministry to accomplish all that the Father has for him to do before he goes to the cross. The Pharisees already hate Jesus, even though it is early in his ministry. He’s cut into their money-making schemes of the temple. We will see that the people increasingly follow and listen to Jesus more than they do the Pharisees, and they don’t like that. There are already some angry enough to kill him. So just as things are taking off with his ministry, Jesus leaves the center of Jewish culture and heads up north toward Galilee because his hour is not yet come — his hour being when he goes to the cross to atone for the sin of his children. There is much he has to do to fulfill all righteousness, and it is not time to die at the hands of religious leaders, so he puts distance between himself and those who would kill him. Of course he will return to Jerusalem to die, but that is yet two or three years off.

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Galilee is in the north and is more rural than Judea in the south, where Jerusalem is located. But between Judah and Galilee is the region of Samaria. That region in northern Israel is loaded with meaning in this passage. Recall that Jeroboam, the first King of Israel in the north after the kingdom was divided, set up golden calves and idols for the people under his reign to sacrifice to, so they didn't have to go to Jerusalem, where God had appointed that the sacrifices occur. Then King Ahab comes along and marries Jezebel, and we move from golden idols to all-out Baal worship as they bring the entire cult into Israel. For God-fearing Jews in Judah, in the south, this is the height of wickedness. But it gets worse. Assyria sweeps in and destroys the northern kingdom in 722 BC, then resettles the land with foreigners who syncretized, or mixed Yahweh worship with the worship of false gods. The Jews who remained in the region inter-married with the foreigners, and the region of Samaria was formed.

Jews hated the Samaritans for a long list of reasons. They intermarried with people who were not Jews, and so a new race was formed, in essence, that Jews disdained as half breeds and impure. The Samaritans were responsible for degrading the worship of Yahweh and departing from the instruction given in God's law. Almost to make it worse, they would not stop the practice of Judaism altogether – they just distorted it and warped it. Jews, who were proud of the fact that God had given them his word, and who endeavored to keep the feasts and sacrifices as prescribed, worshiping the one true God, despised the Samaritans for their mutilation of the Scriptures, the desertion of the sacrificial system centered in Jerusalem— because salvation is of the Jews (v 22), and abandonment of monotheistic worship of Yahweh. When v 9 says Jews have no dealings with Samaritans, it means **no dealings**. They would not do business with them. They would not eat out of a dish that a Samaritan had eaten out of. And they would not travel the direct route north through the region of Samaria, but would go around it either to the east or west, even though it cost them hours on the journey. The Jews hated the Samaritans— religious contempt, ethnic and racial contempt, social snobbery.

All of this makes v 4 hit in a surprising way: He had to pass through Samaria. What does John mean, “he **had** to pass through Samaria?” He did not have to pass through Samaria. At least not for any reason of travel restrictions— other highways were available and well-traveled. Ramping it up even further from a cultural standpoint it is not merely that he didn't have to go there, but he should have stayed out of there. Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

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But **v 4** is loaded with meaning in the phrase **he had to**. That is a divine “must,” a moral **ought**. He had to go to Samaria—not for any physical, geographical, or political reason—but because the Father had made a divine appointment for Him there with a woman living a wicked life. It was the right thing for Him to do, to fulfill all the Father had given Him to do. Chapter 5 tells us the Father is always at work, and the Son does everything the Father gives Him to do. The Father has made an appointment, and **v 23** tells us why: the Father is seeking worshipers, and this woman has been chosen before the foundation of the world to bow before God and worship Him. He had to pass through Samaria.

Two places in the New Testament speak to what God seeks with particular clarity. One is in **Luke 19:10** — For the Son of Man came to **seek** and to save the lost. The other is here in **v 23**: The Father is seeking people to worship him in spirit and truth. One is a necessary precursor to the other. If I have not been saved from my rebellion and sin, I cannot and will not worship a Holy God in a way that is acceptable to him. Obviously, I cannot say that I bow before him and submit to him when I continue with a raised fist living in defiance of him. Salvation precedes acceptable worship. Here at Jacob’s well, we see both happen as God comes to deliver her into his Kingdom: She is saved, and she moves from idol worship to the worship of the one true God.

That is because Jesus followed that divine **ought**, as he always did. (We will see in chapter 5 that He always does what He sees His Father doing. He is always about His Father’s work.) The Father has made a divine appointment for Him, and His life was wholly oriented to obedience. His obedience glorified the Father, and the Father glorified Him.

There is a lesson here for us to apply. Our hearts and minds are to be tuned to the agenda and calendar of God, if all of life is going to be lived for His glory. We are called to be proclaimers of the Good News that salvation is found in Christ. That means adjustments in the details of the day, details of the journey. It means dismantling contempt for people who do not look like you, live like you, have your social standing, are of different ethnic backgrounds, or anything else you find incompatible. We may well have easy, or natural connections or affinity with someone, but we are not to restrain ourselves if no natural connection exists. I speak as an introvert to my fellow non-conversational introverts. Begin praying that God will shape your personality and help you be more conversational. Refining your personality is part of the process of sanctification. Our bodies, our mouths, our talents, and our deficits are all the Lord’s. Where we go, when we go, how we spend our time, who and what

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we give our hearts and minds and affections to, who we talk to, and what we talk about — all of these are subject to our God who is on mission to seek and save the lost, and make them worshipers in spirit and truth. We will see Jesus teach that to the disciples in vv 35 and following.

If we say we are oriented to his agenda, but then a real opportunity is set in front of us and we say, “That’s inconvenient; that’s not on my route; that’s not on my schedule,” we will miss more than a task. We will miss taking the Gospel to Samaria, and we will miss being fed by doing what God has assigned. That level of obedience is what satisfied the soul of Jesus, as noted in v 34 — His food was to do the will of his Father. If we travel around whatever our Samaria is, the bread and water that will fill our lives will only be what we can organize and provide for ourselves. We will miss the soul-shaping reality of contentment and satisfaction in God. We will know only the fullness of what we can imagine, and not what He can do.

There is so much more here, and it is all rich. We will continue next week.

At this time we come to the table of the Lord, where he invites those who have turned from their unbelief and rebellion to Christ in faith. It pictures his atoning death in the broken bread, representing his body given for his people, and the cup, picturing his shed blood which paid the price for sin. He became a substitute for those who turn to him in faith — he became sin on their behalf, paying their sin and death penalty, even though he knew no sin himself.

PRAY