

Gospels class 16-John's Loyalty, Jesus Leaves Judea, Meets the Woman at the Well in Samaria

Good morning/afternoon,

We'll continue today with our study of the Gospels. Last time we covered Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus in Jerusalem at the first Passover during His ministry when Jesus told him he must be born again to see the Kingdom of God. And we talked about what it means to be born again, and then spent quite a bit of time on John 3:16.

So today we'll continue the story in **John 3:22-36**—

22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.

23 Now John [the baptizer] also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.

24 For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

As we've mentioned before, this was an "Elijah place," near where Elijah had been fed by ravens during the drought. Here's where it is on the map. It also says that John is baptizing here "because there was much water there." This tells us something about the proper method of baptism. If baptism was done by sprinkling or pouring, you don't need "much water," all you need is a cupful. But if you're going to baptize someone by immersion, you need "much water" to fully bury the person in the water. So this is just a brief mention in passing, but it shows that baptism was done by immersion, otherwise this makes no sense.

25 Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification.

We see this issue of purification coming up several times in the Gospels. We already saw reference to ritual purification with the wedding at Cana, where Jesus turned the large amount of water in the stone pots to wine, and the water was there to be used "according to the manner of purification of the Jews" as it says in **John 2:6**. You might also write down Mark 7:1-13. We won't take the time to go through that right now, but this is where Jesus Christ criticizes the scribes and Pharisees for their traditions, specifically ritual washing, while rejecting the commandment of God. So we will see this come up in the future as a source of contention.

26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!" And of course, this is referring to Jesus Christ.

27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.

28 "You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' (See John 1:20-23)

29 "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.

30 "He must increase, but I must decrease.

So what's going on here? Some of John's disciples come to him and they're concerned because now Jesus has disciples and they are also baptizing. And as we saw earlier, some of John's own disciples have left him for Jesus—including John, who is writing this. If you're a disciple of a rabbi, as John's disciples were, you're not going to want to see this. Because after all, you're

following this particular rabbi because you think he's a godly man and the best teacher, so you don't want to see people flocking to some other teacher or rabbi as they see taking place here with Jesus.

John could've been upset by this or had his feelings hurt—after all, he knows that he is a teacher chosen by God for a special purpose. But that's not John. John has a wonderful attitude, the kind of attitude we should all have. John tells his disciples that he never expected anything different—that **“He must increase, but I must decrease.”** John knew that he was to be the herald, the messenger, the one who comes with the announcement that someone greater is coming.

John knew that he was always to be the subordinate one. He knew that if people were flocking to Jesus, that's because *God* was the one sending them to Him and not that Jesus was stealing followers from John. That's the point he makes in verse 27 when he says, **“A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven”**—from God, in other words. God was sending these people to Jesus, so why should John complain about that?

And then John uses the metaphor of the bridegroom and what we would call the “best man” to illustrate the point that Jesus Christ as the bridegroom is the one who's most important, not the “best man” or friend of the bridegroom. The bottom line is that John has a humble servant's attitude. He knows that it's not about *him*, it's about God the Father and Jesus Christ. His job is to point people to Jesus Christ. And that's what I'm doing in this series of studies on the Gospels—I'm pointing you to Jesus Christ and to God the Father.

Now we come to a section that continues on in the New King James Version text we're using here as though it is a continuation of what John the baptizer is saying. But as we talked about last time, there are no quotation marks in the original Greek or Hebrew of the Bible, nor for that matter are there any punctuation marks at all. Those wouldn't come along until much later.

In reading through these next few verses, it strikes me that this is more likely the words of the apostle John expounding on this thought rather than a continuation of the words of John the baptizer. Where we've just read the words of John the baptizer, they're very straightforward, very simply stated. But what we see now has quite a different tone and sounds much more like what we read in the first chapter of John, which is the apostle John writing.

Just as an FYI, I checked about 15 different translations and they broke down as about a third have quotation marks as though this is a continuation of John the baptizer speaking, about a third have no quotation marks as though this is the apostle John writing and elaborating, and about a third don't use quotation marks at all as was done in the original Greek. So let's look at this—
31 “He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.

He's making the point that Jesus is above all because He came from heaven or from God, and thus He is far greater than anyone who just came from the earth.

32 “And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. His point here is that if you want to know about something, go to the source. Go to someone with firsthand knowledge. If you want to know about God, go to the one who came directly from God in heaven and can tell us directly about Him because He was there. And then he says, **“and no one receives His testimony.”**

This is one reason why I think these are the words of the apostle John and not John the baptizer.

Because if this is John the baptizer, it doesn't make much sense because what has prompted the discussion in this section is the fact that people *are* flocking to Jesus of Nazareth because they *are* receiving His testimony and believing Him. But if this is the apostle John commenting on this about 60 years after the fact when it's evident that most people *haven't* believed or received His testimony, I think that makes perfect sense the way it's stated here.

33 "He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true.

So those who do accept Jesus Christ's testimony are certifying that it is true and came from God who is true. This is a contrast to those in the previous verse who *don't* accept that testimony and in doing so essentially deny God.

34 "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. Or, for God gives the Spirit without limit" (NIV).

This is saying that Jesus is the One God sent, that He speaks the words of God since He came from God, and coming from God, He had the Spirit of God without limit.

35 "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.

Last time we talked about John 3:16 quite a bit, about how both God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son gave up what was most valuable to them because of their love for us. This is continuing that same theme—that God loved the Son so much that He has given everything into His hand.

You might write down **Philippians 2:9-11—**

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And as we also talked about last time, God is a God of love, but He is also a God of judgment.

And we see this echoed in **John 3:36—**

36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Ultimately every human being is going to have to make that choice. Either we will believe in Jesus as the Son of God and accept the implications of that in terms of how we live, or we will choose to not believe that and we will reap the consequences of that lack of belief as spelled out here. Every human being will have to choose life or choose death—to either choose Jesus Christ as our Lord and Master and Rabbi, or to choose not to, and in so doing choose death.

Now we come to several verses that talk about Jesus leaving Judea and heading north to Galilee. Let's see what's going on here.

John 4:1-4

4:1 Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John

2 (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples),

3 He left Judea and departed again to Galilee.

4 But He needed to go through Samaria.

There are three interesting things to pick up on here. First, Jesus and His disciples are having a lot of success. They're getting a lot of attention. They're baptizing a lot of people, more than John. If they're having a lot of success, why do they pack up and leave and go about 80 to 100 miles north to Galilee?

Also, as stated in verse 1, Jesus knows that the Pharisees are aware that He's having a lot of

success and drawing a lot of attention. And if the Pharisees know, then other people are going to know as well. We saw earlier that when John the baptizer began his ministry, that the Sadducees and Pharisees sent people to spy on him and check him out, and that was never a good thing. And notice how verse 4 puts it: **“But He needed to go through Samaria.”** John says He *needed* to go through Samaria. This is a shortcut. Why did He *need* to take a shortcut through Samaria? What’s going on here?

Let’s keep reading in **Luke 3:19-20**—

**19 But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done,
20 also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.**

Now we see a strong clue as to what is going on. This is not Herod the Great, who has been dead for about 30 years now. This is one of his sons, among whom his kingdom was divided up after his death. His name is Herod Antipas, and he has married Herodias, who was previously married to his own half-brother Philip, another of Herod’s sons. John the baptizer rebuked Herod Antipas for this adulterous marriage, and as we see here, as a result he was thrown into Herod Antipas’s prison.

Matthew 4:12

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee.

Now let’s look at a map, the one that’s on the back cover of the harmony, and put some of these pieces together. That prison, we learn from the Jewish historian Josephus, was in Machaerus on the eastern side of the Dead Sea in what is today Jordan. We’re not told exactly where Jesus is, other than that He’s somewhere in Judea and He needs to go through Samaria to get to Galilee.

Normally a Jew going to Galilee would’ve avoided Samaria by going down to Jericho, crossing the Jordan River, then travelling north on the east side of the Jordan in the area labeled “Perea” on the map to avoid the territory of the Samaritans. But Jesus doesn’t do that. He heads straight north into Samaria in the straightest route to Galilee. Why does He do that? Where is John imprisoned? In Machaerus, not all that far from Jericho and the road north to Galilee.

Presumably Herod Antipas is at this fortress-palace of Machaerus, and Jesus is probably aware of this, and knowing what happens to somebody who gets thrown into Herod’s prison—meaning you don’t come out alive—*Jesus goes in the opposite direction from Machaerus as quickly as possible.*

So putting the pieces together, He knows that the Pharisees are starting to stir up trouble in Judea, and Herod has thrown John into prison in Machaerus, so Jesus for His own safety leaves the area before the same thing happens to Him. Why does He do this? Because His time is not yet. It doesn’t mean He’s a coward trying to avoid trouble, but rather that He knows that ultimately He will die at the Passover, and presumably He knows His ministry will last several years, so He avoids that problem by relocating to Galilee—specifically, to Capernaum, as we’ll get to shortly in the story.

Continuing in Mark 1:14—

14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

And Luke 4:14

14 Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region.

It’s interesting how each of the four Gospel writers gives us slightly different details, different

pieces of the puzzle. None of them gives the whole story. But put them together and we get the whole story. This shows that the Gospel writers didn't get together and coordinate all their stories, but that they each wrote independently and wrote what was most important to them. So the stories differ in what details the writers included, but together it gives us a full picture that makes perfect sense.

And again this gives the lie to those Bible critics who say these were all made-up stories written a century or two later by people who were never there and never saw or witnessed these things. Because if four people were making this up out of their imaginations a century or two later, how would they know to make these details mesh, and also how to make the details mesh with what we know happened to John as recorded by the independent historian Josephus? Nobody can fabricate those kinds of coincidences!

Questions?

Now we continue with the story with the incident of Jesus and the woman at the well in Samaria in **John 4:5-42**—

5 So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.

Let's look at our map again to see where we're talking about. Sychar is just north of the word "Samaria" on your map. Today it's a place we see quite often in the news from Israel, the name *Nablus*. It's quite a large Arab city of more than 100,000 people. It's in the news fairly regularly because at times it's been a hotbed for terrorists launching attacks at Israel.

Before it came to be called Sychar its biblical name was Shechem. Here's what it looked like in 1918 in an aerial photo when it was still a fairly small town. This is also the area of Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerazim, which you can see a bit of at the top corners. Here's an illustration from the 1800s showing this town sitting down in the valley with Mt. Ebal on the north and Mr. Gerazim on the south.

There's a tremendous amount of biblical history in this area. I'll hit a few of the high points:

- Abraham built an altar and was promised the land there (Genesis 12:6-7)
- Jacob (Israel) lived and built an altar there (Genesis 33:18-20)
- Simeon and Levi killed the men of Shechem after Dinah was raped (Genesis 34)
- Joseph came to Shechem looking for his brothers and they sold him not far from there (Genesis 37)
- Joseph's bones were taken from Egypt and buried at Shechem (Joshua 24:32)
- The Israelites shouted the blessings and cursings from Mt. Ebal and Gerazim there (Deuteronomy 27:11-26; Joshua 8:33-35)
- Joshua gave his last words to Israel there (Joshua 24)
- Shechem became the first capital of Jeroboam and the northern 10 tribes (1 Kings 12:25)

After this the Israelite capital was moved to a new capital, Samaria, which we see on the map to the northwest of Sychar and labeled "Sebaste," which Herod the Great renamed it as after he built a city there. And the land of Israel came to be called Samaria after the name of its capital. And that name stuck, which is why it was called Samaria 900 years later in Jesus' time.

There was a great deal of hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans in Jesus' time that we see

reflected in the Gospels. As I mentioned, Jews would normally avoid travelling through Samaria or setting foot on Samaritan territory. Sometimes Samaritans attacked Jews on Samaritan territory, and sometimes Jews attacked Samaritans on Jewish territory. So there was no love lost between the two peoples, and it wasn't all one-sided. In fact, this city name "Sychar" comes from a Hebrew word meaning "drunkard," so apparently this is what the Jews called the city as an insult to the Samaritans.

So where did this hostility come from? I'll give you a short history lesson. This may be review to some of you, or it may be new. After king Solomon died, the 10 northern tribes split off to form the **kingdom of Israel**, with two tribes and many of the Levites forming the kingdom of Judah. You can read about that in 1 Kings 12. Solomon had already led his kingdom into idolatry and worship of other gods, but Jeroboam, king of Israel, took it much further. He set the course of the kingdom of Israel on idolatry, setting up centers of idolatrous worship in Dan to the north and Bethel to the south, with the result that Israel had not a single righteous king in its history. At times the kingdoms of Israel and Judah actually warred against each other, which didn't help the relations.

Eventually God got fed up with Israel's rebellion and allowed the Assyrians to invade and take a majority of the Israelites away into captivity. Some of the Israelites fled from the Assyrian invaders to Judah and were spared. Most were taken captive by the Assyrians. A few of the poorer people were left. We read about this in **2 Kings 17:5—**

5 Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years.

6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

7 For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God . . . and they had feared other gods . . . and then skipping down to verse 22—

22 For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them,

23 until the LORD removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day.

24 Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities.

Here's what this looks like on a map. The Israelites were deported to what is today areas of Iraq and Iran, and the Assyrians took people from those areas and moved them over to where the 10 tribes were and resettled them there. This was Assyrian policy to uproot people from their lands to both show what would happen to those who rebelled against Assyrian rule, and by uprooting and transplanting them, the people more or less lost anything that they considered worth fighting for—their villages, homes, fields, vineyards, orchards and so on. So the Assyrians dealt with rebellion very harshly.

Here are some **Assyrian carvings from that period**, now in the British Museum, showing what they did to other nations. Here is a battle scene showing the capture of a city like Samaria. Everything isn't to scale, so you have to ignore that. What we see here is the fortified, walled city, and the Assyrians are attacking it with soldiers climbing ladders here on the left. In the middle is a battering ram on wheels with a protective cover on the top. Behind it are Assyrian archers firing arrows at the city.

Here in a second carving are **the exiles, the prisoners**, being taken away to Assyria. There's a

donkey cart with two children on it, with the adults walking and carrying some goods on their backs or on their heads, with one man carrying another child on his shoulders. So the Assyrians recorded in pictures what the Bible tells us took place.

But there was another factor that really led to the Jewish hostility. These other people who moved into the territory of Samaria from Babylon and other places brought their own pagan religious practices with them, and as the rest of 1 Kings 17 shows, they mixed their pagan practices with some elements of true worship. So they had this ungodly mixture of truth and paganism that both God and the Jewish people considered abominable.

More than a century later the kingdom of Judah followed a similar pattern. They also lapsed into idolatry, and they also were taken away into captivity, **this time by the Babylonians**. The difference is that they were able to hold onto their religious identity and determined not to make the same mistakes, and they were allowed to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. They got *more* religious during their captivity while the Israelites got *less* religious and lost their identity. And this was the origin of a lot of the very strict religious practices and rituals that brought Jesus into conflict with the Pharisees and others during His ministry.

Another source of conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans was that when the Jews returned from Babylon and began rebuilding Jerusalem as described in the book of Nehemiah chapters 2, 4 and 6 in the 400s B.C., Sanballat, the ruler of Samaria, greatly opposed them. So this conflict goes back for centuries.

The Samaritans built their own temple on Mt. Gerazim around 388 B.C., and in the period between the Old and New Testaments a Jewish army attacked and destroyed it in 128 B.C., and that helped cement the kind of hostility we see between the Jews and the Samaritans we see reflected in the Gospels. So all this setting the stage for what we read about here in John 4 with Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well.

So picking up the story again in **John 4:5—**

5 So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.

6 Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

Let's notice a few things here. This area has a long biblical history as we noted earlier, going back to Abraham and Jacob and Joseph, who lived for a time in this area. The towns at this time had a **community well that looked something like this**, with some kind of frame for lowering a bucket or jar into the well to draw water. These large stones are water troughs for watering animals. Water was a precious resource, and few people could afford a private well. So most people came to the community well to draw water in large pottery jugs to take back to their houses for drinking, for cooking, for washing and for bathing.

Drawing water was considered the women's job, and they did it twice a day, in the morning and the evening. You didn't do it in the heat of the day because it was hard work hauling this water up from the well, filling your water jugs, and then taking it to your house. Incidentally, you can go there and visit Jacob's well today. Don Harms and I did back in 1998 on a Feast trip to Israel. Today it's inside a church, which is pretty typical of many biblical sites. We even drank some of the water from it, although I got diarrhea, but that's another story.

7 A woman of 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.

Let’s notice several things here. First, Jesus is tired from His journey, having been walking in the heat of the day. He’s thirsty, and probably hungry because the disciples have walked on ahead into town to buy food. This tells us that He truly is human as we are. He’s hot, He’s tired, He’s thirsty and He’s hungry. Later we see that He miraculously multiplies loaves and fishes to feed thousands of people, but He doesn’t use that same power to fulfill His own wants and needs here. He always uses His miracles to serve others, not himself.

Another interesting point is that the disciples have gone into the city to buy food. The enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans was so great that the Jews wouldn’t eat food that had been touched by a Samaritan, because they considered it unclean, worse than eating swine’s flesh. And yet the disciples are entering into a Samaritan city to buy food grown and prepared by Samaritans. From this we see that Jesus’ disciples are already being somewhat transformed by His teachings at this early stage of His ministry. They have gotten over some of the normal Jewish prejudice toward the Samaritans. And in the same way His teachings should be changing us.

Another tidbit is that the “sixth hour” here is noon—the heat of the day. So this woman comes to draw water from the well at the sixth hour, not at the normal times of morning and evening. We’ll get a clue as we read on.

9 Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, 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.”

Several things to notice here. First, in typical rabbi fashion, He’s making a puzzling statement to get her to think. Rabbis typically didn’t spell everything out. They wanted their audience to think about what they were saying so they would have to work at getting the answer for themselves. We saw that last time in how Jesus talked with Nicodemus. He challenged Nicodemus with these statements that Nicodemus didn’t understand at all, then used that to teach Nicodemus some great truths.

Jesus also used a term here that is easy to gloss over if we don’t understand it. He said that He could give “living water.” What was He talking about there? Israel for the most part is a dry country. **Here’s a photo from the top of Mt. Gerazim** looking across to Mt. Ebal, with the modern city of Nablus in the valley below. As you can see, it’s pretty dry. It gets more water than we do here, but not a great deal more—about 20 to 25 inches a year. It doesn’t rain there for about six months from May to November. So water is a precious commodity.

People of that day could basically get their water from one of two sources. One was called *living water*. This was *moving* water—water from a stream, a river, a spring or a well. It was called “living water” because it was *moving*. Wells were considered living water because they generally dug wells where there was a spring and they knew water was there. They didn’t go out like we do today and drill for hundreds of feet until they hit water by chance. So these sources were *living* water. Living water was *fresh*, it was *cool*, it was *refreshing*.

The other source of water was from *cisterns*. A cistern is basically an underground storage chamber carved out of soft rock. Here is **Don Harms in a cistern at Shiloh** that we visited back in 1998. When it would rain, the Israelites would have channels that would catch the rainwater and channel it into cisterns to store the water. That way they would have some water stored for use during the dry spells. However, think of how that water would get after several months.

You'd have mud and sticks and leaves and twigs that would wash into the cistern. The original floor of this cistern is about 10-12 feet below the current level. This is how much dirt and debris has filled it in over the centuries. In a cistern you'd have bugs and insects. You'd have small animals that would come to drink out of the cistern. Some of them might fall in and drown, so sometimes you might have to fish out a dead mouse or rabbit out of your cistern. It would get hot and muddy and have algae growing in it.

So water from cisterns was a necessity, but *living water* was much more preferable and healthy and refreshing. Jesus was telling the woman at the well that He could give her not just water, but *living water*—the very best kind of water. Jesus' reference to "living water" here is, I think, a *remez* back to **Jeremiah 2:13—**

13 For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.

He is essentially telling her that *He is God*, the true fountain of living, refreshing, life-giving waters. But the woman doesn't catch this, and takes His words literally. Continuing in

John 4:11—

11 The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?"

He doesn't have a bucket or water jug, in other words, so how is He going to get living water to give her?

12 "Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?"

Another source of contention between the Jews and the Samaritans is that the Samaritans claimed descent from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They actually rewrote a number of the biblical stories had them say things like Abraham was going to sacrifice Isaac on Mt. Gerazim, where they had their temple, rather than on Mt. Moriah, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. But Jesus doesn't respond to her statement; He continues on.

13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,

14 "but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

There's the *remez* back to **Jeremiah 2:13** again, where God says, "**They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters . . .**" Jesus offers the power, through God's Spirit, for us to become fountains of living water giving life and hope and refreshing to others around us.

15 The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

One thing we don't catch in reading the Gospels is the tone of voice. Was she serious here? I kind of doubt it. I think her response may have had a bit of sarcasm in it, something like, "Yes, Mister, give me some of this water you're talking about, and then I'll never be thirsty again and I won't have to wear myself out walking here every day to draw water out of this well and take it back to the house."

One reason I think that is because of Jesus' response to her. He shifts from making puzzling statements to something that immediately grabs her attention in a powerful way.

16 Jesus 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 well said, 'I have no husband,'

18 "for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

And the woman is just dumbfounded. How could this stranger possibly know that she has been married five times and now is living with a man?

What does this tell us about this woman? Think carefully before you answer. We would assume from reading this that she's simply a very immoral woman, divorcing husband after husband and jumping from one bed to another because she's looking for someone or something better, and she lacks the character to stick things out when there are problems in the marriage. And now she's shackled up with a guy, living together unmarried. And she's coming to the well in the middle of the day when no one else will be there because she's ashamed and knows that all the other women would be talking about her if she showed up when the other women of the town came to the well.

That may well be true. But I would like us to consider another possibility. In that culture, women had a very hard life. They had few rights. In Jewish culture, a husband could divorce his wife if, for example, she didn't bear him a son, or couldn't bear children, or he didn't like her cooking, or she got older and didn't look as good as she used to. Mind you, this isn't biblical, but it's the way culture had become by that time in Judea. We don't know specifically about Samaria, but presumably it was similar.

What could a divorced woman do? She didn't have many options. On rare occasions, she might be able to go back to her family if they would accept her and that were possible. She could try to find another husband if she could. Thrown out of the house by her husband, she could turn to a life of begging. Or she could turn to prostitution, or find a man to live with to give her food and a roof in exchange for essentially becoming a personal slave. Those were her options. That's the sad reality. So perhaps she was a very immoral woman, or perhaps she is a broken woman who has just fallen on incredibly hard times who simply has no other options and is struggling to survive in any way she can. We just don't know. But from her reaction, I wonder if it's not the latter rather than the former.

19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet."

Again, she's just been told things that no stranger could possibly know about her. And then she says something puzzling:

20 "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."

Where does this come from? What prompts her to say something like this? What's going on? Here's my take on this. She has just met a man that she realizes is a prophet of God. And that man has either (A) pointed out to her her immoral lifestyle, or (B) offered her help to turn her life around and turn her to God. So either way, her response is to pay homage to God in the only way she knows how, which is to offer a sacrifice. That is how a person worshiped and paid homage to God—by offering a sacrifice at the temple of God.

But she has a dilemma—*which temple?* The Samaritans have their temple and worship there God on Mt. Gerazim right behind them, but here's this prophet who is obviously from God and they worship at their temple in Jerusalem. So she needs to pay homage to God and give a sacrifice, but which temple does she go to? Which is the right one?

21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.

So Jesus explains that it’s not a matter of worshipping in a physical temple at a particular spot. That’s going to change. But Jesus says, “However, since you brought it up—

22 “You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

In other words, you Samaritans have got it all wrong in how you’re worshipping here. You’re not worshipping God in the right way. And of course, the Jews didn’t have it all right either, but they were a lot closer and salvation would come through the Jews because Jesus Himself is a Jew.

23 “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

24 “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Several things to point out here: God doesn’t accept worshipping Him with lies. Modern Christianity has done the same thing the Samaritans did. It has mixed a lot of ancient pagan practices and customs and lies with elements of God’s truth and expects God to view that as acceptable to Him. Why should He? His Word says don’t do that, but they do it anyway.

Another thing is that the Samaritans accepted only the first five books of the Bible, the five books of Moses, and rejected the rest—the prophets like Daniel and Isaiah and Jeremiah, the 12 minor prophets, the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon, the histories of Israel and Judah in Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, and all the rest. They had their five books and those five books only, which is called the Samaritan Pentateuch, something you may have heard of. And they threw out the rest. What does traditional Christianity do? It accepts the books of the New Testament and throws out the other 75 percent of the Bible. It’s no different from what the Samaritans were doing.

So we’re supposed to worship God in spirit and in truth, not in half-truths and truths mixed with lies. And how do we worship God in spirit? In that day, you worshiped God by bringing sacrifices to Him. But what does God say about that? Notice **Psalm 51:17—**

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise.

And **Romans 12:1-2—**

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

And **Hebrews 13:6—**

6 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

And **Mark 12:33—**

33 And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

This is how we worship God in spirit and in truth—by having a humble and converted spirit, by having our minds transformed to become like Jesus Christ, by sacrificing our lives in service to God and others, and loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and loving others as we do ourselves. This is the worship God wants, not the blood of bulls and goats.

Continuing back in **John 4—**

25 The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (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.”

As near as we can tell, this is the first time Jesus openly tells someone He is the prophesied Messiah. And who does He tell? A gentile, and a woman at that, because women were not highly regarded in that culture and society.

27 And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, “What do You seek?” or, “Why are You talking with her?”

Notice several things here. First, it tells us that Jesus was talking with a woman. How were women regarded in that day? Legally, a woman’s testimony wasn’t as good as that of a man. A common prayer of that time for Jewish men was, “I thank you, God, that I was not born a gentile or a woman.” And as we saw earlier, men could divorce their wives on a whim and leave them destitute. Some of the rabbis debated whether women had souls and whether they could possibly ever enter the kingdom of God. Many of the rabbis forbade speaking to a woman in public—even one’s own wife or sister.

So women were very looked down on in that day. This wasn’t from the Bible, but from human prejudice. But as we see from this example, and later from the fact that Jesus had a number of close women followers and friends and women who supported Him and His ministry, His attitude toward women was quite different from the culture of His day. He held them in a much more elevated position than was normal for that day.

It’s interesting too that the disciples didn’t interrupt Him in His conversation with the woman. They were really surprised at this, as John tells us, but they were respectful about it and waited for Him to finish talking with her. Continuing with the story—

28 The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men,

29 “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”

30 Then they went out of the city and came to Him.

It’s interesting that John includes this little detail that she left her water jug there by the well and went into the city to tell others what had happened. Either she was so excited that she was in a hurry to go and tell others, or she left her jug there because she knew she would come back to talk more to Jesus. We don’t know, but either way it’s evidence that this woman’s life had just changed in a major way.

31 In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.”

The disciples have now returned with the food they’d left to go get at the beginning of this story, and they offer it to Him.

32 But He said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.”

Here is Jesus doing the rabbi thing again, making a challenging statement to them to give them something to figure out.

33 Therefore the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?”

34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.

In other words, this is His mission, His purpose, His goal, His desire, what kept Him going—doing the will of the Father, and wanting to finish His work.

35 “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!

36 “And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.

37 “For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’

38 “I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”

And that is the story of the Church down through the ages. Each of us is here today because others sowed seed before us, and we were the recipients of their work and their message. And we continue to sow the seed that may bear fruit well into the future as others come into contact with the truth as a result of what we do now. Probably most of that harvest of the seed we’re sowing now will come in with the great multitude that comes out of the great tribulation. We’re sowing a lot of seed, lots of people are watching *Beyond Today* and reading *The Good News* and our booklets and downloading material from our websites, but not that many are acting on it now. We should be praying for more laborers for the harvest that we be able to reach more people, because the fields are ripe and ready as Jesus said here.

39 And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all that I ever did.”

40 So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days.

This is interesting, because here Jesus ended up staying there for two days just because He stopped and spoke to a woman at a well. This shows that even Jesus, although God in the flesh, didn’t have everything planned out and didn’t know how some things would turn out.

41 And many more believed because of His own word.

42 Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”

So that wraps it up for today. Any questions?