

Teaching Points

Tonight we're going to study Christ's conversation with the woman at the well. As we consider this conversation let's appreciate the stark contrast this woman presents when compared to Nicodemus (whom we read about in chapter 3). Both Nicodemus and this woman have a personal encounter with Jesus - but these two people couldn't be more different. Nicodemus is a wealthy, influential, religious, Jewish man. Here we have an unnamed, rejected, adulterous, Samaritan woman.

Both of these people need Jesus! Whether we're lost in "socially acceptable" sins or completely broken and lost in scandalous affair - all of us have fallen short of God's glory and stand in need of regeneration and redemption through Christ.

First, we need to notice the language in verse 4. Jesus is on His way to Galilee and John says that He "needed to go through Samaria." This necessity didn't pertain to geographical constraints that dictated Christ's travel plans. Rather, this necessity had to do with a divine appointment from His Father. In other words, Jesus "needed" to go through Samaria because His Father had appointed this day to be the day that this Samaritan woman would experience saving grace and faith.

Second, we need to consider the setting. It's in the middle of the day when Jesus' disciples had gone into the city and left Him alone to rest at Jacob's well. When the woman meets Jesus at the well it's a culturally loaded moment. She's a Samaritan woman and Jesus is a Jewish man. It's broad daylight and they're going to speak to each other at a place in which the woman was probably trying to slip in and out unnoticed and alone. There's nothing natural or ordinary about this conversation!

Having said that, let's follow the movements in this woman's encounter with Jesus.

1. Jesus initiates the conversation. This is a picture of how Christ approaches sinners with His grace. Praise God that He takes the first step toward us (1 John 4:19). Jesus opens up the dialogue by asking the woman for a drink of water. This is surprising to the woman due to the cultural barriers that would have hindered Jews and Samaritans from friendly associations. (vs. 7-9)

2. In the entire conversation there is an observable escalation that takes place. The woman begins by questioning Christ's actions and doubting His claims. Throughout their talk she gradually, yet consistently, is drawn to a higher view of Jesus. He's opening her eyes step by step so that she can see Him for what He truly is. She goes from a skeptical standoffish posture in verse 9 all the way to a joyful proclaimer of Christ being the Messiah in verse 28.

Discussion Question: Why does Jesus draw her gradually to the revelation of Himself as Messiah? Why doesn't He just walk up and say, "Excuse me ma'am. I'm the Messiah and you need to believe in me for salvation."?

Thoughts: *This is a beautiful display of Christ's power to change a human heart. He masterfully draws important truths out of this woman's heart. He convinces her that He's a prophet greater than Jacob. He gets her to admit that she's a sinner. And he inspires her to go tell the entire city about her experience. All throughout the encounter we can see her attitude change. This is a testament to Christ's way. He draws us with grace and love to a joyful, faith-filled experience of forgiveness and hope. God doesn't force us into salvation against our will; He draws us to salvation by healing our will.*

3. Notice the theme of water. Jesus asks for a drink of physical water and then offers the woman a supply of living spiritual water. The whole conversation takes place at a well. Jesus is taking advantage of these familiar chores to reveal a great spiritual truth to this woman. God's gift of eternal life is like living water. His grace renews and refreshes our souls. His salvation rejoices our hearts. He satisfies us with Himself - both now and forever. We always need to come back for more water to keep our bodies alive. But this living water is so nourishing to our souls that, having received it, we never thirst again.

Discussion Question: How can Jesus say that we will never thirst again? Aren't we still hungry/thirsty for God even after we've experienced His saving grace? How can we be both satisfied with God's grace and thirsty for God at the same time?

Thoughts: *This is the joy of knowing God. He certainly satisfies our longing souls. Once we experience His saving grace there is no need to look anywhere else for any good thing. He is our all in all. And yet, there is also no limit to the joys and beauties of walking with God. We will always be growing in our enjoyment of Him and our knowledge of who He is. In this way the Christian experience is a paradox. We are satisfied at all times and simultaneously always hungry for more.*

4. See how plainly Jesus reveals the truth to this woman. When she mentions the Messiah in verse 25, Jesus responds by clearly telling her that He Himself is the Savior. It's intriguing to see how varied Christ's approach is with different people. This conversation is different from the one with Nicodemus in chapter 3 and yet the goal is the same. Christ can open our eyes in whatever way He sees fit. He tells Nicodemus that a man must be born again and then leaves him to ponder those claims. He tells this woman in John 4 that He is the Messiah and then waits as she goes and tells all her neighbors. There is great diversity in the details of how Jesus calls us. There is uniformity in the end result.

Prayer Focus

Praise God for the way He satisfies the longing soul (Psalm 107:9). May this story remind us that Christ is living water for the thirsty human soul.

Pray with hope for those who are lost in sin. This woman's life was a mess! And yet she was not beyond the reach of God's grace. Jesus "needed" to go to Samaria because this woman was one of God's lost sheep.

Worship Christ with a sense of His awesomeness. He is greater than our best thoughts. By the end of the conversation, the woman realizes that the man she's speaking to is no ordinary Jew!