

John 4:1–26, 39–42 (NIV)

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. ³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

¹¹ “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

¹³ Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

¹⁶ He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”

¹⁷ “I have no husband,” she replied.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

²¹ “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

²⁵ The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴² They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

John 7:37–44 (NIV)

³⁷ On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as

Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

⁴⁰ On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.”

⁴¹ Others said, “He is the Messiah.”

Still others asked, “How can the Messiah come from Galilee?”⁴² Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David’s descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?”⁴³ Thus the people were divided because of Jesus.⁴⁴ Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

Has your thirst been quenched by the living water?

A woman at the well at noon? Alone? Something is wrong with this picture. Women went to the well in the cool of the morning or the evening, but not at noon. Yet, there she is.

Meeting Jesus

Though no one outside the village would know why the woman is there at noon, Jesus knows. But he soon fills the woman’s head with questions of her own. Jesus asks her for water, though Jews avoided Samaritans and would never drink from their cup or eat from their plate. And he is a man. It was very improper for a Jewish man to be seen alone with any woman and unthinkable that he should speak with her. All this surely set her head spinning.

Does Jesus say

“I am he” or “I am”?

In verse 25 of the story of the Samaritan woman, you’ll see that she ends the conversation about worship with a sort of “we’ll see.” The Messiah will come someday, she says, and answer all these questions. In response, Jesus says, in the NRSV and NIV translations, “I am he,” staking claim to messiahship. Yet the Greek doesn’t say, “I am he,” it says “I am” (*ego eimi*).

This comes up so often in John’s gospel that it is hard to believe that John wants us to see nothing more than self-identification here. “I am” is the name of God revealed to Moses at the burning bush. God is the great I AM. When Jesus responds, “*ego eimi*,” it is a bold connection with the divine name. Later in the gospel, when arresting officers ask Jesus whether he is Jesus of Nazareth, he again responds “*ego eimi*” – and everyone falls to the ground. They understand the larger meaning of Jesus’ response.

In addition to the seven well-known I AM statements of Jesus (“I am the bread of life,” “I am the light of the world,” and so on), there are seven other bold, yet simple, I AM/*ego eimi* claims (4:26, 6:20, 8:24, 8:28, 8:58, 13:19, 18:7).

Then Jesus begins to talk with her about some kind of water that forever banishes thirst and has something to do with eternal life. Who could blame her for focusing on the straight-forward possibility of never having to carry water from the well again.

Then we learn why she is there at mid-day when no one else comes to the well. She has had five husbands and is currently living with a man to whom she is not even married. She comes at noon to avoid the smirks and snickers of the other women in the village. She lives a lonely life, socially cut-off in a world driven by family and community. She is, in a word, an outcast.

Not surprisingly, she quickly gets over her astonishment that Jesus knows these things about her and tries to change the subject. Isn’t that so like us all. When we get close to the heart of the matter, when we begin talking about something that makes us uncomfortable, we try to shift the conversation elsewhere.

The woman begins to talk about worship, especially the “where” of worship. I guess

that shouldn't surprise us either. We can get pretty caught up in the importance of this spot of land or that one, in one building or another. Certainly, Jesus' fellow Jews were often so focused on the importance of "The Land," that they failed to see God's working in all the world. So, Jesus tries to help her see that worship is not about the "where" but the "who." What matters is not where the woman worships, on the mountain or in Jerusalem, but that she worship the one true God. And as we learn in John's gospel, that one true God is revealed fully only in Jesus Christ.

The obvious question is what or whom do you and I worship? N.T. Wright is on the mark when he says that we become what we worship. Worship money and we become greedy. Worship sex and we become lustful. But worship the LORD God and we become Christlike. And as the story proceeds, the woman and many of her fellow Samaritans come to embrace Jesus as the "who." Indeed, it is Samaritans, not Jews, who proclaim Jesus to be not merely the Messiah but to be the "Savior of the world" (4:42).

New life

John's gospel is built on a series of encounters. Person after person meets Jesus and the questions are always the same: Who is Jesus and what is their response? Some believe¹ and some don't.

The Samaritans

(from the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

The name "Samaritans" originally was identified with the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 17:29). When the Assyrians conquered Israel and exiled 27,290 Israelites, a "remnant of Israel" remained in the land. Assyrian captives from distant places also settled there (2 Kings 17:24). This led to the intermarriage of some, though not all, Jews with Gentiles and to widespread worship of foreign gods. By the time the Jews returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, Ezra and Nehemiah refused to let the Samaritans share in the experience (Ezra 4:1-3; Neh. 4:7). The old antagonism between Israel to the north and Judah to the south intensified the quarrel.

The Jewish inhabitants of Samaria identified Mount Gerizim as the chosen place of God and the only center of worship, calling it the "navel of the earth" because of a tradition that Adam sacrificed there. Their Scriptures were limited to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Moses was regarded as the only prophet and intercessor in the final judgment. They also believed that 6,000 years after creation, a Restorer would arise and would live on earth for 110 years. On the judgment day the righteous would be resurrected in paradise and the wicked roasted in eternal fire.

In the days of Christ, the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans was greatly strained (Luke 9:52-54; 10:25-37; 17:11-19; John 8:48). The animosity was so great that the Jews bypassed Samaria as they traveled between Galilee and Judea. They went an extra distance through the barren land of Perea on the eastern side of the Jordan to avoid going through Samaria. Yet Jesus rebuked His disciples for their hostility to the Samaritans (Luke 9:55-56), healed a Samaritan leper (Luke 17:16), honored a Samaritan for his neighborliness (Luke 10:30-37), praised a Samaritan for his gratitude (Luke 17:11-18), asked a drink of a Samaritan woman (John 4:7), and preached to the Samaritans (John 4:40-42). Then in Acts 1:8 Jesus challenged His disciples to witness in Samaria. Philip, a deacon, opened a mission in Samaria (Acts 8:5).

¹The word "believe (believed/believing)" is used in John nearly 100 times! It translates the Greek verb form of the word "faith/*pistis*." It would be better if we said "faithing," but we've lost the verb form of "faith" in the English language, so we use "believing" instead. In John, the noun "faith" is never used, the emphasis is completely on the action - trusting in, believing in, Jesus.

The Samaritan woman believes. We don't really know why. Is it Jesus' knowing things he can't know? Or does she see in Jesus the Word? Regardless, she goes and tells others her good news, and they believe. Indeed, these Samaritans are so excited that they ask Jesus to stick around and he does, for two days, during which time "many more believed because of his word" (4:41). No longer was their believing the result of the woman's testimony, but because of what they had heard for themselves. Do we hear the Word?

Because these people were Samaritans, despised by the Jews, it is easy for us to grasp that when Jesus offers this woman new life, he is offering it to all. Though Jesus is a Jew, his vocation is for the whole world. This story echoes John the Baptist's exclamation when he sees Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29). In Christ, we discover the God whom we are to worship.

A Samaritan Witness

In his commentary on John's gospel, R. Kent Hughes shares these reflections on the Samaritan reaction to Jesus:

A miner once interrupted John Hutton, a famous Welsh preacher, by leaping to his feet in the middle of a sermon and leading the whole congregation in the "Doxology." Hutton was taken aback and decided he would make the acquaintance of the man. Later the man explained that he had been a Christian only a few months and that it was all so gloriously different that he could not sit still while the Word was being preached! Then he said, "I was a bad lot. I drank. I pawned the furniture. I knocked my wife about. And now life is real life, and splendidly worthwhile." When asked how he fared among his fellows down in the pit, he laughed and replied, "Today they asked me, 'You don't seriously credit that old yarn about Jesus turning the water into wine?' " To which he had answered, "I know nothing about the water and wine, but I know this: that in my house Christ has turned beer into furniture; and that is a good enough miracle for me!"

I think there must have been something of this in the Samaritan woman's life. She could not give the townspeople all the right theological answers, but they saw that her life had changed—and they were interested.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world." (vv. 39–42)

The Samaritans were the first to call Christ "the Savior of the world," and it came as a result of Jesus' approach to life. What was his secret? It was his sense of urgency: "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." And they truly were, and are! Those disciples could have argued, "Lord, the Samaritans certainly are needy, but the field needs to be plowed, and the seed needs to be sown, and then we must wait for the harvest." But Jesus taught them that the age of the harvest is *now*. The interval between the sowing and the harvesting has been closed. Now is the time for harvesting. If we are following Christ, we will have a sense of urgency.

Clued-in?

And it is in Christ that some Samaritans discovered the God they worshipped. One of the most striking features of today's story is that it is Samaritans who are the first to really "get it," to be fully clued-in.

They believe his word; they believe him. Not his astounding feats, to which the Jewish crowds have been drawn, but to Jesus' words.

The Samaritans have heard and believed and, hence, understood that Jesus is not merely a Jewish Messiah, but the "Savior of the world," echoing Jesus' own

words to Nicodemus: “For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (3:17).

Though so many in John’s gospel can’t see the truth about Jesus, some do. “Cluelessness” need not be a permanent disease. There is a cure.

As Paul wrote to the Romans, “For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile [or Samaritan!] – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Romans 10:12-13).

Scott Engle’s Bible Classes

Monday Afternoon Class

Current study: *2 Corinthians*

We will begin the book of Judges next week

Meeting on-line at 3pm Monday on Scott’s Facebook page. Search for “Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC.”

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

Current study: *Acts*

Meeting at 12:00 noon Tuesday in person in Piro Hall and on-line on Scott’s Facebook ministry page. Search for “Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC”.

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Scott’s Sunday Class

This week: *Digging Deeper: Jael and Sisera*

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