

Bi132 The Gospels

Lesson Bi132-14 The Samaritan Woman

How far are you willing to go to see people come to faith in Jesus? Perhaps you are willing to go to the next village or to people who in the past have rejected the truth. You may actually travel to a distant place to address a crowd, but fail to go the last few feet to interact with an individual in need. In this story Jesus goes out of his way to reach just one person, a person despised because of her religion, her gender, and her past.

Jesus left Jerusalem and was returning to Galilee, because the religious leaders in Judea were beginning to oppose him. There were two main routes to Galilee. Most Jews took the longer route on the east side of the Jordan River, to avoid going through the region of Samaria. But Jesus had a mission, a reason for going to Samaria, so he chose the more direct route.

The Samaritans were the result of Jews in that region marrying Gentiles after Assyria had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. The half-Jewish descendants rejected most of the Scriptures and opposed Jerusalem and its temple. They had built their own temple on Mount Gerazim, which the Jews had later destroyed.

In keeping with his purpose for coming to Samaria, Jesus came near a town called Sychar, to a plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob had dug a well there. Tired and hot from the journey, Jesus sat down by the well to rest in the middle of the day. His disciples went on into the town to buy food.

When a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” She was from this group of people who were despised and shunned by the Jews because of their past rebellion and corrupted faith. Most Jews would not speak to a Samaritan in public, especially a woman, but Jesus purposely began a conversation with her. He asked her help in meeting a most basic need, a drink of water.

The Samaritan woman stated the obvious, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” She knew that a Jew would become ceremonially unclean if he used a drinking vessel handled by a Samaritan, since the Jews believed that all Samaritans were ‘unclean.’

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who I am, you would ask me to give you living water.”

The woman said, “You have no bucket to draw with and the well is more than 30 meters deep (100 feet). Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself?”

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst again. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:4-14).

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

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

“I have no husband,” she replied.

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

Question: What do you think will be the woman’s response, after Jesus reveals he knows her past and present situation in life? In Jesus’ day, a man could divorce his wife for little or no reason. A wife had no such right, so this woman had been rejected by five men who had taken her in marriage.

Changing the subject, the woman said, “Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. We Samaritans worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem. Which is correct?” The proper place of worship had long been a debate between the two groups.

“Believe me,” Jesus replied, “A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. Even though salvation is through the Jews, soon the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. These are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

The woman said, “I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes he will explain everything to us.” You see, the Samaritans expected the Messiah, but knew little about him.

Then Jesus declared to her, “I am the Messiah.” This rejected woman was the first person Jesus told that he was the Messiah.

Just then the disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked him anything about it. Then leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and excitedly invited the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” The people came out of the town and made their way toward him.

Meanwhile his disciples urged him to eat something. He said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” Then his disciples wondered whether someone else had brought him food. “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of the Father who sent me and to finish his work. You may think there are still four months until harvest time.” He pointed to the people coming out from the town to the well. “But I say, look over there, it is harvest time right now.”

Many in that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. 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, "Now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Messiah, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

Observe what Jesus did to make it possible for this woman to hear the truth. All these involved going against the customs of the day. Jews rarely took the route through Samaria. Jews and Samaritans didn't speak to each other unless it was absolutely necessary. Jewish men didn't talk to women in public, especially women not related to them. Jesus broke all these social rules because he knew that this woman and other people in this village were ready to believe in him.

When Jesus asked about the woman's husband, she gave a truthful answer. By the power of the Spirit, Christ was shown her true situation in life. The cause for her husband's divorcing her was probably that she was unable to have any children. Now she was living with a man, just to have food to survive. Every person in town knew her story. When she told them about Jesus, they were curious. They wondered how this woman, seemingly cursed by God, could be the messenger of the Messiah!

Jesus informs the disciples they have come to this town in order to reap a spiritual harvest. Where people worship, who they are, or what sins they have committed are not the important questions. The important question is whether people are ready to acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah. For the disciples the question is whether they will see the value of the harvest that God wants to have from among all peoples. The woman sowed the seed through her testimony and Christ reaped the harvest of new believers.

God sent his son to this world as a missionary—to show people what God was like and to pay the penalty for mankind's sins. Jesus told his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). And before he ascended, Jesus commissioned all his followers to be missionaries too. He said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Christ empowers us as missionaries—sent ones—both to sow and reap a spiritual harvest.

This story is **important** because it shows us Jesus was not controlled by his culture, but by the Spirit, when he reached out to the despised of his day. As his disciples, we are sent to reap the harvest of the seed others have planted, as well as sowing seed for someone else to reap.

The **main truth** of this story is that God, through Christ, is calling people everywhere to faith, no matter their past or nationality or gender. Jesus wants all people to be a part of the kingdom that God is establishing.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. Why did Jesus travel through Samaria?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered, "Jesus wanted to meet and talk with the woman at the well," you are correct.

2. While the Samaritan woman talked with Jesus, what discovery did she make?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said, "She discovered that Jesus was the Messiah," you are correct.
3. What did Jesus say to indicate that Samaria was ready for a spiritual harvest now?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said that Jesus told the disciples, "You may think there are still four months until harvest, but I say it is harvest time right now," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to this story a few more times, until you can repeat it to someone else. Tell the story to them and then discuss these questions, "If Jesus came to our town, whom would he seek to have a conversation with? Who are the religious leaders, like Nicodemus, or the rejected and hated ones like the Samaritan woman, who need to experience God's love?" You have the good news about Jesus to share with them.