

LESSON #8 CHAPTER 4:1-42
Jesus Evangelized to the Samaritans

Divine Attribute: Proactive

Theological concept: Missional God

Geographical location: Sychar (Samaria)

Chapter Structure

- 4:1-26 Jesus evangelised to the Samaritan woman
4:27-38 Jesus encouraged disciples to evangelise to the Samaritans
4:39-42 Jesus evangelised in the Samaritan town

Spiritual Principles:

P1 Your soul's deepest thirst is for God himself

P2 Our God is missional

A. Today's lesson...

In chapter 3, we saw Nicodemus come to Jesus to seek the way into the Kingdom of God. Following this, the evangelist John presented Jesus taking the initiative to evangelise a Samaritan woman.

At the end of Chapter 3, we learned that the increasing number of those who came to receive Jesus' baptism produced feelings of resentment in the minds of John's disciples (v.26). Apparently, the situation might have been exploited by the Pharisees to the disadvantage of John and Jesus alike. To avoid the estrangement between his disciples and John's disciples, Jesus left Judea and headed for Galilee (4:1-3).

Samaria lay between Judea in the south and Galilee in the North (see map attached). Anyone who wished to go from Judea to Galilee had to pass through Samaria (4:4) unless he was prepared to detour through Transjordan, a region largely populated by Gentiles. On this occasion, Jesus took a direct route and arrived at Sychar, where Jacob's well was (4:5). It was noon (4:6, sixth hour is reckoned from sunrise) "*Wearied as he was from his journey*" – attesting the genuine humanity of the Word became flesh. Jesus rested by the well while his disciples went into town to buy food¹.

B. 4:1-26 Jesus evangelised to the Samaritan woman

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.)

There was something unusual about this woman. Typically, women came to draw water in groups and during cooler times of the day. But this woman came alone at the hottest time of the day. We will soon learn that she did it on purpose because of her exceptional failure in marriage.

¹ Strictly observant Jews would have thought they were incurring defilement if they ate food handled by Samaritans; however, certain dried food was regarded as being less susceptible of defilement than most.

It was natural in the ancient world for a tired and thirsty traveller to ask for water from a woman who was drawing water (Ge 24:17). Yet, Jesus' ordinary request surprised the woman, *9The 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.)*

There was a deep-rooted tension between Jews and Samaritans (2Ki 17:24-41). The tension was aggravated when the first group of returning Jewish exiles rejected the Samaritan's offer of cooperation based on their perceived impurity and intent. (Ezra 4:1-5). The resultant hostility was sharpened by the erection of a rival Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim about 400 B.C. The Jews and Samaritans did not interact or share vessels due to ceremonial pollution concerns. The woman's surprise was 'natural'.

Some basic knowledge of the Samaritan belief will help us understand the significance of Jesus initiating this dialogue:

- The Samaritans are the descendants of Israelites and other races;
- The Samaritan bible is the five books of Moses;
- The five key confessions of faith:
 1. Yahweh is the only one true God;
 2. Moses was the main prophet from God;
 3. The Law of Moses is a revelation of God;
 4. Moses instructed Joshua according to God's instruction to build an altar on Mount Gerizim as the centre of worship;
 5. God has promised a Restorer (Tabeh), who is "the prophet like Moses", who will come on the last day and raise them up.

10Jesus 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." 11The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." 13Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Jesus did not pursue the subject of the Jewish-Samaritan cleavage. Instead, He lifted the topic of the conversation to another plane – living water for the soul. Any traveller in Palestine would know how indispensable water is and would appreciate water as a true gift of God. The woman took the 'living water' that Jesus offered (v.10) to be spring water or running water that feeds Jacob's well (just as Nicodemus understood 'born again' physically). So, she wondered how this strange man would draw water from the depths of the well since he did not have any bucket. (The well is over 100 feet deep today, and it must have been deeper then) Moreover, the ownership of the well was given to them by Jacob. How could Jesus own the wellspring unless he is greater than Jacob?

Jesus took up the woman's question, *"Are you greater than our father Jacob?"* seriously. The water in Jacob's well is refreshing, but those who drink it grow thirsty again and have to come back to get it again. Jesus' words, *"whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again"*, would have rung a

bell in a Samaritan ear. The Samaritan liturgy for the Day of Atonement speaks of the Taheb (who is the Samaritan counterpart to the Jewish Messiah), 'Water shall flow from his buckets' (language borrowed from Balaam's oracle in Number 24:7)

Life Application:

The soul's deepest thirst is not good things from God but God himself. This is because God made man a living soul with His breath, and man can never be satisfied without a close relationship with God. Thankfully, God does not banish our spiritual thirst, for we would cease our search for Him. God quenches us by giving us His Spirit as an inward source of satisfaction that continually and spontaneously supplies each recurrent need for refreshment.

P1 Your soul's deepest thirst is for God himself

Our sole contentment is in Christ, who gave us the gift of his Spirit. If we have Jesus, we will never be thirsty, no matter how little we own in this world. On the other hand, without Jesus, we will always be thirsty regardless of how wealthy we are.

But the woman's next question revealed that she thought Jesus was talking about material water and bodily thirst: *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."* If she had a supply of this miraculous water, she needed not to make the daily journey to Jacob's well under noonday heat! Therefore, Jesus changed the subject to further unfold who he is.

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

The woman was taken aback by the question about the sensitive part of her life. Her natural response, as we all do, was to answer in a broad brushstroke, *17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband"*

It was not the whole truth. Jesus proceeded to let her know just how much he knew about her, *"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."*

We do not know why she had so many husbands or why she is cohabiting with a man to whom she was not married. Jesus' words certainly reminded her of her many disappointments in her relationships. His purpose is that she might appreciate the deep and lasting satisfaction she could find in Jesus.

Indeed, Jesus could read our life story like an open book, as he could hers. Seeing that Jesus had such insight, the woman realised she was talking to a prophet. As Jesus is a Jew, she brought up the subject of controversy – the place of worship. *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."*

However, the authoritative text in Deuteronomy 12:5 *"But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there."* It does not specify the place of God's choice; the Jews and the Samaritans drew different inferences about its whereabouts. The Jews located it 'in Jerusalem', the Samaritans 'on this mountain' – i.e. Gerizim, overlooking Shechem to which they could look up as they talked by the well.

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."

What Jesus was saying was: a new order was now being introduced, which rendered her question out-of-date and meaningless. The important question about worship is not **where** people worship God but **how** they worship him. Firstly, we are to worship God as 'the Father' (Ro 8:15; Gal 4:6). Secondly, God is Spirit, not just a Spirit among other spirits; He is pure Spirit, and the worship He takes delight in is the sacrifice of a humble, contrite, grateful and adoring spirit. It is sincere heart devotion in tune with the indwelling Holy Spirit and conformance with the truth revealed. The psalmists and prophets in the earlier ages had already realised that material things could, at best, be the vehicle of true worship but could never be the essence of worship. Nonetheless, Jesus' affirmation, though not entirely new, crowns their witness.

Spiritual or genuine worship cannot be tied to set places and seasons. The OT prophets had spoken of an age to come when not one central sanctuary alone, but the whole earth would be the habitation of the name and glory of God. The coming age has already dawned, "*is now here*". The life of the age to come may be possessed and enjoyed here and now by true worshippers. As William Cowper wrote:

*Jesus, where'er thy people meet,
There they behold thy mercy-seat;
Where'er they seek thee, thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground.*

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."

In effect, she was saying, "A Day is coming when all these religious problems will be cleared up for us". The Samaritan expectation of a Tabeh (which means Restorer, or the Messiah for the Jews) is grounded on Deuteronomy 18:15-18 " (*The Lord your God*) *I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.*" (18:18) They knew that when this prophet comes, he would explain all mysteries to them.

26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." Jesus, whom the Jews expected as the promised prince of the house of David, was simultaneously the one whom the Samaritans expected as the prophet like Moses!

Dear brothers and sisters, doctrinal accuracy is undoubtedly important. But let us remember that, at the end of the day, only those who worship God in truth and Spirit are the true worshippers God is seeking!

Reflection: Do I enjoy Sunday service? What do I enjoy? Am I the kind of worshipper that God is looking for? What corrections must I make for God to accept my worship?

C. 4:27-38 Jesus encouraged disciples to evangelize

27 Just then his disciples came back. They marvelled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" 28 So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" 30 They went out of the town and were coming to him.

The disciples' return interrupted the conversation but not God's work. The Samaritan woman has received and understood the revelation of God's saving grace, for it is God's will to save her and use her! Dear brothers and sisters, what God wants to give you, be it a marriage, a job, or a ministry, no man can stop Him. Do not resort to unrighteous measures.

They were surprised to find their Master talking to a Samaritan woman, and naturally, they had questions. Probably knowing from experience that their Master always had good reason for what he did, even when it was strange and unconventional, none of them asked what she wanted from him or why he was talking to her. When we do not understand what God is doing, let us recall His attributes and continue to trust and wait for Him.

The woman has previously shied away from her townmates. Now, she was eager to seek them out to tell them the arrival of the Tabeh, the Saviour the Samaritans had been waiting for! The power to turn around came from the joy of knowing Jesus! She was so excited that she left her water jar and went into town immediately, alluding to the insignificance of the unquenchable water compared to the living water to her! Dear brothers and sisters, true conversion will bring about changes, first to our hearts and then to our lives.

Her townsfolks were impressed by her testimony and decided to see Jesus for themselves. We must picture them coming out of the town, hastening towards the well. Looking at them, Jesus said to the disciples, *"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.'"* (4:35)

31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." 33 So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

As a great teacher, Jesus seized this opportunity to demonstrate the truth in Deuteronomy 8:3 and teach them the purpose of life, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, by every word that comes from the mouth of God."* To Jesus, obeying and doing his Father's will is the purpose, joy and strength of his life. Because of this, he could say to his Father at the end of his ministry, *"I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do."* (John 17:4 NIV) The satisfaction he now experienced by leading the Samaritans to God was far greater than any satisfaction that the bread the disciples brought for him could give.

Life Application:

The purpose of our lives is to do the will of our heavenly Father. A true Christian's strength comes not from the world nor his joy from his wealth. We derive our strength and joy from living by the Lord's will for us and doing the work God assigns us. So, when you feel weak and dejected, check what your heart is seeking.

Reflection: O Lord, please forgive me for making plans for my studies, career, marriage, and church service without seeking your will. O Holy Spirit, help me not to repeat this fatal mistake, lest I mess up my life and depart this world with regrets.

36 Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37 For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour."

A Gospel harvest sprang from his conversation with the woman and her witness to the other Samaritans. Jesus was inviting his disciples to share his joy when he asked them to heap the harvest. According to Jesus, in the harvest field of God, both the sowers and the reapers have the right to share the joy of harvesting. Jesus himself is the grain of wheat that fell onto the ground and died to produce an abundance of fruit (John 12:24). His disciples' privilege is to reap the harvest that springs continuously from the good seed of Jesus.

Life Application:

Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus also invites us to share His harvesting joy by witnessing, preaching and interceding for the lost souls. Let us not grow weary in toiling in the gospel field, for Jesus is the Sower par excellence in every field!

D. 4:39–42 Jesus evangelized in the Samaritan town

39 Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days.

The woman's thirst for a husband (she failed five times!) was quenched by the living water she received from Jesus. It had become an overflowing fountain in her life, and others were coming to share the refreshment she had begun to enjoy. Here, we witness that the most unlikely soul may prove the most effective witness!

It was unusual for the Samaritans to invite a Jewish teacher to stay with them without fear of a rebuff. This fear was overpowered by their desire to know God! The harvest was not limited to those who came to the well to see Jesus. Many people in the town believed in him during his two-day stay with them. *"It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world."* (4:41,42)

Life Applications

There are lessons on evangelism for us. Firstly, when the people you witnessed turn to Christ subsequently, do not think they were convicted by your testimony. To think this way is to rob God of His glory because no man can convict a sinner of his sin. Conviction of sin is solely the work of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, second-hand acquaintance with Christ or hearsay belief cannot substitute for the personal knowledge of Christ. Every believer must know Jesus for themselves. It is, therefore, important that we use the words of the Lord to preach the Gospel.

E. Closing

This account represents the first outreaching of God's grace beyond the confines of Judaism. Indeed, Jesus is mission-minded.

P2 Our God is missional

Jesus is missional because the Triune God is missional. The Word became flesh is the divine mission. Jesus, the Son of God, was commissioned into the world to manifest God. We, the children of God, are commissioned into the world to manifest Christ, "you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8) This is the work our heavenly Father assigned us. It is also how we can glorify God.



