

John 4: 1-42 Study with Breakdown (NRSV)

3/19/20

4:1-42: The story of Jesus and the Woman at the Well

This passage starts out with Jesus' goal. The term "had to" can be seen as something Jesus had to do as part of God's plan. There were other ways to get from Judah (the southern kingdom) to Galilee (in the northern kingdom), but Jesus had to go through Samaria.

This passage parallels last week's study of John 3 and Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus. The Gospel writer John's purpose in writing his Gospel is to bolster and reassure the early Christians that Jesus is Lord and Savior and that worshipping Him is right. The early Christians at the time of this writing were undergoing severe hardships and persecutions. It was not an easy time!

God's plan in this story was to reach out to the outsiders with the Good News. Jesus' purpose was to make contact with the Samaritans.

4:1-42: Dialogue between Jesus and the (Samaritan) Woman

4 But he had to go through Samaria. 5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. 7A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

- Jesus' initial words would have been shocking to John's readers. Jewish men did not talk to unknown women in public. Further, Jews and Samaritans hated each other and avoided contact.
- The woman would also have been shocked that a Jewish man talked directly to her.

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus 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." 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"

- The woman steps through her social barrier and asks a perfectly normal question – why are you talking to me? The water is not really of concern.
- As in Chap.3 Jesus does not respond directly to her question – he responds with a statement.
- Again, John uses a Greek word for water that has a dual meaning: one, that the water is flowing water, as in a stream; and two, that the water is life-giving water.

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- In the same manner as Nicodemus, the woman only recognizes the physical aspect of water, the flowing water.
- The woman is very confused. Here is a man who has no bucket to get water from the well making an offer to give the woman something free. "How??"

12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

- Jacob was some of the great leaders of the Jewish people. God guided Jacob to dig the well in a dry area to provide "life-giving" water. The Gospel writer is drawing an association between Jacob, a great man and a miracle, with Jesus who is also promising life-giving water.
- The woman is asking Jesus if he thinks he is greater than Jacob. The readers of John's Gospel would know that Jesus is much more important than Jacob!
- In this section Jesus clarifies the woman's misunderstanding and clearly states that the water that Jesus can provide leads to eternal life.

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

- Again the woman is stuck on the physical aspects of needing water.
- She is looking forward to the promise of not having to come to the well every day!

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet."

- This section reflects a transition. Up to this point, Jesus has been trying to use water as a metaphor for eternal life. He changes his approach and now goes to the woman's personal life.
- My resource for this study gave the insight that Jesus was not trying to draw attention to the woman's possibly low morals. Jesus does not express any interest in her morals, He only wants to convince her of His true identity. There may have been socially acceptable life circumstances that had led to her current situation.
- When Jesus tells the woman about her life situation, she finally is starting to understand about Jesus' true identity.

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20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” 21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 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 seeks such as these to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” 25 The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” 26 Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

- My resource also has a different insight on the first verse. I have always interpreted this as the woman trying to change the subject away from her life. Consider this, the woman does not resist or challenge Jesus in this Chapter. She asks questions, and then gradually engages with Jesus trying to understand Him better.
- Remember that there is a deep hatred between the Jews and Samaritans. A big part of this hatred is around the proper place to worship. The Jews pointed to Jerusalem, the Samaritans pointed to Mount Gerizim
- Mt. Gerizim was considered to be a sacred site much earlier in the Old Testament (ref: Deuteronomy 11:22-30; 27:1-13; Joshua 8:30-35)
- The Samaritans felt very strongly that Mt. Gerizim as declared by God to be the most holy place to worship.
- The woman’s question indicates a strong desire for knowledge: what did this newly discovered prophet have to say about this important and divisive question?
- This is supported by her statement that “the Messiah will proclaim all things to us”
- Jesus does say that salvation comes through the Jews, but is far more interested in talking about true worship.
- Jesus points to the end-times when location of worship is irrelevant – only that we worship the Father!
- Jesus ends this passage by stating that He is the Messiah.

I will leave the rest of this section of this chapter (below) for your personal study. Consider that Jesus has worked through the woman to make a witness to His true identity as the Messiah. This chapter started out saying that Jesus was going from Judah to Galilee. Yet Jesus stayed in Samaria for several days!

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One more observation. The Nicodemus story started out with Nicodemus talking about believing something special about Jesus because of the signs that Jesus had done. In our Bible study last week we talked about that with a couple different interpretations.

Note that the Gospel describes the woman and townspeople believing because of the woman's testimony and Jesus' words. A distinct difference!

27Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"

28Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" 30They left the city and were on their way to him.

31Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." 33So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" 34Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. 35Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. 36The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

39Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." 40So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. 41And many more believed because of his word. 42They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."