

## Notes on John 4

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### Jesus in Samaria and the Healing of the Nobleman's Son – Chap. 4

#### Jesus in Samaria — 4:1-42

##### Verses 1-3

1. Where did Jesus go and why (4:1,2)? (Thought question: Why would Jesus act this way under these circumstances?)
2. Who did the actual baptizing of Jesus' followers?
3. Application: What can we learn from this event about the importance of who actualizes baptizes a person?

#### *Jesus leaves Judea for Galilee*

Jesus realized that the Pharisees were aware of His increasing popularity: He was in fact making more disciples than John. So he left Judea, where the events in the last part of chapter 3 had occurred (cf. 3:22,23), and went back to Galilee. The exact connection here is not stated. The Pharisees were intensely jealous of anyone besides themselves who obtained a following (Matt. 27:18). Jesus knew that confrontation with them was inevitable, but the time had not yet come for Him to die. So maybe He left the area so He would have time to accomplish more teaching before His confrontation with the Jewish leaders would lead to His death.

Some commentators point out that it was about this time that John was arrested by Herod and imprisoned (Matt. 4:12; Mark 1:14; Luke 3:19,20; cf. John 3:24). Herod ruled in Galilee (Luke 3:1; 23:5-12; 13:31; Matt. 14:1-12; Luke 9:7-9), so Jesus went to the jurisdiction ruled by the very king who had imprisoned and killed John. Perhaps He intended there to strengthen and encourage those disciples who would have been distressed by John's arrest. But this would have no connection to the fact the Pharisees heard about the number of disciples He was making.

In any case, it is clear that Jesus did not leave Judea because of any lack of favorable response to His message. He was making many disciples, even more so than John. Even so, He apparently thought there were even more important reasons for Him to return to Galilee.

#### *The connection between baptism and becoming a disciple*

We are told that Jesus was making and baptizing disciples (see notes on 3:22,26,30, where we are first told the Jesus was baptizing people). This shows that baptism was a prerequisite to becoming a disciple — a prerequisite or initiation into discipleship. Other than that, we are not told the purpose of it. But this implies that, even at this early point, one who had not been baptized would not fully be a disciple.

However, we are told that the actual baptizing was done, not by Jesus Himself, but by His disciples. This illustrates the principle of working through agents. Jesus authorized the baptism, but others did it by His authority (cf. Luke 10:16; 16:29; John 14:9; Matt. 25:34-45; 26:26-28). If one authorizes someone else to act in his behalf, then the one who authorized the act is responsible for it the same as if he himself had done it. This is also true in law, as when one hires someone else to commit murder, etc. (1 Kings 21:19). Under the gospel, Christians are authorized to baptize in Jesus' name (or in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38; etc.). When we do, it is Jesus' baptism just the same as if He Himself had done it.

Note also that the emphasis in baptism is not on the one who physically performs the act. If it was important who did the act, surely it would have been preferred for Jesus Himself to do it. This is not to imply that baptism is not important or that the purpose does not matter. On the contrary, the point is to keep the focus on the purpose of the act and the commitment of the one being baptized to do the act properly. So Jesus allowed, and perhaps even encouraged, other

people to do the physical act. This shows that it does not matter who does the act, and it prevents people from seeking prominence on the basis of who performed their baptism. See also 1 Corinthians 1:14-17, where Paul explains that this same principle applied to his work. He too emphasized the work of teaching but then allowed others to do the physical act of baptizing the converts. That way no one would become proud or divisive on the basis of what preacher baptized them.

Verses 4-6

4. What area and what city did Jesus pass through (see map)?
5. What Old Testament event related to this region, and what landmark was there?
6. What time was it, how did Jesus feel, and what did He do? (Thought question: What lessons can we learn from the way Jesus felt and yet what He did in this story?)

### ***Jesus traveled through Samaria.***

When traveling from Judea to Galilee, many Jews crossed the Jordan and went around Samaria because of their hatred for Samaritans (v9). But it was quicker and shorter to go through Samaria, so for some reason Jesus decided that He needed to go the quicker route (v4).

He came to the Samaritan city called Sychar, which was located near Mt. Gerizim (see MAP). It was also near Shechem, where Jacob had purchased a plot of land (Genesis 33:19). We are told that Jacob had given a plot of land nearby to Joseph (perhaps referred to in Genesis 48:22).

### ***Jacob's well***

There was also a well there that was named for Jacob. This same well apparently exists today, since a well in this very area has been attributed throughout history as being the one that Jacob owned. It is about 8 feet across, but the depth has varied from time to time, as apparently people have thrown things in (cf. *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*).

Jesus was tired when He arrived at this well and sat down. It was about the sixth hour or 12:00 noon. He was alone at the time, because the disciples were in the city getting food (v8).

Note that fact Jesus was tired shows that He experienced the physical problems we do. He was truly a man as well as God. But He had a lengthy discussion here with a woman even though He was tired. This shows His zeal for teaching, which we ought to imitate.

Verses 7,8

7. Who came, and why did she come?
8. What request did Jesus make? Where were His disciples at this time?

### ***Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for a drink.***

A woman of Samaria came to draw water, and Jesus asked her for a drink. This may seem a simple request, but under the circumstances it was unusual (v9), and it led to great events.

In teaching, we can often use small things if we watch for opportunities. Teaching does not require formal classrooms with pre-appointed times. Everyday conversations make some of the best times to teach, if we watch for opportunities to bring spiritual things into the conversation. Jesus was a master at doing this, and we would all do well to learn to imitate this ability.

We are told parenthetically that the disciples were not present because they had gone into the city to buy food. This explains why Jesus was alone when the woman came to the well and why the disciples came back later and wondered what had happened (v27).

Verse 9

9. Why did Jesus' request seem strange to the woman?
10. Application: What does this event show about Jesus' attitude toward people of other races?
11. List other *passages* showing Jesus wants people of all races and nations to be saved.

***The woman raises the issue of the conflict between Jews and Samaritans.***

To us, Jesus' action may seem insignificant, but the woman realized that it was very unusual. Jews have no dealings with Samaritans, in that they did not talk with them, eat with them, or visit socially with them. Also men often did not speak to women in public places. Yet Jesus asked for a drink from this Samaritan woman. This led her to comment that his conduct was strange. It is not clear whether she spoke with resentment of Him as a Jew or with curiosity regarding His action.

This was basically a racial issue. The Samaritans were a mixed breed, having resulted from inter-marriage between Jews and other peoples. It seems likely that they were the descendants of the people whom the Assyrians imported into the land, when they deported many Israelites (see 2 Kings 17:21-24 & McGarvey's notes). Inter-marriage with Jews then produced the Samaritans. Jews did not associate with them, like they did not associate with Gentiles. Perhaps the law forbidding inter-marriage with people of the land also affected their attitude.

Nevertheless, the Samaritans claimed Jacob as their father (v12) and tried to worship God. But their worship was perverted. King Jereboam had begun major perversions in the worship in this area, when he erected an altar to a golden calf at Bethel (1 Kings 12:25-33). The people the Assyrians brought in were taught about God, but worshiped Him along with idols as though He was just another god (2 Kings 17:24-41). For this reason the Jews who returned from captivity were led by their rulers to refuse to allow these people to have part in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The people showed great animosity toward the Jews who returned (Ezra 4:1-5; Nehemiah chap. 4&6).

Jesus' attitude toward the Samaritans, however, was the same as His attitude toward all sinners. He did not justify their sins, but He viewed them as souls needing salvation. He wanted to help them become pleasing to God. His salvation would be without respect of persons, regardless of nationality (Acts 10:34,35; Mark. 16:15,16; Matt. 28:18-20). Jewish traditions would not be allowed to hinder His efforts, so long as no law of God was violated.

Hence, Jesus spoke to the woman, resulting eventually in numerous people coming to believe in Him. Nevertheless, He instructed the disciples on the limited commission to avoid preaching to the Samaritans, apparently as a matter of priority and time limitations - Matt. 10:5. After His death as the gospel was being spread, the message was brought to Samaria, where many obeyed (Acts 1:8; 8:5-25). (Cf. Luke 17:11-19.) Note that we too should have a Scriptural love and care for people of all nationalities and races, desiring all to be saved.

Other references to Samaritans: 2 Kings 17:6,24-41; Luke 9:52-56; Luke 10:25-37.

Verse 10

12. What offer did Jesus make to the woman (v10)?

***Jesus used the topic of water to stir the woman's interest.***

Jesus responded by ignoring the question the woman asked. As when He taught Nicodemus, Jesus began with a comparison without explaining it. The woman did not understand the point, but it drew her further into the discussion.

This is an interesting teaching technique. The subject the woman raised was not what she most needed to hear about. She had asked about racial issues. Jesus knew that what she really needed was to know ***who He is***, so He switched the topic. But He raised a new topic in a way

that brought her interest to where He could teach her. He got her attention just by talking to her, then He increased it immeasurably by a challenging statement. These are teaching skills that all Christians need to develop.

He illustrated a need she had but was not aware of, by using the one thing they had in common. She came for water, and He had asked for water. So Jesus introduced her to another kind of water. He said that, if she knew who He was, she would have been asking Him for a drink (instead of the other way around) and He would give her living water.

Commentators discuss at length specifically what Jesus referred to as “the gift of God” and the “living water.” The passage does not say, so I doubt it is essential for us to know. Whether these refer to Jesus Himself, eternal life, forgiveness of sins, knowledge of truth, etc., the end result is the same. He could give her something even more essential to her soul than the physical water was to her physical life. Likely He left the meaning vague, because the important point was to lead her to an interest in the spiritual blessings He could provide. His meaning could have included any or all of the above items.

Note that the very fact that Jesus tried to teach this woman shows that women are important to God. It also shows that He was concerned about individuals to the point He would take time, even when tired, to teach a single individual. Many people are willing to teach if they have large crowds. But some see little value in taking time to teach an individual. Jesus and His apostles showed us the importance of “personal evangelism” with Nicodemus, this Samaritan woman, and on other occasions.

Living water is also mentioned in 7:37f; Rev. 21:6; 22:1,17; 7:17.

Verse 11,12

13. What objections did the woman raise (vv 11,12)?

### *The woman is confused but continues the conversation.*

The woman showed her confusion, much like Nicodemus had. She thought He was talking physically when He was talking spiritually. And as with Nicodemus, her response showed her confusion. She asked what he had that He could use to draw water from a deep well.

Then she asked if He thought He was greater than Jacob who, with his family and animals, had drunk from the well? If Jacob needed a well and a vessel to get water, how could Jesus get water having nothing to draw with and no other apparent source? Doubtless she thought He was not greater, but soon she realized that He was.

Note that Jesus and Jacob and Jacob’s sons had all drunk from this very well. What an interesting thought to drink from it today. Yet even more important would be for us to share in the living water that Jesus offered and have a relationship with God, just as surely as Jesus and Jacob did.

Verses 13,14

14. What results would come from drinking this water (vv 13,14)? (Think: What was the living water that Jesus offered?)

### *Jesus’ water can lead to eternal life.*

Jesus explained further. His water was superior because, unlike the water she could provide to Him, His water could provide people eternal life so they would never thirst again. It is like a spring of water that provides continuing, unending satisfaction. His statement here showed conclusively that He referred, not to physical water, but to something spiritual. Only spiritual blessings could lead to eternal life.

Jesus’ living water is truly satisfying. But the needs it meets are spiritual — it gives eternal life. The illustration is that physical water is essential to physical life. But Jesus can give living water that provides eternal life. If He could provide this, then truly He would be greater than Jacob.

In giving this answer, Jesus expresses one of the fundamental weaknesses of everything physical: its value is temporary. He said that one who drinks of physical water will thirst again. The same is true of eating and all physical blessings. Having enjoyed them, we will desire them again. Nothing physical gives lasting, permanent satisfaction. Only in those things that lead to eternal life can we find lasting fulfillment. (Matthew 6:19-34; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

Again, Jesus nowhere tells exactly what the water is or how to get it. He is doubtless encouraging her interest. The meaning could be salvation (forgiveness), the gospel (truth), fellowship with God, or perhaps more likely He includes all these in spiritual blessings that lead to eternal life.

Verse 15

15. What request did the woman make, and what shows that she was still confused about Jesus' meaning (v15)?

### ***The woman continues her confusion.***

The woman clearly still was confused, for she asked Jesus to give her this water so that she would never be thirsty and not have to come to the well to draw water anymore. She was interested to see what He had to offer, though she was no doubt still skeptical.

But she still was thinking physically, despite the fact His statement referred to eternal life. She just wanted to have physical water that would forever remove her thirst, so she would never have to come to draw from the well again! (Cf. John 6:34.)

Verses 16-19

16. What request did Jesus make next, and what did the woman answer (vv 16,17)  
17. What did Jesus tell her about her husbands and how did she respond (vv 18,19)?  
(Thought question: What were Jesus' purposes for bringing up her husbands?)

### ***Jesus asks the woman about her husband.***

Jesus then appeared to change the subject again. He asked her to go and bring her husband back. This might imply that the living water was for other people too. But Jesus' real intent was to help her understand the spiritual nature of her need and of the blessing He was offering her. He had offered her a source of eternal life, but she kept thinking in terms of physical thirst. So he moved to another subject, yet only to continue toward the same point: she had a spiritual need that only He can meet. She was a sinful woman and needed forgiveness. Furthermore, by bringing up her marriage He proved His ability as a prophet.

Not knowing that Jesus already knew all about her, she said she had no husband. Jesus confirmed that, in a sense this was true, but it was not the whole story. He said that, in her lifetime, she had 5 husbands, but the man she had then was not her husband.

This proved Jesus' supernatural knowledge, since He had never met her before (cf. 2:24f). This in turn eventually led her to the conclusion that His claims were true. This is the purpose of such miraculous powers.

It also demonstrated her sinful condition. Under the law, it might have been possible for her to have had five husbands, since remarriage after death or divorce was allowed. But to have a man not her husband was not justified under either the old or the new covenants. She was living in adultery - what people today call "living together." Many people today think this is justified or think nothing wrong of it. Jesus obviously brought the matter up in a way that reminded them both that she was in sin.

This also shows important lessons about teaching. Many preachers are too "nice" or too "positive" to point out to people that they are in sin. Yet Jesus had not been in conversation with this absolute stranger for more than five or ten minutes till He had brought up her sinful condition. He did not do it with ridicule, but the fact remains that He did it. And He did it in a way that showed it to be unacceptable. He did not excuse or overlook it.

On the other hand, He also did not bring it up for the sake of gloating over her or simply condemning her. He did it so He could help her overcome the problem. He was offering her a spiritual bonanza, but she refused to appreciate it until she saw her spiritual poverty. This needs to be the thrust of our preaching. We too must boldly discuss people's sins and urge them to see wickedness as God sees it. But then we need to seek their salvation.

### ***The woman begins to recognize Jesus as a prophet.***

The woman concluded that Jesus must be a prophet. This, in effect, admitted that what He had said about her husbands was true (cf. v29). It also shows that the purpose of such miraculous powers was to confirm that the speaker was from God.

Perhaps her comment also served, on her part, to divert the discussion from the sin she was guilty of. Instead of talking about the man she lived with but was not married to, she changed the subject to who Jesus was. Nevertheless, Jesus followed her in the discussion, because she was finally coming to realize what the discussion was all about!

The woman was finally beginning to see that Jesus was trying to teach her about spiritual things. Finally, she has perceived that this is not about physical water or even about her family relations. It was about who Jesus was and about why she needed the blessings He could offer.

And note how her estimation of Jesus grew in just a short time. He was "a Jew" (v9), then "sir" (v11), then a prophet (v19). Soon she would learn that He was even more than that (cf. Matt. 16:15-18). Jesus had introduced the subject of who He was in v10. Finally, she was beginning to see the point as His real nature rose in her estimation.

This, of course, is the ultimate issue that must also be faced by all of us. We are all sinners who can be saved only through Jesus. We must ultimately face the question of who Jesus is.

Verses 20-22

18. What issue did the woman raise next, and how did Jesus answer (vv 20-22)?  
(Thought question: Who really had the truth regarding the woman's original question?)

### ***Question about the proper place of worship***

Seeing that Jesus was a religious teacher, the woman raised a religious issue that divided the Jews and Samaritans. The Samaritans worshipped God on a mountain in Samaria (Mt. Gerizim), but the Jews said people should go to Jerusalem to worship. She apparently wanted to hear Jesus' view regarding the controversy. Note the openness of the woman in being willing to consider the view of one whose beliefs would be likely to contradict her own.

Jesus eventually told her that, on this issue, the Jews had the truth. The Samaritans worshiped in ignorance. The Jews knew the proper way to worship, for the way to salvation was being revealed by God through the Jews. They had revelation from God and were worshipping according to knowledge, whereas the Samaritans were not. However, His emphasis is on the fact that the issue would soon not matter at all.

See here the danger in following human tradition and family religion. The woman said their "fathers" had worshiped on Mt. Gerizim, but Jesus responded that they worshiped in ignorance. Many people continue to worship according to their family religion or traditions handed down to them from people. This example shows that such is not a reliable way to know the truth. Cf. Matthew 15:1-14.

Note that Jesus' statement also implies a change of the Mosaic Law. The Law clearly required worship in a specific place, and Jesus says that teaching was true. But by saying that soon would not matter, He was indicating that the law in this matter would soon change. This change occurred when He died on the cross, removed the Old Testament, and instituted the New Testament. Cf. Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17.

Under the gospel, there is no particular place of worship (cf. 1 Tim. 2:8). The law involved a specific building or structure in a specific place where people were required to go to worship God

(Deuteronomy 12:5,11-14,18,21,26; 14:23-25; 15:20; 16:2,6,7,11,15). The Samaritans were wrong, because they had chosen a different place from what the Lord had chosen (and of course, they were wrong in many other ways as well). Other people place special religious emphasis on other places. Moslems seek to worship at or toward Mecca. Some who claim to be Christians think certain buildings or cathedrals are special shrines where worship is accepted. But the New Testament is unique in that it would have no specific city or structure where worship was required. We can assemble as a local church in any place or circumstance that we can arrange in a morally proper manner.

Note also that people today often raise religious issues, like the Samaritan woman did with Jesus. Many people think such issues do not matter and there is no way to know right from wrong. Many religious teachers today would compromise or deny the Bible teaching on such issues. They tell us we should “judge not,” don’t offend people, don’t tell people they are wrong about specific questions, don’t get involved in divisive issues, but just preach a positive message. Jesus did not preach like such men preach. He said there was a right and wrong on this issue. However, He also showed that it would not matter much longer. We ought to stand for truth, but ought not to make matters more serious than they are.

Finally, note that the stand Jesus took constituted an affirmation that the Old Testament canon, as accepted by the Jews, was correct. The Samaritans’ beliefs were argued on the basis of accepting only the books of Moses. They rejected the validity of the other books that the Jews accepted as inspired. By stating that the Jews worshiped according to knowledge of the truth, Jesus was affirming that the Jews had properly determined what books to accept as inspired. This demonstrates that it was possible to know what books belong in Scripture, even though they were written over a period of many years, then copied and translated and circulated by uninspired men. The same is true of the New Testament Scriptures for us today.

Verses 23,24

19. How does God want us to worship Him, and how does this relate to His own character (vv 23,24)?
20. Application: List several examples of worship that is not in spirit or that is not in truth.

### ***Jesus emphasized worship in spirit and in truth.***

Jesus’ emphasis was not on the old controversy, but on the new way things would soon be. The hour (time) was coming and “now is” (i.e., is soon upon us) when people who worshipped truly (not in vain — Matt. 15:9) would worship in spirit and truth. The manner of worship is what would matter, not the place.

Jesus began by affirming that God is spirit: the essential nature of God is spirit. This is a fundamental point in understanding the true God and the kind of worship He wants. God is not physical. This eliminates heathen gods of stone or metal, graven images, human beings, and everything in nature (see also Acts 17:24ff). Likewise, God is not just a force or power that pervades everything in nature, such as the pantheistic God of the Hindus. God is a living spirit, who thinks, chooses, loves, acts, and communicates with man. As such, He is not limited to any specific place, so under the New Testament He would not restrict worship to a place.

Because God is spirit (not physical), He wants worship that is in harmony with spirit as well as truth. Truth is God’s revealed will in the gospel (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16,17), so worship must harmonize with God’s will. Any unauthorized acts in worship displease God (Matt. 15:9; Gal. 1:8,9; 2 John 9; Rev. 22:18,19; etc.). This was the problem with the Samaritan worship in context – it was not based on truth.

However, worship must also be in spirit. It must emphasize spiritual concerns, proper attitudes, sincere meaning from the inner man. God does not want outward pomp, splendor, and display for the sake of show and enjoyment of man’s senses. He wants a sincere heart that ex-

presses itself in harmony with the teachings of His word. There exists too much worship that involves going through outward motions without proper regard for the condition of the heart.

Worship in spirit requires at least all of the following: Preaching that emphasizes sincere concern for man's relationship to God and emphasizes proper understanding of the meaning of what we do; Prayer and singing that are sincerely meant from the heart, that are understood, and that emphasize spiritual concerns; Communing in the Lord's supper that remembers Jesus' death and sincerely appreciates that sacrifice so we can have proper relationship with God; Giving that is generous, cheerful, and without grudging.

Worship in truth requires at least all of the following: Preaching that is true to the meaning of God's word and emphasizes book, chapter, and verse; Prayer and singing that are Scriptural in content, recognizing God as the object of worship and Jesus as the one Mediator; Communing in the Lord's supper with the proper elements on the authorized day; Giving that is on the proper day and that supports the church in the authorized manner.

Worship that is not in spirit includes all of the following: Emphasis on material interests, entertainment, recreation, politics, making a big impression that pleases the people — the "Social Gospel"; Letting our mind wander, day-dreaming, not paying attention to or meaning what we do; Singing secular songs, not understanding what we sing, emphasizing outward beauty and mechanics instead of the message in the words, using mechanical instruments or special singing groups; Emphasizing the number of containers instead of the meaning of the elements, or teaching that the elements become Jesus' physical body and blood rather than memorials of them; Giving to impress people or because we have been pressured to give.

Worship not in truth includes: Teaching false doctrines or human practices; Prayer to Mary or saints; Mechanical instruments of music, special singing groups, secular songs; Using different elements on the Lord's supper or having it on a different day or frequency; Using man-made fund raising methods, requiring tithing, or taking collections on an unauthorized day; Burning incense, wearing special religious clothing; Using images in worship.

Obviously, we could list many other examples. Our point is simply to demonstrate that the issue of proper worship is still an important one. And worship must still be in spirit and in truth. Many people fail to please God even today by not giving the worship God desires. All of us should sincerely examine our worship to see that we truly praise God in spirit and in truth.

**For further discussion about proper worship, please go to our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/) and see our articles about the various subjects listed above.**

Verses 25,26

21. Who did the woman suspect that Jesus was, why did she suspect this, and what did Jesus say about it (vv 25,26)?
22. Special Assignment: Trace the progression of the woman's opinion of Jesus. Who did she think He was at first, then who, etc.
23. Application: List some lessons we can learn about teaching methods from this story.

### ***Jesus confesses that He is the Messiah.***

As Jesus continued teaching her, the woman connected this to what she had heard about the Messiah (Christ). In particular, she believed He would know things that could not be known naturally. As Jesus told her things about herself that He could not know by any human power and as He answered her questions with authority, she wondered if He might be the Messiah. Though a Samaritan and an immoral woman, she was familiar with the coming Messiah.

Jesus affirmed simply and directly that He was the one. Here we have a straightforward affirmation by Jesus that He was the Messiah.

This is the basic issue around which every religious discussion ultimately must be resolved: Who is Jesus? Of course, as in this discussion, multitudes of other issues follow from that one.

But until that issue is resolved, nothing else matters or can be ultimately resolved. Jesus' skillful direction of this discussion is a model for us in what is important in teaching. Every person needs to progress, as did this woman, from seeing Jesus as merely an interesting Jew to seeing Him as the Christ, the Son of God.

Note that Jesus here openly affirmed that He is the Messiah. Those who doubt He made such claims need to reckon with stories such as this. Perhaps in other cases He was not so direct or quick in making such statements, as He took more time to lead people to such conclusions. But in Samaria He had little time. The woman directly brought up the Messiah, so Jesus directly confessed who He is.

For other passages where Jesus confessed (or allowed others to confess), directly or indirectly, that He is the Christ or the Son of God, etc., see Matthew 3:17; 16:13-18; 17:5; 26:63-66; John 4:25,26; 8:58; 9:35-37; 20:28,29; Revelation 1:17; 2:8; 22:13; Mark 2:3-12; Luke 7:48,49; Matthew 20:28; 28:18,20; 26:28; John 8:24; 14:6; 3:13-15; 10:27-29; 5:22; 9:38; Matthew 16:27; 25:31-46; 14:33; 28:9,17; Luke 24:52.

Verse 27-30

24. What did the woman say to the people of the city, and what did the people do as a result (vv 28-30)?

### ***Jesus' disciples return.***

The disciples had been in the city to buy food (v8). When they returned, they were amazed that He was talking to the woman, probably for the same reasons that the woman had been amazed that He talked to her (see v9). She was a woman and she was a Samaritan. They apparently held some of the same prejudices that other Jews did about the Samaritans.

None of the disciples said anything or asked Him why he spoke to her. But He knew their thoughts and soon used the opportunity to teach them the importance of saving all lost souls (see vv 31-38).

Jesus did not deny the Bible teaching that women should be subject to the leadership of men in the home and in the church (Genesis 2:18; 3:16; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:12-14; 3:4,12; Titus 2:4,5; 1 Peter 3:1-7). However, neither did He believe that woman should be demeaned to the position of a slave without value. Even more, He did not believe that her soul is of less value to God than man's soul. In the gospel, Jesus cares for the souls of all people, male and female, of all races and nationalities. He died for all. His concern for the Samaritan woman shows that we too should seek the salvation of all.

### ***The woman spreads the message of Jesus in the city.***

The woman had come for water. But she was apparently so excited by finding the Christ that she left her waterpot and ran back to the city to tell the people about Him.

She urged the people of the city to come out and see Jesus, because He had told her all things she ever did. This, of course, would be recognized by all as an exaggeration. But the point is that He had demonstrated such power that she had no doubt He could tell her all that she had ever done. She asked them to consider if He might be the Christ. As a result, the people came out to see Him.

Surely we too need such zeal. We have found Jesus, and people all around us need Him. We should want to share this good news with others as did this woman and Andrew and Philip (John 1:40-51).

### ***The Samaritan woman demonstrates the proper role of women as teachers.***

The Bible says women should not speak in church assemblies, nor may they teach with authority over men (1 Cor. 14:34f; 1 Tim. 2:11,12). But this does not mean they can never speak about spiritual things to anyone. And note that she even spoke to the "men" of the city, discussing spiritual issues with them. She spoke to all the people, regardless of gender.

This woman became the means by which nearly a whole town became followers of Jesus, yet she never spoke in a church assembly and never took authority over men. She did speak in such a way as to get people's interest so they came to a man who could teach them. There is a definite role for women in teaching God's word (cf. Acts 18:24-28; Titus 2:3ff; etc.).

(Some say this is an example of women teaching under the Old Testament law, but the New Testament teaching on this point is based on the same principle as in the Old Testament — 1 Cor. 14:34,35.)

Verses 31-34

25. What did Jesus tell the disciples, and what did they think He was talking about (vv 31-33)?

26. What kind of meat had Jesus referred to, and what did His statement mean (v34)?

### *Jesus teaches His disciples about the importance of God's work.*

While the woman was gone, Jesus used the opportunity to teach His apostles the importance of saving lost souls, regardless of racial differences. They had wondered why He spoke to the woman, though they had said nothing (v27). Doubtless they would not have had the same doubts had she been a Jewish woman or even more so a Jewish man. Hence, Jesus, knowing their hearts, determined to teach them.

They had bought food, so they asked Him to eat. He said he had food they did not know about. They, as had Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, thought physical when he meant spiritual. They wondered if someone had given Him some food. Again the skillful teacher was using this expression to get their interest and prepare them for a spiritual lesson.

Jesus explained that the food He referred to was doing the will of God and accomplishing His work. This work, Jesus meant, was more important, and in some ways more satisfying, than food. Everyone knows food is essential to life, but Jesus meant to teach them that there are things more important even than food.

Too many people think it is more important to meet physical needs than spiritual. If they are hungry, tired, feel a little bad, or are in any way physically less-than-satisfactory, they think that is reason to have no interest in spiritual things. Some even argue, "You can't convert a man who has an empty stomach. You must minister to the whole man. Feed and clothe him first, then he'll listen to the gospel." Others will not attend Bible studies, worship, or teach the lost if they are hungry, tired, etc. Others will miss these spiritual opportunities any time they have a chance to work to make money.

Jesus said it should be the other way around. The greatest need is to do the will of the Father. This does not mean physical food is not important, but it should not take priority over spiritual things. Cf. Matt. 6:19-34; 4:4; 16:26,27; Luke 12:15ff; John 6:27.

Verse 35

27. What illustration did Jesus use in v35 and what does it mean?

### *The illustration of the harvest*

Immediately Jesus jumped to another illustration. Physically, it was about four months till the harvest time (Jesus might refer here, not to the time of year it was when Jesus spoke as compared to the next harvest, but to a saying people had that stated the normal time from planting till harvest would be about four months). But Jesus said that, if they would look they would see fields that were already prepared to be harvested.

Again, He is speaking spiritually. Some people, like the apostles in this case, do not see opportunities to teach. They may think it is not the time to try to make converts, or they may think it is not the right place, as in this instance. But Jesus saw opportunities in situations that we often do not. We need to see it as He did.

The disciples saw the need to teach Jews. But they were just passing through Samaria, and they did not see the need to teach these people that Jews did not associate with. They doubtless thought Jesus' message was for Jews, like the Old Testament was. Jesus was trying to get them to see that here was a harvest that they were not looking at.

How often do we think someone we know would not be interested in the gospel, so we just don't try? Or we think it is not the right time or place, so we neglect opportunities that could be made. Maybe there are people we just are not concerned about because of prejudices, animosities, or past experiences. What about people at work, relatives, neighbors, school mates, people we do business with, etc.?

Jesus often used sowing and reaping as illustrations to compare preaching to sowing or watering, then the response of the hearers is compared to the harvest. See Matthew 13:1-32; 9:27,38; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9.

Verses 36-38

28. What fruit or harvest was He referring to, and why would it cause joy (v36)?

29. Who were the sowers and who were the reapers in vv 36-38? (Thought question: What does v38 mean?)

***The one who sows and the one who reaps work together.***

Jesus then extended the illustration. A person who reaps in a field gets paid, since the laborer is worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7). Likewise one can gather fruit for eternal life. This shows the spiritual nature of His point. The one who sows can in this way rejoice together with the one who reaps.

It is possible for one person to sow the seed in a field and another person to reap the harvest when it becomes ripe. In that case, both have cause for joy in the harvest, because both can share in the reward.

In particular, Jesus was teaching the apostles to be teachers of His message. If they would use their opportunities, they could save lost souls. But this would be entering into the labors of others.

This can be true in various different ways (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6-15). But here the point appears to be that the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist had done much work to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus. His coming had been prophesied repeatedly, and John had made many disciples who were looking for Him. The apostles could now tell people Christ had come, and many would obey who otherwise would not have. Hence, they reaped the crop that others had sown.

In this case, the Samaritans already knew about the Christ, as the woman demonstrated. Here was an opportunity for people to be taught and saved, but the disciples did not recognize it. Jesus was encouraging them to use the opportunity. It appears they learned the point eventually because they spread the gospel to Samaria after it had begun in Jerusalem (Acts 8).

Harvest time is a time of joy. All the hard work of preparing the crop is then rewarded. Sower and reaper can both rejoice. Why complain or neglect to work to bring in the harvest? Rejoice. You will get your reward for your work and save souls too.

Verses 39-42

30. What happened as a result of the Samaritan woman's words?
31. What did the Samaritans want Jesus to do, and what did He do?
32. Who did they believe Jesus was, and what convinced them?
33. Application: What lessons can this story teach Christians, especially Christian women, about saving the lost?

### *The response of the Samaritans*

Here is the harvest Jesus had been working for and had encouraged the apostles to become aware of. Many of these Samaritan people came to believe in Him. The apostles originally had no interest in this. But to Jesus these were souls needing saved.

They were so interested they even wanted Jesus to stay awhile, so He did stay two days. This gave Him opportunity to teach many people. This was in some ways as amazing as the fact He had spoken to the Samaritan woman to begin with. Now the people ask a Jew to stay in their midst and teach them, and the Jew agrees to do it! Jesus was breaking down the barriers of racial prejudice, but even more He was saving souls.

This additional teaching from Jesus gave the people the final evidence they needed to become believers in Him. The woman played a role in it by telling them what she had observed in Jesus (v39). But what really convinced them was when they themselves observed Jesus, His teaching, and the evidence for His claims.

They concluded that He truly is the Savior of the world. This is an amazing truth that many people today yet need to believe. Many claim to believe He was a great man, even a great prophet. But to believe He is the Savior of the world is to go much further. It recognizes that Jesus can do what no mere man can do: He can save us from sins. And He can save, not just one nationality or even a select unconditionally predestined few as in Calvinism, but He can save anyone in the whole world! See Matthew 26:28; 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18f; 2:24; Hebrews 2:9; Revelation 1:5; 5:9; 1 Timothy 2:4-6; Isaiah 53:5-9; 1 Corinthians 15:3; John 1:29; Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:9-13; 13:20f; Romans 5:6-11; 2 Corinthians 5:14,15

Note the many lessons the inspired author wants us to learn. One is Jesus' concern for the lost, which concern we should share. Another lesson is that here is still more testimony that Jesus is who He claimed to be, and we should accept His claims as these Samaritans did.

Still another lesson though is that, like the Samaritan woman, we can introduce people to Jesus and tell them much about Him. But people will never really be converted until they themselves learn what He is like and see the evidence that His claims are true. Today they can do that only by reading the accounts of His life and teachings and works in the Scriptures (John 20:30,31; 2 Tim. 3:16,17).

When He was alive, disciples could bring others into His physical presence. We bring them to Him by interesting them in studying the Bible accounts about Him. We will never truly convert people just by telling them how **we** feel about Him or what **we** believe or how **we** were converted. They must study and consider for themselves what He is like and the evidence for His claims. We help them when, like the Samaritan woman, we encourage them to do this.

See what great things can come from teaching a single individual? One individual converted may lead to many others converted. We must use the opportunities we have.

## Healing of the Nobleman's Son — 4:43-54

Verses 43-45

34. Where did Jesus go, and what did the people there know about His miracles?
35. Explain v44 (study cross-references).

### *The people in Galilee receive Jesus favorably.*

Jesus had originally planned to go to Galilee (v3), but had ended up staying two days in Samaria on His way (v40). After the two-day stay in Samaria, He went on to Galilee as planned. There He was received by the Galileans, since they had gone to the feast in Jerusalem and had witnessed His miracles (2:23). Jewish males were required to be in Jerusalem for the Passover.

In general, the Galileans were receptive to Jesus. However, Jesus commented that a prophet has no honor in his own country. This may seem strange in the context of the reception He received. However, Matt. 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6; and especially Luke 4:16-31 give more information on this comment. John does not record the fact that Jesus apparently in the meantime had visited His hometown Nazareth and was there rejected by the people. As a result, He did not do many miracles among them, and they ended up trying to kill Him. Their reason was, not that they could prove that His teaching or miracles were false or invalid, but that they knew His family — His mother, brothers, sister, etc.

Jesus' comment here means that often people do not appreciate the greatness of one with whom they grew up. They remember him when he was little and they know all the evidences of his humanity. Hence, they cannot believe that He could become so great from such humble origins (perhaps they are even a little jealous and can't believe that one from among them could become so much greater than others of them had become).

Verses 46,47

36. To what town did Jesus return, and what miracle had He already done there?
37. What man made request of Jesus, and where was the man from?
38. What problem did the man have, and how serious was the problem?

### *A nobleman requests Jesus to heal his son.*

Jesus again went to visit Cana (see MAP), where He had done His first miracle (turning water to wine — John 2:1ff). In this story, He did another great miracle, one which also is recorded only by John.

A nobleman came to see Jesus, because he had a sick son back in Capernaum (see MAP). Commentators point out that the word for nobleman means an officer or official in service of a king. Other examples are Chusa (Luke 8:3) and Manaen (Acts 13:1). Perhaps this nobleman was a servant of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee.

The man had heard that Jesus had come. So he came from Capernaum and implored Jesus to come and heal his son, because he was at the point of death. Note the details that help us see the greatness of the miracle. The son was not just a little sick with some illness that could easily have cured itself. He was almost dead. Further, he was in a different city, some miles away from Jesus.

The nobleman seemed to think this latter problem was insurmountable if Jesus remained where He was. He thought Jesus had to come and personally have contact with his son to heal him. Of course, modern miracle-workers would know they could not heal a person under such circumstances. But it was no problem for Jesus.

Some commentators seem to criticize the nobleman for weakness of faith. And it is true that his faith grew as the story proceeded. Nevertheless, he had faith enough to travel about 25 miles from Capernaum to Galilee to plead with Jesus to come and heal his son.

Verses 48,49

39. What observation did Jesus make in v48?

### ***Jesus states the value of miracles.***

Jesus stated that such miracles were necessary in order for people to believe. John recorded this statement to show us the purpose for the miracles and thereby help us understand why we need to know about them and be convinced by them. They are the stamp of God's approval on a prophet showing him to be who he claims to be, confirming that he is a teacher from God. This is why John recorded several miraculous events and gave much detail regarding them. (Cf. Mark 16:20; John 5:36; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12; Hebrews 2:3,4; 1 Kings 18:36-39.)

Again, some commentators seem to think that Jesus is belittling this attitude, as almost a sign of weakness among the people. Some false miracle workers today criticize those who call upon them to do a miracle in order to prove the power they claim to have. But contrary to these claims, Jesus not only did not oppose this use of miracles, but He knew and agreed this was a valid evidence to prove a man was from God. Jesus worked miracles for people who were honestly seeking for truth. He refused only when people had seen sufficient evidence and had rejected it, yet called for more proof (Mark 8:11,12; Matthew 16:1-4; Luke 11:29; 1 Corinthians 1:22).

The nobleman again urged Jesus to hurry because his son was about to die. This again confirmed the seriousness of the case. But it also shows that the nobleman thought Jesus had to get there before his son died. He seemed to doubt that Jesus could heal without being in the son's immediate presence. And above all, he did not allow for the possibility that Jesus could raise the son after he died. He thought, like a physician today, the healer would have to see the sick person and heal him before he died. After death, the case would be hopeless.

Verses 50-54

40. Describe what Jesus said and did to bring about the requested healing? (Thought question: Why do the miracle this way? How did this strengthen the impact of the miracle?)

41. How did the nobleman confirm that the healing was the result of what Jesus did?

42. What effect did this have on the man and his family?

43. List two other passages regarding the purpose of miracles.

### ***Jesus heals the nobleman's son.***

The man had wanted Jesus to go with him; instead Jesus just told him to go on by himself, because his son was healed. The man believed this and went on. This required a measure of faith on his part. He had come begging for Jesus' personal presence to heal the son. But he accepted Jesus' simple statement that the miracle had occurred.

Note that Jesus' manner of handling this increased the force of the miracle. The purpose was to produce faith. Had He personally gone (as the nobleman had requested), a miracle would have occurred. But by doing the miracle while still miles away, He made it even more obvious. Doctors can sometimes heal by physical means, if they examine the patient, do tests, give medicines and treatments, etc.; and all this takes time to work. But the fact Jesus needed no such methods proved clearly that His healing was done, not by physical means, but by supernatural power.

And He further emphasized His power to do miracles by declaring it to have definitely occurred as an accomplished fact. Though He could not see the sick person to know firsthand whether or not he had been healed, Jesus definitely declared him to be healed. He expressed no doubt or uncertainty in the matter. This also served to demonstrate the man's faith and then to strengthen it when he left and later learned the results.

In order to emphasize the evidence for the miracle, John tells us that, as the man was returning home, he met his servants coming to meet him. They told him the son was healed. He asked what time the change in the child had occurred; the time they named (the seventh hour on the previous day) was exactly the time when Jesus had told the nobleman his son was healed. Note that this also states one of the obvious symptoms of the son's disease: he had a fever. We are not told what disease caused the fever, but this was an obvious sign showing when he was healed.

As was always the case with Bible miracles, the healing occurred instantaneously at the moment the man of God said it would. This caused the man and his family to have faith — the very purpose of miracles. The man possessed some faith or he would never have come to Jesus. But his faith was strengthened by the miracle. And other people also came to possess faith or were strengthened in faith as a result.

This is exactly the purpose of miracles as Jesus had stated in v48. The story accomplishes the same purpose for us. If the fact that such events lead people to faith was something unfortunate or inferior, why did Jesus go to such lengths to do such an obvious miracle, and why did John go to such lengths to record it in detail?

Some commentators point out that the miracle occurred at one o'clock, but the man did not arrive home till the next day. It would seem that, if he was still in great anxiety for his son's health, he would have traveled the 25 miles to Capernaum on the same day that he saw Jesus. That he did not hurry could indicate great faith that Jesus really had healed his son. But perhaps there was some other reason we are unaware of.

This was the second sign Jesus had done when He came out of Judea into Galilee. Jesus had done miracles in Judea (2:23). This verse might appear to mean that, on this particular trip, since he left Judea, Jesus had done some other miracle in Galilee which is not recorded. And this was the second one He did since he left Judea.

However, a more reasonable view is that John has in view only the miracles Jesus did in Galilee, the first one being the changing of water to wine. This would then be the second of His miracles in Galilee.

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