

Commentary for Lesson 10

August 9, 2020

Come and See

Focal Passage: John 4:7-30, 39-42

Background Text: John 4:4-42

Note: For those readers who use supplementary commentaries to prepare for each week's lesson, we will post downloadable commentary on AdultBibleStudies.com through the summer quarter. We will publish an annual commentary for purchase for Fall 2020–Summer 2021.

Introduction (John 4:1-6)

This chapter tells of the dramatic encounter between Jesus and the woman of Samaria. The second part of the chapter contains a healing miracle. In order to introduce this account, the Gospel explains how Jesus came into contact with the woman (verses 1-6). He had recently left Jerusalem for the Jordan valley. Then he left the Jordan valley of Judea, north of Jerusalem, for his home region in Galilee, farther north. The reason seems to have been the Pharisees. Jesus was suddenly generating more religious interest than John the Baptist, even though Jesus' disciples were doing the baptizing, no doubt by his commission. So Jesus left that region for the north. Because Samaria was en route, he and his baptizing disciples passed through that region.

These verses tell of a significant shift in Jesus' ministry. Prior to this time, he had been baptizing people who came to him. Now we are told that his disciples had already begun to do this work (verse 2). As a result, Jesus' ministry now shifted from one of doing baptisms to one of teaching, proclamation, and miraculous deeds.

John explains that Jesus "had to go through Samaria" (verse 4). This would not have been necessary, assuming Jesus was simply traveling to the north with his little band of followers. Perhaps Jesus anticipated meeting the Samaritan woman and, therefore, chose this route. But, theologically, this was an important encounter, because it reaffirmed what was discussed with Nicodemus: that the Messiah had come to redeem all humanity, not just the Jews. The incident explains that the Messiah was to come from the undiluted southern kingdom of Judea.

The little town mentioned here is called Sychar. This is probably a reference to the ancient city of Shechem, now a small village to the southeast of the city of Samaria and 41 miles north of Jerusalem. It was only a stone's throw from Jacob's well.

More important, Shechem had great religious significance in the history of Israel. This was the first city Abraham visited as he migrated south (Genesis 12:6); Joseph was buried there (Joshua 24:32); Rehoboam was crowned king there (1 Kings 12:1); and when the Northern tribes revolted, the city became the capital of the Northern tribes (1 Kings 12:25). So Shechem became a symbol of Northern rebellion and was an appropriate place for Jesus to explain how the Messiah was to come from Judah in the south and not Samaria.

Another important factor helps set the scene. This well was known as a good place for water. It would have been a deep hole, possibly 100 feet deep. It would have been difficult to get water from such a deep shaft. The well would have been covered by a stone or a large rock. Jesus would have sat on the ground near the well, or he would have rested on the stone covering the well, waiting for his disciples to return from town with supplies (verse 8). We are told he was tired, humanly exhausted from his journey. This is an important comment. This Gospel has already emphasized his equality with God (1:1-5, 14). Now we hear of his very human nature. Finally, we are told it was the "sixth hour" (NIV) or "noon" (NRSV). This was the exact time of Jesus' crucifixion when he also asked for water, but from the cross (19:14, 28).

Jesus Asks for Water (John 4:7-15)

In the first part of the exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, Jesus initiated the conversation. The woman was surprised, not so much at Jesus' question, but at his willingness to speak to a Samaritan. The Jews disliked the Samaritans because they claimed to be the chosen nation, and they had refused historically to worship in Jerusalem. (This separation went back to the rebellion following the death of Solomon in 722 BC.) Eventually, the Northern Kingdom intermarried with other nations and thereby lost its Jewish religious purity. The people were hated by the Jews of the south. So it was only natural that this woman should voice surprise at Jesus' question.

Jesus attempted to help her understand his identity (verse 10). First, he shifted the conversation from water in general to the special water of his own personage. The Son is God's gift. Jesus implied that she, like all humanity, was in need of God's gift.

We also find here an indirect reference to prayer. Jesus told the woman that, if she only knew the situation, she would merely have to ask, and God would give. Prayer through Christ, the living water, can never be void and fruitless.

The woman continued the conversation from her perspective, oblivious to the meaning of Jesus' comments. But she did call him "sir," or "Lord." She saw Jesus as a mere person, who had no means to draw from the deep-almost-divine-well of living water. She certainly did not understand him as the Word of God, the light of the world, the very one who is far greater than Jacob (verse 12).

As the conversation continued, Jesus contrasted the two levels of their exchange. He indicated that earthly water is not satisfying. But water from heaven is absolutely the opposite, being everlasting and fully satisfying. And once it is received, it becomes a "spring," or producer of water within, leading to a fruitful life everlasting. The meaning is that, once Christ puts us right with God, this will be a continual work.

The woman began to sense something deeper going on in their conversation. Almost intuitively, she requested some of his water (verse 15). She had moved from curiosity to a deeper request. Here, in a capsule, is humanity's spiritual journey in relation to the Christ.

Jesus Is a Prophet (John 4:16-26)

Jesus, fully knowing the situation, told the woman to fetch her husband. After her negative response, Jesus told her spiritual biography: She had had five husbands, and Jews allowed only three. She was a sinner. She had made mistakes. She was immoral. She had not been fully committed to a basic truth in life that is, relationships. She had been in and out of spiritual and carnal covenants. Like the Samaritans, she had not been faithful.

The woman responded that Jesus must have been a "prophet" (verse 19), one who had special divine knowledge. Then she introduced a topic that would be of interest to a prophet. It was stated in the form of a question/statement. She seems to have been asking, "Is it true? Is your insight from God? Or are we to expect prophetic figures from this mountain in Samaria?" Jesus responded to the woman with powerful statements about the one true God (verses 21-24). The true God of Israel was not the god of Baal. Each verse introduces a theme or truth about the true God of Israel. The "hour" ("time," NRSV, NIV) is this Gospel's reference to the time of God's glory, an hour of which Jesus was well aware (12:27; 16:25). Jesus also suddenly began referring to God as "Father," the Jewish family name for "husband." This name for

God is personal and loving, better translated “daddy.” Thus, salvation came by way of the Jews (verse 22). Only through God’s chosen people was knowledge of God possible. All others worshiped what they did not know.

The kingdom of God is present now (verse 23). The “is now” means a new form of worship. This new worship refers back to the living water that opens the way to the very being of God the Father. This is real worship, in spirit and in truth. This worship means an inner change that is caused by the living water as it cleanses the inner person. Real inner communion with the Father means a true spiritual relationship. God is spirit because God relates to humanity in an inner relationship, bestowing the Holy Spirit upon the children of God through Christ the Son (14:16). The other writings associated with John also state that God “is love” (1 John 4:8) and “God is light” (1 John 1:5). Together the three terms, *love*, *light*, and *spirit*, identify God as one who acts toward humanity.

In verse 26, Jesus comes right to the point. The Samaritans expected a prophetic figure, not a messiah. But the woman, sensing a deeper truth, introduced the Jewish expectation of a messiah. Jesus’ answer was direct, with holy overtones. He virtually answered, “I am he.” Jesus seemed willing to state his identity to the woman of Samaria, perhaps because the title *messiah* did not carry such political meaning as it did to the south in Judea. In the south, the title was directly associated with David and kings.

The Disciples Return (John 4:27-30)

The disciples returned from town. They were amazed that Jesus was speaking with a woman. Probably out of respect for Jesus and the general situation, none dared voice their thoughts.

Immediately, the woman went off and became a witness to Jesus (verses 28-29). She was so keen to tell others, she left her pitcher, signifying her earthly cares and concerns. Her witness was put in the form of a question. Can this be the Christ? She seemed to believe, or she would not have hurried to town. The only manner in which others would come to know and believe was to come and meet him face to face. They could not trust her testimony alone. They had to meet him. Like John the Baptist, she pointed to the “living water.” Her testimony was such that they came to see for themselves.

Jesus Teaches the Disciples (John 4:31-38)

Meanwhile, a conversation began between Jesus and his disciples. Here again, the exchange took place on two different levels. The disciples told their teacher to eat so he would be refreshed and strengthened

(verse 31). But Jesus explained that he had food, meaning his strength came from fellowship with, communion with, and doing the will of the Father. This food they did not yet fully know.

Jesus then used what is possibly an old proverb as a deeper commentary on their conversation. The disciples were on an errand to get food. Jesus spoke of the arriving Kingdom in terms of harvesting food. Four months was the traditional period before the harvest. But in contrast, there was now no waiting. The harvest was here.

The reapers were the disciples, or the church, who would labor in the work of God's kingdom and were blessed ("wages") by rich fellowship with the Father. The sowers were the Old Testament church that labored to plant the seed. And Christ is the seed that produces the bread, the bursting grains, the lush harvest of the Kingdom.

Conclusion (4:39-42)

The final section is a conclusion to the episode. Many from the town responded to the woman's testimony (verse 39). Much like the first disciples, they abided with him and fellowshiped with him over a period of time. Jesus stayed with them for two days, and many came to believe (verse 41). The townspeople's final statement to the woman summarized the real meaning of the entire passage. It is because they actually met Jesus, as the woman of Samaria, that they came to know, understand, and believe in him. Jesus became the seed planted there among the Samaritans. Because he gave them living water, the harvest was now ready. The prophetic history sowed the seed; the reapers were about to begin their labor. The Kingdom had come!

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