

John 4:5-26. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" ¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." ¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." ¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." ²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

He Had To....

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He has a great desire to connect sinners to God.

He had to... If you back up a verse in John chapter 4, a curious phrase is recorded for us. **He had to go through Samaria.** Jesus had to... Does that sound curious to you too. This was Jesus. Did he really have to do anything? He, who had the ability to walk on water, could have figured out some sort of shortcut, some different way to Galilee, but he didn't. It is also worth pointing out that most people just kind of went around this area all together. Sure, it added a few miles to their trip, but there was a social custom, a racial precedent that had been set, one that had existed for years. A typical Jewish man at the time of Jesus would just go around Samaria to avoid any kind of exposure to the Samaritans. For despite their close proximity and not-so-

distant family line connections, the Samaritans were viewed by the Jews as unclean half-breeds who had been turned over to false gods and wretched practices and were therefore immoral idolaters and adulterers. They were to be left alone. They were to be avoided.

Jesus could have gone a different way. But despite his ability to do the impossible, despite the social customs that were steering him in a different direction, the bible tells us that Jesus *had* to go through Samaria. He had to... not because there was no other route or another way for him to go there. He had to go because of his great love for all people. He had to go this way because this was his mission. Jesus had come to seek and to save the lost; both the Jew and the Gentile and even those in between. This was his mission as Messiah that was described in the book of Isaiah. ***“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6).***

He had to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. That sounds like a huge job that would require meeting exclusively in large crowds. And so again it seems more than a bit curious in the way that Jesus goes about his mission to save. To start, the reason that he was traveling was from Judea to Galilee was to get away from the crowds. The people began to come in bigger numbers and the Pharisee saw him as a bigger threat. As this was still very early in his ministry Jesus saw this as a good time to head north toward Galilee in order to get away from the pressures in Judea and preach and teach in more intimate and personal settings. And so it was as he traveled north toward Galilee to preach and teach he decided to take this more direct route through Samaria. And it was in a town called Sychar that Jesus and his disciples stopped in the heat of the day to rest and recharge and refuel. The Bible tells us that this was the sixth hour, which meant that this was about noon. In the middle of the day Jesus was tired and thirsty and he sat down next to a well as his disciples went off to find food at the local market.

It was during this pit stop that Jesus demonstrated some of his wonderful characteristics as our Savior. Our Lord Jesus loves each precious soul. He has a great desire to engage with the individual. He has a great desire to connect sinners to God.

This particular encounter certainly had its share of obstacles that had to be overcome. Culture, gender, and social stigmas were all piled up between the two. A Samaritan woman would not expect that a Jewish man would talk to her, or even acknowledge her. She was coming out in the middle of the day, in the heat of the noonday sun, because she was hoping no one else was there, because she knew that she would have been shunned or ridiculed or abused by those in her community. People knew her personal situation and would have labeled her an immoral and promiscuous woman, even among those who lived in a rather corrupt society already.

It seemed like the most unlikely of pairings. The perfect Savior and this woman who was so obviously imperfect. And yet, Jesus is there. Due to his love for all people he had to be there, to engage with this individual. And he does so on such a personal level. Jesus is human. He knows our human pains. He is aware of, and sympathetic to our emotional and physical distresses. Pressured by the Pharisees and hated by the leaders, he knows the unpleasantness of negative human interaction. And he desires to connect with all people, even those who have been pushed to the side by everyone else. And so, he goes out of his way to meet this person. He meets her

where she is at, not to compromise, not to approve of sinful behavior, but to contact, to interact, to befriend, to teach, to instruct, to heal, and most importantly to save.

Out of his great love for this individual soul he initiates the discussion with a simple request. ***“Will you give me a drink?”*** After she responds in surprise that this Jewish man would make the effort to talk to her. Jesus directs her to spiritual things. ***If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.*** The woman responds in a way that indicated that she was unable to see past her focus on physical needs and the barriers that divided her from the man in front of her. And so Jesus responds, ***“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*** Again, the woman seems intrigued, but she still seems to be hung up on physical needs and so she asks Jesus to help her out so that she won't have to go through the trouble of fetching water ever again. But what Jesus has in store for her goes far beyond physical needs, and so in patience and love Jesus responds in a way that would cut to the heart of the matter and bring to her the gift of eternal life.

The same kind of challenges still exist today, don't they? There seems to be all these challenges to sharing the gospel: language and culture, personal histories, generational divides, social stigmas and prejudice abound. Add to that the tendency for people to be so focused on material things it seems so difficult to reach out with the gift of eternal life. It seems so difficult when we look at things from the viewpoint that a whole culture, a whole generation, a whole group of people is out there that is not in tune with the gospel and we as Christians are facing this impossible mission, this impossible situation. We might have those thoughts, we might have those conversations. In such moments let us remember this account and learn from Jesus as he reaches out with the life-giving water of life. He approaches this woman as an individual. He speaks to her one on one. He is patient with her. He listens to where she is coming from and then speaks in a way that speaks to her situation, connects the physical to the spiritual, and directs her to the only one who can save her. In a personal and conversational way, he speaks the truth in love.

Occasionally in our work as a congregation, or as a church body, we might become discouraged by the challenges that face the spread of the gospel. We might have conversations about how certain generations of people are less in tune with the gospel, that there is a greater tolerance of sin in our culture today, the erosion of family values, the changing demographics make the spreading of the gospel so difficult in our day and age. And while it might be useful to be aware of such obstacles in our world so that we may find ways to avoid and overcome and adjust to such challenges; let us remember as we reach out with the gospel we don't really reach out to groups of people, or different generations, or differently slices of demographics all at once. Instead we reach out to individual souls that are precious to our God and Savior. Person-to-person, soul to soul, neighbor to neighbor, parent to child, we share the message, we share the living water that has power to wash away sin, to create and grow saving faith.

After all that is how he comes to each of us. A holy God, the perfect Savior comes to save each of us. Because of our sin, we deserve God to avoid us, to ignore and shun, the whole lot of

us. We deserve God to write off the whole sinful group as not worth his time, but instead in love for all of us he sends his Son for all of us. We each make a mess out of our lives in one way or the other and you and I deserve God to shun and avoid each one of us for one reason or another. We each struggle with that repeated sin, that foolish habit, that character flaw that drags us into trouble, time and again. A holy God has every right to ignore and neglect and avoid us each one of us. And yet he comes to each and every one of us. In his love he *has to*.

It seems like an unlikely pairing a blameless Savior and sinners like you me, and yet he comes. ***He has to***: He loves us that much. And in his love he comes to each one of us personally. The word is spoken and it makes its way into your personal ears, your personal heart. The LORD addresses you on an individual level as he addresses your personal sin, he applies his forgiveness to you personally. Such interaction can be painful. It can be awkward. But that sin has to be dealt with, for our Savior exposes our sin not to push us away, but to remove that which seeks to separate us from God. He comes to us and explains and makes clear his amazing grace. In his word he speaks of his unconditional love. He heals and restores. He shows mercy and saves. And he speaks of his will for our life. And he gives us the privilege of prayer that we may speak directly to him.

The one who takes away our sin, the one who saves us, the great I am, the Christ, the Messiah, speaks to each one of us through his Word. He speaks to us on a personal level and gives to each of us life through his holy word so that we may live for him now and with him forever in heaven. He offers and gives that living water and we are forever blessed.

And so we watch with knowing eyes as he applies his healing balm to this woman. As the woman leaves, she leaves having talked with her Lord. She leaves having a greater understanding of God's mercy and God's will for her life. Each time we come into contact with our Lord and his saving word we are blessed in a similar way. Our Savior gives us that living water that creates and strengthens our faith. He comes to us, he speaks to us, he connects us to God, and leads us to worship our Lord. In Spirit and truth, both in faith and in action. We trust in him. We believe that Jesus came to save us and thankful for this full and free salvation we follow as he guides our life with his commands.

We give thanks and rejoice that comes to us in such a personal way through his Word. Jesus is the living water. What a blessing to be connected to that life-giving stream. What a blessing it is to be connected to that life-giving water each week in public worship! What a blessing to be able to hear about our Savior on a daily basis at a Christian preschool, or a Christian day school, and in personal devotions and in home meditations! For in him he quenches our spiritual thirst. He meets our greatest need. And he refreshes us daily as he nourishes our faith. May the LORD bless our efforts to share this good news so that his kingdom comes to many more. May the Lord bless us as we share this saving message, this living water, with precious souls that are all around us, friend to friend, neighbor to neighbor, parent to child. May the Lord bless us as we share the living-water to the next generation, knowing that each and every one of us is loved by Jesus. He had to come. He had to die. He had to send us his Word. Because he loves us. Amen.