

**Behold: Who is Jesus?**

Samaritan Woman

John 4:1-42

Mark Vroegop

---

*“Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The 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.) 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.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but 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.’ 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”’ (John 4:1–15).*

Several years ago, my family traveled on a once-in-a-lifetime vacation out west. We visited the Badlands, Mt. Rushmore, Yellowstone, and the Grand Tetons. It was a trip we’ll never forget. Some of the highlights were the various hikes that we took together. For example, we hiked to Harney Peak, an all-day trip that featured beautiful sunshine and driving sleet, until we reached the summit, which is the tallest point in the continental United States from the Rockies to the Eastern seaboard.

Our favorite hike was probably one at the Grand Tetons. We heard from some friends about a trail that led to a famous rock formation from which you could jump—about 30-40 feet—into the water. It was a long trek as well. But after a few hours of hiking, we made it.

We climbed up to the top of this rock, and our boys were quick to jump. Oh, to be a teenager again with no sense of what could happen. It took me a while, but I finally drummed up enough courage to jump into the frigid waters. Then it was mom’s turn. Now you need to know that while Sarah is amazingly adventuresome, she doesn’t like heights. And she especially doesn’t like 60° F water. However, she really wanted to jump.

I had jumped in, and I remember her rocking back and forth at the top, trying to make the decision to jump. She kept asking questions. “How cold is it?” “Was it hard to breathe?” “Are you going to come get me if I can’t make it?” But she couldn’t muster the last-second courage to jump. That is until I said this: “You are never going to forget this moment either way. You’ll regret it for the rest of your life if you don’t jump. You can do it. Jump!” And she did—squealing, kicking her feet in the air, and barely breathing when she came out of the water.

Standing at the top of the rock formation, she had to make a decision: is the risk worth it?

Some things are completely worth the risk, but you don’t realize it until after the fact. Now there are foolhardy risks too. My wife has famously said that it’s a miracle that any boy lives to age sixteen. We’ve had our fair share of ER runs due to bad decisions.

But I’m sure you can look back at your life and see the way a particular risk, while not entirely safe, was worth it.

### **Gospel Risk Is Right**

John chapter four records a risky conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. And John uses this exchange in his gospel to send a number of messages about the ministry and message of Jesus. We could spend four Sundays unpacking everything that is here.

We are going to look at this text in order to discover what we learn about Jesus and his ministry. But I also want to use this message as we consider the next few days leading up to Easter Sunday. This is probably the most mission-oriented week of the entire year.

Jesus helps a broken woman find her way to spiritual wholeness. And John uses this story to reinforce what we read last week in John 3:36—“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life . . .” Even this woman we are about to meet.

But in order for her to be reached, Jesus took some risks. He loved her. He reached her. It was risky. It was instructive. And it was effective.

My end-game is to invite you into this story so that you can consider if God is asking you to take some risks.

Rather than ruin the narrative with a forced outline, I’d like to simply walk you through the text and then make some applications. If you desperately need an outline, you could think of the text as (1) the conversation [vv. 1-26], (2) the lesson [vv. 27-38], and (3) the harvest [vv. 39-42].

### **Setting**

Chapter four records the conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. It is fascinating that John places this story here. I’m sure there were other conversations that Jesus had, but John highlights this one. Remember that the last person with whom Jesus had this kind of dialogue was Nicodemus. The

conversation happened at night. Nicodemus was highly educated, part of the power structure of society, and very religious. This woman lived in a polar opposite world.

John places these two stories near to one another so that we see some important things about Jesus and his ministry.

The story begins with Jesus transitioning out of Judea because of some kind of pressure that was mounting from the Pharisees, the people who were central to the religious establishment of the day. Some commentators suggest that might have been partly because of them not wanting to unnecessarily hinder John's ministry. Others see a movement from Jerusalem (3:1-21), Judea (3:22-36), and now Samaria, following the model that Jesus gave in the Great Commission.

According to verse three, Jesus's intention was to return to Galilee, the location where his ministry began. But in order to make his way north, he had to pass through Samaria. Some commentators make a big deal that Jesus passed through Samaria instead of going around it. However, a first-century historian indicates that Jews preferred the shorter route.<sup>1</sup>

While they may have preferred faster travel, they most certainly did not prefer the people of Samaria. There's some history that you need to know. The Samaritans were despised by the Jews because they were of mixed ethnicity. In other words, they were not truly Jewish. After the Assyrian invasion of the northern tribes in 722 B.C., many powerful and influential Jewish people were exiled. The land was resettled with non-Jewish people (2 Kings 17-18). These foreign people intermarried with the remaining Jewish citizens. When the Jewish people returned, they found the land populated with these ethnic half-breeds, and their religious practices were mingled with some forms of paganism.

Samaria developed its own identity. In 400 B.C. the people erected a rival temple on Mt. Gerizim. They refused to accept any books of the Old Testament other than the Pentateuch. Sometimes the conflict created violence. For example, near the end of the second century B.C., their temple was destroyed by a Jewish ruler in Judea.<sup>2</sup> Needless to say, the relationship between the Jews and Samaritans was tense.

Central to that tension was the cultural belief that Samaritans were inferior to the Jews. That's in the background, and you need to feel that cultural dynamic that hangs in the air. You can't smell the animosity of the Jews towards the Samaritans by just reading the text.

Jesus, according to verse 5, came to the city of Sychar where there was a well-known well of water. Now take note of verse 6, because it says that Jesus was "wearied" from his journey. This is the first instance in John's gospel where we see the full effects of Jesus's humanity. In John 1:14, we saw that Jesus became "flesh." And the disciples saw his glory in that flesh. But here we see Jesus live out his humanity as he is tired. This text is not specifically focused on this aspect, but it is important to note. As we see

---

<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 216.

<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, 216.

the different pictures of Jesus's life and ministry, it's helpful to be reminded of the extent to which he went in order to purchase redemption. He became human in order to reach us.

But then also notice the time. John tells us that it was about the sixth hour. That's about noon, the hottest part of the day. Why is that important? Activity around the well would have been most active in the morning and the evening because it was the cooler part of the day. Jesus is sitting at the well at one of the hottest times of the day.

That's when this woman comes to get water. Now, this should tell us something. A Samaritan woman comes alone to draw water during the time when it's least likely that other people, especially women, will be there. People are people whether they are in the first century or today. Since gathering water was a part of everyone's life, the well was not only a source of needed hydration, it was also a place for socialization and community. It was a meeting place for the community. John is making a statement here.

It would be like saying, "She was from the wrong side of the tracks" or "He was known for trolling the red-light district" or "He was sitting on park bench with a bottle in a bag." A single sentence would tell you a lot.

### **Conversation**

What happens next is risky. Jesus asks her for a drink. The parenthetical comment that follows helps us understand that the disciples are gone. He doesn't have anything with which to draw water. So, he asks if he can use her water jar. Notice the woman's shocked response: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" Jesus is crossing the boundaries of his culture, and she knows it.

Just to make this clear, John adds another parenthetical comment—"For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." This doesn't just mean that they do not socialize with them. It can also mean to not share the use of things.<sup>3</sup> In other words, to not use her pitcher. The Jews despised the Samaritans such that the most religious refused to associate with anything related to them, including the utensils they used.

But not Jesus. He loved this woman and wanted her to be free more than he loved staying in a position that was comfortable. The previous conversation with Nicodemus was intellectually challenging. The conversation with this woman was socially and culturally challenging.

From there, Jesus engages her in further conversation. In verse ten he piques her interest by talking about what she is missing. He mentions the gift of God, not knowing who he is, and the concept of living water. It's fascinating that Jesus starts here because it seems as though he's pulling her into a dialogue while starting with things that would be of interest and attractive to her. In other words, he started with something she would want.

---

<sup>3</sup> Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2027.

Take note that engaging people in gospel conversation requires skill and wisdom because you need to start with something relatable and relevant to the person's life. You don't want everything about the church to be tilted this direction, but a few things need to be.

We don't have time to go into it today, but Jesus's reference to living water is fascinating. He uses an ideal that is connected to what they are talking about and that is a significant biblical truth. Living water is connected to the spiritual renewal in the Old Testament (Ezek. 47:1-6) and the kind of new life that comes from the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39). Without the woman even knowing it, Jesus is creating a conversation pathway that will lead to deeply spiritual truths. He's connecting the world in which they live with a spiritual reality that she needs.

The woman is intrigued. In verses 11-12 she inquires as to how this could actually be true. Jesus doesn't have a water jar. Is he greater than Jacob? Now, as she mentions Jacob, she calls him father. This was a point of contention between Jews and Samaritans. Notice that Jesus doesn't get into sidebar discussions that aren't timely.

Jesus further clarifies what he means by living water in verse 13. He tells her that there is something more available to her, and it relates to eternal life. Jesus points this woman to the fact that this water can satisfy her like nothing else. He's trying to help her see that her deepest needs and longings could be met in what Jesus offered.

She doesn't quite see it yet. The woman desires the water for personal convenience. So, Jesus digs deeper into her moral life. In verse 16, he invites her to call her husband. Think of this as if Jesus said, "Go get your family and let's talk about this." And to this the woman responds honestly in verse 17—"I have no husband."

Jesus's response is amazingly balanced. Notice that he commends her for being truthful. But he presses further, identifying that she's had five husbands and her present companion is not her husband. This explains why she's at the well at noon when no one is around. She has a shameful past. We don't know if her five previous husbands had died or if she was divorced. Either way, there would be a cultural cloud hanging over her. She's either a black widow whose husbands keep dying or she's an undesirable woman who keeps being sent away. Something's terribly wrong.

Jesus is not trying to shame her. Rather he's attempting to identify the "thirst" in her life that is deeper than what she imagines. Her life is not what God intended for her. And Jesus puts his finger on a major need in her life. Jesus took the risk of peeling back the layers of what she was trying to avoid. He carefully and compassionately reveals her need.

The woman, however, tries to avoid this invasive conversation by appealing to a religious controversy. It's almost comical. They move from a discussion about her morality to what place true worship should take (vv. 19-20). The Jews and Samaritans disagreed about the location of worship. It was a long-standing controversy, but Jesus would not get sidetracked. He pointed her to the true meaning of a relationship with God:

“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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24).

Now we come to the climax of the conversation. In verse 25, the woman acknowledges that they are looking and waiting for the Christ. And Jesus clearly and pointedly says, “I who speak to you am he.” The entire conversation led to this pivotal moment. The end-game of his interaction with this woman is the end-game for all spiritual conversations—to lead us to Jesus.

It’s the same thing that Jesus did with Nicodemus. He told him about the Son of Man being lifted up. And this woman is now told the one thing that she needs to know: Jesus is the Messiah.

### **Lesson**

Just then the disciples arrive. They are shocked by Jesus’s conversation with this woman, but they do not inquire of her or him as to what is going on. Instead (v. 28), the woman left her water jar, made her way into the city and told the people about him. John may have intended some symbolism here regarding her newfound focus (from old water to new water) or her past life to a new one. Regardless, she begins spreading the news about Jesus as it relates to her messy life. Her shame is transformed into a platform to talk about Jesus!

However, the disciples miss the point of this moment. John seeks to make that clear. While Jesus is concerned about this woman and her spiritual life, the disciples are focused on whether or not Jesus has eaten lunch. John desires to make it clear that the disciples need different eyes to see the world in which they live.

Verses 34-38 record the lesson that Jesus wants his disciples to learn. He wants them to have hearts set on the right priorities. He desires for them to have eyes to see a harvest that is right in front of them. This is probably referring to the crowd of Samaritans coming out of the city to see Jesus.

In other words, the disciples were guilty of the all-too-common problem of missing the forest for the trees. They were so focused on getting food that they neglected to connect to their ultimate mission. I’m sure that you can relate.

### **Effect**

The result of this conversation with Jesus is a movement of evangelism in the city of Sychar. The people came out to meet Jesus, and they invited him to stay with them for a few days. According to verse 41, many people believed. And the text ends with a powerful statement that connects the woman’s testimony with the life and message of Jesus:

“They 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 indeed the Savior of the world’” (John 4:42).

The gospel came to the city of Sychar. The Samaritan people came to believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world. This is the first major movement of belief in John's gospel, and it comes to a group of people considered outsiders to the kingdom.

John wants us to see the wide-open invitation for the gospel.

### **Take-Aways**

Let me give you a few thoughts on how this text could be applied in our lives.

First, with whom do you relate in the story? Does God find you more like the woman at the well—a person searching for fulfillment in the wrong places? Maybe more like one of the disciples—head down, just trying to “do stuff” without an awareness of God's bigger plan. Maybe more like Jesus—looking to fulfill God's plan for your life. God has grace for all of us regardless of where we fit into the storyline of John 4.

Second, it's important to see the way that Jesus balances this conversation with relatability, relevance, compassion, truth, and clarity. We see in him the critical moments finding a beautiful balance. Let me encourage you to keep your conversations about spiritual things in the right balance. Truth and grace. Love and conviction. Compassion and clarity. The key is maintaining that right balance.

Third and finally, Jesus takes a big risk here in order to engage this woman. And it reminds me that risk for the sake of the gospel is right. Let me put it this way: If you wait to engage people in conversation about the gospel until it's comfortable, it will rarely happen. Nothing squelches the opportunity for the gospel to advance like waiting until it's safe.

Now, I know there should be limits. I'm not telling you to be reckless. But as we enter the week leading up to Easter, I want to encourage you to pray through what kind of risk you might need to take this week. Who's in your world that other people tend to shun? Who is outside the “norm” of your social and cultural arena that you could engage? When was the last time that someone was a bit shocked by your connection to a person in need of Jesus? Is there anyone you view as unreachable or (worse) untouchable?

The story of the Samaritan woman has layers of lessons embedded in it. This account is a stunning example of how far Jesus would go to reach a person in need of his grace. It shows us the risks that he took in order to reach not only her, but every one of us.

And while we are savoring the gratitude that we feel for that grace, we should ask the Lord, “To reach others, what risk are you asking me to take?”

When it comes to the gospel, risk is right.

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. [www.yourchurch.com](http://www.yourchurch.com)