

Lesson 5: *The Setting of the Encounter* **Sunday, October 27, 2024**

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The Testimony of the Samaritans

Memory Text: “Then they said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world’” (*John 4:42, NKJV*).

Who were the Samaritans? The northern kingdom of Israel had been taken captive by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. To create political stability, the Assyrians dispersed their captives throughout their empire. Likewise, captives from other nations were brought to populate the northern kingdom, and these became the Samaritans, who practiced their own form of Judaism.

Relations, however, were not good between them and the Jews. For instance, the Samaritans worked against the rebuilding of the temple at the return of the Jews from Babylon. The Samaritans, meanwhile, had built their own temple, on Mount Gerizim. But this temple was destroyed by the Jewish ruler John Hyrcanus in 128 B.C.

At the time of Christ, this animosity continued. The Jews avoided Samaria as much as possible. Though commerce may have gone on, other interaction was taboo. The Jews would not borrow from Samaritans or even receive a favor from them. Within this context, John recounts the encounter between Jesus, the woman by the well, and the people of the Samaritan city of Sychar.

The Setting of the Encounter Sunday

Read John 4:1–4. What was the background issue that led Jesus through Samaria?

Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John ² (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), ³ He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. ⁴ But He needed to go through Samaria.—
John 4:1-4

The Pharisees discovered that the disciples of Jesus were baptizing more people than did those of John the Baptist. This situation could create tensions between John's followers and Jesus'. The disciples of John, quite naturally, were jealous for their master's reputation and status (*compare with John 3:26–30*). John's impressive reply was that he must decrease, but Jesus must increase (*John 3:30*). Probably to avoid confrontation, Jesus departed Judea to go to Galilee. Samaria provided the most direct route between those two locations, but it was not the only route possible. Devout Jews would take the long way around, going east through Perea. But Jesus had a mission in Samaria.

²⁵ Then there arose a dispute between *some* of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!"

²⁷ John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' ²⁹ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. ³⁰ He must increase, but I *must* decrease.—**John 3:25-30**

Read John 4:5–9. How did Jesus use this opportunity to open a dialogue with the woman at the well?

⁵ So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶ Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from *His* journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." ⁸ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

⁹ Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.—***John 4:5-9***

Jacob's well was located right next to Shechem, while Sychar, where the woman was from, was about a mile away (1.5 km). Jesus sat by the well while His disciples went into the city to buy food. He had no access to the cooling water of the well. When the woman came to draw water, He asked her for a drink.

In John 3, it was surprising that Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews and a Rabbi, would lower himself to come to Jesus. He came by night to avoid discovery. But in John 4, the woman hides in broad daylight, perhaps avoiding contact with other women who came either at the beginning or end of the day when it was cooler. After all, why did she go such a long way to fetch water, and in the middle of the day when it was hot? Whatever the reason for her being there, meeting Jesus would change her life.

What scene unfolds next? A Jewish teacher is contrasted with a Samaritan woman of poor reputation. What a contrast! And yet, in this exact context, a remarkable encounter unfolds.

What are some of the taboos in your own culture that could hamper your witness to others? How do we learn to transcend them?

Skin color, and social class, financial status, gender, sexual orientation/identity, age, culture, political philosophy/party, geographical orientation

¹⁰ “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. ¹¹ For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

¹² “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? ¹³ And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that *sheep* than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. ¹⁴ Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.—***Matthew 18:10-14***

Lesson 6: “More Testimonies About Jesus”