

John 4

October 13, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

John 4:1-42

Session Outline

1. An Unexpected Encounter (John 4:1-19)
2. The Power of Truth (John 4:20-30)
3. The Urgency of the Gospel (John 4:31-42)

Theological Theme

Those who believe in Jesus receive living water and thirst no more. Christ followers should be ready and willing to tell their stories so others may also believe.

Call to Action

Teach the powerful of implication of this encounter of the Samaritan woman with Christ on our evangelistic approach toward others. Believers are to be ready and willing to share the gospel in every circumstance and with everyone they encounter.



Leader Guide

John 4

Introduction

The human body is made up of somewhere around 75 percent water. Water is essential to most bodily functions. A person can last weeks without food but only days without water. It is a vital part of the body's functioning.¹

You may have seen movies where people are without water and the extreme lengths they go to find it. Maybe you've experienced a time where you felt desperate for a drink. Because of water's importance to the body, quenching thirst is vital and the need for water is ongoing. You must drink water continually. In the same way, we need the living water of Jesus continually to sustain our spiritual lives.

- ❓ What is the thirstiest you've ever been?
- ❓ How did it feel to finally have your thirst satisfied?

Session Summary



Jesus encountered a woman at a well in Samaria and spoke to her about living water. The conversation with Jesus changed her life; she shared about Jesus with the entire town, and many believed. Believers should follow the example of Jesus and not let social, racial, or socioeconomic barriers keep them from sharing the gospel with others.

1. An Unexpected Encounter (John 4:1-19)

It was unusual for a Jew to go through Samaria and even more unlikely for a Jew to "need" to take that route. It was not that Jesus needed to go because of travel details, but because of who Jesus knew He would meet and interact with. After walking a long time, Jesus was physically tired. This is a reminder that as a man, Jesus experienced human weakness like physical exhaustion.


The disciples went into town while Jesus sat down at the well. John wrote, “It was about noon,” which would be the hottest part of the day. It was an unusual hour for drawing water and yet that is what happened as a Samaritan woman came to the well. Although Scripture doesn’t specify why she came to the well on her own at an off hour, many believe she was loner or outcast in some way.

When Jesus addressed the woman, it shocked her for several reasons. In that day and time, a Jew would not speak to a Samaritan and men did not converse with women they did not know. A Rabbi would not speak to a woman publicly, not even his wife. If this woman was considered immoral, as some have speculated, that was another reason for no man to engage her in conversation. Even though it was an unexpected encounter, Jesus displayed kindness and gentleness, and the woman expressed her surprise that He asked her for a drink.

-  What does Jesus’s desire to meet and speak with this woman teach us about Him?
-  What opportunities do you have to cross barriers to speak to people about Jesus?

Jesus was strategic in this conversation. He drew the woman in by sparking her curiosity. Knowing that this woman and everyone else in the village used this well daily to satisfy need for water, Jesus used thirst as an analogy of the spiritual need and longing everyone experiences. Once He had her attention, Jesus made an offer of water with lasting satisfaction. The woman responded in a logical manner when she immediately asked for some of the special water Jesus described. But the woman did not yet understand the water Jesus offered.

Jesus moved the conversation to relationships in her life and began to tread on subjects He could have no possible way of knowing except by supernatural means. His conversation with her would be more conventionally acceptable if her husband was present, but Jesus was making a different point. When the woman admitted she had no husband, Jesus spoke truth into her life and revealed His knowledge of her situation. He brought up her broken past but refrained from heaping shame on her. Jesus’s supernatural knowledge led the woman to recognize Jesus was different and deserved her full attention.

-  Application: How might Jesus’s response to the woman have been different than others she encountered? Who is God calling you to respond to in a unique way this week?

Through Samaria

Had to travel may indicate that Jesus’s itinerary was set by the sovereign plan of God (9:4; 10:16; 12:34; 20:9). Through Samaria was the most direct route from Judea to Galilee, but strict Jews, wishing to avoid defilement, bypassed Samaria by taking a longer, less direct route. This involved crossing the Jordan River and traveling across from Samaria on the eastern side of the river.

2. The Power of Truth (John 4:20-30)

Sometimes we must wrestle through confusion to get to the truth. Jesus's conversation with the woman took a turn as she shifted the subject to worship. Maybe it was nerves. Maybe she was intimidated by what He knew about her, personally, and wanted to focus on something else. Whatever her motivation, Jesus was ready and willing to engage in this conversation with her.

He pointed attention to the future and spoke about God's desire for worship. True worship involves Spirit and truth, because God is Spirit and truth. Note that Jesus made a monumental statement about right worship to a woman that many disregarded and cast out. Again, we see the value Jesus placed on the woman.

- ❓ What does it mean to worship God in spirit and truth?
What are some wrong ways we might focus our worship?

In response, the woman connected what Jesus said to the coming Messiah and confessed her expectation of that event. In that moment, at a well in Samaria with a sinful woman, Jesus plainly stated that He is the Messiah she spoke of. Again, we realize this message was delivered to an unlikely recipient.

Note how the disciples responded when they discovered Jesus having a serious conversation with the Samaritan woman. They were around Jesus enough to know that there was a reason for this unusual encounter and Scripture tells us that they didn't question the situation. It is possible the disciples did not ask due to their own pride or insecurity, but there is a principle to take from this moment also. There are times when God is at work around you and, though you may see it as unusual, when you trust that He is in control and you learn that His ways are not our ways, you can accept even what you don't understand.

- ❓ When have you experienced something unusual but believed God had a plan in it? How should we respond in these moments?

The conversation with Jesus so impacted the woman that she left her waterpot and went back to the city to tell others what had happened. These were not disposable waterpots. She needed that vessel, and it was important, yet in that moment it was not as important as what she had experienced with Jesus. Many believe she left her waterpot because she planned to come back. After one conversation with Jesus, she wanted

to hear more, and she was going to invite others to come and hear also. Shockingly, the woman who went alone to draw water, potentially to avoid others, sought out those she previously avoided. Recognizing Jesus for who He is and accepting our need for Him affects everything. The change in the woman must have been obvious because when she told people about Jesus, they came to see for themselves.

- Application: When has excitement about Jesus led you to go and tell others about Him, including those you might otherwise avoid?

3. The Urgency of the Gospel (John 4:31-42)

The disciples, who were still focused on their mission of food and refreshment from the travels, urged Jesus to eat. They took seriously the mission to help their friend and Rabbi. There are times when a person gets caught up in activity to the point that they may need reminders about taking care of themselves physically. This is not a wrong desire, but Jesus used their words to initiate a teaching moment.

He described food they knew nothing about in reference to the fact that He found fulfillment elsewhere. Jesus had a greater source of strength and satisfaction than any food He ate. He explained that doing the will of His Father was the best way to gain strength and be equipped for what was ahead. Jesus also emphasized that He would finish the work the Father had given Him. Many are zealous to begin following the will of God, but the mark of a true disciple is perseverance in the work of the Lord.


- When was a time you began pursuing God's will in your life but eventually faced the temptation to give up? How did you respond? How do you need to respond further now?

Jesus knew His time was not long on earth, and He wanted to impart the importance of not waiting to be about kingdom things. Using the concepts of food and harvest, He showed there was no need to keep waiting. Souls were ripe to be brought to salvation now. The same is true today. Believers should be busy about sharing Jesus with everyone possible that many might come to salvation.

- What gives us urgency for sharing the gospel with others? What might a lack of urgency indicate about what we believe?




In what might be considered one of the first missionary efforts, the woman went back to the village and told the people about Jesus. The townspeople came out to see and talk with Him for themselves, and Scripture tells us many of them believed. Jesus cared enough about the Samaritans that He went there intentionally and then stayed for two days teaching the people. The result was many came to faith. It was a bountiful harvest.

We have been set in this time and place to do the same thing. Every person who has encountered Jesus and accepted Him as Savior has a story to tell. Whether you have been a believer from a young age and spent most of your life in church or turned to Jesus from a pit of sin last week, you have a powerful story to share. The world needs to hear your story and it is your responsibility to tell it as much as possible. Too many people discount their testimonies as not important or dramatic enough when the opposite is true. As a sinner who was bound for hell without Christ, the fact that you surrendered your life to Him and are now bound for heaven is a miraculous story regardless of when or how that transformation began. The enemy wants to keep believers from being like the Samaritan woman and telling others about Jesus.

-  Application: Where is God calling you to be about His work and share your story about Him with others this week?

Conclusion

There are people all around us who do not know Jesus as their Savior. It is our responsibility to share with them how they can be saved. Too many believers allow barriers to come between them and the lost. When Jesus stopped in Samaria and spoke with the woman at the well, He bypassed many social, racial, and ethnic barriers. The result was the woman and many people from the village were saved. When we follow the example of Christ, we can join the harvest of souls as we offer others Living Water that gives true satisfaction.

-  Where is God calling you to go to those you might otherwise avoid to share about Him?
-  How can we make these types of evangelistic efforts as group?
-  Who can you share your story of Jesus with this week?

Prayer of Response

Thank Jesus for being the Living Water and giving you an example to follow about reaching the lost around you and around the world. Ask how you can join Him in His work of salvation.

Memory Verse

And they told the woman, "We no longer believe because of what you said, since we have heard for ourselves and know that this really is the Savior of the world." - John 4:42

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in John* by Matt Carter and John Wredberg
- *Be Alive* by Warren Wiersbe
- *The Gospel According to John* by D. A. Carson

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of John

Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30–31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God’s people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve (“the disciple Jesus loved,” 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24–25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of “the disciple Jesus loved” with Peter in 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3–4; 8:14–25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John’s Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1–4).

Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John’s lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter’s martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1, 14, 18; 10:30; 20:28).

Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John’s Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

Extended Commentary

John 4:1-42

Source of Life (4:1–26)

Not wanting to be seen in competition with John's ministry, Jesus returned to Galilee. In that journey "he had to go through Samaria." It should be noted that Samaria was not a geographic necessity for Jesus' trip but a necessity for His mission. The division between Jews and Samaritans was legendary, a division Jesus did not and would not recognize. Samaritans were rejected because of their mixed Gentile blood and their differing style of worship, which found its center on Mount Gerizim. On this mountain Samaritans had built a temple that rivaled the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus' excursion into Samaria resulted in one of the most fascinating dialogues recorded in Scripture. Resting by a well, Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman who had been living a life of habitual immorality. Their conversation proceeded upon two levels, the spiritual and the temporal, with the woman constantly finding excuses for Jesus' probing of her inner world. Her first shock was that Jesus would even speak to her, an act unheard of for that day between a Jewish man and a Samaritan woman. Jesus continually responded not to her questions but to her needs, offering her the opportunity of receiving "living water."

Here we see much regarding the intent of Jesus' ministry, to bring persons to a realization of the state of their life in order to lead them to repentance and a new life in Him. This new life is a life that honors and worships God in spirit and truth in daily life. The location of worship is not important, but the Object is! The English word "worship" is from the Anglo-Saxon *weorthscipe*, literally reading "worthship." Worship is attributing worth and honor to the living God.

Christ's Mission (4:27–38)

When the disciples rejoined Jesus, they did not dare ask Him about His conversation with the Samaritan woman but rather inquired about His physical well-being. Perhaps they thought hunger had deprived Him of the sense necessary to know better than to talk with such a woman. Jesus then continued the education of the disciples, instructing them that His "food" was to "do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." Jesus was clearly on a mission, a mission that was God-informed and God-directed (5:30; 6:38; 8:26; 9:4; 10:37–38; 12:49–50; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4). What was that mission? To confront people—all people, as the Samaritan woman demonstrated—with the truth of Himself. Jesus told them that the "fields are ripe for harvest" and that in entering that field for work, it makes no difference whether one plants the seed or brings in the crop. This is an important truth, for there should never be competition among Christians regarding differing fields of service. All should share in the joy of seeing the kingdom of God extend.

Savior of the World (4:39–42)

Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well, and her subsequent sharing of that conversation, resulted in many Samaritans believing in Jesus. After they met Jesus themselves, they believed not because of what the woman said but because they had come to believe themselves "that this man

really is the Savior of the world.” This confession of the Samaritan believers, that Jesus was the “Savior of the world,” is only found in the New Testament here and in 1 John 4:14. Only through Jesus is the world able to be saved, and that salvation is indeed for everyone in the world.²

References

1. “Water – a vital nutrient,” Better Health Channel, accessed July 23, 2023, <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/water-a-vital-nutrient>.
2. James Emery White, “John,” in *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 470–472.