

March 29, 2009 by Steve Brandon



Jesus Shows Mercy

John 4:1-26

1. Engaging (verses 7-14)
2. Convicting (verses 15-20)
3. Teaching (verses 21-26)

Over this past month at Rock Valley Bible Church, our attention has been fixed upon the book of Jonah. The main lesson that we learned from the book is God's heart for mercy. God called Jonah, a prophet from among His own people, and summoned him to preach to the Ninevites, a wicked nation that didn't deserve anything from God. They were a wicked people, who had no regard for the true God (3:8). They were a violent people, who sought to extend their dominance all over the world (3:8). And yet, God was merciful to them. God sent a prophet to them (1:1) and God relented from the calamity that He had declared that he would bring upon them (3:10).

The book of Jonah spins upon Jonah's reaction to the mercy that God extended to Nineveh. He hated it that God extended mercy to them. In fact, Jonah's hatred was so much so that Jonah wanted to die, rather than seeing God's mercy upon the people of Nineveh. The question at the end of Jonah is the question of the book. The LORD said to Jonah, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" (Jonah 4:10-11).

Jonah had great compassion for a plant which God appointed to grow to protect him from the scorching sun. When it died, Jonah was most disappointed and most upset. Then God said, "Jonah, if you had so much compassion for the plant, shouldn't I not also have compassion for Nineveh?" Because of the way the book ends (i.e. without an answer from Jonah), the question isn't so much for Jonah, as it is for us. Do we embrace God's mercy? Are we merciful people, who love to see God extend His mercy, even to our worst enemies?

In response to Jonah, I thought that it would be helpful to spend yet another week looking at the mercy of Jesus, after all, He is God incarnate. It will be helpful to our souls to watch His mercy in action.

There are many passages that we could examine this morning. We could look at the mercy of Jesus in helping the Canaanite woman when he went into Tyre and Sidon (Matthew 15:21-28). She had no promises from God, but only begged for the health of her daughter. And Jesus was merciful to her, healing her daughter. We could look at the mercy of Jesus in dealing with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). She was caught in the very act and guilty as charged. And yet, Jesus extended mercy to her. We could look at the mercy of Jesus in curing the ten lepers, just south of Galilee (Luke 17:11-19). They pleaded for mercy and received it. We could look at the mercy of Jesus in healing the blind beggars on the outskirts of Jericho (Matthew 20:29-34). They cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us!" And Jesus had mercy on them. We could look at the mercy of Jesus in granting salvation to the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43). His sin was so great that society was putting him to death for his sin. Jesus showed him mercy, saying, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise."

But, today, I have chosen the story of the woman at the well, as found in John, chapter 4. I want for us to see how mercifully Jesus dealt with the Samaritan woman that he met at the well in Sychar. I want to look at this passage, because it contains a great lesson for us in evangelism as well. After all, the book of Jonah is a call to missions. It's a call to bring God's heart of mercy to those who are without Christ in this day and age. It's a call to evangelism. It's a call to bring a message of God's mercy to a dying world. And I trust that the story of the woman at the well will call us to the same heart of sharing God's mercy with others.

It would serve you well to have the entire text in your mind before we begin to dissect it.

John 4:1-42

Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), He left Judea and went away again into Galilee. And He had to pass through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

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

Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?"

Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw."

He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here."

The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."

The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us."

Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?" So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men, "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" They went out of the city, and were coming to Him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat."

But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples were saying to one another, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."

From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I have done." So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. Many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."

This is a great story of the mercy of Jesus, shown to a Samaritan city. In many ways, this is parallel to Jonah's mission to Nineveh. The Ninevites were enemies of Israel. So too were the Samaritans enemies to the Jews. To be sure, they were not military enemies, but they were definitely religious enemies. The Jews saw the Samaritans as traitors to the Jewish God. In many ways, the rift began shortly after the days of Solomon, when 10 of the tribes of Israel, led by Jeroboam, split with the other two tribes. But, some 200 years later, the rift became even greater when the nation of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 B. C. Many were taken into captivity, but others remained in the land. Those who remained began to intermarry with foreigners. The result was that the Jews in Judah no longer considered those who had intermarried to be genuine Jews. Instead, they saw them as a half-breed mongrel race, who had betrayed their God. Furthermore, after the Babylonian captivity, there were some Babylonians, who came and dwelt in the land of Samaria (Ezra 4:10). They weren't a big help in rebuilding Jerusalem, but even resisted the word (Nehemiah 4:1-2).

In Jesus' day, there was a great rift between the Jews and the Samaritans. In many ways, "Samaritan" was a swear word. When the Jewish leaders were really angry with Jesus and seeking to accuse him, they said, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon" (John 8:48). And these are the people to whom Jesus shows mercy. Just as Jonah went to Nineveh, so we see Jesus here going to the Samaritans.

In our text this morning, we discover Jesus enjoying great ministry in Judea, near Jerusalem. Many people were coming to Him, listening to Him, and believing His message. As a result, many people were being baptized by His disciples. On the one hand, this was good for Jesus, as His message was being received. However, on the other hand, the success of His ministry was catching the eye of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were already a bit concerned about John's ministry, as many Jews were being transformed by His ministry, and not by theirs. But, now, they had a new problem on their hand. Another prophet had arisen who was making more disciples than John. Surely they would begin to investigate His ministry, as they did John's ministry (John 1:19-28). John had been imprisoned and executed. As it wasn't yet His

hour to be exposed and crucified, Jesus went north to Galilee to escape the coming persecution.

It says in verse 4 that Jesus "had to" go through Samaria to get there. It's pretty simple. Judea is in the south. Galilee is in the north. And Samaria is in between them. And so, when you go to Galilee from Judea, you must pass through Samaria on the way.

Now, at this point, many preachers wax eloquent on these words. They point out that the Jews hated the Samaritans, and so, they didn't travel through Samaria. Instead, they cross the Jordan river (going east) down in Judea. Then, they travel north around Samaria. And finally, they cross the river again (going west) once they get across from Galilee. And preachers make a big point that Jesus "had to" go through Samaria, because he had a divine appointment with the Samaritan woman, which we will meet in verse 7. Perhaps you have heard this before.

Surely, there were some who did this, but I'm doubtful that this practice was nearly so prevalent during the days of Christ as some preachers make it out to be. Josephus, the Jewish historian, who lived shortly after the time of Christ, once told of a conflict that the Jews and the Samaritans had with each other. Apparently, some Galileans were passing through Samaria and were killed by some who lived in that area. When the governor of the area refused to help bring things to justice, the Jews took matters into their own hands and plundered some cities in Samaria. And then, there was a counter attack. This was a problem, because, as Josephus said, "It was the custom of the Galileans, when they came to the holy city at the festivals, to take their journeys through the country of the Samaritans." [\[1\]](#) If the Jews didn't travel through Samaria, but instead, around it, then it wouldn't have been such an issue. But, as Josephus said, "it was [their] custom ... to take their journeys through [Samaria]." This is John's point. When traveling from Judea to Galilee, you must travel through Samaria, as it lies between these two regions.

The traveling in those days wasn't so easy. They didn't have highways and tollways where they could pass through in the luxury of their automobiles at 65 miles per hour. Rather, they were forced to walk from village to village until they arrived at their destination, traveling about 20 miles per day. As they had no lighting along the road, they were forced to travel during the day, in the hot sun.

On one day of their travel, when it was high noon (the sixth hour according to Jewish time), they came the historical landmark, Jacob's well, which was near the city of Sychar. When Jesus arrived at the well, He was weary from His journey sat down at the well. He sent His disciples off into the city to get some food for them all, according to verse 8. (They will return later to the scene in verse 27). At this point, however, Jesus is alone, resting upon the well.

Now, before we get to verse 7, I want for us to reflect upon the humanity of Jesus. It is so good for us to remember that our Lord came to us in flesh and bone. He understands being tired. He understands being hungry. He understands being thirsty. He understands the temptations that come about as a result of these things. And thus, He is able to sympathize with us as our great high priest. At the end of Hebrews 4, we read, ...

Hebrews 4:14-16

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and grace to help in time of need.

Jesus can sympathize with all of our weaknesses. He has taken on flesh and blood. He knows what it's like to be human. So, go to him, church family. He is able to grant you mercy and help in your time of need.

Now, we come to the heart of my message this morning. Though Jesus was in great need, being tired and hungry and thirsty, He meets someone who had a greater need, the woman at the well. I want for us to look and see how it is that Jesus extend mercy to this woman. First of all, we see Jesus ...

1. Engaging (verses 7-14)

In **verse 7**, we read, "There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give Me a drink.'" Now to us, this doesn't seem like too big a deal. Jesus comes to the well and He is thirsty. He doesn't have anything to draw the water out from the deep well. He doesn't have anyone to help Him. According to **verse 8**, "His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food." So, Jesus, being all alone and without any to help asks a small favor of this woman. So, He asks this woman for a drink.

In our day and age, this might be a bit akin to being out somewhere and needing to make a phone call. However, upon going to make that call, you discover that the batteries on your cell phone have died. So, you quickly explain your situation to a stranger and ask if you might be able to borrow their cell phone to make a quick call. It's no big deal. We all can envision ourselves making such a request of a stranger.

Now, as little as this request may seem to us, it shocked the woman. We read in **verse 9**, "Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, 'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?' (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)" There was such a rift between the Jews and Samaritans that they often refused to speak with each other.

But, it goes even deeper than that. It's not only that she was a Samaritan. But, she was a woman. In the Jewish culture of Jesus' day, men and women didn't have regular contact with each other. It was socially taboo for a man to speak with a woman. Later, in verse 27, we will see how shocked the disciples were to see Jesus talking with a woman! But, Jesus did speak to her. And this woman was shocked.

The point that I'm making here this morning is that Jesus was intentionally and actively engaging this woman in conversation. In so doing, He

was putting His mercy on display. In the context of the day, it would have been perfectly normal for Jesus to completely ignore her. But, to show mercy, he engaged her in conversation. If we love God's mercy and have a desire to let others know about it, we also need to be proactive in our conversations. I love what J. C. Ryle said about this. He said, ...

Simple as this request may seem, it opened a door to spiritual conversation. It threw a bridge across the gulf which lay between her and Him. It led to the conversion of her soul. ... It is vain to expect that [the spiritually ignorant] will voluntarily come to us, and begin to seek knowledge. We must begin with them, and go down to them in the spirit of courteous and friendly aggression. [\[2\]](#)

This is what Jesus does. He comes to this woman in "the spirit of courteous and friendly aggression."

In **verse 10**, you can see how he transitions his conversation to spiritual matters. He says, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." With these words, Jesus opens a door to spiritual conversation. He turned the conversation away from physical water to speak of spiritual water.

I believe that this is a skill that we all can work on developing. I know that I can. I'm looking to learn from Jesus this morning. How easy it is to talk with unbelievers about the weather, sports and our children. But, oh, how difficult it is to transition to spiritual matters. Charles Spurgeon once told of how he discovered how poorly he did this. He said, ...

I shall never forget the manner in which a thirsty individual once begged of me upon Clapham Common. I saw him with a very large truck, in which he was carrying an extremely small parcel, and I wondered why he had not put the parcel into his pocket, and left the machine at home. I said, "It looks odd to see so large a truck for such a small load."

He stopped, and looking me seriously in the face, he said, "Yes, sir, it is a very odd thing; but, do you know, I have met with an odder thing than that this very day. I've been about, working and sweating all this ere blessed day, and till now I haven't met a single gentleman that looked as if he'd give me a pint of beer, till I saw you."

I considered that turn of the conversation very neatly managed, and we, with a far better subject upon our minds, ought to be equally able to introduce the topic upon which our heart is set. There was an ease in the man's manner which I envied, for I did not find it quite so simple a matter to introduce my own topic to his notice; yet if I had been thinking as much about how I could do him good as he had upon how to obtain a drink, I feel sure I should have succeeded in reaching my point. If by any means we may save some, we must, like our Lord, talk at table to good purpose yes, and on the margin of the well, and by the road, and on the sea-shore, and in the house, and in the field. [\[3\]](#)

This is what Jesus was doing. He was introducing spiritual topics in conversation with this woman. Originally, the topic was physical water to drink, but then, Jesus turned it around to address the issue of spiritual water. In so doing, he shares the gospel to this woman. "Yes, I'm asking you for a drink of water at this moment. But, if you really knew what was going on, and you asked Me for water, it would all be different. I would give you some 'living water.' That is, some water that will really give you life."

Now, in hindsight, of course, we can understand that Jesus was talking about the purifying and refreshing manner in which God is to our soul. Just as physical water refreshes us and gives us life, so will the living water that Jesus gives give us eternal life. But, this woman missed the metaphor. She was still thinking of water in the well. She was thinking of running water that is especially fresh and pure.

Verses 11 and 12 tell us how she responded. She said, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?" All that she could focus on was the situation at hand. Jesus looked like a tired and weary traveler, who had nothing in His hand to draw the water from the well. Today, Jacob's well is more than 100 feet deep and still supplies water. I would suspect that it was at least this deep in their day. His arm weren't that long. He needed something to draw the water out from the well. She couldn't conceive of how Jesus was able to get living water out of this well.

Then, this woman brought up the historical significance of this well. It goes way back to Jacob, who was one of the patriarchs, and considered to be a great man among all in that day. Surely Jesus wasn't better than this man. After all, he was one of the mighty patriarchs.

Notice again how Jesus again directs the conversation toward a spiritual end. He says, in **verses 13 and 14**, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." Again, Jesus comes with the gospel. He has something to give that far exceeds anything that she has ever experienced before. All she has experienced has been the routine that all of us know. We drink, but then we become thirsty. We drink, but then we become thirsty. We drink, but then we become thirsty. But, Jesus has something else. He has the drink that will truly satisfy forever! You drink of this water and you will never be thirsty again. In fact, this water will give you eternal life.

Of course, Jesus is merely talking about Himself. Jesus satisfies all of our thirsts and all of our longings. We can seek to be satisfied in other things, like money, like sex, like friends, like movies, like basketball, like jobs, like recreational activities, and like sleep. But all of these things will ultimately end up giving us an empty feeling in our stomach, like we want more. But, with Jesus, we can be totally satisfied, never needing anything again to quench our longings. Our spiritual longings are ultimately satisfied in Christ Jesus. If you know nothing of this, O call you to seek Him.

Verse 15 indicates that this woman begins to get it. Certainly, not fully, but she was beginning. And at this point, Jesus again turns the conversation. It forms my second point this morning. We have seen Jesus (1) Engaging (verses 7-14). He actively sought to communicate

with this woman the truths about Himself. And now, we see Him, ...

2. Convicting (verses 15-20)

By this, I simply mean that Jesus begins to get to the heart of this woman's sin. And again, I want for you to see how merciful Jesus is in the process. When showing this woman her sin. Jesus doesn't yell. He doesn't condemn. He doesn't accuse. He doesn't scorn or frown. Rather, He gently prods into her life to allow her to see her own sin. You will never the sweetness of the gospel, you first need to taste of the sourness of your sin. If you want to share God's mercy with others, you need to bring them to a place where they see their sin, and thus, their need for mercy. And this is what Jesus does.

In **verse 15**, we see the woman responding to Jesus, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw." At this point, I believe that she's a bit like Nicodemus, who slowly began to understand that Jesus wasn't talking about literally entering again into his mother's womb. She senses that Jesus is talking about something that's different, but she can't quite figure it out. And so, she reaches a point where she is desirous of having whatever Jesus is talking about. But, Jesus knows that she's not ready to receive it, because she hasn't come to grips with the reality of her sin.

So Jesus said to her in **verse 16**, "Go, call your husband and come here." She said, in **verse 17a**, "I have no husband." Technically, this was correct as Jesus points out, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly." (**verses 17b-18**). This is a great statement, because it exposes things about Jesus, and it exposes things about this woman at the same time. It shows that Jesus knows about her sinful past. It also begins to show the woman her sin. She had not lived a righteous life. She was not now living a righteous life.

At this point, I want for you to catch this morning the marvelous mercy of Jesus. Jesus could have responded to this woman like the men responded to the woman who was caught in adultery. They had caught her in the very act and dragged her to Jesus and set her in front of him. They tested Jesus by telling how Moses had instructed them to stone such a one. They wanted to know what Jesus would say. But, Jesus was silent. When pressed, Jesus said, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). Everyone left, except for Jesus. Then, Jesus had the tender conversation, ...

John 8:10-11

"Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" (John 8:10). She said, "No one, Lord" And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

This was great mercy. And this same mercy was shown to this Samaritan woman. He didn't condemn her as an adulteress. He wasn't ready to stone her. Rather, He allowed the Spirit of God to bring her to a knowledge of her own sin. He did so very gently. He did so very mercifully.

Now, this isn't to say that this is the only way that we ought to expose the sins of others. Jesus was very strong toward the self-righteous Pharisees, who believed that they were righteous and needed no repentance. He called them "whitewashed tombs, which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27). He called them "a brood of vipers" (Matt. 23:33). He said that "the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21:31). All of these statements were intended to jolt the self-righteous into understanding their sinfulness, that they might need a Savior.

It was told to me recently, it's "law to the proud, but grace to the humble." To those who hold to their own righteousness, they need to be strongly confronted with the law. But, to those who are humble, they need grace and mercy.

To this woman, Jesus gave mercy. I believe that he was so gentle because He sensed her humility. She was well aware that she wasn't a righteous person. The very fact that she came to draw water alone in the heat of the day shows that she was a social outcast. It was easiest to draw water in the evening, when it was cool. The wells were often social places where people gathered social to talk and mingle. But, after five marriages, she probably wasn't too accepted in her day into the social circles. And her arrangement now of living with her boyfriend couldn't have helped matters too much either.

I believe that this woman was well aware of her sin. To be sure, Samaritans weren't famous for their righteousness. And yet, being so close to Israel, they were fully aware of God's call to live righteously. She knew of her sin.

In **verse 19** she responded, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet." In other words, "You are exactly correct!" She confessed her sin. She acknowledged her sin. Now, whether she was repenting of her sin right here is difficult to know. But, her heart does turn to seeking the truth in **verse 20**. She said, "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

Here we see a third way in which Jesus is showing mercy to this woman. He began by (1) Engaging her (verses 7-14). He continued by (2) Convicting her (verses 15-20). And now, Jesus continues by ...

3. Teaching (verses 21-26)

Now, there are some who say that this woman is trying to change the subject with these words. Jesus had just touched upon her sin, and now she wanted to debate theology? There are some merits to this view. But, the issue that she raises isn't a trivial point.

First of all, Jacob's well was within eyeshot of Mount Gerizim. When my wife and I had the opportunity to visit Israel, we had an opportunity to visit the well. It was pretty special. The well was situated slightly to the east of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. They rise up like two giant

mounds on either side of the well.

The importance of Mount Gerizim was the issue that caused the racial rift between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews held that the temple in Jerusalem was the place to worship. The whole idea of why the temple was built was so that God would have a place where he could put his name (2 Chron. 6:3-11). And this place was in Jerusalem. So, the Jews held that the place where God was to be worshiped was there in the temple in Jerusalem. However, the Samaritans had a different story. When Israel entered into the promised land, God had commanded the tribes of Israel to assemble. Half of them on Mount Gerizim and half of them on Mount Ebal. The blessings would be read by the tribes on Mount Gerizim and the curses of the law would be read by the tribes on Mount Ebal (Deut. 27:2-7; Joshua 8:33). For them, they saw Mount Gerizim as a special place, which God had especially blessed. The Samaritans even built a temple there on Gerizim, where they performed sacrifices. This temple was the source of constant friction between the Jews and the Samaritans.

I believe that this woman, who encountered a man who knew all about her past might just hold the key to solve this debate. However, to this woman, it may have been more than merely a solution to the theological debate of the day. It may have been the answer to her question about being right with God. How can I be right with God? Can I stay here in Sychar? Or, should I seek Him in Jerusalem? Fundamentally, what she was asking is this, "How might I worship God correctly."

Jesus gives her a masterful response in **verses 21-24**, ...

John 4:21-24

Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

I love this answer, because it is such a Jesus answer. The woman gave Jesus two options, "Where is the true place of worship? Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem?" But Jesus answered, "None of the above." While affirming the correctness of the Jews and the errors of the Samaritans, Jesus focused upon what would take place in the near future.

You can see His reference to this in verses 21 and 23 when He speaks about how "the hour is coming." Throughout all of John's gospel, He is always anticipating "His hour." He's talking about all of the events that surround His atoning sacrifice. And when that takes place, all of this talk about Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim will become irrelevant, because things are going to change. Soon, the question isn't going to be about "where." That question will be entirely meaningless. Soon, the question is going to be about "How."

The key phrase is found in the last half of verse 23, "The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." These words are pregnant with meaning. It means that the true worshipers must come to God with two things: spirit and truth.

It is important to come to God in spirit, that is a willingness and an eagerness that desires Him. The worship of God cannot be out of compulsion or out of ritual or out of mere formula. No, the worship of God must come with a zeal for God and a passion for God. It is important to come to God in truth, that is in accordance with reality. The worship of God cannot be based upon any human opinion or in any self-styled manner. No, the worship of God must come based upon the grounds that God has given to us.

That's the way to God: "spirit and truth." In verse 24, Jesus mentions it again, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." Jesus repeats it for a reason: It's important for us to understand. Spirit and truth, both of these things are important. See, it's not merely enough to approach God on the ground of "willingness." There are many in this world who say, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe it," as if the entrance into heaven is a matter of sincerity. But, it's not. You need to come to Him based upon His terms.

Nor is it merely enough to approach God on the basis of truth. There are many in this world who are orthodox in their theology, but have no heart to worship the Lord. James says that "the demons also believe, and shudder" (James 2:18). You need to come to God with a heart that loves the Lord.

The woman responded with some degree of insight. She recognizes the fact that Jesus must be talking about the time of the Messiah, when all will be restored. She says (in **verse 25**), "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." She's getting closer. She's looking to another for help. She doesn't know who this is. She doesn't know when this will be. But, she knows that she doesn't have the answers, but someday, the Messiah will have all of the answers.

Then, Jesus must have really rocked her boat. He said, "I who speak to you am He" (**verse 26**). With these words, Jesus reveals Himself completely to this woman. "You are looking for the Messiah? I'm the guy. I've got the answers. Follow Me."

Continuing on we read, ...

John 4:27-29

At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do you seek?" Or, "Why do you speak with her?" So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men, "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is it?"

At this point, I trust that you will see the mercy of Jesus upon the life of this woman. The disciples were amazed that Jesus was even talking with her. It simply wasn't done in their culture. Men didn't speak with women, especially a Samaritan. And when they came, she left. She left to evangelize her city.

What incredible kindness it was to her to be able to meet the Messiah, face to face. And she became the means of the conversion of many in her city according to verse 42, "and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."

Verse 42 and verse 29 give the reason why John included this story in his gospel. At the end of his gospel, John told us that He made a choice of the things that he included. He also made a choice not to include many, many other things. He wrote everything with a purpose. He said in John 20:31, "These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

In our text we are taught that Jesus is the one with living water. Jesus is the one in whom is life. Our church is a testimony to that fact. We have found our life in Him. Have you found your life in Him? Have you believed in Jesus, the Christ? Have you experienced life in His name? If not, I urge you to turn from your sin and trust the Savior. Jesus is the only one who can save you from your sin.

If you do believe, then I have a clear point of application for you: see the harvest. Soon after this woman left, Jesus was in conversation with His disciples. Among other things, He said, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest" (verse 35). He wasn't talking about the harvest of the crops. Rather, Jesus was talking about the harvest of souls! He had just witnessed to this woman. And now, He calls His disciples to share His heart.

I would encourage you all to be more intentional in bringing the message of God's mercy in Christ to the world. (1) Be engaging people. Search for them and find them and be active in speaking with them. Always look for opportunities to turn the conversation toward spiritual matters. (2) Be convicting people. Show people their sin. A great way to do this is by showing them God's law and what he requires and how far they fall short of it. Finally, (3) be teaching people. Direct them to Jesus. He is the only way that they will ever be delivered from their sin.

Remember, ultimately, that your conversations and directing people to Jesus will be used by God to accomplish His purposes. You may not see conversions (as Jesus did). However, you may merely be planting seed to which others will reap later. Know that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. Jesus told His disciples in verse 34, "One sows and another reaps."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 29, 2009 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Antiquities of the Jews, 20:6:1.

[2] J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on John, Volume 1, p. 203.

[3] Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, pp. 171-172.