

John – An In-Depth Study

[Part 7]

John 4:1-9 [NIV] *“The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptising more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptised, but his disciples. When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 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. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) 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.)”*

The land of Palestine is only 120 miles long but within that 120 miles there was in the time of Jesus three definite divisions of territory. In the extreme north lay Galilee, in the extreme south Judea and in between, Samaria.

Jesus didn’t wish at this stage of His ministry to be drawn into a controversy about baptism, so He decided to move out of Judea for the time being and visit Galilee.

The quickest journey, by foot, was through Samaria, taking about three days.

On this journey they came to the town of Sychar. Just outside of this town was a well on a piece of ground that was bought by Jacob. [**Genesis 33:18-19**] On his deathbed, Jacob bequeathed that ground to Joseph. [**Genesis 48:52**]

On Joseph’s death in Egypt his body was taken back to Palestine and buried there. [**Joshua 24:32**]

So this area had gathered many memories for Jewish people.

The well was 100 feet deep so needed something to draw water from it.

When Jesus and His little band came to this well, Jesus sat down to rest, for He was tired with the journey. It was midday [the Jewish day runs from 6am to 6pm], the disciples went ahead to buy some food in Sychar.

Why should the Samaritan woman come to this well for water, more than half a mile from Sychar, where there was a supply of well water?

Maybe it was that she was so much of a moral outcast that the village women drove her away from the well in the village of Sychar.

When Jesus asked her to draw water for Him to drink, the Samaritan woman was astonished because of the long time dispute between Jews and Samaritans.

John then explains to the Greeks, for whom He was writing, the lack of interaction between Jews and Samaritans.

John’s account of this meeting is very brief, only the salient points of the discussion are recorded.

I feel that the Samaritan woman could have unburdened her problems to this stranger who had shown such kindness instead of critical superiority that she had faced from other Jews and her own neighbours.

This brief account shows us much of the character of Jesus.

a) **It shows us the reality of His humanity** – Jesus was weary and sat down exhausted. It shows us One for whom life was at times an effort as it is for us all.

b) **It shows us the warmth of His sympathy** – For an ordinary religious leader of the orthodox Jewish church this Samaritan woman would have been an embarrassment.

To Jesus it seemed the most natural thing to be speaking with her **not** as a critic but as a friend.

c) **It shows us Jesus as the breaker down of barriers** – This quarrel between Jews and Samaritans was an old story, away back to 720BC.

The Assyrians had invaded the northern kingdom with its capital at Samaria and occupied this area of Israel.

As was the practice in those days, the conquerors would transport practically the whole population of this area to Medes. [2 Kings 17:6]

Into this district the Assyrians brought other people to settle the land and keep the peace. [2 Kings 17:24]

As it is impossible to transport every person from a country, those who were left intermarried with the foreigners and the remaining Israelites became a mixed race.

This made these people impure in the opinion of the Jews who lived in the southern kingdom of Israel.

Thus the pure Jews hated the mixed race called Samaritans because they felt that their fellow Israelites who had intermarried had betrayed their nation.

The Samaritans had set up an alternative centre of worship on mount Gerizim [John 4:20] to parallel the temple at Jerusalem but it had been destroyed 150 years earlier, to this account, by Jewish general Hyrcanus.

The Jews did everything they could to avoid contact with Samaritans, but Jesus had **no** such cultural restrictions.

Another barrier that Jesus took down was – the rule that strict rabbis [Jewish teachers] forbade any rabbi to greet a woman in public.

A rabbi might not even speak to his wife or daughter in public, such an action would destroy the reputation of that rabbi.

Not only was this woman a Samaritan, she was also known to be living in sin, and this conversation was taking place in public.

To a Jew this was an amazing account, the holiest of men listening with understanding to a sorry story of this rejected woman.

Jesus was breaking down the barriers of nationality and orthodox Jewish custom.

Here was a beginning of the universality of the gospel message. Here is God so loving the world not just in theory, but in action.

John 4:10-15 [NIV] *“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.’ ‘Sir,’ the woman said, ‘you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 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?’ Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 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.’ 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.’”

In the ordinary language of the Jew “*living waters*” was running waters, in contrast to the stagnant cistern or pool.

So the Samaritan woman was saying where are you going to offer me the pure stream of water, she was taking what Jesus said literally as did Nicodemus.

When people were on a journey in Jesus’ day they usually carried a bucket made of the skin of some animal so they could draw water from local wells.

The band of travellers with Jesus had no doubt taken this bucket to the village with them.

This Samaritan woman mistakenly thought that with this spiritual water Jesus was offering she would **not** have to make this daily visit to this well. Perhaps this is because no-one had ever talked about her spiritual hunger and thirst before.

It is the living word Jesus Christ and the living word the Christian Bible, that satisfy this spiritual hunger and thirst. This is what Jesus was offering to this woman.

John 4:16-20 [NIV] *“He told her, ‘Go, call your husband and come back.’ ‘I have no husband,’ she replied. Jesus said to her, ‘You are right when you say you have no husband. 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.’ ‘Sir,’ the woman said, ‘I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.’”*

When this woman discovered that Jesus knew all about her private life, she quickly changed the subject by bringing up a popular theological issue, as a smokescreen to keep Jesus away from her deepest need.

John 4:21-24 [NIV] *“Jesus declared, ‘Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.’”*

Jesus directed this subject to make a very important point that is universal and eternal.

The location of worship is not nearly as important as our attitude of worship.

God is spirit, **not**, like a physical being, limited to one place or time.

God is present everywhere and He can be worshipped at any time and in any place, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:26 The Holy Spirit helps our prayers.

John 14:26 Opens up the Word of God to us, the Christian Bible.

Romans 5:5 Allows us to experience the love of God and allow it to flow out to others.

“You Samaritans worship what you do not know.”

The Samaritans were very selective in what they accepted in scripture.

They only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament and rejected the rest.

Also the foreign people brought in by the Assyrians also brought in their own pagan gods [2 Kings 17:29]. When one of the priests of God told them to “*fear the Lord*” [2 Kings 17:28] all that probably happened is that they added Jehovah to their list of gods because they were superstitiously afraid to leave Him out.

In false worship we may detect three main faults.

a) False worship selects what it wishes to know and understand about God and omits what it does not like.

For example, the phrase “*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*” can be used for personal revenge or national revenge when taken out of context of mercy in which it is found. [Matthew 5:38-42]

b) False worship is an ignorant worship.

Religion may begin with an emotional response, but this emotional response has to be thought out.

We not only need to know what we believe but why we believe what we do. [1 Peter 3:15]

c) A false worship is a superstitious worship. Worship is given by many people founded on a vague fear of what might happen if they leave God out of the reckoning.

Romans 12:1-2 [NIV] “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.*”

Real worship is not founded on fear but on a love of God in gratitude for what He has done for us through Jesus Christ. Also a desire for God to re-educate our lives to make them acceptable to Him our Creator and Sustainer.

True worship is when the human spirit in humans [Job 32:8; Proverbs 20:27] the invisible part of a human being, speaks to and meets with the Creator God who is immortal and invisible.

John 4:25-26 [NIV] “*The woman said, ‘I know that Messiah’ (called Christ) ‘is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.’ Then Jesus declared, ‘I who speak to you am he.’*”

Jesus had opened up to this Samaritan woman a new vista that was bewildering to her, well beyond her full understanding, things full of wonder.

All she could respond to this was that when the looked-for Messiah [anointed One of God] comes He will explain all this to me.

Jesus replied, you don’t have to wait for the Messiah is speaking to you now.

Jesus may have explained these things to her and others in Sychar as we are told, at their request He remained two days with them. [John 4:40-42]

John 4:27-30 [NIV] “*Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no-one asked, ‘What do you want?’ or ‘Why are you talking with her?’ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’ They came out of the town and made their way towards him.*”

What was happening was difficult for the disciples who had been brought up in a Jewish culture to accept.

But we see within the response of Jesus’ disciples something that tells us two things.

This narrative could only come from a person who had actually been there to share this happening.

It also shows that the disciples of Jesus were beginning to know Jesus.

However staggered the disciples were it did **not** occur to them to question what Jesus was doing, even if they could **not** understand at the time.

If we find some of Jesus' words and actions difficult to understand, we must know that in time we will be given understanding by the Holy Spirit. [John 16:13; John 14:26]

This revelation happened to the disciples of Jesus Christ with the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, in a very dramatic way. [Acts 2:1-40]

The whole reaction of the Samaritan woman tells us much about the real Christian experience.

a) **Jesus compelled her to face herself and see herself as she really was.** Our first Christian experience may be one of humiliation and personal disgust. Jesus makes us do what we least like in life, see what we really are.

b) **The Samaritan woman was staggered that Jesus Christ knew the intimate details of her life.**

This should **not** surprise any human being if we have read and meditated on **Psalm 139:1-16**.

c) **The response of this Christian experience was to share her discovery with others.** The Christian life should always be based on discovery and communication.

No discovery of the truth is complete until it is shared with others.

d) **This desire to share what she had discovered destroyed any feeling of human shame or embarrassment.**

A person may hide their sins but once they meet with Jesus their first instinct is to say, *"Look at what I was, then look at what I am now, this is what Jesus Christ has done for me."*

John 4:31-38 [NIV] *"Meanwhile his disciples urged him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about.' Then his disciples said to each other, 'Could someone have brought him food?' 'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, "Four months more and then the harvest"? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying "One sows and another reaps" is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour.'"*

The disciples were concerned as to the physical welfare of Jesus, whom they had left exhausted.

Jesus told the disciples that He was nourished by something more than physical food.

Jesus' burning desire to fulfil His Father's commission empowered Him.

As yet the disciples had **not** experienced this spiritual power to fulfil a great task can lift a person above their immediate physical needs.

Again and again John's gospel tells of Jesus being One who had been sent by God the Father, with a mission He had to fulfil. [John 5:36; John 6:38; John 8:29; John 10:18]

This same great desire should be found in every Christian.

There is a harvest to be reaped by every Christian through the way they live their lives for other non-Christians to see. [**Matthew 5:13-16**]

The wages that Jesus offers are the joy of working for Him and seeing a harvest of believers coming to know Jesus Christ, worship Him and eventually love Him.

“*Others who have done hard work*” may refer to the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist, who paved the way for the gospel message to be brought by Jesus Christ.

Jesus was hinting at the golden age that the prophets had spoken about. [**Amos 9:13-15; Leviticus 26:3-5; Psalms 126:5-6**]

Two things are told to every Christian by this passage of scripture.

a) **There is always a harvest that waits to be reaped for God.**

There is a time in most people’s lives when they are sensitive to God; one example of this is the funeral of a friend or loved one. Such a time should be harvested by Christians.

There is always a challenge, even if you do not see a harvest for the work of witness you are seeking to do for God.

Isaiah 55:10-11 [NIV] “*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*”

This is a promise that every person preaching God’s Word can claim.

John 4:39-42 [NIV] “*Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I ever did.’ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, ‘We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.’*”

In the events which happened in Samaria we have a pattern by which the gospel message is so often spread.

a) There was an introduction, this is where God desires to us to be. [**Romans 10:14-15**]

This is one of the wonderful things about the way God works. He desires to do part of His work through His created children and potential created children.

b) There is a nearer intimacy and growing knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The Samaritans after an introduction to Jesus Christ sought His company.

After being introduced to Jesus Christ we all must seek to live in the presence of Jesus Christ.

This is done through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. [**John 14:15-18**]

c) Then comes discovery and surrender.

The Samaritans discovered that Jesus was the Saviour of the world.

Jesus was **not** just an example or pattern of how we should live but our personal Saviour from eternal death.

There is **no** title adequate to describe Jesus Christ except the title Saviour of the world.

John 4:43-45 [NIV] *“After the two days he left for Galilee. (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honour in his own country.) When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there.”*

This statement is mentioned in all three synoptic gospels [**Mark 6:4; Matthew 13:57; Luke 4:24**] on occasions when Jesus was rejected.

John introduces this statement on an occasion when Jesus was actually accepted.

It may be that Jesus was astonished at success in Samaria for this is not an area of His work. [Matthew 15:24; Matthew 10:5-6, 23]

Here we also see that the only real argument for Christianity is to personally experience Jesus Christ.

Effective Christian evangelism really begins when we can say to another person, “I know what Jesus Christ has done for me,” then go on to say “try Him, and see what He can do for you.”

John 4:46-54 [NIV] *“Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. ‘Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders,’ Jesus told him, ‘you will never believe.’ The royal official said, ‘Sir, come down before my child dies.’ Jesus replied, ‘You may go. Your son will live.’ The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he enquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, ‘The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.’ Then the father realised that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, ‘Your son will live.’ So he and all his household believed. This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.”*

In this story of a royal official, there are examples for us to learn from.

a) **Here was a royal official who came to a carpenter.**

This royal official had travelled almost twenty miles from Capernaum to Cana. This explains why it took so long to return home.

To do this the royal official had to swallow his pride. Beyond a doubt his action would cause a sensation in both Cana and Capernaum.

b) **The royal official refused to be discouraged.**

His request was met with a bleak statement from Jesus.

This could be Jesus making sure that the royal official was in earnest.

Jesus had responded in a similar way to the Syro-Phoenician woman. [**Matthew 15:21-28**]

c) **This royal official had faith.**

He had enough faith to turn round and walk the near twenty miles back home with nothing more than an assurance of healing from Jesus.

This must be the faith we have in Jesus Christ.

If Jesus says something it must be true.

d) **The royal official surrendered to Jesus Christ** – he and his household believed in Jesus Christ as a result of His example.

To him and his family it must have been a staggering fact that a carpenter from Nazareth was the Messiah.

It was not going to be easy for him in the future to profess faith in Jesus in the court of Herod.

Mockery and laughter and even being called ‘mad’ is often what Christians face in this godless world.

But the royal official was a man who faced and accepted the facts about Jesus Christ whatever was the outcome of such faith.