

The Samaritan Woman's Testimony about Christ

John 4:4-42 NIV

The Gospel of John Sermon Series

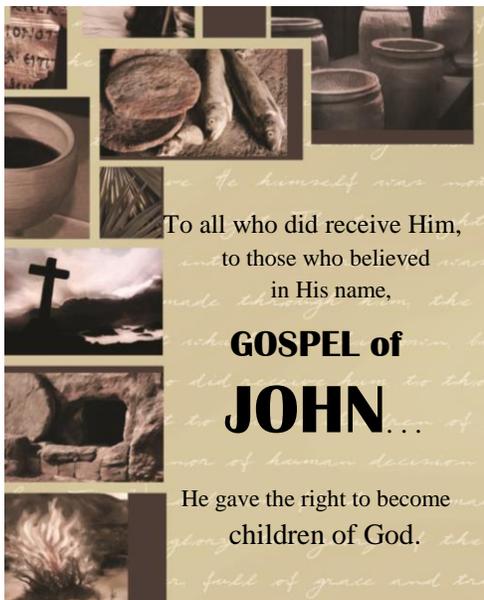
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

March 9, 2014

TEXT: John 4:4-42 NIV

This morning we continue in our series on the Gospel of John following a set of powerful testimonies about who Jesus Christ is and who we are called to be. We're praying for conversions and for new life in Christ. Last Sunday, we heard Nicodemus' testimony, and this morning, we consider the testimony of the woman from Samaria. There is a great chasm between these two testimonies. The testimony we heard last week happened during the middle of the night; this testimony happens at the peak of day. Last Sunday, a man at the highest levels of His society came to Jesus; this morning, a woman who exists on the absolute margins of her world comes. Last Sunday, a man with an illustrious past and a celebrated family history comes to Jesus, and this morning, a woman with a checkered and unorthodox past arrives. Yet Jesus Christ seeks both of these people and welcomes them into His Kingdom. This will be a great challenge for us. It will be challenging to Jesus' disciples that Jesus seeks both of these people. Jesus will speak to this woman in an extended dialogue, and He will then challenge those who are already following Him along the way. Her testimony will have an astonishing impact on her whole community, as we will see.



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The scene is set at a well in Samaria. Jesus is on His way from Judea to Galilee. It takes three days to walk this route, and we see the full humanity of Jesus for He gets tired along the way. Passing through Samaria, He reaches a well, Jacob's well, and He sits down at this well at noon time. This part of the world is very hot at noon, and you crave a small piece of shade. It's often 20° cooler in the shade. Jesus sits nearby the well, and this is the setting for an extended conversation with this Samaritan woman. It is the second of 11 deep, extended conversations that we get privileged to hear in the Gospel of John. This woman comes to draw water, and Jesus requests of her John 4:7:

"Will you give me a drink?"

John satisfies our curiosity by telling us that His disciples had left and gone to town for food. Otherwise, we would be left wondering why they didn't do it. They'll be addressed later in the passage. It's an unusual event, although for much of the world, then as today, drawing water occupies a major daily activity. Yet, this drawing of water is unusual in two significant ways. First of all, it's unusual as to the time. Usually, you draw water in the morning or in the evening when the day is cool. Rebecca, in Genesis 24, comes to draw water at the time when women usually go out to draw water, at night or at dusk, and yet this woman is there at noon.

It is also unusual in that water is usually drawn in a large group. Songs are sung; conversation is shared coming to the well and back. When we lived in New England, we were all questing for a clean water source. The public water where we lived was heavily chlorinated and had a bad taste. We found a well, and literally hundreds of people would go to this well with all kinds of empty jugs just to fill their jugs. We did that and the water tasted great, but it was always a kind of a communal activity, something to be done in groups. Yet, this woman comes alone. Why is that? Most commentators think that she is coming alone at noon to avoid the disapproving looks of the other members of her community. She comes alone at an uncomfortable hour, and, as her story unfolds, we find that she has a past that would lead to isolation. But I think as we read this text more closely, there is another layer that we need to observe. Why is she here at this time, in this location? I believe she is here at this time and this location precisely in order to meet Jesus. So, when you see people around you, and your lives intersect with them at just one moment, in one place, never ask yourself, "Why am I here?" I am here, as Jesus will tell us, to do the will of the Father. Her comings and goings fall under His sovereign care.

Jesus starts the conversation by humbling Himself and asking a favor of her. William Temple says:

"The way to call anyone into fellowship with us is, not to offer them service, which is liable to arouse the resistance of their pride, but to ask service from them."

So, Jesus says in John 4:7:

"Will you give Me a drink?"

Then the woman says in John 4:9:

"You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can You ask me for a drink?"

Her response was: "There are all kinds of reasons why I shouldn't give you drink: You are a Jew, I'm a Samaritan; You're a man, I'm a woman. How can You be asking me for a drink?" There is conflict between these two communities, conflict that goes back deep into the Scriptures. We

read in 2 Kings 17 that the Samaritans have their origin from the Israelites who are resettled into the land and worship other gods. They're a syncretistic group. 2 Kings 17:33 says:

"They worshiped the LORD, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought."

Things get worse in history throughout the intertestamental period. At one point, in 128 BC, the Jewish leader John Hyrcanus gets so frustrated with the Samaritans and their syncretistic worship that he goes and destroys their temple. People don't like that. It creates conflict, hatred, and bitterness between these communities. There's war between the Judeans and Samaritans. One incident happened during the Passover when Jesus was about 15 years old. Josephus tells us that:

"During the celebration of the feast of Unleavened Bread, which we call Passover, it was the custom of the priests to open the gates of the temple [in Jerusalem] after midnight. And then, when their opening first occurred, Samaritan men coming into Jerusalem in secret, began to scatter human bones in the porticoes and throughout the temple."

That creates a huge liturgical problem: Can you go on with the Passover? It's the most defiling thing of all possibilities. People are upset. This conflict makes every human reason why Jesus and this woman should not be talking. Yet Jesus says in John 4:

"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."

Jesus offers a leading question that allows their conversation to go deeper. The woman says to Jesus in John 4:11:

"'Sir,' the woman said, 'You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can You get this living water?'"

Jacob's well is known. The shaft goes down 106 feet deep and is about 7 feet wide. You need a serious bucket to get water from a well like that. He has nothing, but Jesus steps across this conflict, steps across these racial lines, and invites her into this conversation. Jesus says in John 4:13-14:

"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst."

What an invitation; what an offer! The woman says in John 4:15:

"Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

Then Jesus, modeling to us, changes the conversation in John 4:16 by saying:

"Go, call your husband and come back."

He takes a risk to make this conversation more personal, deeper. And she replies in truth in John 4:17a:

"I have no husband."

And Jesus says in John 4:17b-18:

"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."

That presses this conversation in a very new direction, and the woman, startled, taken aback, says in John 4:19:

"'Sir,' the woman said, 'I can see that You are a prophet.'"

A prophet in Scripture is not just someone who predicts the future. A prophet in Scripture is someone who stands in the counsel of the living God and makes God's will and perspective known to someone's real situation. Her next line can be taken in a couple of different ways. She says in John 4:20:

"Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

It's possible that this is a serious question; it is also possible, though, that she is attempting to shift the conversation. It is sort of like a minister asking you a pointed question about your background, and you're just not sure you want to keep going there, so you ask him, "What are your views about divine sovereignty and human responsibility?" and he just goes off. Perhaps you're feeling a little bit of heat from the conversation, so you just pause to ask, "Can you share your thoughts on the textual transmission of the Septuagint?" and he goes off and you're in the clear. It's very possible that she is shifting the conversation, but Jesus does not allow that. He keeps the conversation focused, and He says in John 4:21-23:

"Believe Me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. . . Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."

Then, Jesus says in John 4:24:

"God is Spirit and those that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth."

This verse is commonly taken to mean that since God is spirit, He is present everywhere and can be worshiped anywhere. The important thing, however, is not that we worship, but how we

worship. But people think that since God is spirit you can worship Him anywhere, anytime, anyplace, in your heart of hearts, when, in fact, this verse actually means the exact opposite of that. Jesus is not speaking about some mystical, interior type of worship, that God is available anywhere, anytime, anyplace. Jesus is saying, the time is come, it's here, right now. If you want to worship God, you must worship Him in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit and in truth. To worship God in spirit is not a possibility open to man, but it is the Gospel that now makes this possibility possible. The meaning is that the location of worshipping God is redefined, that He is now to be worshiped in the specific place where He is present in the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ Himself. God is Spirit and His worshipers must worship Him in and through Christ who is the truth and who is Himself the giver of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is drawing her right to Himself, which is what all evangelistic conversations should do. We know that this is the impact of His words, for the woman looks to Him and she says in John 4:25:

"I know that the Messiah is coming, and when He comes He will explain everything to us."

If you wonder if people are ready or interested, they are, by the very nature of their being, and Jesus replies to her, and He says to this broken woman on the margins of her society, at noon, in private, and at a well in John 4:26:

"I who speak to you am He."

He tells her: *"I am the Messiah."*

Dale Bruner says:

"Readers may be allowed at this point an involuntary 'Wow!'"

I have a dear friend who, when we talk on the phone and we start talking about the Word of God and really share and get into it, occasionally says, "Just a second," and he sets the phone down, and he just goes "GLORY!" and then he comes back on the phone and says, "Okay. Keep going." WOW! The Samaritan woman says, *"I know the Messiah is coming,"* and He says, *"I am the Messiah!"* We find it incontestable, then, that this living water of Jesus is a free gift. Do you believe this? It's a free gift, completely independent of gender, of nationality, of merit, independent of one's past or present. A woman in her society, regarded as a five-time loser, is first told Jesus's identity.

His disciples come back, and they are surprised, as we should be. They're still feeling the WOW in a slightly different way. They arrive at the scene, and Jesus is talking with this woman. Notice what John says to us in John 4:27:

*"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?'"*

This is a powerful application for us about personal integrity in ministry and witness. No one even thought to ask, "Is there anything inappropriate here?"

The woman leaves her water jar and goes back to her community, a community that had shunned her. She goes back to this community and tells them in John 4:29:

"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

It's a mini-sermon that she gives, her testimony. It's enthusiastic: "Come and see"; it's human: "Come and see this Man"; it's experiential: ". . . this man who told me everything I ever did"; its engagingly honest: "Could this be the Messiah?" This little mini-sermon is Christ-centered for it really asked the question: "Who is the Messiah?" Our testimony doesn't have to be flowery or ornate; it doesn't have to be delivered in iambic pentameter; it doesn't have to rhyme; it doesn't have to have a tight rhetorical structure; it can be just: "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Is that possibly the Messiah?" Can you do that? Can you say just one sentence to someone around you about what Jesus Christ has done in your life? If you can, then you're equipped from the New Testament perspective, and this woman becomes, in effect, a model, an example, of the living water and the true worship that the Father seeks in the world. She leaves, and we don't know what happens yet.

Now, a little dialogue within this conversation emerges between Jesus and the disciples, and here's where all of us who know Christ already are about to get challenged. The disciples say in John 4:31:

"Rabbi, eat something."

But, Jesus replies in John 4:32:

"I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

The disciples wonder if someone could have brought Him some food. They are wondrously clueless in this moment, which gives hope for all of us. They're not tracking, and Jesus clarifies and says in John 4:34:

"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work."

If you know Jesus Christ already, you've got to hear this, because what Jesus tells us here is that the satisfying effect of doing the will of God brings us joy, and contentment, and meaning in our lives. If you are a Christian and you are struggling with meaning, significance, contentment, and you're restless, Jesus would tell you that the answer to that plight is doing the will of the

Father. To do the will of the Father brings a sustaining joy and personal satisfaction, and Jesus says: "This is my food." He clarifies this further. In John 4:35, He says:

"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."

It's a common sense, *Farmer's Almanac* kind of proverb, yet Jesus says it is dead wrong. From Jesus' point of view, it's dead wrong for Christians to say: "You know, take your time. What's the rush? In four months the harvest will come; it kind of happens on its own. What's the urgency?" Jesus says, "No, I tell you, open your eyes, look around you at the fields. The fields are ripe for harvest, bursting, ready to be gathered." If you know Jesus Christ, then Jesus is challenging you today by saying there are lives that are ripe, ready to be harvested, and the only lack is the workers going out to get them. Jesus says in John 4:36-37:

"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."

Jesus says: "The will of the Father is My food." Sustaining and satisfying joy is to be engaged in the Father's work in the world, and that is where the joy is. The joy is in doing the Father's will, in gathering for Him and with Him. The reaper in this proverbial statement, I believe, is the woman; the sower is Jesus Himself. Jesus has sowed the Word into her, and she has gone forth into her community and is reaping. Jesus says the sower and the reaper are glad together and they are celebrating on the same day, almost simultaneously. There is no delay between the joy of sowing and the joy of reaping. Jesus's conversation with this woman, earlier in the day, gave her living water, and she has become a gushing fountain spilling over into her city with the best news the city has ever heard. She goes to the town, and John tells us in John 4:39:

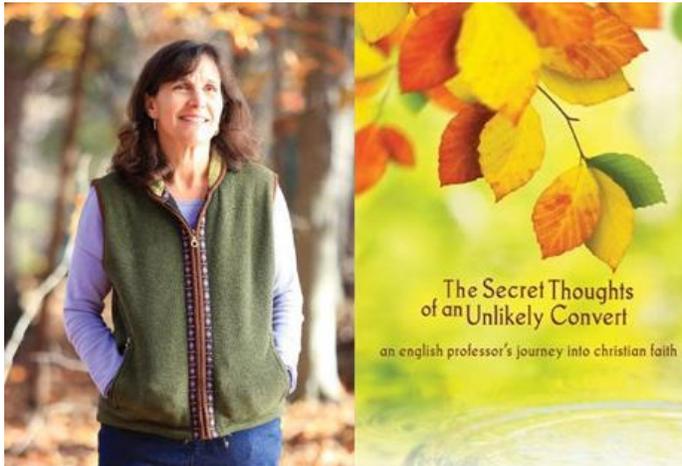
"Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony."

Last week, I said that a whole community was represented by one figure, Nicodemus. Now you see that played out again, right here. It's not just for the woman, but for her whole town. The people come to Jesus and urge Him to stay, and because of Jesus' words, many more become believers in Him. They make this glorious declaration to the woman in John 4:42:

"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 Savior of the world."

The human evangelist will soon be forgotten, and it's okay. John 3 introduced this idea last week, that God so loved the world; His redemptive, saving love has no limit, and we see the meaning of that in the very next chapter, that He is the Savior of the world, including Samaritans, including the broken, including people on the absolute margins of society.

This passage became very real for me this week as I learned the story of Rosario Butterfield. Rosario Butterfield was a tenured professor of English at Syracuse University at age 36. During



this time, she wrote an article in the newspaper that was highly critical of a Christian ministry, specifically a ministry dedicated to men. In the wake of that article, she received hundreds of letters. She had two trays on her desk: one for fan mail; and one for hate mail. In all those letters, there was one letter that was different from all the others. It was a letter written by a pastor named Ken Smith. In that letter, Ken asked her a set of

questions that she said she had never been asked before. Ken asked her: Have you ever considered the nature of the Bible more like a library than a book? She never had. He asked her if she believed in God; he asked her genuine questions about her well-being. Rosario continued on with her testimony and said:

“I put that letter into the recycle bin many times, and then I took it out again. At the end of the letter, written in a very gracious way, he asked me to call him, which I finally did. That phone call resulted in an invitation to Ken and Floy's home for dinner. I went there for dinner. They served a meal in consideration for me; there was conversation; and the beginnings of friendship. There was prayer at the meal, prayer like I've never heard before. It wasn't long, but the prayer was specific, and in that prayer, Ken asked for forgiveness for specific things throughout the day. I'd never seen people live in the presence of God like that. Through that friendship, I began to read the Bible, large portions of the Bible. My training was in literature, and I read the Bible through multiple times, and it began to have an effect on me. I came to the point where I put my toe into this flowing water, and it frightened me. I began to ask myself what would happen to me if I stepped all the way in. I started coming toward the church, but I could not go inside. My life, my world, my community, was so different. I would drive my truck and park in the parking lot across from the church and watch the people come out of their vans. I had my bumper stickers. If I had had a tee shirt, it would have said, “Hello, I'm Rahab the harlot. Can you minister to me?””

As she went on with her story, Rosario told how she watched the church from the parking lot until she finally decided to go in. When she went in, she discovered that this church had been praying for her, by her name. She finally came to John 7:17 where Jesus says: *“If anyone chooses to do the will of God, then he will know if My teaching is from God.”* She said, “My

whole academic training I'd been taught to know, and then do. Here was Jesus bringing me right to the edge of myself, telling me that the only way I could know was to do." She gave her life to Christ, and she is now a powerful ambassador to a community on the margins of our society. I encourage you to read her book or listen to her story.

The woman at the well is met by Jesus and drawn to Him, to saving knowledge of this Person. It's to this woman that Jesus first says: "I am the Messiah." Jesus challenges all of us that if you want joy and contentment and satisfaction and food that won't make you hungry again in a few minutes, then do the will of the Father and enter into His joy. This is where the joy is; this is where the satisfaction is. I believe that we are supposed to be a community that has doors open to all kinds of people around us, and I hope that you will join me in praying, in a whole new way, for our parking lots. I hope that there are people that are sitting in the parking lot wondering if there's a place for them in here. I hope that these doors stay open and that your testimony, like hers, will be simple, direct, and from the heart: "Come and see a Man who told me everything I ever did!" That is really all you need to say, and get people into a living conversation with Christ.

Father in heaven, we thank You for sending Your Son into the world. We thank You for having Him get tired and stop at this well. We thank You for moving this woman to be there at an unusual time, by herself, and for revealing to her Your identity and offering to her the gift of living water, of worship in Spirit and in truth. Father, we worship You that You seek us out. We thank You, Lord, that You continue to seek people today. Father, we pray right now, as a community, for those around us who need Your compassion, that You would help us to be courageous, whether that's writing a letter; whether that's sending a message; whether that's inviting someone into our home; whether that's giving them a Bible; or whether that's encouraging them and seeing them in the parking lot and saying, "May I walk in with You?" Lord, have Your way among us. We praise You that there is no margin outside of Your scope.

We worship You, Lord. Amen.