

Cornerstone  
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Encounter at Jacob's Well  
John 4:1-29

We are blessed here on the west side of Mt. Hood with some of the best drinking water in the world. I can't tell the difference between Bull Run water and expensive bottled water. Can you? It's easy to take for granted our great water until you taste the water elsewhere. We are truly spoiled. But we actually don't have the best water in the world.

That distinction goes to a little spring that bubbled out of a hillside a quarter mile or so from our house, where I grew up in interior Alaska. Everyone in our village of 120 hauled water from the spring – year round. We used 5 gallon metal cans that originally held gasoline, kerosene, or Coleman lantern fuel. In winter the spring glaciated up so we had to chop steps into the ice to get down where the water trickled out of a wooden pipe at about a gallon a minute. Dad hauled all our water until my brother and I got old enough to hitch up 5 dogs. Then we could haul water after school and on Saturdays. Fantastic water.

Late one fall Dad and the other men of the village decided to dig up the rotting wooden pipe to improve the flow. The project failed but they did clean out some mice that had somehow gotten into the reservoir . A Finnish prospector who lived right next to the spring insisted that after they dug it up the water just didn't have the right "tang" anymore.

Today in our study of John's gospel, we will accompany Jesus and his disciples to a well known for its great water. Jacob's well was dug more than 2000 years and tourists still frequent the well today. For Jesus, going to Jacob's well was risky because he was a Jew and the well was situated in Samaritan territory. Jews and Samaritans did not get along.

The conflict was rooted back in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC when Assyrian armies attacked the northern kingdom of Israel and deported 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel. Now you talk about a caravan! The captives walked more than 1000 miles all the way to Assyria (modern Iraq). While in Assyria the Jews intermarried with Assyrians, and back home, those who had not been deported also intermarried with colonists sent from Assyria and also with local Canaanite tribes.

A little more than a hundred years later Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar attacked the southern Jewish kingdom called Judah and took tens of thousands of those Jews to Babylon. But unlike the people who went to Assyria, captive Jews in Babylon did not intermarry.

And when King Cyrus let 40,000 Jews return home to rebuild and rededicate the Jerusalem temple, they looked down on their countrymen to the north who had intermarried with Canaanites and Assyrians. But the Samaritans as they came to be known did not feel inferior to the Jews at all. They were proud of the fact they had escaped or resisted deportation when Assyria attacked. They looked down on their Judean brothers and sisters who, in their view, abandoned their homeland and their temple too easily. The Samaritans saw themselves as the true caretakers of the land God gave Abraham.

They worshiped on Mount Gerizim because it overlooked the first place Abraham built an altar after entering the Land. The Samaritans recognized only the Pentateuch (the Books of Moses) as authoritative (their version was slightly different than the Torah) and they had their own holy days similar to Jewish holy days.

About 400 BC the Samaritans built a beautiful temple on Mt Gerizim but it was destroyed toward the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC by John Hyrcanus, a powerful Jewish high priest from Jerusalem. All this led to palpable tension between the Jews and Samaritans in Jesus' day. Jews believed Samaritans were unclean.

Eliezer Ben Hyrcanus, a prominent 1<sup>st</sup> century rabbi said, "Eating Samaritan bread is like eating swine's flesh." Jews prayed that *God would NOT remember the Samaritans in the resurrection.*

So that's the backdrop to the trip Jesus and his disciples made through Samaria on their way to Galilee. It was about a three day trip going straight north but most rabbis would have taken the longer, alternate route, to avoid traveling through Samaria. You can imagine that after all Jesus' disciples had heard about the dirty, half-breed Samaritans they were probably scared. Open your Bibles to the gospel of John chapter 4.

**John 4:1 Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John— 2 although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. 3 So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. 4 Now he had to go through Samaria.**

He "had to" only because there was divine encounter waiting for him in Samaria. **Verse 6**

**John 4:6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.**

The Greek word translated "well" in v. 6 actually describes a flowing spring— like the one I grew up with. Jacob's well was a deep hole fed by an underground spring so it was a reliable source of water, even in dry times.

Jesus and his disciples arrive at midday and it's interesting John notes that *Jesus was tired from walking*. Jesus is about to have a conversation that will mean eternal life or death for a Samaritan woman and others in this town but John says Jesus is tired. We all get tired and you know what I've noticed? Most work – certainly some of the best work – for the kingdom of God is done by tired people.

The apostle Paul was tired a lot. Here's 1 Thessalonians.

**1Thessalonians 2:9 (NLT) Don't you remember, dear brothers and sisters, how hard we worked among you? Night and day we toiled to earn a living so that we would not be a burden to any of you as we preached God's Good News to you.**

Most meals taken to friends and neighbors are made by tired people. Our Youth Group leaders and volunteers get tired this weekend at the 30 hour famine.

**Gal. 6 says you can expect to reap a harvest *if* you don't give up when you're tired.** We could probably even say tired is normal. Jesus was tired but yet he focused on what was about to happen. Verse 7

**John 4:7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)**

The parenthesis implies that if Jesus' disciples had been there they might have drawn the water.

You know that women fetched water early or late in the day to avoid heat. We're not told why this woman came when she did but it may well have been to avoid other women because as we'll see she had little respect in the community and no respect for herself. Jesus not only talked to this Samaritan woman, he asked to drink out of her ladle or water scoop. That surprised her. V. 9

**John 4:9 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 [no dealings] with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God (if you knew about salvation God offers) and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you *living water*."**

Now she's totally confused. This Jewish man, who is implying he's an important Jewish man, breaks all convention asking for a drink and then he says, *if you followed your faith correctly, you would have turned my request around. You would have asked me to draw water for you from this well.* Verse 11

**John 4:11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep (it's 100 feet deep now, probably much deeper back then). Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well (he probably didn't dig it – he just took possession of it) and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"**

Hear the sarcasm in her voice? "Sir, you got two problems: The first is you don't have a bucket and the second is there's no way you're in Jacob's class. Are you greater than our father Jacob? Of course not! Who do you think you are?" verse 13

**John 4:13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."**

John likes to set up these situations where Jesus confronts someone, they misunderstand, and then Jesus explains. A couple chapters back Nicodemus misunderstood the phrase, "born again." This woman misunderstands "living water." v. 15

**John 4:15 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."**

Clearly, she was not catching on. Jesus knew she was actually hiding behind her lighthearted banter. A lot of people do that. Hey, I'm okay. Nothing wrong here." But behind that front – of humor, or bravado, or belligerence, whichever they chose – there's a hurting person, an insecure person who may not like themselves at all. Don't assume that just because some talks and acts like they have it together, they really do!

Jesus knew what was in the Samaritan woman's heart. He knew all about her past but the remarkable thing is he didn't condemn her. He genuinely wanted her to have "living water" because he knew it would improve her life. Jesus said,

**John 4:16 "Go, call your husband and come back." 17 "I have no husband," she replied.**

Well, yes, sort of.

**17b Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 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."**

You would think about now the woman would say, "Okay, you got me. Instead she tries to take the conversation in a philosophical direction. V. 19

**John 4:19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet.**

The word she uses is broad. She was not necessarily admitting Jesus is the new Moses, the Taheb, as Samaritans called their messianic figure. She's simply admitting that Jesus has special knowledge somehow – but she does not want to talk about herself. Instead, she tries a hot button topic.

If someone asked how you were feeling and you didn't want to talk about it you might ask, "Hey what do you think of Donald Trump?" Everybody has an opinion on Trump, right? The woman raises an old argument between Jews and Samaritans about where God should be worshiped. Verse 20

**John 4:20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain (Gerizim), but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."**

Instead of taking the bait, Jesus makes three points in verses v. 21-24.

#1. Both worship locations (Gerizim and Jerusalem) will soon be irrelevant/obsolete.

**John 4:21 "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.**

It's pointless to talk about where one should worship. Second,

2. Salvation comes from the Jews not the Samaritans.

**John 4:22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we (Jews) worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.**

Jesus was not attacking the sincerity of the Samaritan faith but the fact that Samaritans didn't know who they were worshipping. Since the Samaritans accepted only the books of Moses, their view of God was severely limited and inaccurate.

It's the same today. Most Americans have some familiarity with the God of the Bible but it may not be accurate. Many people see God as an ogre out to spoil their fun. Others think God is a somewhat senile grandpa figure who really doesn't care what you do just so long as you're happy. The woman at the well tried to find happiness in five different marriages and she's on her way to another. Jesus says her problem is not bad marriages but bad theology. She was looking for meaning in the wrong places.

God made us to pursue pleasure – but he also tells us where to find it. It's not a secret.

**“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart (we're talking genuine happiness).” Ps 37:4**

**Ps 16:11 “In your presence (in God's presence – doing what God wants, worshiping God, enjoying God, serving God) In your presence is fullness of joy, and at Your right hand (God's right hand) there are pleasures forever.”**

You cannot lose by pursuing God.

1. Material things cannot make you happy. Jesus repeatedly warned about the deceitfulness of wealth. Friendships cannot fill your need for happiness.
2. You can't do enough sightseeing trips to secure lasting happiness.
3. No sport or hobby can make you happy and
4. despite what the ad says diamonds will not make you happy.

One more fling, one more video game level, one more pain pill, one more joint or lottery ticket, one more Snapchat picture or one more Facebook “Like” will not satisfy you. Lasting happiness comes only through pursuing the one who created us and the things he approves of.

Jesus made a third point, in verse 23.

**“But the time is coming-- indeed it's here now-- when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. (Not with animal sacrifices anymore. The Holy Spirit will indwell all worshipers.) The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23-24 NLT)**

The woman said in v. 25, "Oh yes, I know the Messiah is coming." Jesus said, "I am the Messiah."

**John 4:27 Just then (right after Jesus said, "I am Messiah,") his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want (to eat)?" or "Why are you talking with her?"**

They were all too stunned by what they saw, their leader, their rabbi talking to a Samaritan woman – alone, and maybe even holding her drinking cup. They knew the Pharisees' rule. All Jews knew it.

**"A man shall not be alone with a woman in an inn, not even with his sister or his daughter, on account of what men may think. A man shall not talk with a woman in the street, not even with his own wife, and especially not with another woman, on account of what men may say."**

Jesus was radical in the respect that he gave women. We'll see that all through John. The disciples were still trying to figure it out when the woman took off for town – I picture her running. Verse 28

**John 4:28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did (little exaggeration but she was impressed). Could this be the Messiah?"**

She wanted to believe, but she wasn't sure. She wanted others to help her decide so this woman who spent a lot of time trying to be invisible suddenly gets very bold. "Come on everybody. You gotta check this guy out."

A few years back you may have seen a movie titled *Amazing Grace*, which told the story of William Wilberforce, a 19<sup>th</sup> century British politician who untiringly opposed the African slave trade. Every year for 20 years he introduced a bill in Parliament to outlaw slavery. Wilberforce was a small man and in very poor health much of his career, but stopping slavery was a consuming passion and when Wilberforce stood to address the House of Commons on the evils of slavery onlookers said he became giant-like. One contemporary said when Wilberforce spoke of slavery, "The little minnow became a whale."

That's the transformation that had begun in this Samaritan woman and by the end of the chapter it looks like she fully believed. Verse 39 says many Samaritan's believed. She's changed. Jesus and his disciples ended up staying in a Samaritan town eating Samaritan food for two days. And when they got ready to leave, those who believed said to the woman who had first met Jesus, in verse 42

**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."**

That's quite a confession from the lips of Samaritan people. It's a great story and I want to

summarize it with two final thoughts. The first comes from Jesus' example.

#1 If the Holy Spirit prompts you to do something "out of the ordinary" don't shrug it off.

Samaria was out of bounds for most Jews. If Jesus had polled ten other rabbis about traveling through Samaria it would have been 10 to nothing. Don't go to Samaria. Don't talk to a woman, don't eat Samaritan food – certainly don't go into their homes!

When I was a child, one of my favorite books was titled *Sir Kevin of Devon*. It was fairytale set in the Middle Ages.

A dragon was stalking the countryside and the king called for brave men to fight the dragon. But none volunteered. Even the knights were afraid.

The only person to step forward was a young lad named Kevin, from the town of Devon. The king looked down at this boy who had no experience killing dragons – and more than 50 years later I remember the lines exactly,

*Brave men thought the king  
Are like gifts and surprises.  
They come in all shapes.  
They come in all sizes.*

So the king outfits the boy in armor and lets him go after the dragon. Then there's the picture is of Kevin standing atop the dead dragon's head. The king taps him on the shoulder with his sword and makes the boy a knight.

Against common sense and all convention the Lord went to Samaria. He talked to a Samaritan woman who had made a mess of her life. So she and a bunch of Samaritans are some of the first to believe Jesus truly was the Messiah, the savior.

You may be a Sir Kevin of Devon. If the Lord is prompting you to do something, to say something, start some ministry – get advice of course but realize that other people may not understand. They may try to talk you out of it.

I often think of my own parents' example. They were a young couple from farming country in upstate New York where boys grew up to take over the dairy farm. My folks had two young children, a third on the way (me). A missionary came to their church and talked about little villages in Alaska that had no Bible teaching churches. They said, "we'll go."

No short term trip to check it out. No video to see what they were getting into. No cross cultural training. No language learning. They drove a station wagon pulling a trailer across the country and up the Alaska highway. They sold the car, loaded the family and their belongings in a wooden boat (no life jackets by the way) and shoved off headed west not knowing where they were going or where they would stop.

I shudder to think what I probably would have said to this young couple if I had been their pastor back in the early 1950's. "The LORD is telling you to do what? You want to take your three preschool children where? (Mom was also pregnant with #4.) What if your kids get sick? Where are you going to live? You're going to get there in August. In late September there could be ice in the Yukon."

If the Spirit prompts you to do something out of the ordinary – do it. That leads to the last thought.

#2. There is nothing more satisfying than doing God's work for His glory.

I'm not talking saying you have to be a pastor or a missionary, although that could be God's will for some of you – especially some of you middle school and high school students. Don't rule it out. Listen to the Holy Spirit but also know that every follower of Christ is called to be a disciple and a witness for Christ.

God has instructions that are custom made for you as a nurseryman, an electrician, a business woman, a student, a stay at home mom, a school teacher, office manager, engineer or warehouse worker. God wants you to serve him. Everybody's in the game. No spectators.

God has Samaritan women everywhere – people waiting for someone to tell them that God loves them and has a plan for their lives. Doesn't matter what your skills are, how old you are, how healthy or unhealthy you are, whether you spend your days earning wages or if you're retired or if you're cleaning up after toddlers – open your eyes. God has a purpose for your life.

And when you lock on to what God made you do in your season of life I guarantee you two things. You will say, "I was made for this," and you will get tired. It'll be the best tired ever.

People dedicate themselves to all kinds of things. Some say,  
Basketball is my life. I love basketball.  
For other's it's beer.  
Some people live to accumulate material possessions.  
Some people live to ski.  
Mastering a video game feels great to some  
Others live to be popular – to have people like them.

God is waiting to hear you to say with Paul the apostle, "For me to live is Christ."