

TELLING STORY 7 – WOMAN AT THE WELL

John 4:1-42

by Bob Stacy

CONTEXT

4:1, 2 Therefore refers the reader back to 3:22–36. Christ's success in winning disciples had created jealousy among John's followers and provoked questions among the Pharisees. Since Jesus did not want to be drawn into a controversy over baptism at this stage of His ministry, He left Judea for Galilee (v. 3).¹

PEOPLE

Pharisees — separatists (Heb. persahin, from parash, "to separate"). They were probably the successors of the Assideans (i.e., the "pious"), a party that originated in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes in revolt against his heathenizing policy. The first mention of them is in a description by Josephus of the three sects or schools into which the Jews were divided (B.C. 145). The other two sects were the Essenes and the Sadducees. In the time of our Lord they were the popular party (John 7:48). They were extremely accurate and minute in all matters appertaining to the Law of Moses (Matt. 9:14; 23:15; Luke 11:39; 18:12).

There was much that was sound in their creed, yet their system of religion was a form and nothing more. Theirs was a very lax morality (Matt. 5:20; 15:4, 8; 23:3, 14, 23, 25; John 8:7). On the first notice of them in the New Testament (Matt. 3:7), they are ranked by our Lord with the Sadducees as a "generation of vipers." They were noted for their self-righteousness and their pride (Matt. 9:11; Luke 7:39; 18:11, 12). They were frequently rebuked by our Lord (Matt. 12:39; 16:1–4).

From the very beginning of his ministry the Pharisees showed themselves bitter and persistent enemies of our Lord. They could not bear his doctrines, and they sought by every means to destroy his influence among the people.²

Samaritans — When the Assyrian king Sargon II took the northern kingdom of Israel into captivity in 722 B.C., he followed the Assyrian custom by leaving only the poorest and most uneducated Israelites behind and brought in other nations to come in and homestead the land vacated by those taken captive. These newcomers brought with them their pagan religions (2 Kings 17:24-33). As the Jews left in the land intermarried with them, they came to be viewed as a separate race, neither Jew nor Gentile, and were held in contempt by Jews. (The name Samaritan comes from Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom. In Christ's day the name referred to the entire territory between Judea and Galilee.)

The Samaritans offered to help rebuild the Temple in 536, but their offer was refused (Ezra 4:1-3). A century later, the Samaritan governor Sanballat tried to frustrate Nehemiah's rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls (Neh 6:1-9). A complete break between the Jews and Samaritans occurred when the grandson of Eliashib the high priest married Sanballat's daughter, contrary to the statute prohibiting mixed marriages (Neh 13:23-28). Since he refused to annul the marriage, he was promptly expelled from the priesthood and exiled. He retired to Samaria, where Sanballat built a temple for him on Mount Gerizim. This temple was destroyed by John Hyrcanus in 128 because the Samaritans had compromised with paganism under Antiochus Epiphanes IV by dedicating their temple to the Greek god Zeus.

By the time of the NT, the hatred between Jews and Samaritans had reached its zenith (John 4:9; 8:48). Christ once ordered his disciples not to enter Samaria (Matt 10:5), though he himself ministered to Samaritans (John 4:1-42). A Samaritan was the hero in one of Christ's parables (Luke

¹ Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary* (Jn 4:1-2). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers

² *Easton's Bible dictionary*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

10:30-37). When he healed 10 lepers, the only one who thanked him was a Samaritan (Luke 17:11-19).

During Christ's final days of ministry, one village of Samaritans rejected him because of his plans to go on to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-56). Just prior to his ascension, however, Christ commanded his disciples to proclaim the gospel in Samaria (Acts 1:8).³

Woman of Samaria - A Samaritan woman came to draw water NRSV Two facts are unusual about the woman's actions: (1) she could have gone to a closer well (scholars have identified wells that were closer to Sychar at Ain Asker — Sychar or Ain Defne at Balata); (2) women generally drew water later in the day, when the temperature was cooler. This woman, whose reputation seems to have been well known in the small town (4:18), probably chose the well farther away from home and came to that well at an unusual hour in order to avoid contact with other women.⁴

The Samaritan was a woman. "Never speak to a woman in the street, even if she be thy wife"; "Burn the words of the law rather than teach them to a woman," were current maxims in Jewish society. But Christ, in the unsullied purity of His manhood, brushed aside as cobwebs all social regulations, which tended to perpetuate feminine servitude.

3. This woman lived in habitual sin. But Christ came to save sinners. Notice Jesus Christ

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Jewish reproach of Samaritans: "He who eats the bread of a Samaritan is as he who eats swine's flesh." "No Samaritan shall be made a proselyte." "They have no share in the resurrection of the dead."⁶

PLACES

Galilee — [GAL ih lee] (circle or circuit) - a Roman province of Palestine during the time of Jesus (see Map 3, B-2). Measuring roughly 80 kilometers (50 miles) north to south and about 58 kilometers (30 miles) east to west, Galilee was the most northerly of the three provinces of Palestine-Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Covering more than a third of Palestine's territory, Galilee extended from the base of Mount Hermon in the north to the Carmel and Gilboa ranges in the south. The Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River were its western and eastern borders, respectively.⁷

Samaria — see Samaritans first paragraph

Sychar — liar or drunkard (see Isa 28:1,7), has been from the time of the Crusaders usually identified with Sychem or Shechem (John 4:5). It has now, however, as the result of recent explorations, been identified with 'Askar, a small Samaritan town on the southern base of Ebal, about a mile to the north of Jacob's well.⁸

³ Willmington's Bible Handbook by Harold Willmington Copyright © 1997

⁴ Life Application Bible Copyright © 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991 by Tyndale House Publishers

⁵ The Biblical Illustrator Copyright © 2002, 2003, 2006 Ages Software, Inc. and Biblsoft

⁶ All the Women of the Bible, Herbert Lockyer Copyright © Zondervan Publishing, pg. 236

⁷ Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986

⁸ Easton's Bible Dictionary, PC Study Bible Copyright © 2003, 2006

Jacobs well — This is one of the few sites in Palestine about which there is no dispute. It was dug by Jacob, and hence its name, in the "parcel of ground" which he purchased from the sons of Hamor (Gen 33:19). It still exists, but although after copious rains it contains a little water, it is now usually quite dry. It is at the entrance to the valley between Ebal and Gerizim, about 2 miles South-east of Shechem. It is about 9 feet in diameter and about 75 feet in depth, though in ancient times it was no doubt much deeper, probably twice as deep.⁹

PHRASES

Must go, 4:4 He had to go through Samaria. This was the shortest route from Judea to Galilee but not the only way. The other route was through Perea, east of the Jordan River. (See the two routes on the map.) In Jesus' day the Jews, because of their hatred for the Samaritans, normally took the eastern route in order to avoid Samaria. But Jesus chose the route through Samaria in order to reach the despised people of that region. As the Savior of the world He seeks out and saves the despised and outcasts (cf. Luke 19:10).¹⁰

Living water, 4:10 springs from an unfailing source and is ever-flowing, Jesus of course, was talking about eternal life (4:14; Rom 6:23).¹¹

Husband, 4:17 *aner*, denotes, in general, "a man, an adult male" (in contrast to *anthropos*, which generically denotes "a human being, male or female"); it is used of man in various relations, the context deciding the meaning; it signifies "a husband," e. g., Matt 1:16,19; Mark 10:12; Luke 2:36; 16:18; John 4:16,17,18; Rom 7:23.¹²

Salvation is of the Jews, 4:22 means that the Messiah would come from the Jewish people.

Messiah, 4:25 A proper noun transliterated from the Hebrew, a consecrated or anointed person, corresponding to the Gr. *Christós* (Christ). Usually has a more specific application, meaning the Anointed One who was the supreme Deliverer promised from the beginning (Sept.: Gen 3:15).

The Jews ... expected a mere physical deliverer who would take revenge on their enemies and oppressors and give into their hands the empire, the glory and wealth of the world. Hence they failed to recognize the Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth.¹³ The Samaritans looked for a Messiah, a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:18).¹⁴

Marvelled, 4:27 a 'wonder, amazement,' 25.212) to wonder or marvel at some event or object - 'to wonder, to be amazed, to marvel' (whether the reaction is favorable or unfavorable depends on the context).¹⁵

My meat, 4:34 It's my nourishment and passion. "Seek your life's nourishment in your life's work," said Philips Brook. The will of God ought to be a source of strength and satisfaction to the child of God, just as if he sat down to a sumptuous feast.¹⁶

QUESTIONS

Discussion

- How would you use this story to show someone that Jesus is God?
- How would you use this story in sharing the gospel?
- What is "the gift of God" referred to in verse 10?

⁹ Easton's Bible Dictionary, PC Study Bible Copyright © 2003, 2006

¹⁰ Bible Knowledge Commentary/Old Testament Copyright © 1983, 2000

¹¹ Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary Copyright © 1999

¹² Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985

¹³ The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament © 1992 by AMG International

¹⁴ Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament, Copyright © 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc.

¹⁵ Greek-English Lexicon Based on Semantic Domain. Copyright © 1988 United Bible Societies

¹⁶ The Bible Exposition Commentary, Wiersbe, W. W. Copyright © 1989

- Read the dialog between Jesus and the Samaritan women. What adjectives would you use to describe Jesus' approach in dealing with this women?

Application

- Are you reaching (sharing Christ) with your "Samaria?"
- What is your food? What is your passion? Is Christ your passion?
- Will others benefit from your efforts?
- In what ways does God want you to fulfill His will and complete His work?