

The Good Jew

John 4:1-10

As we continue our worship by focusing our minds on the word of God, I would invite you to open your Bible with me to John 4 for this message entitled, “The Good Jew.” This title is a play on the title “The Good Samaritan” which is the title for a parable Jesus told in Luke 10. In this well-known parable, a Samaritan did for a Jewish man what two Jewish religious leaders refused to do as they passed him on the road—which is to care for him who had been robbed, stripped, beaten, and left for dead.

Jesus told this parable to an expert in the Law of God who wanted to know who fell under the category of “neighbor.” He rightly understood that the first and second greatest commandments are, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” His question to Jesus was, “who is my neighbor?”

The point of the parable was to say that your neighbors are not merely those you love, the people you invite to parties, and the people in your social circles. In truth, your neighbor is anyone who, like you, bears the image of God. Your neighbor is every person who crosses your path, even those who are your enemies. The parable, understood in its historical context is shocking. The Jews and Samaritans by and large hated one another for both ethnic and religious reasons. So for a Samaritan to show kindness to a suffering Jew modelled obedience to the second commandment.

What we have here in John 4 is not a parable invented for shock value, but the real-life account of a Jew—Jesus Christ—who showed kindness, compassion, and grace to a Samaritan woman whose soul was robbed, stripped, beaten, and left for dead. In this passage Jesus models for us how to engage when we encounter someone whose life is reprehensible to our sensibilities.

Follow along as I read John 4:1-10. . . .

It might surprise you to know that while Jesus had lengthy one-on-one conversations with many individuals, this encounter with the Samaritan woman is both the longest and most interactive one-on-one conversation of Jesus recorded in the Bible. This interaction as it’s recorded is longer than Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus and his

interaction with the many people he healed. And that's by the design of the Holy Spirit. Why is that? Because society would have expected and encouraged Jesus to ignore this woman who was both a Samaritan by blood, and morally reprobate. But Jesus treated her with dignity, compassion, and value. And the Holy Spirit wants us to consider very carefully how Jesus interacts with her.

Beyond what Jesus will say about living water and about worship and about evangelism in this chapter, we're going to learn a lot about the kind of person Jesus is that makes thirsty souls drawn to him, and how we can reflect his love to others.

This remarkable section begins in vs. 1 and goes all the way to vs. 42. There are no natural places to divide the conversation, so as we work through this section over the next several weeks it'll seem like we're hitting the pause button on a scene when the character has their mouth awkwardly open. But I trust that by giving it our careful attention, whatever familiarity we already have with this chapter we'll find fresh insight and delight in studying our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we step through these verses I want to draw your attention to two observations of Jesus that will help us understand his character in a way that we can learn from him. In vs. 1-5 we'll observe him following his divine mission. Verses 6-10 will show his how he engages with gracious humility.

1. Observe Jesus following his divine mission (1-5)

Let's begin by observing how Jesus follows his divine mission. LOOK at vs. 1-5. . . .

Jesus was on a divine mission. More than that, he was on a divine timetable. He didn't live his life aimlessly or without purpose. In that day the pace of life was relatively slow. Yes, people were driven by the times and seasons for fishing or agriculture or Jewish feasts; but day-to-day life was unhurried—unlike today. Today, most of us are driven by the clock. The second hand is like a whip on our backs pushing us forward to accomplish all our responsibilities.

But Jesus' life was neither unhurried nor driven by the clock. It's more accurate to say that Jesus drove the clock. With each step he took he pressed the second hand forward. As one would use their hands to unfold a scroll, Jesus' feet pushed the scroll of time as

he revealed the purposes of God for his life and the plan of redemption. We see this here in the first few verses.

After attending the Passover in Jerusalem, 3:22 tells us that Jesus and his disciples spent time in the Judean countryside baptizing people. We don't know how long they were there. It had to have been at least a few days, probably no more than a matter of weeks. We're not told if he went back to Jerusalem for Pentecost which was 50 days after Passover, but he may well have baptized for the weeks between Passover and Pentecost.

Whatever the case, he and his disciples were baptizing long enough for news to travel and people to travel and there to be a noticeable increase in the people coming to him for baptism. His popularity had reached the ears of John the Baptist and his disciples, and now Jesus learns in vs. 1 that it reached the attention of the Pharisees.

Why does Jesus care about that? Because the Pharisees were the established and respected leaders of the people. While the Sadducees oversaw the temple in Jerusalem, the Pharisees oversaw the synagogues throughout the nation.

Unlike the temple that had exclusively religious purposes, the synagogues were community centers where much political, educational, and social activities took place. Having the authority to deny people access to the synagogue meant that the Pharisees had significant influence and power over the people. So they were particularly sensitive to any perceived threats to their influence among the people.

Before Jesus came on the scene, as John the Baptist grew in popularity, the Pharisees didn't believe he was a prophet, and they kept their eye on him to make sure he didn't cause any trouble. After all the attention Jesus drew to himself at the Passover, and now hearing that Jesus had become more popular than John, they certainly would have wanted to investigate the situation further. But Jesus was on a timetable and it seems he was not quite ready to draw their ire just yet. So he decides to leave Judea and head for Galilee.

We mentioned this a few messages ago, but you can see there in vs. 2 that John wants to make it clear that Jesus did not personally baptize anyone. He had his disciples do it. When we noted that as we studied 3:22 I told you it's likely Jesus didn't baptize because he knew the human heart was an idol factory and it would be easy for people to elevate themselves if they had been baptized by Jesus, or elevate others who had.

But to this we can add other reasons. As the Messiah Jesus had a specific mission, and that did not include baptism. Like Paul after him Jesus was sent by God to preach, not to baptize.

Another significant reason is that John the Baptist preached that he himself baptized with water, but after him would come one who baptized with the Holy Spirit. If Jesus were to baptize with water, it might cause confusion as to whether he was the Messiah. So for at least these three reasons, Jesus didn't do any baptizing.

You might also take note of the fact that these days or weeks of baptizing described here is the only time Scripture tells us that Jesus and his disciples conducted baptisms. We can't be certain that they didn't baptize at other times, but it would be unusual if they conducted baptisms as a regular component of their ministry and we didn't know about it.

If Jesus wasn't sent to baptize, why did Jesus have his disciples baptize at all? The Scripture doesn't say, but we might conclude that Jesus used baptism as a bridge between John the Baptist and himself. It was critical that the people of Israel connect the preaching and baptism ministry of John the Baptist with Jesus the Messiah. Since Jesus and John were in different places, doing baptism may have helped people understand that Jesus' ministry was a fulfillment of John's.

But that time came to an end and he determined to make his way back to Galilee. Notice what it says in vs. 4. . . .

As the crow flies, Samaria lies between Judea and Galilee. If Jesus was baptizing at the Jordan river and he planned to go straight up to the Sea of Galilee, that would take him through the eastern edge Samaria. But we learn in vs. 46 that Jesus is headed to Cana, which is far west of the Sea of Galilee, meaning Jesus would pass through the very heart of Samaria.

Either way, the normal routes would be through Samaria. The ancient historian Josephus says that Galilean Jews would commonly pass through Samaria as they travelled back and forth from Jerusalem. On the other hand, it was not unusual for Judean Jews to go out of their way to avoid Samaria.

For reasons I'll make clear in a few moments, even when traveling along the Jordan River north to Galilee, many Jews preferred to cross the Jordan and pass through Gentile territory rather than stay on the western banks and pass through Samaria. Some Jews would inconvenience themselves for days just to avoid traveling through Samaria.

So you could look at vs. 4 and find tension between the logical route to take and the preferred route to take. Do I take the fastest route, or do I take the route that avoids Samaria? But of course, there is no such tension in Jesus. LOOK closely at vs. 4. . . .

This is saying more than just that Samaria stood between him and Galilee. The verb "had to" is a verb that does not refer to possibility but to necessity. There is an oughtness to this journey. Jesus *must* pass through Samaria. There was a divine appointment awaiting Jesus that required that he pass through Samaria.

He had no other option. His life was not his own. He lived as he was directed by the Father and led by the Spirit. There was nothing about the life of Jesus left to chance. His mission included not just the end of his life, but every step in between. It was just as necessary that Jesus pass through Samaria as that he would die on the cross for the redemption of sinners.

So in following his divine mission, Jesus and his disciples make their way north through the hills and valleys of Samaria until they come to a place of vast historical significance. LOOK at vs. 5. . . .

Sychar is not a town named outside of this verse, but the town is less significant than the field nearby. John identifies this field based on something that happened nearly 2,000 years prior to this moment. Not only was this plot of land given to Joseph, but this region was later given to the tribes of his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Genesis 33 records that Jacob purchased this plot of land from the people of Shechem, Genesis 48 records that he gave it to Joseph, and Joshua 24 tells us that when Israel returned to the land after the 400 years in Egypt, he buried the bones of Joseph on this land. Over the 2,000 years of history, that memory was retained by the people and they took pride in it as we'll see next time. In the purposes of God, this historic place would be the location where Jesus would put his magnanimous grace on display.

So here in verses 1-5 we've observed that Jesus fulfills his divine mission. He is committed to accomplishing the plan and purpose of his life, and his decisions are made with confidence knowing he is unfolding the Father's plan.

You and I don't have the kind of knowledge about our lives like Jesus did. We're more like Abraham, following the Lord not knowing where he's going to lead us. But that doesn't mean we can't live with a similar confidence in our steps. Unlike Jesus we don't know in advance where our steps will lead, but like Jesus, we can be confident that our steps are unfolding the Father's plan for our lives.

Many of us have struggled with various decisions in our lives in part because we've tried to look down the road to see how our decisions today might impact the future. We've been afraid of taking a fork in the road that might derail God's perfect and best plan for our lives. But that's not possible.

For sure, sin is a violation of God's revealed will and design for our lives, but even our sinful choices fall within God's secret decreed will for our lives. In the mystery of God's will, every decision we make and every circumstance that comes upon us is part of God's sovereign and good will for our lives—including the most painful experiences.

Rather than seeing our lives as the chaotic mess of random chance, we should view our lives as an endless stream of divine appointments where our mission is to glorify God by trusting in him and being faithful to his revealed will. If we live that way, we can imitate Jesus in fulfilling the divine mission.

2. Observe Jesus engaging with gracious humility (6-10)

Well let's turn now to observe Jesus engaging with gracious humility. LOOK at vs. 6-10...

As simple and innocent as this appears, this encounter is nothing short of remarkable. We should not have expected this. I want you to notice two things from these verses. First, notice the humble condition of Jesus.

The sixth hour is noon by Jewish reckoning. They started their counting of daytime hours at what we could consider to be 6am. So the sixth hour was noon. This means Jesus and his disciples have been walking for several hours, and the sun is now directly above them. It's time to stop, get some food and rest to strengthen their bodies. The

disciples were not yet the full number, and they did not yet have the group of Galilean women with them who would eventually join and support them with logistics. So it was up to the men to get some food.

Practically, it may be that the small handful of men were all needed to carry the food they would buy. But that's not the only reason they left Jesus by himself. Tired as he may have been, it's not likely he was so much more tired than the rest of the disciples that he just couldn't make it into town.

And being noon, it's also not likely that the disciples told him to wait under the hot sun at the well with the expectation that someone would come and give him water. He would sooner find water if he walked the half-mile or so into town than if he waited for some poor soul who was desperate enough to brave the heat to come to the well at that time of the day.

The main reason Jesus stayed at the well was not because he simply could not go on, but because he had a divine appointment. Nevertheless, he was tired. Think about that. The eternal, infinite, all-powerful, all-authoritative Son of God was weary. He who is the sustainer of all things in the universe, grew tired. He who gives life and breath to all creatures, needed a breather.

Why? Because he humbled himself. He who was limitless, unbounded, and free from any constraints and limitations bound himself to a finite, frail, and weak human body. He could have commanded every cell of his body to rejuvenate and function at its fullest capacity, but he never used his power and authority for personal gain. He allowed himself to succumb to the natural weaknesses of humanity in a sin-cursed world.

That's his humble condition. Second, notice his gracious engagement in vs. 7. . . .

What on the surface in modern America seems understandable and normal, if not a little bit rude, is anything but. It may not seem like it, but there's a lot to consider here. Notice first that this is a woman from Samaria. The Gospel writer wants to make sure we don't miss that detail. It would be natural to imply she's a Samaritan from the fact that Jesus and his disciples are in the heart of Samaria. It would only make sense that a local they encounter is a Samaritan. But this is too important a detail to leave to implication.

In fact, this detail is so significant that the woman herself highlights its significance. LOOK at vs. 9. . . .

When it says that the Jews have no dealings with Samaritans, we can't take that too far because the disciples seemed to have no qualms about going into town to buy food. As I noted from Josephus, it seemed that Galileans were accustomed to traveling through Samaria, which would have required some degree of interaction.

The phrase can mean something more specific like, "Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans." For the woman to give Jesus a drink, he would have to drink from her vessel, and that would make him ritually unclean—at least according to the Pharisees.

But it's not just that they didn't share eating and drinking vessels, there was a general—not universal, but general—mutual disdain between Jews and the Samaritans. As an example of that, in Luke 9 Jesus and his disciples are heading through Samaria on their way back to Jerusalem. They arrived at a village for the night, but because they were headed to Jerusalem, the village refused to allow them to stay there. So offended were his disciples that James and John said to Jesus, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

In John 8 as Jesus spars with some Jewish leaders, he declares that they do not listen to him is because they are not of God. They retort, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" They used Samaritan as offensive epithet.

To understand the animosity between Jews and Samaritans, you have to know some of the history. The tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim occupied this territory from about 1375BC until 722BC. By 722 Israel had long been divided between the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In the year 722 BC the Assyrian empire conquered the northern kingdom and exiled most the people, leaving only the poor in the land. Lest the land go essentially unoccupied, 2 Kings 17:24 tells us, "And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel. And they took possession of Samaria and lived in its cities."

Over the centuries the people intermarried with the few remaining Jews and having brought their false religion with them, there was a lot of syncretistic practices where

they combined false religious practices with failed attempt to worship Yahweh. But it was all a sordid mess of depravity, some even practicing child sacrifice.

Seventy years after the Babylonians conquered the southern kingdom and destroyed the walls and temple in Jerusalem, Ezra returned with a number of exiles to rebuild the temple. In a veiled attempt to ingratiate themselves with the Babylonians, the Samaritans wrote to king Artaxerxes to complain about the work in Jerusalem claiming that the city would rebel if they were successful in securing the city. That ultimately failed and the temple was rebuilt. But then when Nehemiah returned and began rebuilding the walls to secure the city, the Samaritans again tried and failed to stop the work.

Beyond this, there was a rather significant religious contest between the Jews and Samaritans which we'll have to wait to unpack in the future. The prophets of old were not kind to Samaria. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, and Micah spoke strongly against the people of Samaria because of their idolatry.

The animosity was so great that decades after Jesus's life, it became coded into the law of the Jews that Samaritan women were perpetually and unchangeably ritually unclean. And if it was coded into law then, you can be sure the sentiment existed when Jesus is sitting at the well and a Samaritan woman approaches him.

Jesus, of course, cares not at all about the strife between Jews and Samaritans. When he sees this woman approaching, he's utterly unconcerned about what the Jewish religious leaders think about ritual cleansing. He's able to engage with this woman without any ethnic animosity. That's grace. But his grace overcame more than animosity. Do you remember what time it is? It's noon. The sun is at its peak, it's the hottest part of the day, and the absolute worst time of the day for a woman to walk well outside the city to draw water.

Genesis 24 tells us that in the time of Abraham, the women would go out in groups to draw water in the evening. It was cooler and there was protection when going as a group. That practice was the standard for ages.

Some commentators propose that Sychar is the ancient name for another city, Askar, and there were abundant springs of water much closer to town than this well. If that's true it only intensifies the situation, but we can't be sure about that fact. Whether or not

there were other sources of water, it was highly unusual for a woman to go by herself to draw water in the middle of the day. Why would she do that? Why would she go in the heat? Why would she go without the protection of a group of women? Why would she go when she'd have no one to keep her company?

Well, I suppose you could say that she must have been desperate for water and simply couldn't wait a few hours. But if she was that desperate, one would think she could go to her neighbor and borrow some water. No, I don't think she was desperate. I think there's a more likely answer.

It seems to me that the best answer is that she was an outcast in her community. She went at noon because she knew no one else would. She didn't go with other women because they wouldn't want to go with her, and even if she tagged along with others, they would mistreat her.

Why do I think that? LOOK down at vs. 16-18. . . . Remember that debate between the Pharisees and the Sadducees about the resurrection? The Pharisees believed in resurrection after death, and they believed that the marriage covenant continued into eternity.

The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection. And they mocked the Pharisees by inventing a scenario where a woman marries seven brothers successively after each one dies. They loved getting the Pharisees twisted in a knot by asking them, "Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?" By using the scenario of seven marriages, the Sadducees used a number that was ridiculously and impossibly high.

This woman standing before Jesus has had five husbands and was living with a sixth man. Her sad life was perhaps more tragic than the fiction the Sadducees could invent. Now of course we're not told what happened that led to her getting married five times. But the fact that she's sinfully living with a man who isn't her husband indicates that she wasn't simply the victim of five tragedies where each husband died. Only the Lord knows the details of her troubled her past—whether it included death, adultery, abandonment or other sorrows and sins—but whatever it was, to be married five times was exceptionally rare.

And now, to be living with someone who isn't your husband is to be living an immoral life. As is the case for many people who go deep into a life of sin, it seems she got to the

point where she just didn't care what other people thought anymore and she lived in open shame. She accepted life on the margins of society. Not being accepted by the women of the city, she chose a life of inconvenience.

We see further evidence that her life was filled with sinful choices in vs. 29. . . . Jesus has just revealed to her that he is the Messiah and in excitement she takes off proclaim this news to the people of the city. But she doesn't call out in the town, "The Messiah is here." She doesn't say, "Come, see a man who told me all the tragedy that has befallen me." No, she says, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did." This is further emphasized in vs. 39. . . .

This is a woman who had lived a sinful life and her sinful choices led to one broken marriage after another to the tune of five failed marriages. And in the end she gave herself over to a life of open shame. In this society this would have made her an outcast. She would have been rejected by her family, rejected by her friends, unable to participate in the social norms such as going with the group of women in the evening to draw water.

This is why I said at the beginning that her soul was robbed, stripped, beaten, and left for dead. Sin and suffering had robbed her of dignity. Sin and suffering had stripped her of participation in society. Sin and suffering had beaten her down to where she just didn't care anymore. Sin and suffering had left her for dead in the sense that she was hopeless to turn her life around.

But on this providential day, as she goes to the well at a time where there isn't supposed be anyone there, she encounters a man. A Jew. You can be certain that as she approached the well, fear rose up in her heart. *Who is this? Why is he here? Is he going to hurt me? Is he going to turn away from me in disgust?*

But as she would soon learn, Jesus is not an ordinary man. An ordinary man might be confused as to why this woman is coming at this time. An ordinary Jewish man would be compelled by his commitment to purity not to talk to this Samaritan woman and turn away from her. And if an ordinary man knew the truth about this woman's life, he would stay as far away from her as possible.

Jesus was no ordinary Jew. He was not confused, he expected this divine appointment. He was compelled to talk with her engage with her. He knew everything about her life,

and he loved her. He showed her grace and dignity and compassion like no one had ever done before.

He does that over the course of their conversation, but he begins by simply saying, “Give me a drink.” I trust you can see now why the woman responded the way she did. “How it is that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” If she knew that he knew everything about her life, she might have said, “How is it that you, a Jew, would ask a drink from me, a woman of Samaria and a sinner beyond measure?”

Jesus didn’t realize his error and turn away from her. He didn’t say, “I know it’s not kosher for me to talk to you, and I’m making myself unclean by using your vessel to take a drink, but I’m so desperately in need of water that I don’t care.” No, his request for a drink, as genuine as it may have been, was less about meeting his need and more about entering her world so he could satisfy her soul.

LOOK at vs. 10. . . .

Jesus’ mouth may have been parched and his body in need of water, but her need was greater. Her soul was dried up and shriveled. Her heart was hardened and calloused on the one hand, yet brittle to the touch and susceptible to being irreparably broken. She was a bruised reed, a faintly burning wick.

But on this day she encountered him of whom Isaiah says, “a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.” She stood face-to-face with the Lord who called out in Isaiah 55, “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” She met him who described himself in Matthew 11:28 saying, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Jesus doesn’t speak to her with disdain or disappointment. He doesn’t approach her cautiously fearing that her sin-soiled garments might touch him. He doesn’t speak to her with judgment or rebuke. No, in humility from his physically weak condition, he conveys grace to her first by speaking to her, and then by how he begins to reveal life-giving truth to her. Next week we’ll begin to unpack the soul-satisfying truth Jesus reveals.

Conclusion

In observing Jesus in this gracious encounter with this Samaritan woman, I wonder if you can discern any parallels to your own encounter with Jesus. Whether we realize it or not, we were all in the same desperate situation as this woman. When the gospel first came to us we were all dead in sin. Our lives may have looked radically different than hers, but we were in no less need of the grace of Christ than she was.

As we observe how Jesus graciously and humbly engages with this woman, and how he has graciously met us in our sin, we see a model for us to follow. All around us are people whose souls have been ravaged by sin. From those you encounter in passing at the store to those you work with every day or those you sit next to in class at school, people have been robbed, stripped, beaten, and left for dead. They've been told they're a cosmic accident. They've been told that this life is all there is. They've been deceived to think there is no meaning or purpose.

They've been convinced that the best they can hope for is to eek out as much pleasure possible. Women have been told their bodies are their most powerful tool to influence men. And men have been taught women's bodies exist for their own pleasure. The world sends endless messages that you can define yourself in whatever terms you want. And people are dying of thirst every day because the muddied waters of the world just don't satisfy.

Like the Good Samaritan, in this encounter with the Samaritan women, Jesus is the Good Jew in the sense that he goes against all social norms and expectations and does what no one else is willing to do. But he's not just the Good Jew—he's the Messiah. He's the giver and sustainer of life. He's the Savior of the world. And as those who have received that living water, it's our joy and privilege to follow him in fulfilling the mission of bringing the life-giving water of the gospel to a world dying of thirst.

So when you see the person you're tempted to turn away from, consider how you might start a conversation that enables you to open the floodgates to the water of life.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything in the message that ministered to your soul?
2. Were there any questions you had from the passage or message?
3. Why did Jesus ask for a drink of water?
4. Why was the woman shocked by his request?
5. Why were the Jews and Samaritans against each other?
6. Read Luke 10:25-37, how does this passage help our understanding of the one in John?
7. What does this passage say about how we should engage with our enemies?
8. How can we keep ourselves focused on making an impact for the gospel instead of cultural divisions?