

“Lift Up Your Eyes” - John 4:1-42

The apostle John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives us the gospel account which bears his name. And as all writers do, he writes with a particular purpose; one that is found at the end of this gospel in 20:31 – “but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

Now John in many ways writes a very simple gospel account. It is one which shows Jesus using physical things as a way to teach parallel yet profound spiritual truths. He begins this gospel in the same manner as the book of Genesis begins, showing how the light and life of Jesus Christ overcome darkness and make order out of disorder and chaos and lostness. However, unlike the Genesis account, he speaks of God overcoming spiritual darkness rather than physical. Such is the touch of One who John describes as the eternal Word and the One by whom the world was made through. He writes of Jesus, the Son of God, who shows us who God really is – 1:18 tells us, “No one has ever seen God, the only God, who is at the Father’s side, He has made Him known.”

So with the words “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (1:29), John the Baptist (another John) introduces Jesus to Israel and to His disciples. John said He is the One who would not baptize with water as the Baptist did but the One who would baptize with the Spirit.

The apostle then tells us how Jesus begins His public ministry by making new wine far better than the old in chapter 2 which signified complete transformation from the inside out by His touch and that the wine had returned to Israel which could and would replace the joyless ritual of the land with true and lasting joy. And later in chapters 2 and 3, He is introduced to Jerusalem, whose inhabitants were “His own” but who did not truly receive Him despite the many signs He did there. He meets an unbelieving Nicodemus there, the teacher of teachers among the Jews, and tells him of new birth, a birth by the Spirit.

Yes, John’s gospel to this point tells us something new had come or rather, someone new had come – the One to whom the Old Testament Scriptures had pointed. And in our text tonight, Jesus makes even more known about God and further reveals God’s salvation plan for an entire world.

So we come to John 4:1.....

Intentional Travel (4:1-6)

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. (John 4:1-6).

The Route (4:1-4)

We see in verses 1-2 that the Pharisees had turned their attention from John the Baptist and onto Jesus. They had learned more baptizing was going on in His camp than in John's. Jesus was not willing to be subjected to these religious leaders and their agenda. And as John gives us His narrative comment, it was not even Jesus who was doing the baptizing. These suspicious "leaders of Israel" had wrong intentions and were antagonistic towards the Son of God. He would not draw further unbelieving attention to himself. No, He had a mission to accomplish; a particular person to meet and a people to whom to bring good news.

So he left Judea and departed for Galilee. Yet He took a particular route; one which took him through Samaria. Verse 4 tells us "He had to pass through Samaria" which tells us this was not a random choice of routes but an intentional one, one ordained by a sovereign God. Now Samaria was north of Judea and between Judea and Galilee. It was part of the Promised Land and in appearance and climate, Samaria resembles Judea but is even more beautiful and the soil more fertile.

A Great Divide (4:4-6)

But there was problem between this region and its neighbor, Judea. Although Jews took this route, it was not a common one for them. Many avoided Samaria, and not the least of which were the rabbis and Jewish religious leaders. You see, they crossed the Jordan to the east and traveled northward through Perea until they cleared Samaria and then crossed back over the Jordan and into Galilee. {Like traveling from Springboro to Troy or Toledo and going way around Dayton via Waynesville, Xenia and Springfield} To understand why, we need to take a moment and revisit some Old Testament history.

In 1 Kings, you may remember that as a result of King Solomon's falling away, the Lord decreed that the twelve tribes of Israel would be divided into two kingdoms; the northern kingdom, Israel and the southern kingdom, Judah. God appointed Jeroboam as king over the North, however, Jeroboam misread his mandate and ruled wickedly and did not follow the Lord. Most importantly, he initiated a distorted copy of God ordained worship in Shechem. He crafted two golden calves, built temples on the high places and sacrificed at them, and also appointed non-Levites as priests.

Now there is much history to recount but the people's disobedience and this idolatrous worship system, styled to some degree after what God had commanded, led to their eventual judgment. Assyria invaded and took many Israelites into captivity and settled the land with foreigners who intermarried with the remaining Jews (2 Kings 17). And this mixed race of people continued to add to the perverted form of worship in the land. They built a temple on Mt Gerazim to imitate the one in Jerusalem since this where they believed it was to be built and also because they had been denied in helping the Jews rebuild the temple in Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile (Ezra 4). They only observed the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) where it is written that both Abraham and Jacob worshipped on this mountain.

So at the time of this account, the Samaritans were a mixed race of people; part Jew, part Gentile and not liked by the Jews. In terms of being the same race or religion, the Jews disowned them

and self-righteously considered themselves superior. And the Samaritans contributed to this tense, suspicious, and jealous separation between the two peoples with their actions through the years towards the Jews as well. All was not well between the two peoples. {Give examples}

Verses 5-6 tell us Jesus and His disciples came to Sychar near Shechem opposite of Mt. Gerazim. This was an important place for both peoples but especially for the Samaritans who valued the patriarchs and the Pentateuch. The field Jacob had given to Joseph many years before was there (Gen. 33:19) along with the well he had dug. In fact, this well still exists and is just under a mile outside the town.

So Jesus, having walked miles already that day, wearily sat down at Jacob's well. And this detail tells us something vitally important about Jesus. He is God and He is man – the God-man - a man like us in all respects, except He had no sin. He experienced hunger, sorrow, pain, temptation, and here, fatigue. These aspects of human experience and sinless perfection qualified Him to save us and to help us in our trials and temptations (Hebrews 4:15).

“It was about the sixth hour” – according to Jewish time this would have been noon so the sun was likely high and hot. Some think the Roman convention of time was used in John's gospel making this to be around 6:00 PM in the evening. In any event, our Lord was tired from a long journey on foot and the person He set out to meet would be right on time....we read on...

A Divine Appointment (4:7-15)

A Woman from Samaria (4:7a)

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. So we see a woman of Samaria enter the scene. Although we will learn more about her later in this passage, we know little of her at this point. We do know she was a Samaritan though, part of a people considered to be of the lowest class according to the Jews. And furthermore, she was a woman in a culture which considered women to be second class citizens. In fact, it was often the cultural norm that no man, not even their husband, could speak to them in public.

This can still be seen in the third world today where women do the majority of the physical labor; walking long distances for water, gathering wood, growing and gathering food, etc. Several years ago I spent nearly two weeks in northern Kenya, where among the various nomadic tribes, it was like going back to ancient times in terms of culture. There I saw the women carrying large bundles of wood on their backs for their cooking fires and mud huts and each day walking 6 miles each way with their water buckets to the nearest well.

Furthermore, as we will learn later about her life, the woman of Samaria was likely a social outcast due to a life of immorality. The hour for her to be drawing water was likely one where traffic at the well was light and she could avoid the stares and silent scorn from the other women coming for water.

A Surprising Request (4:7b-10)

Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." (John 4:7-10)

So we see Jesus, having just spoken to Nicodemus in chapter 3, go from meeting with a man of the highest order in society to now meeting one of the lowest of all people in the land. So with His disciples having gone into the city for food, what does Jesus do? He does the unthinkable and speaks to the woman asking her for a drink of water. He breaks the custom of the day and takes the initiative to start the conversation. Her response is understandable, *"How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?"* A strict Jew considered drinking from a Samaritan cup to cause ceremonial uncleanness.

The Lord's response turned the conversation around on her. She had the physical water but was the one actually "thirsty" and yet did not know it. His answer in 4:10 reverses His request of verse 7 in order to answer her question. In effect, "you would have ignored the cultural prohibition too and made the same request if you knew what I had and who I am". But she did not know about the "gift" and more importantly did not know the "Giver" of it.

The Gift of God Revealed (4:11-14)

The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (4:11-14)

Her answer in verse 11 shows her lack of understanding. How could this curious Jewish man claim He could provide water, a man with no evident means of drawing water? Her mindset is in the physical and does not understand He was now speaking of spiritual water, "living water". Instead she questions Him whether He is more capable than the highly esteemed Jacob and then gives Him a brief history lesson. She and her people thought they were the true descendants of Jacob. "How can you draw water like our father Jacob who dug this well without any means to draw it from such a deep well?"

Jesus goes on in verses 13 and 14 to explain that He is speaking of the gift of God; living water which comes via the Spirit of God, salvation from the Lord, full and free, forgiveness and an ability to know and to live obediently unto God. With this water from above, a person will be transformed and never have spiritual thirst again. This water in a person will well up and result in eternal life. Notice this water does not and cannot be drawn but it wells up. Unlike physical water, this water cannot be extracted by a person's effort. This is no ordinary well of water of which Jesus is speaking. Amen!

A Premature Request (4:15)

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." - (John 4:15)

The women's response in verse 15 is clumsy but shows a change in her. Although she answers in terms of physical water, it is obvious she has begun to realize there is more to Jesus' words. She is intrigued. She wants this water even though she does not fully understand what it was. But the deep cries of her heart are for the first time beginning to receive a response. Such is the work of the Spirit of God.

Her response also shows that the conversation had gotten too heavy for the women. Her understanding was limited and her request for living water was premature. She did not know the conditions for such water and more importantly did not know the "Giver" of the "gift" – she did not know God. For this, Jesus would graciously and wisely turn the conversation so she could understand and know to whom she was speaking.

The Giver Revealed (4:16-26)

In His Knowledge (4:16-18)

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." (4:16-18)

Now Jesus asks her to call her husband. Her answer is technically correct but not entirely truthful for she is currently living with a man. The Lord then recounts her entire life with respect to marriage and relationships and in the process exposes her sin. While showing the woman her sin is important, this does not appear to be the primary reason for Jesus' question and answer. Rather it was to begin revealing to her who He was – someone far larger than Jacob and the patriarchs. After revealing to her the gift of God, she needed to understand who God was. Giving her an example of His omniscience would serve to do so. As we will see shortly, Jesus' knowledge of her and her past had stunned her.

In the Worship He Accepts (4:19-24)

The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

So feeling increasingly uncomfortable, the woman takes a turn at steering the conversation. While referring to the Lord respectfully as a prophet, she then raises the ongoing dispute between Jews and Samaritans over the authorized place of worship; Mt. Gerizim vs. Jerusalem. In effect,

she is saying, “We worship on this mountain but you Jews tell us we are wrong. We are legitimate here in Samaria and you Jews are wrong. And by the way, I know about this stuff too! This line of argument seeks to deflect the conversation away from its object and to discredit Jesus’ words.

But Jesus again redirects and says in effect, “you do not understand”. This dispute over the physical location of worship is going away. In fact, it never really mattered. You are currently worshipping a God who you do not know but that will change (remember they did not observe the Scriptures beyond Deuteronomy) – salvation is coming. As Jews, we know this because God the Father has determined that salvation will come through the Jews. {Jesus identifies with the Jews}

A new agenda is coming – a new covenant where the place of worship is not the issue but rather its nature. God is looking for true / real worshipers (and in fact, He has always sought them) – ones that worship in spirit and truth, a worship that is accurate and heartfelt. He is the God the woman and all of Israel did not know. Instead, they squabbled over locations and methods and all kinds of legalistic and unpleasing forms of worship. Jesus tells her “God is spirit”, the invisible God, the One who dwells in unapproachable light. What is going on in Samaria and Jerusalem is not true religion. It is all wrong and cannot please God!

Yes, the hour is coming where the division between the Samaritans and Jews would end and where the Spirit of God would be poured out at Pentecost. A new agenda was coming.

As Messiah, the Christ (4:25-26)

Now the woman has thrown out nearly all that she knew – all her defenses. All the things she knew from her life, her culture, her religion, her prejudices, her pre-conceived notions had been put on display and found lacking in the face of this Jewish stranger, the God-Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, Messiah. These things did not explain her empty life of sin nor the gaping hole in her heart. Only one thing remained for her to say, the one conclusion to which the Lord was bringing her - the end of herself. She offers almost weakly yet accurately in verse 25, *“I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.* Yes, Messiah, the Christ, is coming and He will clear up all of this confusion. She was waiting for Messiah and her wait was about to end.

Jesus plainly says to her in verse 26, *“I who speak to you am he.”* The great “I AM” had come for her and for the first time, the woman was now on the same page with the Lord. There was no more left to say or to ask....no more, “yeah but...” - the Lord was here and had spoken.

You know when we hear the great I AM speak in the midst of our lives whether for the first time or not, everything is silenced, we can truly be still and know that He is God. I do not know all you are facing today but hear the Christ in verse 26. Your circumstances may or may not change but your perspective will.

Two Witnesses – Two Results (4:27-33)

Witness #1 (4:27-30)

Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the town and were coming to him.

Note here that Jesus shows His divine control over timing and events. If the disciples returned early, the conversation may have been interrupted. If they arrived too late, they would have missed Jesus' claim to be Messiah and the woman's response. As he had done throughout this account, the Lord mastered the situation and the disciples arrived right on time.

The disciples were amazed by Jesus talking to the woman but said nothing about it. They almost seem prohibited.

Meanwhile the woman, overwhelmed by her meeting with Jesus and with His words ringing in her ears and resonating in her heart, simply left her water jar and went back to town. And it was no small thing for her to leave her water jar – this was the means of carrying vital, life sustaining water. People in that day and in that culture did not just leave their water jar. {Give example today} But she had met the One who gave eternal life, living water. In her amazement, excitement, and joy she was overwhelmed by this truth. Salvation had come to her and in a heartbeat she forgot her pursuit of earthly sustenance – lost in Him, the earthly things will now take care of themselves.

The woman had to go tell her people what had happened. Note that it says people; men, women, young and old. The customs of the day nor her bad reputation and past would stop her from talking – the barriers came down. She witnessed to them, acknowledging her sin and Jesus knowledge of it. It was not a complicated theological explanation but she simply told them of her personal encounter and experience with Jesus Christ. Are you struggling in where to begin sharing Christ with a lost friend, family member, or co-worker? Take a lesson from the Samaritan woman - tell them what happened to you and then invite them to see Christ for themselves.

Do you do this or do you get sidetracked by heavy theological discussions, religious denominational debates, conservative politics, moralism, or family values. Or do you even talk about Messiah to those who do not know him?

Also note here tact - she did not relay His claim to be Messiah but asked the question, "Can this be the Christ?" a question already answered in her heart but which begged them to come and see for themselves.

And they did. Without hesitation, the people streamed out of the town to come to Jesus. Now the narrative turns to the second witness in verse 31.

Witness #2 (4:31-33)

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?"

The woman was one witness but note the other; the disciples. Now the disciples were in another world. They had been seeking food in the same town and were preoccupied with the physical only. Yes, the twelve, those who walked with Jesus daily, seeing His miracles, hearing His teaching, experiencing His grace were, as they often did, missing it. They spent a fair amount of time in the town but forgot the mission – no one came out to see Jesus because of their witness.

Can Christ's disciples lose sight of the kingdom? Is anyone coming out to see Jesus because of your testimony or because of the quality of your life? Or do you look just like the rest of the world with an earthly perspective on life only? It is possible

As the disciples urge the Lord to eat, He begins to tell them of another kind of food, food from above, spiritual food – food they knew nothing about. Does this not sound like the conversation with the woman at the well? The disciples are very confused now – “did someone give Him some food while we were away? Did He go ahead and eat without us?”

The Mission Revealed (4:34-42)

Real Food for True Worshipers (4:34-38)

But once again Jesus patiently explains in verses 34-38 - *Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."* (John 4:34-38)

Jesus who was perfectly aligned to the Father's will explains this food “*is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work.*” Real food for Jesus and for God's people is to do His will and His work. It is to be the preoccupation of our life and in doing so, it becomes the ultimate and only lasting source of satisfaction. Physical water and food cannot do this.

Now the Father's work is multi-faceted; there are many things to be about in the kingdom of God. So what is Jesus referring to here? Remember as the Jesus and the disciples were talking, this group of Samaritans (it seems a rather large one) is walking out of the town to see Jesus. And Jesus says to the disciples, “*Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.*” He points to the beautiful Samaritan countryside with its crops growing in the field (it is not harvest time yet – probably December with no harvest until April). But as they look into the distance, Jesus says you did not expect a harvest yet but it is here nonetheless. Look up! Can you not see it? All they can see is the green stalks of grain in the fields and then the white garments of people over the tops along the horizon. “All we see Lord, is people coming down the road and through

the fields.” It suddenly occurs to them that Jesus is not talking about the grain in the fields but rather of souls – a harvest of souls! Lift up your eyes – the fields are white for harvest!

The sowing and reaping of souls had already begun and there was much work to do. And in this work much rejoicing between sowers and reapers is happening. One sows and another reaps – different than in physical farming where the sower and reaper are the same person. As we do the work of His will to evangelize and allow the gospel to saturate all areas of our lives, we are sowing and/or reaping among people. Ultimately, it is the Lord who does the sowing and provides the increase but we are privileged to play the roles of sowing, tending, and reaping, receiving food, true food and as verse 36 tells us, *gathering up fruit for eternal life* (v. 36).

Jesus says, “*I send you into the field to reap that for which you did not labor*”. No, others did the labor and now I am showing you so you can begin to labor as well.

In fairness, what Jesus was showing the disciples had been beyond the comprehension of their Jewish minds. Jesus was here to save non-Jews also and He was giving a preview of the divine plan. His disciples were to be His “witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). I like the “ends of the earth” part because that is where we live.

A Harvest of Souls (4:39-42)

Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did. "So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." After the two days he departed for Galilee.

Many believed on that day. Some believed simply by the testimony of the woman (v. 39) while others believed by directly hearing from His Word (v. 41-42). In any event, notice the absence of any miracles or signs. They simply believed the Word of the Lord. Also note that He stayed with them at their request for two days. Two days spent with the Master!

A simple testimony resulting from a meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ brought many Samaritans to saving faith. The Lord had given us a preview of His plan for carrying the gospel to all nations.

Closing Thoughts

- 1) Have you met the Lord in a believing and obeying way? If not, come to the well. Receive living water from the Lord.
- 2) If you have, are you still lost in Him or have you gone back to pickup your water jar and given it primary importance again? Has life crowded back in on you causing you to forget the life He has called you to? Have you forgotten what real food is?
- 3) Personal Evangelism – learn from the methods of the Master.

- First, lift up your eyes! There is a harvest out there. Or do you not see it? Does your vision filter out Samaritans? Are you only looking for people who you think will make good Christians? We do this, do we not?
- Do not be fearful. Take some risks with people.
- Be intentional – sacrifice your time, your routine, and your schedule. The Lord went through Samaria. Meet people where they are – in the ordinary tasks of life.
- Be human! Take opportunities in the ordinary activities of life.
- Stay on task in your conversations with people – do not be sidetracked by religious talk.
- Do not be afraid you will not know what to say. Begin by telling them what happened to you and what happened when you met the Lord Jesus at the well.
- Do not be discouraged when a person does not immediately respond to the gospel. Most do not, at least not right away. Keep in mind you may only be sowing for another to reap.
- Regardless of the outcome – give Him glory
- It will be worth it all. It will not be long and we will be with the Lord. And we will look around and see people we shared the gospel with but who we forgot all about – we were used to contribute to them coming to Christ. What a joy that will be!

4) Be thankful and be encouraged – He met us at the well and employed us in the field (saved us) and then uses us to reach and save the lost (sow and reap) We have joined with those who were already laboring in the field to bring forth a harvest – a kingdom harvest of souls. What a privilege! And be encouraged. The same Lord who came for you at your well is with you in whatever you are facing. We are not home yet but He is with us.

Let's pray...