

Women Coming to Jesus --- The Outsider and the Isolated Come to Jesus  
Text

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

I absolutely love the two Biblical women we will be spending time with this morning. I just love them. They are two of my Biblical Heroes. And fundamentally they have nothing to do with each other .... I mean there is no link between them. Except the fact that neither of them should even be included in the story. It's true, Jesus should not have been talking to these women and they shouldn't be part of the narrative. Why? well, in addition to not being male, they are not Jewish. But still ---- they find their way into the story --- because they find a way to Jesus. The outsider and the isolated ---- they are Women Coming to Jesus.

## THE GENTILE WOMAN

First the outsider.

Jesus has been traveling. It would seem that he wants to get away from the constant arguing with the scribes and Pharisees so he takes his disciples into Canaanite territory for a little retreat or maybe a vacation. Tyre and Sidon were on the Mediterranean coast. But ... Well, here's how Matthew tells the story:

## ON SCREEN

Matthew 15:21-28

<sup>21</sup> Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." <sup>23</sup> But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her

away, for she keeps shouting after us.”<sup>24</sup> He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”<sup>25</sup> But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”<sup>26</sup> He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”<sup>27</sup> She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”<sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

You just have to love this woman. But I’m going to be honest. I don’t like the Jesus we meet here very much. I find it hard to accept the way Jesus treats this woman when she first comes to him for help. But I do think this Gospel event has something really important to teach us. And here it is --- it’s okay to push back against God. It’s okay to bring our confusion and disappointment and disagreement to God. I think this is one of the most important things that God, in Jesus, clarifies for us.

Jesus has some of his most --- arguably most important theological conversations with women. The Samaritan woman at the well and the discussion of living water. The conversation about eternal life with Martha at the grave of brother Lazarus. And here, the exclusion or inclusion of those who were not Jews. Now having such incredible discussions with women might not seem strange today but in the first century that would have been absolutely astounding, perhaps even insulting to the men in the group. But Jesus does not flinch.

I remember when I was first given freedom to push back against God. I was in college and just beginning to take full responsibility for my own spiritual journey. I had two conversations with two significant mentors that freed me to ask questions and push back when what I had been

taught just did not seem right. I see now that those conversations and the resulting freedom and grace they provided set me on the journey that has brought me here --- to be a preacher --- a proclaimer of the Gospel. The first was with a beloved college professor, Millicent Huneycutt. I was a freshman taking an upper-level class from her --- The Bible as Literature. We went through the Bible with a fine-tooth comb and I found myself confronting things I never even knew were in the Bible and ---- struggling. I met with Dr. Huneycutt in her office. She saw more than a student struggling with an academic course. She saw a young believer struggling with a potential faith crisis. That was the Spring of 1974 --- 49 years ago, and I remember it like yesterday. Dr. Huneycutt held up her Bible. *“Jan,” she said. “You can tear this book up ... pull it a part page by page, verse by verse, word by word and you still won’t do any damage. It has withstood the questioning of countless people before and survived. It will withstand your questions too. And your faith will be all the stronger.”* Whew ... big relief. And that began the vigorous Bible Study that has to date, yielded nearly 40 years of Bible Teaching and Bible Preaching.

The second conversation was with my Daddy, who was of course my pastor. Again, I was a freshman in college, home for the weekend. I can see right now the road Daddy and I were driving on. “Daddy, I’m just not so sure about prayer.” “What do you mean?” he asked. “I just can’t see how a good God could act or not act based on whether I remembered

to pray or not. When people say God answered their prayers, they just mean that God did what they wanted. Shouldn't a good God do what is right whether I or anyone prays about it?" I really thought Daddy would be devastated by my lapse of faith. But no ... he entered right into the discussion. "I think you are right about that. Praying should not be about our trying to get God to do what we want. It should be about trying to join God in the right things He is doing." Whew ... big relief. And that began the prayer life that has survived even through during the countless times when God did not do what I wanted.

In fact, continuing to come to Jesus, even when the answer is not what we want --- may be the greatest evidence of our faith ... and may yield the blessing we don't even know we need. We can push back against God. It's okay. It can in fact yield great spiritual growth. That's one helpful insight from this Gentile woman's encounter with Jesus.

And here's another. Never give up. She is the picture of persistence. Jesus ignores her. The Disciples attempt to push her away. They ask Jesus to dismiss her. Jesus insults her. Well, let me stop there a moment. When Jesus refers to the gentiles --- the non-Jews -- as dogs, it's not really as bad as it sounds. The word he used referred to house dogs --- or pets. Still not good but it does have a different ring, doesn't it? *It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the pets.* Even so --- this woman was dismissed in many ways but she does not give up. Her daughter needed help and she was determined to get it. That's my kind

of woman. She keeps asking Jesus for his help. We could learn something from that. Simple persistence is often underrated when it comes to matters of faith. Coming to Jesus sometimes means coming ....and coming .....and coming again.

### SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL

And sometimes, women end up coming to Jesus ... well almost by accident. Or so it would seem. Such was the case with a Samaritan woman who met Jesus unexpectedly by the side of a well.

### TEXT ON SCREEN

John 4:5-9

<sup>5</sup> So Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.<sup>7</sup> A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." <sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) <sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

Like I said. I love this woman. And unlike the previous scripture about the Gentile woman --- I love this story too. But we are so familiar with it that .... Well, it's in danger of losing it's power. So ... as I mentioned last night we have to get over that hurdle. And to do that .... I'm going to present the scripture just a little differently.

*Scene One ... The curtain rises ... the stage is set with a village well front and center. A single man, visibly tired and hot sits on the edge of the well. The lighting is bright. It is obviously mid-day. Enter stage right*

*... a woman in Samaritan dress .. with a water jar on her head. Upon seeing the man, she hesitates.*

Like I said .... I just love this story. And it does, I think, read like a one act play. Think about it .... Just one set. A handful of characters. The language is compact --- most of what we find in these verses is just dialogue.

I like the story too, and this is probably obvious, because the character questioning Jesus is --- a woman. Here we meet a woman bantering with Jesus over the theological tradition. And I have always liked a good discussion ... even what some might call --- a friendly argument. My older brother, Tommy, a very accomplished trial lawyer, trained me well for it. Our family dinner table and living room were the settings for many a lively discussion. Our friends often were amazed by our free-flowing discussions, usually bordering on arguments. And early in our marriages, when we were together, our spouses would often wander off to their beds ---- leaving Tommy and myself to argue – or discuss --- way into the night. Often those discussions were and --- still are --- theological in nature. So --- you can see why I would like this story.

Let's get back to it.

I want you to imagine the scene ... Jesus is sitting alone at the well. The Samaritan woman enters stage right. Now the division between the Jews and the Samaritans is difficult for us to truly

understand because there is really nothing quite like it in our contemporary society. While the black/white divisions prior to the Civil Rights movements might come close ... it really is quite different. You see, the Samaritans and the Jews shared the same ancestry. The Samaritans were the descendants of those Jews who had been left behind during the Old Testament Exiles. They had married those outside the Jewish race and thus, in the eyes of the Jews, had defiled their Jewish blood. The Samaritans refused to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem and were believed by the Jews to be ritually impure --- especially a Samaritan woman.

The time is noonday. The sun is directly overhead ... the heat overpowering. Noon was an odd hour for a woman to make her daily trek to the village well. Water was usually drawn in the early morning or in the evening. These daily trips to the shared water source were the great social moments of the day. Here the women had a chance to walk and talk with their friends. Children played together in the dust. It was a high moment in the day. But this woman --- well, she avoids all that. She comes to the well alone at a time when no one should be there. And ... to her great surprise, she finds herself coming to Jesus.

Now, I want you to keep the scene in your mind. Jesus, a man, a stranger, a Jew, a weary traveler is seated at the well. Many women would have turned the other way, never daring to even approach. And this woman hesitates but then she proceeds. You see, she was not like

other women. Oh no... this woman had a way with men. She was well versed in all the feminine arts. And, I imagine as she approached the well, she sized Jesus up as just one more man like all the others and interested in only one thing.

Can you picture it? Do you have the scene clearly in your mind? Okay .... Good .... Now listen. Here comes the first word of dialogue. Jesus speaks to this woman. *"Give me a drink of water."* Now I suspect that the woman interpreted this as what we would call a pass or a pick-up line. Folks, a Jewish man would not even look at a Samaritan woman ... let alone speak to her. And the idea of drinking water from her jug? -- well that would be beyond all imagination. If a Jewish man was speaking to her, it could only be because they were alone and he would have one thing only on his mind. But ... that doesn't bother her .... No sir ... she has come to expect that from men. She knows men and she knows the game. *"You are a Jew,"* she replies, *"how can you ask me for a drink?"* That comment should have ended the dialogue. But ... to her surprise, the conversation continues. It is an amazing thing really --- for that day --- a Jewish rabbi, discussing religion with a Samaritan woman of questionable reputation. Amazing and somehow --- wonderful. And the gentle theological bantering continues.

#### ON SCREEN

John 4: 10-15.

<sup>10</sup> 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." <sup>11</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? <sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" <sup>13</sup> Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." <sup>15</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

The woman is not the least bit inhibited. She seems to enjoy what is for her a playful conversation until (CLAP) Jesus shatters surface conversation with a simple and quiet command. ***"Go, ... and call you husband and come back."***

It is this personal confrontation ---when we honestly come face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ. Friends, that is when the surface language of religion gives way to the real questions of faith and worship. Now, make no mistake ... this woman is not singled out for her sin. Every one of us ... every one ... who comes into the brilliance of the Christ fall far short of what we should be. She is embarrassed. She is shamed --- as every one of us would be. But even so, this strange, Jewish man has somehow touched within her a chord that has never before been reached and she will not turn and run away. The flirting and teasing --- the bantering is gone. Now the talk is plain and earnest.

### **ON SCREEN**

John 4: 17-26.

<sup>17</sup> The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband,' <sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" <sup>19</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in

spirit and truth." <sup>25</sup> The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." <sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

*And the Curtain falls. Thus ends Scene One.*

## SCENE TWO

*Scene two. The Curtain rises. The stage setting is just the same. Jesus is still sitting at the well. The woman sits just before him, at his feet. They are deep in conversation. Enter stage right. The disciples. 12 men carrying food and drink. They are visibly surprised at the presence of this woman but they keep their comments to themselves. Seeing the men, the woman rises, leaving her water bottle, she walks without shame through the disciples and hurries away toward the village.*

## ON SCREEN

JOHN 4: 27-38

<sup>27</sup> Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" <sup>28</sup> Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, <sup>29</sup> "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" <sup>30</sup> They left the city and were on their way to him.

<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." <sup>32</sup> But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." <sup>33</sup> So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. <sup>35</sup> Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. <sup>36</sup> The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. <sup>37</sup> For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' <sup>38</sup> I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Scene two is an interesting parallel to the first scene. The discussion then had been about water – earthly and spiritual. The discussion now is about food ---

again earthly and spiritual. And once again, there is concern about the surface rules of religion. The disciples are shocked at Jesus' behavior. They are very clear about this. A Jewish prophet and rabbi just should not be conversing with a Samaritan woman. Those were the rules. Everyone knew that.

So once again, Jesus must somehow push through the surface level. This time he uses the image of harvesting. In scene one, he had confronted the Samaritan woman with her failure, now he confronts his Jewish male disciples with theirs. "You have a saying ... 4 more months and then the harvest ... but I tell you ... take a good look at the fields .. the crops are ripe and ready to be harvested. The disciples are confused by these words. They look about one to the other--- What crop? ... What fields? Here, among the Samaritans ... What's Jesus talking about?

And you know folks, I'm afraid most of us are as bewildered by Jesus' words as those disciples. Could Jesus be talking to us too? ... In the fields that surround our churches .. where are the crops --- ripe and ready to be harvested? We don't have to go very far or search very hard to find people who have never gone to church or people who have stopped going to church. Don't you see ... they are our crops --- ripe and ready to be harvested. Like the disciples who could not see the harvest among the Samaritans, we live with these people, play with them, work with them. They are our neighbors, our family members, our friends. We know they are there but somehow, we just don't see the need to harvest among them. We no longer offer them the invitation. And please, please understand this. I am not concerned with some public confession of faith just for the sake of keeping these people out of hell when they die. My concern is also over the need to help them out of the hell they live in now. For Christ not only offers eternal life --- Christ also offers abundant life. And this world, this nation, the people all around

us day in and day out and some of us here right now .... Are hungry ... hungry for abundant life, desperate for meaning and purpose.

“I have sent you to reap a harvest,” Jesus says, “in a field where you did not work; others worked there and you profit from their work.”

My first appointment was to Bristol England. We lived there for two years and one of our favorite excursions was to a place called Cheddar. And yes ... that is where cheddar cheese was first produced. But, Cheddar’s great claim to fame was the network of underground caves --- they were fabulous --- wonderful works of nature’s art --- they twisted miles into the bowels of the earth --- with underground lakes the size of football fields --- sculptures formed by water dripping for millions of years --- the colors were incredible. And all these wonders were there hiding in pitch black darkness. And you know, the thing in those caves that amazed me the most was the vegetation that grew in the areas where there was artificial light. Now, the lighting, of course, had been placed there so that tourists could enter safely and see and wherever there was light, there would be ferns and mosses .. a whole variety of plants growing. Our family members talked about this all the way through the caves and finally at the end, the recorded commentary explained. The growth had originated in spores, seeds that traveled into the cave on the clothing of people, on the shoes of visitors and in the fur of bats. These seeds would remain there dormant for years but ... when exposed to the light ... they began to grow.

Friends ... there are seeds all around us too --- just waiting --- waiting to be exposed to the white light of Jesus Christ. Waiting to be exposed to a light that we, just like the Samaritan woman ... can bring to them. The seeds in those caves needed the light. And people in our world .... They need the Lord.

*The curtain falls. Thus ends scene two.*

**ON SCREEN**

John 4:39

<sup>39</sup> Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done."

While Jesus has been trying to explain the need to harvest to the disciples, the Samaritan Woman has been out gathering the crops.

### SCENE THREE

*Scene Three. The curtain rises. Jesus and the disciples are seated around the well. Enter stage right. The Samaritan Woman, excitedly pointing at Jesus and calling to others. Gradually the stage fills with the villagers.*

What an ironic twist .. these disciples, followers of Jesus who upon meeting this rabbi have left everything they have to follow the Christ .. they journey into this village and they return to the Lord with absolutely no one --- nothing but the food. Meanwhile, this woman who had come to the well at a time when she could avoid her neighbors, upon meeting this Jesus, has now rushed to those same neighbors so that she can share the good news. You tell me .. who is the true disciple? And the gospel writer tells us that her neighbors believe. They ask Jesus to stay.

### ON SCREEN

JOHN 4 : 40-42.

<sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. <sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of his word. <sup>42</sup> 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 truly the Savior of the world."

They ask Jesus to stay, beg him in fact. Earlier, the disciples begged Jesus to eat .. these Samaritans beg to be fed.

A number of years ago now, my parents traveled to Korea. The Christian church in Korea is the fastest growing church in the world. There my parents were

involved with what was at the time, the largest Methodist Church in the world. 20,000 members. One church. Five full services every day. Five, one hundred member choirs. Two orchestras. All volunteer and with a waiting list of folks ready and anxious to fill any vacancies. The most amazing thing about this church though were the requirements for membership. Now these were not suggestions, mind you. These were requirements. Attendance at worship, of course .. a tithe and a commitment to a weekly Bible Study in the homes. There were 20,000 members. 18,000 were members of Bible Study groups of 8-12 that met every week in a home. My parents attended one of these groups and asked the people how they came to be part of it all. Of the ten there, the leader had been a Christian for the longest period of time – 7 years. How had they come to the church? Everyone of them had been invited to the group by neighbors, co-workers or family. And this is the incredible part, whenever the group exceeded the number 12, it would split and begin to grow again. Now I know, we have small groups in our churches too ... but instead of splitting and dividing, most of our small groups cling to each other basically shutting newcomers out. It may be great for those on the inside, but it sure doesn't help with the harvest.

Well, five years later, my dad returned to that church. What had been a 20000 member church had swelled to 75,000. And then I had the honor of going. In 2014 the membership was 94,000. The converts beg to be fed. That Korean church established the first Methodist Church in Moscow. One thing about living water ... it demands to be shared.

But ... back to our story. The Samaritans believe. And their believing, our believing ... all believing is a two-step process. We come because of others' experiences. We stay because of our own.

## CONCLUSION

When my son Riley was only two, we were saying a prayer together around our table. As was the usual custom, after the prayer, we all looked to Riley to hear him add his sweet AMEN. But this time, he had a different idea. He lifted those bright 2 year old eyes and with all the gusto he could manage shouted: All Aboard!!!!

And that's really what we all should be doing ... as our invitation to those inside and outside the church. Like the woman running to her neighbors ... we too should be shouting ALL ABOARD .. because: (vs. 42) "*we ourselves have heard him and we know that he really is the Savior of the World.*" Be sure you understand this. Coming to Jesus is not the end goal --- Oh no. The end goal is helping others come to Jesus. Just like this isolated outsider the Samaritan woman.

And with that .. our play comes to its end. Can you see it? Jesus, the woman, the disciples and all the villagers are gradually joined on the stage by others ... one by one they come .... From all parts of the theater. From all parts of the community. From all parts of the world. Look carefully. Numbered among them just may one of your neighbors, your co-workers, your family members. Because you see --- Given the chance, they do come. They come to Jesus.

*The Curtain falls and the theater goes dark.*

*Freely, freely you have received. Freely, Freely give. Go in my name and because you believe others will know that I live.*

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.