

# THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

John 4:27-42 (No. 26)

Treasuring Christ Church – Pastor Boyd Johnson

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## INTRODUCTION

Perhaps it would be helpful for you to know that one of my goals when I preach passages like the one we are studying in chapter 4 is to take you back in time so that you can experience the story as if you were there. I want these stories to appear to you in vivid color rather than black and white. I want to give you enough historical, geographical, cultural, and theological detail so that you feel as though you were there with Jesus at the well and watching the events taking place.

Many of these stories in John's Gospel are familiar to us. You've read the stories more than likely. But though you've read the stories, you might not have "gone there" in the story. You've read the story, but you haven't perhaps experienced the story.

One of my aims, then, in preaching these narrative passages is to help you go there—to understand the story in its own context. As one pastor has said, "whatever [the story's meaning is], it was established in the original context." And what it meant then is what it still means now and always will mean (MacArthur). So if we are to grasp the meaning of the text, we have to understand what it meant in context and that requires drawing out the details of the text so that we understand it.

This is our third week on the account of the woman at the well in John 4. It's a long story, even for the gospels. The reason John includes this story (found nowhere else in the other Gospel accounts) is to disclose the identity of Jesus. He is constantly driving us to see who Jesus is.

The full story of the woman at the well unfolds in three sections, which we've taken one at a time. In the first section of the story, Jesus is the one who gives living water (vv. 1-15). He gives the living water of salvation.

John 4:14: "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."

In the second section of the story, Jesus is shown to be the Christ (the Messiah), who was promised to come. We also get a hint that Jesus is more than the Messiah. He hints that he is God by using the name God chose for himself before Moses: I AM. Literally verse 26 reads "I who speak to you am."

Now in this final section of the story, Jesus is shown to be the Savior of the world.

Many in the town come to believe in Jesus and they confess at the end of verse 42, “We know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.” These disclosures of Jesus’ identity drive the story. The whole point in writing down the story is so that you would see who Jesus is and confess along with the witnesses, Jesus is the giver of salvation, he is the Christ, he is God, he is the Savior of the world.

Revealing himself to the Samaritan people, out of all the people he could have revealed himself to, was surprising. Jesus said in v. 22, “Salvation is from the Jews.” You’d think he would, then, focus his ministry on convincing the Jewish leaders that he was the Christ—the prominent teacher and rulers like Nicodemus, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the priests and the high priest.

But in this chapter he reveals himself in the most profound way to the Samaritan woman and then to the Samaritan villagers. These were the “step-children” of the Jews, who forsook most of the Old Testament, rejected Jerusalem as the proper place of worship, intermarried with foreigners, and were generally despised by the Jews. But when Jesus said that “salvation is *from* the Jews,” he didn’t mean that salvation was *for* the Jews only.

God’s salvation came from the Jews in that God promised the patriarchs the land, gave them the Law and the way to walk in step with God, gave them special revelation of who he is and what he desires, and what he had planned, gave them the covenants and the promises. As Paul wrote in Romans 3:2 “The Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.”

And, again, in Romans 9:4–5: “They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.”

Despite all this, salvation wasn’t for the Jews only. Israel was to be a light for the nations—guiding the nations to the true God through their faith and obedience to him. In Isaiah 49:6 God says to Israel: “I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”” “To the end of the earth”—that’s how far salvation should extend—to all the peoples.

Jesus calls his disciples to this very mission in what we now know as the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:19–20: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.””

And Jesus’ parting words to his apostles after his resurrection and immediately before his ascension were recorded in:

Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

In chapters 3 and 4 of John's Gospel, we have a preview of just this progression of the spread of the gospel. Jesus revealed himself to the Jew, Nicodemus, in chapter 3. He revealed himself to Jews. Then Jesus moved on from there to the Samaritans, as we're studying now. After this, he'll arrive in Galilee and reveal himself to a Gentile official by healing his son.

So from the Jews to the Samaritans to the Gentiles he reveals himself. He demonstrates that he brings good news to the whole world. Already we've seen explicit statements in this Gospel that Jesus' mission extends worldwide:

John 1:9: "The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world."

John 1:29: "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

John 3:16–17: "'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Later on, Martha will say in John 11:27: " "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.'"

So salvation is *from* the Jews but *for* the whole world—even Samaritans—and that's what this story in our passage is designed to show. The climax of the entire story is verse 42. He is the Savior of the world and many come to believe in him.

Now we pick up our story in 4:27 and the story proceeds in three scenes:

In the first scene (vv. 27-30), the woman returns to the town and begins to tell people about Jesus.

In the second scene (vv. 31-38), Jesus is alone with his disciples, still at the well, and he teaches them a lesson about his desire to obey his Father.

In the final scene (vv. 39-42), the Samaritans of Sychar come to Jesus because of the woman's testimony and many of them come to believe in him.

Let's read the passage to see this story unfold. Read John 4:27-42.

**John 4:27-42** <sup>27</sup> 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?" <sup>28</sup> So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, <sup>29</sup> "Come, see a

man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"<sup>30</sup> They went out of the town and were coming to him.

<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat."<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, "Has anyone 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 accomplish his work."<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and 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."

<sup>39</sup> Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did."<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 indeed the Savior of the world."

## I. SCENE 1: THE WOMAN RETURNS

In verse 27, the text begins, "Just then his disciples came back." This tells us that the disciples' arrived back from their trip to town to get food just as Jesus told the Samaritan woman that he was the Christ. As the woman says (v. 25), "I know the Messiah is coming" and Jesus responds to her, "I who speak to you am he"—just at that moment the disciples arrived. They heard at least this part of the conversation. Their arrival to the well interrupts and ends the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

You get the sense that the situation was awkward. Our translation reads, "They marveled that he was talking with a woman." Other translations read they were amazed, surprised, even shocked. They left Jesus alone at the well and didn't expect him to be conversing with a woman when they returned.

As I explained a few weeks ago, this could have called into question Jesus' reputation. To be conversing so freely with a Samaritan woman, who the town likely knew as an adulteress. The situation could look like impropriety.

The Jewish rabbis (rabbi means teacher) of the day would barely speak with a woman, let alone carry on a conversation with one. It's been recorded that one of their sayings was, "A man shall not be alone with a woman in an inn, not even with his sister or his daughter, on account of what men may think. A man shall not talk with a woman in the street, not even with his own wife, and especially not with another woman, on account of what men may say" (Morris).

There is no question that the Jewish rabbis of Jesus' day were largely sexist. They regarded women as inferior to men in every way. They thought that the highest good in life was studying the law and they thought women should therefore be discouraged from studying it at all.

One of their prayers, I'm told still in Jewish prayer books today, reads in part, "Blessed are you, O Lord. . . who has not made me a woman" (Morris).

They didn't get these ideas from the Old Testament. The Old Testament honors women and indeed women are at the center of major movements in the history of redemption, playing pivotal roles and honored for doing so. But these rabbis, as they often did in other areas, added to God's Law with their own traditions and customs that became more important to them than the Law itself.

Jesus was considered a Jewish rabbi because he was a teacher. But he obviously didn't share the prevailing view about women. They feature prominently in the gospel narratives and there were even a band of women who were part of a larger group of disciples outside the twelve who went with him to various places. You could say that Jesus and his disciples showed a kind of disdain for the artificial rules the Jews made. They went through Samaria and into their villages and ate their food, drank their water, and interacted even with their women.

We should note that people in the name of God—even Christians—create all kinds of artificial rules to isolate themselves from other people in the name of supposed holiness (MacArthur). They go far beyond what is written in the Scriptures and they create for themselves a standard that is all at once less than God's standard and more than God's standard. "More" in the sense that they require what God does not require. "Less" in the sense that their rules are simply man-made and their standard of holiness is not the holiness of God but the holiness of their own image. They create a standard that is achievable for themselves and then require everyone else to live up to their standard. They aren't truly calling people to pursue the holiness of God, but a holiness made in their own image and using the cloak of God-talk to persuade others they are more holy.

Even though the disciples knew Jesus was different than other Jewish rabbis, they were still taken aback that he would so publicly risk an open conversation with this woman at the well. In their minds, they wanted to ask questions. They wanted to know from the woman what she wanted from Jesus and they wanted to know from Jesus why he was talking with her.

But the verse says, "But no one said, 'What do you seek?' or, 'Why are you talking with her?'" I think they didn't ask because they had already learned to trust Jesus. They trusted his leadership and didn't need to question it. They knew his goodness and believed that he did things for good reasons. Nevertheless, they wondered.

What they surely didn't realize in the moment was how providential their arrival was. Had they come earlier, the conversation would have likely abruptly ended before Jesus was able to reveal his messiahship to her. Had they come later, the disciples would have missed the interaction and wouldn't hear for themselves Jesus boldly proclaiming his messiahship. Their arrival was perfectly timed. It was providential.

All was perfectly orchestrated by the Father and Jesus was carrying out his will.

The woman's reaction is abrupt:

John 4:28–29: "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?""

She left her water jar—the large, earthen vessel used to transport water back home. It's possible she was so eager to tell others about Jesus that she simply forgot it. More likely, it shows that she intended to return to the well to get water, but wanted to get back to the town about ½ mile to a mile away quickly so that she could tell others without the burden of carrying a large water jar.

Her message to the townspeople was simple: "Come and see." That phrase reminds us of Jesus' own words to Andrew and John when they asked where Jesus was staying (1:39). It reminds us of Philip's words to Nathanael when Philip said they had found the prophet Moses wrote about (1:46). She respectfully invited the townspeople to come and see for themselves, not simply on the basis of her own testimony, but what she knew they would find when they met Jesus.

Jesus' supernatural knowledge of her past made such an impact on her that she exaggerates a bit in hyperbole: he "told me all that I ever did." She doesn't explain her past and likely the townspeople knew to some extent her character.

The most interesting thing she said, though, was the question she posed, "Can this be the Christ?" In Greek, the question supposes a negative answer. It's to ask, "This is not the Christ, is it?" She might expect a negative answer, but she hopes for a positive one. It's a hesitant question. She looked for confirmation because she was astonished at what Jesus said. If he could reveal her past to her, what else might he reveal?

Before, she was a skeptic and deep into her sin, avoiding direct confrontation about her past. Now, she has progressed. Whether she had fully repented and trusted Christ at this point, it's difficult to know. But she is eager to spread the news about Jesus and she seems to be over her shame. She went right to the people she previously seemed to avoid. Her whole disposition has changed. Maybe precisely because of her reputation, the Samaritans were intrigued by her change in disposition and her testimony. God often uses the least likely to make the greatest impact. He uses those with a past to create his ordained future.

The town was so intrigued:

John 4:30: "They went out of the town and were coming to him."

The impression is that a large group assembled to go out to the well to meet Jesus. John leaves us hanging. He says they "were coming to him," but then he shifts scenes as they're on their

way. We are left in suspense. He shifts scenes back to the well where Jesus was alone with his disciples.

So we go to the second scene in this story.

## II. SCENE 2: THE DISCIPLES' QUESTION

Verse 31 begins, "Meanwhile. . ." While the woman told the townspeople and the crowd was on its way to the well, Jesus taught his disciples an important lesson. He taught his lesson by using something physical to illustrate a spiritual lesson.

"The disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." Not long before, Jesus was weary and thirsty from the journey (4:6). As fully man, he experienced physical exertion like other men do. He got hungry, thirsty, and tired.

John 4:32: "But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about.""

Both the words "I" and "you" are emphatic in the Greek. They are emphasized. In order for Jesus to teach his disciples this lesson, he had to show them he was different. The disciples began to speak to one another about why Jesus wasn't eating and what he meant.

John 4:33: "So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?""

The way the Greek is stated, the question assumes a negative answer. It's to say, "Surely, no Samaritan brought him food when we were gone!" No, they hadn't. But for Jesus, even though his body needed food for energy, his spirit desired a different kind of food.

John 4:34: "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."

This is the lesson they must learn. Here was Jesus' priority. All in one sentence, Jesus tells his mission, his devotion, and his satisfaction.

The design or purpose in his was coming was to do God the Father's will. His desire was to do the Father's will. His delight was to do the Father's will. All of these—his design, desire, and delight—or, to say it another way, his mission, his devotion, and his satisfaction, was to do the Father's will.

At least 21 times in this Gospel, we're told in some way that Jesus, the Son of God, was on mission to do the Father's will on earth (3:17; 5:23-24, 30, 36-37; 6:38-39; 7:16, 18, 28, 33; 8:16, 26, 29; 9:3-4; 10:25, 32, 37-38; 12:44-45, 49; 13:20; 14:10, 24; 16:5; 17:4; 20:21).

Here, the focus is on Jesus' satisfaction in doing the Father's will. It's like spiritual food to him that energizes him, motivates him, strengthens him.

Jesus is likely alluding to Deuteronomy 8:3, when Moses reminded the Israelites of God's faithfulness: "He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."

Jesus fed on doing the Father's will. What is your spiritual nourishment? It must not be only reading, studying, memorizing, hearing, or meditating on the word. But you must be a doer of the word (Jas. 1:22). You must feed on doing the will of God, obeying what Christ taught. The Great Commission is not just telling others the gospel, and not just teaching others all that Christ commands, but teaching others *to observe or obey* all that Christ commanded.

Jesus lived and died to "accomplish [the Father's] work" he gave Jesus to do. This word "accomplished" takes on a fuller meaning when Jesus uses another form of the word while he's hanging on the cross and says, "It is finished" (19:30). It is accomplished. He completed his mission. He was faithful to obey his Father to the end of his life.

Ephesians 2:10 says that *you* were saved in order to do the "good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." You were saved to obey God as you moved through life, accomplishing the works he prepared for you to do.

In verse 35, Jesus turns the lesson to his disciples. He was teaching for an immediate response. As the Father sent Jesus, Jesus will say in verse 38 that he sent his disciples on mission. They too must do the will of God. They have been selected out of the mass of humanity not only for salvation but to tell others the good news of Christ—to sow the gospel and to reap a harvest of souls.

Jesus said in v. 35: "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 may be quoting a common proverb or saying of the day when he said, "There are yet four months then comes the harvest. Or, perhaps it was about December and the harvest was literally four months away and the grain was green and growing, but not fully ripe—the tips not yet white and indicating the time for reaping.

Regardless, his point is that now is the time of the harvest for men's souls. The farmer sows seed and must wait to harvest the crops. The farmer plants, but the growth can't be hurried and there is no particular urgency while the seeds grow. But as to the souls of men, now is the time of the harvest. The fields are now white (or ripe) for harvest.

The disciples must feel the urgency of the moment. Jesus tells them to lift up their eyes, to look. From that well, they could already see the Samaritan townspeople in their white robes coming toward them beyond the crops. As they came, you could almost imagine their white robes were the white tips of the grain ready for harvest.

Get ready! This is the moment that you must feed on doing the will of the Father! For this moment, you were chosen!

He goes on in verse 36: "Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together." The worker didn't get paid until the work was done. The fruit was ready to be picked. The wages were ready to be distributed to the faithful worker who accomplished his task.

In other words, let no one dilly-dally, let no one hang back, let no worker be found lazy, let no be slow of foot. Grab the sickle of the gospel and reap. Get after it. The harvest is waiting. The time of rejoicing has arrived as the sower and reaper rejoice together because those who labor are winning souls for Christ and their work lasts for eternity.

He continues (vv. 37-38): "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.'" His disciples learn that, when it comes to telling the good news about Jesus, the one who initially sows the seeds of the gospel in someone's life may not be the one who sees the seeds bear fruit and the person become a Christian.

Sowing is hard work and could be discouraging because you don't see the fruit of your labor. But Jesus says now is the time when the sower and reaper rejoice together because they partner in the work. Each Christian is dependent on others for the success of their labor. So don't be discouraged if you have faithfully sowed but see no fruit. You are on the same team as the reaper. Their rejoicing is your rejoicing.

Others came before the disciples: the prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, even the Samaritan woman, who told others of Christ. But now they had been sent to enter into their labor and reap a harvest.

Finally, we briefly look at the last scene.

### **III. SCENE 3: THE SAMARITANS BELIEVE**

John 4:39: "Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did.""

From her testimony was kindled faith among the Samaritans. She told them of Christ. She didn't speak a perfect word. She didn't tell all that could be known about Jesus—she hardly knew him herself. But she spoke an adequate word to others about Christ. What she told them was true.

Don't let your imperfection, your lack of knowledge, your newness to Christ, or your communication skills stop you from sharing what you do know. Do what all good witnesses in a courtroom do: they share only what they know. You can do that much.

And God can make those words adequate for the task—adequate for sowing and harvesting. Tell them to come and see Jesus for themselves.

And they did:

John 4:40–42: "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.'"

They found their Lord. They found their Savior. They met Jesus for themselves and found the woman's testimony to be true. The woman's testimony brought them to Jesus, but their faith was their own. You cannot borrow faith. Faith cannot be second-hand. Faith in Jesus cannot rest on another's testimony (Morris). Another's testimony can introduce you to Jesus, but faith must come from personal knowledge of Christ.

They had come to believe on the Lord Jesus as Savior even of them. Like the woman, they had come to know that they were sinners and they needed a rescue. They needed a Savior—one to deliver them.

Although they couldn't possibly know all that Jesus would soon do by dying on the cross for their sins and the sins of all who believe—paying the just penalty for their sins—yet here they lived up to the light they had. However Jesus would do it, they knew Jesus was their only deliverance, their only rescue. He was the Savior and they believed in him to accomplish it.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is only one Savior—only one person to put your trust in to save you from the wrath of God that we all deserve because of our failure to live up to the holy standard of God.

This Savior's name is Jesus and he is the Savior of the world and worthy of our trust.