

# Evangelism According to Jesus

## Week 1 – The Samaritan Woman – John 4:7-26

### Scripture Reading: John 4:1-7a

#### Introduction

I doubt that there are many church words that strike more fear in the hearts of believers than “**Evangelism**” For some reason, whenever we even think about sharing the gospel we recoil in fear and our brains and voices lock up and we decide that evangelism is best left to those who have that spiritual gift - or at least to the pastor because he’s the trained, paid professional

Then we’re reminded of Matthew 28 where Jesus said that all of his followers are responsible for spreading his good news to the unsaved world around us in the daily course of our lives and we can’t help but feel at least a little guilty

As I have listened to a variety of fellow Christians talk about their reluctance to share the gospel, I have heard three basic reasons failing to live up to our commission:

- 1. I don’t know how** (to evangelize)
- 2. I am afraid** (of what people might think or how they might react, etc.)
- 3. I don’t want to**

When it comes to number three which is a matter of the will; I don’t know that I can offer much help because open rebellion in the life of a believer is a matter for the Holy Spirit to work out

The first and second reasons, however, I believe can be overcome by a proper understanding of just what evangelism is and how we can practice it in our daily lives

And I believe that the best example of how to do evangelism is found in the example of the Master himself because, without a doubt, Jesus is the greatest evangelist who has ever lived

So over the next several weeks we are going to be looking at how Jesus related to real-life people in real-life situations as he went about his ministry during his time on this earth

And as we examine his interactions we will gain insight as to how we should continue the mission that he began and now expects to be carried out by his body, the church

Jesus was sent by the Father into a messy world filled with the same kind of messy people we are surrounded by

So we are going to see Jesus interact with a variety of people – each with their own needs – and we will see Jesus act in ways that might sometimes surprise us

But we will also see that sharing the gospel isn’t a script to memorize or some rote formula that we have to follow to perfection or we’ll mess it all up

And as we strive to imitate Jesus we will instead begin to relate to people as the individuals they are and discover how best to love and serve them as we live out God’s Word before them

And so gain the opportunity to speak the truth of the gospel to them in a way that will have an impact on them

The first account that we are going to consider is probably a familiar one to most of you

It’s when Jesus met the woman of Samaria when she came to draw water found in John 4

If you were following along with our Scripture reading in your Bible it is already open to John 4 but if not, let me encourage you to join me there as we begin

If you are taking notes on the note sheet provided we will first look at **The Woman’s Problems**, then we will consider Jesus’ **Practices**, and then in Roman numeral three we will see **The Prescription for Us** that we see from Jesus’ example

From our Scripture reading we've seen that Jesus is traveling northward with his disciples through Samaria on his way from Judea to Galilee

The entourage comes to the town of Sychar and Jesus is understandably tired from the journey so he sits down to rest beside the well just outside of town

And looking ahead a bit we see in verse 8 that Jesus is there alone when the woman comes to the well to draw water because his disciples had continued on into town to buy food

This seemingly chance encounter between Jesus and this woman would not have appeared to be one that would have any chance of being consequential but, as we will see, first appearances can often be deceiving

But for most serious Jews, the woman who came to the well had significant problems that would have precluded any interaction with her whatsoever – **I want us to consider four of them**

## **I. The Woman's Problems**

### **A. She had a problem with her race**

First, she was of the **wrong race**

In the eyes of the Jews of Jesus' day, the Samaritans were considered to be the worst of the worst people on earth

To understand why this was so we need to look back many years to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC when the Assyrians overran the ten tribes of Israel in the northern kingdom and carried most of them away into captivity

Those who had been taken into captivity ultimately intermarried with the Assyrians while in Assyria

And it was the usual practice for invaders to move people onto an area when they took people into captivity in order to control the territory so any Jews who happened to escape deportation in time intermarried with the pagans that Assyria moved into the land

So long before Jesus' day the Samaritans were no longer purely Jewish and were considered as half-breeds who had defiled the lineage of the patriarchs making them universally despised as worse even than pure-blooded Gentiles

Consequently, no self-respecting Jew would ever desire to have contact with a Samaritan

But not only was there a problem with her race there was also a problem with **her religion**

### **B. She had a problem with her religion**

The Samaritans not only had mixed blood in their veins they also had mixed religious beliefs which would have presented a second significant barrier to any devout Jew

As a result of their captivity and intermarriage, the Samaritans practiced a blended faith that was a combination of worship of the true God and the pagan idolatry of the Assyrians

They only accepted the first five books of Moses as Scripture and they rejected the writings of the prophets along with all Jewish traditions

They built a temple to worship God on Mt Gerizim because they believed that was the place designated by Moses for temple worship

So, of course, the Jews regarded the Samaritans as religious heretics who worshipped in the wrong way and in the wrong place

### **C. She had a problem with her gender**

As if those two strikes weren't enough, the Samaritan woman also had a problem because of **her gender**

In the Judaism of Jesus' day, to say women were not highly regarded would be an understatement

Women couldn't be witnesses in court because they were considered to be irrational and unreliable

They couldn't own property or engage in commerce unless their circumstances were so dire that they were the breadwinners for their household

The home was considered to be the woman's natural place and women were rarely seen outside the home unless accompanied by a male and heavily veiled

No rabbi would have had a female disciple or even condescended to teach a woman about religious matters because women were considered to be incapable and unworthy of learning

But it gets even worse, by tradition a rabbi wouldn't even speak with a woman in public – not even with his own wife

There was even said to have been a prayer of the Pharisees where they gave thanks to God saying: "Thank you God that I am not a Gentile but a Jew; that I am not a slave, but am free; not a woman, but a man."

**So this poor gal had three strikes against her that were outside of her control** – her race, the religion of her people, and her gender

But this particular Samaritan woman had another problem – she had a problem with **her sin**

#### **D. She had a problem with her sin**

The woman who came to the well was a flagrant sinner and her sin was known to everyone

Her sin is revealed to us in verses 16-18 [**John 4:16-18**] when Jesus tells her to go and bring her husband to meet with him and then reveals the fact that he knows she has had five husbands and is currently living with a man without the benefit of marriage

In Jesus' day divorce was a relatively easy process for a man

If a man found a woman more to his liking or if his wife displeased him in some way he could readily obtain a divorce

And in the case of divorce the sentiment was that the woman was always the one at fault

So a woman who had been found unfavorable and divorced five times as this woman had would have been despised by everyone and a man would not need to marry her in order to have her

She would have been a disposable creature who could be passed from man to man as each man tired of her

The other women would have seen such a woman as a complete failure and even as a threat to their own marriages

This meant that she was not only despised by the Jews but also by her own people which may explain why she was at the well alone at an unusual time of day

Most women would go for water in the cool of the morning or evening and they used the opportunity to gather together for some very valuable social interaction

But here we see this woman come to the well alone and in the heat of the day when she was unlikely to have to endure the scorn of the community

**She was the ultimate outsider and it's hard to imagine how her status could have been any lower**

But none of that mattered to Jesus as we are going to see next as we consider **three specific things** Jesus did in this encounter

## II. Jesus' Practices

### A. Jesus went to where she was

First, we see that **Jesus went to where this woman was** – he put himself in the place where they could meet

In verse 4 [John 4:4] we read that Jesus *“had to pass through Samaria”*

If we were to look at a map of the area (as we will do here in just a few moments) we would naturally see the sense of that statement because Samaria lay directly between Jerusalem in the south and Galilee in the north

But that statement doesn't mean what we might initially think it means

The road Jesus was on was the shortest route from Jerusalem to Galilee but it wasn't the only route

In fact, it wasn't even the preferred route for any pious Jew and it was usually avoided unless the traveler was in a hurry

There were actually three established north-south routes that Jesus could have taken [map.jpg]

There was a route that lay to the west and followed the coast of the Mediterranean Sea which was considerably longer but it had the advantage of skirting most of the major cities and towns of Samaria

And there was a road that ran through the region east of the Jordan River which was just a little longer and the preferred route for a devout Jew because it completely avoided any potential contact with Samaritans

Typically, only those who were in a terrible hurry or less strict in their devotion to God went on the route directly through Samaria which Jesus and his disciples were travelling on

The Jews felt so strongly about avoiding contact with a Samaritan that there was actually a saying among them that if they met a Samaritan on the road they would rather walk in the ditch to avoid even allowing their shadows to make contact just to be sure to prevent being made morally and religiously unclean

No one would reasonably question Jesus' devotion to God and we ascertain that he wasn't in any particular hurry because as we see in verse 40 [John 4:40] that Jesus stayed in the Samaritan village for two days after his encounter with the woman at the well

So, it seems clear that when our text says that Jesus had to pass through Samaria we can understand that to mean that this wasn't because it was the only way to travel but because there were people in Sychar who needed to hear him

Jesus was serious about being about his Father's business and he didn't go anywhere or do anything by chance

We see his life recorded as a series of divine appointments and he knew that he needed to be at that particular well outside that Samaritan city so that he could meet with that sinful woman who needed to hear the gospel

Jesus is called the friend of sinners in **Matthew 11:19** because he didn't avoid sinners – he went where they were and he befriended them

### B. Jesus broke the rules

And in doing so we see the second of Jesus' practices; **he broke the rules**

Look with me at verse 7 [John 4:7] where we see Jesus ask the woman to give him water to drink

That looks like a rather harmless and simple request to us but in making it Jesus broke the social and religious rules of Jewish culture because Jews were barred by law from eating or drinking from containers used by Samaritans

Normally, a Jew would travel with a container that had been ritually purified according to Jewish law but Jesus didn't have something of his own to use and he knew if he were to have a drink it would have to be from her container

And John records the astonished reaction of the woman because no man has ever spoken to her as a social equal and certainly no Jew has ever asked for anything from her hand

Even the disciples were surprised to see Jesus speaking with her when they returned showing just how little they really knew him at that point

But her problems weren't a barrier to Jesus and he gave this woman, who polite society said was beyond even civility let alone redemption, the opportunity to serve him and meet his need

And in his conversation with her Jesus treated her as a rational and thoughtful person – he even entered into a theological discussion with her

I think we can safely assume that John's record of the conversation only hits the high points and that the conversation was actually longer and more in-depth than what we see in the pages of the Bible

But in John's account we see that they talked about Jacob and the handing down of the well; the proper place for worshipping God; the nature of worship itself and what constituted true worship; the fact that salvation would be from the Jews; living water that leads to eternal life; and the coming of the Messiah

And even though her knowledge was limited and her theology flawed; Jesus didn't blow her off as unworthy but continued to converse with her

### **C. Jesus was gracious**

And in this we see the third of Jesus' practices – he was gracious toward the woman

Not only did Jesus talk to her and allow her to serve him, he also treated her with complete respect

He engaged with her and gave her dignity and worth in spite of her race, in spite of her gender, in spite of her bad theology, and in spite of her sin

As a matter of fact, he even treated her gently *about* her sin which gave him credibility with her

There is no doubt that her sin was serious and as we've seen it had to have weighed heavily on her because it affected every aspect of her life and made her an outcast even among her own people

But Jesus didn't beat her up about her past or present life of sin

I think it's a shame that we can't hear Jesus' tone of voice in the words we see written in our Bible because I believe we would hear compassion and not condemnation when he relates his knowledge of the woman's sins

And it was this part of their conversation that convinced her that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah – she says she can see he is a prophet

And she refers to this part of their conversation when she excitedly tells her fellow villagers about him

Look with me at verse 29 [John 4:29] – *“Come see a man who told me all I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”*

I doubt she would have been so open and accepting of what Jesus revealed that he knew if he had also beat her up about it

Then Jesus did one final thing in his conversation with her – **he put her to work in service of the kingdom**

First, Jesus told her to go and fetch her husband which she cannot do but in the end she carried the good news to her neighbors and brings them to the well to meet Jesus

And what a successful evangelist she proved to be as we read in verses 39-42 [John 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.”*

**Jesus' wanted these Samaritans to come to salvation and everything he did was aimed at that outcome**

So, what can we learn from this account that we can put into practice concerning our evangelistic efforts?

Let's look quickly at three things we can take away from this account that form a kind of prescription for us

### **III. The Prescription for Us**

#### **A. We must lead lives of intention**

First of all we must live lives of intention

If we want to be faithful to the commission we have been given to make disciples which begins with seeing people come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ we have to actively take steps to make that happen

Jesus was a most focused individual and everything he did was aimed at doing the Father's will

Compared to him, most of us lead lives that are rather diffused in their focus and haphazard in their execution

We need to change that tendency and determine to seek out opportunities to interact with unsaved individuals and then to make the most of every opportunity for outreach that presents itself

The apostle Paul in writing to the believers at Colossae told them to be intentional about their outreach by commanding them to, *"Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time."*

And in the example of Jesus we see that we should even endeavor to put ourselves in the way of opportunity so that it finds us

We can't just sit back and hope that people who need the Lord will somehow find us – we have to go to where they are

Jesus could have gone from Jerusalem to Galilee by a different route but he chose to put himself in the precise spot where he would meet this sinful Samaritan woman so that he might see her saved along with many in her village

We don't know how long it will be before the Lord returns which means we don't know how long we have to complete our work at presenting the gospel to our friends, neighbors, co-workers, loved ones, and even those who we might not normally associate with

That's why Paul told the Ephesians to live purposefully and with intention in **Ephesians 5:15-16** where he wrote: *"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil."*

If we want to evangelize the way Jesus did we must lead lives with the intention of meeting people where they live and work and play and seek opportunities to share the love of God with them

#### **B. We must tear down barriers**

We must also make every effort to tear down barriers between us and the souls around us

Jesus was faced with strong cultural and religious barriers that should have precluded his speaking with any Samaritan let alone a flagrantly sinful Samaritan woman and yet he did just that

We need to be honest about the barriers that we as individuals or our church culture have erected that keep us from those around us

**We often say that we are to be in the world but not of the world and that is certainly a true sentiment**

But, sadly, our fear of being of the world often keeps us away from the very people who need to hear about the Lord

We know very well that God prohibits us from adding to his commands and we shake our heads at the Pharisees of Jesus' day for building a hedge around the law so that they would never even come close to violating it

But we are prone to do the same thing

In our desire for moral purity for ourselves and, perhaps especially for our children, we devise "Christian" rules about living that cause us to remain at a safe distance from non-Christians

And I can't say that the desire for moral purity and being on guard against corruption is anything but proper

**However, there is a better way to go about achieving it than isolating ourselves from those God wants us to reach**

In John 17 we have what is known as the High Priestly Prayer where Jesus spoke to the Father shortly before his arrest and crucifixion

Let me encourage you to turn to John 17 and follow along as I read verses 14-23 [John 17:14-23]

*"I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth."*

*"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."*

Just think, Jesus is praying right now for each of us individually and collectively as we commit to follow him away from our own devised protections into the world while trusting in his divine protection

However, it's still our responsibility to put on the full armor of God that we find in Ephesians 6, to remain in God's Word and to be among God's people because those are provided to us for our protection

But we cannot expect to be able to reach the lost if we remain insulated in our "holy huddle" safely cocooned from the influences of the world

The church is a locker room where we strategize, train, and receive healing and encouragement but we must take the field if we want to engage the enemy and win people for Christ

### **C. We must treat people properly**

That brings us to our third and final prescription if we want to evangelize like Jesus

We must treat people properly

How do you think the Samaritan woman would be treated by many churches today?

Do you think she would be welcomed as she is or would she be sent away to get herself straightened out before being allowed in?

Sin is offensive to God and therefore we know it should be offensive to us and we might ask how we could possibly be expected to be gracious and gentle with people who are openly engaging in sinful behavior

Remember, though, that Jesus was fully aware of the train-wreck of a life the woman at the well was living

He knew of her sin and the offensiveness of it even better than she herself did

But he didn't heap scorn or contempt on her or even hint at his personal disapproval of her sin-filled life

He opened his arms wide to her without shrinking back and welcomed her in spite of her sin knowing that he knew the cure for her sin

And because Jesus was perfect her sin was a greater offense to him than it ever could be to us as fellow sinners alongside her

If there is anywhere a sinner can go where they should be able to expect compassion and understanding it's in the company of God's people

Unfortunately but not altogether undeservedly, Christians have the reputation of being "holier than thou" scolds who rail against other people's sins when we should know better

This is one area where we could learn a great deal from the example of others

You've undoubtedly seen an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting portrayed on TV even if you've never been to one personally and how at the start of a meeting everyone introduces themselves by giving their name and admitting to their alcoholism showing that everyone in the room is on a level playing field and no one is better than any other

The church should be more like an A. A. meeting where we know we are all in the same boat and welcome everyone into our midst to find the truth that brings healing even if they sin differently than we do

We need to face the fact that we aren't perfect people who never sin and we only know the true burden of sin because its awfulness has been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit's work in our lives

But we also know that a person can be relieved of their burden of sin and we should be eager to show everyone how that can be accomplished – in love and with complete respect

People need to know that they can be in our company and while we may need to show them the reality of their sin we will do so gently and without making them feel condemned and rejected by us as we show them that they too can be forgiven and accepted by God

And then when they do accept Christ we need to follow Jesus' lead and put them to work reaching others

Jesus didn't wait for the woman to get herself all straightened out – he sent her to get her husband and then allowed her to proclaim the gospel to her community – immediately

And many more in her village came to a saving knowledge of Jesus because of her testimony

And we see this “domino effect” repeatedly in the New Testament where many are saved straight-away as the result of the testimony of someone they know having been saved

## **Conclusion**

If we want to evangelize like Jesus we must look to how Jesus did evangelism

And today we've seen how he lived his life with the intention of doing the Father's work and how he deliberately and with forethought put himself where he had the opportunity to talk with people who needed salvation

Then we saw that he shunned the conventions and rules of his day as he interacted with those who needed him without fear

And how he treated even the most unlikely of people with respect and grace and gentleness in his interactions with her

As a result the woman at the well and many of her fellow villagers were saved

The first step of successful evangelism as Jesus did it is being available to the right people at the right time in the right place and then treating them in the right way so that they might see the love of God that is available to them

The woman Jesus met at the well was still a Samaritan; she continued to be a woman; her doctrine was still no doubt flawed in many ways; and she still had the matter of her sin to deal with

She was not what some might call “Christian material” and yet she was different in the only way that really matters as a result of Jesus making the effort to be there and his willingness to break the rules to witness to her

Dealing with people who have not yet met and accepted Jesus is going to be messy and it may make us uncomfortable

We are going to be in situations where people don't dress modestly, where people use language that might make us blush, and we are going to be where people are engaged in unwholesome activities

But, if we want to evangelize the way Jesus did; we must endeavor to make this the pattern of our lives and intentionally go to and be among those who need to hear the gospel without judgment and condemnation; armed with the power of the gospel in order to lead our fellow sinners to find the cure for their sin and the path to eternal life

Let's pray