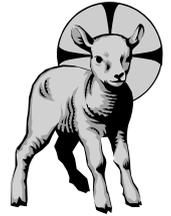




# Enjoying God: Life in All its Fullness

(passages from John's Gospel)

Summer 2017



## John 4:1-26 Refreshment

(sermons: May 28)

### Introduction

The **Samaritan woman** whom Jesus meets in chapter 4 could hardly be more different from **Nicodemus** in chapter 3 (Samaritan/Jew; ordinary/upper class; woman/man; immoral/respectable) yet Jesus spends time with both of them, shows insight into their personal circumstances, and has a message that connects with their own way of thinking and their individual needs.

**Samaria** was an area about 20 miles across which started 20 miles north of Jerusalem. When Israel was divided after Solomon's reign, it was the centre of the **northern kingdom** (which broke away from the southern kingdom of Judah). When the Assyrians defeated the northern kingdom in 721BC, they deported important people and brought in foreigners to replace them. The Jews of the southern kingdom (around Jerusalem) were eventually deported by the Babylonians in 587BC but they managed to preserve their identity in exile. When they returned to Jerusalem from 538BC onwards, **the Jews despised the Samaritans** as the **mixed-race descendants of rebels and foreigners**, who had corrupted their religion. In fact the Samaritans had initially kept to the Law (first 5 books of Old Testament), although they had set up (they would say re-founded) an alternative religious centre to Jerusalem on **Mt Gerizim** (as decreed in Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:12). They built a temple on Mt Gerizim in 400BC but, when the Greeks conquered the Samaritans, it was rededicated to Zeus; during the Jews' successful (though short-lived) rebellion against the Greek rulers of Syria, they destroyed the Samaritans' Gerizim temple in 128BC. The Samaritans did not accept the authority of the History and Prophets of the Old Testament, which traced God's purposes through the southern kingdom of Judah. However, they did expect a Messiah ('Taleb' was the Samaritan title for their awaited teacher and restorer). There are still a few hundred traditional Samaritans near Nablus, the nearest modern town to the sites of Shechem / Sychar; they still perform religious ceremonies (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles) on Mt Gerizim (now Jebel-et-Tor).

### John 4:1-26 Jesus' Encounter with the Samaritan Woman

- v.3 When the Lord learned of this – at this stage, Jesus avoids confrontation with the Pharisees, which his growing popularity might provoke.
- v.4 he had to go through Samaria – the direct route from Judaea to Galilee went north through Samaria; in order to keep to mainly Jewish territory, you could go east across the River Jordan, then go north through a drier landscape, before re-crossing the Jordan. Some Jews preferred this longer route.
- v.5 Sychar seems to be the same place as Shechem, or nearby. Joseph's burial place was here on land bought by Jacob/Israel (Genesis 33:18-19; Joshua 24:32). The site of Jacob's Well (v.6) is half a mile away.
- v.6 sixth hour – mid-day. Women would usually go in groups to draw water in the cooler morning or evening. Perhaps this shows that this Samaritan woman was a social outcast, although this point can be over-emphasized, as her neighbours listened to what she told them later on.
- v.8 into the town to buy food – Jesus' disciples were prepared to buy food from Samaritans, which some very strict Jews would not have done.

- v.9 *do not associate with – or do not share the same water-vessel (see NIV margin)*
- v.10 *living water – literally ‘running water’, even better than water from a well. Also means water that purifies, washes away sin. See Jeremiah 2:13 (symbol of pure religion); Zechariah 14:8 (sign of God's coming to his people); Isaiah 55:1-3 (God's gift).*
- v.15 *The woman's response is literal, perhaps flippant; but Jesus sees through to her deeper need.*
- v.18 *five husbands – previous husbands could have died but divorce (by the husband, in those days) is more likely*
- v.25 *he will explain – Samaritans expected a new Teacher/Restorer rather than a military leader*

1. What does Jesus mean by his offer of ‘living water’ (vv 10, 13-14)? In what ways are we ‘thirsty’? Is Jesus referring to grace? forgiveness? the transforming power of the Holy Spirit? something else? In what ways does Jesus offer *lasting* satisfaction, rather than the temporary satisfaction available from other sources? Where else do we, or others, look for satisfaction and meaning today?
2. This passage shows both Jesus' humanity (v.6 *tired*, v.7 *thirsty*) and his divinity (v.16-18 *his knowledge of the woman – or is this revealed to him by the Father?*). How do we hold both these aspects of Jesus' Nature together? Do we present a balanced picture of Jesus to others?
3. How did the Samaritan woman try to change the subject when Jesus touched on a painful area of her life? (*see verses 19*)  
Do we find that people do this when we are speaking to them?  
How can we distinguish between a question that is troubling people, or making it hard for them to believe, and a question that is a distraction? How do we deal with questions like those?
4. What does it mean to worship God ‘*in spirit and truth*’ (v.24)? What is the opposite of worshipping ‘*in spirit and truth*’?  
What are our modern equivalents of arguing about which mountain we should worship on?
5. Jesus gave as much attention to this Samaritan woman as to Nicodemus. What does this show about Jesus' attitudes to popular prejudices and preferences?  
Do we show partiality in the people we spend time with and try to contact for Christ, or are we just making best use of the contacts we have on our own ‘front-lines’?
6. Is this encounter a pattern for personal evangelism? (*starting where people are, being prepared to ask for help ourselves, posing intriguing questions, avoiding side-issues without squashing genuine questions; seeing beneath the surface to deeper needs and relating our message to them....* )
7. Later in chapter 4 we see how the Samaritan woman told her neighbours about Jesus.  
What was it about Jesus that impressed the Samaritan woman? (vv 28-29) Why do you think she was so effective in her testimony? (v.39) What can we learn from her?  
And how can we encourage people to have a first-hand faith for themselves? (vv 41-42)
8. Give an opportunity for members of the group *who wish to do so* to share:
  - where they feel in need of spiritual refreshment
  - ways in which they find, or have found, spiritual refreshment at times
 How can the group, or the church, be a place of refreshment?  
Pray for each other, for those we know who are spiritually dry or exhausted, and for opportunities to point others towards the refreshment that Jesus offers.