

Main Idea: We see a series of five shocking actions taken by Jesus in John 4:1-14, and they provide us with important insight into the heart of our Savior for a lost world.

- I. Jesus left the crowds in Judea (1-3).
 - A. He didn't measure success like we often do.
 - B. He was on a mission to save sinners, not recruit them.
- II. Jesus went through Samaria (4).
 - A. He had a divine appointment to keep.
 - B. He had a lesson to teach.
 1. If we're going to be like our Savior, we must go after the lost.
 2. If we're going to reach the lost, we must cross barriers.
- III. Jesus became tired and thirsty (5-6).
 - A. Because He is God, He can turn water into wine.
 - B. Because He became a man, He can relate to us.
- IV. Jesus asked a Samaritan woman for water (7-9).
 - A. He initiated the contact.
 - B. He violated social expectations.
- V. Jesus claimed to be the source of living water (10-14).
 - A. Like this woman, we enter the world with a problem.
 1. We are ignorant of God and His gift.
 2. We tend to think that physical needs matter most.
 3. We use religion to justify ourselves.
 - B. Like this woman, we need what Jesus alone has to offer.
 1. He satisfies the thirsty soul.
 2. He promises eternal life.

Make It Personal: Ask yourself some important questions...

1. Have you taken a drink?
2. Are you sharing the water?
3. Are you prepared to go to Samaria?

“Would you like a copy of the Koran?”

I was on a flight from Goroka to Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea when Ahmed asked me that question. It was November 2001, and I was beginning my trek back home after eleven days ministering in the jungle with our missionaries, Bob and Shirley Litteral.

Ahmed, I learned on the plane that day, worked for PNG's department of education. We had enjoyed a brief but meaningful conversation getting to know each other, when Ahmed invited me to come to his home in the capital city. “I'll give you a Koran and you can see where I live,” he said with a smile.

“Why not?” I thought to myself. “I've got six hours before the next leg of my flight. Plenty of time. True, it's just two months after 9-11. And true, I'm traveling alone and no one will have any idea where to find me if something goes wrong. So why not get in the car with a total stranger, a Muslim man to be precise, and go to his house to receive a gift copy of the Koran?”

Maybe not the wisest decision I ever made, looking back, but I sensed the Lord was in it and He protected me. I met Ahmed's family that day. They shared their food with me (it was Ramadan, so I ate alone), their pictures, their stories, and their holy book.

Inside the front cover Ahmed wrote:

“Presented from Ahmed Saudie & Family to Pastor Brad & His Family, with compliments. I hope you will find some thoughts and ideas about the Islamic religion. Regards, Ahmed Saudie.”

I learned something that day. I learned that the world is a whole lot smaller than I used to think. With that in mind, let me ask you something. Our Bible says, “For God so loved the *world* that He gave His only begotten Son.” Does “world” mean *world*? Then

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

it says, “That *whoever* believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” Does “whoever” mean *whoever*?

The reality is, we tend to see the world narrowly, and we tend to narrow the scope of God’s love to people like us. As a small example, take a look at the artwork that portrays Jesus around the world. In the far east He looks Asian. In Africa He’s black. In Europe and America He’s fair-skinned.

When we hear Jesus say, “For God so loved the *world*,” we’re prone to think, “Yes, the world where I live, the world where people are *like me*.”

And to the degree that’s true, we’re like the Jewish man named Nicodemus who first heard Jesus’ John 3:16 announcement. But the fact is, “world” means *world*. And lest we miss the point, the gospel writer includes a story in the very next chapter that cuts away the blinders that keep us from seeing the world as God sees it.

As we begin, let’s go to the end of the story and look at John 4:40-41, “So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.”

Who became believers? Samaritans did. Incredible. That’s sort of like saying, in today’s terms, “Jesus got on a plane and went to Mecca, and the whole city believed in Him.”

Yet not only did the Samaritans believe, but they made an amazing announcement in verse 42, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is *the Savior of the world*.”

Did you catch that? The Savior of the *world*? That’s the very purpose for which John wrote this gospel, isn’t it? To persuade men, women, boys, and girls to “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, have life in his name (John 20:31).”

John the Baptist believed and declared back in John 1:29, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” But John was a Jew. You might expect it from him. But *Samaritans*? Samaritans are proclaiming that Jesus is the Savior of the world? How did *that* happen?

We find the answer in the story that’s recorded in the first part of chapter four. Friends, I must confess that the story we’re about to read and ponder is one of my favorites in the Bible. It’s an amazing account, one that reveals so much to us about Jesus, about His heart and mission, about who He is willing to save, and how He does it.

It’s also a story filled with surprises. *Shockers* might be a better word. It’s the kind of story that causes you to sit up and say again and again, “He did *what*...with *whom*?” Sort of like, he got in a *car*...with a *Muslim*? But that’s nothing compared to *what* Jesus did in John 4, and with *whom*.

As we begin to investigate John 4 today, we’re going to see a series of five shocking actions taken by Jesus in verses 1-14, actions that provide us with important insight into the heart of our Savior for a lost world.

I. Jesus left the crowds in Judea (1-3).

Listen to verses 1-3, “The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.”

It’s still early in Jesus’ public ministry and the cross is a couple of years away.¹ Back in chapter two we learn that Jesus had been in Galilee. That was late February or early March of His first year of ministry. Then He traveled south to Jerusalem for Passover,

¹ William Hendriksen provides a helpful timeline.

and then spent some time in the capital (cleansing the temple, meeting Nicodemus, etc). Now He decides to head back up north to Galilee.

We need a little geography lesson to appreciate what we're about to see. The country of Israel is about 120 miles long from north to south (for perspective, think of from here in Wheelersburg to just north of Columbus). In the first century the country was divided into thirds. In the north was Galilee, in the south Judea, and in between was Samaria.

Our text indicates that the Pharisees heard that Jesus' popularity was growing. Remember, Nicodemus was a Pharisee. When Jesus learned that the Pharisees had Him on their radar, He decided to change locations.

Now that's a shocker. Why the change? He's got a good thing going down south. Good crowds. Popularity increasing. The movers and shakers taking note of Him. That's not the time to leave a ministry, is it? Know this about Jesus, my friend...

A. He didn't measure success like we often do. He wasn't in to getting a crowd. To the contrary...

B. He was on a mission to save sinners, not recruit them. What's more, He knew it wasn't time yet to ruffle the Pharisee's feathers. That will come soon enough, but not yet. And so He led His little flock of disciples northward to Galilee.

Shocker number one—He left the crowds. Here's the second shocker...

II. Jesus went through Samaria (4).

Verse 4 states, "Now he had to go through Samaria." In terms of traveling options, Jesus had basically three choices for His return trip to Galilee. He could take a road along the seacoast in the west. Or He could take another road that went through Perea in the east. Or He could walk straight north right through Samaria.

Barclay points out that the quickest route by far was the one through Samaria—the trip took three days. It took twice as long to take the route that avoided Samaria because you had to go east and cross the Jordan River, the head north, and then head west again once you passed Samaria.

Our text says that Jesus *had to go through Samaria*. Why? Some scholars say it's because Jesus was in a hurry to get out of Judea and reach Galilee, so He *had to go through Samaria to save time*. I'm convinced there's something else going on here, namely...

A. He had a divine appointment to keep. Throughout his gospel account, John points out that Jesus operated on a heaven-sent schedule (see the word "must" in 3:14, "The Son of man *must* be lifted up;" in 9:4, "*we must* do the word of Him who sent me;" in 10:16, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I *must* bring them also;" and in 12:34, "The Son of Man *must* be lifted up.").

That's what's happening here. In the language of the KJV, "He *must* needs go through Samaria."

You say, "Okay, so Jesus had a divine appointment to keep in Samaria. What's so shocking about that?" It's this. In Jesus' day the Jews and the Samaritans hated each other with animosity that went back centuries.

Back in 722 BC, the Assyrians invaded and conquered the northern tribes of Israel. They proceeded to deport most of the surviving Jews to other countries and brought in non-Jews from other conquered lands to settle in Israel (check out 2 Kings 17). The residents began to inter-marry and the resulting people group was the Samaritans. Jewish half-breeds.

For the orthodox Jew, even to this day, this is the unforgivable crime, to mix pure Jewish blood with Gentile blood in marriage. If a Jewish son or daughter chooses to marry a Gentile, the family conducts a funeral service.

Then in Nehemiah's day, 450 years before Christ, the Jews declined the offer of the Samaritan ancestors to help rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. Then a renegade Jew named Manasseh married a daughter of the Samaritan Sanballat (see Neh. 13:28), and as Barclay points out, proceeded to establish a rival temple on Mount Gerizim in the heart of Samaritan territory. John Hyrcanus, a Jewish general, added fuel to the fire in 129 BC when he attacked Samaria and destroyed the Samaritans' temple.

The bad blood went both ways. The Samaritans refused to worship in Jerusalem. They had their own Bible, too, known as the Samaritan Pentateuch (which had only the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures and cut out the Psalms and the Prophets).

The point is, we're talking about resentment and hatred and prejudice that's been spewing for over four hundred years. And yet Jesus, a Jew, *had to go through Samaria*, for as we'll see in a moment, there's a lost person there who not only desperately needs Him, but who is the object of His unmerited love.

Which brings us to another reason for this trip, namely...

B. He had a lesson to teach. "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you," Jesus later told His disciples in John 13:15. That's what Jesus did with His disciples wherever He took them, taught them by example. And that's certainly what happened the day He headed north into Samaria. And this example is for us, too, if we belong to Him. The fact is...

1. *If we're going to be like our Savior, we must go after the lost.* Not wait for them to come to us, but go to them. Go next door. Go to the next town. Go to the next people group. Go to the next country. Which means...

2. *If we're going to reach the lost, we must cross barriers.* What kind of barriers? We'll see in a moment. A third shocker...

III. Jesus became tired and thirsty (5-6).

That's what we're told in verses 5-6, "So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour."

According to Barclay, just before Sychar, the first century road to Samaria forked. One branch headed northeast to Scythopolis, while the other went west to Nablus and then north to Engannim. It's right there at this fork in the road that to this day there stands a well. It's that well that we see in our story, a 100 feet deep well known as Jacob's well.²

John says it was about "the sixth hour," that is, the sixth hour after sunrise, which means it was about noon when Jesus arrived at the well. Verse 6 says He was *tired*. In addition, verse 7 indicates He was *thirsty*.

Now that's a shocker. Tired and thirsty. The Son of God is tired and thirsty? We saw back in chapter two that...

A. Because He is God, He can turn water into wine. That's what we expect to see out of the Messiah, *miracles*. But tired and thirsty and *no miracles*? What's going on here? The fact is, Jesus is fully God, but He is also fully man. And...

B. Because He became a man, He can relate to us. The Word became *flesh*. He experienced what you and I experience. Hunger, thirst, weary bones, aching muscles, not to mention the excruciating pain of torture and crucifixion.

Why would the Living God subject Himself to such fleshly experiences? The book of Hebrews tells us. "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their

² William Barclay, p. 147.

humanity (2:14).” “For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people (2:17).” And Hebrews 2:18 declares, “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”

Are you hurting today, my friend? Turn to the Savior. He can relate.

IV. Jesus asked a Samaritan woman for water (7-9).

Verse 7 says, “When a Samaritan woman came to draw water.” Stop there and chew on that for a moment. It’s a good half mile from where this woman lived in Sychar to this well, and there was water in Sychar. So why did she bypass a closer source of water and walk all the way to this well to fill her jar?

And furthermore, why at noon? Why travel to get water at the hottest time of the day when typically the women went for water during the cooler morning or evening hours?

Apparently, that’s the reason. She’s choosing the place and time best suited to avoid the scorn of the women of the village where she lived.³ This woman is an *outcast*.

Yet notice what Jesus did when He saw her. Verse 7 reveals, “Jesus said to her.” That’s a shocker. Please notice that Jesus didn’t treat this woman as an outcast. Meaningful contact took place, and...

A. He initiated the contact. He talked to her. And what did He say to her? He asked her at the end of verse 7, “Will you give me a drink?” Another shocker...

B. He violated social expectations. Good Jewish men didn’t do what Jesus is doing here. For starters, she’s a Samaritan. Let me remind you that when the critics wanted to insult Jesus, the worst slur they could come up with was to call Him “a Samaritan” (John 8:48). He’s talking with a *Samaritan*.

What’s more, she’s a Samaritan *woman*. No orthodox rabbi would ever greet a woman in public. In fact, there were actually Pharisees called “the bruised and bleeding Pharisees” because they shut their eyes when they saw a woman on the street and consequently walked into walls and buildings!⁴

Verse 8 adds the parenthetical note, “His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.” And verse 27 states that when they returned they “were surprised to find him talking with a woman.”

And she’s not just a Samaritan woman. She’s a Samaritan woman with a *bad reputation*. As we’ll see later in the account, she’s been through five blown marriages and is currently living in fornication with a man who’s not her husband.

I must emphasize that Jesus isn’t doing anything here that violated the law of God. He always did what the Scriptures commanded. But when it came to standards set by men, He felt no compulsion to keep the party line.

Even the woman herself picked up on Jesus’ breach of the social norm. Notice verse 9, “The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?’ (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)”

The Jews wouldn’t use the Samaritans’ dishes. They believed it would make them unclean. But Jesus isn’t intimidated by such thoughts. He is the holy Son of God and He is not defiled by coming into contact with a Samaritan woman nor her water pot. To the contrary, whatever He touches becomes clean. That’s true for a dead body, as in Luke

³ Barclay asks, “May it be that she was so much of a moral outcast that the women even drove her away from the village well and she had to come here to draw water?” Barclay, p. 148.

⁴ Barclay, p. 151.

7:12-15, and a leper, as in Matthew 8:2-3. It's also true for you and me. When Jesus touches a sinner, the sinner doesn't make Him unclean. He makes the sinner clean.

Step back from this text and look at the context. There's a stunning contrast between John 3 and John 4. In John 3 Jesus ministered to a man, while in John 4 it's a woman. The man in John 3 is a Jew, while the woman in John 4 is a Samaritan. The Jew in John 3 is a religious leader who recognizes that Jesus is a teacher come from God, while the Samaritan in John 4 is a woman of ill repute who hasn't the foggiest notion who Jesus is. The former has high morals and is an upstanding citizen, while the latter is a moral shipwreck and an embarrassment to her society.

Yet Jesus reached out and offered Himself to both. He spent time with the up and outer, the religious sinner who thought his good deeds made him right with God. And He spent time with the down and outer, the loose living sinner who wondered if she could ever be right with God.

It doesn't matter who you are or what you have done, good or bad. You need Jesus, my friend, and Jesus offers Himself to you. May I remind you that He hung between two thieves on the cross and announced to the one who believed in Him, "Today you will be with me in paradise."?

Here comes perhaps the biggest shocker of them all...

V. Jesus claimed to be the source of living water (10-14).

Listen to verse 10, "Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'"

How's that for turning a conversation to spiritual matters? Jesus doesn't answer her question, but redirects it so as to teach her about Himself and her need for Him.

Barclay points out that we see here the same pattern we saw in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. First, Jesus makes a statement, but His statement is taken wrongly. So Jesus next makes the statement in an even stronger way, but once again it's misunderstood. So then Jesus compels the person to face the painful truth about himself/herself.⁵

There's much we can learn from watching the process Jesus went through to reach this woman. As William Hendriksen observes, "In the process of winning the soul of this woman Jesus appeals to her *sympathy* ('Give me a drink'), to her *curiosity* ('if thou knewest'), to her desire for *ultimate rest and satisfaction* ('whoever drinks the water I shall give him will in no way be thirsty forever again') and to her *conscience* ('Go, call your husband'). He addresses himself to every phase of her personality in order that the goal may be reached."⁶

If you knew the gift of God. But she didn't. That was her problem. She didn't know about the gift God gave the world.

And she didn't know *who it is that asks you for a drink.* She didn't know the truth about the person in front of her. If so...

You would have asked him and he would have given you living water. I'm not sure about the Samaritans, but first century Jews used the phrase "living water." To them "living water" referred to water that flowed in a river or stream as opposed to water that sat in a pond or cistern. And for ritual purification purposes, the Jews preferred "living water," water that flowed. Don't miss that picture. They used "living water" to wash away defilement so an unclean person could worship God acceptably.

⁵ Barclay, p. 152.

⁶ William Hendriksen, p. 158.

That was Jesus' offer. *I can wash away your sins so you don't have to live in shame any longer.*

It's worth noting that in the Old Testament the Lord is called "the fountain of living waters" in Jeremiah 2:13 & 17:13. Isaiah offers this invitation in Isaiah 55:1, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters." And in Ezekiel 36:25-27, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

I could do that for you, woman, if would ask me.

But she didn't get it, of course. Notice verses 11-12, "'Sir,' the woman said, 'you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?'"

The fact of the matter is, we've got something in common with this woman.

A. Like this woman, we enter the world with a problem.

1. *We are ignorant of God and His gift.*
2. *We tend to think that physical needs matter most.*
3. *We use religion to justify ourselves.* Did you notice how the woman defends her religion to Jesus? *Our father, Jacob*, she says (implying, he doesn't just belong to you, Jews). And, *who gave US the well* (implying, not you). She may be living in adultery, but she's ready to defend her religious system.

Don't miss this. Lost people are often religious, even those living in blatant sin. They say they believe in God and like to talk religion. In fact, they'll even argue religion with you and miss the point of it all.

I've tried to talk with lost people about Jesus only to hear them say things like, "Do you use that contemporary music at your church?" Or, "Do you use the KJV?" Or, "Do you let men wear jeans in God's House?" That's how blind we are, beloved, unless God graciously opens our eyes. We are lost and heading to hell, but we don't want to talk about that. We'd rather argue religious technicalities. The truth is this...

B. Like this woman, we need what Jesus alone has to offer. Listen to verse 13, "Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again.'" Ponder that for a moment. There's why giving a cup of water to a thirsty person is good, but not enough. Humanitarian ministry must address man's need for a Savior or it's not truly humanitarian. Yes, give the cup of water, but give them something else, too, or they'll just be thirsty again.

What do they need? Verse 14—"But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Jesus made two astounding claims. Did you catch them? First, He says that...

1. *He satisfies the thirsty soul.* If we drink what He offers, we will never thirst again. G. Campbell Morgan pointed out that mankind needs air, water, and food in order to experience life. Jesus Christ provides all of these. He is the *breath* (Spirit) of God (John 3:8; 20:22). He is the Bread of Life (John 6:48). Here we learn that He gives us the water of life.⁷ And then a second claim...

2. *He promises eternal life.* There's a progression here. Notice the verbs. First you *drink* the water Jesus offers. Then the water *becomes a spring*. And then the spring *wells up to eternal life*. It's worth noting that the phrase "welling up" is the word

⁷ Observation in Wiersbe, p. 300.

translated “leaping” in Acts 3:8, referring to a healed lame man who was leaping on his feet.

Leon Morris offers this helpful insight, “The life that Jesus gives is no tame and stagnant thing. It is much more than merely the entrance into a new state, that of being saved instead of lost. It is the abundant life.”⁸ Or, as Jesus later put it in John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

Sir, give me that water, said the woman. To which Jesus replied with another shocker, *Go, call your husband and come back*. Why did He say that? After all, here’s a woman who’s ready to “pray the prayer.” She wants what He has come to give, living water. Yet He wants to talk to her about her husband. Why? We’ll find out, as the Lord allows, next week.

Make It Personal: Ask yourself some important questions...

1. *Have you taken a drink?* He’s talking to you, my friend. *If you knew the gift of God and who it is who is standing at the well, you would ask Him, and He would give you living water.* So ask Him. It’s as simple as that.

The Son of God came from heaven to earth because mankind was dying in the desert of sin. He went to the cross to pay sin’s penalty, then conquered the grave, and today He offers to take hopeless sinners out of the desert and bring them to the oasis of eternal life.

Have you taken a drink? Why not today? And if you have, a question for you...

2. *Are you sharing the water?* Are you investing your life so that others who are dying of thirst might come to drink from the fountain which is Christ?

Let’s be honest. It’s risky to share the water with lost people. Sometimes they want to argue religion. Sometimes you have to cross uncomfortable barriers to reach them, and when you do, sometimes you find out they’re living in blatant and embarrassing sin. It’s a whole lot safer just to stay inside our church building and houses than share the water.

C. S. Lewis said it well: “To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.”⁹

Let’s share the water, brothers and sisters. Which brings me to a final question. The Bible says, “He had to go through Samaria.” So answer this...

3. *Are you prepared to go to Samaria?* Where’s Samaria? It’s wherever there are people who need Christ, and particularly people who need Christ that others are avoiding. You’ll find them on airplanes in PNG. You’ll see them at school this week in the lunchroom. You’ll see them all over our community, too, if you’ll look. And they’re in the next community, and in the next country, too. Are you prepared to go?

⁸ Leon Morris, p. 263.

⁹ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, p. 169. Quote taken from Kent Hughes, p. 103.