

SERMON NOTES
John 4:4-42
“An Unlikely Evangelist”

Intro:

- Suppose a woman came to our church with this kind of history: *She had three children by three different men – one of whom was a live-in boyfriend and two were husbands from whom she is now divorced // In addition she has had two abortions from pregnancies resulting from sexual relationships with two other men // and right now she is living together with yet another boyfriend, and she is pregnant out-of-wedlock again*
- **Suppose she just accepted Jesus as her Savior a month ago, but is still living with her boyfriend and is unsure when – or whether -- she will marry him**
- *Suppose she is a NSHS grad and her history and lifestyle are well known in the community*

- How would we relate to such a woman?
- *Of course, we would be friendly to her and welcome her to our worship services*
- Would we welcome her into a home group?
- *Would we give her a baby shower for her new baby?*
- Would we allow her to serve as a helper in the nursery or Jr. Church or AWANA?
- *Would we allow her to give her testimony in a church worship service?*

- ***How “cleaned up” and “doctrinally sound” does a new believer need to be in order to witness for Jesus Christ?***

- *Of course, it was just such a woman that Jesus chose to be his key witness in reaching the town of Sychar in Samaria with the Gospel*
- And this was no aberration on Jesus’ part – for he also chose a similar sort of woman to be the first witness of his resurrection – a woman whose chief claim to fame is that Jesus had cast 7 demons out of her
- *And this in a culture in which even virtuous women were not respected as credible witnesses or teachers of religious truth*

- What can we learn about what kind of man – and Savior – Jesus is from this story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman?
- *And what can we learn about what it means to be a witness and fully devoted follower of Jesus from this story?*
- What qualifications does Jesus look for in choosing his followers, servants and witnesses?

I. EXPERIENCING GRACE & UNDERSTANDING TRUTH (4:4-26)

- In the Jewish culture of Jesus' day – the only people who were qualified to teach religious truth in public were righteous Jewish men
- *Mothers could teach their children, but only Jewish men could teach in the synagogue or Temple*
- And of course, any religious teacher would need to have an impeccable reputation for moral righteousness and obeying the Law of Moses

- *The Samaritan woman whom Jesus encountered at Jacob's well in Sychar was neither righteous nor Jewish nor a man*
- All Samaritans were regarded as half-breeds and heretics among the Jews – and this woman was an outcast among her own people – *an outcast among outcasts*

- Divorce was not unheard of in that day – but it was much rarer than in our day
- *To get divorced and remarried once or twice was socially permissible – but to be divorced and remarried 5 times – and then to be living together with a man outside of marriage – was absolutely scandalous and totally unacceptable*
- *Even in our day such a woman's character would be regarded as suspect – but in that day such a woman would be branded as exceedingly immoral and as a total loser*

- Where morally respectable church people would see a sinner and respond with moral superiority and judgment – *Jesus saw a woman thirsting for love, acceptance and hope, and responded with an offer of God's soul-restoring grace in the form of living water – new life from the Spirit of God coming to live within her*

- Where morally respectable church people would see a promiscuous, 5-time loser who would obviously never be able to get her life together – *Jesus saw the glorious potential of a woman reborn by the power of the Spirit and then testifying to the saving grace of Jesus transforming her life*

- **Jesus didn't come to pat righteous people on the back and bolster the prejudices of religious people who look down on others – *Jesus came to seek and to save lost people* – and this woman was clearly lost – and yet redeemable**

- And so Jesus initiated a relationship with her by first of all extending grace to her – *the grace of his acceptance even to talk with her in public when no one else would // and then the grace of offering her the gift of living water – new life from the Spirit of God welling up to eternal life*
- **When dealing with this lost and sinful outcast – Jesus leads with grace and then follows up with truth**
- *The offer of living water is free for the receiving and believing – but before she could receive the living water, she first needed to face the truth of her broken cisterns that had run dry – instead of turning to sexual relationships with men to quench the thirsting of her soul – she needed to turn to Jesus*
- And so Jesus exposed the truth of her past failures and current immorality – not in order to shame or condemn her – *but in order to heal her and set her free to experience fullness of life in Christ*
- She could not drink freely of the living water while still searching for love in all the wrong places
- **Jesus was the embodiment of the Love of God in human flesh – and only a personal relationship with Jesus could quench the thirsting of her soul**
- *In order to experience the full power of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, the woman must first face the truth about herself – and then she must understand the truth about Jesus*
- Because he was able to tell the woman everything about her life without being told – *the woman surmised that Jesus must be a prophet – his supernatural knowledge must have come from God*
- And so she asked Jesus a theological question – in part to deflect the conversation away from her own sin issues – *but also in part with a sincere desire to hear what a true prophet would say about an ongoing theological debate between Jews and Samaritans*
- The Samaritans believed that Mt. Gerizim near Shechem in Samaria – where Abraham and Jacob and Joshua worshiped God -- was the most holy place where God wanted to be worshiped – *whereas the Jews believed that the Jerusalem Temple on Mt. Zion – chosen under the leadership of David and Solomon -- was the most sacred place for worship*
- What did Jesus the prophet have to say about this controversy?

- Jesus clearly identified himself with the Jewish faith rather than the Samaritan syncretistic religion – *stating that Samaritans worship what they do not know and that salvation comes from the Jews*
- But then Jesus said the issue of sacred places of worship was no longer relevant since both places would soon be obsolete
- *Under the old covenant, God’s holy name and Presence dwelt in the Temple – but now in the new covenant sealed with Jesus’ blood – Jesus’ own resurrected body – and by extension the church as the body of Christ – would be the new Temple where God would dwell by His Spirit*
- *Worship is no longer about a sacred Place but rather about a Sacred Person – namely, Jesus Himself*

Hebrews 10:19 - 20 (NIV) ¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,

- *And worship is no longer a matter of performing prescribed rituals in a man-made Temple on a holy mountain – but rather a matter of spirit and truth*

John 4:23 - 24 (NIV) ²³ “**Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.** ²⁴**God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”**

- *True worship is dynamically empowered by the Spirit of God quickening and energizing our human spirit to worship the one true God who has revealed Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ*
- *Worship in spirit and truth is empowered by the Spirit of God and informed by the revelation of God in Jesus, who is the Truth*
- *Worshiping in spirit and truth involves the engagement and moving of our mind, will and emotions*
- *Worshiping in spirit and truth involves strong affections for God rooted in the truth of who God is*

* John Piper: “*The fuel of worship is a true vision of the greatness of God; the fire that makes the fuel burn white hot is the quickening of the Holy Spirit; the furnace made alive and warm by the flame of truth is our renewed spirit; and the resulting heat of our affections is powerful worship – pushing its ways out in confessions, longings, acclamations, tears, songs, shouts, bowed heads, lifted hands, and obedient lives.*”

*“Worship is a way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of His worth. It is not a mere act of willpower by which we perform outward acts. Without the engagement of the heart, we do not really worship. The engagement of the heart in worship is the coming alive of the feelings and emotions and affections of the heart. **Where feelings for God are dead, worship is dead.**”*

- The woman senses that the discussion is moving into uncharted deep waters, and she remarks: *I understand that one day a Messiah will come – and he will explain all of this to us*
- And then Jesus makes one of his most significant declarations:

John 4:26 (NIV) ²⁶Then Jesus declared, **“I who speak to you am he (the Messiah).”**

- *And this statement is even more profound and bold in Greek than in English*
- Literally: **I am, who is speaking to you.**
- To understand the import of this declaration, remember that the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses and throughout the OT was Yahweh – a Hebrew word meaning: **I AM WHO I AM** – often shortened to simply: **I AM** – conveying the idea that God is the eternal and self-existent One – the Alpha and Omega – **Who was, and who is, and who is to come**
- When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, this name of God -- **“I AM”** -- was translated with the Greek words: *ego eimi*
- John 4:26 reads: *Then Jesus declared: **Ego Eimi**, who is speaking to you*
- **Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah – God’s Anointed King who will establish God’s Kingdom and reign forever over all the earth from David’s throne**
- *But Jesus is claiming to be more than the Messiah of Jewish expectations*
- **Jesus is claiming to be the divine “I AM” – that is, God Himself in human flesh**

II. TESTIFYING TO EXPERIENCE & TRUTH (4:27-38)

- How much truth content does a person need to understand and believe in order to have saving faith?
- *How much Christian doctrine about the Trinity and the deity and humanity of Christ and atonement and justification and regeneration does a person need to understand and explain in order to be a witness for Jesus Christ?*

- How much does a new believer need to clean up their act before they are qualified to tell others about Jesus?
- *Faith is more than intellectual assent to right doctrine about Christ – Faith is humble reliance upon Christ and his finished work on the Cross and allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord*
- *There must be some truth content as the object of faith – but the emphasis of saving faith is not so much creedal assent as heart surrender and allegiance*
- **If you believe that Christ died for your sins and was raised from the dead – if you rely upon Christ and his saving work on the Cross rather than your own good works and moral righteousness to put you right with God – if you give your heart allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord – then you are saved**

Romans 10:9 - 10 (NIV) ⁹That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

- *How much did this Samaritan woman understand about the Trinity // about the pre-existence, incarnation, deity and humanity of Christ // about Christ’s atoning death and resurrection and coming again*
- Nothing
- *For that matter, how many of the baptized converts on the Day of Pentecost could have articulated a doctrine of the Trinity?*
- Probably none
- *How much truth did this woman understand?*
- Not much
- *She was probably still confused with a lot of baggage and corrupted theology from her Samaritan background – that did not get all cleaned up by this one conversation with Jesus*
- *She first came to believe that Jesus was a prophet – and then she was excited by Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah – but she almost surely did not catch the deeper significance of Jesus’ subtle claim to deity*
- Her testimony was very simple:

John 4:28 - 29 (NIV) ²⁸Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”

- She told others of her experience with Christ: *He told me everything I ever did*
- And she testified to her understanding of truth: *Could this be the Messiah?*
- Her experience of the personal grace that Jesus had extended to her – and of his prophetic knowledge of her past and present situation – had left a deep impact upon her
- *And his words impressed her with the possibility that he may actually be the long-awaited Messiah*
- That was the extent of her testimony: *Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?*
- Consider this also: *The woman giving this testimony had not even begun to clean up her life yet*
- She was still involved in an immoral relationship -- she was still not married to the man she was living with
- Wouldn't you be curious to know what this woman did next about her relationship with her live-in boyfriend?
- *Did she leave him right away? Did she stay with him? Did she give him an ultimatum? Did she get married to him? Did he become a Christ-follower? Did she marry someone else? Did she remain single? How long did it take before she cleaned up her act?*
- The story mentions none of this
- **This woman did not wait to clean up her life or become better instructed in biblical teachings and Christian theology to begin her witness for Jesus Christ**
- *As soon as she began to grasp that she had been having a conversation with someone acting like and claiming to be the Messiah – **she spread the news***
- Surely there would have been better qualified people to take the good news of the coming of Jesus the Messiah to the people of Sychar
- *She was not theologically qualified // she was not morally qualified // she was not socially qualified*
- What did this woman know about God's plan of salvation – and who would listen to her anyway?
- *At the very least shouldn't she wait to make some lifestyle changes before telling others about Jesus being the Messiah?*
- Who was she to represent the Holy One of God?

- *What is a witness?*
- A witness is someone who tells others what they have seen or heard
- *And that's exactly what this woman did – she told the people of her town what she had seen and heard – and invited them to come and check it out for themselves*
- We might think that she should have waited until she was better trained and better qualified
- *We might think that the Samaritan townspeople would not have been ready yet to believe her testimony*
- But what was Jesus' comment on this situation?

John 4:35 (NIV) ³⁵ Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

- *Nearly every person in this room knows more truth about Jesus Christ and the Bible than this woman did*
- Nearly every person in this room has a more respectable lifestyle than this woman did
- *Nearly every person in this room has experienced more of the life-changing power of Jesus Christ than this woman had*
- Yet the enemy will try to silence you by convincing you that you are not worthy or ready or qualified to tell others about Jesus
- *Don't believe the enemy's lies!*
- **Be a witness! Tell others what you have experienced – share with others the truth of Jesus and his salvation to the best of your understanding**
- Of course, you want to grow in your knowledge of the truth // *Of course, you want to grow in holiness and Christ-likeness* // Of course, you want to grow in your ability to explain to others the reason for the hope that you have // *Of course, you want to bring your lifestyle into alignment with biblical teachings*
- But right now – just as you are – ***if you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, then you are qualified to tell others what Jesus Christ has done for you***

III. CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH JESUS (4:39-42)

- *Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?*
- *A witness points people to Jesus*

- A witness tells others what she has seen and heard and then brings people to Jesus
- *Come, see for yourself – Could this be the Christ?*
- This woman is under no illusion that she has all the answers
- *She is under no illusion that people are going to be saved by admiring her righteous lifestyle*
- There is no holier-than-thou self-righteousness in her witness // there is no air of superiority in her witness // there is no dogmatism in her witness // there is no boasting in her witness
- *Her objective is not to get people to become more religious or moral*
- **The objective of her witness is to connect people with Jesus -- He's the One with all the answers – He's the One with the Living Water – He's the One who is the Way to the Father**
- Sometimes we are timid in our witness because we don't think we have enough knowledge // or because we aren't holy and sanctified enough // or because we don't know what to say to answer all their questions or solve all their problems
- **It is not the responsibility of a witness to have it all together or to know all the answers or to fix people's lives – it is not the responsibility of a witness to BE the Savior – it is the responsibility of a witness to introduce others to the Savior – to tell others what Jesus has done for you and urge them: Come, check it out – Could this be the Savior of the world?**

John 4:39-42 ³⁹Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, "He told me everything I ever did!"

⁴⁰When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay at their village. So he stayed for two days, ⁴¹long enough for many of them to hear his message and believe. ⁴²Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe because we have heard him ourselves, not just because of what you told us. He is indeed the Savior of the world."

- *Some believed because of the woman's testimony – many more believed as the result of a personal encounter with Jesus Himself*
- **The job of a Christian witness is to tell others what you have experienced and what you understand of the truth of the Gospel – and then challenge people to check out Jesus Christ for themselves to see if he is who he claimed to be**
- *Some will believe on the basis of your words and your changed life*
- But others will need to read the Gospels for themselves and see for themselves who Jesus is

- *Still others will need some kind of personal encounter with Jesus Christ – an answer to prayer // a healing miracle // a personal experience of the love of Christ’s body in action*
- *When someone comes to you with a need that you cannot meet // a problem that you cannot fix – a situation where God must intervene with His power and love – don’t be afraid to ask God to do just that – to reveal Himself to that person in need by answering a specific prayer request for something that only God could do --even praying out loud for God to show Himself real in the person’s life*
- **If you believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world – then give him a chance to be that Savior for others**
- *Connect people to Jesus – and let Jesus prove Himself real to them – that He is the Savior of the world*
- *Who are the people who will have a hard time believing that?*
- *Many social outcasts have a hard time believing that // many women who have been used and discarded again and again have a hard time believing that // many people who are deeply ashamed of past failures or current sins have a hard time believing that // many people who feel shunned or rejected by respectable church people have a hard time believing that*
- *What kind of Christian witness is best qualified to bring the hope of Jesus Christ to people who feel cut off from the love of God?*
- *Christians like the Samaritan woman*
- *They are far from being Bible scholars // their theological understanding may be a little off at some points // they are not people with much worldly influence or social standing // their lives are still kind of messy – a long way from being fully cleaned up to the standards of most long-time church people*
- **But at a time when their life was falling apart – when they were losing their grip and sinking into a frightening chaos – when they were experiencing deep anguish of soul and all hope of a better life was fading – they had a personal encounter with Jesus of Nazareth – and his living water began to quench the thirsting of their soul**
- *Their life is still not put together all nice and neat like some Christians’ – but they have tasted the living water of Jesus Christ and they know he is the Savior of the World*
- *And they are able to relate to non-Christian sinners in a grace-filled, non-judgmental way because they are deeply aware of their own shortcomings*

- They don't claim to have all the answers – but they can point people to the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life
- **Every church needs many women – and men – like the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at the well**
- Some Christians have all kinds of Bible knowledge – *but rarely share a word of witness with any unbelievers – and rarely bring unsaved people into a personal relationship with the Savior of the world*
- Christians like the Samaritan woman may not know much – but what truth they do know – they share with other sinners
- *Come, see for yourself – this Jesus knows the worst about me – all my past failures and my present sins – and he still loves me – and he has living water that quenches the thirsting of my soul as nothing else does*

(Conclusion):

- A few years into my pastorate in Ely, MN, our church moved into a new building across the street from some low-income apartments
- *Somehow I met a woman living there – I think her kids were attending Adventure Club (similar to AWANA) at our church*
- Her life was a mess – she had made some mistakes in her past -- her husband was abusing her and threatening to leave her – she had 3 children and was struggling to support them – her self-esteem was badly damaged – and she had all but lost any hope of any kind of decent future for her family
- *But then she began to experience the living water of Jesus Christ – his grace // his unconditional love // his resurrection life // his hope*
- Her life stayed messy for quite awhile – but she began to change within as the living water of Jesus Christ began to quench the thirsting of her soul
- *She went through a painful divorce and many other hardships – but her life also began to bear witness to the work of the Spirit of Christ within her*
- And as she was growing in her experience of the love of Christ – she began to share that love with other hurting women with messy lives
- *And many other hurting women found new life in Christ because of this woman's witness*
- She has matured in Christ immensely in these past 20 years – but her life is still not quite as neat and tidy as some who have been Christians longer than she

- *But she has not forgotten what condition her life was in when Jesus rescued her and gave her new life – and she still has compassion for women in similar situations*
- She has never forgotten her desperate need of Jesus Christ
- And most of all – Wendy loves Jesus because the love of Jesus was everything to her when she had nothing else
- *And that passionate love for Jesus makes her witness very powerful*
- *You see, that is what makes the witness of a Christian persuasive and winsome and compelling – **when the witness comes from a heart that treasures Jesus above all else***
- **Every church needs some Samaritan women Christians**
- *Their lives may be a little messy around the edges*
- **But in the depth of their heart – they treasure Jesus above all else – they have exchanged their broken cisterns for the streams of living water that never run dry – and they are able to lead other thirsty sinners to that living water**
- **Jesus has become their life – and they share his living water with others**

Prayer:

- *For those who need to come to Jesus for new life*
- *For those who need to witness for Christ just as they are*
- *For those who need to reach out to Samaritan women and extend Christ's love to them*

“Jesus, You Are My Life”