

**The Woman at the Well**  
*Jesus Changes the Rules*  
Jn. 4:1-10

Introduction:

1. This is a familiar account to most of us.
2. It is a striking account given the cultural setting as it relates to the tensions that existed between men and women AND the tension that existed between Jews and Samaritans.
3. Throughout Scripture it is noted that the Jews were the chosen. Chosen to be the special people of God to serve His purpose.
4. BUT Scripture indicates that God has always been concerned about all people. Ex. He sent Jonah to Israel's enemies in Ninevah to invite their repentance.
5. The prophets had predicted an influx of Gentiles into the kingdom with the coming of the Messiah (cf. Isa. 2:2-3; 42:6; 49:6; Acts 14:47).
6. Jesus' ministry evidences an inclusiveness that stretched the limitations of Jewish expectation. It included women, like the Syrophenician woman, Gentiles like the Roman centurion of Matt. 8:5ff.
7. And now here, it includes a Samaritan.
8. In our country we struggle with racial issues, religious division, immigration, the treatment of women, and marriage and divorce. In this account all these issues are in play.
9. What does Jesus have to teach us? How does our thinking need to be changed in this kingdom that He is initiating? Are we prepared to be as inclusive as the King? Jesus is in the process of changing the traditional rules.

Discussion:

I. The circumstances. The rules.

- A. Avoid Samaria and Samaritans to avoid defilement.
  1. Pious Jews usually traveled around Samaria to avoid defilement (Kenneth Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, p. 201).
  2. But for Jesus defilement came from within (Matt. 15:15-20). So, taking the most expedient route to Galilee from Jerusalem was not prohibited. (Now there are some absolute rules established by God, but it is often the rules that we have created that get us stuck in unworkable behaviors. Cf. Matt. 15:1ff).
  3. The origin of the Samaritans traces back to the time of the Assyrian captivity. 2 Kings 17:24ff describes how foreigners were brought into Samaria in place of the Israelites. Lions came among them and they said, "We do not know the custom of the god of the land and so he has sent lions." So, one of the priests of Israel came to Bethel and taught them how they should fear the Lord. But they made gods of their own from their own traditions. "They feared the Lord and served the gods of the nations."
  4. Such differences are evident in the woman's question about the place of worship and Jesus' observation that "You worship what you do not know" (4:22).

5. So, seemingly some good religious reasons to avoid Samaritans and Samaria.
- B. Samaritans are enemies.
1. Three hundred years earlier the Greeks had used Samaria as a base of their control of Jewish territory (Gary Burge, John, NIV Application Commentary, p. 141). In 128 B.C. the Jews had destroyed the Samaritan temple at Mt. Gerizim. The Samaritans then penetrated the temple area of Jerusalem a few years before the birth of Jesus and had scattered the bones of the dead across the area on the eve of Passover to defile the complex and make it impossible for Jews to keep the feast (Bailey, p. 203).
  2. Good reason for considering the Samaritans enemies.
  3. But Jesus ignored all this political and military antagonism and talked to a Samaritan.
- C. Don't talk to women.
1. The Mishnah, a book of Jewish oral tradition, said, "Talk not much with womankind. He that talks much with womankind brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the Law and at last will inherit Gehenna" (*'Abot* 1:4, Danby, p. 446, as quoted by Bailey, 203).
  2. Jesus not only talked to this woman, but a Samaritan woman, and included women in His cohort of disciples (Matt. 8:1-3).

## II. The Jesus direction—a break with the traditions. He changed the rules.

- A. He recognized God's rule (Jn. 4:21-24). The woman recognized that the Messiah would support God's rule (4:25). He confessed that He was the Messiah (4:26).
- B. Jesus asks for a drink (4:7-11).
1. He has no vessel to draw with.
  2. Will He use her vessel and then drink from it? This is like drinking from a fountain labeled "Colored only" or drinking from the same water jug that that the "black hired hands" drink from.
  3. Will He really drink from her vessel?
- C. Jesus asks for her help.
1. I have trouble asking for help. I want to operate from a position of power over and be perceived as helping others. I prefer not to be the one needing help.
  2. Daniel T. Niles observes, "To serve from a position of power is not true service but beneficence" (This Jesus . . . Whereof We Are Witnesses, pp. 23-27).
  3. Jesus humbles Himself to ask for help from a Samaritan woman.
  4. He is the Messiah, the King, the one who is the gift of God, the one who has the power to give living water!!!
  5. What power is this that humbles Himself to ask for help from a Samaritan woman?
- D. The disciples are amazed at such a breaking of rules.
- E. A radically new kingdom is being initiated. Is it any wonder that Isaiah said, "All the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, 'Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord . . . that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths'"? (Isa. 2:2-3).
- F. Jesus here reflects the nature of the kingdom and the nature of God's rule. It will become even clearer as the Son of God voluntarily accepts the humiliation

and shame of the cross to give life to those dead in sin (Heb. 12:2). He came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). This is what He did for us who are arguing over who is the greatest among us.

G. Yes, Jesus is a rule changer!

### III. The result (4:27ff).

- A. The woman left her waterpot. "Come, see a man who told me all the things I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?"
- B. The disciples are focused on getting Him to eat (31-38). Maybe John was thinking at the time, "He really needs to eat. He is wearied from the journey" (see v. 6). Now in reflection, he sees more clearly Jesus' purpose and the purpose of the kingdom as he recalls what Jesus said about having food to eat that you do not know about.
- C. Jesus sees clearly what the mission is.
  - 1. It is not about eating bread.
  - 2. It is about the bread of life.
- D. The Samaritans came to believe that Jesus is the One, the Savior of the world (42).

### Conclusion:

- 1. Is this the result produced in you when you see Jesus, this radical rule changer?
- 2. Are you humbled by this new direction?
- 3. Do you see the gift of God?
- 4. Do you hear His word?
- 5. Are you ready to receive the living water?