

Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: Genesis 12:1-3 & John 4:4, 23b, 27-42

1. The Historicity of Jesus' Mission to Samaria

- "R. Brown remarked regarding this passage in John 4: 'Either we are dealing with a master of fiction, or else the stories have a basis in fact.' ...A. Lincoln...severely questioned the historical validity of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman...Most scholars today would probably be moderately skeptical about the historical value [of John 4]...While **the basic historicity...is not doubted**...we are dealing with a skillful...creative composition...Other...scholars have...[are] more positive about [its] historical reliability...'The story betrays a considerable knowledge of Samaritan beliefs, local color, geographical factors, & Jew-Samaritan relationships that...**point us in the direction of an historical account.**' (Ben Witherington)." (Philipp F. Bartholomä, *Johannine Discourses*..., pp. 136-7)
- "According to John 4:4 Jesus passes through...Samaria. However the tradition of the Synoptic Gospels makes no mention of a 'missionary' activity of Jesus in this region. According to Mt. 10:6 Jesus forbade mission in Samaria, However **in...Luke there's a favorable attitude of Jesus towards the Samaritans** (Lk. 10:28-37). Also Acts 8:5-8 reports the missionary activity of Philip among the Samaritans...later completed by Peter & John. On the basis of these common traditions...in Luke & John, one could conclude that the author of the 4th Gospel **did not invent the presence of Jesus among the Samaritans**... The Samaritan woman appears to be an historical figure." (Varghese Johns, *Imagery of Love in...John*, 141)
- "Unlike the Synoptic Gospels in **John salvation is not confined to Israel, but is for the 'world'** (Jn. 3:17; 4:42)." (Carsten Claussen, "Salvation," in C. A. Evans (ed.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus*, 539)

2. A God Of Mission (Gen. 12:1-3)

- "Gen. 12:1-3...sets the agenda not only for Abram's life but also for his descendants. By focusing on how **divine blessing will be mediated through Abram to all the families of the earth**, it marks an important turning point within the book of Genesis. The repetition of the verb bless (vv. 2-3) underscores the hope that through Abram people everywhere may experience God's favor,

reversing the predominantly negative experience of chs. 3–11. God's plans for Abram have both national and international dimensions..." (ESV Study Bible)

- a. Blessed Abraham (12:2)
 - b. Abraham was to be the channel for God's blessing to all people (12:3b)
3. Three Words that Point to God's Mission in John 4 (Jn. 4:4; 23b; 34)
- a. Jesus 'had to' go through Samaria (4:4)
 - *"had to', usually is associated in [John's] Gospel with God's plan (3:14, 30; 9:4). It seems best, therefore, to read the necessity of the journey through Samaria as both geographical and theological. Jesus' itinerary may have been governed by geographical expediency, but his stay in Samaria was governed by the theological necessity of offering himself to those whom social convention deemed unacceptable."* (Gail O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 480)
 - *"Jesus had to pass this way because of geography (it was the shortest route), but the words may also indicate that Jesus' itinerary was subject to the sovereign and providential plan of God ('had to' translates Gk. dei, 'to be necessary,' which always indicates divine necessity or requirement elsewhere in Jn. [3:7](#), [14](#), [30](#); [9:4](#); [10:16](#); [12:34](#); [20:9](#))." (ESV Study Bible)*
 - b. God the Father is 'seeking' people (4:23b)
 - c. God the Father 'sent' Jesus (4:34; 5:30; 6:38)
 - *"Jesus' mission is often characterized as doing the will and work of God (5:30, 36; 6:38; 10:37-38)." (Gail O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 485)*
 - *"The necessity of Jesus' Samaritan sojourn (4:4) and his conversation with the woman (4:7-26) can be understood as examples of Jesus...doing the will and work of God..." (Gail O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 485)*
4. Through the One, Many Believed (Jn. 4:27-42)
- a. On God's mission, Jesus violates the social barriers (v. 27)
 - *"Jesus himself was not hostage to the sexism of his day (7:53-8:11; 11:5; Lk. 7:36-50; 8:2-3; 10:38-42)." (D. A. Carson, *Pillar Commentary: John*, p. 178)*
 - b. The woman becomes God's witness (4:28-30)
 - *"The woman...departs...leaving her water jar behind...On the level of the plot line, the abandoned water jar provides a link between the two conversations at the well. The woman's jar will stand before Jesus and his disciples as they speak. Yet the detail also has meaning on a more theological level. The abandoned jar suggests that the woman's...desire for miraculous water, has been superseded by the revelation of Jesus' identity." (Gail O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 484)*
 - *"She put down her water jar. This very well may be the heart of this beautiful story. Her water jar is her own agenda. It's the reason she came to the well. She came to draw water. She came for natural water. She left with eternal life. She walked away from the well with living water because she was able to let go of her own agenda. She was able to put down the water jar of her own agenda and go forth with God's agenda. She forgot the water jar. Her own need for her natural thirst to be quenched suddenly wasn't all that important, for she had come to experience the quenching of a much deeper thirst in her encounter with Jesus. She put down her water jar and she went out to tell the good news. She brought other people to the well, and so, to Jesus. She became a bucket, a means of bringing others to the living water. Jesus, give me the courage to put down my water jar. My agenda is getting heavy in my life. I want to go with your agenda for me. I want to be a well!" (Macrina Wiederkehr, *A Tree Full of Angels*, pp. 76-7)*
 - a. Invites – "Come & see" (v. 29a)
 - a. *"She invites...come and see'...to participate in the life of faith, to experience Jesus for oneself. [Then she] offers her own experience as the basis for her witness." (Gail O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 484)*
 - b. Personal experience – "He knows me inside, out" (v. 29b)
 - c. Uncertainty – "Could this be the Messiah?" (v. 29c)
 - *"The NRSV accurately captures the tentativeness of the woman's words. (the question begins with a negative particle in the Greek, a construction that anticipates a negative or contradicting response). She cannot quite believe that Jesus is the Messiah, since he challenges her conventional expectations (vv. 23-25), but her lack of certitude does not stand in the way of her witness." (Gail O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 484)*

- "...her final words are a question that technically expects a negative answer: 'He can't be the Messiah, can he?' **She invites people to 'come and see,' but she does so despite lingering uncertainty.** What she has received from Jesus enables her to **bear witness, but it has not fully eliminated her questions.**" (Craig Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel*, p. 173)
 - "The woman's behavior stands in **marked contrast** to...Nicodemus (3:9), the crowds (6:25-34), the Pharisees (9:24-34) who insist on their own certitude and hence close themselves off to what Jesus offers." (Gail O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 484)
 - "The term 'Messiah' is anachronistic because the Samaritans did not expect a Davidic Messiah. **They looked forward to the [coming] of a prophet like Moses** (Deut 18:15-18). The Samaritans called this figure the **Taheb, which means 'the one who returns' or 'the one who restores.'**" (Sarah Miller, *The Woman at the Well: John's Portrayal of the Samaritan Mission*, p. 76)
- c. Jesus helps his disciples to understand God's mission (4:31-38)
- "Jesus conversation with his disciples follows a **similar pattern** to his conversation with the woman...It opens with a dialogue that revolves around a **misunderstanding** about the meaning of food versus the misunderstanding about water." (Gail O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 484)
- a. God sent me to do this (v. 34)
- "Jesus makes clear that **the food that sustains him is...to do the will of the one who sent him and complete God's work.**...Jesus' mission is often characterized as doing the will and the work of God (5:30, 36; 6:38; 10:37-38)." (Gail O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 485)
 - "For the first time here [Jn. 4:34] we encounter the designation (that occurs more than twenty times in the Fourth Gospel on Jesus' lips) of God as '**he who sent me [i.e., Jesus].**' It is **that mission**, that is, the authority given to Jesus by God...that **determines his entire existence.** He describes it further as "the will," that is, the plan of salvation, that it is his task to realize and "the work" that he must accomplish. **In this one word 'work'...Jesus' entire mission...is summed up** (cf. 17:4)." (Herman Ridderbos, *A Theological Commentary: The Gospel of John*, p. 128)
- b. Two correctives (vv. 35, 37)
- "**Jesus uses a common saying** ('Do you not say...?' or 'Is it not your way of speaking...?')" (Herman Ridderbos, *A Theological Commentary: The Gospel of John*, p. 128)
- a. There is no need to wait – "There is still four months until harvest" (v. 35)
- "The conventional understanding is that one must wait for the **Messiah/harvest** (vv. 25, 35a). In reality, they **are here now.**" (Gail O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 485)
 - "The seed may be planted, but there is no way of getting around the months of waiting. **Growth is slow and cannot be hurried. But Jesus did not share this view when applied to spiritual thing.** He had an urgent sense of mission and these words convey something of it to the disciples. They must not lazily relax, comfortable in the thought that there is no need to [rouse] themselves." (Leon Morris, *NICNT: John*, p. 250)
 - "**All the emphasis falls on the word 'already' because that is what the disciples need to understand.** Sowing is no longer only a time of expectant waiting: sowing, harvest, and the time in between all now coincide, since while the sower is still going out to sow, the harvest is already coming in. In other words: the sower & the reaper meet each other, 'rejoicing together' at the same time. This is the paradoxical new wisdom about the sower & the reaper that replaces the old and leaves it behind." (Herman Ridderbos, *A Theological Commentary: John*, p. 129)
- b. We are all working together – "One sows, & another reaps" (v. 37)
- "The second maxim Jesus applies to himself & the disciples. He notes that **they benefit from a long string of 'others' who have sown and labored**, divine spokes persons such as the prophets all the way up to John the Baptist, culminating in Jesus (4:38). The harvest is now, & the disciples are not merely called to follow Jesus; they are sent by him on a spiritual mission: "I sent you to reap" (4:38)." (A. Koestenberger, *Encountering John*, p. 74)
- c. I am sending you (v. 38)
- "In John,...**the mission to outsiders does not wait until after Jesus's death.** It is part of his own ministry. John 4 is the only New Testament evidence of a Samaritan Mission during Jesus' ministry, although Acts corroborates the Samaritan mission of the early church (Acts 8:4-24)." (Gail O'Day, *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 486)
- d. The Samaritan harvest (4:39-42)
- a. Many Samaritans believed in Jesus based on the woman's words & experience (v. 39)
 - b. The Samaritans came to Jesus & invited Jesus to stay with them (v. 40)
 - c. Many more Samaritans believed when they had their own encounter with Jesus (v. 41)
 - d. The Samaritans declare Jesus to be the Saviour of the world (v. 42)
 - "The Samaritans' acclamation of Jesus as the 'Savior of the world' is **the most sweeping... confession yet encountered in the Gospel.** Salvation may be from the Jews (v. 22b), but it is not limited to the Jews. Ethnic

& religious **distinctions...are dissolved** in this recognition of the **universality of salvation available in Jesus** (3:17). (Gail O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 486)

- **"Saviour"** is a very general word, but it certainly **contains the idea of deliverance, of saving from serious disaster...The addition of 'of the world' elevates the title to one of infinite grandeur.** Jesus is not...the Saviour of a few unimportant individuals. He is the Saviour of the world." (Leon Morris, *NICNT: John*, p. 253)

5. Application

a. Disciples have uncertainty

- **"[The disciples'] faith is not a triumphant march forward toward ever-new heights of understanding.** They move from insight to confusion and back again. What is important is that **their relationship with Jesus continues despite the uncertainty**, since faith is the context within which understanding develops – and their questions continue to the end of Jesus' ministry (14:5, 8; 16:17)." (Craig Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel*, p. 174)

b. Don't wait to witness

c. Is he your Saviour?

- **"This is the place to which I long to come in my faith Journey...to know out of my own experience that Jesus is Lord and Savior. The day will come when I must say to my grandparents, my parents, my teachers, 'No longer does my faith depend on your story. I have seen and heard for myself. Now I know. This is the Savior of the world. I have experienced God. It is my own experience, not just something I heard from the altar. No longer does my faith depend on your story. It's within. I've become a well! And when that day comes I'll also give thanks for all those buckets who brought me to this welling moment."** (Macrina Wiederkehr, *A Tree Full of Angels*, p. 77)

d. Don't impose your thoughts upon the text

- **"The woman's role in this text has been misinterpreted because of imported assumptions about women's sexuality, intellect, and interests.** The interpreter must be very careful to return to the text and discover what [John] says about the woman, rather than pass on what one has heard about this text. The Samaritan woman is never judged as a sinner. On the contrary, she is portrayed as a model of growing faith as she comes to entertain the possibility that Jesus might be the Messiah (4:29). Of even greater significance, however, the woman is portrayed as a witness (4:39)." (Gail O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 487)

e. The role of women in church ministry

- **"The Samaritan woman's successful evangelization of her town belies the myth of the privileged position of men as witnesses and disciples.** Because of her witness, the number of persons who believe in Jesus grows. Jesus treats her as a serious conversation partner, the first person in the gospel to whom he makes a bold statement of self-revelation (4:26). The Samaritan woman's story summons churches to re-examine the boundaries they set around women's witness and work. (Gail O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 487)

f. Challenging the Status Quo

- **"Jesus' actions in John 4:4-42, as he embraces both Samaritans and women, are one example of the way this text challenges the status quo.** Jesus' actions model alternatives for the faith community and show how human interrelationships are transformed in the eschatological present. **Jesus' words in this passage also challenge the status quo.** They do not attack it directly, but, like his actions, **suggest what is possible in the new reality ushered in by his presence.** (Gail O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*, p. 487)