

The Gospel of John

Lesson 3

John 4:1 - John 4:54

As previously stated, the other Gospel writers tell of the imprisonment of John the Baptist, but John does not. John the Baptist has made many enemies in his short ministry by calling the Pharisees a brood of vipers and publically accusing Herod Antipas of a sinful relationship with his new wife, Herodias. Josephus says that Herod put John in prison because of his fear that he would "raise a rebellion."⁵⁰ The last conversation John has with his disciples shows slight jealousy on their part since Jesus is baptizing converts from the ranks of the Jews. The Pharisees know of the two baptisms and Jesus makes a calculated decision to move to Galilee.

Jesus to Galilee through Samaria

John 4:1 Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ² (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), ³ He left Judea and went away again into Galilee.

The number of Jesus' disciples is growing exponentially at this point in the story. John's reply to his disciples concerning the two baptisms shows the jealousy held by John's disciples; however, the passage may have been included to introduce the growing concern of the Pharisees. Since Jesus leaves the area, we can assume that He is leaving the fate of John in the hands of the authorities and not entering a confrontation with them until John the Baptist is dead. Because the author includes the story of the best man and the groom prior to this event, John's answer to his disciples shows that he is ready to decrease in importance so Jesus can increase. Surely, John the Baptist does not know his fate, yet the Lord does. From now on, each time Jesus returns to the area, He will have an open confrontation with the authorities.⁵¹

Jacob's well in Sychar

John 4:4 And He had to pass through Samaria. ⁵ So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; ⁶ and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

During the exile of Israel, the Promised Land was divided into the three provinces of Galilee, Samaria and Judea. The inhabitants of Samaria were interracial, a mixture of Jewish and Gentile blood. This area was considered unclean to the pure Jews and was not considered part of the Holy Land at all. Jews would normally avoid this province when traveling to Galilee from Judea by crossing to the east side of the Jordan River and traveling up through Perea. By going through Samaria, Jesus is traveling the road not usually used by the Jews although it is the most direct route. It is only 35 miles from the capital of Judea to the capital of Samaria.⁵²

Sychar, the modern town of Askar, is about one mile from Jacob's well. Of all the biblical places in Israel, there is no dispute about the site of Jacob's well. He dug the well on the parcel of ground he purchased from Hamor.⁵³ The well, about two miles south-east of

⁵⁰ Ant. XVIII. v. 2

⁵¹ John 5:1-47; John 7:14-10:21; John 10:22-42; John 11:17-53

⁵² Shechem is the capital of Samaria. Jerusalem is the capital of Judea.

⁵³ Genesis 39:19

Shechem, is nine feet in diameter and seventy-five feet deep. Traditionally, 6:00 PM is the hour for women to draw water at the well and Jesus is there waiting for her to arrive.

Woman at the well at the sixth hour

John 4:7 There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." ⁸ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. ⁹ Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (~~For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.~~)

The Lord's disciples are headed to town to buy food and the woman is on her way to the well to draw fresh water. When Jesus asks her for a drink of water, her answer shows how shocked she is that He is even talking to her. Because she is half Jewish, she is considered unclean.⁵⁴ Drinking from the well was not forbidden for the Jew; but drinking from a Samaritan water pot was.

Jesus asks for a drink

John 4:10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." ¹¹ She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?" ¹² "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?" ¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw." ¹⁶ He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here."

The woman knows that Jesus is a Jew, but she cannot know that He is the Messiah. She can readily see that He is not prepared to draw water from the well unless He has some powerful ability beyond the sweat and labor of Jacob who dug the well and blessed his descendants for generations from his labor. Little does she know that Jesus is offering her water that will bless her for all eternity! Since there is nothing at the well with which to draw water, we can assume that every woman who comes to the well brings her own supplies. She probably has with her a one-hundred foot goat's hair rope and an animal skin bag that will act as a bucket to draw the water from the well.

Jesus does not directly answer her question about His superiority to Jacob; nevertheless, she is interested in the living water. The arduous daily routine of walking a mile to the well for water is on her mind. If by some possible way she can end her daily trips to the well, she is all for it. She misunderstands the eternal meaning behind the words of the Lord.

Just as the Lord read the heart of Nathaniel when he was under the fig tree and the hearts of the Jews in the temple, He reads the heart of this woman. He already knows her life story, so to make a meaningful impact on her life, He calls for her to bring her husband.

The woman's husbands

John 4:17 The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly." ¹⁹ The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. ²⁰ "Our fathers

⁵⁴ A result of the Assyrian invasion in 722 BC that removed many of the Jews from the land.

worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

The woman is living in a sinful state with a man who is not her husband, but Jesus does not condemn her for this sin; He is concerned with her soul first. She is truthful with Jesus and He tells her her tragic life's story in twenty-five words. Now she knows that Jesus is special and she turns the topic to the worship of God.

Jacob's well is at the foot of Mt. Gerizin. Both Abraham and Jacob built altars there to worship God.⁵⁵ A temple was built on the mountain for the Jewish Samaritans by Sandballet, the man who tried to stop Nehemiah from rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. It was destroyed in 129 BC by John Hyrcanus and never rebuilt; however, the Samaritans still came to the mountain where the temple once stood to worship God. She has heard about the temple in Jerusalem, but she has never been there. Her words show concern that she is not worshiping in the right place. Jesus' next words are spoken to bring her comfort.

We can't help but notice that Jesus does not focus on the woman's sin; He focuses on her need for salvation. Today, most of the church leadership throughout the world focus on the sins of people and refuse to help them with physical needs until they correct their sinful actions. Again, Jesus is not concerned with her sinful actions; He is concerned with her eternal salvation, a model that churches should follow. Once eternal salvation is settled, the Light of the world will shine on their souls and they will abandon their sins.

Worship in Spirit and Truth

John ^{4:21} Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴ "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (~~He who is called Christ~~); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am *He*."

The woman is looking for the Messiah just as the Jews in Jerusalem are. Jesus answers her words by declaring that He is the Messiah. He is the salvation that comes through the Jewish nation. He is the One who comes to declare all things to the world concerning salvation and eternal life.

The disciples arrive

John ^{4:27} At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?"

The conversation is interrupted by the arrival of the Lord's disciples who are bringing food from town. They are amazed that He is speaking with the Samaritan woman, but they are afraid to question His judgment. Their arrival provides a perfect opportunity for her to leave the Lord for a mission trip to bring others to the Messiah.

⁵⁵ Genesis 12:7; Genesis 33:20

The woman goes to town and brings others to Christ

John ^{4:28} So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I *have* done; this is not the Christ, is it?" ³⁰ They went out of the city, and were coming to Him. ³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." ³² But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³ So the disciples were saying to one another, "No one brought Him *anything* to eat, did he?"

We don't know why the men of Sychar believe the woman and go to the well to meet the Messiah, but they do. Who is she? Even though she has had five husbands and is living in a sinful relationship, she must be thought of as a woman of some integrity.

Jesus is not interested in eating even though the disciples have brought food from town for Him. Privately, they are wondering if someone has fed Him while they were in town. They do not understand His response to their concerns.

Jesus has food

John ^{4:34} Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.

Jesus was sent into the world by the Father to accomplish the Father's plans for Him. Although He is fully human, He is still fully God and needs no earthly food. He uses the concern and hunger of the disciples to teach an eternal truth. What He has just accomplished with the woman is a perfect picture of what He came to earth to do.

Sowing and reaping, June AD 27 – October AD 27

John ^{4:35} "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and *then* comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. ³⁶ "Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. ³⁷ "For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ "I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."

Finally, John's record indicates a point on the timeline of Jesus' ministry. It is June of AD 27 and there are still four months until the general time of harvest in October of AD 27. But Jesus is not willing to wait four months to reap the harvest of souls for all eternity. He has just planted the seed of eternal life in the heart of the woman at the well and the fruit of that seed can be seen coming up the road from town. They are not young men and she is not a young woman; the story of her life confirms her age. Jesus sees the white-haired men coming down the road to meet Him because the woman had gone to town to sow seeds of evangelism for the Lord to reap the harvest of her labor, all in a single evening.

Because of the woman at the well

John ^{4:39} From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I *have* done." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. ⁴¹ Many more believed because of His word; ⁴² and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."

The people of the town believe her testimony that evening, and it is confirmed as the truth when they meet the Lord at Jacob's well. A multitude of Samaritans are now true believers because of one conversation at the well in Sychar. Jesus has already broken Jewish law by talking with the Samaritan woman, but He compounds the breaking of that law by staying with them for two days.

Two days in Samaria and on to Galilee

John 4:43 After the two days He went forth from there into Galilee. ⁴⁴ For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.

It is interesting that John reports the testimony of Jesus but not the incident that causes Him to make the statement. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke clearly show His success in that province. His testimony speaks solely of His reception in His hometown of Nazareth which is also in Galilee. The Gospel of Luke records their rejection of Jesus and the Gospel of Matthew records his second rejection in the same town.

What feast?

John 4:45 So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves also went to the feast.

The Galilean Jews accept Jesus because of His cleansing of the Temple at Passover and the signs He performed in the seven days that followed. The Galileans are expecting the same miracles in their region and the Lord does not disappoint them.

Royal son lives

John 4:46 Therefore He came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a royal official whose son was sick at Capernaum. ⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and was imploring *Him* to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸ So Jesus said to him, "Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you *simply* will not believe." ⁴⁹ The royal official said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Go; your son lives." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off. ⁵¹ As he was now going down, *his* slaves met him, saying that his son was living.

Returning to Cana a second time since His baptism, the Lord is approached by a royal official from Capernaum on behalf of his sick son. It is a hard day's journey from Capernaum to Cana, and the official has taken the chance that if he catches up with Jesus and returns with Him to Capernaum, Jesus may be able to keep his son from dying. The words of the Lord show His concern that the people are viewing Him simply as a magical miracle worker, yet He knows the heart of this man who has reached out to Him on behalf of his son. Jesus does not return with the official and the official does not press the matter; he accepts the word of the Lord at face value and begins his journey home believing his son will be well.

Second sign in Galilee

John 4:52 So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. Then they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." ⁵³ So the father knew that *it was* at that hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives"; and he himself believed and his whole household. ⁵⁴ This is again a second sign that Jesus performed when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

The official has traveled all day to catch up with the Lord in Cana. It is late in the evening, around 7:00 pm, when he finally finds the Lord and begs Him for His help. We do not know if he has spent the night in Cana or headed home immediately; nevertheless, the next day he hears the word of his son's health and he questions the time of his healing. It is the second sign performed by the Lord in Galilee, but not the second sign on this trip to the province. The first sign was performed in the same city of Cana when He turned the water into wine on His first visit to the region after His baptism. This sign was performed on His second trip. As the official is returning to Capernaum, the Lord is traveling to His hometown of Nazareth for the Sabbath.

List of an event in the life of Jesus in Galilee from the other Gospels, not included in John's Gospel

EVENT	SCRIPTURE PASSAGE
Jesus is rejected in Nazareth	Luke 4:16-29

Luke records that the people in Nazareth want Jesus to perform the same miracles in their town that He has performed in Capernaum. Amazingly, none of the Gospel writers record any miracles performed by the Lord in His previous short visit to Capernaum after His baptism. But they have heard of the healing of the official's son; Jesus does that from Cana even though the son is in Capernaum. They want the same miracles in Nazareth by saying to Him on that Sabbath, "Physician heal thyself," when He teaches them in the Synagogue. Their plea is for the healing of all the sick people of His hometown and not intended as a reference for Jesus to heal Himself. Jesus infuriates His hometown audience by recalling the three-and-a-half-year famine during the days of Elijah and Elisha when only one widow was helped and one leper was healed. In the matter of a few minutes, the people of Nazareth move from hanging on the Lord's every word to dragging Him to the edge of the city to cast Him off the wall and kill Him. Rejected this first time in His hometown, Jesus travels to Capernaum where He performs many wonders while staying in the home of Peter.

John failed to include the important events that happen in Capernaum from July through October of AD 27 although the other three Gospel writers give lengthy details of these events.

List of events in the life of Jesus in Galilee from the other Gospels, not included in John's Gospel

EVENT	SCRIPTURE PASSAGE
Jesus settles in at Capernaum as His northern headquarters in the home of Peter.	Matt 4:13-17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:31-32
Jesus calls Andrew, Peter, James and John to be disciples.	Matt 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20
Jesus heals the demonic in the Synagogue.	Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:33-37
Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law.	Matt. 8:14-17; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39
Jesus heals many of the demon-possessed.	Mark 1:32-34; Luke 4:40-41
The disciples try to find Jesus.	Mark 1:35-38; Luke 4:42-43
Jesus preaches in the Synagogue.	Matt. 4:23-25; Mark 1:39; Luke 4:44
Jesus preaches in Simon's boat	Luke 5:1-3
Jesus causes the miraculous catch of fish.	Luke 5:4-11
Jesus heals the leper.	Matt. 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45. Luke 5:12-16
Jesus cures a paralytic.	Matt 9:2-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26
Matthew is called to be a disciple.	Matt. 9:9; Mark 2:13-14; Luke 5:27-28
Jesus goes to Matthew's reception for his friends and the Pharisees question why Jesus' disciples are not fasting.	Matt. 9:10-17; Mark 2:15-22; Luke 5:29-39

Following the reception at Matthew's home for his tax-collector friends, Jesus heads to Jerusalem for the feast called the Day of Atonement. His first few months of public ministry in Galilee are over, but He will return. He still has not selected His twelve apostles, an event that will take place during His next stay in Galilee.