
I have found that anytime anyone tries to put God in a box He just tends to break it wide open. Oh, for a while we think He fits, and we think we have Him figured out, and we have this whole religious system wired. But right when we start to get comfortable, He gives a little stretch and just shatters the box. God is so huge and marvelous that we can never shove Him in any box, no matter how hard we try – especially the box of our human reason. We will find tonight that Jesus just demolishes all sorts of boxes of religious and cultural significance without hesitation. He just does things His Father’s way and He gives little to no credence to any many made rule, tradition, or practice.

John 4:1-3

Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John (though Jesus himself didn't baptize them—his disciples did). So he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

As we know, John the Baptist had warned the Pharisees about Jesus and they already had a power encounter with Him at the Temple, but this was getting serious. People were starting to come to Him in great numbers and the implication of this verse is that the Pharisees were not happy about it whatsoever. Jesus then leaves Judea and goes to Galilee. Now, I don't want you to think even for a moment that Jesus was turning tail because He was afraid of the Pharisees. Rather, He knew that Father had an appointment for Him and He was not going to miss it.

John 4:4

He had to go through Samaria on the way.

This is a verse of utmost importance for buried within these 9 words is a secret to Jesus' entire ministry. Everything which Jesus did was in accordance with the dictates of His Father's will. Nothing was random, nothing was incidental, but all that Jesus did, every place He went, and all that He said was according to and in alignment with the will of God.

To understand this we need to look at the Greek word which is translated here as "had." The root of this word means to bind and is used in such contexts as "binding the strong man" and "what is bound in Heaven has been bound on earth." In other words, Jesus hands were tied, so to speak; therefore, He had no choice but to go to Samaria. This was not optional for Jesus; the Father had an appointment which He had to fulfill.

This is one of the first boxes of religion that Jesus shatters. Jesus did not go to Samaria because it was a short cut to Galilee, because He was missions minded, or because He was sympathetic to the Samaritans (although it was a short cut, He was missions minded and sympathetic to the Samaritans), He went because the Father had a very special meeting arranged for Him and His will was bound to the will of the Father. In fact we will see that Jesus arrived at the just right place in just the right time for this important meeting.

This is such a powerful concept. Jesus did not rely on His own earthly wisdom, and He did not set His own agenda, He was always submitted to the will of the Father. Jumping ahead to *verse 34*, Jesus said: "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work."

Just staring at this truth even for a moment should cause us to step back and ask ourselves: "if this is how Jesus lived, why do we carry on as if we have the ability

to guide and direct our own lives?” Why do we hold on to the notion that since God gave us a mind we are to use our God given wisdom or common sense to figure out what we are to do, where we are to go, and what we are to say? Isn't it a bit arrogant for us to think so highly of our own ability considering that Jesus lived only to do the will of the Father and finish His work? *1 John 2:5-6* says: “By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in him out himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” This means we are to live in the same level of dependence on the Father as Jesus did only doing the things that the Father has bound us to do so that His will in Heaven is done here on Earth.

The temptation to manage our own life and to serve God in the way that we want and not necessarily in the way that He requires is strong and always knocking at our door. After all He is intangible and we are living in a tangible world that is constantly moving and constantly requiring from us. We must however not be deceived by this illusion. God wants you to know Him so intimately that the intangible becomes as real to you as everything you can see, feel, and touch.

I understand that this is easier said than done and the actual implementation of this truth in our lives is only experienced when we presently and continually abide with the Lord, but everything must start with choosing to believe the truth. Therefore, each of you must choose whether or not you are going to believe that the events of your life are not random, arbitrary, or capricious and that God will lead you, guide you, and talk to you such that you can know and fulfill the work that He has appointed for you. The choice is yours. God will for force you to make this choice. It is a decision of faith—actively believing the truth! You have to decide if you are going to believe and walk as Jesus walked.

Going back to our text, let's revisit a little bit of history regarding Samaritans and the Jews in order to get a better understanding of the historical, religious, and

cultural dynamic that surrounds this encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well. First of all, it would not be inaccurate to say that the Jews hated the Samaritans and would literally have nothing to do with them. In fact, no self-respecting Jew would even step foot onto their soil. Thus, if a Jew was traveling to Galilee, he would either take the long way around near the coast or he would cross the Jordan river and take the long journey up on the East side and then re-cross when he passed by Samaria.

The reason for this goes back to the time when Assyria had taken Israel captive and deported most of its residents to other locations within its kingdom and likewise transplanted people from Babylon and from Cuthah and from Avva and from Hamath and Sepharvaim, and settled them in the cities of Samaria in place of the sons of Israel. Now these new residents started to intermarry with the surviving Israelites which created a huge problem, especially because these new residents brought with them all of their own gods and customs for worship.

As you might expect, God was not ok with any of it. So He gave the locals a strong incentive to, at a minimum, acknowledge His power and authority. He sent lions to attack and indiscriminately kill those in the land. The people knew that this curse had come from the God of the Jews and so they asked the king of Assyria for help.

In response, the King sent one Jewish priest to Samaria to teach the locals how to worship the God of the land. And while that showed an acceptable level of honor such that God called off the curse of the lions, the locals did not give up their own gods; rather, they merely incorporated the God of Israel in their own religious practices. Those from each nationality still made their own gods and put them in little houses in the high places and appointed priests to oversee the worship.

And the Israelites who intermarried with these settlers found themselves beholden to foreign gods. So in the eyes of a faithful Jew, the land had been utterly defiled by these false gods and half breed traitor Jews. That is why no “righteous” Jew would step foot onto the corrupted soil. For this history, see *2 Kings 17:24-41*.

Now there is more to this story of animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans. In 586 B.C. (about 135 years after Israel or the Northern Kingdom was taken captive by Assyria), the Southern Kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonian armies and also suffered deportation. However, once King Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of Babylon, died the Babylonian Empire quickly declined. Its fall came in 539 B.C. at the hand of Cyrus the Great and his Persian army.

Under Cyrus, the Jews were eventually allowed to return to the land of Judah and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. The Samaritan population, who was very uncomfortable with the return of the Jews, offered to help in this rebuilding program saying that they also worship the God of the Jews. But the people of Judah believed them to be enemies with a totally different agenda and so they rejected their offer.

Ezra 4:3

You may have no part in this work, for we have nothing in common. We alone will build the Temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, just as King Cyrus of Persia commanded us.

This sparked off a feud that was to last for the next 500 years. In the years that followed, the Samaritans built their own temple to the Lord on Mount Gerizim and instituted their own priesthood all the while worshiping other gods. The Samaritans

also rejected all of the Old Testament except for the Torah (the 5-books of Moses) and they claimed to have a copy of the Torah which was older than any possessed by the Judean Jews.

So this is the backdrop to Jesus saying He had to go to Samaria and why even the thought of Him stepping foot into that land would be considered by any Jew – much less the Rabbinical community – to be an act of treason. This brings us back to the fact that Jesus did not have to go to Samaria – He had to go to Samaria and in so doing He broke open so many religious, social, and cultural boxes in which the people of the day were bound.

John 4:5-8

Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

Jesus and His disciples made the approximately 35-mile trek from Judea to this famous well that dates back to the beginning of Jewish ancestry. Then He sent the disciples into town to get some food and He purposely stayed behind knowing that His appointment would soon arrive. Sure enough, before long comes this woman all alone to draw water.

What is wrong with this scene, besides the fact that Jesus is talking to a Samaritan? First of all, she was a woman and Jesus engaged her in conversation.

This was so culturally awkward and inappropriate. In those days men, especially Rabbis, did not talk to women in public—most of them would not even acknowledge their own wife if they were out in the open square. It was considered to be an act of indecency. Further, some even considered it to be an appearance of evil as the only kind of woman who would make herself available in public would be a woman of ill-repute.

Second, this woman is alone and she is coming to get water in the middle of the day at the height of the heat. That gives us a very important clue to her situation. She was a cultural outcast; for in those days a big part of a woman's social interaction was going together out to the well to collect water; in fact it was probably the only social time a woman had. They would go get the water just as the sun was going down and the day started to cool. So clearly this woman had crossed some serious lines if she was not part of the pack.

So if you can imagine, Jesus just totally shattered this woman's world-view by asking her for a drink of water; she was taken completely off guard.

John 4:9-10

The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?" Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

I like the way Jesus does not answer her directly, but He baits her. He plays off her curiosity over this unusual situation and tells her that God has a gift for her and

that He is the giver. And if she understood these two critical bits of information she would long for living water. Her mind must have been reeling thinking: “This Jewish man is not only talking to me, he says he has a gift from God for me. How can that be?”

Interestingly, Jesus uses a Greek word that is very unique and would not be otherwise commonly used. The Greek form of the word “gift” refers to something that is freely given without any agenda, obligation, duty, or implied requirement for reciprocity. It is truly free. The Bible uses this word only in context with gifts that come from God – the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of eternal life, the gift of His righteousness and so on.

This kind of gift stands in contrast to the gifts that are given between people which always have some underlying obligation, or implied duty associated with the gift. For example, we give in connection with social customs: graduations, weddings, Christmas, or to sustain a relationship such as with anniversaries or birthdays. But regardless of the event, it is human nature to always look for reciprocation in some way, shape, or form (even by way of a thank you, a hug, or some other acknowledgement). If we get no feedback whatsoever, we get bothered and over time even resentful.

But the gift that Jesus refers to comes without any expectation of reciprocation. It is free, without cost, without compulsion, without any form of implied duty or obligation on the part of the recipient; it is truly a free gift from God.

Then Jesus attempts to make a connection in her mind between the gift and the giver. He has “living water” and He is the only one who can give it and since this gift comes from God, Jesus is in effect telling her that she is having an encounter not just with some Jew who dared venture into Samaria, but with the living God.

John 4:11-14

"But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?" Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."

She is starting to wrestle with what Jesus has said. She does not really understand what He means by living water, but she is willing to play and see where this conversation leads. She starts with a little push back and asks if Jesus is greater than her ancestor Jacob. This is an important little fact. This woman was not just some displaced foreigner, but her ancestry was Jewish. Her family must have been one of those that were left behind during the Assyrian deportation and her question shows that she still has a deep seeded consciousness regarding the God of Israel.

However, instead of just answering her, Jesus points her again to the gift and the giver. He says that this gift is supernatural and the one who drinks of it will never thirst again for it comes from the well source of eternal life. Therefore, the giver must be far greater than her ancestor Jacob.

Jesus then starts to hone in and take her on a journey deep within her heart to the source of her true need. He initially engaged her in a discussion about water, then He moved her thoughts toward things of God, and now He is going to start drawing out truth from her own well. He is going to show her that no matter how

many times she draws from the well of her soul, she will always be left unsatisfied and alone.

John 4:15-18

"Please, sir," the woman said, "give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water." "Go and get your husband," Jesus told her. "I don't have a husband," the woman replied. Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband—for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!"

What I see in her reply is that this woman is finally getting in touch with that place where Jesus was poking. I don't think she was saying: cool, I can chill in my lazy boy and not have to fetch water in the heat of the day. I think what she said came from deep within her well of sadness, despair, abandonment, and isolation. If you can give me this water, I don't have to come out here all by myself every day in total humiliation as people watch, point their finger, and scoff. I have made a horrible mess of my life, I have no honor in the eyes of those in my village, and I am daily paying the price and it is getting to be too much for me to handle. I would rather just stay in my house and avoid the shame altogether.

I believe Jesus is thinking, "Finally, now we can get somewhere, we are finally on the same page; we both agree that you are in desperate straits." It's as if He draws the bucket up from the well of her soul and pours out the water on the ground so she can see how dirty and disgusting it really is. Sin has so thoroughly

corrupted her well that all she is left with is shame and despair. She has no one to care for her, no one to love her, no one to help her; she is all alone.

Jesus then asks her to get her husband knowing full well that she did have one. Notice that He did not come right out and call her a tramp or an immoral woman, and He did not purposely embarrass her by asking why she was at the well all by herself in the middle of the day (although it was like the pink elephant in the room). I can imagine that if He would have approached her in that way she would have instantly shut down and the conversation would have ended. After all, this discussion was not about sin but about her need for the gift. She asked Jesus to give her some of this living water so He wisely helps her come to grips with the nature of her true thirst. You see this woman did not just need a way to avoid ongoing public humiliation, she needed redemption and she needed to be truly satisfied.

Jesus tells her that she has been futilely seeking to satisfy her thirst by going from man to man to man and now she is even more alone than ever before for the man she is living with is not even her husband. In the Greek, the implication is that he is someone else's husband. In other words, drawing from her own well has led her to a place of ultimate pain, loneliness, and wanting for there is not even a chance that he is going to marry her much less stay the night. She is in a dark, dark, lonely place.

Now, when you find yourself in a conversation with someone and it starts cutting a little too close to the bone and getting a little too real for your comfort, what is your natural tendency? Change the topic, of course; and what better than to spout out lofty ideas about God. It is a common tactic which I have seen over and over again.

John 4:19-20

"Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?"

Forget the heat of the day, this woman must have broken out in a serious sweat when Jesus started turn His spotlight of truth on her heart. She needed a quick out, so she cleverly brings up a topic that she expects will create enough controversy that the spotlight will move away from her heart and on to a 500-year old conflict. She must have thought, whew! I'm sure to get out of this one, just in the nick of time. But not so fast, she still does not realize that she is talking to the giver.

John 4:21-24

Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

Jesus takes her first to a concept that comes from the book of *Malachi* which He knows full well she and the other Samaritans did not accept. Remember, they only held to the Torah. That is why He told her that the Samaritans know very little

about God but the Jews know all about Him. It is because they hold to the entire teachings of the Jewish Bible.

Malachi 1:11

For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering that is pure; for My name will be great among the nations," says the Lord of hosts.

Jesus declares that this prophecy is being fulfilled – even right at that moment everything that she thought she knew was in the midst of radical change. Jerusalem, Mount Gerazim, it really does not matter for God is Spirit and He is not bound by location. He is merely looking for those who will worship Him in Spirit and truth. Notice, after making sure she knows that salvation comes from the Jews – namely Himself – then He emphasizes this point three times.

This concept takes us back to Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus in Chapter 3. In order to truly worship the Lord, and it not just be some religious activity that is in reality empty and meaningless, you must be born again of the Spirit of God – for God is Spirit. The only way you can come to God is on the basis of His Spirit which He is willing to give to you (I just want to note the Greek word for Spirit that is used both in reference to God and to our worship is the same word). Thus, your humanity is not enough and never will be enough to enter the presence of God and to worship Him. In fact, your best acts of holiness and righteousness are as filthy rags to God (*Isaiah 64:6*) and do not qualify you to be a true worshiper. That

is why Jesus said in *John 3:5* that “no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of the Spirit.”

The fact that Jesus repeated this idea three times means that by the witness of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, He is telling the truth – there is no way a person can be a true worshiper of God unless they are filled by the Spirit of God and come to Him on the basis of His Spirit.

Do you understand the implication of this? First of all, if you have not been born again, then there is no way for you to have intimacy with God. The word we have translated worship literally means to kiss and it comes from the idea of a dog licking his master’s hand which is an act of trust, intimacy, adoration, love, thanksgiving, and homage. It is beautiful, but you must be in a relationship, through the Spirit, to share this kind of intimacy with the Father.

Secondly, and this is where it cuts close to the bone and shatters one of the massive boxes within the religion of Christianity in which we have tried to shove God, if you approach God while abiding in your *Old Man* (whether you are aware of it or not), you might as well go home; you’re wasting your time. True worship is Spirit to Spirit. Then to make this point even more poignant, Jesus added that you must also worship in truth.

You cannot come to God on your own terms; you cannot have your own ideas of what it means to be in relationship with God; and you cannot insist that God be ok with your methods and attempts to worship Him. The only way you can truly be a worshiper is if, *when* you come to God, you are under submission to the Spirit through an abiding relationship with Jesus where He is your absolute *priority* and the ultimate *authority* over your life.

I know this is difficult but please keep in mind that worship is not just singing some songs with our eyes closed on Sundays, but the worship these verses describe is in the *present active* tense – meaning that true worship is an ongoing current activity in your life. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that true worship is when you live from the *New Creation* and walk by the Spirit of God; I believe it is synonymous. It is a life of absolute surrender to God where He is gets to call the shots in your life and you merely trust that He knows what He is doing believing that He loves you. It is a life lived without all the striving and wrestling with God as you try to control and figure out your life according to your own wisdom. It is a life lived in accordance with this truth found in **John 15:5**: “apart from Him I can do nothing.” Yes, apart from an abiding relationship with Jesus I can do absolutely nothing, including being a true worshiper of God.

I love the fact that this is the kind of person that God seeks. One who will yield to His ways and His will.

Let me tell you something really interesting. In **verse 24** where it says: “those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” That word “must” is the third person singular active present tense of the same word which was used to describe the fact that Jesus’ will was bound to the will of Father such that He had to go to Samaria. In other words, *when* we are in the Spirit of God we have to continually worship – our hands are bound, so to speak. The Spirit worships and so must we presently, actively, and continually worship God. This is accomplished when our will is bound to the will of the Father and we yield to His control such that He is free to direct what we say, what we do and everywhere we go; all to the glory of the Father. This is true worship!

John 4:25-26

The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus told her, "I AM the Messiah!"

Ok, this verse rocks for many reasons. First of all, don't be surprised that this Samaritan believed the Messiah was coming. Remember, she held to the Torah and in ***Deuteronomy 18:15*** Moses told the Israelites that one day the Lord will raise up for them a prophet like Moses and they had better listen to him. So the Samaritans were looking for this one to be sent from the Lord. But what is remarkable is that this is the first time that Jesus declares to anyone who He really is. We have heard the witness of John, the witness of the Father, and the witness of the Spirit, the witness of Andrew, Phillip, and Nathanael, but now Jesus gives His own testimony about who He is. And just to make sure there is no confusion, He did not just say that he is the Messiah or the prophet; rather, He spoke to her from the Torah and invoked the name of God in reference to Himself. Yes, the giver of living water is Jesus, God in the flesh. In the Greek it literally reads: "I am, who am speaking to thee."

In Exodus, Moses asked God for His name so he could tell the Israelites who were captive in Egypt who sent him. God replied:

Exodus 3:14-16

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ' I AM has sent me to you.'" God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ' The Lord, the God of your fathers, the

God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.

The “I Am” – the ever existent one – the one who was greater than Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, picked a despised Samaritan, a woman who was as immoral as they come, to be the one to whom He would first reveal Himself. Yes, God meant what He said. He was looking for her for He knew she would worship Him in Spirit and truth. Her heritage did not matter. Her gender did not matter. Her moral standing did not matter. God loved her and wanted her and so Jesus came to her breaking all those boxes of cultural, historical and religious bigotry and chose her to be one who would drink from His well of living water.

The fact that you are here tonight makes me believe that God has also chosen each of you to be one who would presently, continually, actively worship Him by the power of the Spirit of God. I know that He wants you to experience His living water flowing from your life like a perpetual bubbling spring. It does not matter who you are, where you came from, and even if you have been abiding in your *Old Man* as an enemy of God. He wants you to love Him and worship Him Spirit to Spirit. He has the gift and He freely gives it; you just need to yield your will such that you become bound to the will of the Father.

We will pick up the rest of this story next week, but I want you to consider the nature of what it means to be a true worshiper of God. I want you to consider what it would look like if you were to yield and walk by faith in the Spirit of God. I invite you to choose to actively believe the truth and by faith become intimate with the Father.

Let's Pray