

**The Gospel of John (27);
“Jesus and the Woman of Samaria” (5)**

Introduction:

Last Lord’s Day we were addressing the nature of the true worship of God. This subject was before us due to our Lord’s words to this woman of Samaria, while they sat at Jacob’s well. In John 4:23 and 24 we read our Lord’s words,

23But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

In passing I mentioned a matter that was not in our notes, but needed to be, and so I purposed to mention it again at the outset of today’s study. It is very significant that the word, “worship”, is most commonly a verb, not an adjective or a noun. In other words, the worship of God is what we do when we gather on the Lord’s Day. Worship should not be understood as chiefly something we *derive* from God; worship is that which we *give* God, or *offer* to God. But all too often “worship” in today’s consumer culture is assumed to be primarily as a means *to receive* something we need or desire from God. Often churches will have a philosophy of church ministry that makes the person in the pew the center and focus of all that takes place in a worship service. Those churches that are perceived to provide a “worship experience”¹, are frankly the most appealing to unspiritual and poorly instructed Christians. They do not gather to worship God, although they may say so. Their motivation for going to church is primarily to obtain something from God, not to glorify God. It is a worldly spirit of *pragmatism* that always asks, “What did I get out of it?” Or, “How did it help me?” ***It is a self-absorbed, sinful individualism that measures spiritual truth by its utilitarian value.***

Suppose we were close friends. And I had the habit of coming to your house each week to visit with you. But I stopped coming because I did not perceive I got anything from it. “I have been going to your house week after week and I haven’t been helped by it.” I would be perceived as quite selfish and self-absorbed. And so it is with those who attend the house of God with little desire except to obtain something from God.

When we come together as the people of God on the Lord’s Day, we are to do so in order that we offer true worship unto Him through our prayerful, joyful, thankful praise for who He is and for all that He has done for us in Christ. Worship is to be understood by what we render to God, not by what we derive from Him. Worship is an action in which we are to glorify God. Worship is not a feeling we get when we are in a so-called worship service. The issue is not what moves you or what makes you feel close to God; rather, what is all important is that you please God in what you offer Him. And He has prescribed in His Word quite clearly what He desires from those who would worship Him and He has made it quite clear what displeases Him and what He will not accept from people who gather to “worship” Him. When we come to worship God we are to do so in spirit and truth. We are to set ourselves and our own interests and desires as secondary, with our primary desire to glorify God. True worshippers are the ones who offer that which God desires most. They too, by the way, will be those who receive most from God in having done so.

Toward the end of last Lord’s Day message, we addressed the important matter of Christians making preparation prior to coming to worship, in order to worship God rightly. Throughout Scripture the people of God were to undergo preparation when they were anticipating meeting with God. The main goal of preparing for worship is to sanctify God in our hearts. I had referred to the classic work of **Jeremiah**

¹ Note, “worship” here is used as an adjective-worship experience.

Burroughs, Gospel Worship. The verse that he called upon regarding the nature of our preparation to worship God was Leviticus 10:3. There God declared to Israel, “***I will be sanctified in those that come nigh to me.***” The context of this verse was God speaking to Aaron, the High Priest, immediately after God had consumed with fire Aaron’s two oldest sons, Nadab and Abihu. Here is the account:

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He commanded them not. ²And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. ³Then Moses said unto Aaron, “This is it that the LORD spake, saying, ‘I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified.’” And Aaron held his peace. (Lev. 10:1-3, KJV)

These two priests, who were sons of Aaron, legitimate priests before the Lord, attempted to worship God in a way that He had not commanded. They had become “creative” in their worship; they had offered “strange fire.” They suffered severe consequences for doing so. God’s punishment was that He consumed them with fire. In God’s explanation to Aaron, He said, ***I will be sanctified in those that come nigh to Me.*** God is holy. He has prescribed how His people are to come into His presence to worship Him. And certainly, when we come to worship God in His presence, our primary focus and emphasis should be upon God Himself and we are to approach to worship Him only in the manner that he has prescribed in His Word.

Our Lord rebuked the Pharisees and scribes for setting aside the written Word of God and substituting the traditions of men in its place. The Lord said of them, “***In vain do they worship Me***, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (15:9). The Protestant Reformers adopted a standard for assessing whether or not certain practices should be maintained in the public worship of God. This was a very important matter for the early Reformers. When the Reformers had learned the original languages of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, and when they obtained copies of the Scriptures in these original languages as well as in their own native tongue, one of their first and greatest concerns was to reform the worship practices of the Roman Catholic Church, which had dominated Christendom for 1,000 years. They jettisoned any practice that was not prescribed in the Word of God. They adopted the order and elements of worship that could be clearly shown to have been directives in the Word of God. The principle that came to be identified in reforming the church’s worship was called **the regulative principle of worship**. It essentially says this: ***acceptable worship of God is only that worship that is prescribed by God in His written Word.*** They argued that we may not come into His presence and worship Him in ways of our own choosing and of our own creation.

The regulative principle of worship, which distinguishes the Calvinist approach to the public worship of God from other views, states that only those elements that are instituted or appointed by command or example, or which can be deduced “by good and necessary consequence” from Scripture, are permissible in worship, and that whatever is not commanded or cannot be deduced by good and necessary consequence from Scripture is prohibited. God has revealed in His Word the way that He invites and encourages His people to worship Him. It is our responsibility to understand His Word and conform our practice to it. The church at Corinth had been coming together to worship, but that church had been worse off for doing so, because their worship was not in accordance with the will of God. And we are as they were if we do not worship God according to the Word of God. We would then be as they, coming “together not for the better but for the worse” (1 Cor. 11:7).

We read and hear much these days about “new and creative worship” that is taking place among churches. This is a denial and abandonment of the regulative principle of worship. God is a holy God and as such, has prescribed precisely how He is to be worshipped. You and I do not have the authority to make changes in what He has commanded.

The **regulative principle** of worship is to be distinguished from the **normative principle** of worship, which teaches that whatever is **not** prohibited in Scripture is permitted in worship, as long as it is agreeable to the peace and unity of the Church. In short, there must be agreement with the general practice of the Church and no prohibition in Scripture for whatever is done in worship. The normative principle of worship is the generally accepted approach to worship practiced by Lutherans, Anglicans, many Evangelicals, and Methodists. The regulative principle of worship is generally held by Reformed (Calvinistic) Christians.

We would advocate that if the Scriptures do not command or illustrate a duty or practice, it is not to be employed in the public worship of God. The point is this: God does not permit or approve of our being “creative” in the forms and mode of our worship. God is holy and He has declared how His people are to worship Him. Worship is Godward--worship is what we render to God, not what we derive from Him or from our service to Him.

God has not only told us what it is to worship Him, but He has told us what *means* we may use to worship Him. In our own **Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689**, Article 22 addresses “Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day.” Here is paragraph 1:

1. The light of nature shews that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is just, good and doth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart and all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures. (Jer. 10:7; Mark 12:33; Deut. 12:32; Exo. 20:4-6)

The above statement describes *the duty to worship God* and the source of instruction whereby we may learn how to worship God properly. Paragraph 2 reads this way:

2. Religious worship is to be given to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to Him alone; not to angels, saints, or any other creatures; and since the fall, not without a mediator, nor in the mediation of any other but Christ alone. (Matt. 4:9f; John 6:23; Matt. 28:19; Rom. 1:25; Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10; John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5)

This describes *the object of our worship*-- God alone, and that through Jesus Christ alone. We then may read paragraph 3:

3. Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one part of natural worship, is by God required of all men. But that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of the Spirit, according to His will; with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; and when with others, in a known tongue.² (Psa. 95:1-7; 65:2; John 14:13f; Rom. 8:26; 1 John 5:14; 1 Cor. 14:16, 17)

What is stated is *the responsibility and privilege of prayer*, as well as defining what proper prayer is. The next paragraph further *limits the realm of prayer*. There are some for whom prayer is not to be offered.

4. Prayer is to be made for things lawful, and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter; but not for the dead, nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death. (1 Tim. 2:1f; 2 Sam. 7:29; 2 Sam. 12:21-23; 1 John 5:16)

And then we read of the different *means* of legitimate worship that God has prescribed.

5. The reading of the Scriptures, preaching, and hearing the Word of God, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord; as also the administration of baptism, and the Lord’s supper, are all parts of religious worship of God, to be performed in obedience to Him, with understanding, faith, reverence, and godly fear; moreover, solemn humiliation, with fastings, and thanksgivings, upon special occasions, ought to be used in an holy and

² This was repudiating the Roman Catholic practice of having portions of their “worship” in Latin, a language that the people did not understand.

religious manner. (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2; Luke 8:18; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19; Matt. 28:19, 20; 1 Cor. 11:26; Esther 4:16; Joel 2:12; Exo. 15:1-19, Psa. 107)

And lastly, the confession describes what the Bible says about *the places* where believers are to worship God.

6. Neither prayer nor any other part of religious worship, is now under the gospel, tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed; but God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by Himself; so more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly nor willfully to be neglected or forsaken, when God by His word or providence calleth thereunto. (John 4:21; Mal. 1:11; 1 Tim. 2:8; Acts 10:2; Matt. 6:11; Psa. 55:17; Matt. 6:6; Heb. 10:25; Acts 2:42).

We have considered our Lord's words to the woman of Samaria that when people worship God they are to do so "in spirit and in truth." We read in **Psalm 19:14** the kind of attitude and the desire we should have when we come before God to worship Him. The psalmist wrote,

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

The psalmist requests that God will receive his worship, realizing and acknowledging that God Himself must enable him to do so and that God must redeem him from his fallen sinful state. This verse may be coupled with **Hebrews 12:28**, which states, "let us have *grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*" Here the word "serve" is literally "worship." By considering these matters, we may propose this definition of gospel worship

Worship, according to the Scripture, is that which we offer to God by His grace with reverence and godly fear, through our speech and thoughts that are acceptable to God.

Let us be specific in how God has commanded us to worship Him. If we are to worship God in a way that He will receive our worship, we must worship Him with the *right motive*, in the *right manner*, using the *right means*.

First, let us worship our God with *the right motive*. When we gather to worship it should be our primary motivation to worship/glorify God. This may seem quite basic, but so few get it right. For example, consider the typical church attendee or even member. He leaves the church service which had not risen to his expectation and he expresses his disappointment, "I didn't get much out of church today." This reveals a complete ignorance or denial of everything that we have been saying. The question we should be asking ourselves is this: "Did the Lord get much out of me today?" The evidence that true worship has taken place is not whether or not I perceive that I have gotten anything from it. True worship has taken place when one can say based on Scripture and his heart's intention that God received something from him. The person who dismisses or disregards a church service or a sermon by saying, "I didn't get anything out of it", reveals that he or she had not been worshipping God at all. When we can affirm, "Today God received from me the best I could offer Him in my sincere devotion (spirit) and praise of Who He is and what He has done (truth)", then you may go home content and satisfied. You have performed your proper and pleasant duty to worship God. You have worshipped your God as He has commanded you to do, called you to do, and you are privileged to do. When this simple test is applied, then it can easily be seen that much of what is touted as worship is not worship at all.

But one might ask, "Am I not supposed to get anything from it?" Absolutely, but the benefit flows from having set aside your own self as the principle subject of your heart and mind and fixing your mind and heart upon Him where it belongs. As long as you come to church motivated *chiefly* for what you can get out

of it, do not think that you will receive anything from the Lord. The Lord Jesus would be able to justly charge you with the offense of so many on the day following His miracle of the loaves,

Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. (John 6:26)

Because many people come to church primarily for what they can get out of it rather than for what they may offer to their God, often they will only keep coming to church as long as they are serviced. But if and when the time comes that they are not being serviced in the manner that they have determined for themselves, they are “down the road.” These are the people who are easily deceived, deceived by what some claim to promise them. They are deceived in thinking for a time they are receiving it. In reality few people really want to serve or worship God. But may it be true of us, *let us worship our God with the right motive.*

Let us worship our God in *the right manner.* We have read how we are to worship our God. Our congregational worship is to be characterized by *reverence and godly fear.* What may we do as individuals and as families to help insure that our congregation worship God in this manner? Now let us become very practical and direct.

First, let us place great priority on our privilege and responsibility to worship God together. We have banded together as a body of Christ to worship God corporately. This means that we as members should purpose to gather faithfully at the appointed times to worship God together. It is our duty and privilege to be here as members. Each month we recite our covenant together. We read these words together, “*We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together.*” God holds us accountable to our words. It is the proper expectation of the church body to expect that we will be faithful to our commitments to the body. Now we all recognize providential hindrances and difficulties that prevent this from time to time. But church attendance should not be viewed as something to be observed only when I think that I need it or only when I have an impulse or sense of guilt that “I should be in church.” We should view our opportunity to worship God as a great privilege and responsibility to which our God will hold us accountable.

Second, in consideration of the glorious occasion and opportunity we have to worship God together, *let us all be on time to begin our worship.* And perhaps, yes, let us be early and in our place, having fixed our minds and hearts on this great matter before us. Do we worship God rightly when we jump right in without forethought or preparation?

Third, let us prepare ourselves beforehand for the proper worship of God. The Jews observed their Sabbath as beginning the evening before the day. May our Lord help us prepare ourselves before we gather on the morning of the Lord’s Day. Read the Scriptures. Read good devotional literature. Pray alone. Pray with your family. I would encourage you to listen to Christian music that instructs and edifies rather than entertains. We would also perhaps recommend internet Christian radio.³ The point is this: proper preparation for worship will enable you and this church to worship God in reverence and godly fear.

Fourth, let us worship God without distraction. Be aware that you disrupt others from the worship of God by your coming and going. For those who must leave or enter during worship service, I would encourage you not to do so during prayer, Bible reading, or the sermon, but do so when the congregation stands for singing or at another fitting time. Now, we would never want to burden the conscience of someone not to leave if they must. We will assume that if you do leave, it is because you must do so.

Let us now continue our consideration of our Lord Jesus interacting with this woman in John 4. We will read verses 25 and 26. After Jesus told this Samaritan woman of the new manner in which God’s people would worship Him, we read:

³ Now giving allowance to individual taste, I would encourage the listening to (http://wordoftruthradio.com/listen_wotr.php). Much of the music is instrumental hymnody.

²⁵The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will tell us all things.”

²⁶Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

When we began to consider the contents of this chapter five weeks ago, we proposed an outline. Here it is again for us:

- I. Jesus arrived in Samaria (4:1-6)
- II. Jesus met and engaged a Samaritan woman in conversation (4:7-26)
- III. Jesus instructed His disciples of the great evangelistic opportunities before them (4:27-38)
- IV. The faith placed in Jesus by the Samaritans (4:39-42)

We see that **verses 25 and 26** conclude the second portion of this narrative, in which *Jesus met and engaged a Samaritan woman in conversation*. Again, here are verses 25 and 26:

²⁵*The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will tell us all things.”*

²⁶*Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”*

The woman expressed the belief of the Samaritans in the coming Messiah. The Samaritans believed that the coming Messiah as one who would restore and reform His people. They understood the Messiah to be the Restorer that is mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:18, in which Moses said, “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” The Samaritans referred to their coming Messiah as the *Taheb*. We see that both the Jews and the Samaritans had messianic expectations. It is not clear why the woman made this statement of verse 25. Was she attempting to distance herself from the claims of Jesus, retreating into her own understanding of matters? Or, did the woman “suspect the truth, voicing her confession of faith as a kind of test to see what He would say”?⁴ It is not clear. It is somewhat ironic that she attempts to instruct Jesus in the nature of the ministry of the coming Messiah according to her understanding. “The scene is drenched in irony: a Samaritan woman is explaining messianic expectations to the Messiah.”⁵

J. C. Ryle summarized her condition quite well as it is depicted in verse 25:

This verse is an interesting one. It shows the woman at last brought to the very state of mind in which she would be prepared to welcome a revelation of Christ. She had been told of “living water,” and had expressed a desire for it. She had been told her own sin, and had been unable to deny it. She had been told the uselessness of resting on any formal membership of the Samaritan Church, and the necessity of spiritual and heart-worship of God. And now what can she say? It is all true, she feels: she cannot gainsay it. But what can she do? To whom is she to go? Whose teaching can she follow? All she can do is to say that she knows Messiah is one day coming, and that He will make all things clear and plain. It is evident that she wishes for Him. She is uncomfortable, and sees no relief for her newly-raised perplexities, unless Messiah should appear.⁶

Jesus made the claim that must have quite surprised the woman. “*Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am He’*” (4:26). “This is the one occasion on which He admitted His messiahship prior to the trial.”⁷ Jesus helped this woman in making a confession of faith.

⁴ Donald A. Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 226.

⁵ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 246.

⁶ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 227.

⁷ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 273.

As Jesus helped the woman with her confession of sin in verses 17 and 18, so He now helps her with her confession of faith (compare v. 29). To this obscure woman Jesus reveals point-blank what He had revealed to no one else.⁸

Perhaps she had suspected that this man was more than what she had originally thought.

If she had begun to have an inkling about His identity, it was now confirmed. He whom the Jews expected as the promised prince of the house of David was at the same time the one whom the Samaritans (and others) expected as the prophet like Moses. She had not known at first who it was that asked her for a drink of water, but now she understood how He could make a claim that marked Him out as a greater than their father Jacob; it was the Coming One in person who sat thus by the well and spoke so wonderfully to her.⁹

Matthew Henry wrote of the great privilege bestowed upon this woman and then he described God's ability to impart grace to a hearer who may not have all of the opportunities or knowledge that others may have enjoyed.

Christ did never make himself known so expressly to any as He did here to this poor Samaritan, and to the blind man (9:37); no, not to John the Baptist, when he sent to Him (Matt. 11:4, 5); no, not to the Jews, when they challenged Him to tell them whether He was the Christ (10:24). But, [1.] Christ would thus put an honor upon such as were poor and despised (James 2:6). [2.] This woman for aught we know, had never opportunity of seeing Christ's miracles, which were then the ordinary method of conviction. Note, to those who have not the advantage of the *external* means of knowledge and grace God hath *secret* ways of making up the want of them; we must therefore judge charitably concerning such. God can make the light of grace shine *into the heart* even when He doth not make the light of the gospel shine *in the face*.¹⁰

Our Lord's statement to the woman is quite emphatic: "***I who speak to you am He.***" Actually the Greek text is not entirely reflected by our English translation. A more literal English translation might read this way: "Jesus says to her, 'I am, the one speaking to you.'"¹¹ What Jesus was doing was describing Himself as God in the Old Testament, when He said, "I am." Here the Lord is not only asserting that He is the promised Messiah, but He is also asserting His divine nature. He is God incarnate. The commentator **Edward Klink** described what Jesus was asserting:

Jesus' statement is emphatic and strongly impressionistic. With careful choice of words, "I am he" (Ἐγώ εἰμι), which adds an emphatic "I" and has no "he" in the Greek ("I, I am"), Jesus speaks in the style of God of the OT. The self-revelation God gave to Moses through a bush in Exodus 3 has now been spoken to a Samaritan woman through the incarnate God. Jesus' response is both a correction and a revelation. So much of what the Samaritan woman believed was wrong or incomplete. She had been waiting for a "what" (v. 22), yet all the while *the* "who" was standing before her. His revelation is the correction, for there is no need to adjust her messianic theology. He only needs to announce his presence. The irony of v. 25 has been traded for a new irony: the Jewish Messiah announces his presence in Samaria to a Samaritan woman in the middle of a rhetorical challenge. It is equivalent to the birth of the King of kings in a stable! This verse ends the rhetorical challenge proper. The rest of the pericope draws the encounter to a close by providing the necessary resolution to the scene.¹²

⁸ R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel** (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), p. 327.

⁹ F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 111.

¹⁰ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 907f.

¹¹ In Greek it reads, λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς Ἐγώ εἰμι (I am), ὁ λαλῶν σοι.

¹² Klink, p. 246.

With verse 26 we come to the conclusion of the second portion of our passage. The conversation between Jesus and the woman concluded. We may next consider that ...

III. Jesus instructed His disciples of the great evangelistic opportunities before them (4:27-38)

Let us read this next section of John 4, beginning with verse 27.

²⁷And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, “What do You seek?” or, “Why are You talking with her?”

²⁸The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, ²⁹“Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” ³⁰Then they went out of the city and came to Him.

³¹In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.”

³²But He said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.”

³³Therefore the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?”

³⁴Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. ³⁵Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! ³⁶And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. ³⁷For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”

A. The disciples returned to Jesus, who had been speaking with the woman. (4:27-30)

We read that the disciples of Jesus returned from the nearby town where they went to purchase food (cf. v. 8). They must have come to the well as Jesus and the woman were competing their discussion. “They marveled” that He talked with the woman. The verb, “marveled”, or perhaps “surprised”, is set forth in Greek in the imperfect tense. What this means in this context is that the disciples’ surprise “was more than momentary.” They were quite taken back that He was talking with this woman. It was very unconventional, and even unseemly in the opinion of the Jews. In fact, among Jews for a man to talk at any length with any woman, even your wife, was not a desirable or profitable thing to do.

The disciples who had gone into the city to buy food now returned. Their surprise at finding their Master talking to a woman was no doubt all the greater because the woman was a Samaritan, but for a rabbi to engage in conversation with a true-born Jewish woman was regarded by many as a waste of time that might have been more profitably spent. The classical comment on this verse is provided by the words of Yose ben Yohaqqan, a rabbi of the second century AD, ‘Prolong not conversation with a woman’, together with the editorial remark of whoever was responsible for preserving his words, ‘that is to say, even with one’s own wife; how much more with a neighbor’s wife. Hence the wise men say, “He who prolongs conversation with a woman brings evil upon himself, ceases from the words of the law, and at the last inherits Gehanna (hell)”’.¹³

With the coming of the Lord Jesus and the church He established, the status and treatment of women was greatly improved. It was a very profound and transformative statement that in Christ Jesus “you are all sons (children) of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, *there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Gal. 3:24). The Lord Jesus demonstrated this reality during His earthly ministry. He treated this woman with interest, dignity, and true regard for her soul. But His disciples were yet clueless, or

¹³ Bruce, p. 112.

at least almost so, for at least they knew better than to have voiced their questions, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are You talking with her?”

They wondered He should condescend to talk with such a poor contemptible woman, forgetting what despicable men they themselves were when Christ first called them into fellowship with Himself. Yet they acquiesced in it; they knew it was for some good reason, and some good end, of which He was not bound to give them an account, and therefore none of them asked, *What seekest thou?* or, *Why talkest thou with her?* Thus, when particular difficulties occur in the word and providence of God, it is good to satisfy ourselves with this in general, that all is well which Jesus Christ saith and doeth. (Matthew Henry)

Now in verse 27 the narrator (the Apostle John) gave some inside information that, it would seem, only one of the disciples who was present could possibly have known. We read in verse 27, “they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, ‘What do you seek?’ or, ‘Why are You talking with her?’” It would seem that two questions were on their minds, one for the woman and one for Jesus. Of the woman they might have asked, but dared not, “What do you want by talking with Him?” (What do you seek?). But of Jesus they would have asked Him, “Why are you even speaking with this woman?” Of the first question, the Gospel writer used the Greek word for “seek” (v. 27) that he used to describe God the Father “seeking” true worshippers (v. 23).

The verb “seek” is significant, for it was the same verb used to describe the action of God in v. 23. The reader has been guided to see that while the woman did not know what she was seeking, God was seeking her.¹⁴

But the disciples were clueless that the Lord Jesus was in the seeking business, and that is why He was speaking with this woman.

It would seem that no sooner that the disciples arrived that the woman departed. But she left with a different “mission” than what had brought her to the well that day. We read in verse 28, “*The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city...*”

The imagery is potent. The narrative’s focus on the abandoned water jar reflects the abandonment of the Samaritan water for a wholly different kind of water (v. 14). For just a few feet away from Jacob’s well, she had been introduced to a wholly other drinking source. It is also important to note that the narrator includes the disciples of Jesus in the aftereffects of the dialogue (v. 27) before giving the final response of the Samaritan woman (v. 28). The narrator probably intends to make clear that all people, not just the Samaritans, are in need of what the Samaritan woman had just received.¹⁵

She forgot the water in Jacob’s well, for she was now experiencing the living water which Jesus had given her, a well springing up into everlasting life. She could not contain herself. She would have to tell somebody. She would attempt to tell everybody. Or as **F. F. Bruce** described her actions:

She forgot the water of Jacob’s well in her excitement at receiving the living water of which Jesus had spoken. The well-spring of perennial refreshment was now bubbling up within her. Her abandonment of the waterpot is a parable of the renunciation of the old ceremonial, practiced by the Jews and the Samaritans alike, on the part of those who through faith in Christ have received the divine gift of eternal life. If she had avoided the company of her fellow-citizens before, she was a changed woman now: she must seek them out and share her news with them.¹⁶

¹⁴ Klink, p. 246.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 247.

¹⁶ Bruce, p. 112.

She said to the men in **verse 29**, “*Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?*” She got their attention. Her manner and demeanor was quite different than what they were accustomed witnessing of her. Something had happened to her. She had engaged someone of influence or importance. They would go see for themselves.

The woman was very clever in the manner that she bore witness of Jesus. “She speaks not as a theologian—she never really did have good theology; rather, she speaks as a witness to someone whom she did not understand but who had understood her.”¹⁷ But we read that her witness was effective. **Verse 30** records, “*Then they went out of the city and came to Him.*”

B. Jesus speaks to His disciples of that which moved His soul. (4:31-38)

³¹In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.”

³²But He said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.”

³³Therefore the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?”

³⁴Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. ³⁵Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! ³⁶And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. ³⁷For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”

Typical of John’s Gospel is the failure of some, even those closest to Jesus, to understand His true desires and motivations. They see only that which is physical, while He is moving about in the realm of the spiritual. Both Jesus and His disciples speak of food, but they mean something quite different from one another. They are concerned about Him gaining physical strength and stamina from needed food. He speaks of having already been invigorated in reaching a soul for the kingdom and the possible expansion of the kingdom that might result from that encounter. The woman had spoken of physical water, but He of spiritual life-giving water. His disciples spoke of physical food, but He spoke of spiritual life-motivating and invigorating food of service to His Father, fulfilling the mission on which He had been sent. Just as Jesus used physical water to direct the woman to consider spiritual truth, so He did with His disciples. He used physical food to direct their minds to spiritual reality.

Jesus speaks about already having food. Jesus uses real food to speak about something more real, for He is speaking in parabolic language in order to move the minds of His disciples beyond themselves (and their stomachs) to the unseen.¹⁸

Jesus said to His disciples, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.” He must not only do His Father’s will, but He also must “finish” it. Jesus used this term, “finish”, in the following places in this Gospel. Jesus said:

“But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me *to finish*-- the very works that I do-- bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.” (John 5:36)

¹⁷ Klink, p. 247. Klink went on to say of this verse: “It is important to note that the Samaritan woman concludes with a question that, with this particular negative particle “not (μήτι), expects a negative answer or at least communicates serious hesitation. The effect is not necessarily to challenge the possibility that he is the Messiah but to introduce a possibility not considered before. In a way, the Samaritan woman left the rhetorical challenge with Jesus and entered an entirely different rhetorical challenge, one involving the possibility of a Jewish Messiah for the Samaritans. Having watched Jesus broach a sensitive topic, the Samaritan woman carefully poses an exhortative rhetorical question to her own people.”

¹⁸ Klink, p. 248.

“I have glorified You (the Father) on the earth. *I have finished the work* which You have given Me to do.” (John 17:4)

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I thirst!’²⁹ Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. ³⁰ So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘*It is finished!*’ And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.” (John 19:28-30)

John used the term “finish” to emphasize Jesus completing His work when He died upon His cross.

The Lord Jesus was testifying to His disciples of the vital connection that He had with His Father and that His very life was sustained and contained in doing His Father’s will.

It is important to note that Jesus aligns His needs with “the one who sent me”. Jesus is so exclusively defined by the Father and His “sending” that even food is made subsidiary. That is why Jesus claims to do another’s “will” and “work”, terms used exclusively in the Fourth Gospel for the Father’s work of salvation. It is never the work of Jesus or His disciples; it is always the work of his Father (cf. 17:4). Jesus is so dependent on the Father that the Father’s will and work is food to Him, and He is actually hungry for it, actually craving its accomplishment (cf. Deut. 8:3). Jesus’ life is sustained ultimately by God.¹⁹

Jesus went on to declare in **verse 35**, “*Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest?’ Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!*” (4:35).

It is difficult to tell if Jesus was alluding to a particular time of year from which the harvest was yet four months away. Some say that the harvest He was alluding to was the wheat or barley harvest that would take place in the middle of the month Nissan, or April. This would mean that they were in Samaria in our month of December. However, Jesus may have simply been quoting a proverbial saying that people would use to suggest it is a time of waiting for a more convenient or suitable time for something to occur. At any rate, the Lord Jesus was awakening His disciples to the great opportunity to advance the kingdom of God right there and then. It is very likely that when Jesus issued these words, the crowds of Samaritans were coming forth through the fields from the village where the woman had proclaimed Jesus possibly was the promised Messiah.

Jesus turns from his unique food (as the unique Son) and speaks now to the rest of the Father’s children about their food: the will and work of God. By describing the fields as “white” for the harvest, Jesus is describing them as ready to be harvested. There should be no delay. The two-imperative phrase, “Lift up your eyes and look”, and a third if we include “behold”, are exhorting a certain kind of vision, the same kind that is hungry, but not for bread alone, or thirsty, but unsatisfied without “living water.” Jesus is now speaking directly about what the prologue depicted as the “unseen.” What they cannot see is that Jesus can see a horde of Samaritans coming down the road toward Him. They are Samaritans satisfied from their recent meal at midday (cf. v. 6), yet still hungry. It is another exhortation to “come and see” (cf. 1:46). They have come but have not yet seen.²⁰

We will close here. But as we do let us challenge ourselves at the great opportunity that lies before us in this world in which our Lord has placed us. Consider the words of **Richard Lenski** (1864-1936) that describe our Lord and His desire and work to save sinners.

There on the path through the young grain the Samaritans were coming, impelled by the report from the woman. We now see why John has the picturesque imperfect ἤρχοντο (“were coming”) in

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 248.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 249.

verse 30—there they were, still coming. They were the grain that Jesus saw, white for harvest, ready to be gathered into the granary of the kingdom. Thus the contrast between the two kinds of “food” (v. 31 and 33) is carried over into the two kinds of “harvest.” The disciples and we with them are ever inclined to see only the material and must have our attention drawn especially (“behold!”) to the spiritual. It often seems less real to us than the material, yet if anything it is more so. At least it is infinitely more important and vital. We go into a large city and see great buildings, a vast amount of commerce, etc., but we often fail to see the millions of poor sinners for whom Christ died, the “much people in this city” who may be gathered into Christ’s kingdom (Acts 18:10). We see a man’s wealth, social position, learning, power, etc., but we often overlook the immortal soul he has to be saved. On the other hand, we see a poor wretch, criminal, outcast, loathsome, but again do we see that he, too, is a soul bought by Christ’s blood and desired by him for Paradise (Luke 23:43). To the eyes of Christ all this is different. Our meat may be only the earthly, His meat is the spiritual; our view may be only concerning grain, His is concerning souls to be gathered into his garner.²¹

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think,
according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church
by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:20f)

²¹ R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel** (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), p. 334f.