



John 4 v 4-26 – Leader’s version

Life-giving water

For an hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – ask everyone, including the leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

What does the passage say and mean?

Read John 4 v 4-26

It will help to explain some geography and politics: Jesus was travelling north from Judea to Galilee. Samaria was in the middle. Sychar is a town in Samaria about halfway from Jerusalem to the Lake of Galilee. All this territory was in Israel. The Judaeans were Jews who had been exiled to Babylon and returned around 400BC and remained (in general) faithful to God, worshipping in the Temple at Jerusalem. The Samaritans descended from Jews who had become racially mixed and their faith in God had become diluted and mixed with other religions. They worshipped God on Mount Gerizim in Samaria.

The Jews and Samaritans really didn't get along well! The Jews believed that the Samaritans were permanently 'unclean' – unworthy before God – and that sharing crockery etc with them would make you unclean too. When Jesus was asked to explain 'Who is my neighbour?' he told a shocking parable about a Samaritan who helped a Jew; the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Read John 4 v 4-8

1. What do Jesus and His disciples do in Sychar?

Jesus sits down by a well (still in existence – about 2m in diameter, 30m deep) and the disciples go into town to get food. 'The sixth hour' is midday (Jews counted the time from 6am). It's worth considering why Jesus does this. Is He being lazy? Does He expect the disciples to run round getting the shopping while He sits in the sun? Or is He lining up a sequence of events...?

2. **SHOUT-OUT** It was usual for women to go to the well together early in the morning before it got hot. Why do you think this woman comes to the well to draw water alone in the heat of the day?

Let them brainstorm answers onto the flip-chart. Then explain that these circumstances indicate that this woman was not welcomed by the other women. For some reason, she is socially rejected.

Read John 4 v 7-9

3. What does Jesus ask her and what does she say?

Jesus asks for water (He hasn't got a jar to collect water in Himself) and she states that a Jewish man shouldn't be asking a Samaritan (or a woman) for a drink. This was not socially acceptable.

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How do you treat people that other people would reject? Are there any groups of people you would not treat well, simply because of who they are or what they have done?

Tell the group not to name groups or individuals that they deem 'unacceptable'. Don't let them use this question to judge other people or increase someone's vulnerability!!

How does Jesus' example in John 4 challenge your behaviour?

Read John 4 v 10-15

Questions 4-6 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. Let the group work on them in pairs.

4. **SDL** What does the woman think this conversation is about?

Water (the wet stuff in the well!)

5. **SDL** What is the conversation really about (v10)?

Eternal life and Jesus' real identity. Jesus is using his physical thirst to help the woman to recognise her spiritual thirst.

6. **SDL** What does Jesus mean when He says 'living water' (v14)?

(Living = life-giving). He's talking about giving her the Holy Spirit who gives eternal life.

7. How much 'living water' is Jesus offering her?

'A spring... welling up'. This isn't a cupful of water, it's a permanent provision of running water – He's saying that He can give her abundant eternal life; He's offering to make her spiritually alive in such a way that she would never have spiritual thirst again (because the supply of 'water', the Holy Spirit, will never run out).

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Do you have a thirst for spiritual things? Where are you looking for answers and why?

Has your spiritual thirst has been quenched by Jesus?

(It's ok to know that your thirst has been quenched (= you are saved) but still thirst for more because the spring will keep welling up and supplying you!)

Read John 4 v 15-18

8. Jesus and the woman have been talking about water. The woman has said that she wants 'this water', even though (like Nicodemus in John 3 v 4) she hasn't fully understood Jesus (v15). Jesus suddenly changes the topic. Why do you think He does this?

He's challenging her with her root issue: her sin and her need for His 'living water' – she's not married to the man she's living with and has five former men (Gk word could mean men or husbands). She is either a very unfortunate widow, has had multiple divorces or five relationships without marriage.

*'...it seems Jesus' intention in mentioning these things was not to create a sense of guilt, but to confront the pain in her relationships with men. This would accentuate her thirst for a meaningful relationship with God...'
(Kruse 2003, p134)*

Read John 4 v 19-24

9. What does the woman recognise about Jesus and why? (v19)

That He is a prophet – He knows her relationship history although they have not met before. And He is offering her eternal life.

10. What does she challenge Jesus about? (v20)

The correct place (or way?) to worship God. God had said that He would dwell (be especially present to His people) in the Jerusalem Temple which was built on Mount Moriah (2 Chronicles 3 v 1). That was where they were to worship Him. The Samaritans built another temple on Mount Gerizim. It was destroyed over 100 years before this conversation at the well. This second temple was deeply offensive to the Jews, since God dwelt (1 Kings 8 v 10-13), and therefore they should worship, in Jerusalem.

11. What does Jesus say about where to worship God?

He says the location is not the issue – things are about to change...

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Jesus said the Samaritans 'worship what you do not know'. Their Scripture only contained Genesis-Deuteronomy so they were ignorant of God's full revelation and didn't know God properly.

Why is it important that we try to read the whole Bible (preferably in order); not just our favourite bits, the easy bits or the page it falls open on?

Not everyone can read well and the gospels are the best place to point people to initially. For OT bible studies see www.tfcministries.org.uk/resources/bible-studies

12. What does Jesus say about 'true worshippers' and what does He mean? (v23-24)

He says that true worshippers will worship the Father 'in spirit and in truth'. God is spirit, meaning He is not confined to one place. Location will not be an issue. The Jerusalem Temple was where God dwelled and met with His people, and where His people offered sacrifices to Him, but it was never meant to be a permanent arrangement; it was meant to point towards something better. Jesus fulfils the promise, and function, of the Temple – He is the 'place' where mankind can meet with God. Through Jesus we can have relationship with God because He has paid for our sin at the cross (the final and complete sacrifice for sin) and has restored our broken relationship with God. Worship is to be focussed on Him.

God's Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of believers, so our own bodies are referred to as 'temples of the Holy Spirit' in 1 Cor 6 v 19-20! This means we can worship God everywhere and anywhere!

13. Look back at John 3 v 5-7, Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, which we studied last time. How does John 4 v 24 reinforce what Jesus said to Nicodemus?

Jesus tells Nicodemus that he needs to be 'born again' (be reborn spiritually) in order to enter the kingdom of God. 'Only as people are born of the Spirit, only as they receive the gift of the Spirit, can they truly worship God who is spirit.' Kruse (2003) p136

14. Read v25. Who is the woman waiting for?

She is waiting for the Messiah to come. She seems to be waiting on the promise of what little she knows of the Scriptures.

15. What is the good news that Jesus gives her in v26?

That He is the Messiah. This a clear statement of Jesus' identity – made outside of Jewish territory, to a Samaritan woman with a dodgy social history.

16. Read John 4 v 28-30 and v39-42. What happens over the next few days? Does this surprise you, given the location of the events?

The woman brings people from the town to meet Jesus and many become believers. We wouldn't have expected such a response in hostile territory – but these people are hungry for the truth and they recognise it when they hear it!

17. What does this remind us about who the gospel is for?

It's for everyone! Not just the nice people, the good people, the people who were brought up going to church, the acceptable people, etc.

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Is your worship based on the biblical truth about God? Or is it based on YouTube clips / what you want to be true about God?

Is your worship spiritual – do you bow down before God? Or do you seek an emotional experience from worship (/ the band)?

Check out – ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

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