

John, Part 11: When God Orders Your Steps

John 4:1 ESV Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John **2** (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), **3** he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. **4** And he had to pass through Samaria. **5** So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. **6** Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. **7** A woman from Samaria came 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** The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) **10** Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

- I. About two and a half months ago we began a series, exploring line by line, word by word, the Gospel of John. Today, we enter chapter 4 and will begin to look at one of the most interesting encounters that Jesus had during his earthly ministry; his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar. I am certain that this story is beloved because it is so easy to see ourselves in it. Today, I'd like to set up the story in order to explore it in a more in-depth fashion over the next couple of weeks.
 - A. Our journey through John's gospel so far has given us the story of one encounter after another of Jesus with various people.
 1. Remember way back when we started? Among the first things we saw was John the Baptist pointing Jesus out and saying to the crowd, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" just before he would baptize him.
 2. Remember how that this earth-shaking announcement of Christ's appearance caused two of John the Baptist's own disciples, one of whom just happened to be Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, to leave John in order to follow Christ?
 3. Do you recall how that Andrew was so affected by this meeting that he dashed over to his big brother, Simon, joyfully proclaiming, "We've found the Messiah!". Can you remember how that Jesus came into Simon's life and immediately changed his identity, saying that he was no longer flaky old Simon, but "Kephas" (kay-FAS, Cephas), now he was "a Rock" -Petros or Peter!
 4. Do you remember how after this Jesus went to Galilee and found Philip and made him a disciple by simply saying "follow me"? Or how Philip found his pal Nathanael and told him that they had found the one that Moses had spoken of, as well as the prophets, and that he was Jesus of Nazareth? Remember Nathanael's disdain for anything Nazarene, but how at the end of his first short meeting with Jesus, he was on his knees confessing him as the Son of God?

5. How about when his disciples went with Jesus to a party (a wedding party to be specific), and Jesus brought the wine? Well, more like Jesus **made** the wine (the best wine, as a matter of fact) giving everyone who knew about his first miracle a beautiful picture of the kingdom of God?
 6. Remember how he made a whip and cleaned house in the temple, driving out money-grubbing merchants and currency exchangers, thus restoring a sense of holiness to the temple?
 7. Do you recall how he blew the minds of the religious big shots that day by telling them that if they destroy “this temple” that he would raise it up again in 3 days? Remember how they mocked him, not realizing that it was the temple of his body of which he spoke?
 8. And do you remember cautious Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night to avoid the paparazzi? How, though he thought he would pat Jesus on the head with a compliment, he was told by Christ that his only hope of seeing God’s kingdom was to be born again? And how he told them that God loved the whole world, and not just one Jewish nation?
 9. And do you again recall John the Baptist, who, in contrast to Nicodemus, boldly proclaimed Christ’s worthiness in the light, even when it meant his disciples, his influence, and his fame went away to Jesus?
- B. All of these people had encounters with Jesus, and though on first inspection it may seem like it, none of these meetings were random or by chance. On the contrary they were intentional, strategic and ordered. It is this understanding of how God works that will be our focus this morning, using John chapter 4 as a backdrop.
1. What I am going to attempt to show you is critical if we are every to truly understand that God is up to something in our lives, even when we don’t understand **what** God is up to in our lives. Knowing deeply that God is working, and that he’s working from a blueprint of his own design, is the only way you’ll ever have confidence in the darkest days of your life when everything seems to be spinning out of control, or if you are to have any sense of purpose and usefulness as a believer.
 - a) How many of you here have ever played an actual pinball machine? Not a video game, but an actual game in which you dropped in a quarter and tried to keep the silver ball from rolling downhill and out of play with the use of flippers and bumpers? (How many of you wish you had all those quarters back so you could put a kid or grandkid through college?)
 - b) Sometimes in life we feel like that little silver ball don’t we? We’re shot into a loud, bright and exciting, but sometimes scary life.
 - c) We hope that random bumps and flips work in our favor to constantly avert possible disaster. Things like finding the right spouse, or getting the right education, or career; we hope for ideal health, beneficial friendships and investments.
 - d) Sometimes we feel like things go in our favor, and that we’re bumping off enough good fortune to keep us in play. But everyone of us has also experienced moments when we feel the pull of gravity; when we’re not

- bumping off of anything that is giving us a better score, and all we can do is fear the impending declaration of “Game Over”.
2. But what if God never wanted us to view our life as simply trying to make the best of the hand we’re dealt, and that we’re ultimately victims of happenstance? What if in the best and worst, the highest and lowest of every moment of every day, there was a beautiful scarlet thread that we could identify as “purpose” and “destiny”.
 - a) And not in some cheap, self-help, fanciful Jedi way (“Have a purpose in this life, you do!”)!
 - b) But rather to understand our destiny in a way that looks to God as the sole architect of something meaningful that is meant to be discovered in the sum of your days!
- II. Our text begins today with Christ and his disciples leaving Judea, (which is in the southern part of Israel surrounding Jerusalem) and returning north to Galilee, where he originally met Philip and Nathanael.
- A. The occasion for his leaving is that he has learned that the Pharisees have discovered he and his disciples are making and discipling more people than John the Baptist. This is huge. They are concerned about his swelling influence.
 - B. Although, as Curtis pointed out last week, John the Baptist is rejoicing in this transition wherein he decreases and Christ increases, the Pharisees don’t share John’s enthusiasm.
 1. They are hostile to the one who brought the whip into their precious temple and claimed to be able to restore it from rubble in three short days.
 2. John was super influential among the common people, but now this would-be prophet from backwater Nazareth is exceeding even John’s ministry, so the hostility of the religious powers-that-be was growing.
 3. So Jesus, who knows it is not time for a confrontation with the Pharisees that will rattle their religious cages further, retires to the north for a season.
 - C. Now the most direct route to Galilee in the north was through a region called Samaria. This region was named after the capital city of the Northern Kingdom, which was formed after the 10 northern tribes split away from the rest of Israel after Solomon’s reign almost 1,000 years before the time of Jesus.
 1. In 720 B.C., the Assyrian empire sacked and dispersed the Northern Kingdom. However, according to 2 Kings 17, the king of Assyria resettled this area with foreigners so the land would not become desolate.
 2. But because of their pagan wickedness, God began to judge the newly settled people of the region by sending a plague of lions to attack them in their cities and fields. So the Assyrian king makes a decision to send back one of the priests of Israel to teach them the law of “the god of the land”, thinking this will cause the carnage to cease.
 3. The result however, is that, according to the Bible, **2 Kings 17:33 So they feared the Lord but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away.**
 4. Those remaining in Samaria in Jesus day were remnants of the people that “feared the Lord **but also served their own gods**”; therefore the most

religious people of Christ's day considered them "half-breeds" at best, and pagan infiltrators at worst.

- D. In Christ's day, contrary to what many commentators taught in previous generations, Jews would travel through Samaria, but they probably did it at a quicker pace in their steps. It is by no means an exaggeration to say that the average Jew in Jesus day **hated** Samaritans, on par with the most extreme examples of racism you could begin to imagine in modern times.
- III. This makes what is said by John next very interesting. **John 4:4 ESV** And he had to pass through Samaria.
- A. As often is the case, this passage looks a little different in the old KJV version. **John 4:4 KJV** And he **must needs** go through Samaria. Although we don't use the term "must needs" anymore, I like it. It denotes urgency and importance.
1. In the Greek, it is the word translated "must needs" is "dei".
 - a) It can mean simply, "necessity in reference to what is required to attain some end" (i.e., "I must do this in order to do this")
 - b) But it can also mean "necessity **established by the counsel and decree of God**, especially by that purpose of his which relates to the salvation of men by the intervention of Christ and which is disclosed in the Old Testament prophecies". This means that something is done as a divine imperative.
 - c) Therefore, when our text says that Christ "had to pass through Samaria", it might simply mean that his journey required it as the quickest route; but could it also mean that that **the purposes of God** required it?
 2. It's interesting to note that in the Gospels, when the word "dei" is used in relation to Jesus, it is almost always in the context of God's big picture purposes, and not the mere necessities of life (he had to eat, sleep, etc.) Look at some examples...
 - a) **Luke 2:49 ESV** And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be (dei) in my Father's house?"
 - b) **Mark 13:10 ESV** And the gospel must (dei) first be proclaimed to all nations.
 - c) **Luke 9:22b ESV** "The Son of Man must (dei) suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."
 3. So could it be that both of these things, taking place simultaneously (what it took for Jesus to get from Judea to Galilee, **and** what God wanted to do in an entire Samaritan village) were both uniquely orchestrated by God to accomplish what God wanted? Even though one purpose seemed mundane, and the other one seemed epic?
- B. Jesus was very clear that he operated out of a great sensitivity to what the Father was up to...
1. **John 5:19 ESV** So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

2. What about where scripture says that Jesus was led (or driven) into the wilderness, by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil? Or when he prayed in the garden before he was arrested, “Nevertheless not my will but yours be done”?
 - C. But these things all indicate a very intentional obedience on the part of Christ. But could it be that nothing in his life was random? That when the Pharisees tested him, or when he happened upon a funeral procession and raised the only son of a widow, or answered questions from the rich young ruler or the lawyer - what if every bit of that was orchestrated by God?
 - D. And what if God is calling us to a place where we could be led by the Spirit into moments of eternal significance just like Jesus?
- IV. I have known people who are so insecure about doing the will of God that they can't go to Baskin Robbins without first having a 20 minute prayer meeting to determine if God wants them to have Rocky Road or Cookie Dough! But is this what the Bible teaches us to do?
- A. Obviously there are a lot of questions in life that require us to make diligent inquiry of the Lord. I would never tell you otherwise. But I believe that God wants us to cede control of lives to him to such a degree that it is our constant expectation that we will see him intervene through us to be led and see miracles. This seems to be the message of the psalmist and the writer of Proverbs...
 1. **Psalm 37:23 ESV** The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way; **24** though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand.
 2. **Proverbs 16:9 ESV** The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.
 - B. This revelation could be huge for our understanding of what God wants from us; and how he will use us to accomplish his awesome will in our city and individual circles of influence!
 1. Most of us get out of bed thinking about what the day requires, often with a negative sense of obligation. We are overwhelmed and even obsessed with a sense of what we “gotta” do. But how different would it be if we began our morning by surrendering our day, our decisions, and our direction, by faith, to the Lord's control? What difference would that make?
 2. Would we see more people wanting to ask questions about the hope that lies within us? Would we have more success sharing the gospel as a result? Would we be more prepared to pray for those around us, and would we see more miracles as a result?
 3. How would this knowledge of God's leading shine a new light on mundane activities such as buying your regular cup of coffee in the morning, going to your kid's soccer game, or interacting with your co-workers?
 - C. Many of us pray to be led by the spirit; but what if in the truest reality, we already are being led but the Spirit? What if we will one day stand before him only to give account for all the missed opportunities today when we “must needs” go to our local Starbucks, or our school, our workplace, our neighborhood?

- D. Shouldn't we all begin to pray that our eyes will be opened and we will see our jobs, our schools, our hobbies, our daily interactions in the community as places where we "must needs" be?
- V. Living like this really puts our lives in a God-focused perspective. One of the passages that is particularly hard for us to walk out is when Paul says **1 Thessalonians 5:18 ESV** "...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."
- A. How would a renewed perspective that God is leading you in everything: sickness and health, poverty or wealth, success or failure; to accomplish his mission and for his highest glory, and all for your greatest ultimate good, help you to live a life of thankfulness?
- B. We offer pray for the will of God in careers, relationships, and material desires. But what if the people of City View determined that 2017 would be a year (better yet the beginning of a new era) of uncompromising thankfulness.
1. And why shouldn't be? The Bible doesn't tell us conclusively what God's will is for your job, your relationships, your stuff, or even your health.
 2. But it does say explicitly that to give thanks in all situations is "the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."
- C. And these two concepts go hand in glove! To understand that God is leading us because we are his, and that he wants us to thank him for where he leads us, fills us with hope that, when seen, will crack even the hardest hearts to hear the gospel with new ears!
1. This kind of life fills us with a sense of purpose; that we are privileged to participate with the Father in something so much bigger than our 70-80 years occupying earthly real estate, and borrowing oxygen.
 2. But this kind of life, unlike any other, also displays the glory of our great God and Savior: who loved us, gave himself and died for us, rising again on the third day that we might be empowered to live a new live of purpose, usefulness and thankfulness.
 3. This is the life that a dying world is dying to see. This is the life that will empower us to be sensitive to what Christ may doing in their lives. This is the life that will show them that Christ is the only one worthy of being our supreme treasure.
- VI. So let's pray that God will open our hears to here what he is doing, and where it is this week that we "must needs" go. Let us also pray that he will smash our pride and stubbornness, and that our hearts would be open to thankfulness in every situation, and that thereby we would fulfill the will of God.