

John, Part 12: Jesus and Religion - Nothing in Common

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." **11** The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? **12** Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." **13** Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, **14** but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." **15** The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." **16** Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." **17** The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; **18** for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." **19** The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. **20** Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." **21** Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. **22** You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23** But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. **24** God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." **25** The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." **26** Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

- I. Last week we began to look at Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well in the village of Sychar. You'll recall that Jesus and his disciples were journeying from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north. Their journey required them to travel through the region inhabited by the Samaritans, whom the Jews despised, both racially and religiously.
 - A. But you will also remember that the implication of the original Greek text is that Christ's steps were ordered by the Spirit to go through Samaria in order to accomplish the purposes of the Father.

1. But what were those purposes? We will see this morning that God had singled out an outcast woman of Samaria in order to make his salvation known beyond the Jewish nation.
 2. This “divine appointment” with the woman was orchestrated by God in order to demonstrate that God loved the entire world, and was calling people to himself from every people group, and not just one nation; just as Jesus had told Nicodemus.
- B. But this meeting was also important because it shows us that the new covenant of grace, that was coming on the scene through Jesus work was far superior to the pursuit of God’s favor through our own religious works. It also shows us not only that Jesus **is** better than religion, but **how** Jesus is superior to religion.
1. To some, the idea of religion may be a good, noble, and beneficial thing. But if you call yourself a believer in Jesus, it is vital to make a distinction between religion and what Jesus offers. They have nothing in common.
 - a) By religion I don’t simply mean denomination or creed (although those things may be implied.)
 - b) Rather, I mean the system of measurement we use to evaluate and establish our worthiness, righteousness, or acceptability to God.
 2. Most of us would freely admit that all people are born sinners, but seriously consider the possibility that because we are all sinners, that we all have a natural bent toward religion as well.
 - a) Everyone from Baptists, Methodists, Catholics and non-denominational people, to atheists, agnostics, pagans, and intellectuals; good people and bad people and everyone in between are **all** religious because we all have a default system to make sense out of life and somehow justify our actions and beliefs.
 - b) You can call your religion a code or a creed, a tradition, a habit, a choice, or a reaction; but we all have one, and we use it to try to get a handle on our sinful nature, whether we admit or realize it.
 - c) But the good news of the message of Jesus is that he died to free us from the dual burden of sin **and** religion, and offering us life in exchange.
- II. So when Jesus comes to the well, weary and thirsty from his travels, we see something very important in Jesus’ request of this woman who has come to draw water. It is something that clearly contrasts him with the methods of religion.
- A. **John 4:7b** Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ...**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.)
- B. The first key difference between Christ and religion is that he has no regard for spoken or unspoken rules about who is approachable or acceptable. Religion, by its very nature, excludes those who cannot measure up to an accepted standard, excluding those who lack privilege or achievement.
1. In his book “Soul Survivor”, Phillip Yancey talks of growing up in Atlanta during the height of the civil rights movement of the 1960’s.
 - a) During that time, he tells of how a denominational publication called “the Mississippi Baptist Record” made the argument that God meant for whites to rule over blacks because they were “a race whose mentality

averages on borderline idiocy” and is therefore “bereft of any divine blessing.”

- b) The woman at the well could relate to this kind of racism in her culture as well! In fact, when the Pharisees wanted to deliver a blistering insult to Jesus **John 8:48 ESV** “Are we not right in saying that *you are a Samaritan* and have a demon?”
 2. In a similar vein, the Jewish Talmud, includes a prayer that originated in the 2nd century A.D. that has become known as the “three blessings” prayed by faithful Jewish men every morning when the rooster crows.
 - a) The prayer states, “**Blessed are you O God, King of the Universe, Who has not made me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.**”
 - b) The nature of all religion is that it segregates the worthy and the unworthy using a manmade system of spiritual weights and measurements.
 3. We may attempt to comfort ourselves by saying, “But I am neither a racist nor a sexist! I regard all people equally!” But perhaps you are a legalist at times. Do you judge those stumbling over different sins than you do?
 - a) “**Legalism is a more dangerous disease than alcoholism because it doesn't look like one. Alcoholism makes men fail; legalism helps them succeed in the world. Alcoholism makes men depend on the bottle; legalism makes them self-sufficient, depending on no one. Alcoholism destroys moral resolve; legalism gives it strength. Alcoholics don't feel welcome in the church; legalists love to hear their morality extolled in church.**” - John Piper
 - b) In your heart, have you prayed the prayer of the Pharisee? **Luke 18:11b ESV** “God, I thank you that I am *not like other men*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.”
 - C. Jesus arrives as the perfect contrast to all of this self-righteous religious bigotry; gently approaching one who is despised because of her race, disregarded because of her gender, and damned by others because of her moral failures, and yet he offers to quench her gnawing spiritual thirst forever!
- III. John 4:11 ESV** The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?”
- A. Secondly, Religion always is overly concerned with limitations, drawing strict boundaries about what the rules say can happen. Religion will always cruelly point out how deep the well is, and that you have nothing to draw with.
 1. Religion is always like a rigged carnival game, telling you how easy it is to win the prize, when in reality the ball is always weighted unevenly or the sights on the gun are crooked.
 2. Paul definitely pointed this out in Romans 7, decrying how the actions he desired to be found doing were at war with his religious “ought to’s”.
 - B. But thankfully, Jesus didn't come to pile on more rules! He knew that we couldn't keep the ones we already had! On the contrary, Paul states clearly to the **Galatians 5:1 HCSB** Christ has liberated us *to be free*. Stand firm then and don't submit again to a yoke of slavery.

C. So the woman tries another religious tactic, comparing Jesus to some long dead hero. **John 4:12 ESV** Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.”

1. The Pharisees attempted this as well in **John 8:53 ESV** Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” **54** Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ **55** But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. **56 Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.**”

2. “Are you greater Jesus?” His answer was “YES!” He is greater! He was telling them that he wasn’t looking back to Abraham, but that Abraham was looking forward to him!

D. Religion looks back to the alleged good old days, when that revival happened, or when there was less immorality, or more god-fearin’ church-goers! But Christ says **John 4:13 ESV** Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, **14** but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

1. He is saying that old religious pool from which the woman had drank is stagnant and unsatisfying, but that he has opened a spring of water, flowing fresh and cool, forever quenching the thirst of those who partake!

2. This proclamation creates thirst in those who listen. **John 4:15 ESV** The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

3. She has heard the message and recognized her need. She is tired of dragging her water bucket to the well over and over again. But watch what Jesus does next...

IV. **John 4:16 ESV** Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” **17** The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; **18** for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

A. Jesus is now ready to deal with the obstacle that is keeping her from drinking deeply of the living water he is offering her.

1. The woman has had a very checkered, adulterous past! This is why she comes to draw water at noon, when the sun is hot, though the other women of her village were probably there in the cool of the morning! She cannot stand to hear any more cackling and mocking behind her back from those “holier than thous”!

2. Religious people tend to shame, criticize and judge people, oftentimes behind their backs; hypocritically comparing their self righteous trophies to another’s open sin, and claiming the moral high ground.

B. But Christ *never* plays that game. When he calls you to himself, he neither ignores your impurity nor shames you for it. He rejects the very idea of moral

“high ground” and chooses instead to meet you where you are. But he does require that you acknowledge where you **really** are, and who you **really** are.

1. Why? Because like a surgeon who looks you right in the eye and tells you your body is riddled with cancer, Christ will always give you a truthful, unblinking diagnosis of your condition so that in your acknowledgement of the thing that is killing you, you can be reborn.
2. This is where many people decide that the cost of living water is too high. They assume that the pain of honesty and exposure is too great a cost for the freedom their soul craves. But Jesus never wants to shame or mock us, but to cover, cleanse, and heal us. But honesty its the starting point, and Jesus will not compromise with you on that point.
3. But like so many of us, the woman tries to take one more religious detour...

C. **John 4:19 ESV** The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. **20** Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”

1. Do you see the humor in this? Christ has laid bare the secrets of this woman’s heart and she “perceives” that he is a prophet! What amazing insight she has!
2. But instead of talking about her sin, and confessing and repenting in order to be free, she selects this moment to have a theological discussion! “Who’s right, Jesus? Us or them?”

D. **John 4:21 ESV** Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. **22** You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23** But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. **24** God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

1. Twice in this passage Jesus states, “the hour is coming” and then he says that the hour in question “is now here”.
 - a) What is coming? What is here? Namely this; the time is coming and yet has arrived when all petty religious squabbles will become entirely irrelevant because of something bigger that God is doing with the arrival of the kingdom of God.
 - b) What God has in mind will remove all the significance of any particular place of worship, or practice of religious ceremony.
2. Henceforth the standard of worship will not be measured by trips to a mountaintop or a temple, by sacrifices offered or liturgies prayed; but the new standard will be measured by the standard of God himself. “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”
 - a) To worship God in spirit means to worship him, not in a ritualistic way, but in a relational way. “God is Spirit”, Christ says, and therefore must be worshipped “in spirit”.
 - b) All humans have been given an eternal spirit by God, so as we are redeemed, it is on this inward level that God meets us and we respond in

worship to him, instead of outwardly with ceremony and sacrifice, and only at places we perceive to be “holy places”.

3. But Christ also said that we worship God *in truth*. This means that we are no longer driven by our deeply rooted religious impulses as we come near to God, but rather we are motivated by what he has made possible through the gospel.
 - a) This means instead of groveling because of our failures, we show gratitude because of his mercy. Instead of making vows and bargaining to gain his approval, we joyfully dance in the light of his unearned favor.
 - b) To try to work your way in is to worship, not in truth, but in deception.
- V. **John 4:25 ESV** The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.”
 - A. The last indication of a dying religious heart is the wistful gaze toward the future. Religion loves to think in terms of “someday”. “The messiah is coming someday”, the woman says, “when he does, he’ll make all of this clear.”
 - B. Jesus settled every argument, resolved every question and fulfilled every desire for a hopeful future when he said to the Samaritan woman **John 4:26b ESV** “I who speak to you am he.”
 1. Though the gospel holds great promise for the future, it’s call to believe is always for today!
 2. **2 Corinthians 6:2b ESV** Behold, *now* is the favorable time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation.
 - C. There was no more need to wait for the Messiah, or for every religious question to be resolved. The one she was waiting on was here, now, standing right in front of her, bearing in himself the truth she craved.
 1. All she had to do now was drink deeply of the fountain of living water that was opened for her.
 2. The promise of never thirsting again was not some fantasy from a Jewish stranger sitting at the well in her village, but a promise of complete satisfaction for her thirsty soul from the promised one standing now in her presence.
- VI. Guess what! The fountain is open for you as well! Are you tired of drinking from the stagnant pool called religion? Come to the fountain!
 - A. The promise of living water is that you will NEVER thirst again...and that is a promise religion can never keep, and has never bothered to make.
 - B. The bottom line is that Jesus and religion have nothing in common. May the Holy Spirit never allow us to mistake them for being remotely the same again.