

Core Study #4

The Love and Compassion of Jesus

Passage: John 4:1-31, 39-42

Background Summary:

John 4:1-42 features the story of Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman. Jesus is on his way from Judea to Galilee, and stops for a rest near Jacob's well in Sychar. He is tired from the long journey and asks a woman at the well to give him a drink. He tells her of a "living water," something that will satisfy her spiritual thirst in a way that no physical water from the well can. She shares the story of her encounter with other Samaritans, and many become believers. This passage is primarily about Jesus' love and compassion for the Samaritan woman, and illustrates that he did not only come to be the Jewish Messiah, but the Saviour of the entire world!

Leaders' Preparation:

Pray, and read through the passage a few times. Jot down any questions you may have as you read as well as any interesting things that stand out to you. Here are some questions you may want to try to answer after you have finished reading and before you prepare your core study. It would also be a good idea to read a good Bible commentary such as Holman's New Testament Commentary on John or the NIV Application Commentary once you have prepared your study to make sure that you understand the passage and the historical context thoroughly.

a) Who are the Pharisees?

The Pharisees were Jewish religious leaders who sought to strictly observe religious ceremonies and practices, and adhere to oral laws and traditions. They believed in an afterlife and the coming of the Messiah.

b) Who is the John referred to in verse 1?

It is John the Baptist, as opposed to the John the apostle who is identified as the writer of this gospel. John the Baptist was the son of Zachariah and Elizabeth, who began a ministry of baptism at the Jordan River. You can find out more about him by reading John 1:6-34.

c) Where is Samaria, and who are the Samaritans?

Samaria is the region between Judea and Galilee. The common route from Judea to Galilee would have been to go through Jericho and avoid Samaria completely. The relationship between the Samaritans and Israelites was strained since the Israelites had returned from Babylon and found themselves in conflict with the residents of Samaria. The tensions escalated into a war that destroyed the Samaritan temple, and in return the Samaritans stormed the temple in Jerusalem. Samaritans refused to worship in Jerusalem and were, therefore, outcasts of Israelite society.

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Introductory Question (choose one):

- What makes you feel loved?
or
- What makes people feel loved?

Discussion Questions (selection to choose from):

- Why does Jesus leave Judea?
The Pharisees were interested in anything that might look like a religious political movement, and may have assumed that Jesus had now succeeded John the Baptist in stirring up political unrest (Holman's New Testament Commentary).
- Why are the disciples shocked that Jesus is speaking to this Samaritan woman?
Note: Jews didn't normally associate with Samaritans and men didn't usually speak with women in public in this culture. See the "Leaders' Preparation" section for more about the relationship between the Israelites and Samaritans.
- Why did Jesus choose to speak to this woman?
- What is the "living water" that Jesus talks about?
The living water is not the physical water from the well, but a water that is spiritual in nature. It refers to the gift of a personal relationship with God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the gift that Jesus came to make available to all.
- What does Jesus mean when he says in verse 22 that "salvation is from the Jews"?
Here, Jesus is saying that salvation is found only through himself and not through any other religion or God. He is also responding to the woman's assumption that worship is restricted to a particular place (temple, tabernacle, mountain, or city). This was an Old Testament idea, and now (with Jesus' arrival) a new time has come where worshipers of all ethnicities and denominations can worship in spirit and in truth rather than in a particular geographical location.
- What do you think that the words "Messiah" and "Christ" mean?
- What do we know about this woman? Put yourself in the woman's shoes. How would you respond to the claims Jesus makes in verse 13-14? Verse 26?
- Why do you think that the woman leaves her water jar (verse 28)?
- What does this passage teach us about the love and compassion of Jesus for this woman and the Samaritans (outcasts)?

Application Question:

- Who are the "Samaritan women" in your life? What are some practical ways that we can love these people?
If you like, have everyone write down on a piece of paper some way that they would like to show love to these people in practical ways this week. Check in next week to find out how these "random acts of kindness" went!