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## The Bad Samaritan

### John 4:1-4

**Intro:** We all should be familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan. Today, we're beginning our study in [John 4](#), a chapter that presents the story of a bad Samaritan. Of course, in [ch4](#), Jesus will meet and minister to a variety of different people: the sinful Samaritan woman, other Samaritans from her home town, even a nobleman and his entire household. According to the Bible, there is no member of the human race who cannot come freely and boldly to the Lord Jesus Christ and discover glorious salvation in Him. This is the true universalism of Christianity, **not** that all men will be saved but that all men **can** be saved! The Bible teaches us that no one will ever be refused by Christ because of their gender, intellect, race, nationality, wealth or social status. Universal acceptance is the glory of God's grace.

Now, every good story needs to have some drama in it and in this story, the drama is provided by the ancient law of hospitality. Hospitality was the social responsibility of everyone in the ancient near East. In its fullest definition, it was the practice of graciously entertaining strangers but in a region where death by dehydration was a constant danger, the barest definition of hospitality would extend to simply providing a drink of water for a weary, parched traveler. In the society of the region, if a person was unable or unwilling to provide hospitality, it would be considered the worst social faux pa and the individual would become an outcast from normal, acceptable society.

In [ch4](#), hospitality provides the drama because the supposed host is an immoral Samaritan woman and the needy guest is a religious Jew. John himself will state in [vs9](#) that the **Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans**; the details of which we will get into later. But the irony of the situation is not lost on this unnamed woman who is surprised that a Jewish man would condescend to ask her, a Samaritan woman (immoral) to extend the barest form of hospitality to him. The host/guest tension in [ch4](#) is merely reflective of a greater host/guest tension – that between the world and God. John alludes to this tension in the prologue when he wrote of Jesus, "**He came unto His own and His own did not receive Him**" ([1:11](#)). This tension is seen in a more personal level in [Rev 3:20](#). Jesus is clearly the

guest and the human heart is the host. But, the greatest irony in our story takes place when the supposed host (**Samaritan woman**) becomes the surprised guest of the only true host: Jesus. He has so much more to offer than we could ever give.

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Now, the placement of this story in John's Gospel serves a purpose greater than simple chronology. If you recall at the end of **ch2** that John wrote of states the initial response of some men to Jesus- **many believed in His name but...** (**2:24-25**). The very next vs (**3:1**) says, "**There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus...**" Obviously, Nic is set forth by John as the first great example of the human race. But we mustn't think Nic's the only one who needed the gospel. In fact, all men and women need it. So, to make this point, John sets forth his second example, this unnamed woman that Jesus met beside Jacob's well somewhere in the region known as Samaria.

John presents this woman of Samaria as an immoral woman who had a bad reputation. This is implied by the fact that she came to draw water in the heat of the day when no one else, particularly the other women, would be at the well. She just came for water, but instead, she met Jesus. He would give her the water of life, a gift she had never dreamt of but one which completely satisfied her most important thirst—her thirst for God. The story ends with her witnessing to others in her town and many of them believing on Jesus, confessing Him as their Messiah and Savior.

It is hard to imagine a greater contrast between two people than the contrast between the important and sophisticated Nicodemus, the ruler of the Jews, and this simple Samaritan woman. He was a Jew; she a Samaritan. He was a Pharisee; she was by all accounts a pagan. He was a politician; she had no status whatever. He was a scholar; she was uneducated. He was highly moral; she was immoral. He had a name; she is nameless. He was a man; she was a woman. He came at night, to protect his reputation; she, who had no reputation, came at noon. Nicodemus came seeking; the woman was sought by Jesus.

A great contrast! Yet the point of both stories is that both the man and the woman needed the gospel and were welcome to it. If Nicodemus is an example of the truth that no one can rise so high as to be above salvation, the woman is an example of the truth that none can sink too low as to be

beyond it. Thus, it's not by accident that John has placed these two wonderful stories together at the beginning of his Gospel to illustrate the broad scope of salvation and that they end in 4:42, with the Samaritans' statement "***This is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.***"

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**1-2** - Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus took place in Jerusalem. The events at the end of **ch3** took place in rural Judea but **ch4** takes place in Samaria so John inserts this short section to explain the change of scenery. This brief

mention of Pharisees reminds us that Jesus had real opposition to His ministry and mission and His opponents seem to be watching and taking note, even if only from a distance. If the Pharisees had taken great interest in the work of John the Baptist, how much more the actions of Jesus, who not only had recently cleansed the temple and survived Nicodemus' challenge, but was now a greater threat since He was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John.

The rapid growth of Jesus' ministry had already posed a problem for some of John's disciples; maybe there was now an opportunity for the Pharisees to attempt to drive a wedge between the ministries of Jesus and John. If that was a real threat, Jesus is taking action to prevent that. He knew John's ministry would come to an end but it wasn't that day. He also knew that one day He would have a confrontation with the Pharisees but the time wasn't right so He withdrew to Galilee. There's certainly nothing here to suggest that Jesus was troubled by this knowledge and thus, ran off to avoid the Pharisees' questions. If Jesus were trying to avoid conflict, He had a strange way of showing it. No, a clue to His departure can be found in **vs3** and the verb used there implies that His reasoning was spiritual.

**3- left**- While it is obvious that one must leave Houma in order to go to Thibodeaux, the verb John uses here is not the normal verb used for leaving a place. This verb carries the connotation of "abandon" as in **vs28**, "***The woman then left her waterpot...***" Jesus' move here is an abandonment of Judea! This is only a temporary yet vivid rebuke of His opponents who, after several encounters with Jesus, are only growing in the darkness-fueled hatred of the Light.

Jesus had gone to the Temple. He had ministered with marvelous success in the Judean countryside. But now, hostility was stirring there, so He **left**

Judea – He abandoned it. Was this a thwarting of God’s plan? Of course not! It was the fulfillment of God’s original plan. What had begun in the outermost courts of the Temple, the court of the Gentiles, was now taking place in the land of the Gentiles, in Samaria. In fact, before Jesus ascends back up into heaven, He instructs His disciples to follow the same pattern in their own ministries: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. The Apostle Paul even points to this in **Romans 11** when he states that the casting away of Israel was the necessary catalyst that brought about the reconciling of the rest of the world to God (**vs15**). Jesus abandoned Judea but only temporarily, He would eventually return to complete His part in God’s plan of salvation. This encounter with the Samaritan woman will serve to illustrate this reality: the further Jesus moves from Jerusalem, the less combative are His encounters with others.

**4 - *needed*** – John uses another curious word here in describing the actions of Jesus. He says He ***needed*** to go through Samaria. The KJV renders it “***must needs***.” I find this interesting because this wasn’t the only way to Galilee. In fact, there were 3 different routes one could take to get from Judea to Galilee: **1)** cross the Jordan and travel north thru the region of Perea (modern Jordan). This was considered the long way but it was the most preferred way for the Orthodox Jew. There was a deep-seated hatred that had existed for centuries between Jews and Samaritans and because of this, the Orthodox Jews avoided Samaria in general and Samaritans in particular, like the plague!

**2)** Follow the Med coast North then cut across to Galilee (the really long way) or **3)** go through Samaria. This was the only way to go if you were in a hurry to get there. Now, Jesus was on a divine timetable but we never see Him in a hurry so how is it that He ***needed*** to, ***must*** or ***had to*** go through Samaria?

The answer is found in the use of this word. Every time the word ***die*** or ***deon*** (must, need) is use in conjunction with the actions of Jesus, it always points to the compelling necessity of God’s divine plan. We see this necessity early in Jesus’ life when His parents discovered He was not in the caravan returning from the Passover celebration. They frantically ran back to Jerusalem and searched high and low for the boy, finally discovering Him in the Temple discussing theology with the teachers. When Mary attempts to scold Him, He responds, “***Why were you looking for Me? Don’t you know that I must be about My Father’s business?***” (**Lk 2:49**). This divine

necessity appears thru-out His ministry, especially in John's Gospel: **3:14; 9:4; 10:16; 20:9**.

Why did Jesus need to go thru Samaria? Because He would meet a woman there beside Jacob's well near Sychar and lead her into a saving faith in Himself, the kind of faith that would affect an entire village. Jesus needed to go thru Samaria because He came as the Light of the world and it was imperative that this Light shine to others besides the Jews. Jesus was no respecter of persons, He loved this immoral woman just as much as He did Nicodemus.

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The fact that Nicodemus and the woman are different is important. But now, we need to forget about their differences and concentrate on their similarities, which are even more important than their differences. What are the similarities?

**1)** They both thought they were spiritually OK! Sure, there was an inner hunger but, in their own minds, each thought they were all right. Nicodemus thought so because of his religious and intellectual achievements; the woman thought so because of her superstitions and religious traditions. The point is, they were convinced that all was well when in fact, all was not well. They have a lot in common with many of those who live in our own self-satisfied time.

**2)** They took Jesus' spiritual teaching in a crudely literal way. In each case Jesus taught about the need for receiving new life from Him. But when He spoke of the new birth, Nic thought that He was talking about obstetrics. When He spoke to the woman about receiving "living water," she merely thought of the distance between her house and the well and of the joy of not having to carry heavy waterpots. These reactions are an illustration of the spiritual blindness Paul refers to in **1 Cor 2:14**. Many today limit their interest in Christ to what their 5 senses can grasp: "Will He heal me, deliver me from the mess I've made of my life, give me every thing I want?" They only desire to have their immediate material needs to be met and thus, the most important terms of Christianity are meaningless to them.

**3)** They were spiritually empty and sensed a need for God. This was true even tho everything they believed in denied it. There are many people today



in the same situation. They literally possess everything they have ever wanted or ever could want and yet, deep down in their hearts they recognized that they are desperately unhappy about something and don't know what it is. **Ecc1 3:11** tells us that God has **put eternity** in the hearts of every person, the longing for, the **need** for it. We have been created for God and our hearts are restless until we find rest in Him.

**4)** They were both spiritually lost! This was the root of all their other problems and their most significant similarity.

What does it mean to be lost? In the Bible, it refers to a deliberate waywardness and rebellion, in other words: an active, *willful* departure from God's way. According to God, all of mankind has willfully abandoned the way to Him (**Is 53:6**). The position of man is even worse than that of the Devil, the fallen angels, and the demons. There's no record that there was ever an offer of salvation made to any of them, but of the human race there is the record that the greatest love of the universe was freely offered to them and that they willfully and continually rejected it.

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What do you need to do when you are lost? You need to find your way back. What do you need if you are unable to find it? You need someone to show you the way back. This is what Jesus came to do. He came to show a fallen, rebellious race, a race composed of people like Nicodemus, the woman of Samaria, you and me, the way home to God our heavenly Father.

Of course, if you're lost in the woods, someone just needs to show you the way home but for us to get back to God, the way had to be made and it was by Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus died for us in order that He might bear all the judgment and wrath of God that should have fallen on us because of our sin. The gift of salvation is available to all but it is only applied to those who believe on the name of Jesus Christ and accept Him as their Savior.

Have you done this? Will you do this today?

