

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 20 December 2020. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Call to Sychar

At this time of year, our minds are filled with scenes of a night long ago, when a band of shepherds was tending its flock on the rolling hills outside Bethlehem. In our mind's eye, we see an angel of the Lord appearing to those shepherds, and announcing the Saviour's birth. We see an army of angels appearing to the shepherds, and shouting praises to the new-born King. We see those shepherds running to Bethlehem; and we then see Baby Jesus lying in a manger, with Mary, and Joseph, and the shepherds gathering around to worship Him.

The story of Jesus' birth is beautiful. God spent more than 2,100 words of Scripture to tell us about the events surrounding Jesus' birth! However, important though Christ's birth is, we mustn't leave the picture "frozen" on that night in the stable. Bethlehem was only the beginning of Christ's 33-year journey here on earth. Christ, the eternal Son of God, came down into our world; and in every place where He went, He went there in obedience to His Father's will. In every place where Jesus went, He went there for a purpose.

Christ's first stop was **Bethlehem**. Why did He go there? First, it has been *prophesied* that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah. Bethlehem was the city of Jesus' great ancestor, King David. It was the city of sheep, and shepherding; and Jesus is both the Lamb of God, and the Good Shepherd. Bethlehem is also the "house of bread"; and Jesus is the Bread of Life.

Jesus' next stop, **Egypt**, had an important purpose, as well. Just as God allowed His "son," the nation of Israel, to go down into Egypt, so that He could later call him *out of* Egypt, so He called His only begotten Son to go into Egypt, so that He might later call Him *out of* Egypt. Israel's journey out of Egypt, and Jesus' journey out of Egypt, give us the same spiritual picture. It is a picture of the deliverance that God gives to sinners when they abandon their sin and their idols, and follow Christ to salvation and victory.

Then, there was **Nazareth**. Of all the cities in Israel in which Jesus could have grown up, God chose the town of Nazareth for His Son. Why? Because the word "Nazareth" comes from the word *netzer*, which means "branch"; and Jesus is the "Branch of David," and the "Branch of Jehovah." To this day, Jesus is still called "the Nazarene," just as the prophets foretold. Also, Christ grew up in the region of Galilee in order to fulfil the prophecy of **Isaiah 9:2**. In this Scripture, Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would arise from Galilee, and would give "*great light*" to those that dwelt in the "*land of the shadow of death.*" Though born in Bethlehem, Jesus grew up as a Galilean, and as a Nazarene, because He is the Branch.

This morning, we will follow Jesus to another stop in His earthly journey. Not long after Jesus had begun His ministry, the Father called Him to go to a town called **Sychar**. Why? That is what we will find out this morning. The title of this message is *The Call to Sychar*.

Read John 4:1-5. (Keep a bookmark in this passage. We will return to it!)

Why did the Father call His son to Sychar? First, He called Him there...

I. To fulfil the Scriptures

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, He was baptised by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. He then went into the wilderness of Judaea for forty days to fast and pray. After this, He went

up to Galilee. There in Galilee, He called His first five disciples. Shortly after this, He did His first miracle in Cana of Galilee. This was when Jesus' public ministry truly began.

Now, after Jesus had preached for a short time in Galilee, He went down to Jerusalem to keep the Passover. It was there that Jesus drove out the corrupt money changers from the Temple. It was there that He talked with Nicodemus, and showed him how to be born again. Many people were now believing on Jesus; and Jesus' disciples were baptising these new converts.

Now, the religious leaders didn't like this. Already, they were plotting to kill Jesus. And so, Jesus left Judaea, and went back up into Galilee. Why did Jesus do this? Was He afraid to die? No. It simply wasn't yet His *time* to die. Christ had to die at the right time, and in the right way, just as the Scriptures had prophesied. And so, Jesus journeyed toward Galilee.

Now, in **verse 4**, we find an interesting statement. The Bible says, "***And he must needs go through Samaria.***" It was a *necessity* for Jesus to go through Samaria. Why? Because the Father had *work* for Him to do there; and to Jesus, His Father's "***work***" was like "***meat.***" It was like His necessary food. It *had* to be done! What, then, *was* this great work that had to be done in Samaria? Why did Jesus *have* to go there? Well, to understand this passage better, we need to learn a little more about this place called "Samaria."

In Jesus' day, Samaria was a Roman province; and it was right in the middle of the land of Israel. It was sandwiched between the province of Judea (in the south) and the province of Galilee (in the north). Judea and Galilee were both inhabited by Jews; but Samaria was inhabited by **the Samaritans**. The Samaritans were partly Jewish, and partly Gentile.

What was the history of the Samaritans? How did they come to be a "mixed" ethnicity? Well, it all started in the year 722 B.C. Up to that point, for several hundred years, Israel had been divided into two kingdoms. There was the kingdom of Judah, in the south (which was made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin); and there was the northern kingdom, which was made up of the other ten tribes. This northern kingdom was simply called "Israel"; but it was also called "Samaria," after the name of their capital city, Samaria.

Now, as I say, the year 722 B.C. was an important year. In that year, God allowed the northern kingdom of Israel ("Samaria") to be invaded and destroyed by the Assyrian empire. God allowed this to happen to His people because of their continual sin and rebellion against Him. Most of the Jews were taken away to the land of Assyria, as slaves. However, the kings of Assyria were smart enough to realise that they needed to leave *some* of the Jews in the land, to keep it from becoming a wasteland. This made the kings of Assyria nervous, though. They were afraid that the Jews might eventually rebel against them. So, they took several Gentile peoples from other parts of their empire, uprooted them from their homelands, and relocated them into Samaria, in order to keep the Jews weak, so that they couldn't rebel.

Now, after being relocated to Samaria, these Gentiles got it into their heads that they needed to worship the God of Israel (since, after all, they were now living in the land of Israel). They figured that things would go better for them if they were on the good side of Israel's God. So, they sent a letter to the king of Assyria, and asked him to send some Jewish priests to them, so that they could teach them how to worship Israel's God.

Over time, many of the Jews who still lived in the land intermarried with these Gentiles; and eventually, they became one people—the Samaritans. They followed the same religious

ceremonies that the Jews did; yet, at the same time, they worshipped false gods. They mixed Judaism with occultic practices, and formed a “Judaism” all their own.

Now, let’s fast-forward about 700 years, to the time of Christ. In Jesus’ day, the Samaritans still lived in the central part of the land of Israel; and even though they themselves were partly of Jewish blood, they hated the Jews; and, sadly, the Jews hated them, too. The Jews and Samaritans were bitter rivals. In fact, during the time of the Persian Empire, in the 400’s B.C., the Samaritans had built their own temple, just like the one in Jerusalem, on Mount Gerazim. They claimed that they had the *true* place of worship, and that the Jews’ temple in Jerusalem was the false one. Now, the Samaritans’ temple was destroyed in 111 B.C.; and in Jesus’ day, it was still in ruins. Nevertheless, the Samaritans still regarded Mount Gerazim as their place of worship.

Now, the Jews and the Samaritans hated each other so much, that the Jews wouldn’t even travel through Samaria. If they were travelling from Galilee down to Judaea, or from Judaea up to Galilee, they would go eastward to the Jordan River, and travel all the way around Samaria, so that they would have as little contact with the Samaritans as possible! Yet, that isn’t what Jesus did. The Bible tells us that Jesus “must needs” go *through* Samaria. Why did Jesus need to go “**through**” Samaria, and not *around* it, as the other Jews did? Because Jesus had a mission there. Unlike other Jews, Jesus *loved* the Samaritans. Jesus loves *all* people; and He wants *everyone* to be saved. It has always been God’s will for all nations to be saved. This is where the prophecy comes in. Jesus went to Samaria to begin to fulfil prophecy!

Read Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6.

When Jesus’ was on earth, His preaching was mostly directed toward the Jews. The Jews were given the first chance to hear the Gospel, because they were His covenant people. However, it was God’s will that the Gentiles be saved, too. Jesus expressed this beautifully in His “Good Shepherd” sermon.

Read John 10:14-16.

Who are these “**other sheep**” that Jesus came to gather into His fold? The Gentiles! Jesus came first to His *own* sheep, the people of Israel; but He also came to save the Gentiles. To this day, He is saving both Jews and Gentiles, and placing them together in the “fold” of the local church. There are not *two* folds; there is *one* fold; and **Christ is Shepherd to them both**. Jesus loved the Samaritans, just as He loves all men. The Bible says that Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. That is why He went to Sychar. In the town of Sychar, there were some sinners whom Jesus had come to save.

This brings me to our second point. The Father called His Son to Sychar...

II. The seek a sinner (vv. 6-26)

Read John 4:6-26.

In this passage, we find that Jesus was wearied with His journey, and was in need of a rest. He was also thirsty. Of course, being God, He could have miraculously provided water for Himself; yet, He didn’t. As a Man, He had chosen to limit Himself. And so, he asked this Samaritan woman to draw water for Him to drink. However, **water was not what was really on Jesus’ mind**. He wasn’t thinking about His own needs: He was thinking of this woman’s

need of salvation. Although He was weary, and though He *could* have sat there in silence and said nothing to her, He went out of His way to strike up a conversation with her.

If you know Christ as your Saviour, you have a perfect pattern to follow in Christ. Christian, do *you* think about the spiritual condition of lost people around you as you pass through your daily life? Are *you* on the lookout for ways in which you may introduce the topic of salvation? Do you allow your fatigue, or your “business,” to keep you from telling others about Christ? I’m afraid that too often, that is exactly what we do. But *Jesus* wasn’t too weary. He was seeking the lost *all the time*. We should be doing the same. We should be compelled by love to seek for the lost ones, and to share the love of Christ with them!

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11, 14-15.

Now, let’s return to Jesus’ conversation with this woman. What was the woman’s reaction to Jesus when He began to speak to her? It was hostility! Jesus had politely asked for a drink of water; yet, she sarcastically replied, ***“How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.”*** She was pretty snippy! Yet, what was Jesus’ reaction? Did He get upset, and say something rude in return? No. In fact, He didn’t respond to what she had said at all. He would not be drawn into an argument that was of no profit. He had one thing in mind: this woman’s salvation!

Now, as Jesus talked with people, He was always using earthly things in order to illustrate spiritual truths. In this case, He used the illustration of *water*. He also used the illustration of a “gift.” (Read verses 10-14 again.) Jesus says that salvation is a ***“gift of God.”*** That’s not hard to understand, is it? Anyone who has ever received a gift can understand this illustration. That is why God uses this illustration so much. Throughout the Scriptures, God repeatedly calls salvation a *free gift*. In **Romans 5:18**, for example, Paul tells us, ***“Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.”*** In other words, Adam brought *judgment* upon us all, by his sin; but Jesus came to bring us the *gift* of salvation. In **Romans 6:23**, Paul says, ***“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*** **Ephesians 2:9** says that salvation is the ***“gift of God.”***

Salvation is a gift. It cannot be earned: it can only be received. Notice what Jesus said to this woman. He said, ***“If thou knewest the gift of God...thou wouldest have asked of him.”*** Jesus has purchased the gift of salvation for every person; and He freely offers it to all. *However, this does not mean that you are automatically O.K. with God!* The Bible says that every sinner remains under God’s condemnation *until* he chooses to receive the gift of salvation. *You* must personally receive Jesus’ free gift. There must come a time in your life when *you* admit that you can’t save yourself, acknowledge that Jesus died and rose again to pay for your sin, and *ask* for His salvation! Those who, by faith, receive that free gift, have eternal life.

Jesus used the illustration of a “gift” to explain eternal life; but He also used the illustration of “water.” He referred to the gift of eternal life as ***“living water.”*** What did He mean by this? Well, just as you can’t have physical life without water, so *spiritual* life—a relationship with God—is not possible without the gift of God. *Jesus Christ* is that gift! Jesus Christ gives that living water. If you have not entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ, you are still spiritually dead, separated from God, and bound for the Lake of Fire.

Now, this woman surely must have understood, by this point, that Jesus was talking about spiritual matters. The phrase ***“gift of God”*** was the clue. She couldn’t have missed it. Yet,

she didn't really understand what Jesus was saying. She said, "***Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; from whence then hast thou that living water?***"

This woman had the same misunderstanding about salvation that most people still have today. She thought that salvation could be obtained through something *physical* (in this case, water). Apparently, she thought that Jesus was saying that He could take *physical* water, and endow it with spiritual properties, so that it could give her spiritual life! Sad to say, there are millions of people today who think this way. They think they're O.K. with God because they've had some *physical* element applied to them. They think they're O.K. with God because they had water sprinkled on their heads, or because they've been dipped underwater. They think they can be saved by participating in external religious rituals, or by possessing religious relics, or by lighting candles, or making pilgrimages to holy sites. That was *exactly* the thinking of this woman. Her thinking about salvation was *external and physical*. She thought that Jesus was claiming to turn ordinary water into "holy" water, with spiritual properties.

With this in mind, it's not hard to understand what the woman asked next. She said, "***Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children?***" She wanted Jesus to know that He was not sitting on just *any* old well: He was sitting on *Jacob's* well. Jacob was the father of the tribes of Israel; and although she was only *half* Jewish, she was still a descendant of Jacob. In her mind, this was *her* well, and *her* heritage. She thought that this well did something for her spiritually. She thought that whatever "living water" Jesus had to offer couldn't possibly be "holier" than the water from this ancient well of her "Father Jacob." Furthermore, since the *Samaritans* lived on this ancient ground, this was *their* well. Therefore, whatever "spiritual water" this Jew had to offer her was no match for the water from "holy" well of the Samaritans. This was her thinking.

The woman at the well was spiritually blind, and without understanding. Yet, millions of people today have the same thinking. They think that because they have a rich religious heritage, they are O.K. with God. They think that because they have rich traditions, they are O.K. with God. They think that because they live among ancient church buildings; or because they've visited "holy" sites; or because their family has been buried in the church cemetery for generations; or because their name is written in a "family Bible" or church membership role of a parish, they are O.K. with God. Yet, they have never stopped to consider whether their names will be found in the Lamb's Book of Life. My friend, does this describe *you*? Your name may be written in a religious register; but is your name in the Lamb's Book of Life?

Read Revelation 20:11-15.

The Bible says that the "***natural mind***" (the mind of an unsaved person) cannot understand the things of the spirit of God. Spiritual things are foolishness to those who have never been saved. So it was with this woman. She was spiritually blinded, and unable to understand the salvation that Jesus was offering her. Nonetheless, Jesus was patient with her. Kindly and gently, He explained what He meant by "***living water.***" (Read John 4:13-14 again.)

At this point, Jesus made it clear that He is *not* talking about literal H₂O. He said, "***Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again.***" He also made it clear that He was not talking about anything that man can accomplish by his own efforts—with or without a water pot! He is talking about an *inner transformation* that only God can accomplish!

Read John 7:37-39.

Multitudes of people think of eternal life as something far off in the future—something that they might or might not receive after death, depending on their behaviour in this life. However, Jesus says that eternal life is something that you can have *right now*. The moment a person repents of his sin, and places his complete faith in Jesus alone for salvation, the Holy Spirit enters that person's life, and makes him *alive to God!* Whereas the sinner was once dead to God, he is now alive. Best of all, Jesus promises that the gift of salvation cannot be lost! How often did Jesus say that a person will thirst once he has drunk from the spring of eternal life? Never! The Holy Spirit of God, once He takes up residence in a person's life, is like a *continual* spring of everlasting life. He gives "**everlasting**" life--life that never ends!

Now, please take note of what Jesus did next: He *pierced her conscience!* (**Read John 4:15-20 again.**) At this point, the woman was becoming interested in what Jesus had to offer. She said, "**Give me this water.**" However, a casual desire for salvation is not enough. Jesus knew that this woman needed to realise the *seriousness of her sin*. Throughout this conversation, this woman had been piously bragging about Jacob's well, and about her religious heritage; but Jesus ignored all that, and got right to the point. The point was that she was a dirty, rotten sinner! First, Jesus pointed out that she had been married five times. Then, He pointed out that she was now living in open adultery, without even the pretence of marriage. *That* got her attention! Her conscience was now being pricked. She was seeing her sin for what it was.

By the way, Christian, you don't have to be all-knowing, as Jesus is, in order to pierce people's consciences. You don't need to know the secret history of a person's life in order to prove that he is a sinner. When someone says, "I don't really sin," or, "I'm not so bad," all you need to do is to respond with the *Word of God*. **Jeremiah 17:9** says that "**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?**" **Isaiah 64:6** says that "**We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.**" **Romans 3:23** says, "**For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.**" Start quoting verses like this, and people's hearts will be pierced with conviction!

That is exactly what was happening with this woman. Her conscience was being pricked. Jesus was putting the finger right on her sinful heart. And so, she did what sinners often do: *she tried to change the subject!* She tried to shift the subject back to her *tradition*. She brought up the old argument that "We *Samaritans* worship in this mountain; but *you Jews* worship on your mountain in Jerusalem." (This sounds just like people today who say, "You have your religion, and I have mine.") She was trying to hang onto every last shred of righteousness that she *thought* she had. Of course, Jesus could easily have ripped her tradition to shreds. However, Jesus didn't do that. He patiently and kindly got back to the topic of salvation! Let's look at how Jesus responded. (**Read John 4:20-24 again.**)

On His way back to the topic of salvation, Jesus pointed out a couple very important things. First, Jesus pointed out that the *place* of worship would soon be irrelevant. Jesus knew that the Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed in only 40 years (in A.D. 70). There *literally* would be no physical Temple in which to worship anymore!

Secondly, Jesus pointed out that her people, the Samaritans, were not worshipping the true God. In **verse 22** He says, "**Ye worship ye know not what.**" Remember, the Samaritans had mixed the worship of false gods with the worship of the true God: thus, they weren't truly worshipping God at all. Thirdly, Jesus pointed out that "**Salvation is of the Jews.**" This was a *very* important point! Jesus wasn't saying that only Jews can be saved: He was simply telling her that in order to be saved, she was going to have to put her prejudice aside, and

acknowledge that the Messiah would be a *Jew*. In a moment, He was going to reveal to her that *He* was the Messiah; but she first had to be willing to accept that her Saviour was a Jew!

Now, here is the main point that Jesus was getting at. **(Read verses 23 and 24 again.)**

According to Jesus, true worship has always been about *the spirit* in which a person worships God! Now, to be sure, God had ordained Jerusalem as the place to worship Him. However, God was not impressed merely with the fact that people were worshipping Him in the *right place*; He was concerned that they were worshipping Him in *spirit*. People must place their *faith* in God, and to be saved from their sin, so that they may be able to worship Him spirit and in truth. In **Habakkuk 2:4** God told the people of Israel, **“Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”** In other words, God rejects those who are trusting in their own imagined righteousness; but those who place their faith in *God* are accepted by Him, and justified in His sight. Religious performances without true faith in God mean nothing to Him. Let’s see what God said to the people of Israel about this.

Read Isaiah 1:10-18 and 29:13.

God’s message to Israel is clear: despite all the religious rituals that they did, their hearts were unconverted. They were going to the correct place of worship, and they were mechanically doing their sacrificial offerings; yet, their hearts were filled with wickedness. There was no repentance of heart, or true faith in God. Therefore, their offerings were repugnant to God. The same is true today. There *is* a right place to worship: and that is the Gospel-preaching local church. If you go to worship in a place where a *false* gospel is preached, you are worshipping in the wrong place! However, even if you go to the *right* place—a place such as Redemption Baptist Church, where the true Gospel is preached—your worship of God is dead, empty, and meaningless *if* you have not been born again. If you have not been saved by placing your faith in Christ, then your being seated in a Bible-preaching church means nothing. Your spirit is still cut off from God; and you *cannot* worship Him in spirit and in truth! You *must* repent and place your faith in Christ, so that He can save you!

This brings me to the last reason why Christ went to Sychar. Christ was called to Sychar...

III. To save a sinner (vv. 25-30)

Read John 4:25-39.

At this point in the conversation, the woman’s outlook and attitude changed dramatically. Do you see the difference? She was no longer clinging to tradition: rather, she was now clinging to the Messiah. When Jesus said, **“I that speak unto thee am he,”** she believed Him. And she didn’t merely believe with her *head*. In her *heart*, she clung to Him for salvation. She was *saved* from her sin; and that made all the difference. This is why Jesus came to Sychar. This was His **“meat.”** This was His Father’s will; and He finished it.

When a sinner meets the Saviour, and *commits his soul* to Him, nothing is ever the same again! So it was with the woman at the well. She was now forgiven; and her life was changed! She was still a sinner; but she was now a sinner saved by grace. What’s more, she couldn’t keep silent. The first thing she wanted to do was to *tell others* about Jesus! She went back into Sychar and told everyone about what Jesus had done for her! Jesus Christ has that effect on people. When a person is truly saved, he desires to tell others about what Christ has done. **“Old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new.”**

Conclusion: If you don't know Christ as your Saviour, and the Holy Spirit is prodding at your heart, then you are like the woman at the well. Christ is seeking after you, just as He sought after the woman at the well. He is offering you the "*gift of God,*" which He has already purchased for you. However, you must *receive* the gift of eternal life. Have you personally *believed on* Christ, and received Him into your heart? If not, why not do so today? Should you be saved already, I would ask you this: Are you seeking the lost, as the Saviour did? Are you going out of your way to speak to that "woman at the well"—that person in your life who needs Christ?