

Overcoming Differences (Prejudice)

DEVOTIONAL READING: John 4:35-42. **BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** John 4:1-42.

LESSON TEXT: John 4:7-10, 19-26.

TIME: A.D. 27 **PLACE:** Sychar

LESSON TEXT

John 4:7-10, 19-26

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

John 4:19-26

¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." ²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

LESSON AIMS

- To show that Jesus overcame differences during His encounter with the Samaritan woman.
- To show that God wants us to worship Him in Spirit and in truth.
- To urge believers to make a practice of examining their worship to ensure that it is heartfelt and based on God's revealed truth.

INTRODUCTION

As we will soon approach Black History Month and all of the contributions that African-Americans have made/are making to benefit mankind, how befitting it is that today's lesson deals with racial and social prejudices in Jesus' day.

Gene Brown tells of two apples that were looking down upon the world. One said, "Look at all those people fighting, robbing, rioting-no one seems willing to get along with his fellow human being. Someday we apples will be the only ones left. Then we'll rule the world." The second apple replied, "Which of us-the reds or the greens?"

This lesson will help us to understand that even though the power of prejudice wrecks society and brings misery to everyone in some way, Jesus Christ has the power to transform our lives and break down barriers of prejudice. The American Heritage Dictionary defines prejudice as an "irrational suspicion or hatred of a particular group, race, or religion." People have been long divided by these very things. India's caste system divides one billion people by profession, wealth, religion, and family heritage. Many religious groups fight over power, territory, and sacred sites.

Prejudice is learned. Children of many races may be playing happily together until one parent says, "Stay away from those people." Such preconceived notions fail to treat people individually, are not based on all the facts,

and forget God's love for the entire world.

Prejudice is a sin and has its roots in selfishness, pride, anger, and hatred. It ignores compassion, mercy, love, and forgiveness. The power to overcome prejudice comes from God. In today's lesson Jesus will brush aside the prejudices of His day and help a social outcast find new hope.

BACKGROUND

While in Judea, Jesus decided to travel north to preach in Galilee (John 4:3). To get there He had to go through Samaria (4:4) if He wanted to take the shortest route. At midday Jesus and His disciples arrived at a well about a half-mile from the village of Sychar (4:5). Jesus was weary, so He sent His disciples for food (4:8) while He stayed at the well (4:6).

History was all around Him as He sat there. Tradition holds that Jacob himself had dug that well nearly two thousand years earlier. This is "*near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph*" (John 4:5; see also Genesis 48:22). A short distance away were Mounts Gerizim and Ebal, where people had recited God's blessing and curses at the command of Moses (Deuteronomy 27:4-26). Some fourteen centuries earlier, Joshua stood on Mount Ebal and encouraged all Israel to keep God's law (Joshua 8:30-35). Also nearby was Joseph's tomb.

But Jesus did not have time to dwell on history. A woman had appeared, carrying a water jar. The woman who approached the well had no idea that she was about to come face to face with the long-awaited Messiah. She had no idea that she was about to have a conversation that would change her life.

Casual Conversation - John 4:7-10.

Jesus' success in winning disciples in Judea had created jealousy among John's followers and provoked questions among the Pharisees. Since Jesus did not want to be drawn into a controversy over baptism at this stage in His ministry, He left Judea for Galilee.

Because Jesus is God, we have to remember that nothing happens or happened by chance with Him. He knew that He would encounter the Samaritan woman at the well. He knows all outcomes since before the beginning of time.

Continuing to answer the question, the shortest route from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north went through Samaria. The journey took three days by foot. Christ "needed to go through Samaria" if He wanted to travel the direct route. The Jews often avoided traveling this route, and instead chose to go around Samaria by traveling along the Jordan River.

Jesus was and is no respecter of persons. We are all on the same level when we come to worship Him, for He wants us to worship Him in spirit and in truth. He wants us to bury those things that divide us and seek Him together.

1: Why did Jesus change the location of His ministry, and how did He decide to get to where He wanted to be? (John 3:22-36)

When Jesus arrived at a well near the city of Sychar, He sat down to rest. It was noon, and He and His disciples had probably been traveling since sunup. While His disciples went into the city to get food, Jesus rested by the well. Soon a woman came from the city to draw water. It was unusual to do this during the heat of the day, but it will soon be obvious that she was somewhat of a social outcast and probably came at a time when others would not do so. Because Jesus was thirsty as well as tired and hungry, He spoke first.

His request was simple: "*Give me a drink*" (v. 7). The simple request was planned by Jesus in order to give Him an opportunity to share the wonderful truth with her.

Every day we no doubt encounter similar opportunities to share with others the Good News of Jesus' Death, Burial, Resurrection, and Return. Let's not let these opportunities pass by. We might not get another chance.

2: Who did Jesus see at the well at Sychar, and how did He initiate a conversation? (John 4:7, 8)

First of all, Jesus had never met this woman before. And, since it was normally considered socially improper for men and women to converse in public, and especially for Samaritans and Jews to do so, it no doubt shocked her. She vocalized this fact in verse 9, "*How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?*" John the Baptist explained further that, "*...Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.*"

3: Why was the woman surprised? (John 4:9)

After Solomon's death, the nation of Israel was split into two kingdoms, with Israel on the north and Judah on the south. IN 722 B.C., Assyria conquered Israel and took many of the Israelites into captivity. Nearly thirty-thousand of them were resettled in other countries, according to Assyrian records, and were replaced by people from other nations the Assyrians had conquered. Inter-marriage between these people and Jews still dwelling in the north resulted in children who were not purely Jewish.

4: What was the historical background that led to the tensions that existed between Jews and Samaritan? (John 4:9b)

Jesus immediately shifted the emphasis from His need for water to the woman's need for spiritual life. He had gained her attention by asking for a drink, and now He aroused her curiosity by making a statement that would cause her to think about matters she had never considered before meeting Him. In essence, He said that if she was surprised by His addressing her, she would be even more surprised if she knew what He could give her simply for the asking.

5: How did Jesus shift the emphasis from physical water to the woman's spiritual need? (John 4:10)

Spiritual Implications - John 4:19-22

The gift that Jesus offered the woman was one of "*living water*" that springs from an unfailing source and is ever-flowing. Jesus, of course, was talking about eternal life.

6: What "gift of God" was Jesus offering the woman? (John 4:10)

The Samaritan woman did not comprehend Jesus' spiritual message. She was thinking only of physical water and could not understand how Jesus could provide water without a means of drawing it from the deep well. But, because of what Jesus told her about herself in verses 17 and 18, the woman concluded that Jesus was a prophet, a person divinely inspired with supernatural knowledge.

The direction of their conversation had taken an embarrassing turn for this woman. In order to get away from personal issues, she tried to entice Jesus into talking about religion. She proceeded to point out one of the major differences between Samaritans and Jews, namely, the place for worshipping was to be chosen, but they disagreed on the place.

7: Why and how did the woman change the subject in the conversation? (John 4:19,20)

Jesus knew that it was useless to debate about location since both places of worship would be gone before long, and the subject would be irrelevant. He "solved her theological question in one sweeping statement: true worship does not depend on holy days and places but upon whether the worshipper is sincere, and the God he worships be the true God" (Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels*, Eerdmans).

Additionally, Jesus could not allow the woman to think and speak erroneously without correcting her. The worship of the Samaritans was mixed with idolatrous cult worship. For this reason Jesus could say that the Samaritans did not know what they worshipped. Their understanding of God was inaccurate, leaving them with false concepts that were keeping them from worshipping Him properly. Jesus went on to state that the Jews, on the other hand, knew what they were doing.

8: Why did Jesus continue to focus on the subject He had introduced? (John 4:20, 21)

Most importantly, Jesus told the woman that true salvation was through the Jews, not the Samaritans. What Jesus was saying was that the One who would provide salvation would be a Jew. Of course He spoke of Himself, but He was not yet ready to say so.

9: What was the one big difference that made the Jews' worship superior? (John 22)

Universal Truth - John 4:23-26

Our worship is spiritual, for God is spirit and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Our worship must come from our hearts-our spirits-and it must be based on the truths proclaimed in God's Word. It is not enough to go through religious rituals; we must worship sincerely and with all who love Him.

10: What do we learn about worship from this incident?

CONCLUSION

Jesus helps us break down walls of separation, for we are all in need of a Messiah to save us. It does not matter where we came from or what we have done, for God sees us all as sinners in need of a Saviour. All our differences are overcome when we recognize Jesus as our personal Messiah, as the Samaritan woman did.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Thoughtful comments can often lead to an effective opportunity for witness (John 4:7-8).
2. Lovingly challenging a person's shallow beliefs about Jesus may well lead to a more meaningful witness (vss. 9-10).
3. Arguing with unbelievers about differences in religion accomplishes nothing; just share the truth (vss. 19-21).
4. Use truth as a hook, not a club, to draw people to think on spiritual issues (vs. 22).
5. Real worship is about spirit and truth, not style and preferences (vss. 23-24).
6. Proper witnessing always leads one to focus on Jesus (vss. 25-26).

PRAYER

Father, thank You for Jesus who offers salvation to all. Help us to show others by our words and actions that Jesus can solve our deepest needs, even the need for eternal life. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).