

# Where is Your Samaria?

by James A. Keen

Much of the fourth chapter of John's gospel is dedicated to the familiar story about the woman at the well. Many of us know that story by heart. Jesus was resting by a well while the disciples went into town to buy some food. While He was resting, a woman of Samaria came up to draw water from the well, and Jesus used this opportunity to tell her about the "living water" that He could give her. We also know that this woman was saved by the grace of God, along with many others in her town. Beyond the many lessons we might learn from Jesus' dialogue with the woman, there is another lesson that our Lord is teaching that merits our attention.

In the first three verses of the fourth chapter of John, we read, "When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee."

At the time of these events, Jesus was approaching the height of His popularity. Many people were listening to His bold teachings. Some were being healed, and some were being saved. At this point, more had been converted under His ministry than had been converted through John the Baptist's ministry. The disciples that had been following Him, especially the twelve, had witnessed great blessings in Judea and they surely expected to see similar blessings in Galilee.

To journey from Judea to Galilee, they needed to pass through Samaria. For those who are not familiar with the historical circumstances of that time, I will explain a little bit about Samaria. The Jewish people had no respect for the Samaritans. They were not of pure Jewish descent and had also strayed away from the traditional Jewish religious beliefs. The Samaritans did not worship in Jerusalem as other Jews, but worshipped at Mount Gerizim. In addition, the Samaritans only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament as divinely inspired. There was a great deal of animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans, which is why Jesus' parable about the Good Samaritan was such a powerful illustration about how we are to love our neighbors. Because of these differences between the Jews and Samaritans, the disciples journeying with Jesus did not think of Samaria as an opportunity for ministry. They only considered it to be the quickest way to get from the blessings in Judea to the anticipated blessings in Galilee.

After Jesus spoke to the woman at the well and she believed, the disciples returned from buying food. When they saw Jesus with the woman, they questioned in their hearts why He would waste His time talking to a woman of Samaria. Jesus responded to their thoughts in John 4:35, "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."

The great lesson Jesus taught to His disciples here is that reaching the lost is not a part-time job. Even though they were just passing through Samaria, Jesus was still looking for opportunities to share the gospel. Because He did not pass this opportunity up, the woman at the well heard the message of salvation and believed, along with several others.

Rather than just stopping for lunch, as the disciples had planned, read what happened in Samaria. John 4:39-41 tells us, "And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word;"

The disciples were blind to the opportunities for evangelism that existed in Samaria. Rather than seeing the lost and dying souls around them, they were only focused on their next destination, Galilee. Samaria was an uncomfortable place for them. They were not around people they had much in common with and they only saw it as the way to get from point A to point B. Jesus taught them that there was great potential for fruitful labor in the place where they least expected.

Is there a Samaria in your life? Is there a place or a time that exists between two points where you do not continue to look for opportunities to witness for Christ? Some may get caught up in

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“revival syndrome.” That could be described as only having a burden for the lost during the special times that a church has revival services. They see their last revival as Judea and the next revival as Galilee. However, they miss the opportunity to labor in the Samaria between revivals.

Others may have limited themselves to “four wall evangelism.” This could be defined as only trying to reach the lost within the confines of a church service. These people look at the last church service as Judea and the next church service as Galilee. Their church services are the places of blessing where the Lord works, but they lack faith to believe that He can work outside of the service. What they miss is the opportunity that exists on Monday through Saturday, when they are around their co-workers, family, and friends. Their evangelism is limited to inviting people to church, rather than taking the gospel out to those who may never step foot into a church.

Neither “revival syndrome” nor “four wall evangelism” is scriptural. Jesus and the early church took the gospel out and so must we! As it is often said, the first word of the Great Commission is “Go”. We must realize that this is a 24 / 7 / 365 commission. We are to be looking for opportunities to tell others about Jesus, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and three hundred and sixty five days a year.

Do not lose heart if you have fallen into this trap. The disciples had a similar mentality before Jesus corrected them. It is easy for us to forget the priority of evangelism from time to time. However, let the Lord use this reminder to cause you to stop and consider your life. Where is your Samaria? Is it at work? Is it at home? Is it the time between certain events or services? Wherever it is, stop and look around you. Are the fields white to the harvest? Are there lost souls in your Samaria that need to be saved? Pray for the Lord to provide opportunities to labor in your Samaria and remember the great harvest of souls that the Lord saw there. He can bless your stay in Samaria too!