



# The Gospel of John

## Week 9: Prejudice Breaker

Brent Bossi - 07/29/2025

Good Morning! My name is Brent Bossi and I work at The Downtown Church as the Community Coordinator. We have officially concluded an eight-week series on the Gospel of John. Today's message will be an epilogue of sorts to the series by going deep into one of my favorite stories in the Bible: the Woman at the Well.

Pastor Brian introduced this story in Week 3 and it is a beautiful story with many layers and truths on how Jesus Christ wants all of us to live so that we get closer to God—*especially on breaking through our own prejudices.*

The story includes the longest one-on-one conversation between Jesus and an individual in the Gospels—the Woman at the Well. We're going to take our time walking through this story, pausing to let it breathe, to let key moments sink in and I will add comments throughout the story.

If you think you know this story already, I ask that you sit back and hear it with fresh ears, because you may hear a new perspective.

And so we begin.

Jesus is working his way back to Galilee from Judea. He is travelling through Samaria to get there - the shortest route. Normally the Jewish community goes around Samaria because they and the Samaritans despise each other.

By choosing this route, Prejudice Number 1 - **Place**, is immediately challenged by Jesus: “for God so loved the *world*” (John 3:16 anybody?) cannot be demonstrated by circumventing Samaria.

Jesus and his disciples enter a town where Jacob’s Well is located. Jesus was tired from the journey and sat down by the well.

**<sup>7</sup>When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” <sup>8</sup>(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)**

**<sup>9</sup>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.)**

Let this moment sink in:

- Jesus is asking someone else for help. He’s being vulnerable.
- Not only is he asking someone else for help, he’s asking a Samaritan, who his Jewish culture has taught him to despise. Take your pick on why:
  - ethnicity,
  - religion,
  - nationality, Samaritans are viewed as foreigners (see Luke 17:18),
  - race, some even consider Samaritans a mixed-race.
  - Prejudice clings to many many labels, and Jesus just shattered the prejudice of any label his tribe has toward Samaritans. We will lump all of this into Prejudice 2 - **Labels**.
- I can go on—Jesus is talking to a WOMAN—ALONE—IN PUBLIC—IN DAYLIGHT WHERE ANYONE CAN SEE!! For us, the impact of this scene may be dulled by what we experience daily in western civilization, but this scene is scandalous. We will call this Prejudice Number 3 - **Sexism**, that has just been shattered. So far, the boundaries set by the tribe who Jesus grew up with are being shattered left and right. Jesus is

reaching across tribes, across red lines. *The power of culture is strong, but Jesus is greater than cultural differences.*

Now, notice the woman's initial response. While it's tinged with her own prejudice, she's at least opening the door with a question: "How can you ask me for a drink?"

**<sup>10</sup> 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."**

**<sup>11</sup> "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?"**

*Living water* is associated with, and can also be translated as, *flowing water* or *running water*. True to how the Gospel of John is written, Jesus and the woman are working from two different meanings but will be drawn closer together through this misunderstanding with continued dialogue.

The woman is intrigued with finding flowing water to help reduce her burden of pulling water from the well. She then asks a question that draws her even closer to Jesus; she references a common ancestor—Jacob, the namesake of the well.

**<sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"**

**<sup>13</sup> Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."**

The woman then says, "Sir, give me this water..."

Ok folks... we're done with Scene 1. I cannot emphasize the amount of prejudice Jesus just bulldozed through, showing how this interactive dialog

allows individuals from two vastly different cultures to be drawn together—*Jesus modeled how vulnerability allows us to get to know each other better as well as God.*

Scene 2 starts with Jesus making a request.

**<sup>16</sup> He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”**

**<sup>17</sup> “I have no husband,” she replied.**

**Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. <sup>18</sup> The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”**

I have a question for you all. Do you see Jesus saying these words in a condemning way? Do you see Jesus passing judgement on this fact? Did you have an immediate judgement?

I reviewed the writings and teachings of Dr. Fred Craddock (a Disciples of Christ ordained minister), Dr. Jennifer Garcia Bashaw (an ordained Baptist minister), and Franciscan Priest Richard Rohr (ordained in the Roman Catholic Church) in preparation for this message. None cast additional labels on this woman or say Jesus judged her. Jesus basically said “I know” and continued the conversation.

Regarding this topic, Dr. Bashaw writes:

**Neither Jesus nor the Gospel writers make a value statement about the five husbands; it is likely the woman’s past is not her fault. As a woman, she could not initiate divorce; she could have also been widowed and remarried multiple times.**

Jesus is not phased by the Samaritan Woman’s past—another prejudice shattered by Jesus. I’m starting to lose count. How many prejudices has Jesus blown through in this story? A lot... and there are more.

Here comes the prejudice of **place and religion** again for good measure:.

**<sup>19</sup>“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”**

**<sup>21</sup>“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.**

The disciples are still looking for food during this conversation. What do you think they would have felt if they heard Jesus say “a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem?” My gut tells me they were not ready for that truth-bomb; to them, Jerusalem is where God will always dwell.

Jesus continues to explain the new truth to the Samaritan woman.

**<sup>22</sup> You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”**

God is Spirit and Truth—not a place. If you think verse 22 sounds a little tribalistic, or elitist—“for salvation is from the Jews”—recall Genesis 12:3 when God blessed Abram to fill the earth—it is noted that his tribe will eventually bless ALL the peoples of earth through his family.

*Jesus is repeating God’s overall plan—in the beginning there was The Word, which became flesh in Jesus Christ, who is now pointing out that worshipping God is in Spirit and Truth—NOT in place.*

**<sup>25</sup> The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” <sup>26</sup> Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”**

Jesus, our Savior and Lord, just identified his true identity for the first time, directly to a Samaritan woman. Let that moment sink in.

Pick any prejudice: ethnicity, race, sex, religion, social status, place, tribe—Jesus is CLEARLY telling us through this conversation with a Samaritan woman, that there are NO SUCH BOUNDARIES in the kingdom of God.

Yet, Christians today keep trying to define God to THEIR tribe, trying to “exclusive-ize” God, defining who he is—and worse, trying to define who God is for—even while God shows that he is RADICALLY INCLUSIVE.

But there is even more to learn as we now move on to the third and final scene of this act.

At this point the disciples return. Remember they are Jewish, and they are astonished that Jesus is speaking with a Samaritan woman. *But they say nothing.*

They do not even ask the simplest question in the world—“Why? Jesus, why are you conversing with this woman?” The disciples could NOT get past their own prejudice. *Do not overlook this point.* The disciples, in a position of cultural superiority, said nothing to Jesus, their teacher, in their own tribe. The woman, from a position of cultural inferiority, at least asked Jesus why—“How can you ask for a drink from me?”

Reading the crowd and knowing she is not welcome, the woman returns to her village to tell of her encounter—even leaving behind her water jug.

**She said to the people, <sup>29</sup>“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” <sup>30</sup> They left the city and were on their way to him.**

Notice the woman does not have full faith yet, asking “He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” But this did not stop her from witnessing, and her neighbors were obviously intrigued—they travelled back to the well to see Jesus for themselves.

Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus to eat something, but Jesus was not interested in their earthly food. No, to quote Friar Richard Rohr, “now Jesus is moving to a notion of what really feeds people.”

**<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. <sup>35</sup> Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. <sup>36</sup> The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. <sup>37</sup> For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ <sup>38</sup> I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”**

The disciples returned to Jesus focused on food, not on witnessing to the woman. Others have been witnessing, like John the Baptist and the Woman at the Well. Dr Fred Craddock writes:

**The point is, taking the Gospel to the Gentiles has the authorization of Jesus himself, the time for that mission is now because the harvest is ready, and the followers of Jesus are immobilized by misunderstandings, prejudice and distorted values.**

The twelve disciples often misunderstand what Jesus is teaching, partly because what they had expected from the Messiah and what Jesus is teaching them are two different things. They have a prejudice toward pure strength, expecting a warrior to take back the kingdom with physical power—and Jesus is shattering that prejudice, too, by preaching active love.

One of the themes in the Gospel of John is that eternal life starts *now*, not just in the afterlife, and it starts with love. Friar Rohr explained the last passage this way.

**Heaven is going to be a continuation of what you have chosen right now. And if you are not a loving person today, why would you want to go to heaven? It's going to be all loving people and you won't fit in. ... We are all reaping what we sow, right now.**

Speaking of love, the Samaritan villagers invite Jesus to stay with them, which he did for two days, and many more believed in Jesus because of his word. Another prejudice broken—Jesus lived with the “enemy” for two days, ate with them, shared the Word with them. The story closes with this verse:

**<sup>42</sup> They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”**

The writer of John wants you to know that Jesus is the Messiah and to understand that following Jesus means modelling his actions here on earth. The story we just shared shows Jesus is a prejudice breaker.

As we navigate the world today, what does this mean for you individually? Is there a prejudice you need to tackle head-on to overcome? Is there a way you want to lead your life to be a beacon of light for others to witness for overcoming their prejudice? There is so much talk in what different tribes believe, in what Christian tribes or denominations believe, that it pulls the spotlight away from what Jesus actually DID!

Whether you are here today in person or online—look at what Jesus DID in this story for your personal inspiration on what to do tomorrow. And the day after that. And for the rest of our lives as we bring the Kingdom closer here on earth.