

Judea through Samaria, Back to Cana of Galilee (John 4:1-54)

Author: Dr. David Turner

Session 6

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

John 4, Samaritan woman, Jacob's Well, living water, true worship, royal official, Capernaum, Cana of Galilee, signs and faith, Craig Koester

Abstract

Dr. David Turner's lecture on John 4 details Jesus' geographical and spiritual journey from Judea through Samaria and back to Cana in Galilee. The narrative is marked by two key interactions: an extensive theological discussion with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well and the distant healing of a royal official's dying son. Through these events, Jesus subverts deep-seated cultural, gender, and ethnic barriers, presenting Himself as the source of living water and declaring that true worship occurs in spirit and truth rather than physical locations. The session concludes with a reflection on the complex relationship between signs and faith, comparing the rapid, receptive belief of the Samaritans with the sign-seeking skepticism of others.

Outline

I. Introduction to Session 6 (John 4:1-54)

A. Travelogue and Geographical Movement

1. Jesus departs Judea, travels through Samaria, and returns to Cana of Galilee
2. This journey represents a geographical circle connecting back to Cana, where Jesus performed His first sign in John 2

B. Narrative and Structural Overview

1. Simple three-part structural flow: traveling to Samaria, conversing with the woman/teaching disciples, and returning to Cana
2. Core themes center around Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well and healing the official's son
3. The narrative explores the complex relationship between signs and faith

II. Narrative and Literary Flow of John 4

A. The Three Simplest Movements

1. Journey from Judea to Samaria with a stop at Jacob's Well in Sychar (near modern Nablus, Mount Gerizim, and Mount Ebal)

2. Extensive dialogue with the Samaritan woman and instruction of His disciples at the well
3. Departure back to Galilee and the healing of the royal official's son

B. Artful Blending of Parallel Plots

1. First Plot: Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman while His disciples are away looking for food
2. Intersecting Transition (verses 27-30): Disciples return as the woman departs to fetch her fellow villagers
3. Second Plot: Jesus teaches His disciples about spiritual harvest while the woman is testifying to her townspeople
4. Resolution: The Samaritan villagers stream out, witness to Jesus, and many come to corporate faith

III. Historical and Theological Background of Samaria

A. Old Testament Roots of the Jewish-Samaritan Schism

1. Regional capital of Samaria built by King Omri after the divided monarchy (1 Kings 16)
2. Covenant renewal ceremony conducted under Joshua at Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal (Joshua 8)
3. Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom, deportation of Israelites, and importation of foreign settlers
4. Resulting intermarriage and religious syncretism (combination of Yahweh worship and foreign deities)
5. Post-exilic exclusion: Returning Jewish resettlers under Persian rule (Nehemiah 4) reject association with Samaritans

B. New Testament Perspectives on Samaria

1. Severe friction shown in Luke-Acts: Samaritans reject Jesus on His journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9)
2. Jesus subverts cultural bias through the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10) and healing the Samaritan leper (Luke 17)
3. Spirit-led reunification in Acts 8: Samaritans turn to Christ, receive baptism, and are united with Jerusalem through the laying on of hands by apostles
4. Biblical theological fulfillment: Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12) starting with exclusive election to bring inclusive blessings to all nations

IV. Jesus' Encounter with the Samaritan Woman (John 4:4-42)

A. The Necessity of the Journey

1. The geographical "must" indicates divine necessity and theological appointments set by the Father rather than pure physical route
2. Jesus acts as the Father's agent to accomplish divine works

B. Jesus' Deep Humanity at the Well

1. Described as weary, tired from travel, and thirsty, explicitly affirming His genuine physical humanity

C. Six-Part Conversational Exchange

1. Dialogue on Living Water (verses 7-15)

- a. Jesus asks for a drink, crossing rigid boundaries of gender and ethnicity
- b. Ritual purity concerns: Jews avoided Samaritan vessels as ritually impure
- c. Jesus shifts focus to the "gift of God" and offers eternal, welling-up living water
- d. The woman's initial material misunderstanding (no longer needing to carry her water jug)

2. Dialogue on True Worship and Messiahship (verses 16-26)

- a. Jesus displays supernatural insight into her personal history of husbands and companions
- b. Theological debate over the proper place of worship (Mount Gerizim Samaritan temple vs. Jerusalem Jewish temple)
- c. Jesus declares the dawn of a new era of worship "in spirit and in truth" transcending geographical boundaries
- d. Assertion of Israel's place in redemptive history: "Salvation is from the Jews"
- e. Clear self-revelation: Jesus explicitly identifies Himself as the Messiah

D. Comparison and Contrast: Nicodemus (John 3) vs. Samaritan Woman (John 4)

1. Nicodemus: A Jewish man of high social class, prominent teacher, orthodox, religiously pure, and guardedly open
2. Samaritan Woman: A marginalized Samaritan woman, low-class, syncretistic/heretical religious background, and totally open
3. Outcast status re-examined: Modern scholarship (e.g., Lynn Cohick) suggests multiple marriages may reflect tragic loss or divorce rather than immorality
4. Both demonstrate a deep universal need for Jesus and the light of His new creation

E. Social and Contemporary Applications

1. Disciples are astonished to find Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman
2. Racial, ethnic, and cultural bias is fundamentally incompatible with following Jesus
3. The Gospel is universally designed for all people, requiring believers to step outside comfort zones and take relational risks

V. Healing of the Royal Official's Son (John 4:43-54)

A. Return to Galilee

1. Jesus asserts that "a prophet has no honor in his own country"
2. Contextual reference indicates the mixed, superficial reception Jesus received in Jerusalem/Judea rather than Galilee

B. The Distant Healing Sign

1. A royal official from Capernaum makes an urgent journey to Cana to beg Jesus to heal his dying son
2. Jesus' sharp response: "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe"
3. The official persists in simple faith, taking Jesus at His word and departing without Jesus physically visiting Capernaum
4. Official's household comes to complete faith after servants confirm the fever left the boy at the exact hour Jesus spoke
5. The sign is designated as Jesus' second Galilee miracle, completing a cycle begun in Cana (John 2)

VI. Theological Reflections on Signs and Faith

A. Craig Koester's Perspective (The Word of Life)

1. Genuine faith occurs when people are brought to trust Jesus' message prior to seeing signs
2. Signs function constructively within an existing relationship, rather than serving as the baseline spark of faith
3. Parallel to Protestant focus on Sola Scriptura (believing the Word first aligns subsequent experiences of God's work)

B. Interpretive Nuance and Complexities in John

1. John contains counter-examples where signs/sight precede or provoke faith
2. The Thomas encounter (John 20:29) demonstrates believing because of seeing/touching, which Jesus accepts but contrasts with those who believe without seeing
3. The complex, tension-filled relationship between sign-based and word-based faith remains a core interpretive question throughout the Gospel of John