

Dr. David L. Turner, John, Session 6, John 4:1-54

6-Min. Video Overview

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Alright, let's dive into one of the most famous encounters in the entire Bible. It's a story that absolutely shatters social norms and really challenges how we think about faith. We're talking about a journey packed with ancient rivalries and a theological puzzle that scholars are still debating today.

Let's get into it. So the whole thing kicks off with this simple, almost throwaway line. But this little sentence, it's the key that unlocks the entire story.

It drops a mystery on us right from the get-go. Jesus had to pass through Samaria. And that's the big question, isn't it? Because if you were just looking at a map, he absolutely did not have to go this way.

In fact, this was not the easy or the popular route for a Jew to take. So that word is a huge clue that something much, much deeper is going on here. We're not just following a travel itinerary; we're witnessing a mission unfold.

See, this is the thing. That phrase- he had to, or he must- it pops up again and again in the Gospel of John. It's basically a code word, a signal that Jesus is operating on a divine timetable, not just his own.

This wasn't about the easiest way to get from point A to point B. It was a divine appointment that couldn't be missed. Now, to really get why this journey is such a big deal, you have to understand the culture at the time. Most devout Jews would actually take the longer, harder route to avoid setting foot in Samaria.

The hostility between these two groups was that intense. So for Jesus to choose the direct route wasn't just unusual. It was a deliberately provocative statement.

And that choice leads us right to this encounter at the well, which proceeds to break just about every social and religious rule you can think of. This was so much more than a friendly chat. It was a radical act of social defiance.

I mean, just look at the layers here. First off, you have a Jew speaking to a Samaritan. That's a huge taboo right there.

Second, a man initiating a public conversation with a woman he doesn't know. Another major breach of etiquette. And third, and this is a big one, a rabbi asking to share her drinking cup.

As Dr. David Turner points out, this was a massive risk for ritual impurity. And Jesus, he just blows past all of it. So why all the bad blood? Well, this wasn't some minor disagreement.

We're talking about a bitter rivalry that was centuries old. It all started way back when the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom and brought in foreigners, creating this mixed culture and a religion that many Jews saw as completely illegitimate. Later, when the Jews came back from exile, they flat-out rejected the Samaritans' offer to help rebuild.

And that just cemented the feud for generations. You know, this is where the writer of John's Gospel does something brilliant. He uses this shocking encounter to make an incredibly powerful point, especially when you put it side by side with the story that comes right before it.

Jesus's talk with a man named Nicodemus. And this comparison just lays it all out, doesn't it? On one side, you've got Nicodemus. He's a man, a Jew, a top religious leader.

He's the ultimate insider. But when he talks to Jesus, he's just confused and hesitant. On the other side, you have this woman, a Samaritan, an outcast, someone holding what were seen as heretical beliefs, the ultimate outsider.

And yet what's her response? She's immediately open, and she becomes the very first missionary, running to tell her entire town about Jesus. It's a powerful contrast that really forces you to think about who might be overlooked as an outsider today. And hey, a quick but really important point about her supposed immorality.

For centuries, people have assumed she was a moral outcast because she'd had five husbands. But scholars like Professor Ludwik make a great point. We might be reading our own modern biases into the story.

In that culture, it's very possible she was widowed multiple times or divorced by her husbands, things that were totally outside of her control. Her story might be one of tragedy, not transgression. But you know, no matter what her backstory was, the result of this wild, rule-breaking encounter is immediate and absolutely stunning.

It leads to something nobody could have seen coming. You can literally trace the ripple effect here. Step one: the private conversation where Jesus tells her who he is.

Step two: she immediately drops everything and runs to tell her entire village. Step three, on her word alone, the villagers come out to see for themselves. And step four, they come to believe, first because of what she told them, and then because they heard Jesus for themselves.

This supposed outcast becomes this incredibly powerful messenger. And the whole thing becomes this incredible object lesson for the disciples. Right as they get back with lunch, Jesus tells them to look up because the fields are ready for harvest.

And then, right on cue, a whole stream of Samaritans, the very people they would have ignored and written off, is walking toward them ready to listen. It's just this powerful real-time demonstration that God's work shows up in the most unexpected people and places. But wait, the chapter's not done with us.

It pivots to a totally different encounter, one that seems simple on the surface but actually unpacks a theological puzzle that echoes through the entire Gospel of John. And it all

connects back to the very idea of belief we just saw with the Samaritans. The scene totally shifts.

A royal official finds Jesus, and he is desperate. His son is dying, and he's begging Jesus to come heal him. It's just a raw, urgent plea from a father who's about to lose everything.

And Jesus' response? It's jarring. I mean, it sounds incredibly harsh, doesn't it? Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe. He doesn't even seem to be talking just to the father, but to a whole group of people.

It creates this immediate tension and puts the central theme of the story right in our faces: this tricky, complicated relationship between faith and miracles. This is what scholars call the signs and faith dilemma. Think of it like a chicken-or-egg question.

Does faith need to see a miracle to be born? Or does faith come first, just from hearing the message, and the signs just show up later to confirm it? Do you have to see it to believe it, or do you believe it and then you see? It's a question the Gospel of John wrestles with over and over. Now, one prominent scholar, Craig Keister, has a really neat solution. He argues that real faith always starts with hearing the message.

Trust comes first. Then, signs and wonders come along to confirm the faith you already had. It's a clean, elegant idea.

But, and this is a big but, as Dr. Turner points out, the text itself doesn't always fit neatly into that box, which leaves the question wide open. And that's exactly where this chapter leaves us. It gives us one story of an outsider who believes instantly, just from a conversation, and another of a desperate insider who witnesses an impossible, long-distance miracle.

So we're left to wonder for ourselves: what is the true foundation of faith? Is it the word that we hear, or is it the wonder that we see? The text doesn't give us an easy answer. And you know what? Maybe that's the whole point.