

# Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

By the Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, Founder of Crossways International

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**Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:**

**John 4:5-42**

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):  
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Year A - Lent 3, Text: John 4:5-26 (27-30) (39-42)  
Year A - Lent 3, Text: John 4:5-42

**Verse 4:1–4:** In this story, Jesus ministers to a “half-Jew,” a woman living in Samaria. It continues John’s theme of replacement. Here Jesus replaces the cult of Samaria (and its worship on Mt. Gerizim) with Himself. (In John 2:1–11, Jesus replaces the rites of purification; in 3:1–17, He replaces the mode of entry into God’s people.) The farther Jesus moves from Jerusalem and Judea, the more He finds faith. This shows how Jesus increases faith (see 3:30), but not among the Jews. He is accepted by the hated Samaritans.

Jesus leaves Judea to make room for John the Baptist. People are not to think they are rivals because baptism is found in both movements. Why does John stress that Jesus himself did not baptize but only his disciples baptized? He wants his readers to know that salvation does not depend on being baptized by Jesus Himself. In fact, Christian baptism began only after Jesus’ death and resurrection..

**Verse 4:5:** Jews and Samaritans hated each other. So, when traveling from Jerusalem to Galilee, Jews usually bypassed Samaria by traveling along the east bank of the River Jordan. However, Jesus does not avoid Samaria. His more direct route from Jerusalem to Galilee takes him to Sychar — probably the city of Shechem referred to frequently in the Old Testament.

**Verse 4:6:** Jacob’s well was near Sychar. Since Jesus was tired, He sat down near this well around noon. (Tourists can visit Jacob’s well; its waters remain as cool and fresh as they were in Jesus’ day.)

**Verse 4:7:** When a Samaritan woman comes to the well, Jesus finds Himself in a difficult situation. Jewish tradition stated that no man should talk to a woman alone; see v. 27. Doubts would arise about Jesus’ character if He were seen to be speaking with the woman. Furthermore, no Jew would want to be seen talking to a Samaritan since Jews believed that Samaritans were worse than heathens. Even worse, Jesus finds Himself in the company of a Samaritan woman. Jews regarded

Samaritan women as ritually unclean, and were forbidden to drink from any vessel that a Samaritan woman had handled. However, Jesus ignores these Jewish notions and asks the woman to give Him water to drink.

**Verse 4:8:** All the more challenging for Jesus is the fact that His disciples are not with Him. They have gone to buy food and left Him alone with the woman!

**Verse 4:9:** The woman finds Jesus’ actions and request rather amazing! She asks how He, a Jew, could ask a woman of Samaria to give Him a drink?

**Verse 4:10:** Jesus must show her that racial differences are totally unimportant and irrelevant. If she knew who He was, she would ask Him for living water, the water of life, the revelation that Jesus brings.

**Verse 4:11:** The woman thinks of “flowing water” — more desirable than stagnant cistern water. Like the Jews in 1:20 and Nicodemus in 3:3, the woman misunderstands what Jesus is talking about. Does Jesus need longer ropes to reach down for this special water? Has He a secret well with a special healing agent?

**Verse 4:12:** Is Jesus even greater than father Jacob who used this well for his family and flocks?

**Verses 4:13–15:** We can drink water to quench our thirst. But it is not long before we are thirsty again.

Jesus now makes an amazing statement: “I can give you a drink that will end all thirst. I can put in you a spring of water that will keep bubbling up and overflowing — a water that gives eternal life.” Obviously, Jesus is offering Himself to her as the end of her thirsting after God. Whether she grasps this truth is not yet clear. Yet, like the people who say, “Sir, give us this bread always” when Jesus promises them the bread of life (6:33, 34), she begs, “Sir, give me this water!”

Jesus’ request for water ends as a revelation of His identity. It is fascinating to see how Jesus speaks with this woman. The conversation moves from the ques-

tion of her many husbands, to that of true worship, and finally to the identity of the Messiah. Jesus exposes the woman but does not harass her. Rather, He gently leads her to the point where she can glimpse His truth for herself. (Little wonder that the woman went to the well when she did. Knowing that she was a person of ill repute, she went there at midday while “respectable women” went there early in the morning or at sunset.)

**Verses 4:16-18:** The conversation begins in an embarrassing way for the woman. Jesus tells her to go call her husband and return to Him. She denies that she has a husband; Jesus agrees. He reveals that He knows all about her past. She has had five husbands, and the man with whom she is living is not her legal husband.

**Verse 4:19:** The woman is amazed by Jesus’ response! She states that Jesus must be a prophet! Although that is not the full truth, she is now on a spiritual journey.

**Verse 4:20:** Yet she changes the subject! For the Jews, the true holy mountain is Mount Zion in Jerusalem — on which stands the Temple. For the Samaritans, the true holy mountain is Mt. Gerizim — close to Shechem. (In the Samaritan Bible, it was Mt. Gerizim, not Mt. Ebal, on which the Israelites built an altar after crossing the Jordan to enter Israel [Deuteronomy 27:4-5]. The Samaritans built a temple on Mt. Gerizim in the 4th century BC as a rival to the temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish Hasmoneans destroyed it in 128 BC.)

**Verses 4:21-22:** But Jesus refuses to debate the place of worship. He says that the Jews, rather than the Samaritans, have preserved the knowledge of God from the Old Testament; the Jews at least know whom they are worshiping. And since Jesus is a Jew, salvation comes from the Jews! It is not the where or the what of worship that matters, but the Who and the why.

**Verses 4:23-24:** Jesus points forward to the coming time when the true worship of the Father will begin — a worship in spirit and truth. Spirit and truth are the new basis of Christian worship. Worship of God may use material places and things, but in them God’s Spirit is at work, and Jesus is present as God’s truth.

**Verse 4:25:** Once again, the woman has no answer. She tries to evade the issue by suggesting, “Well, who knows the answer now? We will only know the truth when the expected Messiah arrives. Let’s leave all these arguments until he appears.” The woman’s statement is expressed in Jewish terms. The Samaritans

were not waiting for a messianic king of the house of David, but for a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15). After all, the Samaritans accepted only Genesis through Deuteronomy as divine revelation.

**Verse 4:26:** But the woman’s statement is just what Jesus has been waiting for! He says, “I am He.” His words are literally “I AM” — an Old Testament term for God (Exodus 3:14; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10, 25; 46:4; 51:12, and Deuteronomy 32:39). The Messiah is God!

**Verse 4:27:** As the disciples return, they are stunned! Jesus is talking with a woman! But they say nothing.

**Verses 4:28-30:** The woman now functions as a missionary. She leaves her jar near the well, returns to the city, and invites the people to come and see Jesus — the Man who knows everything she has ever done! Is He perhaps the Messiah? The people come to Jesus.

**Verses 4:31-34:** When the disciples urge Jesus to eat some food, He tells them He has food to eat that they know nothing about. The disciples are puzzled. Has someone else given Him something to eat? The disciples do not compare well with the Samaritan woman whose one desire is to speak about Jesus to her friends in the city! The disciples address Him as “Rabbi” and their one concern is that He should eat. Jesus quickly points them to the food that really matters! They immediately misunderstand Jesus. They think that He has some private supply of food. However, what Jesus has to do is something far more important. He has to do the will of His Heavenly Father!

**Verses 4:35-38:** Jesus says that the harvest-time is near. When the ears of wheat turn color, the farmer knows that harvest time is near. Moreover, the harvest in Samaria is about to begin as the people of Sychar come out to see Jesus. Later, there will be a new start to the mission in Samaria (Acts 8). The disciples must not forget that the mission is the Lord’s. Whether they are sowers or reapers does not matter. All servants can rejoice in the harvest no matter what their task, whether seemingly important or lowly.

**Verses 4:39-42:** The Samaritan woman becomes a witness for Jesus, and many of her people believe in Him. They ask Jesus to stay with them, and He does, for two days. Finally, many more believe, not because of what the woman has said, but because they have listened to Jesus Himself. The Samaritan “converts” see in Jesus the Messiah and Savior of the World.