

Stage III. The Early Judean Ministry

E. Jesus Makes Disciples in Samaria

1. Jesus Decides to End His Ministry in Judea by Traveling Through Samaria

The DAILY JESUS NEWS #043

JN 4.3-6

3 (In order to avoid any appearance of competition with John the Baptizer's ministry,) Jesus left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

4. Jesus sensed that it was necessary for him to travel through Samaria. 5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there.

Jesus, thoroughly exhausted as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	The Judean Wilderness, then Sychar in Samaria
Timeline	August 30 AD (Month seven)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage III: The Early Judean Ministry
	E. Jesus Makes Disciples in Samaria
Title	I. Jesus Ends his Judean Ministry by Traveling Through Samaria

COMMENT:

Today's brief reading introduces Jesus' transitional journey out of his early ministry location in Judea. It was early August now. Jesus decided to leave Judea and minister elsewhere. John was keen for us to understand Jesus' motivation for ending his work in Judea, and moving north to Galilee. We begin our by thinking about why Jesus left Judea.

John had explained Jesus' think earlier, in JN 4.1: ***"Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and immersing more disciples than John..."*** This was the crux of the matter. Why did this matter to our Lord? Jesus could not stand the fact that sinful people would misunderstand Him to be in competition with John. Jesus valued unity over misunderstood success.

We have note the Immerser's humility in past readings. It was to be expected. Jesus is Lord and God. It is the nature of reality that He be all, and in all, and that everything in creation give way before Him, like the parting of the Red Sea. John's "friend of the bridegroom" approach was the only appropriate attitude toward Jesus.

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Look at Jesus' humility and selflessness in this decision. He had no pride. He was enjoying great success—His ministry was growing, great things were possible with John feeding His outreach with new seekers daily. But Jesus would rather abandon the maximum success zone and start all over again in the most despised and obscure part of the country (Galilee)—without the benefit of John's support— if remaining in Judea harmed the public perception of unity between himself and the Immerser. Jesus was too humble to pursue success over perceptions of competition—even if those perceptions were wrong.

Jesus would not take advantage of anybody, or any circumstances. He was ever the servant; ever the Giver, because he is the supreme Lover— and never the Taker of anything. Selflessness. Humility. This is what we see in Jesus' motivation.

Having decided to depart Judea for Galilee, Jesus next had to determine his route. Almost all Jews by-passed despicable Samaria, and went out of their way to circle around the land they considered cursed. John would later make a understated comment : ***“For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.”*** JN 4.9. In contrast, John wrote: ***“Jesus sensed that it was necessary for him to travel through Samaria.”*** For Jesus to deliberately travel through Samaria, rather than around it, and then to engage in evangelism and disciple-making there, was a highly offensive act to the average Jew of his day.

At least four different kinds of prejudice divided Jews and Samaritans like a great wall. (1) *Religious prejudice* exerted a powerful force. Unfortunately, religious prejudices are almost impossible to overcome, because they are based on conflicting claims to absolute truth. Untold millions of people have died in wars stemming from religious prejudice, right up to this very day. (2) *Racial prejudice* also separated Jews and Samaritans. The pernicious power of this kind of prejudice is all too active in our day, too. Because religious and racial prejudices are so common and entrenched in our sinful natures, they added the power of (3) *tradition* to the self-perpetuating energy of prejudice. These three in turn (4) created *economic prejudice*, which further fortified the dividing wall of prejudice.

For Jews, it was worth it to add an extra day to their journey to avoid the defiling stain of touching the “unclean” dirt, or breathing the odious air of Samaria. On the other hand, Samaritans did not receive Jews into their own cities. Even Jesus was rejected in this manner by some Samaritans on His final journey from Galilee to Jerusalem in Luke 9.51–55. As is typical, the prejudices went both ways.

“It was necessary” for Jesus to travel through Samaria on His journey down to Galilee for several reasons. We will deal here with the two major ones that apply to all of us, every day.

First, ***“it was necessary”*** for Jesus to demonstrate the unconditional, and therefore impartial love of God that is the only solution to the sin of prejudice. Jesus HAD to show the world that religious, racial, traditional, and economic prejudice, indeed ALL prejudice of any kind, are wrong. Every form of prejudice must be obliterated by the power of love in the Kingdom of God. Jesus' insistence on traveling straight through Samaria on all of His travels between Judea and Galilee bore witness to His love for all people.

Secondly, ***“it was necessary”*** for Jesus to go through Samaria because He knew He had a Divine Appointment to reveal His salvation in the village of Sychar. Jesus told His disciples: ***“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to fully accomplish His works.”*** JN 4.34. Jesus knew his Father had prepared good works in advance for Him to accomplish, and some of those works were waiting for Him in Samaria. So ***“it was necessary”*** for Jesus to do His Father's will by traveling through a region that most Jews refused to enter at any cost.

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God's kind of love refuses to participate in any kind of prejudice. It insists on being different when the sinfulness of prejudice is considered normal behavior. God's love therefore operates outside the expectations and norms of any society or culture in the world today, because they all include sinful values and traditions that contradict God's impartial kind of love.

Make no mistake about it. Jesus was radically different from His contemporaries. He rocked their boat constantly. Disciples who pursue conformity to His likeness will also be different and radical in their own cultures. It is inevitable. The love of God is irreconcilably different from human sinfulness, including prejudice. **"It is necessary"** to be different if we would follow Jesus.

This trip through Samaria was a transitional journey in Jesus' ministry in many ways. The physical location of his ministry was about to change, but much more than mere geography was involved. Three major new facets of Jesus' ministry pattern emerged in Samaria, and then developed further in his two years in Galilee. What were these three?

In Sychar Jesus began his ministry in his typical manner for Judea, with personal evangelism. However, that one-on-one encounter quickly led to **the first effective mass evangelism** of Jesus' ministry, as the Samaritan woman proved to be a powerful evangelist in her own right. The entire town ended up believing in Jesus through her witness. Jesus would major on preaching to the masses in Galilee.

Effective mass evangelism in Sychar led into something else. For the first time in Jesus' ministry we will see how he **trained and equipped his disciples to follow him in the work of sharing the gospel**. This will be highly instructive for each of us. This emphasis on training his disciples to minister also continued in Galilee.

In addition, Jesus' ministry in Samaria was his first occasion to **reach out to non-Jews**. Judea was the headquarters of "real" Judaism so Jesus began his ministry there partially to fulfill the "to the Jew first" progression of Biblical world evangelization. Jesus was himself a physical son of Abraham, and David, and he came to fulfill the Jewish Law by obeying the Old Covenant perfectly. It was important that he begin his ministry as a Jew, among the Jews, in the heart of their country.

On the other hand, though Galilee was Jewish territory, it was considered to be defiled... **"Galilee of the Gentiles."** Many non-Jews lived in the region. By ministering in Samaria, Jesus chose to highlight the grace and unconditional love for all people that caused him to be the Savior of the entire world... both Jews and Gentiles... the same grace that enabled him to minister to all of the people of Galilee, whether Jew or Gentile.

The fact that Jesus decided to begin his ministry in Samaria with a "loose" woman who was rejected by her own peers makes his grace and love revealed there that much more poignant and spectacular to behold.

APPLICATION:

The splendor of Jesus' grace and love is on full display in his journey through Samaria. To top it all off, John makes note of the fact that Jesus was **"totally exhausted"** from the journey when he sat down on the edge of Jacob's well. He had already walked at least 7 hours straight in the heat of the day at that point. A mighty torrent of grace was about to pour out of a very tired, empty vessel.

The fact that Jesus ministered so powerfully at his own point of great physical weakness highlights his selflessness and compassion. It also models the principle that he would later share with the apostle Paul:

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"My grace is sufficient for you. For my power is made fully perfect in weakness." II Cor. 12.9. Jesus lived by this principle. Therefore he can relate to us in our weakness in exactly the same way that he experienced his own.

Always remember Jesus sitting exhausted at Jacob's well when you call on him in faith for his empowering grace.

What area of weakness do you need to yield to Jesus today, so that his power can be made perfect in you?

What aspect of prejudice does your culture consider normal? How will you be different in sharing the unconditional love of Jesus in your circumstances?