

The Woman at the Well: Being Witnesses For Christ
People Jesus Met, Part 34
Lon Solomon
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You know, my wife Brenda comes from a long line of farmers. Her grandfather was a farmer. Her great-grandfather was a farmer. Her great-great-grandfather was a farmer, all of them in western Maryland and Pennsylvania. When Brenda's grandparents were still living, we used to go up and visit them fairly often.

I know nothing about farming, but one thing I noticed is that they raised a lot of hay. On this farm, I noticed that when the hay was ready for harvesting, when it was ripe, it would turn a bright white color as it glistened in the sun. Seeing that reminded me of a passage in the Bible. Seeing that made a passage in the Bible spring to new life, and it's that passage that we're going to talk about today. John chapter 4 tells the story of the woman at the well.

Don't forget, we're in a series of messages entitled "People Jesus Met." Today we want to go back and see what Jesus said to the woman at the well and to the disciples who were there with her. Then we're going to wind all of that forward and talk about what difference that makes to you and me.

So here we go. As I said, John chapter 4 is our passage, and we begin at verse 3. The Bible says, "So Jesus left Judea and went back to Galilee, and He had to pass through Samaria." Samaria was inhabited by a group of people in Jesus' time called Samaritans, and let me tell you just a little bit about the Samaritans. In 721 B.C., the Assyrian Empire conquered the northern kingdom of Israel—Samaria—and the Assyrians exported most of the Jews who were living there and imported Gentiles from all around their empire into Samaria.

Well, the Jews that remained in Samaria intermarried with all of these imported Gentiles, and they produced a race of half-breeds, half Jewish and half Gentile, called the Samaritans. At the time of Jesus, the Jews despised the Samaritans. At the time of

Jesus, no self-respecting Jew would be caught even talking to a Samaritan. It's important that we understand that as we go forward.

Verse 5, "So Jesus came to a town in Samaria called Sychar. Jacob's Well was there. And Jesus, tired as He was from His journey, sat down by the well. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, so Jesus said to her, 'Please give Me a drink,' for His disciples had gone into the city to buy food. And the Samaritan woman said to Jesus, 'How is it that You, as a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan, for a drink?'" John, the apostle, the author of the book adds, "For the Jews have no dealing with the Samaritans."

Verse 10, "Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you understood the gift of God and who it is that's asking you for a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water. Everyone who drinks the water from this well—the one where you and I are, ma'am—will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst again.'"

Now let's stop for a moment. Do you see what Jesus is doing here? He's dangling a little piece of spiritual bait, if you will, in front of this woman to see if she's interested. Okay, at this point, she is.

Verse 15, "The woman said to Him, 'Sir, please give me this water, so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.'" Now she doesn't quite get it yet, does she? At this point, she's still thinking He is going to give her some kind of physical water, but the important point is that she was interested.

We might have expected at this moment that Jesus would have immediately moved on to talk to her about who He was, to talk to her about the plan of salvation, to talk to her about the gospel, but He doesn't, not yet. Notice verse 16. "Then Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and return.' Then the woman said, 'Well, I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You're right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you've had five husbands, and the man you're now living with is not even your husband. What you have said is quite true.'"

Hey folks, Mother Teresa, this lady wasn't. Do you understand what I'm saying? She had already been married five times. She'd been divorced five times. She's now

shacking up with some man, but the important thing I want you to see is that when Jesus confronts her with her sinful behavior here, the woman makes no excuses. The woman makes no alibis. The woman just stands there defenseless in front of the Lord Jesus and owns her stuff.

Verse 25, "Then the woman said to Him, 'I know that Messiah is coming'"--John adds for our benefit, "He who is called in Greek, the Christ"—"and that when He comes, He will explain everything to us." Then Jesus said, 'I who speak to you am He.'"

My friends, this is the clearest, the most straightforward declaration of His Messiahship that Jesus has made to anyone up to this point, and would you please notice that He made it not to a Jewish person. He made this great declaration to a Samaritan woman, to an outcast woman, but she was a woman who was ready to do business with God.

You know, the beautiful thing about the Lord Jesus Christ is that He doesn't really care where we are in the world's pecking order, my friends. He doesn't care whether we're an outcast or whether we're a big shot or whether we're somewhere in between. If you and I are ready to do business with God, whoever we are, Jesus is ready to reveal Himself to us and do business with us.

I remember when I was talking to the man on the street who led me to Christ, Bob Eckhardt, on the streets of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. As we finished our very first conversation, which went about two hours, he gave me a Bible. He said, "I want you to take this Bible and put it by your bed stand. I want you to read a little bit every night." He said, "If you read something you don't understand, don't worry about it. There will be enough in there you do understand, just keep going," which was great advice. He said, "I want you to start every night with a little prayer. I want you to say, 'God, I am willing to believe in You. I am willing to do business with You if You reveal Yourself to me and prove to me that You are who You say You are, amen.'"

I said to him, "Bob, how in the world is God going to reveal Himself to me and prove to me He is who He said He is?" Bob said, "Lon, don't worry about it. What difference does it make? That's not your job; that's God's job. Your job is just to make sure if He does it, that you're willing to do business with Him."

I prayed that little prayer every night, and I read the Bible for a few minutes every night, and one month later, I got on my knees absolutely, utterly convinced that Jesus was exactly who He said He is, the Messiah of Israel, the Savior of the world, and I asked Him into my life. To this day, I can't explain to you how Jesus Christ convinced me that He was who He said He is, but what difference does it make?

If you're here today and have never trusted Christ in a real and personal way, then I want to challenge you to do what Bob Eckhardt challenged me to do. Read the Bible a little bit every night. If you read something you don't understand, don't worry about it; keep going. And pray and say, "God, I'm ready to do business with You, if You're ready to do business with me. Convince me that You're real."

But friends, you've got to be ready to do business with Him if He does that, and He will know the truth. I was, and the Samaritan woman was. If you are, He will reveal Himself to you. You say, "How?" Don't worry about it. He will, I promise.

Let's go on with the story. Verse 27, "Just then Jesus' disciples returned and were surprised to find Him talking with this woman, a Samaritan, but none of them dared ask Him why He was speaking with her. Then the woman left her water jar and went back into town and said to the people, 'Come! See a man who told me everything I ever did! Could this man be the Messiah?' So the whole town came and made their way toward Jesus."

Wow, can you imagine what this must have looked like as Jesus and the disciples stood there at the well looking off in the distance and seeing an entire town full of people walking out for the express purpose of meeting with Jesus? Wow, what a great thing!

Verse 35, "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'Do you not say four months more and then comes the harvest?' Pointing at all these townsfolk on their way out to meet Him, Jesus said, 'Behold, fellows! I say to you, open your eyes and look at the fields, not fields of grain, but fields of humanity, fields of people. I tell you, these fields are already white for harvest.'" You see, this was January in John chapter 4. The physical grain fields they were standing in were four months away from reaching harvest, but Jesus said to His disciples, "Hey, open your eyes and look at the fields of humanity. We

don't have to wait four months to harvest in that field; in fact, we don't have to wait four hours to harvest in that field. That field is ready now. There are people out there who are ready to listen now. There are people out there who are ready to believe in Me now."

Look how right He was. Verse 40, "So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they urged Him to stay with them, and He stayed there two days. And because of His words, many became believers."

I love verse 42! "Then they said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said, but we have heard Him for ourselves, and now we know that this man is indeed the Savior of the world.'" Wow, that's exciting! Almost the whole town came to Christ!

Now friends, I want us to understand that the fields are white unto harvest right here in our modern world today. George Barna, the famous pollster, conducted a survey recently, and here's what he said. He said, "A recent nationwide study we conducted among unchurched adults indicated that 25% would attend a church if a friend ever made the effort to invite them." Barna continues, "Our best estimate is that the unchurched population of this country is roughly 60 to 70 million people, which means that 15 to 18 million adults are waiting to be asked to go to church!" He goes on to say, "That's more people than live in all of Belgium or all of Holland. It's twice the population of New York City!"

Now we all understand, don't we, friends, that bringing people to church is not the central issue. Bringing people to faith in Jesus Christ is the central issue, but what Barna's report tells us is that there are people in America today who are spiritually open, people in America today who are willing to listen, people in America today who are willing to believe in Jesus Christ, millions and millions of people if you and I will simply get out there and tell them! But I'm sad to say that Jesus' lament 2000 years ago is still true today. He said in Matthew chapter 9, "The harvest is plentiful, but the harvesters are few."

Now that's as far as we want to go in the passage today, because we want to stop now, and we want to ask our most important question. You know what that is,

yes? Yes, okay! All you folks on the Internet, we want to hear you too, so when I say three, are you ready? (silence) You're not inspiring me with great confidence. (laughter) Are we ready? Here we go, one, two, three—SO WHAT? Oh, that is sweet! Thank you so much. You guys are awesome! God bless you.

All right, now you say, "Lon, I hear this about John chapter 4. It's a wonderful passage. I think I understand what happened there, but I'm sorry. I just don't see what all this has so much to do with me." Well, let's talk about that.

Let's go back and remind ourselves what happened at the well there in Sychar. Jesus was sitting alone after a long day's journey when this Samaritan woman appears, and Jesus strikes up a conversation with her. All of this begs the question, "What was Jesus' purpose in talking to this lady?" You say, "Well, He was just trying to be friendly." Nope. "He was thirsty, and He wanted something to drink." Nope. "He was lonely, and He wanted companionship." Nope, nope, nope.

Friends, Jesus' purpose in talking to this woman was unashamedly evangelistic. Jesus' purpose in talking to this woman was to try to bring her to saving faith in Himself. As a matter of fact, every conversation that Jesus had with every non-believer that He ever met was overtly evangelistic in its intent, was an overtly evangelistic conversation. Here in John chapter 4, what Jesus was trying to get the disciples to understand and what He is trying to get us to understand is that we need to have the same kind of witnessing passion everywhere we go as He had.

We need to enter into every encounter, into every conversation that we have with people, hoping and praying that we can turn that encounter, that we can turn that conversation into an evangelistic conversation. I'm thrilled that this is exactly what the woman at the well did. Remember what she did. The Bible says that she left her water jar at the well. She forgot all about the water, and she went running back to town and said, "You guys have got to come and meet this man. You won't believe this man. I think He's the Messiah! Come on with me, you need to go meet this guy!" Wow! Jesus said, "Now those are the kind of footsteps I want you guys to walk in."

You say, "But Lon, time out. You're on a roll, buddy, but stop a minute. You see, Lon, you just don't understand the problem. The problem is that I understand the

fields are white unto harvest here in Washington. I understand there are people out there probably willing to listen, but the problem is, Lon, I don't know how to do this. I don't know how to be a good evangelist. I don't know how to be a good witnesser. I don't know how to be a good harvester for Christ." Okay, fair enough.

So why don't we go back to John chapter 4 and watch how Jesus did it, huh? Why don't we pull the principles out of John chapter 4 that lay at the foundation of how He witnessed to this woman, and why don't we encapsulate them and say, "If we do it the same way, then we don't have a better example in the world than the Lord Jesus, right?" Okay.

There are three principles here for being a good witnesser, and the Lord Jesus Christ followed all three of them. Number one, here we go. If you want to be a good witnesser, then deal with the interested. Verse 10, "Jesus said to the woman, 'If you understood the gift of God and who it is that's asking you for a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.'"

Remember what we said earlier. What was Jesus doing here? He was trying to find out if she was interested. He was trying to dangle a little piece of bait and see if she would bite. He didn't just rush right in and share the gospel. He wanted first to find out, "Is the woman even interested?"

Now what would have happened if the woman would have said to him, "Look, pal, I'm not interested in any living water, okay? I've got a lot to do today, and I'm already behind, so if You don't mind, just move Your parts over, let me get my water, and I'm gone, okay?" What would Jesus have done? He would have let her go, because He let other people go who had no interest.

Why would Jesus have let her go? Well, because in John 6:44, Jesus said, "Nobody can come to Me unless the Father is drawing them." When we meet people, this needs to be the very first thing that we have to find out, which is whether the drawing ministry of the Holy Spirit is full, complete and mature in that person's life. If it isn't, friends, all the witnessing in the world won't bring them to Christ right at that very moment. There is more work the Holy Spirit has to do in their heart first.

You say, "Well, Lon, how do we find this out about a person?" Well, we find it out the same way Jesus did. How did He find it out? He put a little bit of bait out there. He put a little spiritual teaser out there, and He waited to see how the woman responded, whether or not she took the bait. You know, we say to people today, "I'm a blessed man. I'm a blessed woman. Lord willing. It wasn't luck; it was the Lord. The Lord's been good to me," or whatever, and we wait and see if people grab hold of that comment and show any interest. If they do, we go on to step two, which we'll talk about in a minute. If they don't, friends, we switch our strategy from preaching to praying, because they need to be drawn more fully and more maturely by the Holy Spirit, and that's something we need them to pray for.

A few weeks ago, I was on a flight on my way out to California for a Jews For Jesus board meeting. I love to fly to these meetings, because I've got five hours going one way and four-and-a-half hours back with my laptop and my Bible, and I work on my sermons. I don't sleep, and I don't watch the movie, and I don't eat the meal. I give it to the flight attendant. I just work on my message. It's great! There are no fax machines, no e-mails, no telephones. It's wonderful!

So I got my laptop out and my Bible out. It's a little crowded, but you can get it done. I was on the aisle, and sitting right next to me was a Jewish man. You say, "How do you know he was Jewish?" What kind of Jewish person would I be if I couldn't spot another Jew? All right? Come on now, give me a break here! I knew he was Jewish, and he knew I was Jewish. We knew, and we knew we knew. (laughter) Trust me, we did.

So I'm about four hours into the flight, and I'm working. The flight attendant came by and said, "Hey, I noticed you had your Bible out. Are you a Christian?" I said, "Yes, I am. As a matter of fact, I'm a Jewish person who believes in Jesus." (laughter) She's like, "Really? Where are you going?" I said, "Well, I'm on my way out to a Jews For Jesus board meeting." (laughter) He didn't even flinch. I tried to talk to him and open a conversation after that. He wouldn't even recognize I was trying to talk to him.

We got off the plane, and he was just a little bit ahead of me in the terminal. I caught up to him and said, "Hey, excuse me. You're Jewish, aren't you?" He said,

"Well, what's that got to do with anything?" See, I was right! I knew I was right. I told you I was right. I said, "Well, I'm Jewish too, but I believe in Jesus, and I wanted to give you this CD"—I always carry CDs of my life story with me—"that tells you how I came to believe in Jesus." He said, "I don't want it." I said, "Yeah, yeah, okay, but I really think you would enjoy this." He said, "I don't want it! That's my right, isn't it?" I said, "Well, sure, but I don't see how it could hurt you just to listen to it. Jesus Christ changed my life. He could change your life too." He said, "If you give it to me, I'm going to throw it in the very next trash can I pass. I don't want it!"

Now I think it's fair to assume that this person wasn't interested. (laughter) Would you assume that? Okay, so you know what? At that point, you stop. There's no point in going on. I've been praying for him ever since then. I don't know. Maybe I planted a seed, somebody else will water, and maybe the guy will end up in heaven, but you can keep pushing it, and it's not going anywhere. The drawing ministry of the Holy Spirit was obviously not full and mature in that person's life.

I love what Robert Murray McShane said. He said, "When preaching fails, try praying." A lot of times, my friends, it's not about what we say to somebody; it's about what we pray for somebody that really makes the difference.

Well, let's say you've got somebody who's interested. Then what do you do? Well, what did Jesus do? The very next thing He did was to emphasize repentance. Verse 16, "Jesus said to her, 'Go call your husband and return,' and she said, 'I don't have a husband.' He said, 'You're right. You've had five. You're shacking up with man number six.'"

Now what was Jesus trying to do here in step number two? What He was trying to do is to force this woman to acknowledge her sinful behavior, to admit her sinful behavior that she was shacking up with this guy. As we said earlier, she was willing to do that. She stood there completely defenseless, no alibis, no excuses.

In Acts 20:21, the apostle Paul said, "I preach to both Jews and Gentiles alike"—look at the verse—"that they should put their faith in Jesus Christ." Uh oh, wait a minute. Didn't we leave something out? Let's go back. Here's the verse. "I preach to

both Jews and Gentiles alike that they must”—what’s the next word?—“repent and put their faith in Jesus Christ.”

What exactly is biblical repentance? Well, it’s two things. Number one, it’s a willingness to admit our sinful behavior before almighty God, no excuses, no alibis. Number two, it’s a willingness to turn from our sinful behavior as part of embracing Jesus as our personal Savior. Listen, friends, if a person is not ready to repent, then a person is not ready to come to faith in Christ yet.

Bob Eckhardt is the man who led me to the Lord. In that two-hour conversation we had the very first day, as part of that conversation, he said to me—this wasn’t his opening line, but as part of it, he said to me, “You know, you’re a sinner before almighty God.” I said, “I know that.” He said, “And you’ve broken the laws of God, just about every one of them.” I said, “I know that too.” He said, “And because of that, you’re under the judgment of God for your sin.” I said, “I know that.” He said, “And you’re alienated from God and separated from God.” I said, “I know that too! Bob, I know the problem. I need some way to fix it! I’m not arguing with you about the problem.”

See, so many times we try to give people a prescription when they’re not even willing to admit they’re sick yet. You can’t do that. We’ve got to preach the whole counsel of God to people. We’ve got to help people understand that they’re sinners in the sight of a holy God, that they are under the judgment of God for sin. Only when people understand this does the love, mercy and forgiveness of Jesus Christ make any sense to them.

When we come across people who aren’t yet ready to repent, we need to do the very same thing that we do when we come across people who aren’t yet interested. We need to switch from preaching to praying, because you’re not going to convince somebody that they’re a sinner in the sight of God, and I’m not going to do that; that’s the work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s heart.

This is why Jesus said in John 16:8, “It is the Holy Spirit who convicts and convinces people regarding sin and judgment,” and if a person’s not ready to repent,

then we need to start praying that God the Holy Spirit will do His convicting work in their heart with fullness and completion, so that they're ready for Christ.

All right, so let's say number three, we've got a person that's interested. We've got a person who's ready to repent. What do we do? Well, we need to keep people focused on Jesus. Verse 20, "Now the woman said, 'Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is Jerusalem.'" So here you've got a woman at the well. She's interested. She's willing and ready to repent, but what happens here? She gets off on some religious rabbit trail about what mountain you're supposed to worship on.

We've all met people like this, haven't we? You try to share the Lord with them, and before you know it, they get sidetracked on some issue of religious performance of one kind or another. They say, "Well you know, I haven't been going to church much," or "I haven't really been keeping the Ten Commandments very well," or "Well you know, I haven't been taking the sacraments." We have to constantly come back. A good witnesser says to them, "Look, salvation is not about church, and it's not about sacraments, and it's not about the Ten Commandments. It's about Jesus Christ." We get people back on Jesus.

Sometimes we meet people who get all sidetracked about non-religious things, about evolution or creation, what the Bible says about Adam and Eve, what the Bible says about homosexuality, what the Bible says about money, or the scandals that have plagued the Christian church. We need to say to them, "All of that aside, none of that has anything to do with eternal life and going to heaven. Let's get back on Jesus. That's the key point."

Jesus did that for this woman. Jesus responded to her when she talked about the mountain. Look what He said in verse 21. Jesus said, "The time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem." Jesus said, "Forget the mountains, lady! The mountains don't make a bit of difference. Forget the mountains! The time is coming and has now come, when God's true worshippers will worship Him in spirit and in truth."

This led her to say in verse 25, "I know that the Messiah is coming," to which He said, "I who speak to you am He." What did He do? He took this woman's rabbit trail and brought it right back to the main thing again, which was Himself. This is what good witnesses do. They don't let people get off into the weeds of church attendance, spiritual performance, evolution, or Jonah and the fish.

I've said to some people before, "Look, it doesn't really matter whether Jonah got swallowed by a fish. That has nothing to do with you going to heaven. Let's get you born again, and then Jonah and the fish will take care of themselves, I promise. Let's deal with the first thing first here." Friends, good witnesses keep Jesus Christ front and center in every conversation they have about heaven, salvation, and eternal life to keep the main thing the main thing.

So let's conclude. What have we learned today? Well, we've learned that as followers of Christ, God wants us to see the world the way He sees it. He sees it as fields of humanity that are white unto harvest. Then we've learned that Jesus wants us to take seriously His call on our lives to go out there and be harvesters, to go out there and be witnesses.

How do we do it? Well, here are the three principles Jesus followed. Number one, we deal with people who are interested, and we pray for those who aren't. Number two, we emphasize repentance, and we pray for those who won't. Finally, number three, we keep people focused on Jesus and their personal relationship to Him.

I had a guy in the lobby come up to me and say, "I just prayed the sinner's prayer with you three weeks ago!" I said, "That's great!" He said, "But I'm an Episcopalian." I said, "Well, I'm Jewish! What difference does it make? It doesn't make any difference. It's not about being Episcopalian or Jewish; it's about Jesus and your surrender to Him." Right? That's what we do.

Now listen, if you want to hone your witnessing skills a little more, I encourage you to sign up for Christianity 301, which starts right after Easter. In six weeks, we'll go over and teach you how to be a better witnesser. You should take advantage of this course.

I have a challenge for you this week. Here's my challenge. My challenge is to ask God to give you one person this week where He opens the door for you to have an evangelistic conversation or an evangelistic opportunity, and ask Him to give you the courage to step in and take it.

Listen, friends, witnessing can be nerve wracking. I understand that. Witnessing can be scary. I understand that. Our armpits get all wet and soggy. We get cotton in our mouth, and our stomach kind of flips over. Listen, it happens to me too, honest! But I have found that once I get the first words out of my mouth, the rest of it gets easy. The Lord takes over. I've had to debate, "Do I go after this guy in the terminal, or do I just let him walk off? There are people all around," but the Lord said to me, "Hey Lon, it's real simple. You know what? Your wet armpits and the cotton in your mouth is worth that man's soul. Go after that man!"

Friends, that's why we do it! We don't do it because sometimes it's not nerve wracking. We don't do it because sometimes it's not scary. We do it because people's souls are on the line, and it's worth a little bit of nerve wracking in our own hearts.

So this week, this is your assignment. "Lord, this week, open that door with at least one person. Give me the courage to step through. Give me the words to say." We can trust God for one person this week, can't we? What do you say? Okay, one or two people. Thank you. (laughter) Can we trust God for one person this week? Yes? All right.

Let me just warn you. If you pray that, if you ask God for that, you're going to get it, so you'd better be ready to take it. I promise you, if you ask God for an open door, then you're going to get one. That's great! That's what it's all about. Let's go out and be great witnesses for the Lord this week. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for talking to us today about something we all know we should do, but honestly, very few of us do it. That's stepping out and being bold outspoken witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, I pray today that You would grab hold of our hearts, that You would help us see the fields of humanity the way You see them. God, give us a passion like You had, a passion like that woman at the well had to tell people about You. Lord, give us that one chance this week, or maybe more.

Give us the courage to take it. Give us the words to say. God, open people's hearts this week, that we might share Jesus with them. Bring us people who are interested. Bring us people who are ready to repent. Bring us people who are ready to come to Christ. We commit our week to You and pray that we would represent You well here in Washington, D.C., this week or wherever we go, and we pray these things in Jesus' name, and what did God's people say? Amen!