

“Christianity and Culture”

John 4:1-42

Introduction

The Samaritan woman from John 4 gives us a basis for what it looks like to navigate racial, ethnic and cultural differences. In protest to a racial norm, Jesus Christ – while maintaining his own racial history and heritage – obeyed the will of God by traveling to Samaria to offer help to a woman in spiritual need. Jesus offered spiritual guidance and simultaneously dealt with an illegitimate representation of God that was held by both the Jews and Samaritans.

God has not left us uninformed or ill-equipped about what He says regarding race, ethnicity and culture. Historically and culturally, it was unacceptable for Jews to pass through Samaria because of racial differences. Jesus protested this commonly held belief by traveling from Judea to Galilee through Samaria rather than going around it. By doing so, we see Jesus is more committed to God’s will than the will of His own racial identity. In addition to the challenge of cultural views, Jesus had another reason to go through Samaria: He was to meet a woman at a well who needed spiritual help. He connected with her on common ground at Jacob’s Well – a place recognized by both cultures as a significant historical monument. In contrast, our spiritual enemy, Satan, wants to cause division and strife by highlighting how we differ. Jesus is calling believers to seek opportunities for unity (common ground) as a starting point for bringing God’s viewpoint and purpose forth in society. If you are a serious follower of Jesus Christ, your faith must always win.

The Samaritan woman was surprised to meet Jesus and immediately called out the fact that Jesus was willing to talk to her. Not only that, but He was also willing to put His Jewish lips on her Samaritan cup. Jesus did not give up His own racial history or heritage to relate to someone different than Himself. He also did not let His racial history or heritage get in the way of His Father’s will. As a result, Jesus was able to disarm the woman by showing humanity in a way that a typical Jewish man would not. Believers cannot attempt to talk to the souls of people while skipping their humanity. At the same time, we cannot hold humanity above our commitment to God and His purposes. To do so is to make humanity (race, ethnicity or culture) an idol, which is a sin against God.

Jesus masterfully took the social and turned it into the spiritual. His willingness to drink from the Samaritan woman’s physical cup provided a transition for His desire to offer her living water (vv. 10-14) from His spiritual cup. During their conversation, she revealed her understanding of God based on her background and historical context. Jesus corrected her illegitimate view of God because He understood the importance of having a correct view of God. To worship God, we must worship Him in truth and in a biblically accurate way.

The current cultural climate might suggest that some people who love God can waiver in their commitment to Him when racial challenges reveal differences in philosophy. Jesus shows us the opposite. Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well gives us the model for dealing with tough issues - love people and remain obedient to God.

Getting Started

1. How do worldly conversations about race and culture compare and contrast to the same conversation inside of the church?
2. Are Christians prepared to have the difficult conversations needed in current times? Based on this week’s message, what is one takeaway you think the church needs to understand in order to have productive conversations across cultural dividing lines?

Let’s Get Personal

1. Reflect on this point from the notes, “our spiritual enemy, Satan, wants to cause division and strife by highlighting how we differ. Jesus is calling believers to seek opportunities for unity . . .” Are you personally

more focused on differences or common ground? Share an example from your life that illustrates your answer.

2. What does obedience to God look like for you based on this week's message?
3. People who love God cannot talk to people's souls without caring about their humanity. As you engage with people, are you balanced in your approach? Are you so heavenly-minded, but not much earthly good? Do you address issues with people, but often not deal with the most important thing—the salvation and sanctification of souls? Or instead, do you address humanity seeking to meet needs?

Take the Next Step

1. Have you wavered in your commitment to God during the global troubles of the last few months? What has been the most shaking for you? What questions have arisen in your head or heart as a result? Did this week's sermon help strengthen your faith? Why or why not?
2. Have you been able to unwaveringly stand in your faith despite the tumultuous times we are living in? What has enabled you to do so? What encouragement can you share with another person in your group that might help strengthen them?
3. Take a moment to pray for each other in your group. Ask God to strengthen your faith in Him and to guide you as you seek to honor Him with your obedience.
4. Want to go deeper? Take a look at the following passages: Romans 3:4; Exodus 21:16; Revelation 5:9; 7:9; Galatians 2:11, 20.

Renew Your Mind

*"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."
John 4:24*
