

God's Plan for You

Does Your Plan for Your Life Match God's Plan for Your Life?

I recently read that a guy driving down the road spotted the side door of the van of a landscaper open, so he stopped his car and jumped in the van to steal the tools. It seemed to him like "easy money". The guy was on parole for another crime and what happened next was sheer comedy. The van door closed behind him and locked automatically. He started screaming that he was trapped in the van and could not breathe. The landscaper heard the shrieking but rather than opening the door for the would be burglar, called the police and waited for them to arrive. Not every plan we have is a great plan and sometimes it turns out to be disastrous. But God's plans are always right and perfect and they work out just as He wishes. Today we will look at a plan of God's that is described in John 4 that certainly did not seem reasonable to His disciples but revealed the full extent of Jesus' love for us. Our big idea today is perhaps not one you have considered. Be excited that God has a plan to make you great!

John 4 is the account of Jesus bringing His disciples somewhere I can be certain they had no interest in visiting, Samaria. Samaria was a small region of Israel between Judea and Galilee. Samaritans were descendants of Israelites not deported at the fall of the Northern kingdom and colonists from other countries brought in by the Assyrians to repopulate the region. The Samaritans were despised by the surviving Hebrews because they were not purely Jewish but rather a mixture of a variety of nationalities. The Samaritans also refused to worship in Jerusalem but rather chose to make Mt. Gerizim in Samaria their place to make sacrifices to God. When Jews, following the Babylonian captivity tried to resettle in Jerusalem and southern Israel, the Samaritans made it difficult for them. In the second century B.C., the Samaritans helped the Syrians in their war with the Jews. Later in 128 B.C., the Jewish High Priest had the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim burned to the ground. Hatred between the Samaritans and Jews was widespread. Knowing that the disciples were all Jews, they probably were not excited when Jesus told them they were going to be going through Samaria to leave Judea and return to Galilee. **When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria.** (John 4: 3-4 NIV)

Many reading this could have the impression that because Samaria was between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north, it was necessary to get to Galilee by passing through Samaria but that was not the case. There was a much easier route Jesus and the disciples could have taken, one the disciples would have been well aware of, that brought them along the Jordan river valley and bypassed altogether Samaria. This route was far easier than going through the hills of Samaria because it was level ground and an easy hike. Plus, they would not have had to interact with the despised Samaritans, who by the way, would not have liked being with them either. However, Jesus chose the more difficult route, clearly for a reason. The grammar here is important to consider. "He had to go through Samaria." The precise Greek wording indicates that Jesus was determined to go through Samaria. To the disciples it may have been more like Jesus stubbornly insisted they go through Samaria. The Greek term "Deow" used here in other parts of the Bible speaks of God's plan. In other words, Jesus had to go through Samaria because it was the will of the Father He do so. Jesus only had three years to get done His mission to bring salvation to the world and nothing He did was random or without purpose. Jesus had a specific reason for traveling through Samaria and we shall see why.

Not one of the other Gospels describes what takes place in John 4 and it is perhaps included in this biography of Jesus because it answers a particular question. Is the new birth described in John 3 only for good Jews or is it also for obvious sinners? Jesus' trip through Samaria was His way of telling us His salvation is for the entire world, regardless of one's past. **So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.** (John 4: 5-6 NIV) Wells were generally just a deep hole in the ground with a rock covering the opening so debris and dead animals wouldn't fall into them. Literally Jesus, being exhausted, sat on the well. Anyone wanting to get water from it would have to go through Him. **When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)** (John 4: 7-8 NIV) This would have been bizarre to the Samaritan woman for Jesus to ask this of her because generally Jewish men did not talk to women other than their wives in public and certainly Jews did not have any interest in starting conversations with Samaritan women. **The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)** (John 4: 9 NIV) Even more shocking is what comes next.

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." (John 4: 10 NIV) The way this statement is structured grammatically in the Greek, the contention Jesus made, and He knew what He was talking about, was that the woman did not know the gift of God nor who was talking to her. She was, as was Nicodemus before her, in the dark spiritually. We find out later that this particular woman had been married five times before and now was living with a man not married to her. She was certainly not someone Jewish rabbis or religious Jews would have thought was a candidate for salvation but Jesus here was making it clear she was. Jesus contrasted the tepid well water the woman had available to her with what He wanted her to have. **Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."** (John 4: 13-14 NIV) Of course Jesus is not talking about better tasting water. He is describing something much more crucial to this woman and all those in her village. The verb translated "welling up" is more precisely leaping up and it speaks of continually, never ending leaping up. It is a term only here in the entire New Testament used to describe water "leaping up". Otherwise, it is used three times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to depict the Holy Spirit coming upon such mighty heroes of the faith as Samson, King Saul and David. This verse in John 4 speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing eternal life. Water is the symbol; the Holy Spirit is who the water represented.

In each case, with Samson, Saul and David, the Holy Spirit came upon them as a springing up sort of work and it had nothing to do with what Samson, Saul or David did. It was all about God. Be clear about this. Jesus says He is the one who gives the eternal life that springs up on the one who gains it. It is not something the Samaritan woman could make happen or earn or even deserve. It was only Jesus who could do it and it came simply by asking. This is what separates Christianity from the religions of the world. You do not earn nor develop the work of God in you that results in salvation. It is God's gift alone and it is the Holy Spirit who makes it come about. There is not a religion of the world, at least not one of the most widespread, that would say that God loves someone like that Samaritan woman, so full of immorality and corruption. But Jesus does and did. The idea that any one of us would be the center of the Spirit of God so filling us that He bubbles up out of us like a bottle of soda that has been shaken and then opened suddenly is absurd and yet that is exactly what God has for each of us...for you. God's plan for you is to make you great, not because you have wonderful talents or skills or such a fabulous personality. His plan for you is that He so fills you that you cannot help but be great. Many say that all religions are about the same because they have similar packaging, similar discussions about God. But consider which pill you would want in your mouth when you need relief from your pain. An aspirin pill or an arsenic pill? They both are pills. But it is not the similarities that matter but rather the differences. Christ alone gives you the Holy Spirit to transform you and make you free of sin, bubbling over with eternal life. That is God's plan, to join you so thoroughly and transform you so completely that you have the life of God in all you do.

Listen to the great plan of God for you and marvel at its magnificence. **Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.** (Matthew 5: 48 NIV) Here is something I am guessing you did not realize. When Matthew recorded these wonderful words of Jesus, be perfect in the Greek is not in the form of a command as if that is something you must do if you are ever going to be right with God. It is in the future tense. Jesus has a plan for you and it will come to pass just as He says it will. You will be perfect, just like your heavenly Father has always been perfect, is perfect now and will forever be perfect. Here is our big idea and it is as big as it gets. Be excited that God has a plan to make you great. Yes, so great that you will be perfect just like your heavenly Father.