Intro: What if I came in here today just to tell you a story –

It’s an ancient story – it’s an old, old story – it’s really a very familiar story to some people – it certainly was to ancient Jews -

Here’s the story: A man goes on a long journey to a foreign country. He travels a long way – He has a great purpose in mind.

When he finally arrives at his destination the first place he goes to is the well. He is tired, he is thirsty. He is hoping to meet some people, get some rest, get a drink, and fulfill his purpose for being there.

As he arrives, someone else also arrives at the well. It’s a woman! She has come to draw water and she offers to assist the weary traveler.

As the story goes along we find out about the woman. We find out some information about her family – her background. As the story goes along, there are various other details included which may or may not be important – the time of day – conversation held by the man and the woman. Gifts are discussed, brought out, exchanged.

The woman leaves. She tells someone else about the man and the conversation. The man meets other people the woman knows and he makes a good impression. The man spends at least one night with people he met through the woman.

Now, most of you know that we are going through the Book of John and that we are in chapter 4 today – and so you say, “Pastor, why are you approaching this differently? You’re in chapter 4 – we know the story you are talking about is Jesus meeting the woman at the well!”

Ok – that’s good – Let’s read it –

John 4:1-42 – Page 811

Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John (though Jesus himself didn’t baptize them—his disciples did). So he left Judea and returned to Galilee.
He had to go through Samaria on the way. Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"

Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

"But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?"

Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."

"Please, sir," the woman said, "give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water."

"Go and get your husband," Jesus told her.

"I don't have a husband," the woman replied. Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband—for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!"

"Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?"

Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

Then Jesus told her, "I AM the Messiah!"
Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, “What do you want with her?” or “Why are you talking to her?” The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?” So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus, “Rabbi, eat something.”

But Jesus replied, “I have a kind of food you know nothing about.”

“Did someone bring him food while we were gone?” the disciples asked each other.

Then Jesus explained: “My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. You know the saying, ‘Four months between planting and harvest.’ But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! You know the saying, ‘One plants and another harvests.’ And it’s true. I sent you to harvest where you didn’t plant; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest.”

Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, “He told me everything I ever did!” When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay in their village. So he stayed for two days, long enough for many more to hear his message and believe. Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world.”

Does any of this sound familiar to you? Other than the fact that some of you know this story – some of you have heard this story many times – it is very familiar to you – but does it remind you of anything else?

I can’t take credit for this – most of these thoughts are my brother’s –

But isn’t this story eerily familiar to Genesis 24?

- Abraham needs to find a wife for his son Isaac …

But what about a couple of generations later – In Genesis 29 –

- Jacob got in trouble … had to run away … stops by a well … meets a girl … Rachel … gives her gifts … and yes, she becomes his wife.
But there is another story – it is so familiar –

- Moses – has to flee from Egypt … out in the desert he runs into some guys who are giving these sisters a hard time … Moses ends up marrying one of the sisters …

Does any of this sound familiar? Does it seem like it’s almost always the same story – just names and a few other details are changing?

Would that make our story in John 4 or any of these other stories untrue?

What happens when you go to the newspaper to give them your story of an engagement –

- Your child made the Dean’s list
- Your wedding announcement
- Anniversary
- Obituary

In each of these cases and more, the newspaper is going to give you a form to fill out to tell your story.

Read those announcements – every story is the same – they follow the same pattern – just the names of the people and a few other details are different – but they follow the same pattern – does that make the stories untrue?

No! And all of these stories are true – and they follow the same pattern! That is not by chance, accident or coincidence!

There’s another story that changes just a bit more – the genders are reversed –

- Ruth …

So then, John tells this story – and in order to get the full impact of this story, we have to begin to think the way John’s readers would think the first time they read or heard this story –

Jesus goes on a journey – meets a woman – They are immediately going to see the similarities – the other stories are about their heroes. The other stories are about their George Washington’s – Thomas Jefferson’s and Abraham Lincoln’s – Abraham – Isaac – Jacob – Moses – Ruth – all great heroes of the faith – they knew these stories very well – so when John tells this story – they recognize the pattern immediately! But they also notice the differences – what stands out?
- **This woman is from an unfaithful people** –

The origination of the Samaritans …

The OT book of Ezra refers to the Samaritans as being descended from Jews who abandoned their covenant with God - So this woman’s ancestors were unfaithful, in the understanding of those who are hearing this story.

The way they worshipped was different – Mount Gerazim was the mountain where the OT covenant blessing was confirmed, so when the Samaritans were rejected by the Jews, they built a rival Temple and a rival altar on Gerazim – the Jews said you could only do that in Jerusalem! Both Temples were destroyed, but where the Jews ceased sacrifices after their Temple was destroyed, the Samaritans continued animal sacrifice in worship up until the modern era!

From the perspective of the people reading John’s words for the first time, this woman is from an unfaithful people!

- **This woman has a unfaithful past**

Some Jewish sources near this time say that traditions only allowed for women to marry three husbands in their lifetime, regardless of whether the marriage ended in death or divorce. This woman had five husbands. Not only is she from an unfaithful people, she personally has an unfaithful past.

- **The woman has an unfaithful present**

She’s living with a man that is not her husband – certainly a scandal for the time – In reality, the practice has been scandalous throughout most of history. The fact is cohabitation has never been a model lifestyle. Even with its popular acceptance in our culture today, studies prove that the lack of long-term commitment is a detriment to the stability of relationships. People who live together before marriage have a higher rate of divorce than those who wait until marriage to live together, and the rate of problems with children is higher in homes where the father and the mother are not married to one another long-term.

I have no desire to insult anyone here today – or insult anyone’s family members – but a lifestyle of living together in a sexual relationship without being married is simply not compatible with the Bible, with historic Christianity or Judaism – certainly this was the case in the time of Christ.
So this woman is from an unfaithful people, she has an unfaithful past, and an unfaithful present. John’s readers in their culture would come to no other conclusion than that this woman had bad character and lacked faithfulness. In fact, that truth hits them in the face when they are very familiar with the pattern of how the other various stories have been told.

Now – let’s go back – what happened in each of these other stories where the traveler went a long way – went on a journey with a purpose – stopped at a well – sat and talked with someone ….

They all ended in a wedding!

- Abraham’s servant took Rebekah home to marry Isaac!
- Jacob married Rachel
- Moses married Zipporah
- Ruth married Boaz

As John starts the story they are remembering, “Abraham’s servant met Rebekah – a great wife for Isaac! Jacob met Rachel, who was willing to marry him without hesitation! Moses met and married Zipporah, the daughter of a priest. Boaz was a man of great reputation in Bethlehem and married Ruth … All of these people are ancestors of Jesus –

Jesus meets this woman … she’s going to be nice! Wait a minute … she’s is a Samaritan? She did what? She’s been married how many times? What is he saying here?” The pattern of the story changes at this important point, and it is impossible for the readers of John’s time not to notice. Was it necessary for John to include these details? They are not only included, but these details are crucial to the point of the story.

You know how you read a story – or watch a television show – especially the ones today that continue each week – every week is a cliffhanger – you’re trying to figure out where the story is going to go next – and when there is a big cliffhanger before the summer – you’ve got to wait all summer to find out what’s going to happen next!

John’s readers and hearers are anticipating – and they can come to no other conclusion than that Jesus is going to marry this woman!

This woman? Are you kidding me? Samaritan? Sinful? Dirty? Unfaithful?

Here’s more -

- What happened in John 2?

And do you remember –
In John 3:28-29 - … ‘I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.’ It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the best man is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows.

John is leading right up to this ON PURPOSE!

- In John 4, we have this story –

It is clear, when John begins the story in John 4, these people have got to be expecting a wedding between Jesus and this woman!

Is this the kind of woman Jesus is looking to marry?

The answer is: Yes! Exactly! She is a picture of the bride of Christ!

Christ being the Groom and the church being the bride is the ultimate reality.

It’s all through the Old Testament …

It is a priority teaching of the New Testament …

When we are told of the second coming of Christ – Jesus talks about it in terms of a bridegroom coming to take His bride –

The Bible ends in Revelation – written by this same John – with chapter 19 describing a great wedding reception!

... The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come!” ...

All of this is the point of this story – If this story follows the pattern of all of these other stories of the heroes of the faith finding their brides – how is it that Jesus can even think about or intend to marry a woman like this?

Because this woman describes us – and Jesus travelled a long way – a long arduous journey – a journey with many sacrifices – to come to us -

Christ’s bride is not originally pretty. She is not originally beautiful. She is marred. She has flaws. But Jesus meets her – meets us - in a foreign place. He goes out of His way to meet her while she is walking her own way … while we are walking our own way. He doesn’t condemn us for our past or our present. He has a gift for us that is greater than what we
are drawing from the wells along our own way, and His gift will not only change our life, it will give us life!

In His word, God compares our way, the unfaithfulness of His people, to the unfaithfulness of an adulterous wife. Jesus comes to that unfaithful, ugly, sinful woman and in the story she is a potential bride. In spite of our unfaithfulness, in spite of our ugliness, in spite of our sinfulness, in spite of the fact that we want to live our own way and on our own agenda., Jesus has gone out of His way to come to us and make us a potential bride! No matter who we are, we all have been unfaithful to God. We have all been like this woman. We have all faced the choice to either please God or please ourselves, and often we make the choice to please ourselves.

Jesus didn’t just come to this woman. He came to us. This true story is told in this pattern, because in the ultimate prototype, Christ’s wife is not perfect until He perfects her. No matter how unfaithful we have been, there is a faithful God, who loves us, who wants a relationship with us, who actively seeks that relationship and God often chooses to use marriage as a picture of the relationship that God wants.

It is a continuation of the old, old story.

If you don’t know it yet – if you haven’t had this conversation with Jesus while you are going on your own way – minding your own business - He is hunting you down to bring you into relationship with Him!
- Just like Abraham’s servant looking for a wife for Isaac
- Just like Jacob meeting Rebekah at that well
- Just like Moses finding Zipporah in a desert
- Just like Ruth chasing after Boaz
- Just like Jesus – going out of His way, to meet this woman on her destructive way – He pulls her off to save her and get her on the way to life

All of us are on this journey … we are the messed up girl that God is longing so much to make His bride that He was and is willing to take the trek and go to the ultimate length to get us to marry Him and join us on His way!

Jesus is on His knee today saying, “Will you marry me?”

And if you have accepted that proposal – just like a bride wants to hear her husband say again and again through all the years that he loves her, through this message Jesus is saying to you once again, “I love you! –In spite of all your past, in spite of where you’ve come from, we are on a journey together!”
He came for you – He gave His life for you – He invites you to stay with Him forever!

...And the Spirit and the Bride say, “Come”...