

The Woman at the Well

It is a privilege for me to have the opportunity to speak to you today about an extraordinary encounter of Jesus – the story of His meeting with a woman from Samaria at the site of an historic well. It is so much more than just another familiar Sunday School story, it is rich with life and restoration and redemption and the revelation of the nature of God and His kingdom on earth.

Today I will start by reading John 4, where the story is recounted.

I will discuss the background of the Samaritan people: geographical, historical, and cultural, and the origins of the ill-feeling of the Jewish people for them.

I want to focus on the dialogue between Jesus of Nazareth, our Messiah, and this woman, and consider some of the statements that were made, what Jesus was really saying, considering her responses to Jesus' revelations, and how Jesus revealed Himself to her, to her people, to His disciples with whom He was travelling.

4 Now when Jesus^[a] realized that the Pharisees had heard he was making and baptizing more disciples than John—² although it was not Jesus who did the baptizing but his disciples—³ he left Judea and went back to Galilee.

Geoff talked a couple of weeks ago about Jesus cleansing the temple, and I think it is fair to say that Jesus is being noticed here. He has gathered a group of followers, who are baptizing new believers – John the Baptist at this point is also still baptizing people, so the Pharisees are taking notice.

4 Now it was necessary for him to go through Samaria.

This is interesting that it was “necessary” for Him to go through Samaria, as the Jews typically would avoid going through Samaria. Samaria is right in the middle section of Israel (map) but because the Samaritans were such a despised people group, Jewish people travelling between Judea and Galilee would normally veer off the central Samaria path and skirt around between Samaria's mountain range and the Jordan River, in order to avoid contact with Samaritan people as much as possible. The really religious would cross the Jordan river and travel on up on the far side of the river. Jesus apparently felt the need to travel through Samaria, where he came to a well with historical significance. This land was given by Jacob to his son Joseph, who was also buried there. At this point I want to talk about the history between the Jewish people and the Samaritans. Samaria is first mentioned in the book of 1 Kings as a country with cities.

- After King Solomon, Israel had divided into two kingdoms – Israel (north) and Judah (south) under Jeroboam and Rehoboam respectively. Samaria was known as an area with cities during this time.
- Jeroboam established places of worship in Samaria because he feared losing control of his kingdom (and potentially his life if his people switched allegiance) when his people went down to Jerusalem to worship. Included in these places of worship were golden calves

1 Kings 12:28 “here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”

- Name Samaria was also given to a city, built by Omri on a hill purchased for 2 talents of silver - 1 KINGS 16:24

- This city became the Royal City of (Northern) Israel during the time of King Jehoshaphat (in Judah) It was also the city where the notorious King Ahaz and Queen Jezebel were based at the time of Elijah.
- Isaiah 8:4 - “For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria.”
- Prophecy fulfilled – 2 KINGS 17:5-6 “the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria..”
- 2 Kings 17:24 - And the king of Assyria brought [men] from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed [them] in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.
 - Brought their own customs, traditions, idolatry, and intermarried with remnant of Israelites still there.
 - Created their own version of Jewish religion, accepting only the first 5 books of the Bible and rejecting books such as Psalms and Proverbs that focus on Jerusalem and the line of David. They eventually built their own temple in Samaria.
- This religious impurity and difference of background and tradition, was the reason for the Jews’ superior contempt for Samaritans - continues today – Jews and Samaritans do not intermarry, and the Samaritan people now number only about 750.
- Jesus “needed” to go through Samaria – Why? Did He know why? Did He just feel in His Spirit that there would be a divine appointment He needed to keep? How well tuned in are you to God’s prompting to change your routine or your route in order to keep those appointments? How well tuned in am I? Am I willing to disregard prejudice and judgementalism to be obedient to my God? I hope so.

⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the piece of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob’s Well was also there, and Jesus, tired out by the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.^[b]

It is about 30 miles from Jerusalem to Sychar, not very far by our standards – under 50 km, so with good roads we would drive it in about half an hour. Jesus and his disciples would have travelled either on foot or on donkeys, either way it would take them a very long time. They had probably stayed overnight on the journey, unless they had left Jerusalem very late or in the early hours of the morning.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus told her, “Please give me a drink,” ⁸ since his disciples had gone off into town to buy food.

It was about noon, and this woman came to the well to draw water. Normal practice was for women to draw water first thing in the morning or in the evening – why was she there at that time? She was probably disliked or mistrusted or misunderstood by the other women because of her reputation – drawing water at the well was a social time for the women, and she likely did not fit with them or chose to come at a “safe” time. She was about to experience an extraordinary encounter which would change her life!

That Jesus spoke to her at all was wrong on many levels –

- The most obvious was that she was a woman and he a man. Customarily a man would not speak to a woman to whom he had not been introduced, unless they were family.
- Secondly, she was a Samaritan woman, and He a Jewish man
- Thirdly, although she probably did not recognise it at this point (the disciples had gone off to buy food,) He was a rabbi, and she a woman of questionable reputation.

⁹ The Samaritan woman asked him, “How can you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” Because Jews do not have anything to do with Samaritans.

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who is saying to you, ‘Please give me a drink,’ you would have been the one to ask him, and he would have given you living water.”

The gift of God – in this case the Gift of God refers to an unmerited gift, a free gift. He is calling Himself the gift of God, He is literally God’s gift to mankind.

Romans 5:15 But God’s free gift is not like Adam’s offense. For if many people died as the result of one man’s offense, how much more have God’s grace and the free gift given through the kindness of one man, Jesus the Messiah, been showered on many people! ¹⁶ Nor can the free gift be compared to what came through the man who sinned. For the sentence that followed one man’s offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift brought justification, even after many offenses.

Same word in adverb form: Romans 3:24 By His grace we are justified freely through the redemption that is in the Messiah (Jesus)

LIVING WATER

Jesus not being cryptic or difficult – she knew the concept of living water. Living Water is well-known in Jewish law – its simple meaning is just running water. The term refers to water that has been provided directly by God, not retained by man-made devices such as a well or a canal. In Jewish law precious water could be made unclean by introduction of something dead or ritually unclean but the addition of even a few drops of “living water” (like rainfall) could make that unclean water clean again. By offering it to this woman he is offering cleansing of anything that is unclean

¹¹ The woman^[d] told him, “Sir, you don’t have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where are you going to get this living water? ¹² You’re not greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it, along with his sons and his flocks, are you?”

She hears what He is saying but does not understand how he can be offering living water. Was He greater than their ancestor Jacob? Yes! Living Water can only come from God Himself.

¹³ Jesus answered her, “Everyone who drinks this water will become thirsty again. ¹⁴ But whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never become thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become a well of water for him, springing up to eternal life.”

Offering cleansing of the unclean through living water. Living Water from Jesus Himself will become a well, springing up to eternal life. It will satisfy completely and forever

Compare: Jeremiah 2:13 “Indeed, my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of **living water**, and they have dug cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that cannot hold **water**.”

¹⁵ The woman told him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I won’t get thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Is she being difficult? I feel like there is an awkward quality to this conversation – I was talking to Pete about it yesterday and he mentioned the phrase “sword-fight”. At this point, Jesus changes tack. Maybe she still does not understand what He is claiming to be.

¹⁶ He told her, “Go and call your husband, and come back here.”

¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I don’t have a husband.”

Jesus told her, “You are quite right in saying, ‘I don’t have a husband,’ ¹⁸ because you have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

¹⁹ The woman told him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet! ²⁰ Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain. But you Jews^[e] say that the place where people should worship is in Jerusalem.”

This is a woman who has married 5 times, and is now living in another de facto relationship. Has she been rejected or widowed? She recognises the truth of His words but brings up their differences.

²¹ Jesus told her, “Believe me, dear lady,^[f] the hour is coming when you Samaritans^[g] will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You don’t know what you’re worshiping. We Jews^[h] know what we’re worshiping, because salvation comes from the Jews. ²³ Yet the time is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit^[i] and truth. Indeed, the Father is looking for people like that to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit,^[j] and those who worship him must worship in spirit^[k] and truth.”

It is not going to matter where you worship as long as you worship the Father genuinely, from the heart. A new kingdom has arrived, it is not the kingdom of Samaria or Israel or Judah, but the Kingdom of God. It is no longer about tradition and religious observances. There is no place in this Kingdom for prejudice of any sort. God is looking for people to people to worship Him with integrity – integrity meaning with a whole heart, and with their whole life, worship is not just “something we do on Sundays” but a way of living our whole life.

[Ezekiel 36:26](#) I'm going to give you a new **heart**, and I'm going to give you a new spirit within all of your deepest parts. I'll remove that rock-hard **heart of yours** and replace it with one that's sensitive to me.

[Romans 12:1](#) - I therefore urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercies, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices that are holy and pleasing to God, for this is the reasonable way for you to worship.

²⁵ The woman told him, "I know that the Anointed One is coming, who is being called 'the Messiah'. When that person comes, he will explain everything."

What does a seeker of God look like? Unlikely softness of this woman who has been hurt and has lived in a less-than-ideal way. She reveals her understanding of a hope within her, and more importantly she reveals her heart

²⁶ "I AM," Jesus replied, "the one who is speaking to you."

Many instances in OT of God revealing Himself as I AM

Exodus 3:14 - God replied to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM," and then said, "Tell the Israelis: 'I AM sent me to you.'"

²⁷ At this point his disciples arrived, and they were astonished that he was talking to a woman. Yet no one said, "What do you want from her?"^[1] or, "Why are you talking to her?"²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to town. She told people,²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me everything I've ever done! Could he possibly be the Messiah?"^[2]³⁰ The people^[3] left the town and started on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile, the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi,^[4] have something to eat."

³² But he told them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

³³ So the disciples began to say to one another, "No one has brought him anything to eat, have they?"

³⁴ Jesus told them, "My food is doing the will of the one who sent me and completing his work.³⁵ You say, don't you, 'In four more months the harvest will begin?' Look, I tell you, open your eyes and observe that the fields are ready^[5] for harvesting now!³⁶ The one who harvests is already receiving his wages and gathering a crop for eternal life, so that the one who sows and the one who harvests may rejoice together.³⁷ In this respect the saying is true: 'One person sows, and another person harvests.'^[6]³⁸ I have sent you to harvest what you have not worked for. Others have worked, and you have adopted their work as your own."

³⁹ Now many of the Samaritans of that town believed in Jesus^[7] because the woman had testified, "He told me everything I've ever done."

⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to Jesus,^[u] they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there for two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of what he said. ⁴² They kept telling the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, because now we have heard him ourselves, and we know that he really is the Savior of the world."

Hospitality of the Samaritans – a compliment in Eastern custom (wondering what the disciples thought)

The Result – it is no longer... we know that He really is the Savior of the world

Luke 10 – Jesus made a hero of a Samaritan man. Jesus Parable of Good Samaritan – who is your neighbour?

Acts 1:8

But you'll receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 8:4-8

Now those who were scattered went from place to place preaching the word.⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began to preach the Messiah to the people.⁶ The crowds, hearing his message and seeing the signs that he was doing, paid close attention to what was said by Philip.⁷ Unclean spirits screamed with a loud voice as they came out of the many people they had possessed, and many paralyzed and lame people were healed.⁸ As a result, there was great rejoicing in that city.