

The Story – The Woman At The Well

Turn to John 4 as we continue our series. We are looking at the unfolding story of redemption and specifically this morning we are looking at Jesus' unexpected interaction with the woman at the well. This story is important because it gives us a glimpse into the heart of Jesus and his desire to reach all people everywhere. As redemption's plan unfolds we discover God's redemption is not just for the Jews, it's for the Samaritans, the Gentiles. It is the good news of redemption for all! Let's read this encounter and then see what we can learn from Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well. **John 4:1-34**

To understand the significance of this encounter, you need to understand the utter disdain the Jews and Samaritans had for each other. It seems people in the Middle East never forget a wrong done to them. The hatred goes back about 800 years. After the northern Kingdom of Israel was exiled in 722 BC, the Assyrians repopulated the area with people from throughout their empire. The remnants of the Israelites married the Persians and the other people who were now populating their region. They mixed their religion with these other people and cultures and that led to them building their own temple on Mt. Gerizim and their own version of Judaism. All this led to their utter rejection by the Jews. Numerous events fueled the hatred back and forth. Finally, in 128 BC the Jews attacked Samaria and burned the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim. When the lady said "our fathers worshiped on this mountain," what she didn't bother to say was, "until your people came and burned down our temple." The Jews went out of their way to avoid contact with a Samaritan and yet the bible says Jesus "had to go through Samaria." What's up?

Two things. First, **Jesus' love for the world translates into Jesus' love for the individual.** It's amazing isn't it? The one who spoke the world into existence had concern for this one Samaritan woman. He came to give his life as a ransom for many, but he "had to go through Samaria" because he cared about this one, solitary life. If he cared for this one Samaritan woman, I believe he cares about you and me. But here is the second thing,

Jesus' love for the world crosses cultural barriers. Jesus doesn't see Jew or Samaritan, he doesn't see black or white or brown, he doesn't see Democrat or Republican or Communist or Socialist, he doesn't see class or status, rich or poor, legal or illegal, he sees individuals. He sees lost and found, saved and unsaved. He sees those for whom he died and it moves him to cross whatever cultural barrier might prevent those people from receiving the good

news of salvation. Think for a moment about the barriers Jesus broke in order to reach this woman.

We've already pointed out she was a Samaritan living in Samaria. Jews didn't travel through Samaria let alone deal with the people. John's gospel points out Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Not only was she a Samaritan, she was a Samaritan woman! Jewish men thanked God they were not born a Gentile or a woman. Part of the oral tradition, the Mishnah said, "Talk not much with womankind. They said this of a man's own wife: how much more of his fellow's wife. He that talks much with womankind brings evil upon himself..." Women were poorly regarded in the ancient world. Jesus, by talking to this woman not only showed his concern for the individual, he also showed his concern for women. Jesus elevated the status of women in every sense, even allowing women to travel with the disciples. The disciples returned, shocked to find Jesus talking with a Samaritan woman because single men never spoke to women. Not only that, but Jesus asked for a drink of water from this woman. That meant he had to touch the cup or whatever she offered him to drink from. In the Jewish mind she was unclean, the cup was unclean, but Jesus stepped across cultural barriers and cultural prejudice in order to bring good news to the individual. What barriers might we need to cross to share God's good news of redemption? And in case you are wondering if Jesus cares about you, he cares enough that he had to go through Southwest Tulsa to talk to you!

Jesus loves us in spite of us. I don't know if you know this, but you may not be all that lovable. The good news is, Jesus loves you in spite of yourself! Everyone has a story, a past. Everyone's made mistakes. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" the bible says. You may be thinking "God couldn't love me. Jesus couldn't love me if he knew what I know about myself." Oh yes he can. Look at this Samaritan woman.

Jesus offers this woman what he called living water. By that he is referring to salvation. He uses a phrase that God used through the prophet Jeremiah. **"My people have forsaken me, the spring of living water."** **Jeremiah 2:13** Jesus is talking about giving her eternal life through his forgiveness and grace. She was dying of thirst and didn't know it. You may be in that same situation today. Dying of thirst, needing this living water. Jesus is talking about a life nourished by the Spirit of God. He said this water would well up inside of her like a spring of water that wells up into eternal life. Jesus intended that her life, her character, her whole being

would be transformed from the inside out. That's what salvation is all about. All she needed to do was believe, ask and receive.

She said, **“Sir, give me this water so I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”**

The offer is incredible. Living water! Eternal life! Perhaps she thought, “I'll receive this from him. I'll take him up on his offer of eternal life and living water before he finds out more about me.” Perhaps she was worried that someone from town would show up and then Jesus would find out who she really was and what she was really like. Surely Jesus wouldn't offer her living water if he knew the whole story! But this lady has been both found by Jesus and found out by Jesus. Understand, Jesus didn't plan to leave this woman as he found her. He knew that, but she didn't. Look what he does.

“Jesus told her, ‘Go, call your husband and come back.’ ‘I have no husband’ she replied. Jesus said to her, ‘You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.’”

Jesus tells her about herself and by doing so he is saying, “I know all there is to know about you and the offer is still good. Believe upon me. Turn away from your sin and turn to me and I will give you this living water, the life of God and you will never be the same.”

Now she could receive this living water because now she knew salvation was being offered to the real person. This wasn't a scam by some stranger, this was salvation and eternal life. It was THE proof for her. The bible says, **“Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ‘Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’” John 4:28-29.** John mentions again in verse 39 that many of the Samaritan's believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony that Jesus had told her everything she ever did. Was it because of the miracle, that Jesus could know things no one else knew? It had to be more than that. I believe it was that Jesus knew everything this woman had ever done, all the sin and the mistakes and failures of her past, and yet he still chose to sit with her, to speak to her, and to offer her salvation and eternal life.

There is a gospel song that says, “He knew me, yet he loved me, he whose glory makes the heaven's shine, so unworthy of such mercy, yet when he was on the cross, I was on his mind.” He knew me, yet he loved me. That's the truth for you as well today. He knows you.

He knows your past. He knows your sin and failures and mistakes, and yet he loves you. He isn't running from you. He isn't turning his back on you. Instead, he is calling you to come to him. Come clean with him. He knows, so admit the truth. Tell him you've sinned and that you need his forgiveness, his mercy, his grace. Tell him you believe upon him, that he is Savior and Lord and ask him to cleanse you from your sin. He will forgive you and pardon you and give you living water and eternal life!

Understand, Jesus confronted her with her sin, not to embarrass her or humiliate her, he didn't do this in front of a crowd of people. He did this to show her his love goes deeper than her sin. He did this to show her that his forgiveness is greater than her past or her sinful present. She wouldn't have to hide, afraid he would find out and then withdraw his offer of salvation.

I said it earlier, he didn't come to leave her as he found her. He didn't come to simply point out her sins. He didn't come to forgive her sin and then leave her living in sin. He came to save her, to liberate her from sin, to change her forever. That's what he wants to do for you. He didn't come to leave you in bondage to sin and selfishness. He came to give you living water so you will never thirst again. Don't go back to the desert when Jesus gives you living water!

Jesus is eager to show himself to any hungry heart! There is something extraordinary about this story and this woman. While the Pharisees and teachers of the law, even the disciples themselves are trying their best to figure out just who Jesus is, to this Samaritan woman, thirsty for this living water, Jesus reveals himself as the Messiah. Look at this. **“The woman said, ‘I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.’ Then Jesus declared, ‘I who speak to you am he.’” John 4:25-26.**

The religious leaders couldn't figure it out because their hearts were hardened, but this woman had an open and hungry heart. Jesus sees that and tells her, “You won't have to wait for the coming of the Messiah because the Messiah is standing in front of you. I who speak to you am he.” Kenneth Bailey, a noted professor of Middle Eastern New Testament studies wrote, “the phrase ‘I AM’ that appears here in the Greek text of John is the exact phrase that is used in the Greek Old Testament to translate the Hebrew of what God said to Moses at the burning bush. Moses asked who was speaking to him and the voice from the bush said, ‘I AM.’”

Jesus wasn't just saying he was the Messiah, he was saying the one who stands before you is the I AM. The one who stands before you is God incarnate. You may have come to the well thirsty and dry. You may have come like this woman did, likely trying to hide from the

other women in town because of her reputation, her past, her present adultery. You may have come in desperation, about ready to give up. You've got no answers and no help in sight. You're thinking like the woman at the well, "I guess someday, when Jesus comes back, things will be okay. Maybe then I'll get some help or some answers." But I've come here to tell you, the One you've been waiting for is right here! Jesus, the I Am, the eternal God is here and ready to help, ready to deliver, ready to give you that living water that will quench and satisfy the longing of your soul! If you are hungry and thirsty, if you are ready and willing to surrender your life to Jesus, he is eager and ready to save you, give you eternal life and make you whole.

Jesus is ready to use a willing and surrendered life. Jesus had told this lady to go, call your husband, and come back. Now, having heard Jesus' word that he was the Messiah and I believe by faith she had received that living water, now she goes to call the entire village to come back with her and "meet a man who told me everything. Come see for yourself." They may have been thinking, "well, you've always been good at finding men. Maybe you have found the Messiah." But think of this. This sinful woman with a messed up past and a ruined reputation is the person that brings the town to Jesus!

You may be wondering if God can use a broken vessel like you. Look at the woman at the well and you'll know the answer. If you repent of your sins and turn your life to Jesus, yes he can use you. Yes he has a plan and purpose for you. The bible says many from the town believed in Jesus because of her testimony. Because they believed, Jesus stayed two more days with these folks and even more people became believers in Jesus. **"They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.'" John 4:4**

Out of her brokenness comes a usefulness to the kingdom of God. Listen to me. Your past may disqualify you from some things, but it doesn't disqualify you from telling others about Jesus! God can use you. He will use you. He will use even your brokenness for his glory.

Hear the good news: Jesus cares about you as deeply as he did for this Samaritan woman. He knows you, just as he knew this woman. He knows the truth about you, the truth you manage to hide from others, but he loves you in spite of you. He knows your sin yet he loves you and wants to give you a new life. You may feel unlovable, unusable, unwanted, but believe the lesson of the Samaritan woman at the well, God loves you and has salvation and redemption for you. There is hope for you! There is a purpose for you. Put your trust in Jesus and believe!

