

#22 - Woman at the well - John 4:1-42

Engage:

God's Redemptive Story is all about God giving people the opportunity to come back to Him. The way Jesus treated people clearly demonstrated this fact. In John 3 we see Jesus sharing with Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader. In this story from John 4, we see Jesus crossing several different social barriers to present the opportunity for another person to see who He was. The key person in this story was a Samaritan woman. Samaritans were considered outcasts by Jewish people of that day. During the 8th Century B.C. Assyrian captivity of the 10 northern tribes of Israel, they had intermarried with the Assyrians and other pagans who came to live in that part of Israel. This group became known as "half-breeds" or Samaritans. To make matters worse, they established their own worship of God at a temple they built at Mt. Gerizim. Another major difference was their belief that only the Pentateuch (the 5 books of Moses) was considered as scripture.

This woman seemed to be an outcast among other Samaritan women since she was getting water by herself at the 6th hour (noon), rather than with other women at the usual time of the day (early morning and late afternoon). The story will reveal a reason why she went to the well by herself (Jn 4:17-18).

We will see how she became a believer that Jesus was the Messiah, and how she influenced many other Samaritans from her home town to believe that Jesus is the "Savior of the world."

Just as Jesus was willing to accept a person like this woman, we can rejoice that He will receive people like ourselves. Just as her faith caused her to witness to others, so should yours!

Thoughts about the story:

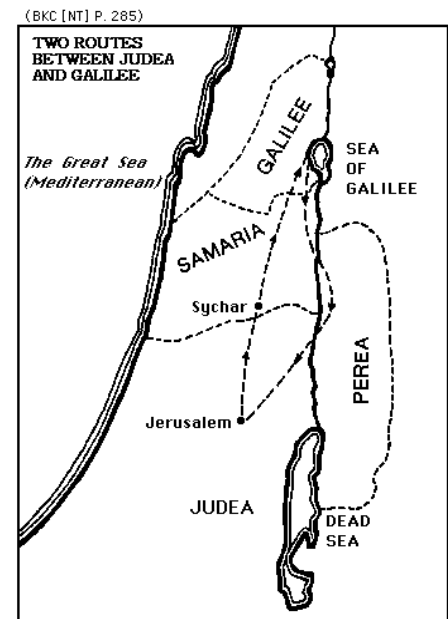
John 4:1-3 - The reason for Jesus to be in Samaria

The occasion was brought about because Jesus and His disciples were headed north to Galilee from Judea. The shortest route took them through Samaria. This would be like traveling through Iowa from Missouri to get to Minnesota.

John 4:4-9 – Jesus, a Jew, speaks to a Samaritan woman

It should be noted that in the larger context surrounding this story, Jesus is constantly meeting people from different types of backgrounds. There was Nicodemus, the Jewish religious leader in John 3. There was the Samaritan woman, the Samaritan people of Sychar and the royal official in Galilee in John 4. In each case, all of these people needed Jesus.

This story started by telling us that Jesus "had to go through Samaria." The reason for this is unknown, but there are several suggestions. Here are three: 1) it was the most direct route; 2) Jesus may have wanted to avoid other Jewish people who took the longer route through



Perea (east of the Jordan River); 3) or it may have been a “divine appointment” for Jesus to meet this woman at Jacob’s well.

Once Jesus arrived at Jacob’s well just outside of Sychar, He met a Samaritan woman to whom He spoke. This had to be just as much of a surprise to her as it was to his disciples when they returned from getting food (Jn 4:27). It was not considered proper for a Jewish man to speak in public to his wife, and certainly not a strange woman, especially a Samaritan.

Jesus used the occasion to begin a conversation with this woman by asking for a drink of water. She had no idea where this conversation would eventually lead. Note: A Jewish person would consider anything touched by a Samaritan to be defiled. It had to surprise her that He would want to drink from her water jar.

John 4:10-15 - Jesus caused the woman to question who He was

Just as Nicodemus mistook spiritual rebirth for physical birth (Jn 3:4), so the Samaritan woman mistook real water for “living (spiritual) water”. Jesus made the point that the things of the world do not satisfy. The water from Jacob’s well would not completely satisfy. But with Jesus as the water of life, you will never be thirsty again. When she heard this explanation, she knew that the water that Jesus offered was what she needed.

Her faith at this point could only be described as shallow, without root (Matt 13:20-21). She had made progress, but still had a long way to go. Jesus continued to patiently deal with her.

John 4:16-24 - The Samaritan woman recognized that Jesus was a prophet

Jesus helped this woman to get to the next step in recognizing who He was by asking her to go and call her husband to come. By doing so He forced her to face her own sin. Note: There can be no repentance that leads to conversion without there first being conviction of sin!

Her initial response to Jesus was short: “I have no husband.” Jesus’ response caused her to know that He was not an ordinary person. His “supernatural” knowledge caused her to recognize that He must be a prophet from God. She then tried to change the subject by bringing out the differences between what Jews and Samaritans believed.

Jesus then raised the revelation of Himself to the next level. He wanted her to know the following:

1) Salvation was from the Jews. Salvation comes to humans through Jesus - a Jewish person. This does not mean that just because a person is Jewish that they do not need a savior. They do!

2) “True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23). Therefore, in the future, worship of God will not be centered in temples made with hands, but through faithful allegiance to Jesus the Messiah.

Also, Jesus said that “God is spirit.” This means that even though He is invisible, He can be primarily seen through Jesus and through the changes brought about in lives the true followers of Jesus.

John 4:25-42 - The Samaritan woman then recognized that Jesus could be the Messiah - and so did many other Samaritans

Jesus then told her that He was the Messiah. At that time the disciples of Jesus returned. They were very surprised to see what Jesus had done. The Samaritan woman then left her water jar behind and went back to Sychar to tell the people to come and see the person that she believed could be the Messiah. Note: This woman who seemed to be a social outcast because she was at the well by herself seems to now have great courage – courage that led her to tell the people of her hometown about Jesus.

The disciples were concerned about the physical health of Jesus so they tried to get Him to eat. He responded that He had “food” and that it was “to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” Jesus made the point that His priority was spiritual food, not physical food. Also see Deuteronomy 8:3 and Matthew 4:4.

Jesus then changed the image from food to harvest. The reason why His “food” was to do His Father’s will was because there would be a harvest – a harvest of people who would believe that Jesus is the Messiah!

Note: Earlier, the disciples had gone to Sychar to get food. The Samaritan woman went to Sychar to bring as many as would come to meet Jesus as a harvest from the seed He had first sown in the heart of the Samaritan woman.

Note: The disciples learned a valuable lesson. Sharing the gospel can be done by working as a team. One sows, another cultivates and another reaps! See the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Tares - Matthew 13:1-30 and the teaching of Paul - 1 Corinthians 3:6-9.

The story ends by showing that not only did the Samaritan woman become a believer, but also many of the Samaritans from the city of Sychar became believers too. They showed their conversion to be stronger than one would imagine by declaring that Jesus is “the Savior of the world.” Point: Jesus set an example for us to follow as we share God’s Redemptive Story. That example is to share this message with everyone – even someone as unlikely to bear fruit for the kingdom as the Samaritan woman. For all are sinners and need to be convicted of sin so they can repent and become followers of Jesus. When we follow His model for reaching people, He will bless our labor with a fruitful harvest.

Questions for your consideration:

- What social, ethnic or religious barriers do you find difficult to break through? How do you believe Jesus would have you handle your situation?
- What did you learn from the Samaritan woman, the people from Sychar and the disciples of Jesus from this story? Who are you most like?
- What did you learn about being a more effective witness (see Jn 4:34-38)?