

9. Encouragement for the Journey Sermon



Wednesday 1st July, 2020 – Glenda Bolitho



The Woman at the Well

Bible Reading

John 4:1-30.

Before I commence, let me pray.

*“May the words of my mouth and the
meditation of my heart,
be pleasing in your sight,
O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”*

The conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians has been with us for numerous decades. Differences of religion, nationality, culture and language play a major role in this conflict, and people in both camps keep memories of the bitter conflict alive. In Jesus’ day the tension between the Jews and the Samaritans were similarly painful. Samaria was on the direct route between Judea and Galilee, but very few Jews ever took this route – often going a very roundabout way through Perea to avoid travelling through the despised Samaria.

Thus, when the Gospel tells us that “Jesus needed to go through Samaria” the thought was not so much that he was compelled to go that way but rather there was a needy soul in Samaria He could help.



And so, in the shadow of Mt Gerazim, at the well of Jacob, which I believe can still be seen and is one of the few identifiable sites of the OT, Jesus met the Samaritan woman. She appears as a nameless woman in Scripture, having had a quick succession of divorces and having been known by the names of five different husbands, she now lives in a common law marriage. Known in her community as an immoral woman, she is despised by her fellow citizens, and at the same time she is spurned by the Jews. Accordingly, she lives a pitifully lonely life.

It was about noon when Jesus reached the well. He was weary after his long walk, so he sat by the well which remarkably had been dug 2000 years earlier by his ancestor Jacob to more than 1000 feet to ensure the waters never ran dry. Jesus stayed by the well whilst the disciples travelled into Sychar for supplies for the evening meal. He was thirsty but he had no bucket.

He saw the solitary woman whom he recognised as a Samaritan by her dress, walking with her water jar. The women traditionally came in the cool of the morning to replenish their water supplies. Likely, because of her shame, she chose to come at the hottest part of the day to avoid the other women – or perhaps they shunned her.

Whatever the situation was, Jesus knew it all along. He knew he could expect animosity, but taking the initiative, he asked, *“Will you give me a drink?”* In doing so, he became indebted to her and thus made a point of contact with her.

The woman’s reply to Jesus’ request for a drink of water was amazement. *“How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink of water?”* Jesus dealt gently with the woman. Assuming the role of a teacher, he said, *“If you knew the gift of God and realised who was asking you for a drink, you would have asked him for a drink of living water.”*

By using the terms *“the gift of God”* and *“living water”*, Jesus spoke religious language. The woman probably did not understand the first expression, which referred to God’s gracious gift of his Son and she undoubtedly thought that the second term referred to running water bubbling up in Jacob’s well, as opposed to water kept in a storage tank.

Also, she might have superstitiously believed that water from Jacob’s well possessed some mysterious power. She took pride in believing that water from this well was superior to water from any other well in the area.

The Samaritan woman realised that Jesus was no ordinary Jew and therefore she began to address him politely with the title “Sir”. She noticed that he did not have a bucket, and she knew the well was deep. How would he, whoever he might be, get any water out of the well? She entertained a fleeting suspicion that this stranger might be a fraud. She wanted to find out who he was and said, *“Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep.”*

She also knew that Jews and Samaritans shared a common heritage in the patriarch, Jacob. She asked Jesus, *“Are you greater than our forefather Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and*

herds drank from it?" The wording of her question was edgy and was designed to prompt Jesus to identify himself. She wanted him to tell her whether he indeed was greater than Jacob was.

Her suspicion that Jesus was a rabbi was confirmed when Jesus answered her. He said,

- *"Everyone who drinks water from this well will thirst again."* This fact of life needed no discussion.
- *"But anyone who drinks the water that I will give will never thirst again."* Was he a magician who could produce water that would satisfy a person forever? Her curiosity was aroused, and she wanted to know more about him.
- *"Indeed the water that I give will become a spring of water within them welling up to eternal life."* Now that was news she had never heard before.

Her interest stirred, she could hardly restrain herself and asked Jesus for a drink of this living water. **The roles were now reversed, for not Jesus but the woman was asking for water**, even though the woman had no knowledge of Jesus' spiritual message.

This was the opening Jesus needed to reach her soul, to talk about her immoral life and to refresh her spiritually with a spring of water that will well up inside her perpetually. Jesus changed tactics and told her to go home and return with her husband. His words hit home, for her terse reply was, *"I have no husband!"*.

Jesus' gentle reply was, *"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 did not call the woman to repentance, but by exposing her sin, he forced her to come to terms with her life and acknowledge her sinfulness. By revealing his supernatural insight, Jesus caused the woman to reply, *"Sir, I see that you are a prophet."* She realised that

the prophet was able to see straight through her and knew all the secrets of her life. She didn't become angry or defensive as she had when the people of her city had labelled her immoral. This Jew had not rebuked or admonished her- he had only mentioned her marital status or lack thereof. What he had done was to remove her external cover and now she felt ashamed. But could this prophet help her spiritually to change her life for the better? Knowing the religious differences between the Jews and the Samaritans, the woman began to speak in religious terms. *"Our fathers worshipped on this mountain but you say the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."* Jesus' answer removed all feeling of resentment and discord. He explained that the time had arrived in which Jews and Samaritans would not have to go to their distinctive places of worship but could worship God the Father anywhere. Jesus taught the woman that true worship must be both spiritual and truthful. He showed the woman that worship means standing in the presence of God and God rewards those who diligently seek Him.

In a polite and indirect way, she pressed Jesus to identify himself as the Messiah. She said, *"I know the Messiah is coming, the one who is called Christ. When he comes he will tell us everything."* Undoubtedly, she had heard about *"the one who is coming"* and wanted to know if indeed she was privileged to meet Him.

Jesus answered her modestly and yet directly- *"I, the one who is speaking to you - I am He"*

The Son of God revealed His divinity to the Samaritan woman, so she in turn might tell her people about the Messiah!

Initially she had called Jesus a Jew, then Sir, then a Prophet and now she learned that he was the Messiah!

She rushed excitedly into the city to tell her people about her encounter. In her enthusiasm, she even forgot her water jar.

Far more than just a charming and familiar story, the story illustrates vividly and at some length, the way in which Jesus dealt with individuals. As such it has often been used as a pattern for personal evangelism. Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the level of felt and shared human need.

As I was preparing today's talk, I was reading through our commentaries on John's Gospel, and I kept coming across the same fact, over and over. *"The woman left her water pot behind."* And I thought, "Did she?". So, I checked and there it was - *"The woman then left her water pot."* Why did she do that? For that is why she came out in the heat of the day – to collect her water. She not only left her water pot behind, but off she went into the city – the city where she had so recently been despised. So often, when a person repents and turns to Christ, he or she immediately begins to think of others who are in need of *"the water of life."* Her simple, factual testimony led many to come and see.

I'd like to close by sharing these words from verse two of a hymn written by Horatius Bonar which I believe reflect the essence of the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in our reading to-day from John's Gospel.

*"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Behold I freely give
The living water- thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink and live.'
I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream.
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him."*

Amen

References:

"Conversations with Jesus" by S. Kistemaker.
"Believer's Bible Commentary" by William MacDonald
"Daily Bible Commentary – Matthew to Acts"