

Woman Of Samaria

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- [0 : 0 0] Thanks, which again this week, like last week, is full of familiar things.
- It's a very familiar story. One person says that it either is a true account or it's one of the most brilliant pieces of writing that's ever been put down.
- You know, because it's an amazing story again. It's John chapter 4, verse 7 following.
- And I'll just begin by reading it, I guess, and waiting for Alice to arrive with a big black pen. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water.
- Jesus said to her, give me a drink. For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, how is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?
- [1 : 1 4] For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. The gift of the Lord is saying to you, give me a drink.
- You would have asked him and he would have given you living water. The woman said to him, sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep.
- Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our... The water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.
- The woman said to him, sir, give me this water that I may not thirst nor come to draw. Jesus said to her, go call your husband and come here.
- The woman answered him, I have no husband. Jesus said to her, you are right in saying I have no husband. For you have had five husbands and the one you now have is not your husband.
- [2 : 4 2] This you said truly. The woman said to him, sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.
- Jesus said to her woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know.
- We worship what we know. For salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.
- For such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. The woman said to him, I know that Messiah is coming. He who is called Christ. When he comes he will show us all things. Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am he.
- [3 : 4 7] Let me just pray for us now. Father, as we turn our minds to this passage from the scriptures, and as we know that this scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit in writing it, so we pray that we may be inspired by the Holy Spirit in hearing it, and that we may not only be hearers of the word but doers, and that we may be able to trace in this story of another person, in another age, at another time, that we may be able to trace how you work in our hearts to bring us to a place of faith and trust in you.

We ask that this faith and trust may be confirmed in our hearts by your spirit as we read and study this passage. We ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Amen. If you keep your eye on the text, I will follow through as closely as I can. From verse 7 of chapter 4, there came a woman of Samaria to draw water.

You will know that what happens is...

And... That's Jerusalem right there. And... That...

[5 : 38] That when you go from Jerusalem, you can go down to Jericho, which is almost at the Dead Sea.

But then if you go north, you go up here into Capernaum, is right up here. And then all this area over in here is known as the West Bank.

That's how... And in the midst of the West Bank is a city called Shechem. I guess it... And they think that probably Shechem, which is the center of the West Bank territory now, that it was outside of this city where Jacob's well was.

And there was a field which had been given by Jacob, and in the field was this well. And the well was the source of water from which all the people in the community came out to draw water at this well on a regular basis.

It is considered unusual that this woman came out at the sixth hour, which seems to be about noon, the way John's Gospel uses time.

[6 : 52] So that's where you have it, and that was the location. Just to... That's the well.

And it goes down deep. So the water is down here, and there's two people standing by the well discussing it, the woman and the Lord Jesus.

And she has a bucket here and a rope, presumably, to let it down, and Jesus has nothing. So that the interest...

One of the interesting sort of focuses of this conversation is that she says to Jesus, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. So how can you give me what you said you could give me?

And I think that that's probably what a lot of people feel about Christian faith, that the promises it makes, it's not able to perform.

[7 : 58] It can't do it. You know, a surgeon can say, promise things for you and he can do it to you, and a bank can promise things and give it to you, and so on.

But how does Jesus give to this woman something which, for which he seems to be singularly incapable of doing because he has no rope, he has no pail, and the well is deep.

And so the woman says to him in this poignant way, how can you? You have nothing to draw with. The well is deep. And you see, what I think happens to us in our personal lives is that we have our personal problems with which we are very familiar.

The things that beset us, the particular problems and tensions that afflict us. And that we tend to think that when we turn to Jesus and say to him, well, you can't deal with my problem.

My problem is too deep, and you have no way of providing me with the answer that I need in my situation.

[9 : 16] And so just as the woman at the well turned to Jesus and said, what you promise you can't perform, so our unbelief means that very often we do this.

And we can't believe that Jesus is able to do what he promises. And that's one of the sort of central parts of this story is how Jesus does it.

So there comes a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, give me to drink. Now, the first thing then that Jesus does is to give her a job to do.

And it's a job that she can do. It's something where she can minister to him.

And in doing that, he is saying to her, there's something you can do for me. And when she goes to do it, then he says, is there something I can do for you?

[10 : 29] I think that it's a little bit like, you know, perhaps it's a job like teaching, or you can compare this to many other jobs.

But I think that one of the things that has been characteristic of life is you learn how to do a job. And then you get paid for doing that job, and you get rewarded for doing that job.

And soon you find out that the job does more for you than you do for the job. That somehow that's how it works.

So Jesus gives her something to do. But what he's going to reward her with is something infinitely more that's going to make it extremely worthwhile.

But she has some real difficulties with him doing that. Because she says to him, how is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?

[11 : 33] Now, you know that when you, back in the beginning, there was a, if I could put it across there, there was a southern kingdom and there was a northern kingdom that split up after David's reign into a southern and northern kingdom.

These were the people of Israel up here and these were the people of Judah down here. So these were the Jews down here and these were the Israelites up here. And then when about 587, the, they were taken away into captivity in Babylon, many of the Israelites stayed there.

And other people came in and occupied that land. And the Jews were taken off to Babylon and held in captivity. While they were in captivity, they became a very kind of pure race.

You know, they became more Jewish than the Jews. They wouldn't marry outside of their own people. They wouldn't, they were very strict about observing their own customs because once you have moved into a foreign territory, you become very anxious to retain your culture and your customs and all those kinds of things so that, so that you won't be lost in the midst of an alien population.

So being in captivity, they returned, retained their pure Jewishness so that when they came back to Jerusalem after the captivity was over, they considered themselves to be very pure Jews.

[13 : 08] And the people who'd stayed here tended to marry into tribes and people came in here and the whole line became corrupted so that they didn't think that they were really very, very loyal to what it meant to be a Jew any longer.

So that, you know, it was sort of first class and second class Jews and the Samaritans were very definitely second class Jews, despised by the Jews. And that's why you have the story of, in Luke, of the Good Samaritan.

And Jesus rubs people's noses in it a little further when the ten lepers came to him and he healed them all. The one came back to thank him.

And who was the one that came back? It was a Samaritan. So it was a very deep gulf fixed between these people, the kind of thing that you see all the time in human society.

the Tamils versus the something or others in Sri Lanka. Who are they? Yeah.

[14 : 18] And you get French and English, Protestant and Catholic. You get all sorts of groups who get into a position of antipathy one for another and then they live out of that almost permanently.

You can't overcome it. And you can see how the whole of our country is trying to break down now into ethnic groups. We're trying to find our identity in our ethnicity at the moment.

Yeah, nice work. But it tends to break down very badly because something has to be bigger than our ethnicity in order for us to survive.

And if there isn't anything bigger than that, then there's an endless scrambling. So she was quite right to say to Jesus, how come you, a Jew, would ask of me, a Samaritan, for something to be vastly superior to us and yet you are coming to me to ask me to do something for you.

She had no idea how vastly superior he was. How infinitely superior. Because one of the ways you need to look at this story is that this is the God who created the world, having become man, confronting another human being.

[15 : 47] and how does he do it? And it's an amazing story because it sort of boggles your imagination to think this. But this is the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, the eternal Son of God, confronting a time and space individual.

And she, of course, doesn't even recognize him. And she says, as far as I'm concerned, you're a Jew and you think you're superior to us, how could you be that important?

So, Jesus answers her by saying to her that if you knew who I was, if you had any idea who I was, then you would be able to ask me for a gift, a gift of living water, and I would give it to you.

So that Jesus tells her from the beginning that there's something to this relationship which could lead way beyond anything she could imagine if she could only understand who he is.

Now, take careful note of that because at the heart of the Christian faith is one fundamental question, and that is, who is Jesus Christ?

[17 : 16] That's our search, that's our pilgrimage, that's the thing we need to come to know. Nothing makes sense until we make the breakthrough to understand who he is.

And here you have a lovely, lovely story of how one woman comes to discover who he is. And the beginning point is her total misunderstanding because she sees him as a Jew and she is a Samaritan and the kind of differences between them are such that they would have, normally have nothing whatever to do with one another.

And it's only when Jesus offers her such a gift that she begins to think about who could this be that offers such a gift.

And it's then she comes with the second sort of problem she has with him. First that he's a Jew, now that he has nothing to draw with and the well is very deep.

So where are you going to get for me what you have offered to me? And so she asks him that question.

[18 : 26] And then she goes on to say another question. Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well? Well, of course he is infinitely greater than her father Jacob, their father Jacob who gave them the well.

She was in a sense being fairly subtle with him because Jacob was a patriarch both to the Jews and to the Samaritans. So she was beginning to sort of suggest that maybe the Jewish view of the Samaritans wasn't altogether well founded.

but she says are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well who drank from it himself, his sons, and his cattle.

So this is a very famous well and it was a well that was provided by the patriarchs.

This was something that the whole community had depended on for centuries by this time. The well that had been given which was called Jacob's well.

[19 : 35] And apparently if you go there it's easy still to identify this well, the well that was being spoken of here outside the city of Shechem.

So she asks that question. And he says you want to know what the difference is? It's this. Everyone who drinks of this water, water that your father Jacob gave to you, will thirst again.

In other words, it lasts but it doesn't meet the deep needs of the human heart. And there was within the scriptures of the Jews which was familiar to the Samaritans a sense that at some point God himself would give them a water which would meet their deepest need.

There's a lovely chorus that goes, the well is deep and I require a draft of the water of life. Who was that? Who was that? Who was that?

Early North American explorer who came to Florida or someplace looking for the fountain of youth. There he is. Well, you see, that idea pervades our culture and our society.

[20 : 54] That somewhere there will be that which will completely meet our deepest needs from which life itself will be brought to us. In the same way that Jacob's well provides you on a daily basis with water, but the water that I will give you is something which has eternal consequences.

So, Jesus told her that and she got to the place where she said, Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst nor come here to draw.

Now, people don't know whether at this point in the story she was playing games, kind of coy games with Jesus. or whether she was beginning to understand who he was.

But you see how the progression goes from you're a Jew and I'm a Samaritan, you have nothing to draw with and I have something to draw with. Are you greater than Jacob?

She's sort of narrowing the field down to trying to discover who this person is. You know, he is something more than just a Jew.

[22 : 15] He has some way of getting to the water. He is infinitely greater than Jacob and that he has a gift of God for her. So, almost in a speculative way, she says to him, Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst nor come here to draw.

And so, when she says, give it to me, Jesus says to her, go and call it to God. Now, the reason he says this is because he knows, and William Temple deals with this in a brilliant way in his commentary, he knows that if she was to receive this gift, the thing she would want to do with it primarily was to share it with somebody.

You know, when you get really good news, you've got to phone somebody and tell them. If something really nice happens, you've got to share it with somebody. So, Christ knew that once she understood what this gift was, she would want to share it with somebody.

And in fact, it turns out to be true because once she does, she puts down her water pot, which was what brought her out to the well in the first place, goes back into the town to tell them the good news of the man who told her all she ever did.

So, Jesus knows that. And so, he says, go and call your husband. But Jesus did it for another reason too.

[23 : 49] And that became apparent when she said, I have no husband. You know how easy it would be for Jesus at that point to have said to her, you're a liar.

But indeed, what he did say to her was, you've spoken the truth. You have no husband. You've had five of them and the one you now have is not your husband.

And so that the two things that come together when the woman contemplates taking the gift is one that she will want to share it, but the other is that she's got to, in a sense, reveal who she is.

her, she can't take the gift and keep her secrets, so to speak. She's got to, her hand has got to be open so that she knows that he knows and he knows that she knows that he knows who she is, what kind of person she is.

and of course that is completely at the heart of our faith in Jesus Christ. He is the one who knows who we are.

[25 : 10] He is the one from whom, as that wonderful prayer says, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, from whom no secrets are hid.

That he is the one who knows who we are. and one of the great moments in our spiritual life is when we come up against the person of Jesus Christ who knows who we are.

Everybody else demands that we pretend. Everybody else demands that we play a role of some kind. Everybody else demands that we maintain our reserve, that we keep our dignity, that we in some measure deceive them because everybody wants to be deceived to some extent and we don't want people coming around telling us who they are because we can't handle it.

So play your part and pretend and it's easier to get along that way. And that's one of the basic conventions of human society. But in our relationship to Jesus Christ there is a necessity to open up as to who you are.

There's a brilliant story about this which is written in a book called From Noon Till Three. Now this is a story of a professor in a Midwestern university who had a wife and two children.

[26 : 46] And in the course of his lecturing fell in love with one of his graduate students and had an affair with her. But he managed to live a double life so that his wife didn't know about it and she didn't know too much about his wife so he was able to keep these two things separately.

And it only became increasingly difficult when subsequently he moved on to another affair with another graduate student. So then he had to live a kind of triple life so that she didn't know and he didn't, she didn't know and she didn't know and he had to know which key he was playing in at any moment and he was playing all the time.

Then he met a fourth graduate student and he fell deeply in love with her and recognized her to be a very, very different kind of person than he had ever met before.

and he was very anxious to have an affair with her. And so he went ahead to try and negotiate such an affair and became increasingly aware just by who she was that if he was going to enter into this relationship with her he would have to tell her who he was.

He would have to tell her all about his home, his affairs, everything about him. He would have to tell her exactly who he was. That was the kind of person she was.

[28 : 11] Nothing else would do but that she should do that. And so he agonized and he was torn and he didn't know what to do and he expected the worst and he was very hesitant to tell her.

And finally he realized that there was no other option and he went and told her. The great question is what did she do?

What? Oh no, I want to know your answer. Did she accept him or did she reject him? What?

If she was such a straightforward person she wouldn't have anything to do with the double-crossing. Absolutely, you're right. Yes, he ought to get it worried. I'm cheering. But the purpose of the story is to demonstrate our relationship to Jesus Christ.

You see, that when you come into relationship with him, you have to be able to open up the whole story to him. and he, because of what this book calls something like incredible grace, he accepts us, even when we have opened up to him in such a way that he has every reason to reject us.

[29 : 43] and that this is, you know, that this is the heart of the story of our relationship to Jesus Christ. When this woman opens up and says, you know, the story comes out, five husbands and now a paramour that she's living with, so to speak.

What does Christ do? He accepts her. You see, that's the miracle of grace that's at the heart of the Christian faith.

that we are accepted by reason of God's grace towards us. At the very point where we expose ourselves to condemnation, we receive forgiveness.

Now, that's very hard for people to believe, especially people who are good people like us and don't get into trouble like that. Very hard to realize that that's the basis of the relationship.

That at the very point at which we should be kicked out, we are accepted. And that's what happens here when this woman says, when Jesus says to her, go and call your husband.

[31 : 04] And she says, I have no husband. man. And then Jesus opens up to her the fact that he knows all about her, that she has no secrets from him, and that that doesn't change the relationship between them.

So the woman says, sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. And that's what prophets did. And prophets were people who had some kind of insight into knowing what was going on.

They understood people. So she says, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

Well, you see, this is, this is, again, what happens at the very point at which we are about to come to really know who Jesus is, and, and we're then, we're terribly threatened by the fact that he may know who we are.

And so we've got to put up our guard. And what is our guard? Our guard is what I call, we jump into the intellectual quagmire from which we may never recover.

[32 : 20] How do I know there is a God? How can the God that you believe in accept suffering? How does God relate to this group of people, or to this group of people, or why would God allow this to happen?

And on and on we go asking a whole lot of problems. And the only reason that those problems are problems is because underneath them all we believe there must be a God who knows the answer to them.

But we keep asking the problems so that intellectually we can keep God at arm's length. And she did exactly that when she said, do we worship in Jerusalem, or do we worship on Mount Gerizim?

which is the right place to worship? And Jesus heard her question and answered it, probably more fully than she wanted it answered, and perhaps more fully than even she understood, because he gave a very profound answer indeed.

And this is one of the sort of pivotal verses in the whole of Scripture. When Jesus turns to her and says, woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

[33 : 35] You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. The hour is coming, and now is when the true worshiper will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him.

Now, I can't go into all that that says, but basically, let me tell you one or two things about it, so that you can at least think some more about it.

What happens is that Jesus says that worship is not to be a particular ritual, or according to a particular code, or involves particular customs.

Worship is to be characterized by two things. One of them is that you should worship in spirit, and what that means is, I think, that God is spirit, is a kind of at the point where God and man intersect, that the spiritual nature of man, the sort of highest level of our humanity meets the highest level of God's purpose.

spirit, that's what spirit means. It's that kind of encounter. And the second thing that it means, that spirit means, is that it's a kind of heart's worship.

[35 : 24] It cannot be done merely by any form of external observance. External observances are no longer going to be significant, Jesus says.

What is going to be demanded is heart's worship. A self dedication to God. The whole sort of dedication of your heart to God in worship.

It's why, you see, you constantly have the problem which the church has resolved by talking about the two aspects of a sacrament, the outward invisible sign and the inward and spiritual grace.

And that the church can keep on, century after century, maintaining the outward invisible sign. But if it loses the inward and spiritual grace, it's no longer significant.

So that the worship is going to take place, it's got to take place in spirit and in this way, in this commitment from the heart to the way that God has revealed himself.

[36 : 39] The second thing that has to happen is it has to be in truth. And that is, it's got to be without hypocrisy. Now hypocrisy, you know, means play acting.

And we very often come to a place where our life in the church, mine or yours or anybody's, tends to be a little drama we go through, a little play acting we do that makes us feel better.

And Jesus says this isn't acceptable, that there can be, there must be absolute sincerity without any hypocrisy.

And finally that there must be no idolatry. idolatry. You know that idolatry consisted in great stones that drop from the moon, like Diana of the Ephesians in Ephesus, that it is something that is carved by man out of wood that may be inlaid with gold and set with rubies and diamonds, that such idolatry was part of the ancient world and is still very much part of our contemporary world.

And that we in the West are more sophisticated because we don't do that, but our idolatry is all made up of concepts, ideas, and ideologies that we worship. And those are the idolatries which are contemporary to us at the moment.

[38 : 12] And we don't question them, we just fall down and worship them. And Jesus says all this has got to be cut through and there's got to be from the heart, with sincerity, the highest level of our humanity reaches out to God as he presents himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

And he says that's what worship is. You see that could shred all the religions of the world because religion is I mean we think we worship one God because we all do the same silly things when we worship.

I won't go into that. But worship the world over doesn't look very different. What is demanded is worship in spirit and in truth.

And that's the demand that God makes on the whole of humanity. So he makes that on the woman and says that's the place where worship has to take place right there.

Well, the woman hears this and then she comes to the final sort of well, her final question, the final barrier.

[39 : 39] Because Christ is in all this revealing more and more of himself to her so that she is having to fight harder and harder to get away from acknowledging who he is.

Just as we fight very hard to get away from acknowledging that Jesus is really Lord. That the man who hangs on the cross is the eternal incarnate son of God.

And that we do all sorts of things. Most of the religions of the world are organized around denying that fact. And Jesus draws her closer and closer to having to acknowledge that fact.

And her last avenue of escape she seeks to run away to like a rabbit to its hole. She says, ah yes, we know that when the Messiah comes he will lead us into all truth.

What you call the kind of perpetual deferral. And that lots of people, you know, defer this encounter with Jesus for the whole of their lives.

[40 : 48] They keep putting it off and putting it off and putting it off. And we've developed in our society and culture the thought that maybe on one's deathbed you can make amends for having put it off for the whole of your life.

It's not a, it's a, something we speculate about, thinking that that may be the most convenient way to handle religion. Well, it's not beyond the grace of God that religion should be handled that way, but it sure robs us of all that life was meant to be.

If we defer the moment we meet God till the end of our life, we've missed out most of what life's meant to be. And that's what this woman sets out to do when she says, we know that when the Messiah comes sometime, then we will, then we'll know the truth, then we will understand.

And Jesus says to her, I that speak to you am he. And that's the, that's a magnificent statement.

do you remember when Moses was stuck way back in the beginning and wanted to know what, what God's name was and God had spoken to him and he was supposed to go for God to speak to his people and that Moses said, if they ask me your name, what will I say?

[42 : 16] and that. The Lord said to Moses, you say, I am that I am. And that's exactly what Jesus is saying here in this passage.

When he says to the woman, I am. The he isn't there in the Greek. Greek. And it's that presentation of himself.

You see, what that does for us is by telling us the story of how this woman comes to acknowledge who Jesus is, it's an invitation to us to come to acknowledge him in the same way.

See the same barriers that we use to hide from our faith in Jesus, to allow those barriers to be taken away as Jesus gently and lovingly works through all those barriers.

The barrier of you have nothing to draw with, the barrier that you are a Jew and I am a Samaritan, the barrier of you are you suggesting that you're greater than you, to open up her own life to him so that she isn't hiding anything from him.

[43 : 26] Then the barrier of the religious barrier of do we worship there or do we worship here? That's becoming quite relevant, isn't it? And Jesus giving her that wonderful and profound answer and then she's saying well, of course sometime it'll all happen and then I hope to be there.

And Jesus saying the time is right here and right now. that Jesus is our contemporary. He is.

He belonged to this moment more than you do. This is just a flashpoint in time for you and me. But for Jesus it's part of eternity and that we encounter him in this way.

Let me pray for us. Lord Jesus we thank you for your great patience and love.

We thank you for this wonderful story of how you broke down all the barriers for this woman. She came to she came into an encounter with you that transformed her life.

[44 : 53] Transformed it simply because she knew who you were and she knew that you knew who she was. So our God we pray for one another and ask that we in all the particular circumstances of our own lives may come to know who you are even in this moment and they come to acknowledge that you know who we are and have from all eternity.

So give us grace to believe. We ask in your holy name. Amen.