

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Jesus' Conversation With A Samaritan Woman

By Dan Trygg

This incident shows how **Jesus was able to recognize spiritual opportunity, and skillfully turned a small incident into a protracted ministry encounter** that stretched out for several days. **It also contains a vivid example of the persuasive power of personal testimony.** Beyond the surface story, however, Jesus had an awareness about spiritual work that is very important for us to grasp. His example shows us what to focus on in our ministry efforts.

Jesus and His disciples were traveling from Judea to Galilee. Coming to Jacob's well at Sychar, Jesus was weary from the journey. His disciples went to the village to purchase some food. After they left, **a Samaritan woman came to draw water.** This was the heat of the day, *an unusual time* to be doing this, ...*but very timely for Jesus' need...*, so He asked her for a drink. Her response was less than friendly, pointing immediately to their differences. Instead of taking offense, however, **Jesus used their common concern to draw her into a spiritual discussion.**

Her first question, "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask me for a drink, since I am a Samaritan woman?" (vs. 9) **had been designed to check Him**, to challenge His motives and to accentuate their differences. Note that **He did not answer her, but instead initiated an entirely new direction for their conversation.** "*If you knew... you would have asked...*" -- **The Lord raises her curiosity by suggesting that she is the one who is missing out on something** more valuable and desirable than what she had to offer. What was He was suggesting? Something was the "gift of God", ...and this stranger was apparently claiming to be someone special, ... and was claiming that He could give her "living water" (vs. 10). (In common speech, "living water" was used for *moving* water, like from a spring or river.)

Jesus' comment engaged her interest. She scoffed, "*You have no means to draw water from the well, where would you get 'living water'?*" (vs. 11). He then said **He could offer her water that would not only alleviate her thirst, but could even keep her from being thirsty again.** The water He would give her would become a well-spring or fountain inside of her, bubbling up unto eternal life (vs. 13,14). (This latter comment was in stark contrast to the well by which He was sitting. Jacob's well was only a cistern, a pit where rainwater collected, and the water level was often 100 feet below the surface. A bucket was kept by the well, but in order to get water, you needed a very long rope. Typically, the "well" would only last until May, when it dried up until the autumn rains.) **That was enough for the woman. She was definitely interested.** "*Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty again, nor come all the way here to draw water*" (vs. 15). Clearly, she was not grasping the spiritual line of thought Jesus was attempting to lead her toward. She was only hearing and understanding the surface meaning of His words, totally missing the deeper implications of what He was hinting at, ...namely, that He could give her something that would *satisfy the longing of her soul!*

"*Go, call your husband, and come here*" (vs. 16). **To break through the spiritual blindness, Jesus directly addressed the most obvious area of brokenness and pain in her life**, ...her problem with relationships. Her response was honest, but she downplayed what was really going on. "*I have no husband.*" Jesus commended her for honesty but also, **through a word of knowledge (cf. I Cor. 12:8), He underlined how this was a very problematic area of her life.** She had had been with *five* other men, and the man she was now with was not her husband. **This unexplainable insight convinced her that God was with Jesus. She thought that He was a prophet** (vs. 19).

"...*you say that in Jerusalem is the place it is necessary to worship*" (vs. 20). **To divert the discussion away, she brought up the religious disagreement between Jews and Samaritans, which Jesus brushed away.** "*God is Spirit*" (vs. 24). Note the statement regarding God's nature. He is not physical, but non-material, nor limited to one place. Consequently, **it is not so important where we worship God, so much as how we worship Him.** What is necessary is that we worship Him (submit to, and offer our willingness to serve, Him) in the inner being and in truth (honesty, integrity).

"*I know that Messiah is coming... when that One comes, He will declare all things to us*" (vs. 25). – **The woman is ready to table the discussion. She appeals to the coming Messiah, thinking to put Jesus off by appealing to a final umpire that they would both respect.** She believed that the Messiah's coming was not at all in the immediate future. "*I who speak to you am He*" (vs. 26). **The Greek actually says, "I AM, ...the One speaking with you."** **This is the first of seven "I am absolute's" in the gospel of John.** (Cf. 4:26; 6:20; 8:24,28,58; 13:19; 18:5-9 -- Each "I am absolute" is spoken in an unusual context, or makes an unusual claim. In each case, Jesus says "I am". This is an intentional reference back to Exodus 3:14, where Moses asked God regarding His name. God said, "I AM who I AM. Tell them I AM has sent me." In the Greek Septuagint translation of the OT, this phrase for "I am" was "Egō eimi", ...*the exact same wording Jesus used* in each of these passages! Since the first person singular ending is part of the verb, the use of the pronoun, *egō*, is for emphasis, "**I am.**" *You would only use the pronoun to strongly draw attention to yourself as the speaker.* Unfortunately, most of these passages are not translated well in English. The editors have chosen to add the pronoun, "He", to the phrase in most of these contexts, "I am He. [In the NASB, you can recognize

this, because the “He” is in italics.] Only 8:58 is translated without modification.) **This was a very strong and direct claim to be the very Messiah she had been talking about.** When the woman heard *this*, she left everything by the well and ran into the town to tell everyone she knew about Him, and to invite them to “come and see” and “could this be the Christ?”

About this time, **the disciples returned with the lunch they had purchased. When they offered some to Jesus, He declined to eat, saying, “I have food to eat that you do not recognize”** (vs. 32). This was confusing to them, so He explained, “*My food is the do the will of Him who sent Me, and to complete His work.* Don’t you say, ‘It is yet four months, and the harvest comes?’ *Look, I say to you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white (ripe) for harvest!*” In other words, **something was happening that He could see, but they were totally unaware of.** They were *preoccupied with their own affairs*, their own hunger and comfort. Consequently, they were *not in tune with their surroundings*. **They did not see what was taking place around them. Their field of vision was limited to themselves.** It was because that was where their priorities *truly were*, in actuality. **Jesus’ priorities were to do the Father’s will, and to fulfill His working.** *That really was* the most important thing to Him. **Consequently, He was more attuned to the opportunities and activities around Him.** He was looking for what the Father was doing, so that He could act in accordance with what the Father was causing (Jn. 5:19).

What was He talking about? **What was happening that they were unaware of?** Why would Jesus choose *not* to eat, right then? **When they looked up, they saw a crowd of people coming down the hill from the town!** Why would people be coming out to the well *now*? *What was going on?*

These villagers had come out of their houses to see what the woman who had been with Jesus at the well was so excited about. She normally kept to herself, and avoided public attention. What would be so important that *she* would go door to door in the heat of the day, saying, “Come and see, come and see!”? **Her enthusiasm and excitement had motivated them to see for themselves what she had been talking about. The change in her behavior, her excitement and her persistent invitation rallied the entire village to come and investigate what had happened. Why was she so animated?** She probably assumed that He would eat and then move on from their village. She wanted to roust people from their houses to meet Him *before the opportunity was gone!* The truth is that **such opportunities are often temporary. We must respond to what God is doing now. We may not get another chance.** “Behold, *now* is the acceptable time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation” (II Cor. 6:2).

“*One sows and another reaps... I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored*” (Vss. 37,38). As the people were coming down the hill, **Jesus expressed a couple of other important lessons from this incident.** The first is that though there are set periods of time required for natural crops to develop before they can be harvested (e.g., four months), **we must be ready and watchful for spiritual harvesting at all times.** Why is that? Because *others* may have done the work of sowing the seed of the gospel. In this circumstance, it was the woman who was busy sowing the seeds that were beginning to quickly bear fruit. Jesus specifically told *the disciples*, “I sent *you* to harvest what *you* have not labored for. *Others* have labored, and you have entered into *their* labor.” **Some sow; others reap. These are two very different, but necessary, functions.** Without someone to sow the seed, there would be no harvest to reap. This is very clear from Jesus’ parables of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:1-23; Mk. 4:26-29). **The word must be preached, if there is to be a harvest** (Rom. 10:14). Also, **no one will benefit if someone does not bring in the crop.** Some of us will invest in the lives of people repeatedly and faithfully, and may not see all the results of those spiritual investments. *Others* may come through those who are especially appointed by God to do the work of harvesting. *If the goal is to get people to come to Christ, then whether we happen to be the ones to directly benefit, or not, we will rejoice if they do respond to the gospel and follow Jesus.* In this case, *both* the sower and the reaper will rejoice together. **Whether we are sowers or reapers, we must do our part in order for the Kingdom of God to advance.**

“...*many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified*” (vs. 39). **The excited, personal testimony of the woman was very effective.** People could *see the change* in her life, and *accepted her testimony* regarding what had happened. They, too, came to ask themselves the same question that she had, “Could this be the Christ?” Based upon *her* testimony about His supernatural knowledge, they concluded that He, indeed, *was* the long-awaited Messiah. “...*they were asking Him to stay with them...*” **They came to Jesus, and wanted to hear and see more, so He agreed to remain for two more days.** “*Many more believed because of His word...*” They went on to tell the woman that they had come to believe through her testimony, but now they were convinced from their own experiences, ...*what they themselves* had heard Jesus say and do. This is where we want everyone we lead to Christ to grow into, personal experiences with Jesus. **We don’t want people to be dependent upon us for their knowledge of God. We want them to develop their own relationship with Jesus.**

This story gives us an important glimpse into the content of Jesus’ teaching. He was not talking about Judaism, or keeping certain customs or religious duties. **His teaching centered on who He was and why He came.** From what He *said*, and what He *did*, these Samaritans concluded that He was the Savior of all people (vs. 42b).