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JOHN 4:10-42 -- Jesus' Conversation With The Samaritan Woman

This story is a great example of how Jesus demonstrated spiritual awareness. There are many insights to be gained from a study of this passage, but the main story that plays out through the chapter involves 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 is also a vivid example of the persuasive power of personal testimony. Beyond the surface story, however, was an understanding that Jesus had about spiritual work that is very important for us to grasp. It gives us a clearer understanding of evangelism, one that will help us to perceive what we need to focus on in our ministry efforts, both as individuals and as groups. Once we grasp what Jesus was talking about, we can see that this same understanding of spiritual work can be found throughout many of His teachings about ministry.

Jesus and His disciples were traveling from Judea, in the south, to Galilee, to the north. To take the most direct route, they had to travel through Samaria. There was bad blood between Samaritans and Jews. It had to do with differences in religious beliefs and ethnic backgrounds (II Kg. 17:24-41), aggravated by a history of insult, abuse and bitter feelings. Many Jews avoided Samaria altogether, crossing the Jordan and travelling the eastern side of the river. This was especially advisable when heading from Galilee to Judea. Making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem flew right in the face of the differences in belief systems. Therefore, the Samaritans were even more inhospitable. Here, however, Jesus and His men were heading north, which was less likely to be met with harassment. Coming to Jacob's well at Sychar in the middle of the day, Jesus was weary from the journey. His disciples went ahead to the village to see if they could purchase some food, and left Him by the well.

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.

NOTES:

Vs. 10 -- *Jesus answered* – It was the Lord who took the initiative to turn the conversation to spiritual truths. Her previous question, “How is it that you, being a Jew, ask me for a drink, since I am a Samaritan woman?” had been designed to check Him, to challenge His motives and to accentuate their differences. Note that He did not answer her inquiry at all, but instead initiated an entirely new direction. *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. His language is very indirect. It appears awkward to us, but it was a common way for people of that culture to talk about very serious matters. What was it that He was suggesting? Something was the “gift of God”, ...and this stranger was apparently claiming to be someone special, “and who is the One speaking to you”, ... and was claiming that He could give her “living water”. *living water* -- In common speech, “living water” was used for moving water, like would come from a spring or river. While He had no means to gather natural water from the well, He said that He possessed something far better. He said, “*If you knew the free-gift of God, and who you are talking to, you would have asked Me, and I would have given to you living water.*”

Vs. 11-14 -- *She said to Him...* – Jesus' comment had engaged her interest. She scoffed, “*You have no means to draw water from the well, where would you get 'living water'?*” 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. (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 replenished by rainfall in the autumn. During the summer, water could be gathered from the abundant springs of ‘Ain ‘Askar, a village located a half mile away.) *That* was enough for the woman. She was *definitely* interested.

Vs. 15 -- *Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty again, nor come all the way here to draw water.* -- It is clear that she was not fully following 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.

Vss. 16-19 -- *Go, call your husband, and come back.* -- To break through the spiritual blindness, Jesus directly addressed the most obvious area of brokenness and pain in her life, ...her problem with relationships. In her response, she was honest, but downplayed what was really going on. “I have no husband.” Jesus commends her for the truthfulness of her statement 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.

Vss. 20-24 – *you say that in Jerusalem is the place it is necessary to worship* -- To divert the discussion away, once again, she brought up the religious disagreement between Jews and Samaritans, which Jesus brushed away. *God is Spirit.* -- 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 Him, so much as *how* we worship Him. What is necessary is that we worship God (submit to, and offer our willingness to serve, Him) in the inner being and in truth (honesty, integrity).

Vss. 25-30 - *I know that Messiah is coming... when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.* – 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* – 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 verb itself contains the first person singular ending, 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?”

Vss. 31-36 -- *Rabbi, eat.* -- 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.*” 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 was sure acting strangely. She normally kept to herself, and avoided public attention. (It may be hard to understand from the standards of *our* culture today, but a woman who had been with six men would have been considered a woman of ill repute in that day. She would have been thought of as “trashy”, maybe even the village whore, though she wasn’t actually a prostitute. Undoubtedly people gossiped and joked about her, adding to the shame she felt at being repeatedly used and rejected. Interesting that God used *her* to initiate His evangelistic strategy to reach the entire town!) 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 city 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).

Vss. 37,38 – *One sows and another reaps... I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored* -- 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. 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 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. So, whether we are sowers or reapers, we need to faithfully fulfill our duty in order for the Kingdom of God to advance.

Vss. 39-42a -- *many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified* – 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 Him* – 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 know 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.

Vs. 42b – *we know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world* – Obviously, there must have been more that Jesus preached about than the small bit we have recorded in this chapter. It gives us a 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.