

Encounters with Jesus

Week 3 - Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-45)

Context:

After the encounter Jesus had under the darkness of night with Nicodemus, the esteemed teacher of Israel and religious leader, John reports another meeting of an even more shocking nature: this time Jesus speaks with a Samaritan woman drawing water at a well under the noon sun. Both the woman and Jesus' disciples could not believe that Jesus would even be speaking with her, but the encounter would change this woman forever, making her the first missionary of Christ to the Samaritans, bearing the waters of life she received at the well.

1. The Gospel Breaks through Social, Cultural, and Racial Barriers

a. Nicodemus vs. the Samaritan Woman

- (1) Nicodemus is an esteemed spiritual leader, who would have been seen as being righteous, an example, and worthy of honor
- (2) The Samaritan woman is:
 - a woman: not recognized as being equally valuable; adult men did not speak with women who are not relatives, especially not in public
 - poor reputation: most women would draw water at other times, when it was not in the heat of the day, and it was a significant social time; the Samaritan woman is drawing water at noon in order to remain unseen as best as she can
 - a Samaritan: the Jews saw Samaritans as being racially, culturally, and spiritually inferior (this is why the parable of the good Samaritan would have been shocking — many Jews could not imagine the possibility that a Samaritan could ever be good)

b. Notice the contrast:

- (1) Nicodemus came under darkness and went away confused. He is the one who **should** be able to see clearly, but he does not (at least not immediately).
- (2) The Samaritan woman who **should** be blind and unable to see (if we follow natural, worldly assumptions) is the one who actually recognizes Jesus for who he is and tells everyone about him.

Jesus reaches through every barrier: he comes to uplift the outcasts, the oppressed, and the poor, even though worldly perspectives would treat them with contempt.

Leslie Newbigen: spiritual renewal will only happen when “local congregations renounce an introverted concern for their own life, and recognize that they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument and foretaste of God’s redeeming grace for the whole life of society.”

In Christ, we become united to those who are not like us, as a true family. It is for this reason as well that we are compelled to speak out on behalf of those who are mistreated because of cultural, racial, and social prejudices because these evils do not reflect the Kingdom of God.

2. The Brokenness of Humanity

CS Lewis - “ human history is a long terrible story of man trying to find something other god that will try to make him happy”

- a. Jesus understands her brokenness and came to redeem her in the midst of her brokenness
 - (1) She, like all of us, are thirsty: she has had five husband, unable to find true satisfaction in any of them
 - (2) We all have been figuratively drinking from many different wells, water which cannot satisfy (Jeremiah calls them “broken cisterns” (Jer. 2:12-13)
 - (3) We all must identify the idols in our lives: what are we relying upon for purpose, meaning, identity, value, etc.**
- b. We live in a world of thirst
 - (1) Jesus moves from water, to her husbands, to worship because these are seamlessly connected
 - (2) We seek out satisfaction, purpose, meaning, value, and identity in and through our worship
 - (3) We were created **by God** and **for God**, which means that it is through relationship with him alone that we can experience life as God intended it to be

The world is desperately thirsty for the waters that only Jesus can provide. We have been given this living water to share with others as well.

3. The Power of the Gospel

- a. Encountering Jesus transforms her into a completely new person:
 - (1) She leaves her jar, and immediately rushes into the town to announce that the messiah had come
 - (2) She has spent her whole life hiding, but now she rushes to tell everyone she possibly could about what Jesus had said — she was freed from the fear and shame and now compelled to give good news even to those who mistreated her
 - (3) She becomes the first missionary of Christ and “[m]any Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony” (4:39)!
- b. Jesus challenges the disciples and us
 - (1) The disciples were shocked that Jesus spoke with the woman, but now she was changed by Jesus and was preaching to everyone: Jesus proclaimed to them what they were unable to see: “Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest” (4:35)
 - (2) Our own blindness sometimes keeps us from witnessing (and participating in) the harvest that is right before our eyes

Conclusion

Jesus did not reject the Samaritan woman, but instead bears her sin and shame. Upon the Cross he would cry out, “I thirst,” yet to all who call upon him he gives water that always satisfies.

May we all honor the example of the Samaritan woman. May we all go out to share what Jesus Christ has done for us!

(Discussion questions on next page)

Discussion Questions

1. What was a time in your life when you tried to hide or avoid someone out of shame? When we experience shame, what kind of thoughts or beliefs about ourselves and about God are we believing, which are actually not true?
2. Think about the context of this conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan. Why was it a surprising event? Think of it from different perspectives (the disciples', the woman, the Samaritans, Jesus, etc.)
3. Jesus refuses to be lead by racial prejudice, cultural bigotry, or self-righteousness, and seeks out all people. How have you seen prejudice like these in your own life?

How does the temptation to believe we are superior to others actually destroy our ability to love them?

4. How does Jesus challenge the Samaritan woman? How can you relate to her experience (seeking out satisfaction in things which do not satisfy)?

In what way does Jesus himself actually fulfill everything we might seek to find in "broken cisterns" (truth, identity, purpose, value, etc.)?

5. The Samaritan woman did not wait to tell everyone she could about Jesus. What are some of the things that keep you from sharing good news with others (could be fears, not knowing what to say, etc.)?

Think of one person in your life who you could be praying for and looking for opportunities to invite to church and share the gospel.