

**A sermon preached by Emma Hodge
On 28th April 2024
at St. Michael & All Angels Church at 8am
and
at Sandhurst Baptist Church at 10:30am**

In the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit, Amen.

Our passage today is the Samaritan Woman at well and this story is one that is relatively well known, and with so many bible passages there are several different layers and meanings, and I am going to focus on the woman and her interactions with Jesus.

We are in the middle of looking at people and how they have lived out their faith, and this bible passage is a good example of someone engaging with faith and brining others to know Jesus.

The passage is set in John's gospel in the fourth chapter and is set in a Samaria, Jesus and his disciples were travelling and had stopped for rest and food. The Disciples had gone into town to get food but Jesus stayed at the well to rest as he was tired, it is in this small detail that we **are reminded of Jesus' humanity, he came and lived among us, he knew what it was to be tired, just like us.**

It is as Jesus is resting at the well, the Samaritan Woman comes into the story, the culture at the time, and women were not treated on an equal footing with men, and as such would have a more subservient role. Women fetching water from wells was a daily essential,

all the water that they and their households needed had to be gathered, and it might mean multiple trips a day depending on how much was required.

We know that this woman is not young, she has been married 5 times and is currently living with another man, and there may be many reasons for this and different scholars have different views on this from commenting on her moral character (but note that Jesus doesn't comment on this) or the fact that the number 5 may have links to how the Samaritan community evolved or Well you get the picture.

The woman was a Samaritan, and this is not the only instance in the new testament where we meet Samaritans, you may be familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan, but let's look at the background to the Samaritans.

The Samaritans believed in the same God as Jews, both groups were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, they both used the first five books of the bible as scripture and here it varies slightly as the Samaritans only treated the first 5 books as scripture whereas the Jews also treated the rest of the old testament as scripture, but one of the main difference, as the woman draws our attention to, was where they should worship God.

There is a long history of hostility between Samaritans and Jews and sadly there are too many similarities with different groups today, Israel and Palestine, Ukraine and Russia are just two that come to mind.

However due to the history of hostility between Jews and Samaritans which can be seen in different passages in the Old Testament, and as such dates back centuries.

Jesus by speaking to a Samaritan woman broke two of the instructions given by the Jewish Rabbis, firstly the rabbis taught that a man should not speak to a woman he didn't know and they also taught that Jews speaking to Samaritans would mean that they would be considered as ritually unclean,

However Jesus and his disciples clearly didn't worry about this, he and his disciples were willing to break this custom as the disciples went into a Samaritan town to buy food and would need to engage with the shopkeepers.

But if we turn our attention to the conversation that the woman and Jesus have,

Jesus starts the conversation by asking the woman to conduct a simple task,

- drawing some water to give him a drink of it,
- she has her water jars to draw water,
- she has come to the well to draw water, so it is not something that she is incapable of
- She could have just drawn the water, given him a drink and left it at that,
- she would have acted within the societal norms but she doesn't

She engages with Jesus, she asks questions, she starts a discussion highlighting that they have some

differences in their faith and culture. She wants to know more...

It was through her asking Jesus a question about the difference between Samaritans and Jews and asking why he was willing to speak to and ask for help from someone how was different that led to the conversation about faith.

Jesus did not ask her a question about faith nor did he ask her about the differences between Samaritans and Jews, he left the big questions to one side, all he did was ask a simple thing of her, to draw water, and that was the prompt for her to engage with the questions that she had. Jesus then engaged with her in conversation.

If we are to model Jesus example in this, all we need to do is be ready to turn our everyday encounters into sharing our faith and discussing the questions people have.

The conversation that the Samaritan woman and Jesus have touches on many topics,

- 1) The wonderful gift of living water, Jesus moves the conversation on from talking about literal water, to our spiritual thirst being satisfied by living water. At first the Samaritan woman doesn't understand (and this is a common theme in the gospels, the people Jesus is speaking to, including his disciples don't quite get it, it needs to be explained – even further on in this story, the disciples get confused by literal and metaphysical food)

If you feel that you don't always understand things in the bible, things about faith, you

are not alone, the disciples didn't; the Samaritan woman didn't, they needed help to understand!

2) What true Worship means

The Samaritan woman clearly has questions about worshipping God, she asks Jesus about why the Jews say that they can only worship in Jerusalem but for Samaritans they worship on the mountain. The question the woman asks allows Jesus to explain that where we worship doesn't matter,

What does matter is about why we worship God, and where our hearts and focus are. We worship God in Spirit in truth, when we pause, pay attention to God, listen and learn from him.

The differences about where we worship, how we worship are inconsequential, what matters is that we focus on the God who sent his only Son to earth to become human, to live among us, the son that paid the price for our mistakes by dying and then by rising again, the son, Jesus who is alive, now and always.

3) If talking about living water and true worship wasn't enough for a conversation, it continues, with discussion about the Messiah.

The Samaritans and Jews both knew that the Messiah would come one day, Samaritans often referred to the Messiah as the Redeemer.

In the Old Testament, God often reveals himself to others with the words "I am", the example

that the Samaritan woman would have been familiar with is the passage from Exodus where God says “I am who I am”, however there are other instances throughout, especially with the books of the prophets.

When the Samaritan woman revealed that she knew that the Messiah would come, Jesus echoes the words God speaks when he reveals himself, with the words “I am he”.

In the gospels, Jesus doesn't always reveal that he is the Messiah, but John's gospel is different as it contains many statements starting “I am”, for example “I am the bread of life”; “I am the true vine, you are the branches”; but the first time he does reveal it in John's gospel is to a Samaritan woman, not to a fellow Jew, not to one of his disciples, but to a Samaritan woman, someone that a lot of Jewish society would have looked down upon.

Jesus made it clear that his teaching, his message was for everyone, it was no accident that he revealed that he was the Messiah to a Samaritan woman, he wanted everyone to hear his message, to come and believe. Jesus is not just for a few, it is for everyone, no one is excluded.

The revelation that Jesus is the Messiah, which literally means the anointed one, can also be interpreted as someone who is coming to redeem, or save, the people. They were looking for someone, not expecting a son of God, but someone, chosen and anointed by God, to

come to save. God revealed himself to the people with the words “I am..”, but those words hadn’t been heard for a long time, and the people were waiting, for him to come and then Jesus not only says that the waiting is over but uses a phrase “I am...” that shows that God had come to earth to save us.

Jesus came to earth, he lived among us, and he is the Messiah, the one who has come to save us, he paid the price for us, for all our failings upon the cross, he died and rose again, to save us, for you, for me, for everyone who believes. This is the amazing God that we have, the God who saves us.

How the Samaritan woman felt when she heard these words we don’t know but we do know that her actions speak loudly, she went back to the town

And when the Samaritan woman returns to the town, she tells other people about Jesus, the words that she uses is more of a tentative question and she uses this to encourage other people’s curiosity. She doesn’t simply state a fact but instead issues an invitation – to “come and see”

The result of her invitation, Jesus and his disciples stayed in town and many people came to believe in Jesus.

We don’t know the woman’s name,

but what we do know is

- 1) She was not afraid to speak to Jesus and ask him the questions that were on her mind,
- 2) She spoke to other people about Jesus
- 3) Her words and actions led others to Jesus.
- 4) and his disciples staying in the town and many others came to believe.

All because she spoke to Jesus and asked the questions that she had. All she did was talk, nothing more, she talked to Jesus, and to the people in her town.

An unknown woman who had the courage to ask a question of a man at a well, who received the gift of knowing that Jesus was the Messiah, the redeemer who had come to save them. and she led others to meet Jesus for themselves.

An example for all of us: To ask questions, to invite others to meet the saviour, our redeemer, Jesus Christ, Our Lord

Let us pray

Oh, perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.