

## **John 4: Woman At the Well.**

**13/08/2017 Rory Birkbeck**

### **[Slide 1]**

Imagine there's no heaven

It's easy if you try

No hell below us

Above us only sky

"Imagine all the people living life in peace" are some of the lyrics to one of the most famous songs in the world, a track called "Imagine" written by one of the most famous artists in the world John Lennon.

John was so famous that he couldn't go outside, so one of his favourite pastimes was watching TV, in fact he was addicted to TV (it was his way of looking at the world since he could no longer walk around anonymously). In 1972 he wrote a desperate letter to a TV evangelist Oral Roberts, confessing his dependence on drugs and his fear of facing up to "the problems of life." He expressed regret that he had said that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus (He probably also had to rethink the lyrics he wrote in "Imagine" 1yr earlier).

Oral Roberts wrote a personal letter in response and the most interesting part is the end of the letter where he writes "You said, John, that you take drugs because reality frightens you. Remember as you open your life to Jesus, He will take all the fear away and give you peace. Peace that passes all understanding.

### **[Slide 2]**

Hello, this is Jesus. This is the calibre of the man we are talking about today, that the even the most famous people, at some point recognise their need for Him.

Jesus was sent to make peace between God and people as well as between people and people. Jesus is incredible, perfect and powerful.

In our current series - Hello I'm Jesus, we have been tracking with another John, John the apostle, one of Jesus's friends and disciples.

John wrote his gospel to reveal that Jesus is the long promised Messiah of the Jews. But that he wasn't just simply a man, But God in the flesh – the Son of God.

John's main intention was so that anyone who reads the words would come to believe in the Jesus.

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But what is Jesus like in real life? How would He act towards you? What would He say if you were pounding the pavement and having a conversation with him.

Some answers can be found in the story we are focusing on today.

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The Woman at the well is a very well-known story, pardon the pun, many of you may have read it multiple times, heard it talked about, maybe even way back in Sunday school.

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Because a lot of you are probably very familiar with this story, we are not going to go verse by verse instead we are looking at the bigger picture of the encounter, and the overarching theme, which is that Jesus came to save, the least, the last and the lost.

In the story we see Jesus as someone who treats people as individuals, accepting them with love and compassion. Going out of his way to embrace the unloved, unworthy and marginalised. The folks who don't matter at all to the rest of society - in fact to a lot of us these people are embarrassing but these people aren't nobodies to Jesus. They are somebodies. These are the people he chooses to spend his time with, even more than that, these are the people Jesus chooses to use to build his Kingdom.

Let me ask you a question: What do you think of a person that tells you the end of movie? Ok. A quick spoiler alert: I'm going to tell you what happens in the end in story. I'm not a spoil sport, I would never do this in a movie, but in this story it helps to work backwards, so let's roll it back in reverse – The end of the story or climax is that a huge number of people in a Samaritan village come to believe in Jesus and proclaim “we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

**[Slide 6]**

**John 4:39-42 Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”**

At Sunday school you may have learnt one simple truth about this story, that is, if you are thirsty drink water and if you need God get “Living Water” something we will get to later on. But this story has many aspects, one of the significant aspects is who Jesus chooses achieve His mission in Samaria.

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He chooses someone we would probably never would have chosen, someone the religious establishment of the day never ever would have chosen - this is, of course the Samaritan women.

But was this such a wise choice, If you were the Son of God, and you had the difficult task of bringing the good news to Samaria who would you choose?

Before you answer, let me tell you the relationship, the backstory, between the Jews and the Samaritans. To say there was religious and political pressure between them would be an understatement. The short answer is they hated each other. Hate is a very strong word and I don't like to use it, but it really was that bad between them. The Samaritans had intermarried after the Assyrian invasion in 722, and therefore they were no longer pure, according to the Jews.

The Samaritans were corrupted Jews, and they branched off on their own religious track, where they decided to only follow the Pentateuch, that is the first 5 books of the bible, they had their own temple (Mount Gerizim) instead of Mount Zion. They were able to completely avoid each other, except Samaria was sandwiched, between Judea and Galilee. So conflicts arose when Jews journeyed, because the shortcut was through Samaria, so Samaritans took pleasure upsetting the journey of any Jews who dared take the road less travelled.

So you can see if you were the Son of God, and had insight into all things, that this task required the right person, you wouldn't want to throw just anyone in there.

It was the mission of a lifetime - surely someone like Nicodemus would have been a good choice – he was highly educated, esteemed, learned – but nope - Jesus left Nicodemus back in chapter 3. As Brian said last week I don't think Nicodemus was a bad bloke. Perhaps he was just caught up in the cultural climate of the day, like all the of other most qualified were disqualified for their hatred for the Samaritans, hardened hearts and determination to enforce rules and judge others rather than judge their own hearts.

Against all odds of what the Jewish leaders of day would have thought was an impossible mission (if they cared enough to think about the salvation of the Samaritans), Jesus chooses someone of least importance from within the Samaritans own ranks, it is the Samaritan Woman who fulfills God's plan to see people in Sychar saved.

But first, In this story Jesus comes for the lost sheep, The Samaritan Woman, Jesus has grace for her, has a love for her, she is the least, the last and the lost, and Jesus came to save her.

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Let's read:

**Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John— 2 although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. 3 So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.**

**4 Now he *had* to go through Samaria. 5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.**

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**6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, *tired* as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.**

**7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)**

**9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans)**

**[Slide 10]**

10 Jesus answered her, “If you knew the *gift* of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you *living water*.”

**[Slide 11]**

11 “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

13 Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the *water* I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the *water* I give them will become in them a spring of *water* welling up to eternal life.”

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15 The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

16 He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”

17 “I have no husband,” she replied.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

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19 “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

21 “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.

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23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

25 The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

26 Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

We see Jesus as a missionary on a mission trip to Samaria, and He breaks three social boundaries to enter into the encounter. These are - gender, race and marital status. She was a powerless, female Samaritan, outcast for her marital status.

Stark contrast to Nicodemus, powerful male Jew, a model of piety and wisdom. Nicodemus came to Jesus, and therefore was the pursuer, yet here Jesus is pursuer, He is pursuing this woman. She is the least (a woman), the last (samaritan) and the lost (sinner) and Jesus came for her.

#### **[Slide 15]**

##### **The least.**

Jesus came for the least - The Samaritan Woman.

It would be easy to paint her as a particular person, but as we know nothing of her context, So i'm not going to do that.

What I can say, women weren't considered of great importance back then, in fact treatment of woman was terrible in that time period, they were treated as objects, and to be honest, here we are in 2017 and today we aren't much better.

#### **[Slide 16]**

To quote the Former Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan - "Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace".

Jesus came to save the least. His views on woman were revolutionary for his day, from v7-13 we can see Jesus cares about this woman's individual life, he starts by asking her for a drink and then turns the tables, revealing that she in fact, is the one who is thirsty, and He is offering "Living Water", another name for Holy Spirit, the gift that will satisfy her spiritual thirst.

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However she doesn't understand, thinking that Jesus can offer her a temporary fix to her human condition of thirst, so that she doesn't have to go to the well every day to draw water.

In V13 & 14 Jesus expands on his personal invitation to this woman and this time uses the words eternal life itself.

At the Festival of Tabernacles later in John's Gospel we get a greater understanding of the personal invitation that Jesus offers. In **John 7:37** He says **"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."**[c] **v39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.**

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##### **The Last**

Jesus came for the lost. The Woman was a Samaritan. Jesus came for the Samaritans. Jesus himself was a Jew, and went to Samaria, not only for race relations or to demonstrate loving his enemies, but Jesus wants to see this corrupted Jewish people, the Samaritans come to believe in Him.

Jesus announced a major change. In those days Jews and Samaritans travelled to their separate temples to worship God, believing God's presence rested there. But when questioned by the Samaritan woman about the proper place for worship Jesus replied in v22 'a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father *in spirit and truth*', for they are the kind worshippers the Father seeks.

Jesus dislocated God's presence from its traditional building (which he predicted would soon be destroyed) and relocated it in the most unlikely place: ordinary people like the Samaritan woman herself.

It was not God's chosen ones - the Jews, that first proclaimed the Messiahship of Jesus, it was the Samaritans. They were the first in John's Gospel to proclaim that Jesus is the Saviour of the Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles - the world.

#### **[Slide 19]**

Where is your Samaria? - [Talk about Get Smart]

#### **[Slide 20]**

##### **The Lost.**

Jesus came for the lost. When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, He touches the most sensitive, vulnerable spot in her life. He brings into the open her marital status, which was that she had 5 previous husbands and was living with a man who was not her husband.

This is reason the woman asked the question, about the proper place of worship is that she feels convicted about her sin, wants to get right with God, and is confused about where to take her sacrifice or sin offering. She is thinking "Jesus is a Jew so maybe I need to go to the temple in Jerusalem."

We can see from what follows that even as a Samaritan she knew of a coming Messiah (Christ),

#### **[Slide 21]**

In the very oldest book in the Pentateuch Job says "I know that my *redeemer* lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth."

Jesus reveals to her "I am the Messiah", and therefore reveals his master plan for (her) and all of us.

#### **[Slide 22]**

He came to earth for the lost, as the redeemer, He is stepped in our place - completely innocent, but was punished voluntarily guilty, that the guilty (us) might be rewarded as innocent.

At the cross Jesus paid the penalty for our sins and canceled the debt of sin against us, making possible our reconciliation with God.

This Samaritan Woman was standing next to a Holy God, that cannot stand any violation of his holiness, and in her case the penalty for adultery is death, she knew the old testament law, but instead of death, she received life when she met Jesus.

Jesus changes lives, people come to him broken, and He fixes them, people come to him sick and He heals them. One theologian rightly says "In contrast to the traditional view that uncleanness was contagious, Jesus touches people who are unclean or sick, without fear of contamination," He writes. "Holiness, Jesus saw, was not something to be protected; rather, it was God's miraculous power of transformation. God's holiness cannot be soiled; rather, it is a cleansing and healing agent. It does not need to be shut up in a temple; it is now, through Jesus' healings and fellowship with the despised and rejected, breaking out into the world to transform it."

The Samaritan Woman may have not have been educated or have a theology degree, but she had something equally or more powerful, her testimony and face to face encounter with the living God. People knew her and her background - all she needed to say was "you know who I was, I am not ashamed anymore" and "come see Jesus".

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I can relate to the Samaritan Woman, as her story and my own personal story have so many similarities.

In v28-30 we read **"Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him."**

[Personal testimony]

*Like the Samaritan Woman I dropped absolutely everything in my life, everything changed the day I met Jesus and immediately I wanted to tell everybody what Jesus had done in my life, like the Samaritan Woman I went into villages and said "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did". God sent me to the ends of earth.*

Jesus came to save the least, the last and the lost, in whatever state they are in, Jesus can handle it. Perhaps this resounds with you today, or something of the story of the Woman at the well resounds with you.

Maybe this isn't you, you know Jesus, but are tired, thirsty, and need to be refreshed. We think sometimes that our own wells sustain us. Our wells are called wealth or power or approval or even entitlement. Maybe today you need a reminder - All Jesus asks is that we take what we think are our wells, realise that they are nothing but dry holes in the ground, and leave it all behind. He asks us to come to the one true Well."

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Ends