

**JOHN 4:5-42**  
**ST JOHN'S, 19.3.17, 9.30 am**

**INTRODUCTION**

Just before the beginning of Lent, a friend of mine posted the following on Facebook: *it will be 7 weeks of living more consciously and also more slowly. My aim is to reduce the "now!" and the "immediately!" for 7 weeks. Less hectic, less stress.* I was challenged to try something similar. I haven't been very successful! It seemed as if there was more 'stuff' than ever, claiming my time, my attention, forcing me to stay busy! This story reminds me of the challenge!

Jesus used time very differently. He was travelling through Samaria because it was the shortest route from Jerusalem to Galilee. He'd had to make a quick escape from Jerusalem, to avoid being arrested. So he had a *real* reason to be in a hurry! It doesn't look as if Jesus intended to stop in Samaria. But when he gets an opportunity to minister to people in need, Jesus takes it, even though it means stopping, not for a couple of minutes, but for a couple of days.

Jesus wasn't bothered about the delay, because he had his priorities sorted out. Jesus' mission, his most important task was *to seek and to save what was lost* (Luke 19:10). And so, when he had an opportunity to 'seek and to save' the woman at the well, and the rest of the people of Sychar, he postponed any other plans he had, and stayed there to do just that.

Another thing which this story challenges me about is my attitude to other people, especially people with whom I wouldn't normally come into contact. I don't often initiate conversations with strangers. But Jesus came *to seek and to save the lost*, so he actively seeks to enter into a conversation with this woman. The end result is that a large number of people declare, *we know that he really is the Saviour of the world* (v42). But it all starts when . . .

**THE WOMAN MEETS JESUS**

One of the amazing things about this story is that Jesus, who has so much to offer this woman, begins by asking her for something - for a drink. It reminds *us* that Jesus was human; he was tired, and he was thirsty; and it shows us that he didn't mind asking for help. Jesus' request stops *the woman* in her tracks. She would have expected him to ignore her. After all, she was a woman, and Jewish men never spoke to any woman in public, let alone to someone with her kind of reputation. If that wasn't enough, she was a Samaritan, and as John says (v 9), Jews didn't associate with Samaritans. No wonder she sounds so bewildered in verse 9!

The Jews and the Samaritans had been enemies for centuries. The Jews despised the Samaritans, because they weren't pure-bred descendants of Abraham, and because their religion was corrupted by the foreigners with whom they'd intermarried. To make matters worse, the Samaritans had built their own temple. As they only acknowledged the first five books of the OT as Scripture, they didn't accept God's

instruction to David that the temple should be in Jerusalem. But the Jews found their alternative temple offensive.

Knowing the normal attitude of Jewish men towards women, and knowing something of the way Jews felt about Samaritans, we can understand why Jesus has to begin the conversation with this woman. We can learn a great deal from the way he treats her. Remember, he's a man, he's Jewish, he's educated, he's living completely according to God's will; she's a woman, she's a Samaritan, she's uneducated, and her lifestyle is totally at odds with the Jewish law. And yet, Jesus speaks to her compassionately and sensitively; he speaks to her as a person in her own right. To Jesus, she's not just a sinner who needs to repent, she's a unique individual, created by God, and with her own history, her own dreams, her own disappointments and frustrations in life. In short, Jesus loves her; he loves her enough to break some strong social taboos to speak to her, and to listen to her. Jesus respects her; he respects her enough to spend time explaining spiritual truth to her, in terms which she can understand. And Jesus cares for her; he cares for her enough to challenge her about her lifestyle, which she must know falls far short of God's best.

We don't know anything about what happened to this woman after Jesus left Sychar, but for her, the simple fact of being treated with dignity and respect by a Jewish man must have had a very deep effect. We do know that Jesus changed her life, just as Jesus changes the life of every person who meets him without prejudice.

I'm sure most of you here today could tell us from your own experience that Jesus is still in the business of changing lives today. When anyone meets Jesus for the first time, and allows Jesus to show his love, his respect and his care for them, their life will be changed. If you haven't had that experience yourself, and you want to know Jesus for yourself, please don't hesitate to talk to me afterwards, or to a Christian friend.

The next thing that happens is that . . .

### **THE WOMAN TELLS THE VILLAGERS**

We can see that this woman's life has begun to change because she can't wait to go back and tell everyone in the town about Jesus. She's excited. She's so excited that she can't keep quiet.

People who've only just met Jesus for themselves are often very excited about him. There was a guy on my course at University, called Stefan. I didn't know him very well, and I didn't want to, because he gave the impression of being a neo-Nazi. But during the year which all the language students spent abroad, Stefan became a Christian. When he got back, he was really excited about it. One of his friends complained to me that Stefan would never stop talking about Jesus!

One commentator says, 'There are no more attractive evangelists than those who've newly discovered Jesus'<sup>1</sup>. People like that often challenge the rest of us. Stefan may have put his friend off at first, but at least he told him about Jesus, which was more than I'd ever done! The challenge for those of us who've been Christians for a while is to go on being excited about Jesus, so excited that we can't help telling

other people about him. They're certainly not going to be interested if we're not excited, enthusiastic, passionate, like the woman in the story is.

## **CONCLUSION**

By the end of the passage, the people of Sychar had come to know that Jesus is the Saviour of the World. They came to this knowledge through a series of events, beginning with Jesus breaking with convention and starting a conversation with the woman at the well.

None of us would be here today if Jesus hadn't taken the initiative with us, if he hadn't *chosen* to enter into a relationship with us. Isn't it amazing to think that the Creator of the universe wants to know us, that he wants to be in a relationship with us? Let's always give thanks to God for his love for us.

The woman was excited, and rushed off to tell other people about this amazing man she'd just met. Let's ask God to fill us with joy and excitement, so that we can't help but tell people about Jesus.

By the end of the story, the people of Sychar had come to know Jesus for themselves, and they believed in him. Let's remember that we can't have a relationship with Jesus at second hand; each of us has to have our own personal relationship with him.

Jesus came *to seek and to save what was lost* (Luke 19:10). The amazing thing is, he chooses to depend on *us* to point people towards

him. As he tells his disciples in verse 38, he sends us to reap the harvest, to show people how to have their own relationship with Jesus. Not everyone wants that relationship; some of the people we bring to Jesus will choose to reject him. But let's remember that they don't have that choice unless we do our job, bringing them to Jesus in the first place.

So let's pray:

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Milne, [The Message of John: Here is your King!](#), (IVP, Leicester, 1993), p 86