

8. John 4:1-42

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Getting started

When do you speak with people who may be thought to have nothing in common with you?

How does it go?

Observation

1. Where is Samaria, who were the Samaritans, and what was the general relationship between the Jews and Samaritans? (Samaria is north of Jerusalem, between Judea and Galilee. It is the direct way between these two areas of Jesus' ministry. The Samaritans believed in the first 5 books of Scripture, but not the rest. They worshiped on Mount Gerizim, not in Jerusalem. There was distrust and animosity between the Samaritans and Jews.)
2. What were the social implications of Jesus talking to, and accepting drink from, an unaccompanied Samaritan woman?
3. What are the theological implications of Jesus being thirsty? (He was 'truly human'. He had become 'flesh' (1:4))
4. Rather than being defiled by taking something from the Samaritan woman, Jesus sanctifies what he touches. What did Jesus offer the woman?
5. What questions were going through the woman's mind?
6. What does Jesus know about the woman, and what does this show about Jesus?
7. What does the relational status of the woman suggest about her moral standing in her community?
8. Why might the woman change the subject to their differences in theology? (Some suggest it is to avoid talking about her sin. But it may be she was genuinely interested in their theological differences.)
9. How would you summarise Jesus' teaching in verses 21-24?
10. It is sometimes suggested that Jesus was just a good teacher, and did not identify as God's Messiah. Is this supported by verses 25-26? (It is possible Jesus discloses himself as the Messiah to a Samaritan, but not so overtly to Jews, because the Jews attached too many political and military implications to the title.)
11. What is the 'food' Jesus offers, what is the harvest, and who are the sower and the reaper?
12. What was the value of the woman's testimony?

Interpretation

1. What links are there between this story and the earlier stories in John? (Water symbolism, baptism, Jesus disclosing himself as the fulfilment of OT promises and purification.)
2. What did Jesus think he could offer? (i.e. look for the meaning behind the metaphors of living water and food, but also consider how he lifted the woman in to new relations with her people.)
3. In what way(s) was Jesus greater than Jacob? (Jacob needed a deep well to get water. Jesus needed no well for his living water and offered the means (living water) to eternal life.)
4. Why did many of the Samaritans believe in Jesus?
5. What does this say about Jesus' awareness of his mission?

Implications

1. How refreshing is living water?
2. How should we assess growth in the church?
3. What social/cultural boundaries do we need to cross to share the good news of Jesus? (Try to be specific.)

Prayer suggestions

1. That we may accept the free gift of living water.
2. That we can embody the freedom from sin, the possibility of new relations, and the joy in sharing the gospel, that are so evident in this woman.

Notes:

The misunderstanding we saw when Nicodemus confronted the concept of being born again continues here with misunderstandings about the nature and effect of living water. More of God's humour?

The sixth hour is probably about midday (i.e. six hours after dawn). Normally people fetched water at the start of the day. The timing in this story probably suggests she was an outcast in her own community.

Some commentators have criticised the gospel of John as being 'anti-semitic', because he has some harsh things to say about the Jews. However, here he explains that at least the Jews know the God they worship, and affirms that salvation is from the Jews. This does not mean all Jews will be saved, but it is positive about the Jewish religion which Jesus fulfils.

There are too many OT references in this passage to mention here. Your appreciation of this story will be greatly enhanced by reading a commentary on this passage, e.g. Don Carson's, *The Gospel According to John*.