

Title: An unlikely conversation – John 4v1-42

Purpose: To observe the stages by which a woman gains increasing & deeper IMPRESSIONS of Jesus until the full light of day breaks through and she beholds him as the Messiah and as her Saviour.

INTRODUCTION

If there's any well-known parable of Jesus that has a Samaritan in it – it is that one that we call "The parable of the Good Samaritan".

This morning we kind of have the reverse – this is a true story and not a made up parable, and more than that it is about a Samaritan who is very evidently a BAD SAMARITAN and not a good one!

Take stories one by one

It is often the case that when we come to a new story, and this morning we are with Jesus and the Samaritan woman, that we tend to assume that in every way we are starting something afresh.

Now while there is undoubtedly a lot of truth in that, and stories are refreshingly new each time, we should also see that they may be stronger links with previous stories (or ones about to come than we realise).

Contrasts and comparisons

Now for there to be a valid connection between stories doesn't of course mean that the linkage must be something the stories or the characters have **in COMMON** – it can frequently be the reverse – it can be **the CONTRASTS**.

Just take Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman and do a quick side-by-side comparison:

- he was **highly educated** – she was **hardly educated**
- he was **respected** – she was **despised**
- he was definitely part of the "**in crowd**" – she was in a "**crowd of UNO** – of 1"
- he was **powerful** – she was **held no sway whatsoever**
- he was a **ruler of others** – she was one **ruled over by others**
- he was a **man with all the privileges** that that brought – she was a **woman with no hint of any privilege**
- he was a **man of pure Jewish origin** – she was a Samaritan with **mixed-race heritage**
(the Samaritan race only dated back to around 720 BC when the King of Assyria had conquered Samaria – deported all the worthy people and then imported people from the East, who then intermarried to form what became the Samaritans)
- he was **one with a full and fine religion** – she was **one with an incomplete and a folk religion**
(the Samaritan's only had the first 5 OT books that they accepted as true)

So on first inspection, you certainly wouldn't think these two would ever come together in the same breath. But then again, there are a few things that might indicate that they had stuff in common:

- For both of them, at the start, they get the wrong end of the stick twice as they assume Jesus is just talking purely at a NATURAL, MATERIAL and PHYSICAL level
- For both of them, the setting is completely PRIVATE – there is no-one else there, no crowd, no disciples – just

a straight one-on-one AUDIENCE with Jesus

- For both of them, had others known of this HIDDEN and PRIVATE CONVERSATION, it would have ruffled people's sensitivities, it would have been a source of no little SCANDAL
- In both of the cases, Jesus loses little time to get right to the nub of the matter – so we see that each one is actually just as needy as the other.

I suppose you could express that by saying that they were both TARRED with the same BRUSH OF SIN, with the self-same DEEP INNER PROBLEM, just wrapped up in very different clothing.

Jesus avoids the spotlight

Well let's get into the flow of the story.

The opening 6 verses set the scene and give us the TRIGGER for Jesus being here by this well.

We are told that the Pharisees in Judea (that is the Southern part of Palestine), had become aware that Jesus' disciples were now doing much more baptising than John the Baptist.

Q. So what did that really mean?

Well simply that the spotlight of interest was now swapping over from John to Jesus and so Jesus now makes AN EVASIVE MANOEUVRE and begins the journey which will take him back to Galilee where his home and headquarters is.

Jesus does this because his life is governed by a SINGLE FACTOR which he will not permit to be COMPROMISED by too much attention from the wrong people at the wrong time.

As Verse 32 and Verse 34 tell us:

"I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

"My food", said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

Jesus hits the road

So Jesus hits the road and heads North to Galilee.

Now that gives him a couple of choices:

- **EITHER** - he can **cross the Jordan River into the TransJordan** and then travel up on the East side of the River and then cross back again when he hits Galilee – travel time 6 days.
- **OR** - he can take **the motorway** that heads straight up and takes just half the time.

Q. Now why would anybody want to take the slow and windy road?

Well simply because of **what was in the way**.

Samaria was a strip of territory that, under Roman rule, was considered to be simply a part of Judea, however, the Jews had a very long-standing feud with the Samaritans and they often would prefer avoiding them at all costs (even an extra 3 days of travel inconvenience)!

And hence he arrives, after half a day of travel, at a famous well – one called **Jacob's Well**, going all the way back to the great Patriarch himself.

It is the 6th Hour – which is midday – so not surprising that Verse 6 tells us that Jesus was both **WEARY** and **THIRSTY** given that this would be a very hot part of the day.

Four Impressions

Ok – that was a bit of background to bring us up to speed and to bring us to the conversation between Jesus and this “bad Samaritan” as you might call her.

It is worth noting that the conversation goes through 4 consecutive stages of knowledge and insight.

I suppose if you wanted an illustration, somewhat in keeping with the story – then perhaps we might imagine this Samaritan woman climbing up Jacob’s ladder one rung at a time and getting nearer to the brilliant & revealing light of heaven.

Through these four changing impressions, THE STAKES ARE PROGRESSIVELY BEING RAISED A NOTCH AT A TIME.

The **impressions** are as follows (and I think you will be pretty easily able to spot them in the passage):

- **Impression 1** – You are a Jew! (An exclamation)
- **Impression 2** – You are greater than Jacob? (A question)
- **Impression 3** – You are a prophet! (Another exclamation)
- **Impression 4** – You are the Messiah? (A question)

IMPRESSION #1 – “You are a Jew!”

So we are now at Verse 7 and this is where the action begins and the conversation gets underway.

Notice that it is Jesus who takes the initiative and begins with something **VERY NATURAL** – I’m thirsty – so “Will you give me a drink?”.

And the reason I start with that is **because many of us find it difficult to know how to converse with people who don’t subscribe to Christianity.**

You have probably heard people say something along the lines of:

“I don’t have a problem with talking about Christianity, it’s just that I have absolutely no clue how to turn the conversation around to Spiritual things.”

I think this is a very common experience and very possibly you find that a source of real frustration and perhaps even a hefty piece of guilt too.

I think we can learn a couple of lessons here from the way that Jesus proceeds:

- **FIRST OF ALL** – he is VERY HUMAN and he allows his life to overlap with others. The reality is that Jesus is 100% divine BUT he is also 100% human and he connects first via his humanity, his thirst.

We should always remember that there are probably more things that we have in common with people than things which make us very different.

We all have hopes and fears – we all have joys and sorrows – we all know what it is to be well and to be sick etc. etc.

- **SECONDLY** – he is VERY NATURAL.

Now Jesus knows that him asking for a drink from a woman and a Samaritan woman at that – is *NOT EXACTLY THE DONE THING* - however, he just asks in an entirely NATURAL WAY if she could give him a drink.

And she answers also, in a NATURAL WAY, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?”

Now thinking about this there are a couple of things that could have happened here: ONE is that Jesus could have simply FILTERED OUT whatever might have carried any SURPRISE or caused any EYEBROWS TO BE RAISED. Q. Do you do FILTERING?

Q. I wonder if our conversations are *NOT* Chicken Soup but Consomme? You know how we serve up conversations that are sieved of all those pieces and chunks of goodness. And thus there is no spark or trigger left to get the conversation going on.

The SECOND thing that Jesus could have done was to have got a bit fidgety and embarrassed by his request and subsequent conversation.

Q. Do you know why babies often cry when someone else takes them? Well very often it comes down to the fact that the person who is taking them is giving off vibes that they are **nervous** and **unsure** and the baby immediately senses this and feels insecure.

Q. I wonder what vibes you give off when you converse with people and you introduce something SPIRITUAL – God, Church, The Bible or even Jesus!! ?

Let me read you a section that really resonated with me when I read “**Out of the saltshaker**” By [Becky Manley Pippert](#) and the section actually comes from the opening words of the Foreward written by [Walter Trobisch](#):

“This is a book about the **second turning**. In the **first turning**, a Christian experiences the transformation from **A NATURAL PERSON TO A SPIRITUAL PERSON**. Instead of “self” being the center of life — exploring, cultivating, adoring it — God becomes the center. This miracle is brought forth by the Holy Spirit giving us new life in Christ. It is a necessary, indispensable, basic step. But it is only a first step.

The work of the Holy Spirit should not stop here but lead to a **second turning** in which the **SPIRITUAL PERSON AGAIN BECOMES NATURAL**. It is this **second turning** which enables Christians to communicate their faith. The **second turning** makes communication of faith – evangelism – something they are unable not to do. It becomes natural.”

[You are a Jew! \(Verse 8\)](#)

Now in [Verse 8](#) we have the Samaritan woman’s first response, her first impression of Jesus which shows her surprise:

“You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?”

Q. What was the reason for her shocked surprise? Well two things here – and you may well be familiar with them if you know something of the history and the culture of Jesus times:

- **FIRST** – the Samaritans, as a separate racial group within the Jewish confines of Palestine, were considered as an impure racial group. Historically they had their origin directly following the time of 722BC when the King of Assyria deported the vast majority of people from the Northern Kingdom (whose capital city was Samaria) and then they replaced them by importing non-Jews from all the various lands of the East. Naturally intermarriage took place and the end result was a new racial & cultural entity called the Samaritans who only received the first five books of the Hebrew bible – that is the Torah, the Law.

Because of this they were never accepted as properly Jewish or having any part with Israel as the true and pure people of God. (So perhaps you remember the book of Nehemiah and how the advances of the Samaritan people to help them rebuild the temple in Jerusalem was firmly rejected.)

The end result was that the Samaritans established their very own temple on Mount Gerazim and then much later in 110BC this was destroyed by Hyrcanus II.

So there was plenty of “bad-blood” between the Jews and the Samaritans, as Verse 9 tells us “(For Jews do not associate with Samaritans).

- **SECOND** – Orthodox Jews were a very male oriented culture and they would not contemplate a public conversation with a woman. It is known of the time that a Rabbi would not greet a woman in public EVEN if it was his own wife!!

There was a **group of Pharisees**, at the time of Jesus, who got the name the “**BRUISED & BLEEDING**”. They had such a strict policy that whenever they saw a woman in the street they would avert their eyes – the end result being that they would all too-often crash into things in the process!!

So her INITIAL IMPRESSION is one of definite surprise in relation to Jesus because he doesn’t seem to travel along the well established paths of religious & cultural etiquette- thus she says “You are a Jew!”

IMPRESSION #2 “You are greater than Jacob?”

Now Jesus continues the fledgling conversation in Verse 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**.’”

Now the woman, just as Nicodemus had done, takes Jesus’ words at the literal level and for her “living water” would translate to “running water” as opposed to stored water (such as in a cistern or that at the bottom of a deep well).

She therefore responds, Verse 11:

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

Not an open or serious question

At this point, I really don’t think that the woman’s question about Jesus being “greater than Jacob”, the great Patriarch, is thorough open or serious question. In fact, I would say she is very sceptical, perhaps even somewhat

DISMISSIVE – rather like Nathanael (if you remember back to our FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS back in John 1 – where he said “Can anything good come from Nazareth!”).

An opportunity to raise the stakes

For Jesus, her words are the opportunity to raise the stakes further:

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

One thing that comes pretty clear in John’s gospel is that the theme of LIFE is a very strong one along with other themes such as BELIEF or BELIEVING. (The word comes up 50 times which is the same as Matthew, Mark & Luke put together – and it isn’t “any old life” because 33x it is ETERNAL LIFE that is in view).

Jesus is certainly starting to get the woman’s attention, but her thinking is still very **MATERIAL IN ORIENTATION** as her response shows:

Verse 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.**”

Q. What would you do?

Now let me ask you – Q.. What would you do at this point?

Everything Jesus says, which is spiritual in nature, this woman either **DEFLECTS, DISMISSES** or simply “**DOES NOT UNDERSTAND**”.

It is very tempting to give up – but this passage does serve as an encouragement **TO PERSERVERE**.

Let’s go onto the THIRD IMPRESSION:

IMPRESSION #3 – “You are a prophet!”

Now arriving at **Verse 16** – it does seem like the natural back and forth of the **dialogue** is suddenly JARRED – Jesus says appears to very ABRUPTLY change the direction of the **conversation**:

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

Christianity – involves 2 revelations

I think there is an important principle at play here that we are PRONE TO FORGET – and that is that Christianity (and maybe I should say true biblical Christianity, as there seem to be so many flavours around these days) involves TWO REVELATIONS and not just ONE.

Q. What do I mean?

- Well, we have the REVELATION (by which I simply mean ‘revealing’) of the knowledge of God Himself – (and this is certainly the PRIMARY KNOWLEDGE that gets revealed in Scripture and in other ways).
- HOWEVER, there is also that SECONDARY KNOWLEDGE which is also very vital and that is the knowledge of ourselves.

FRESH for STALE - awareness

Jesus knows that the woman will hardly exchange one water for another UNLESS she comes to see that what she has is STALE and what is offered is FRESH.

Another way of saying this is that the Samaritan woman is **NOT AWARE OF HER REAL NEED**.

Just like Nicodemus

In this she is exactly like Nicodemus who had no idea that he needed to begin at the beginning and be BORN OVER AGAIN (Born from the beginning) and similarly BORN FROM ABOVE where his own learning and religious achievement could have not even the slightest contribution.

Teenager story – brainwashed!

The story is told of a teenager who truly came right through to faith in Jesus. On telling **his friends** and especially **his parents**, they **took the position that he had obviously been brainwashed**.

His reply showed the reality of his coming to faith – for he would say to them:

“If you had seen my brain, you would have known that it needed washing!”

Such a key moment in the story

Right here at this point we have such a key moment – because up until now, the woman realises that her life is not the best, BUT she does **NOT REALISE THAT SHE IS ACTUALLY THIRSTY**.

Dehydration

I don't know if you are aware but “**CHRONIC DEHYDRATION**” (that is being inattentive to your actual THIRST over a prolonged period of time) is sometimes called “**THE SILENT KILLER**”.

And Jesus wants to open this woman's eyes to the fact that she is REALLY THIRSTY and yet has not realised it. The reason she has not realised it is because she has masked the thirst by, in her case, a diet of husbands and men.

Tim Keller, commenting on this passage, puts it like this:

“Something gets in the way of our hearing what Jesus is talking about, and I think it's that most of us aren't able to recognize our soul thirst for what it is.

As long as you think there is a pretty good chance that you will achieve some of your dreams, as long as you think you have a shot at success, **you experience your inner emptiness as 'drive' and your anxiety as 'hope'**.

And so you can remain almost completely oblivious to how deep your thirst actually is. Most of us tell ourselves that the reason we remain unfulfilled is because we simply haven't been able to achieve your goals. And so we can live almost our entire lives without admitting to ourselves the depth of your spiritual thirst.”

So this is why Jesus places on the table for this woman to see THAT WITH WHICH SHE HAS BEEN TRYING (clearly unsuccessfully) TO SLAKE HER THIRST, her Spiritual Thirst.

Q. Have you ever wondered why things and dreams and ambitions never actually satisfy us even if we do achieve them?

Well it has to do with the fact that we are hard-wired to worship and the object of our worship is so large and all-consuming that the FACULTY of our hearts is truly huge and thus it cannot even begin to be adequately filled up by created things.

Admit and neutralise

It is interesting seeing the woman's response – she kind of does an “ADMIT AND NEUTRALISE” response.

She has no choice but to admit that Jesus has hit the SWEET SPOT or possibly the SORE SPOT – thus she grants that he must be a PROPHET – given that no one could know her whole life story without it ever having been told him – but she goes onto NEUTRALISE it's effect by launching into a religious “RED-HERRING”.

Q. Has anyone ever done that with you?

You have a great conversation and you have made some very strong arguments for Christianity and the truth of what is written in the bible – and then they say something along the lines of:

“Well of course Christianity has been the cause of so much conflict in the world – those Crusades were pretty inexcusable, all done in the name of the Bible!!”

Well **Jesus is**, as one former British Prime Minister famously said, “**Not for turning...**” and so we ratchet up to ONE FINAL IMPRESSION, the most important of all:

IMPRESSION #4 – “You are the Messiah?”

Reading from Verse 19 (thru to Verse 26) ***READ***

An old polarising chestnut

The woman probably thought she had dealt Jesus a bit of a fatal blow by asking “Who's right when it comes to the correct temple?” This was like **an old chestnut** that had simply served to polarize and divide opinion depending on whether you were a Jew OR whether you were a Samaritan.

But Jesus simply says, in effect, **you are wrong in your basic assumptions here – in the future there will be NO NEED OF A PHYSICAL TEMPLE, in order to have access to God.**

Later on the Apostle Paul would put this reality in writing in the 2nd chapter of the letter to the Ephesians where, speaking of Christ:

“For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”

And then again 3 verses further on he would add:

“In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

True worshippers

Q. So what does Jesus tell the woman that she needs to become? Well – the simple answer is “A TRUE WORSHIPPER”.

The sobering truth is that we are all worshippers, who ever we are – religious or non-religious.

If that is a statement that you would strongly take issue with – have a listen to the words of a non-religious man giving a graduation speech at a university a few years back – this is a man called David Foster Wallace, one who the Guardian newspaper called “the most brilliant American writer of his generation”:

*“In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God or spiritual-type thing to worship — **is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive.** If you worship money and things — if they are where you tap real meaning in life — then you will never have enough. Never feel you have enough. It’s the truth. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you. On one level, we all know this stuff already — the trick is keeping the truth up-front in daily consciousness. Worship power — you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart — you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. And so on.”*

Eaten alive?

(I read the whole speech online and it is very insightful – the saddest thing is that that speech was used afterwards **In Memoriam** as just 3 years later he took his own life – almost as if it was for him a self-fulfilling prophecy that the things you worship can have the power to virtually “eat you alive”.)

Now Jesus does not wish that for any of us – and even though the woman appears to delay again saying “that when Messiah comes he will explain everything to us” Jesus does not allow any more prevaricating.

Verse 26 “Then Jesus declared, ‘**I who speak to you am he**’.”

At that moment all her defences finally fell, the shutters that she had been trying to pull down finally exploded upwards like those old-style blinds tha were very springy.

Finally now she accepts everything without any more resistance – in fact RESISTANCE is replaced by RECEIVING in equal or greater measure.

CONCLUSION

Let me close with 2 QUESTIONS:

FIRSTLY: Q. How do we know that she has now embraced Jesus as her Saviour?

Because she now has A CLEAR TESTIMONY.

Verse 29 “**Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?**”

(By which she is not expressing her own continuing doubt – rather she is expressing the suggestion that they come and determine what she has already determined)

Verse 39 “**He told me everything I ever did.**”

You have to admit that is a PRETTY STRIKING & POWERFUL TESTIMONY.

SECONDLY: Q. Are you willing to follow the example set by all the local people who heard her testimony?

The end section reads from **Verse 39ff** *****READ*****

See the example in the last verse:

“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 Saviour of the world.”

You have to admit that this chapter does give us, by degrees, a stonger and stronger impression of Jesus:

- as a real man
- as one beyond Jacob
- as a true prophet
- AND as the Messiah – Saviour of the World

A final thought

A final thought just for good measure:

- the first time in John’s gospel that Jesus says: “I thirst”

a spiritually de-hydrated woman and her town gets saved
- the last time in John’s gospel that Jesus says: “I thirst”

is upon the cross where he is actually experiencing spiritual thirst and deprivation so that the whole world may have its ULTIMATE THIRST QUENCHED.

I leave you with an invitation from **Isaiah 55**:

Isaiah 55 verses 1-3:

“Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.
2 Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labour on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.
3 Give ear and come to me;
hear me, that your soul may live.
I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
my faithful love promised to David. “

AMEN