

## Spirit and Truth: Evangelism & Worship

John 4:4-26

Our journey with John has covered Who Jesus is, that God's new wine can only be poured into new wineskins, and that such wineskins are God's gift when we are Born Again! As we head into Chapter 4 John seeks to draw a contrast between two conversations (one in Chapter 3 with Nicodemus: male, highly learned teacher, Pharisee and a member of Sanhedrin, and now one with a unnamed woman: female, a bad Samaritan, illiterate, with a lifestyle opposed to the law, publicly despised and ostracised): ***Yet both needed Jesus!*** What John wants us to notice is that Jesus was at home with both and presents the good news in a way that is meaningful and attractive to both of them. A story is told of a famous Christian speaker who concluded his sermon before an enthralled crowd of thousands, and then swept off the platform while the final hymn was being sung, his entourage leading the way. A young man stepped out in front of them, eyes bright with inspiration, desperate to ask the great man a brief question. 'Excuse me, Sir', he said, 'do you have just a moment?' The 'celebrity' preacher was swift in his reply: 'Frankly, young man, I don't.' And then he was gone. The crestfallen look on the young man's face showed his acute disappointment. In his stirring rhetoric, the preacher had expressed his willingness to die for the gospel - but he was not prepared to be interrupted for it. Someone far more important than that man was willing to be interrupted when a woman came to collect water from a well. Her arrival came at the worst possible time, and in less than ideal circumstances. The location was shady and dangerous; the road to Shechem was known as a place of murderers (Hosea 6:9), and the town of Sychar had a reputation as a place of drunkards and liars. So a casual chat with a stranger was not such a good idea. Jesus was heading back to Galilee through Samaria, because he does not want to involve himself in the competitiveness game that was being played by the religious. He comes to Sychar and the

disciples go off to get some food: Jesus is hungry and weary, it's the sixth hour (noon) and hot, so he sits (sat: to be preoccupied with nothing) down by Jacobs Well: here is the Word made Flesh who embodies the heights of divinity having to balance that with the realities of his humanity! So then here comes a woman - in a culture where men didn't salute women, even less Samaritan women - and this woman had quite a reputation. To top it all Jesus didn't have his own bucket, so would have been made ceremonially unclean by drinking from hers. 'Will you give me a drink?' he says to the Samaritan Women.... But his request is censured! I'm a Samaritan and a woman!

On the death of Solomon the Assyrians took the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722BC and resettled it with foreigners: this led to a loss of racial and religious purity, and they went on to build their own Temple on Mount Gerizim about 400BC: So Samaritans were out as far as orthodox Jews were concerned! The Torah says: one should not talk with a woman on the street, not even with His own wife, and certainly not with somebody else's wife, because of the gossip of men, and it is forbidden to give a woman a greeting.

So Women were out too!

Malcolm Muggeridge says: "I may, I suppose, regard myself, or pass for being, a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets - that's fame. I can fairly easily earn enough to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the Inland Revenue - that's success. Furnished with money and a little fame even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of trendy diversions - that's pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time - that's fulfilment. Yet I say to you, and I beg you to believe me, multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing - less than nothing, a positive impediment -

measured against one draught of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty, irrespective of who or what they are". So Jesus offers the Samaritan woman a draught of living water. The woman like Nicodemus misunderstands the allusion thinking that this must a magic water source and him with no bucket! Jesus needed to clarify further and did (v.13) but she still looks at it in the flesh as a labour saving option. So Jesus operating in the power of the Holy Spirit through Word of Knowledge asks a key question about her husband. This brings her to the point of realising the relational desert she was in and the oasis only Jesus could give her.

So here is a model for Personal Evangelism John is giving the Church: Jesus has much to teach us about sharing our faith!

His Relevance: the whole conversation is couched in terms which the women could understand. Even when Jesus attempts to take her beyond present experience by talking about Eternal Life, his teaching is shaped by her experience (so, living water), and she is given handles from her experience to help to grasp it.

*Be Relevant! We need to be in relationship with the person and aware of what has/is shaping their life.*

His Humanity: & Naturalness. At no point does Jesus appear odd! The conversation appears to flow easily, despite the major social taboos which Jesus is breaking and the profoundly markedly distinct lifestyle of the woman. Jesus is clearly 'at ease' with her, which frees her to confront her deepest needs.

*Be Real! The world says : get real! The Holy Spirit fills that hole that nothing else can fill.*

His knowledge: He is well aware of the woman's lifestyle and background, but also of the finer points of the historic relationship between the Jews and Samaritans, and so can relate competently to her questions. Whilst clearly supernatural dimensions appear in the story, much of Jesus' knowledge had come from a dedicated study of the scriptures in his early years

and his willingness to acquaint himself with the social and religious history of his people.

*Deal in Reality: build up basic knowledge. How's your working knowledge of other faiths and sects such as J.W's & Mormons? Slamming the door in their face or telling them they are wrong will probably simply deepen their wrong caricature of Christians.*

His Moral Integrity: and directions. What Jesus offers her is no easy believism. The effects of the fall in her life are not swept under the carpet. The woman's response to Jesus' invitation was an emotional one, but it was also moral, involving new relationships and a new sensitivity to her behaviour.

*No Compromise on God's righteousness: no need to water down the Gospel.*

His Positive Presentation: Although the moral needs of the woman are confronted and the call to repentance is issued, Jesus' presentation is a thoroughly positive and winsome one. He plainly tells the woman what she is offered (Eternal Life), and he takes pains to ensure that she grasps the full terms of it.

*Be Encouraging!*

His refusal to be side-tracked: Jesus' goal is clear and he keeps it in sight: i.e. the woman putting her faith in Him. The question concerning the Jew/Samaritan divide is not dismissed, but neither is it allowed to deflect Jesus.

*Keep to the point and avoid red-herrings or secondary issues!*

His Compassion and Sensitivity: Throughout the entire conversation Jesus deals with her as a person in her own right, with her unique history and special longings. She emerges in the account as a credible character with personal dignity because Jesus treats her as such. Simple put, Jesus loved her, and was prepared to breach age-old conventions' to reach her. ***Our failures in evangelism are so often failures in love.*** Nothing is so guaranteed to draw others to share our living water than an awareness that we genuinely care about them. ***People want to know that we care before they care about what we know.***

*Let your passion and love for the lost shine through in practical ways.*

Lets look out for that irritating interruption to our carefully choreographed schedules. It could just be a set-up. From Heaven! Jesus concludes his conversation with the Samaritan women with some teaching on worship: First he speaks of the Critical Hour (the time has come): of His Exaltation through Death & Resurrection. The location of the Temple Gerizim or Jerusalem would become an obsolete issue. Temple worship would be replaced by a new 'spirit and truth' worship based on His sacrifice and living presence: please God that our worship area never becomes an obsolete Temple either! But he goes on to say that the OT revelation is still valid and should be preserved and cherished by the Jews, so don't throw the baby out with the bath water. It still gives a true knowledge of God. Hence despite their periodic apostasy, the Jews remain the historic vehicle for the coming of God's salvation to the World. Jesus' renewal of worship will therefore be based on the OT revelation and will affirm it whilst transforming it! Again, for St Andrews, that means keeping our roots strong and fresh in Scripture rather than in tradition. The time for true worship is now at hand because Jesus is now at hand. This is worship in Spirit and Truth. He is the Truth. He receives and dispenses the Spirit to all who believe in Him, a dispensing experienced as a second birth (Born Again). True worship is accordingly the worship offered through the Son and in living faith - union with Him by means of the Holy Spirit. The same conclusion is reached by another route in v24. The Spiritual nature of God (God is Spirit) means self evidently that we cannot relate to God satisfactorily in physical terms. He is invisible and intangible and hence beyond our immediate sense-apprehension. For God to be known and focused by us, thus making worship possible, He must take the initiative to disclose Himself to us. This He has done initially in the OT Scriptures (v22 the Jews know whom they are worshiping). But further and fuller revelation

of God is now at hand in the Son who makes the Father known (1:18). Hence we reach the same conclusion. True and Satisfactory worship is worship offered in and through Jesus Christ; only through the truth He embodies, and the spirit He imparts, can we know God and worship Him.

Finally Jesus highlights some hindrances to worship:

**Wrong Practices:** The woman illustrates the principle! Until her life is put right and its failures addressed, true worship cannot happen for her. This was Israel's error throughout the OT period, the assumption that if the externals of worship were in place, God would be satisfied. He was not and is not today! (Amos 5:22-24). This is not to imply that worship is possible only for perfect people, but God does seek a sincere and humble dependence upon Him and a genuine commitment to live in obedience to him. 'the sacrifices of God are a broken Spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.' (Psalm 51:17)

**Wrong Priorities:** In essence this was the error of the Jews and Samaritans who were locked in conflict over where worship should take place, largely unaware that the long-awaited messiah who was sent to renew their entire relationship with God, was at that very time in their midst. It is not difficult to see that the Church today stands in danger of a similar imbalance. Issues are endlessly debated, such as the type of music to be used in worship. Should hands be raised or kept down? Should one particular form of words be used or should there be complete spontaneity? And should worship be led by one leader or should many participate? These look suspiciously like the issues raised by the woman in the passage. They are concerned with form rather than the heart of worship. In fact it is beyond question that true and sincere worship can be and is offered using each of these alternatives I mention. It is also true that insincere and unworthy worship is offered using each of the same alternatives. Decisions about form are often in essence matters of taste and temperament and should be seen as such. One of the implications

of the fact that God is spirit is that no form can ever be made the absolute one. No worship form can, or ever will, meet every need. If it did it would detract from the Glory that is God's alone. The true priority is the content of worship, worship from the heart which truly exalts God.

**Wrong Perceptions:** This last barrier concerns wrong perceptions, particularly about who God is and about our relationship to Him. Since God is Spirit we can worship Him truly only as we bring our worship to the test of His Self-Revelation in His Word. Worship should therefore, be Bible-Centred and at the same time Christ-Centred, for He is at the heart of the Bible, the truth embodied (1:14), and the one through whom the Spirit is given (7:38-39). One clear implication is that where worship is not explicitly through Jesus Christ, it falls under our Lord's direction of worship of what you do not know. If that is said of Samaritan worship which was based, at least part, on the OT, how much more must it be said of the worship in non-Christian traditions. Only in and through Jesus Christ, the Son who alone is 'at the Father's side', can the Father be truly known and worshipped. There is in these verses a supreme incentive to worship: 'they are the kind of worshippers...the Father seeks' (v23), and nothing so encourages our approach to Him than to realise this. Our worship incredible as it may appear in our eyes matters immensely to Him. He gave His only Son to make it possible. To you and me, he has said, 'Seek my Face!' (Psalm 27:8). If we truly believe that, then we shall echo back from full and exultant hearts, 'Your Face, Lord, I will seek!'

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