

# The Samaritan Woman at the Well: John 4:1-42

August 21, 2022

## Intro:

If you have been to Toronto, you probably know about Nathan Philips Square, town hall – it is a hub of activity in the middle of the city. Individuals come from all over to visit, people take photos with the Toronto sign, festivals, events, and concerts frequent the square, and in the winter, people come together for Christmas markets, lights displays, and to skate. It is a place of connection, community, and conversation.

But at night, as the sun goes down, things shift. The tourists and visitors leave, and a different group of people come to the square. These individuals are not welcomed during the day and are intentionally displaced during the hustle and bustle of the square.

Each night, individuals who are homeless and living on the streets return to the square. And that is where we meet our friends. One night myself and a team from Cornerstone were visiting those sleeping in the square. While our team talked with another individual, I noticed a man hunched over on a bench. I went over and said hello. He then stood up in front of me. He must have been three times my size, he was big, burly, and did not look too happy that I came to say hello.

I wasn't so sure what to do in that moment, I wasn't sure what to say as I looked up at this man who was so different than me. I asked how he was doing, he shook his head, "Not so good." "What's up?" He explained to me that he had just gotten out of jail after over a decade and was now homeless and on the streets. His voice was a mix of anger and sadness as he recounted the challenges and hurt of his story. All around, he was having a really hard time.

As he told his story, I got increasingly more uncomfortable, he told me about the crimes he had committed, the hurt that he had felt, and the experiences he had in jail. The conversation was uncomfortable, but my heart hurt for him. Even though I wasn't really sure what to do or what to say, I felt God prompt me, so I asked, "Can I pray for you?" He stared at me for a long moment, before his eyes soften as he nodded. So, I stood in front of this man who could not be any more different than me, and we prayed together. That prayer didn't change his life, or heal his hurt, or solve his problems. But in that moment there was peace, even as his eyes welled with tears. Jesus was there and we both felt it. It was an unlikely place and two very unlikely people, but Jesus met us there and encountered each of us in our own way.

Today we are going to explore another story of an unlikely encounter – a place where two people who could not be more different, met in a place defined by loneliness and isolation. This story is found in John four and together we are going to journey through three different acts of the story.

## Act One: An Intentional Detour. John 4:1-6.

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

## The Samaritan Woman at the Well: John 4:1-42

August 21, 2022

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

Jesus was traveling with his disciples from Judea towards Galilee. Now, the fastest possible route would take them directly through Samaria, but it wasn't that simple. Jesus was a Jew and Jews and Samaritans were enemies. They hated each other – Their cultural history was full of rift and disagreement, and religiously they didn't agree and viewed each other as unclean. The common route for Jews traveling towards Galilee would be to detour around Samaria through Perea and continue on from there. But this isn't the route that Jesus takes. It says, "Jesus *had* to go through Samaria" – Geographically Jesus didn't need to go through Samaria as most Jews would simply travel around – but Jesus didn't travel around. Jesus traveled straight into Samaria – this was an intentional choice. He travels straight into a place he is not welcome and sits down at a well.

At this time, and in much of the world today, the well was a hub of activity. It was a place of community. It was a place where woman gathered, where conversations were had, and where connections took place. These points of community would happen in the early mornings as this area was HOT, and women would gather in the mornings to avoid the heat of the day.

But this story doesn't happen in the early morning, it happens at the 6<sup>th</sup> hour, about noon. The sun was at it's highest, it would have been hot, and much of the community would have been at home resting. At this time no one would have been at the well... unless they were trying to avoid people, or were not welcome to join the others in early mornings. Jesus knew these things, but he sat and waited.

**Act Two: An Awkward Conversation.** John 4:7-26.

John 4:7-9 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) 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.<sup>[a]</sup>)

Think for a moment about how awkward this would have been. I picture this woman coming around a corner and up to this well. She is coming at midday, so is likely trying to avoid people. She comes around the corner and looks up, expecting the likely familiar sight of an empty well... But there's a person. A man. A JEWISH man. Did she hesitate? Did she pause and question whether she should go? Did she think about just turning back and returning home empty handed? Was she so done with everything that she just walked straight up without any question or hesitation?

She approaches the well and Jesus starts talking. From here the conversation gets uncomfortable. Jesus asks her for a drink. By all cultural and religious customs, he shouldn't have asked. He shouldn't have been talking to a woman at all, much less a Samaritan woman, MUCH less asking for a

## The Samaritan Woman at the Well: John 4:1-42

August 21, 2022

drink from her, someone who was considered to be unclean. She sees how awkward this all is and tries to convince him to leave, but Jesus stays.

John 4:10-15 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." "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 livestock?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 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." 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."

The awkwardness continues. Jesus starts talking about living water and she does not understand what he is talking about! Jesus speaks about a different way – a way that is so vastly different from the life she had led. She has one thing on her mind – the reason why she had come to the well in the first place. She wants water and Jesus is offering her an eternal solution to the thing that makes her trek to the well alone each day – her thirst.

John 4:16-26 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 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." "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 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. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

Jesus asks for her husband, knowing full well the answer is not that simple. Now here's an important distinction. Often, we read this story and assume that this woman was of low morals – that she was promiscuous, that she jumped between different relationships. But there are many different possibilities as to how she got to the place she was in. Her husbands could have passed away, divorced her, left her if she was unable to have children, she could have been a concubine or a servant. But in each of the possible situations, she likely would have had no choice in the matter. But whether they passed away, divorced her, or left for other reasons, she likely would still have been the point of blame and shame for the men leaving her.

## The Samaritan Woman at the Well: John 4:1-42

August 21, 2022

But this is where Jesus meets her. Right in the middle of the awkwardness and mess. He doesn't condemn or argue, but simply asks and listens. Jesus knows her story and slowly and carefully reveals more and more of who she is and who he is. Even in the awkwardness, this conversation is important and powerful. This is the longest conversation that Jesus has with anyone in the book of John and this is the first time in John that Jesus reveals himself to be the Messiah.

### Act Three: The Plot Twist John 4:27-42

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" 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. Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

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."

Talk about a plot twist. This woman who was shunned and ostracised from her community, meets a man at a well, and ends up telling leading many in her community to Jesus – personally inviting them to encounter him themselves. Jesus takes this seemingly mundane moment – a simple ask for water, and turns it into something extraordinary.

### Key Points

#### **Jesus Encounters us right where we are, at our lowest.**

Jesus intentionally detours to meet this woman right where she is, on her own turf. He plops himself right down in the middle of her story and waits for her, asking her for help. Jesus doesn't set up a big, miraculous, situation; he doesn't reveal himself in flurry of power. He meets her right in the mundane of her day to day life. And more than just coming to find her, he meets her right smack dab in

## The Samaritan Woman at the Well: John 4:1-42

August 21, 2022

the middle of her shame and loneliness. He meets her at her lowest spot, a moment of loneliness, isolated from her community, beside a quiet well.

He not only enters into her neighbourhood to encounter her, he enters into her story. He enters into uncomfortable and messy conversations. Even as she dwells on differences and gives reasons for Jesus not to stay, he doesn't leave. He doesn't argue, he doesn't condemn. He asks questions, listens, and invites her to a better way.

Just as Jesus meets this woman right where she is, Jesus meets us too. He enters into the mess of our lives, the effects of the mistakes we have made or biggest hurts we have experienced, the places we may be going to avoid the hurt of this world. He intentionally enters in, he sits and waits for us to arrive, and he listens and invites us to a better way.

### **Jesus shows us the pathway to healing.**

Jesus sees the hurt that this woman is experiencing, He knows her story. But he offers her a better way. Even as she focuses on the things that divide them, Jesus offers a better way – one of hope, community, and belonging. He offers her living water – she sees it as a solution to her physical thirst, the very thing that forced her to make the trek to the lonely well each day. But Jesus speaks of a quenching of the spiritual thirst, a way to heal the hurt in her life, a way to fill her life with the hope, love, and belonging that can only come from Jesus.

No matter where you are right now, no matter what your life or these past few years have held, Jesus is offering us the same. He is offering us that same living water that will fill the holes and gaps in our lives. He is offering a way to heal our hurt and fill our lives with hope, love, and belonging in him.

Life is HARD and these past few years have been HARD, but Jesus is inviting us to a different way. If you are looking to follow Jesus on this path to healing there are a few opportunities here at Cornerstone.

**Freedom Sessions:** <https://cornerstonechurch.ca/freedomsession/>

**Experience Jesus's Care and Healing:** <https://cornerstonechurch.ca/experience-jesus-care-healing/>

### **Our lives change when we encounter Jesus.**

Quickly this woman's story changed. After she talks with Jesus, she gets up and leaves. Just like the disciples left their nets in an act of surrender in their call to follow Jesus, this woman leaves her water jar – running to town to tell everyone. She says, <sup>29</sup> "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did." (John 4:29) And as a result, "Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the Woman's testimony." (John 4:39) Because she met the Messiah her story goes from one of shame and

## The Samaritan Woman at the Well: John 4:1-42

August 21, 2022

loneliness, to a story of many coming to know Jesus because of her. Her identity shifted, her relationship with her community shifted, and she finds meaning in her story.

She becomes an agent of change in her community – someone who tells others about Jesus, someone who brings hope, joy, and a better way to her community. When we encounter Jesus our lives change, and we become agents of change. We become people welcomers, people who invite others into the family, into the story, into a better way.

The Bible is FULL of stories of people encountering Jesus. And across all of these stories, we see that no one goes away the same after encountering the Lord. Encounters change us. How have you encountered God in your life and how has your life shifted because of it?

You may be sitting here and be able to answer that question quickly. You may have a story in your life where you encountered Jesus, where your life was shifted, where He healed you, redeemed you, met you, restored you. And praise God for that – go tell that story and invite others in, just like this woman did.

Or you may be sitting here unable to name a time that you have encountered Jesus. You may have grown up in church hearing these stories and praying the prayers, but never truly knowing God for yourself. You may be brand new to this whole thing and are just trying to figure out who this Jesus guy really is. You may feel like you have done all the right things and tried really hard, but have never met Jesus on a personal level. Your story may be so full of hurt or heartbreak that you are finding it hard to even imagine encountering God in the midst of this. You may be doing just fine on your own and feel you don't need Jesus to intervene at all at this point.

No matter where you are or what your story has held, Jesus is still longing for us. He is still intentionally entering into our stories, detouring into the unlikely places, sitting us in the awkwardness and mess, meeting us at our lowest, and giving us a better way. A way to never be thirsty again, a way to be known, welcomed, and loved.

This woman was not named, and yet she was seen, she was valued, and she encountered Jesus in a powerful way. In a place where she was to be alone, Jesus found her and changed everything. Jesus sees her exactly as she is, carrying a lifetime of hurt, loneliness, shame, and abandonment and whispers quietly, "I know it's hard. I see you. And I have a better way."

Friends, he whispers the same to us. He encounters us where we are, he shows us how to be healed, and our lives change when we encounter Him.

Let's lean in. Let's keep our eyes open and our hearts soft, waiting for his encounter.

Amen.