

**BREAKING
BOUNDARIES**



westview.org.za

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN:

**WHERE TO GO WHEN YOU
REALLY NEED A DRINK**

BREAKING BOUNDARIES

WEEK 4

The Samaritan Woman:

Where to go when you really need a drink

Some of this week's devotions was extracted, summarised and paraphrased from:

James A Harnish. 2013. *Women of the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Adrio König. 2018. *Geloofskatte in die Evangelies* (Faith Treasures in the Gospels). Vereeniging: CUM

Monday – Divisions – but Jesus approaches



John 4:4-9 (NIV) (shortened): *Now he [Jesus] had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar . . . Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. . . . 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.)*

First, the context: Samaria was once the capital city of the former Northern (10 tribes) kingdom of Israel, which was defeated and disbanded by the Assyrians *circa* 721 BC. After that, the area in general became known as Samaria and its people as Samaritans. Dr Adrio König summarises: The Samaritans were 'half-Jews'. They emerged after the ten tribes of Israel were forcibly removed by the Assyrians. Large areas were then uninhabited and the Assyrians relocated some of their own people to live and work there. This led to intermarriage between the Assyrians and the remaining Jews, and so the Samaritans were born. They still served the God of Israel, but had their own places of worship and priests. Their relationship with the Jews (mainly from the Southern kingdom of Judah) was very tense, as so often happens when

differences arise between people who are actually close to each other.

In his analysis of how the Gospel of John differs from the first three (Synoptic) Gospels, Adrio König concludes (among others) that John places greater emphasis on Jesus' interaction with individuals rather than groups. In John we see the Jesus who explains to people who He is and how He can change their lives. **This is at the heart of this story of the woman at the well.**



Prayer: Jesus, thank you for bridging divisions and reaching out to people like me. AMEN

Tuesday – More about her – and ‘mixed messages’



John 4:10 (NIV): *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”.*

The following extracts from James Harnish’s booklet provide even more perspective:

‘She came to the well at high noon. Unlike the rest of the women who came in the morning or the evening, she came in the heat of day. And unlike the other women, she came alone. She was a social outcast, a woman with a bad reputation. The respectable women in the village didn’t like her.’

‘The well .. was also the gathering place where single men came to find a wife. “Give me something to drink” was evidently an ancient Middle Eastern ‘pick-up line’. If a woman dropped her bucket into the well, you knew where this story was going. .. This woman had been to that well before. Six times, in fact, she had dropped her bucket into the well and every time it came up empty as the men in her life used and abused her.’

‘Along with her empty bucket, she carried with her the emptiness of

her broken dreams; the pain of her shattered hopes; and an inescapable thirst for one who would love her rather than use her, one who loved her for who she was and not for what he could take from her.’

This woman is sometimes portrayed as a sinner, but we can see that she may as well have been a misused (maybe even abused) woman, possibly suffering from depression. Now she meets this lone man at the well. Is his request merely ‘more of the same’ that she’s experienced? And on top of that, a Jew! BUT, he offers her something else, hitherto unknown to her.



Prayer: Dear Jesus, I am amazed that you are still coming to my ‘well’ too, in spite of my own brokenness.
AMEN

Wednesday – Jesus’ amazing offer



John 4:11, 13-15 (NIV): ¹¹“Sir”, the woman said. “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get the living water?” ¹³⁻¹⁵Jesus 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”. The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming back here to draw water”.

Let’s just add to the cultural issues mentioned already – Jesus is not only talking to a Samaritan, but worse even, a woman! In those times, conversations between men and women were very limited. According to Adrio König, the Jewish culture of the time was that men should not even talk much to their wives, let alone someone else’s wife. ‘In the time of the Bible, women came second.’ But again, Jesus breaks through these barriers! Do we?

James Harnish summarises what happens next so well:

‘Jesus turned a pick-up line she was ready to reject into an invitation she couldn’t refuse. It was, in fact, an offer of incalculable love and grace.’

‘Like so many conversations in John’s Gospel, this is a classic of missed communication. Their words simply bypass each other. She’s thinking literally, calculating

the depth of the well and the impossibility of drawing water without a bucket. Jesus is talking figuratively, using the metaphor of “living water” to describe the Spirit of God so deeply at work within us that it is like a spring of water .. bubbling up within the human soul. She’s thinking water; he’s thinking Spirit. She’s talking about the well and the bucket; he’s talking about her heart and soul. But something about the water Jesus offered and something about the way he offered it touched that arid place in this woman’s broken soul.’



Prayer: Lord help me to also recognise when YOU speak to me and to fully understand what YOU offer. AMEN

Thursday – Going deeper

Read John 4:16-26.

Let's turn the sequence of this part of scripture around a bit, to learn something more about this woman. We see that she is not a 'heathen', someone with no knowledge of God and the expected Messiah. See Monday's devotions about the Samaritan's religious beliefs – and now we see that this faith and hope were also still living in her broken heart. In fact, in an essentially spiritual conversation, she is willing to testify to her religious beliefs. Even coming from the fringes of the (Jewish) religious society of that time, she now voices her personal hope for the coming of the Messiah. (See verses 19-20 and 25.)

On top of that, this unknown man whose words about 'living water' have already touched her, now also reveals to her (verses 16-18) that he knows of her life, sorrows and innermost struggles. What then happens is told best in scripture:

¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet".

²¹ Jesus declared .. ²³ "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for

they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth."

²⁵ The woman said, "I know that the Messiah .. is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he".

Today still, we may rightly be concerned about those who have never heard of our God, but there are also many people who live on the fringes of our religious society and churches. Many of them are broken people too, in some or other way, but longing for salvation. Do we do enough to 'meet them at the well' and reveal Jesus to them?



Prayer: Dear God, please guide us through your Spirit on how to meet those on the fringes of our church at today's 'wells'. AMEN.

Friday – A believer testifies and God’s kingdom grows

Read John 4:27-42.

We now see more of this remarkable (yet unnamed through the ages) Samaritan woman. She has met Christ, experienced Justifying Grace, has new hope – but she doesn’t keep it to herself! She acts as an outcast no more, but becomes a worker in God’s kingdom.

John 4: ²⁸⁻³⁰ *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 Christ?” They came out of the town and made their way towards him.*

³⁹⁻⁴² (shortened) *Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony .. 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 because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world”.*

James Harnish summarises: ‘She went out to invite the very people who had marginalised her to “come and see”. And because of her witness, they found that living water for themselves.’

When we come to faith, can we follow this woman’s example?

When the church is really the church, it’s the place where broken lives are made whole, and where we are drawn into relationships with people who we otherwise may have had nothing in common with. ‘It’s a place where people who by the world’s standards are separated from each other are drawn together in the love of Christ.’



Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I not keep your Grace to myself, but receive your power and wisdom to become a strong link in your chain of Salvation. AMEN