

Lent 3 / March 12, 2023

John 4:42

“It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.”

We know and believe this is the Saviour of the world

Do you like to talk? One of the features of John’s gospel is the extended conversations he records between Jesus and other people. Jesus talks with Nicodemus, the man blind from birth, Martha the sister of Lazarus and of course the woman at the well. Jesus’ conversation with this woman is significant for several reasons. It takes place when no one else is present. Men and women in the ancient near east were never alone together, unless they were married or otherwise related. Jesus initiates the conversation with the woman. Rabbis didn’t engage women in conversation in first century Judaism, let alone initiate conversation. The woman was a Samaritan and as the woman reminded Jesus, Jews wouldn’t have anything to do with Samaritans, especially Samaritan women.

Jesus asks for a drink. She responds, *“How is that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?”* He says that if she realized who it is who is talking with her that she would ask Him and He would give her living water. She observes that He doesn’t even have a rope and a bucket to get well water, so how in the world is He going to give her living water. She asks with sarcasm, *“Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well.”* That goes over our heads, but those were fighting words to Jews who considered themselves sons of Jacob, not Samaritans.

Jesus lets it go. He offers her water that will well up within her to a spring of eternal life. She says *“Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water,”* her voice dripping with sarcasm. Her tone only changes when Jesus reveals divine knowledge in regards to her personal life. She perceives He is a prophet and engages in a serious dialogue about Samaritan/Jewish relationships and the worship of God. As their conversation progresses she becomes convinced that more than a prophet, He is indeed the Christ who is coming into the world. Jesus asked for well water. *He gave her living water.* He revealed Himself as the Saviour of the world. The Holy Spirit opened her ears to listen, her eyes to see, her heart to receive and her spirit to drink deeply in faith.

She left her water jar and ran into the village telling everyone who would listen, *“Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”* Those who had ears to hear, came to Him, listened to His words and also believed. They came because of the woman’s words. They believed because of Jesus’ words. It’s important to tell people about Jesus, but the power to change hearts and create faith comes from Jesus’ words. He has the words of eternal life. His words are living water that refresh our souls and become a spring within us, welling up to eternal life. It’s important to tell people about Jesus. It’s most important to listen to His words. His words open our eyes to see, our hearts to receive and souls to believe that He is the Saviour of the world!

The woman first identifies Jesus as a prophet. How would we know a prophet if we met one? Moses said that a person would be proven a prophet, when his or her words came to pass. But that could take some time to determine. The short hand means of identifying a prophet was through his or her knowledge. Prophets were expected to know things, such as people’s character. Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to his home. A woman with a scandalous reputation approached Him and touched Him. Simon thought, *“If this man really were a prophet He would know who is touching Him and what kind of woman she is, that she is a sinner.”* Jesus proved His prophetic powers by telling Simon what he was thinking. It’s one thing to discern a person’s character, it’s another to know their thoughts. The woman at the well is convinced Jesus is a prophet, because more than her thoughts and character, He knows her marital history, even though they were strangers to each other.

Prophets know things on a higher level and perceive things on a deeper level. But, the most important quality of a prophet is to know God’s word and speak it truly. Coincidence and luck can make a person appear to have prophetic powers. The proof is the prophet’s words. If a prophet leads people away from God and His revealed word, he is not a prophet of the Lord and should not be listened to. Prophets speak from the word. Their words lead us to Jesus. It says in Revelation, *“The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”* Jesus’ words open our hearts to believe, nourish our faith with the living water of forgiveness and well up within us to a spring of eternal life. Jesus offers living water for all to receive. Again it says in Revelation, *“Let the one who hears come: let the one who is thirsty come: let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”* Jesus paid the price. He offers the water of life as a free gift for all to receive. To all who receive, the water of life gives refreshment in time and life for eternity.

To fully appreciate Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman and villagers, we have to appreciate the relationship between Jews and Samaritans. To put it simply: They despised each other! Not all Jews and Samaritans felt this way, but all religious Jews and Samaritans did. The Pharisees insulted Jesus by calling Him a Samaritan. They both claimed Jacob as their father. They each thought the other were illegitimate children at best. They both claimed to have the proper sanctuary for worship, the Jews at Jerusalem and the Samaritans at Mount Gerizim.

The Samaritans were a racial mix of Hebrews who remained in the land after the Assyrian exile and Gentiles, who were imported to replace the Hebrews who were deported. They worshipped the Lord, but were held in suspicion by the Jews who returned from the exile to Babylon. Their initial conflicts are recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Jesus told a parable which included a Good Samaritan. To the religious Jews there were no good Samaritans. Samaritans felt the same about Jews. In Luke's gospel Samaritans refuse to allow Jesus to enter their village, because He was a Jew on the way to worship in Jerusalem.

Who was right? Jesus decides the temple dispute, saying that the Jews worship what is known. God made Jerusalem known as the place of His habitation. As to the question about Jacob, He said salvation is from the Jews. Salvation is from the Jews, but salvation is for all people. He creates a new relationship between Jews and Samaritans, telling the woman the Father is seeking worshipers who will worship Him in Spirit and truth. Soon the Jerusalem temple will be obsolete. His body is the true temple. In His body sacrificed on the cross, He atoned for the sin of the world. He made peace between Jews, Samaritans and all peoples, by making peace with God through the sacrifice of His blood on the cross. He is the Christ who sacrificed Himself to take away the sin of the world. He brings peace with God to all who believe.

Jesus is the Great Prophet, promised by Moses. He spoke God's word with power and in truth. He embodied God's word in His flesh, becoming one with us and dwelling among us. He is the Christ, the anointed King of Israel, heir to the eternal kingdom promised to David. He is a king, but not in the manner of earthly kings. He came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. He offered Himself as the sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the whole world. Jesus is the Saviour of the world, because He suffered for the sin of the world. He is the Saviour especially of those who take His words to heart and believe.

We take His words to heart and believe. He speaks words of forgiveness, healing and life. He heals the divisions between us and among us. In the book of Acts the Jewish believers rejoice that salvation has come also to the Samaritans. They were no longer divided as Jews and Samaritans, they were united as the people of God in the church, the body of Christ. We are united as the people of God in the body of Christ. Most importantly, we are united with God in the body of Christ. Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. He brings us to the Father in peace. We know and believe that He is the Saviour of the world. In Jesus' Name Amen.