

## WOMAN OF SAMARIA

### Introduction

The word 'convert' is common in religious parlance. What does it mean in relation to Christianity? This is the third in a series of studies of New Testament examples of conversion. Each is different, but they all have common features. It is important to examine this, both to know if we belong to Christ, and to be assured that Christ receives even the most unlikely people. We are going to think about **the two parties involved** in this incident, **how Jesus dealt** with the woman of Samaria, and **the outcome**.

### Who was Jesus?

- John says his reason for writing is 'so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' (John 20:30). His Gospel emphasises Jesus' deity.
- The Person who met the woman that day was her Maker. If he created all things out of nothing he is also able to re-create.
- In one sense he was her husband. Humanity's relationship to God is more than merely Maker/ object. We are 'his' in the sense of being related to him – that is inescapable. The Parable of the Prodigal Son repeats that. God is not some Stranger who wants to meddle with us – he is our Father from whom we have become estranged. When we join with his Son that relationship is restored.
- He was also her Lawgiver and Judge. Whether we like it or not God has given us wisdom for living, and has given us commands so that we may live good lives instead of evil. The fact that she ignored his commands did not change her obligation to keep them.
- This incident teaches us something about conversion to Christ. How would we feel if we were in her position, and God came to meet us? Would we regret our broken relationship with him and want it restored – or try to escape? Would we be sorry for our disobedience and lack of love – or resent his authority and be afraid of his judgement?
- It is not surprising that some people are terrified at the thought of God, but notice this – she did not realise who he was until he had won her over; how gentle the Son of God is! That should encourage anyone who is a stranger to Christ to open their heart to him.

## Who was the woman of Samaria?

- When we meet her she seems strangely out of place. The middle of the day was not the best time to carry a heavy water pot. And she was alone; it was normally a social activity. That illustrated her slightly chaotic life.
- Some people keep their finger on the self-destruct button. They act as they do because 'it feels right'. She was one of them. She had 5 husbands plus the man she was with at the time. That suggests she was incompetent and changeable ('no truth' – c.f. John 8:44).
- It could explain what seems to be her social isolation; people generally don't want someone as fickle or stupid as that – Jesus is the exception – and his followers should be exceptions too.
- Her experience probably made her cynical, even if it was her own fault. She probably felt she had been used; how could she trust anyone? At first, Jesus seemed to her like anyone else – do we feel society mistrust the church?
- We know little about her except the obvious self-destructive aspects of her life. She might have felt that God would not want her – she must have assumed his people would not. But Jesus took the initiative to draw her into his fellowship – he still does for such people.
- She was a Samaritan. They were an ethnically mixed group of people with a mix of religions. They ignored the latter part of the Old Testament and believed God had chosen Mount Gerizim as the place to meet his people long before David built on the Temple Mount – geographical location of their was the most obvious difference with Judaism. Does that sound important to us?
- On the positive side it meant she had some knowledge about a promised Messiah – she mentioned that. Many people have some idea about Christ in the background but it does not affect the way they live. It took a personal encounter with Jesus to change that.
- The fact that she was a woman and a Samaritan meant that no self-respecting Jewish rabbi would speak to her. Jesus was the exception; even his disciples were surprised at his conduct. And there was no reason why she would speak to him, an obvious foreigner. Perhaps we felt like that about Jesus at one time.
- She seemed an unlikely person to become a convert of Jesus – but she did. He gathers the outcasts and wanderers.

## How did Jesus deal with her?

- Jesus had to make a choice – ignore and reject her (as others would do), or engage with her. Even if we know the way Jesus lived we should not think his choices were automatic; they were conscious decisions. He did what he was not required to do. That shows his love for sinful, needy people, and is a lesson for us. When we plead with him we are really responding to his initiative towards us.
- It was a very ‘human’ approach. Her Maker, Lawgiver and Judge was sitting at a particular spot, on the edge of Jacob’s well facing a certain direction, at a certain time of day, just when she arrived. There was no reason to recognise him as God.
- He identified with her in other ways starting by asking for a drink of water. He put himself on the same level and made it easy for her to speak to him. Although he is the Son of God Jesus has come into our world to live our life. If we had seen his divine glory we might have fled; but he draws us to himself by his love and tenderness.
- Jesus’ approach is as unexpected for us as it was for her. It was against all the social rules of the day for him to speak to her. And it is against all we might expect for our God to sit down with us, and then suffer for our sins on the cross.
- Jesus drew her attention to two issues. One was the lack in her life – ‘If you had known who is speaking to you, you would have asked him for living water.’ And it prompted her to start questioning him – ‘Give me that water so that I don’t need to come here again.’ Have you begun responding to Jesus? Her sense of need was vague; ours may be also. But only the life of God’s Spirit can satisfy it – and that is Jesus’ gift.
- The other issue was her lifestyle. ‘Go and call your husband’ prompted an admission about how she had lived. It prompted her to confess him as a ‘prophet’. God’s Word probes. Do not hide from it but let it do its work – the outcome is blessing.
- This led them into a discussion about religion. That can be good or bad, depending on the motives and where it leads to. She may have been avoiding the issues, or just talking about what seemed to interest him. She focused on what divided them – where God should be worshipped.
- Jesus did not hide God’s sovereign choice of certain people to carry his message. That can hurt our pride. The turning point came when she mentioned the Messiah, and he revealed his identity.

## What was the outcome?

- When her eyes were opened to recognise the Christ everything changed. That is always the case in conversion to Christ. Other things are secondary – the main thing is a relationship with the Son of God come in human form. People may talk about God; what matters is that they come to know him in the Person of Jesus. That is the main difference with other religions. He has reconciled us to God by his blood. He opens our eyes. He is God's presence among us – to be worshipped, loved, and trusted.
- The focus of her life changed. It was no longer, 'Me, Me, Me'. She left her water pot and went back to the city. What occupied her before became secondary. When she met the men of the city she did not say, 'Come, see me'. She said, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Is this not the Christ?' The sure way to stop being self-centred is to meet Christ Jesus. He is greater than anything we have known. He is more admirable. He meets our needs more than anything else. He is love, and we are drawn to him. Genuine Christianity is neither a label nor one interest among others; Christ becomes everything to us. He is our friend, our guide, and our hope.
- Her vision changed. She was no longer inward-looking but thought about the interests of others – 'Come, see a man ...'
- If we remain focused on ourselves it will lead others to fear we have never converted to Christ; and we may lose the assurance that we belong to Christ. Conversion takes us out of ourselves. It gives us new confidence because we have met Jesus. And it will correct our thoughts and our conduct.
- But we must not say, 'I will have to be less self-centred'. That will not work. The only way to change is to meet Christ and be drawn to him. In the gospels people are recorded as saying, 'We want to see Jesus'. They did. Ask to find him. Ask God's people to tell you about him. And ask him to show you himself.
- It was the start of a new life for her; change had already begun, and more would come. Jesus had come 'to proclaim good news to the poor', and this dysfunctional person found hope. He came 'to proclaim liberty to the captives', and she was freed from her cultural and spiritual chains. He came to give 'recovery of sight to the blind', and discovered truth on a grand scale. He came 'to set at liberty the oppressed', and was freed

from the penalty and consequences of her sin and the pressures that other people imposed.

- It did not end with her. Her townsfolk came, and spent time with her. Then they told her, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard him ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.' One conversion leads to others.