

Day 4 Missionary in Samaria

“Come, see a Man who told me all things that ever I did. Could this be the Christ?” (John 4:29).

If there was a local press, a newspaper announcing the most important events in the Samaria region, I think an article would have appeared with the title, “Revival in Samaria.” Such an article would have elaborated on the two days Jesus spent in Nazareth, in the city of Sihar, with His disciples. It would have been an extraordinary event because of the tensions and hatred that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans.

No respectable Jew would have done such a thing. The article would describe how Jesus became known among the Samaritans, as well as the important role that a woman, whose name we do not know, played in this case. At that time, there weren’t the means of communication we have today. But the event that took place in the suburbs of Judea was a real one. The people involved were real people, and this woman has been talked about for centuries and counting. She can be considered one of the most successful missionaries in the Bible because she met the greatest missionary of humanity, Jesus Christ. Let’s not forget, it all started with the smallest thing, a glass of water.

Jesus Christ, the Great Missionary

There is a fear we do not talk about, although it is present and dominates the lives of many who call themselves believers—the fear of witnessing. Fear can have many causes: we may not know what to say, we are not convinced that it is our duty, or we realise it can change someone’s life forever.

In the Gospel of John, an entire chapter is dedicated to Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (John 4). John, the evangelist, after presenting the meeting of Nicodemus with Jesus during the night in the third chapter, continues the description of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman as

a demonstration of the most important verse in the Bible, which says that “whoever” believes can have eternal life (John 3:16). These two people, Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, are the two extremes of the whole religious spectrum. No one can be so good that he does not need a birth from above; but at the same time, no one is so far away that God’s grace cannot recover him. The gospel is both for the wicked as well as for those who consider themselves good.

Jesus Christ is also our model for mission and evangelism. The entire chapter is dominated by surprises. The woman is surprised at Jesus’ request. She has never seen such a thing (John 3:9)—a Jew addressing a Samaritan woman. The disciples are surprised because the Teacher is talking to a woman (verse 27). In their turn, the inhabitants of the city are surprised by the woman’s words, and they come to see Jesus for themselves. The biggest surprise is the change that takes place in this woman’s life. We do not know the exact amount of time Jesus spent at the well with this woman. John presents us with just a summary of the dialogue, but there are so many things we can learn from it.

First of all, the intention of Jesus is to save souls. We have exact geographical data and historical context, but John always gives us details that highlight aspects less noticed by the inattentive. Jesus, says John, “needed to” go through Samaria (John 4:4) on His way from Jerusalem to Galilee. This road, although shorter, was usually bypassed by the Jews precisely to avoid any encounter with Samaritans. Jesus had each day’s agenda, as we have it. Every day he asked for His heavenly Father’s approval as well as for guidance for the prepared occasions. Heaven still prepares opportunities for those who want to be used by God today.

Second, Jesus overcomes all barriers—ethnic,

religious, racial, and cultural, as well as the prejudices raised by both sides—by initiating dialogue and asking for a favour—a drink of water, because He was thirsty. Although the Samaritans believed in the first five books of the Bible, they were considered by the Jews as being worse than the pagans because they polluted the pure race of patriarchs by mingling with the Gentiles. The vessel for water that the woman had was considered unclean, and her own community regarded her as immoral. That's why she was alone: no one wanted her company. Through the request, "Give Me a drink," Jesus honours this woman and gives her dignity. He treats her as a responsible, respectable person, capable of a theological discussion. He tells her about the living water, the true worship, the true temple. Even more, she is ready for the noblest discovery: His identity. "I, who speaks to you, am He" (John 4:26), that is, the Messiah.

Jesus helps her discover the greatest need in her life: the need for cleanliness and forgiveness. He convinces her that He can read the most hidden secrets of her life, that nothing could be hidden. There, in the depths of her soul, was a painful, dirty chapter, the sixth man, who was not her husband. Jesus knew that this woman longed for love, fulfilment understanding, and acceptance, and the well from which she was trying to satisfy her thirst for the soul was poisoned.

The woman saw Jesus' face and understood from His words that He was not condemning her, but rather expressing mercy and love. God's grace, the living water, is poured into the heart of this woman, who leaves the vessel and runs to the city. She has a message for all Samaritans, and her message is "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did" (John 4:29), knows everything about me, and yet treated me with respect and love like no one else in my life.

Again, John adds a detail—the woman left her vessel at the well—but he does not explain why. Maybe she left it for Jesus to have something to drink with, or she intended to return anyway. The empty vessel can also be a symbol of her inner emptiness. Morris, on the other hand, prefers another meaning that I like very much:

"She abandoned bringing water to bring people."

Can this woman be considered a missionary? Was she ready for such an important work? Here John emphasises the mission of a person engaged in evangelism. It is not to convert people; this is the work of the Holy Spirit. She had her own experience in meeting Jesus, her own testimony, and she did one thing: she invited people to Jesus. "Come and see," an expression that is repeated in this Gospel (John 1:39, 46).

Jesus' Food

In the absence of the woman, the disciples ask Jesus to eat, but Jesus refuses, saying that He has food to eat that they do not know (John 4:32). In this case, they wonder if anyone has brought him food. In the Gospel of John, we find two levels of reality. First is the physical one, which can be seen and known; but Jesus always turns the eyes of the listeners to another reality, the spiritual one, which can be identified and seen only by faith. In chapter 2, he talks about the spiritual temple, His own person, in which all people have the opportunity to meet God; but the Pharisees and even the disciples, do not understand His words. Nicodemus reacts to Jesus' imperative, "You must be born again," by asking how this is possible, and Jesus corrects him by pointing to the spiritual birth (John 3:25). The disciples, too, do not understand Jesus' words about the special food He received through His dialogue with the Samaritan woman. Jesus continues: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34). Nobody spoke like this.

This chapter helps us to look again into God's heart, which is the priority of heaven. The entire Bible tells us about a missionary, God, who passionately seeks the lost. The mission is not ours; it is not the church's but God's. It is part of the very nature of God. He is the protagonist of the mission. We do not have a God who sends us first, as He allows Himself to be sent and speaks about this again and again in the Gospel of John. Jesus' work is to offer eternal life; it is the work that the Father has entrusted to Him (John 17:2-4), and involvement in this mission

gives Him the greatest satisfaction. He was strengthened by witnessing, and His joy was full when He met thirsty souls. Even on the wooden cross, when the agony of death took possession of His being, He was comforted by the last witness He gives to the robber beside Him. The cry "I'm thirsty" is an echo of God's search, of the desire to save as many souls as possible.

All people are loved by God and included in the work of salvation. God loves the world as a whole and each person individually (John 3:16). There is a spiritual hunger and thirst for God in our hearts, an empty spot in every soul, but many, like the woman in Samaria, still don't know where this need can be met. Because of sin, however, all people show resistance to God's call, which is why the Spirit of God fights with every soul. Resistance can be seen in the woman's dialogue with Jesus. She was not willing to open her heart, but Jesus gently leads her to the spring of living water. Even we ourselves often resist the divine message, and the Holy Spirit continues to work in our hearts. It's painful that some will continue to show resistance all the time. Jesus warned us that the seed could fall on unprepared soil. But even in such situations, those who don't accept the message do not reject us, but rather the One who loves them and wants to save them.

Ready for the Harvest

The effect of this woman's testimony is seen in the multitude of people coming to the place where Jesus is. All these people come not to hear a sermon but to see a living sermon in the person of the Saviour. Ellen White captures the greatest need of humankind in the following words: "The world needs today what it needed nineteen hundred years ago—a revelation of Christ. A great work of reform is demanded, and it is only through the grace of Christ that the work of restoration, physical, mental, and spiritual, can be accomplished."¹

Jesus uses agricultural images to describe the interest shown by the people of Sihar. "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, lift up

your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" (John 4:35).

According to the parable, the sower who went out to sow is Jesus Christ Himself; but in the Gospel of John, He is not only the sower. He is also the grain that must die in order to bear much fruit (John 12:24). He is the Seed of the woman in the first promise of the Bible (Genesis 3:15), and the wood of the cross is the place where the Seed dies not only to rise in glory but to see the fruit of His sufferings (Hebrews 12:2).

The hardest work is not ours; it was and is His work, but all disciples are called to participate in the great harvest. The harvest has always been an occasion for joy, and the whole community was involved in this activity (Ruth 1:22).

In nature, there is an order that God has set: it is a time for preparing the soil, a time for sowing, and a time for harvesting the fruit. We use these images to describe the long and difficult process by which the church is involved in winning souls. Sometimes even four months (verse 35), according to Jesus' application, are not enough to prepare the souls to enter into a covenant with God through baptism.

But in John's account, time is compressed. In the same day the sowing took place, the harvest takes place as well. It is what the prophet Amos prophesied: that the day would come "when plowman shall overtake the reaper" (Amos 9:13). The whole city is set into motion. The people come not only to see Jesus; they ask Him to stay with them, and Jesus Christ spends two days with them. We are not surprised that after the Resurrection, after the preaching of the gospel in Jerusalem and Judea, Samaria is ready for Philip's message (Acts 8). The Samaritans recognise in the person of Jesus the Saviour of the world (John 4:42), an expression we find only once in the Bible (1 John 4:14).

We wonder what Samaria represents today. Where does Jesus want to be known, and what are the barriers that need to be overcome? Even today, everyone defends their religion, their forms, rituals, and mountains (John 4:20). We can have our own mountains, enclaves in which

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

we recede, and forget about the world around us. To the question, “Is Samaria ready for the gospel message?” what would have been the disciples’ answer? How about today’s disciples? People do not need just to change a religion; they need to see Jesus. God can use the simplest tools, such as a woman with a doubtful past who has known the grace of forgiveness.

Ellen White in the chapter “At Jacob’s Well” in *The Desire of Ages* says, “Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary.”² The gospel is for “everyone who believes,” and whoever receives the gospel, the good news—Jesus Christ—naturally becomes a missionary. This is the honour that God wants to give each one of us.

Questions:

1. What are the similarities between the woman of Samaria and today’s society?
2. What can we learn from Jesus’ method of evangelism?
3. What are the challenges of today’s disciples? To what extent am I willing to be led by God each day for the opportunities of witnessing that He prepares?

² Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 195

I Promise

To **OFFER** one day (or evening) each week to **WORK** for God, spreading the Good News to others through Bible Studies, small groups, etc. **TMI** (Total Member Involvement).

Children's Story:

The 5-Year-Old Missionary

“Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32).

Not long ago, in 2013, the Seventh-day Adventist church in Ploiesti, Romania, held an evangelistic campaign and decided to distribute the book *The Great Controversy* in the entire neighbourhood. There were many apartments in the neighbourhood that they wanted to reach, so the pastor invited the students from the Adventist high school to help distribute the books. About 50 students came on a bus from 60 kilometres (37 miles) away, and they were divided into groups of three to go down all the streets, distributing books to all the apartments and houses. With big smiles and polite words, they knocked on doors, giving away the book and inviting people to read it. Some of the people accepted the book happily, while others were reluctant or even rejected the students.

Along with them came the chaplain with his wife and two sons: a 7-year-old and a 5-year-old. They observed that while refusing the adults, people never refused the children. So they decided to let Robert, the 5-year-old boy, approach people while the rest of the family silently prayed for them to accept the gift.

By the time the family had finished the street that had been allotted to them, only two people had refused the little boy's offer. He was very happy, and for weeks he continued to pray “for the people who had received the books to read them and know God.”

Three years later, Robert and his family attended a big Mission Conference held in Bucharest, the capital of Romania. As they were listening to the inspirational experiences and mission stories shared by the participants, a woman suddenly stood up in the back of the room and

told the story of her conversion. She said that three years ago she had been given the book *The Great Controversy* by a little boy who asked her to read it, which she did. After reading the book, she sought a church and started attending the local Seventh-day Adventist church. She was now preparing to get baptised.

When little Robert, who was now 8 years old, heard her story, he turned to see who was speaking and recognised the woman to whom he had given the book. During the break after the meeting, he went with his mother to talk to her, and she recognised him, as well. It was a wonderful, happy experience!

Imagine the great joy and celebration in heaven when you meet boys and girls, men and women, who will recognise you as being the one who told them about God! Maybe some will thank you for being kind to them, for giving them a book, for smiling or responding politely, or praying for them when they did not even know. But in time, they came to know God because of your missionary spirit to serve others.

Never forget: everything you do can witness for God or against Him, and you can be a missionary at any age!

Questions:

1. How can you serve other people and be a missionary for God? Give some examples.
2. Why do you think God wants little children to witness for Him?
3. Plan some things that you could do in the following days to help others know God better.