
THE UNEXPECTED GIFT

A man brought home birthday present for his wife.

- She opened the gift and saw that it was a piece of jewelry.
 - She wasn't particularly fond of jewelry, so she said, "Thank you," pecked him on the cheek, and put the gift with all the other stuff she rarely wore.

A few weeks later, she did wear the gift, but when someone complimented her on it, she told the person that it was just cheap dime-store junk.

- You see, they didn't have much money so they usually only bought modest gifts for each other for birthdays or anniversaries.
- Her husband, though, was smiling as he heard this exchange, because, despite not having a lot, he occasionally did the unexpected.
 - This time, instead of cheap jewelry, he had gone to a fine jeweler and purchased something expensive.
 - But since his wife didn't know the value of the gift, she had not appreciated it.
 - Later though, after she came to understand its value, she came to treasure it.

In this gospel reading, JESUS gives a gift that, at first goes unrecognized;

- unrecognized because of the greatness of the gift and because of the person to whom it was being given.

JESUS is in Sychar, a Samaritan community as HE travels from Jerusalem back to Galilee.

- Most Jews took the longer route that followed the east side of the Jordan River.
 - They did this to avoid contact with Samaritans who they considered unclean.
 - The Samaritans were the offspring of Jews and Assyrians from the time of the Assyrian exile.
 - They were half-breeds and the Jews didn't like them.

But here is JESUS in this unclean region and talking to a woman, which was also unacceptable.

- Men never spoke to women who were not their own wives, so JESUS is breaking several cultural rules.

This woman is also shocked that JESUS is speaking to her for several reasons:

- As I said, she is a Samaritan and she is a woman.
- More than this, she is drawing water at noon in the hottest part of the day.
 - She must be doing this so to avoid others meaning that, even among her own people, she is disliked and an outcast.

Yet, JESUS is talking to her—like and equal and not one to be despised.

- More than that, HE offers her a gift—the gift of a life time.
 - But like the woman who received the jewelry, she doesn't recognize the value of the gift.
 - She needs some help understanding, as do many people.

In the story we find a wonderful lesson—the steps to take when witnessing to people—how to teach them about GOD.

1) JESUS meets her where she is at and recognizes her need.

- She comes to draw water—physical water—and JESUS shows vulnerability by asking her for a drink.
- This in turn provides the opportunity for HIM to offer to her spiritual water—the water she really needs.

2) The Samaritan woman is now curious.

- She wants to know about this living water and how to draw it.
- She still doesn't understand and needs further instruction.
- She needs to realize what the gift is and what it does.

3) JESUS points out her deeper need—healthy relationships.

JESUS shows that HE really sees her.

- The reason comes to draw water at noon is that she has had five husbands and now lives with a man who is not her husband.
 - No wonder they don't like her.
 - She either can't keep a husband or has been stealing men from the other women, and the man she's with now won't marry her.
- By offering her living water, JESUS tells her that she has worth and that recognition is the beginning of a relationship with the LORD—a relationship that is truly meaningful.

4) JESUS gives her purpose.

- She returns to her village to tell them of her experience with JESUS.
 - They listen to her and they also come to meet JESUS.
 - She has now found the purpose of become a witness to them.
- She has discovered the deep satisfaction that comes from doing GOD'S work.

I had a conversation with a couple who had attended a Bible study on sanctification—being made holy.

- They were both feeling a tremendous need to understand how to achieve sanctification and to earn GOD'S love—their need.
- I told them that they were already holy, but not because of anything they had done.
 - They were sanctified because of what JESUS has done.
 - Nothing they could do today would make them holy.
 - They were holy because of what JESUS did 2000 years ago on a Friday afternoon.
 - All they could do was decide how they would respond to what JESUS had done—their new purpose.

There are several results to this encounter with JESUS.

First, this woman has a new relationship with the LORD.

- Prior to this she seems to have been unaware of GOD'S love for her.

Second, she has found a new purpose for her life.

- She has a story to tell and recognizes it as one that can change the lives of others.

Third, the barriers between with her neighbors is weakened or perhaps even removed.

- They now see her as the one who brought them to meet the SAVIOR.

Fourth, the people of the town also develop a relationship with the LORD as they go to meet HIM.

- In fact, they invite HIM to stay with them and to dwell with them.

Fifth, the townspeople also find a new purpose.

- They now desire to grow in their relationship with the LORD and to understand HIS will for them.

And finally, many were saved.

- They have come to know the true source of life and salvation, simply through a conversation at a well.

The lesson for us is that we, too, have been given a tremendous gift.

- Too often, though, some Christians cheapen or miss the value of the gift because they do not understand it.
 - Many today don't understand the relationship that they can have with the LORD.
 - Many don't allow the gift to affect them beyond an hour on Sunday morning.
 - Many fail to claim the life in the Kingdom that GOD promises by clinging to life in this world.
 - And perhaps the biggest way the gift is cheapened is that it is not shared with others.

JESUS at the well with the woman reveals that GOD'S love is for all people.

- The living water that JESUS offers is available to everyone.
 - And it is more precious than anything the world can offer.
 - It can create and restore relationships.
 - It can create purpose where none is perceived.
 - And it can save lives.

How extraordinary is this encounter, filled with invitation:

- an invitation to recognize that the very MESSIAH who is speaking to her sees her as someone of value and worth;
- an invitation to leave behind her burdens and share with others the joy that comes from really knowing JESUS;
- an invitation that challenges moving past the safety of a set life, however full or empty that life is, to find the identity and purpose that GOD offers to all people.

And how extraordinary that this invitation comes from a man to a woman, a Jew to a Samaritan, a rabbi of relative power and authority to someone who has neither.

Many in the world do not understand the gift.

- Our purpose is to teach others about it.

A relationship with GOD may not appear to be worth much.

- Our mission when we recognize the gift is first, to claim it for ourselves and to live into all that it has to offer,
- and then, not to keep it to ourselves, but to share it so that other lives can also be changed by the value and purpose and promise that comes from the ONE who breaks the rules in order to reach everyone with the message, with the gift of GOD'S unconditional acceptance and love.