



Reviled to Redeemed

BY PAM HACKETT

In John 4:4-26, we read of Jesus' divine appointment with the woman at the well. She is not aware of such an appointment, but soon finds out the basis of her encounter with Jesus. Walking to Galilee, Jesus left the city of Judea and purposefully crossed through Samaria on His journey. Because of their disdain for the Samaritan race, the Jews avoided walking through Samaria. They possessed a prejudice against the Samaritans, considering them heathens and unclean. Just walking through Samaria was an act of defilement for a man of Jewish origin. Jesus felt no such prejudice—His love covers everyone, regardless of race. In this biblical account, Jesus was physically displaying to His disciples, to us, and to the Samaritan woman that God's love is unconditional.

This biblical record reminds me of *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. This story has several correlating points worth comparing to the Samaritan woman narrative. Hester Prynne was the protagonist in the story, known for wearing a "scarlet A" on the outside of her clothes, declaring to everyone that she was an adulteress who had birthed a child from a man who was not her husband. Wearing this scarlet A was her outward punishment.

In comparison, we could say the Samaritan woman

abstractly displays three separate letters. The first letter would be W. In John 4:4-7, we read how Jesus kept His divine appointment with this woman at the well of Jacob in Sychar. It is around noon, and He is weary and thirsty from His long walk.

During this time in biblical days, women were positioned as inferior to men, especially Jewish men. Please note the Samaritan woman came in the middle of the day to fetch water for the needs of her household. Jesus also arrived at noon, hot and exhausted from His long journey. He already knew this woman chose this time of day to come to the well to avoid the shame and ridicule she endured from the other women in her community. Meeting at the well was a social event for the neighborhood ladies, and no doubt, this woman was often the topic of their gossip.

Jesus elevates her womanhood by asking her for a drink to quench His physical thirst. Most Jews would not have talked to her because she was unclean. Jesus controlled the conversation by carefully leading her to the truth.

All Christian women can be thankful the Lord has elevated us to a place of dignity and honor through



His salvation. An interesting tidbit: Jesus' longest recorded conversation in the New Testament was with a woman—this Samaritan woman.

The second letter to define the woman at the well is the letter S for Samaritan. She understood the racial prejudice connected to an encounter with any Jewish man. As Jesus waited for his disciples to return from getting meat for their meal, He sat alone on the ledge or beside the well. As the Samaritan woman approached, Jesus immediately asked for water to quench His thirst. Surprised and defensive, she asked why He was asking her, a woman of Samaria, for water. In no uncertain terms, she informed Him Jews would consider themselves defiled if they had anything to do with the Samaritans (verse 9). Jesus lovingly takes this opportunity to start a spiritual conversation about His divine appointment with her.

Jesus outwardly displayed to her His love for everyone regardless of their gender, race, or sin. This encounter demonstrated that His Gospel was for everyone and not just for a select group of people. He was validated by His free salvation.

The Jewish culture usually prevented a Jew from passing this way, but not Jesus. He was on a mission of compassion. To Him, the Samaritan woman needed a Savior, and no prejudice would prevent Him from touching and changing her life. Jesus was not concerned with the opinions of the Jews but with the eternal soul of a Samaritan woman.

The woman has now challenged Jesus. "Then saith the woman of Samaria unto Him, how is it that thou, being a Jew, asked drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (verse 9). Her confrontational attitude toward Jesus changes after He explains His mission, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water" (verse 10). A slow progression of change begins in her heart, and her tone becomes one of respect when she says to Him, "Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with,

and the well is deep; from whence then hast thou that living water?" (verse 11).

As Jesus journeyed to the well of Jacob, He revealed His human need for water and physical rest. He was the Son of God, but He also existed in the body of a man. He walked on water but needed physical water to quench His thirst. "Jesus answered her and said, 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life'" (verse 13).

The last letter we will use to describe the Samaritan woman is the letter A for adulteress. Respectfully, she asks Jesus ("Sir") for the water He is offering her. Jesus responds by saying, "Go, call thy husband, and come hither" (verse 14). Truthfully, she admits she has no husband. Jesus agrees with her but also reminds her that she has had five husbands and the man she is living with now is not her husband (verses 16-18). Again, signifying her growing humility towards Him, she calls him Sir and acknowledges that He is truly a prophet (verse 19).

Just as Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* is recognized by wearing the scarlet letter A for her sin of adultery, the Samaritan woman's sins were openly exposed by Jesus. Undoubtedly, her heart was heavy with guilt as she realized this Jewish man, for whom she had shown resentment, knew all about her personal life yet had not passed judgment on her. Jesus' love and compassion covered all her sins.

This woman was still not ready to accept the living water Jesus offered her. Instead, she wanted to discuss religious prejudices, quickly changing the subject from her sinful lifestyle. Jesus then talks about the future—an hour that is coming when it will not matter if they worship in this mountain or in Jerusalem (verses 21-23). This Samaritan lady understood about a Messiah coming called Christ and that when He comes, "He will tell them all things" (verse 25). And Jesus' next words: "I that speak unto thee am he."

Jesus offered her the living water of salvation. What a thrill this must have been for her! She was so excited about hearing this truth that she left her waterpot at the well and went to tell her friends and neighbors about her encounter with the Messiah—“is not this the Christ?” (verse 29).

The Samaritan Woman manifested several unfavorable indicators as she made her trip to the well each day. She was a woman and considered lower than a second-class citizen. In His kind and respectful treatment of her, Jesus elevated her standing with no consideration of her gender.

She was a Samaritan, and her kind was frowned upon by the Jews. Jesus, however, carried no room in His heart for racial prejudice and came to earth so that

ALL may have salvation, not just the Jews.

She was an adulteress woman having been married five times and living in sin with her present mate. Yet, Jesus did not pass judgment on her for the sins in her life. Instead, He reached down and “brought her out of the miry clay; He set her feet on the Rock to stay.” In grateful response, the Samaritan woman told others about the Messiah and how He could also bring them salvation.

This woman, full of disfavor, overcame these negative factors in her life and became a great soul winner for the Lord. Her gender was no longer a negative issue; her race was no longer a domineering influence; the weight of her sins was released, and she was set free.

APPLY IT

As Christians, how are we affected by our prejudices regarding race, gender, and sin?

Do we avoid sharing the gospel with other races or ethnicities out of fear or ignorance?

How do we treat those walking into our churches from different backgrounds and races?

Do we treat individuals differently because of their sins? Are their sins worse than our sins? Do we make that comparison?

Do we take note and compare the sins of omission and commission in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ?

When they visit our churches, how do we treat unmarried couples living together? Are we welcoming, kind, and compassionate? To lead them into the right relationship with God, do we take the time to invest in them and their children without passing judgment on them?

Maybe it is time the church engage in a heart check-up regarding our compassion and how well we connect with others regardless of their racial status, ethnicity, gender, or sin? Where would any of us be if not for the compassionate love of Christ? Are we not all just sinners saved by grace? The example Christ demonstrated in this beautiful account of the Samaritan woman should be the pattern we faithfully follow in lovingly welcoming all people into our lives and our churches.

In the last part of *The Scarlet Letter*, the truth about Hester Prynne and her circumstances are revealed. She is redeemed, no longer reviled by her community. The Samaritan woman found the Living Water and was no longer reviled but redeemed and used by God as a mighty testimony of His love to win others. Just

as this woman, we have also been redeemed by the love of a compassionate Savior. Let us follow her lead and share the news of this Living Water joyfully and faithfully.

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About the writer: Pam is the wife of Tim Hackett, pastor of Fairview Free Will Baptist Church, Spartanburg, South Carolina, where they have ministered for thirty years. She is the mother of three children, grandmother to five, and happily blessed with one great-grandchild. Pam serves as co-teacher of the Ladies Sunday School Class and as Mission Prayer and Mission Study Chairperson of Fairview's Women's Ministry. She was the South Carolina Coordinator for 14 years, and currently, serves on the WNAC Board.

