

Set Free from Shame

Scripture: John 4:1-42, John 3:17

Today, we will consider another historical narrative from the Gospel of John. It's about someone who was completely broken and living in shame, but who had an encounter with Jesus, and afterwards was never the same.

John 3:17 - *God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.*

John 4:1-42 – Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well.

Context and Background

Jesus sits down beside a well. He is very tired and thirsty from his journey. He's alone because his disciples went into town. A woman approaches to draw water. She is all by herself, and she is a Samaritan.

First, Samaritans and Jews despised each other. They did not interact together because the Jews felt the Samaritans had abandoned the Jewish faith by intermarrying with Gentiles and adopting Gentile practices both in life and in their religion. It was very unusual for a Jew to speak to a Samaritan, and for a Jewish man to speak to a woman. Jesus speaks to this Samaritan woman.

Second, these two have different worship practices. The Samaritans believed that worship was to be conducted on Mount Gerizim, which is near where this story is taking place. The Jews believed the center of worship was, of course, in Jerusalem at the Temple.

Jesus said that "*true worship*" will take place neither on Mount Gerizim nor in Jerusalem, but instead will take place "*in the Spirit and in truth*" which can be anywhere, not determined by location (4:23). Jesus says, "*these are the kind of worshippers that the Father seeks*" (4:23).

Third, the woman comes to the well by herself and during a very hot part of the day. Women typically go together and during the early morning when it's cool. She seems to have no friends and is perhaps shunned. She is a sinner; she cannot make life work.

The odds are that she has been divorced several times because of adultery. Perhaps it has been with men of her community. The women don't trust her. She is a mess.

So, if all of this is true, or even partly true, what do you think God should do with this woman and this community? What does God in Christ do? He reaches out to them with the gospel.

Jesus Reaches Her by Humbling Himself

With courage and conviction, Jesus humbles himself. He breaks the social taboos of the day and speaks to this Samaritan woman. Why? Jesus is on a mission - to seek and to save the lost. His mission was also His Father's mission. This was His Father's will. He may have been tempted to not engage her, but Who He is and His desire to obey His Father, controlled Him.

She is a sinner, lost and confused, beaten and despised. And Jesus engages her with relationship and conversation. He does not see her as inferior to himself. He instead sees her as a sheep without a shepherd. Like Nicodemus, this woman needs the gospel; they need to be saved from their trajectory that leads to hell.

Jesus was constantly eating, healing, loving, talking, and praying with sinners like this woman. He was not offended to be in their presence. He was not self-righteous. He was kind, loving, truthful, and direct. His goal was their salvation.

She responded to Him and His approach. She received his kindness, love, truth, and directness. She owned up to her faults; she went back into town and brought everyone out to meet him.

Her Shame

This woman probably lived life in shame.

What is shame? Shame is defined as the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging. It is a fundamental emotion that often begins in the primitive parts of the brain, which are wired to signal us that we are in danger—in this case, the threat of losing the acceptance and affirmation of those who care for us.

Although shame is primarily a feeling, attached to the feeling are thoughts. These thoughts are usually repetitive and predictable, often laced with profanity and accusations.

There is a difference between guilt and shame.

Guilt has to do with your behaviors, like when you do something wrong. Guilt is a healthy feeling. Shame has to do with your identity, what you believe about yourself.

A person living with guilt says, “I *made* a mistake.” A person living in shame says, “I *am* a mistake.” Shame is when you say to yourself, “There is something wrong with me. I am nothing but ...*expletives*.” And you live your life believing this about yourself. Shame involves deep humiliation about yourself, not about something you’ve done.

The Holy Spirit will convict us of guilt and of sin, but, child of God, he will never shame you. Notice Jesus points out what she’s guilty of *doing* (five husbands, and the current one isn’t her husband) and not what she’s guilty of *being*. Jesus doesn’t belittle her, insult her, or condemn her. Why? Because the Son of God came to save and not to condemn.

Child of God, do you define yourself by your failings and weaknesses or by who you are in Christ? God doesn’t define you that way. God sees your sin, mistakes, and failures, but He knows that’s not who you are. You are his son. You are his daughter. And he loves you very much. And he is going to clean you and heal you from those sins, mistakes, and failures that haunt you, if you simply look to Jesus on the cross, asking Him to heal you. Asking Him to take away the shame. Let them point you to the empty tomb, that Christ is risen, and that His resurrection power will resurrect you out of your shame.

Jesus Heals Her and Starts a New Story

After Jesus declares to her in v 26, that He is the Messiah, in v 28 she leaves behind her water jug and returns to her community and tells the towns people to come and meet a man who could be the Messiah. The towns people notice her demeanor is different, and her enthusiasm piques their curiosity. In v 39, some do believe Jesus is the Messiah based on her testimony, yet, they go to see Jesus. They urge Him to stay with them for two more days. Through this encounter with Him, many believe He is the Messiah.

In vs. 30-38, Christ teaches the disciples about the principle of sowing and reaping in evangelism and mission. When Christ stays two more day, they witness this principle in action.

God is not done writing your story. He knows about all the secrets and the mess, and he’s not going to leave you there. He is and continues to pour Living Water inside of you. Do you want this Living Water to do its work in you? It’s time to have a talk with Jesus.