

If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is speaking...

What we know is important because it determines the nature of our faith and discipleship. You can't believe in Jesus if you do not know him as the Messiah; you can't follow him if you do not understand his teaching. Hence John regularly draws our attention to what people do and do not know.



The woman does not know why Jesus - a Jewish man, asks her - a Samaritan woman, for a drink (9). Neither do the disciples (27). Nor do they understand that the reason he went miles out of his way to travel through Samaria was because he knew that Samaria was a field white for harvest (35). They do not understand this because they do not know that Jesus' food is to do the will and work of the Father (34). While they have been preoccupied with earthly food, he has been focused on accomplishing the work he was sent to do (32-34).

When Jesus first speaks to the Samaritan woman, she does not know who he is (10, 12) or what he has to offer (living water). She does not understand what the living water is (15). Like the disciples with their food, and Nicodemus previously (3.4), she thinks in earthly terms. As the conversation proceeds though, Jesus opens her mind to understand the heavenly things of which he speaks. Her knowledge and understanding grow, and with them her faith. At first she perceives him to be a prophet (19), but is then open to believing he is the Messiah (29). By the end of the story, not only does she know and believe he is the Messiah, many others do too (42).

The turning point is Jesus' abrupt command "Go, call your husband." This is, in effect, a call to repentance. Before she can receive Jesus' living water, she must turn her back on her old life. She tries to change the

subject (20), but Jesus again addresses her need to get her life right with God: unless one is able to worship in spirit and in truth, it doesn't matter where or how one worships (21-24). That Jesus has got through, and the woman has begun to understand, is signified by her leaving her water jar and going off to tell others (28). Just as water jars at Cana (2.6) represented the old order which Jesus superseded, so this woman's jar, which would have been a treasured possession, represented her former life and earthly thirsts. It is only as she leaves them behind that Jesus is able to fill her with the life-giving water of his Spirit, the water of rebirth (3.5).

How different this encounter is to that with Nicodemus. He is everything she isn't: righteous under the Law, an influential leader, a theologian. Yet he comes by night and seemingly goes away still much in the dark. She, on the other hand, has her life laid bare at high noon, repents, and proves to be the most effective witness to Jesus in John's Gospel after John the Baptist.

To ponder

How earnestly do you desire to do the will of the Father and accomplish his work?

To pray

Heavenly Father, I praise you that no matter what the state of my life, you can clean, restore and use me for your glory. Help me so to know and love you that I desire only that food and drink which you give, and accomplish the work you have called me to do. I ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen

Reflections