

# **St. Mary's Sermon Series**

**John 4:4-26**

**Spiritual Gifts:  
Words of Knowledge**

Jesus had a wonderful way of dealing with all kinds of people. First and foremost, he genuinely loved them. He also had the wonderful gift of always being able to see to the heart of their problems, finding ways of dealing with them and sensitively ministering into them. Last week we saw how Jesus was able to skilfully turn the tables on the religious leaders who were seeking to trap him; at the same time he was able to help a very broken woman start the long journey towards healing and wholeness. On that occasion the key to a successful outcome was his ability to listen to his father and to receive a word of wisdom.

Today's reading contains an equally fascinating account of what has often been described as a "Divine appointment" and there is plenty of material in this story for a whole host of sermons. The obvious starting point is: how Jesus broke all the social conventions of his day by initiating a conversation with a woman knowing full well that she was also a Samaritan which, at the time, was unthinkable. We could learn much from this story about Jesus' method of evangelism, looking in detail at how he talked to her and eventually brought her to a point of acknowledging that he was the Messiah. We could also look at how she then became an evangelist herself, but today I simply want to focus on how Jesus used another one of the Gifts of the Spirit - this time the word of knowledge.

On the surface this whole encounter would appear to be simply a chance meeting. Jesus just happened to be at the well, resting from his journey, when the woman arrived. However, I am convinced that this was not merely a coincidence. The woman deliberately chose to visit the well in the middle of the day because she was embarrassed by her sinful lifestyle and wanted to avoid contact with all those she knew would be judging her.

It didn't take a great expert to work out that there must be something in her past that was deeply troubling the woman. After all, the task of fetching water was hard enough but collecting it at the hottest point of the day would have been even more arduous.

We are not told at what point in the conversation Jesus received the revelation that this woman had a chequered history of broken relationships with men; often revelations like this come instantly. John Wimber coined the phrase that 'we know in our knower'.

Obviously Jesus could not simply blurt out this awkward piece of revelation, "I know all about you, you have committed adultery". I am sure that if he had it would have stopped the conversation in its tracks and the woman would have simply "run a mile". So Jesus had to tackle the subject with a great deal of tact so he asked the woman to go and fetch her husband which brought forth a confession from the woman that, in fact, she had no husband. Only then was Jesus able to elaborate on her confession, revealing to her that he already knew that she had had six husbands and was now living with yet another man. Once again Jesus used a word of wisdom, enabling the woman to face up to her past, find forgiveness and, although we don't know what happened to her, the opportunity to change and begin to live a normal, whole life.

This incident, in the life of Jesus, suggests that there is often a degree of overlap between the various gifts of the Spirit and is a very clear example of Jesus receiving a profound revelation, a word of knowledge, from his father into the secret life of the woman. This word

of knowledge allowed him to know something about her that he could not possibly have known unless it had been revealed to him. But Jesus also had to use a word of wisdom to apply the knowledge that he had received in order that the woman was able to receive the revelation and allow it to transform her life in a positive direction.

Not only is there evidence of a degree of overlap between the gifts of a word of wisdom and a word of knowledge, but it also seems clear that there is also a measure of overlap with the gift of prophecy as well. Notice also the woman's response to Jesus' words of revelation about her past, "Sir I see that you are a prophet". We will look in more detail at this response when we look at the gift of prophecy.

So, how does this gift operate today? Let me give you an example which you may have heard before from John Wimber:

"I was once on an airplane when I turned to look at the passenger across the aisle to see the word adultery written across his face in big letters. The letters, of course, were only perceptible to spiritual eyes. He caught me looking at him, gaping might be more descriptive, and said, "What do you want?"

As he spoke a woman's name came clearly into mind and I leaned over the aisle and asked if the name meant anything to him. His face turned pale and he asked if he could talk to me.

It was a large plane with a bar so we went there to talk. On the way the Lord spoke to me again, "Tell him to turn from his adulterous affair or I'm going to take him". When we got to the bar I told him that God had told me that he was committing adultery with the woman whose name God had revealed to me and that God would take him if he did not repent. He melted on the spot and asked what he should do. I led him to through a prayer of repentance and he received Christ. This was in front of a stewardess and two other passengers, who were shocked but also began to cry. Then he said that his wife was downstairs in the seat next to him. I told him to go and tell her the entire story, which he did and he lead her to Christ."\*

\*Adapted from the book Power Evangelism by John Wimber

## **Conclusion.**

The word of knowledge can be a very useful gift when it comes to evangelism. If used sensitively it can bring people, even those who know little or nothing about what it is to be a Christian, into the recognition of the greatness and power of God, in a way that conventional means of evangelism cannot. John Wimber would have described this as "power evangelism", but it could also be referred to as "prophetic evangelism". Most of us find that sharing our faith with others effectively is a very difficult thing to do. We are aware of Jesus' final words to his disciples, which we know as the great commission to go and make disciples of all people, and we feel guilty because of our failure to be obedient to his command.

Why not ask God to use you through words of knowledge to reach others for him?