

Jesus Christ's Transformative Encounter with the Samaritan Woman: An Exposition of a Revolutionary Mission

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ABSTRACT--- *This article is about a case study on spiritual transformation. It is inspired by Chapter four of the Book of John in which Jesus Christ entered Samaria and encountered the Samaritan woman. He prophesied about her life, and anointed and appointed her as his first evangelist. Consequently, she courageously and radically initiated successful evangelism in a community deeply wounded by social divisions. This study shows that despite the criticism that anti-Bible feminists have launched against God, Jesus' unprecedentedly progressive attitude toward women is a great example that all male leaders should emulate everywhere. The study is based on the analysis of the Bible, relevant Bible-inspired books and newspaper articles. Its main conclusion is that counter-productive divisions based on gender, class, race, culture and religion are ungodly. They produce social disadvantage that diminishes the worth and dignity of many people and separate them from God. Structural analysis, textual criticism and the author's personal observations were used to analyze and interpret the text. Jesus' spiritual transformation of the Samaritan woman and his deployment of her for high impact evangelism while they were so many male rabbis, points to the fact that carnally minded religious leaders are irrelevant to the Kingdom of God. They have no spiritual capacity to deliver God's people from systemic oppression. The author offers useful lessons that Christian leaders can use to increase their relevance and effectiveness as change agents.*

Keywords--- revolution, mission, feminist critics, transformative encounter, structural locations, oppression

1. INTRODUCTION

This article is an expose` analysis of Jesus' revolutionary mission presented in chapter four of John verses 4-42). Samaria is a site or case study used to reveal and explicate this mission. The article interprets his encounter with the woman at Jacob's well, and the disciples' "divine exclusion" from the duo's meeting. This historic encounter with a downtrodden woman is not superficially understood and presented as a woman's affair from a constricted gender lens. Her "problems of living" are treated as a multidimensional social condition that is inextricably intertwined with other human conditions within a structural environment which has the effect of undermining and eroding human dignity.

Given the different forms of marginalization experienced within Samaria, it is appropriate to use structural analysis to show that Jesus was a radical advocate for the liberation of all oppressed people (Lutzer and Lutzer:2006). This mode of analysis recognizes and exposes multiple forms of oppression, or the marginalization of people according to their different locations in the social structure, including gender, socio-economic class, race, culture, religion, marital status and lifestyle.

Since carnally minded feminist critics partly attribute sexual or patriarchal oppression to the Bible, Jesus' emancipatory practice is used here to deconstruct and nullify this myth, which emanates from spiritual ignorance and false teaching.

On the basis of Jesus' anti-colonialist/discriminatory practice, the author adopts the stance that church leaders who discriminate against women (and other victims of social exclusion) are anti-Christ. The article also highlights the implications of Jesus' revolutionary mission for his contemporary followers whom he commands to vigorously implement the Great Commission (Mathew 28:18-20).

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The researcher seeks to achieve the following set of objectives:

1. To present Jesus' divine visit to Samaria as an opportunity to initiate spiritual transformation.
2. To interpret Jesus' historic encounter with the Samaritan woman from a structural perspective.
3. To demonstrate that contrary to feminist critics' position that the Bible or Jesus encourages gender based exclusion, Jesus is in effect the "original feminist".

4. To invalidate male Christian leaders' exclusion of women from church leadership
5. To identify useful lessons that Christian change agents may learn from Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman

3. STATING THE PROBLEM

The Bible is inherently progressive. It expresses God's unconditional love for men and women irrespective of artificially or socially constructed sources of divisions like gender, socio-economic class, race/tribe, age, marital status, religion and lifestyle (Galatians 3:28). These social factors constitute a foundation for discrimination in the nations of the world. Disappointingly, many people, including those in the church, still attribute discrimination perpetrated by institutional apparatuses like the church to God.

The majority of the victims of structural oppression virtually everywhere in the world are women (Moser:1993). It is so despite the fact that God has a special place for women (and men) in His heart (Jaynes:2010). Interventions carved out to address these problems are ineffectual significantly because of development activists' failure to mainstream and institutionalize godly perspectives in their work. They tend to build society physically and neglect it spiritually despite the fact that the Word of God tells us that people should first seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the things they need shall be added to them (Mathew 6:33).

Unfortunately, the misguided perception propagated by feminist critics that the Bible has helped entrench discrimination against women (and other people) is a function of ignorance, misinterpretation of the Bible, and the pervasive anti-Christ spirit. According to Olukoya (2004), this spirit works against Christ by sponsoring false doctrines, prophecies, teachings and blasphemies. It confuses people (including immature Christians) and dangerously separates them from Christ. In Hosea 4:6 we learn that God's people perish precisely because of lack of knowledge. John 8:32 says they shall know the truth and it shall liberate them.

Many people, including those in the church, have not understood that when Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman, and anointed and appointed her for a radical evangelistic mission, he was not only setting her free as a woman, but as a member of a despised gender in a structurally dislocating environment.

Jesus' intervention in the life of the Samaritan woman was also meant to sensitize nations to the need to demolish the walls of divisions based on gender and other multiple sources of oppression, including prejudice and discrimination based on class, race, culture and marital status. Thus, any interventions geared toward effecting female empowerment won't succeed if they are narrowly women-centered. Interventions should have a holistic focus because women ineluctably co-exist with men in intertwined structural sites in which conflicts produce "existential troubles" that societies are not able to surmount with limited human/earthly wisdom.

Such "existential troubles" tend to be more pronounced among females in virtually every society. Although Jesus Christ has identified with the plight of women, many anti-Bible feminists still attribute the abuse of women or different forms of female marginalization to the church/Bible (Madibana:2009, Rakgati:2009). And many miseducated males in the church deny capable women a chance to ascend to positions of leadership, claiming that even Jesus did not select women to be amongst his twelve apostles/disciples. All these positions are false as Kenneth Hagin points out (1983:xix):

"The attitude of Jesus toward women is an example to all men. None could ever treat women with greater consideration than did the Lord Jesus Christ Himself".

Finally, due to spiritual illiteracy many women are still victims of disabling self-disparagement. Their low self-esteem, which produces self-doubt and underachievement, emanates from the fact that they define themselves and weigh their self-worth according to patriarchal cultural values and traditions; and not according to God's Word as a critical reference point. As a consequence, their lack of self-confidence hinders many from accepting God's call as we will learn later from Jacobs' (2012) personal testimony.

4. JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

Although many Christians have read about Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman, they have superficially treated the whole episode as one of the stories in the Bible. They have not received profound revelation about the real essence of the duo's encounter. The Bible says without vision or revelation/discernment, people perish (Proverbs29:18).

Some Christians do understand the morale of the encounter. But they are too submerged in culture which incapacitates them to help restructure human relations from a Godly perspective. Thus, it is sufficiently important that this article should explicate this encounter with a view to inspire Christian change agents to adopt Jesus' counter-cultural approach to social change. According to Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's Dictionary, counter-culture refers to:

“A set of values and ways of behaving that are completely different from those of the rest of the society”.

The Bible requires Christians to be counter-cultural precisely because culture (and the social constructs it produces such as classism, racism, sexism and religiosity) harmfully divide society and separate people from God as reflected in the case study of Samaria. According to Peterson (2002:1557), Christians are advised:

“Don’t become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You will be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what He wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings out the best in you, develops well-formed maturity in you”.

Siilvos (2006) encourages the Christian church to be counter-cultural like Jesus Christ and not promote a subculture. People who are counter-cultural create an empowering spiritual environment by uprooting and replacing counter-productive aspects of culture, whereas those who passively accommodate themselves to a subculture are content with surviving under a dominant or disabling culture.

One of the walls of division that Jesus demolished in Samaria is racism. As far as Jesus is concerned institutionalized racism is the same evil as sexism and classism. Hence, Jesus wants these evil to be addressed through a structural or integrated approach which emphasizes the interconnectedness of these social evils. However, it is patent that Christians today are not doing enough to confront these evils. Thus, this study is important to the church in that it exists in an environment that is infested with so many social problems which need its urgent response. The study should make the church realize that as long as it is still dominated and contaminated by the strongholds of classism, sexism, racism and ethnicity, it won’t have spiritual authority to help society to eliminate social ills.

5. METHODOLOGY

Literature Review

The primary source for this study is the Bible. Some books and newspaper articles have been used. These sources are meant to prove that indeed Jesus Christ’s encounter with the Samaritan woman in Sychar is a case study of a revolutionary move, not just from a narrow gender empowerment perspective, but from structural analysis that calls for radical transformation of human relations polluted and distorted by divisions based on gender, class, race, religion and other social factors.

The literature shows that such transformation cannot be achieved through carnal interventions, but by a genuine desire to liberate and empower all oppressed people in line with God’s will. The literature presents the Samaritan woman as an empowered agent Jesus deployed to bring about a spiritual revolution in Samaria. This perspective is supposed to inspire us to value all people irrespective of their locations in the social structure, and actively remove any conditions that promote social disempowerment.

The literature reveals that the bigger picture painted by Jesus Christ’s intervention is that women (just like men) have a crucial role to play in the building of God’s Kingdom. Christ wants his contemporary followers (both males and females in leadership) throughout the world to set women free so that they can victoriously partner with men in developing and unleashing their enormous creative potential for the benefit of humanity as a whole. This is the will of God.

Tools of Analysis

The following tools of analysis were used:

- **Structural analysis.** This approach to understanding and analyzing society emphasizes that social relations or relations of ruling are structured and woven according to the social constructs of class, race, ethnicity, gender and religion to establish and maintain patriarchal hegemony (Smith:1987). These social factors determine access to and control over resources in nations. However, stratifying society along these constructs has no place in the Kingdom of God for He is not a respecter of person (Romans 2:11), He is only impressed and moved by the faithful observance and application of His principles.
- **Textual criticism.** This approach to interpreting Scriptures does not introduce a negative or destructive dimension against the text/book (Conner and Malmin:1983). Instead, it enables a meticulous researcher to go deeper into the text to discern the subtleties and nuances or hidden meanings.

- **Personal observations:** Although the author did not conduct any interviews for this study, over the years he has made useful observations that have helped him a great deal in analyzing the text (Chapter four of John). His interest in gender reconciliation and human empowerment in general, has encouraged him to engage in discussions with many spiritual leaders (both male and female) from all walks of life.

In particular, he has directly challenged many to share with him their understanding of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman and its implications for gender relations in their churches and other institutions. He did not only check their understanding of the text; he scrutinized their application of its Scriptures. He observed that despite many leaders' fluency in Scriptures, their actual practice is not counter-cultural.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Jesus as a Transformational Leader

Jesus did not come to humanity to leave the world as he found it. He powerfully preached a life-changing message about the kingdom of God. His earthly ministry promoted counter-culture as opposed to sub-culture (or conformation to the cultural and religious status quo).

Through counter culture, Jesus deliberately launched a transformation project by which he sought to save souls, and renew carnal minds through his earthly ministry. Paul states in Romans 8:6 that to be carnally minded is death, to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Paul also asserts in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that people with natural minds cannot comprehend the things of the spirit of God. To them such things are tantamount to foolishness. These things can only be known, understood and appreciated by people with sharp spiritual discernment.

When authentic spiritual transformation has occurred, Christ's followers no longer regard anyone by the flesh because anyone who believes in Jesus is a new creation, old things have passed away, and all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:16-17). Jesus has also underscored the criticality of transforming mindsets or paradigms by teaching that new wine should not be poured in an old wineskin for such a container is bound to break up and the wine will be lost (Mathew 9:17). He was referring to the same idea when he pointedly urged Nicodemus, "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Jacobs (2012) also suggests that when Jesus attended the wedding at Cana with his disciples, he came to initiate his mission of spiritual transformation. By miraculously converting ordinary water into the wine of the spirit, she says symbolically this implies that, as a transformer, Jesus was basically communicating that he purposefully came to the world to turn things around. For instance, he came to restructure human relations by teaching the values, principles and standards people need to know in order to live a righteous life that pleases God.

The crucial mandate of Jesus' earthly ministry was to effect transformation in people's lives through teaching, preaching and healing (Mathew 4:23). In Luke 4:18 he says he was anointed to teach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and free the oppressed.

Teaching the poor Samaritan woman directly, and powerfully anointing her for transformative evangelism in a cultural and religious milieu in which social apartheid was widely entrenched, was a special dispensation that expresses God's immeasurable love for humanity. We also realize that Jesus was able to spiritually transform Nicodemus, a famous scholar and member of the Jewish ruling council (Sanhedrin). This council was diametrically opposed to Jesus' teachings and spiritual exploits. We can readily assume that another member of the Sanhedrin, the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea, who also became Jesus' secret disciple and volunteered to bury Jesus in his family tomb, was converted by Jesus the same way he proselytized Nicodemus.

The apostle Paul, who humbly regards himself as "less than the least of all the saints" (Ephesians 3:8), was also miraculously converted by Jesus Christ. Paul passionately regrets his past evil conduct. He was a blasphemer, a persecutor of Christians and an insolent man (1 Timothy 1:13). But the compassionate Christ showed him mercy, and gave him grace to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ among the Gentiles.

Jesus' converts included both men and women, and the poor and the rich. The story of the Samaritan woman is used here just to show us that despite the globalization of different forms of female marginalization enforced by patriarchy, God values women for they too can faithfully and lovingly do His work if propitious conditions are created to facilitate their active participation in change and development. For instance, Mary, Jesus' mother, humbly cooperated with God when, as a virgin, God deployed an angel to inform her that she would conceive a child (Jesus) by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Even though her crucial engagement for marriage to Joseph was at an advanced stage, she submissively permitted the sovereign will of God to prevail over her original personal desire.

Mary was also instrumental in teaching others faith and obedience as “one of the key disciples” of Jesus. For instance, when the wine ran out at the wedding at Cana, she ordered the servants, “whatever he [Jesus] tells you, do it” (John 2:5). We also remember that Jesus taught Mary Magdalene, who later thankfully expressed her profound love for the lord by buying him an expensive perfume that was used to prepare him for burial (Mark 14:3-5).

However, it should be acknowledged that many male leaders justify their offensive exclusion of women from spiritual leadership on the grounds that Jesus’ twelve disciples/apostles were male. But as the Scriptures will reveal later, the strategic choice of these men does not connote sexism on the part of Jesus. Even though Jesus was not motivated by gender prejudice, in terms of the prevailing immensely patriarchal culture, when he started his ministry it was inopportune for him to directly enlist women as disciples.

In his foreword to Jacobs’ work (2012), John Dawson tackles the above-stated criticism launched against Jesus, saying Jesus was single and he travelled constantly and extensively. Thus, culturally it would have been difficult for women to cope with his work schedule because traditionally they were literally confined to the home. He had to tread carefully in the early stages of his ministry lest he encountered massive patriarchal resistance, even from his twelve disciples who were also steeped in a sexist culture.

Jesus’ active involvement in the lives of women demonstrates that contrary to the distorted and deceptive view raised by many critics in international feminism, that God or the Bible condones patriarchal domination, God wants women to be free and impactfully exercise leadership according to their enormous potential just like men. Such critics have grossly misinterpreted the Scripture (Ephesians 5:22) that commands wives to submit to their husbands, saying it means that women are less than their husbands. These critics don’t understand that when wives obediently submit to their husbands and the latter love their wives, they both engage in mutual submission under their Master, Jesus Christ.

Women’s faithful submission and men’s love under Jesus Christ result in gender reconciliation, unity, peaceful co-existence, harmonious collaboration and “*cooperacy*”, all which are all vital for success in marriage and family life. A family (city or kingdom) divided against itself is disorganized and effete to stand firmly against adversity (Mathew 12:25).

Jesus’ Revolutionary Mission in Samaria

According to John, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus, on a particular day, when Jesus returned to his home town, he purposefully passed via Sychar in Samaria for a divine appointment with a socially, emotionally and sexually amputated woman. Because of her social insignificance, her name is not even mentioned in the Scriptures, and racially biased and condescending Jews would not even talk to her (Maxwell:2007). Jesus was led by the spirit of God just like he was led to do his Father’s business in the Jerusalem temple when his parents and others left for Nazareth after the Passover Feast, thinking he had gone ahead of them with other travelers (Luke 2:43-46).

God wanted to initiate something new in Samaria through Jesus and the woman who, according to Jacobs (2012:271), “was considered less than a dog”. As usual, Jesus obeyed the voice of God and went to Samaria. He says he never does anything without hearing from the Father, because he and the Father are one (John 17:21).

The opportunity to meet the woman at Jacob’s well was provided by God because “a man cannot receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven” (John 4:27). And according to John 14:6, Jesus is the way, the truth and the source of eternal life. The Samaritan woman and other women in deplorable living conditions could not come to the Father except through Jesus. In John 7:5 Jesus reveals his indispensability to us, saying he is the vine and we are the branches. If we abide in him and he abides in us, we will bear much fruit because without him, we can do nothing.

God strategically deployed Jesus to Samaria precisely because of the disempowering relations of ruling that undermined the quality of life of His people there. Jesus was the only appropriate person to execute God’s mission for he fully understands the plight of abused and oppressed people. Hebrew 4:15 says he can’t fail to empathize with those who are weak and going through the storms of life because he was tempted in all points, yet he did not yield to temptation. In Mathew 4:1-11 he completely defeated Satan, the tempter.

Right from his birth, Jesus went through suffering. As a matter of fact, the devil attempted to kill him while he was still in Mary’s womb (Revelation 12:1-5). The owners of the inn in Bethlehem could not accommodate Joseph and Mary when the latter was ready to deliver baby Jesus. He ended up being laid in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes. Jesus was superficially assessed and ridiculed by critics who rejected him offhand because he came from a despised

community of Nazareth. Even when he was born, his birth was taken very lightly; hence the correct record of his birth was lost. This resulted in a wrong date (December 25) being imposed as his date of birth (Guta Ra Mwari:1997).

When Phillip said “we have found him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45), the potential prophet Nathaniel assessing Jesus by physical (and not spiritual) eyes made a sarcastic and disparaging remark about him and his home town: “can anything good come out of Nazareth? (verse 46). Jesus was also accused by the Pharisees of being a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mathew 9:11). He was called a Beelzebub, head of demons (Mathew 12:24). Before his resurrection members of his own family also ignorantly poked fun at him as they perceived him to be an eccentric fellow. They did not even believe him before the resurrection ((John 7:15).

Social Apartheid in Samaria

“How is it that you, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4:9).

In Jesus’ days Samaria was awfully despised and rejected by social chauvinists who regarded it as a spiritually contaminated place. In fact, some people considered it an insult if they were referred to as Samaritans. Lutzer and Lutzer (2006) indicate that many Jews during those days were comfortable with entering cities like Jerusalem, Galilee and Judea, but scornfully shunned Samaria. And within Samaria there was internal oppression. The Samaritans were considered racially impure by Jewish chauvinists. The Jews despised them so much that they insisted that they (Samaritans) should worship God in Jerusalem, creating the erroneous impression that it was futile or ungodly to worship God in Samaria (John 4:20).

In his response Jesus, the liberator, asserted that eventually such a religious requirement would not be necessary in a new dispensation of the Holy Spirit in which worshipping God is not tied to a particular place. He said the omnipresent God is spirit, and anyone who worships Him should do so in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). And Jaynes (2010:110) amplifies this idea as follows:

“God is more interested in how we worship than where we worship. He is more concerned with our relationship with Him than our religious practices”.

Again, the Bible teaches that where there is the spirit of the Lord there is liberty. Jesus was also basically teaching that people should not allow culture, traditions and religion to senselessly divide and emasculate them, and separate them from God.

Jesus’ Unprecedented Conversation with the Samaritan Woman

The conversation Jesus had with the Samaritan woman included the following key aspects:

- Jesus mentioned to the woman that he could offer her water that truly quenches thirst. He was referring to supernatural empowerment through the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus brought the message of hope and comfort to the woman when he revealed himself to her as the long awaited Messiah.
- Jesus empathically prophesied about the marital situation of the woman and the trials and tribulations she had gone through in a male supremacist culture and religion. Jesus did not condemn her but showed her that she needed him to save her.
- When the woman mentioned that the Jews insisted that the Samaritans should worship God in Jerusalem, Jesus indicated that it is not the place where one worships that matters, but the condition of the heart when one worships. One should worship God in spirit and in truth.

Divine “Exclusion” of Jesus’ Disciples

There is a very good reason why Jesus had to meet the woman without his disciples. They had gone to town to buy food. Thus, God created a golden opportunity for Jesus to meet the woman alone. Interestingly, even Nicodemus had to meet Jesus secretly at night (John 3:2) because had other members of the Sanhedrin seen him being taught by Jesus, his conversation with Jesus would have been interrupted or terminated prematurely. Nicodemus’ colleagues would have raised eye-brows about his spiritual derailment and defection. They were vehemently opposed to Jesus’ teachings and his deity claim.

God kept the disciples away because they had not yet undergone spiritual transformation. They had not achieved a level of maturity necessary for them to perceive and accept the woman from Jesus' emancipatory and empowerment perspective. Being Jews who had no dealings with the Samaritans, they would have raised eyebrows about Jesus' conversation with a downtrodden woman from a marginal race and class. Significantly, they would have been confused when Jesus unceremoniously broke an established cultural convention and asked for water from the Samaritan woman. And their presence would have hindered her from freely interacting with and learning from Jesus.

The apostle John shows that even though the disciples did not say anything when they found Jesus talking to the woman, deep down they were curiously asking themselves what she was seeking from him, and why Jesus was talking to her (John 4:27). And they couldn't understand that Jesus' encounter with the heartbroken woman gave him a great spiritual breakthrough that pleased the Father. Jesus himself was immensely gratified by what he achieved for God through the woman so much that he did not feel the hunger for food. The disciples could not make head or tail of why he was not keen to eat. They wondered if someone had given him food. Jesus answered:

"My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish His work" (John 4:34).

The same idea of concentrating on his core assignment was on Jesus' mind when multitudes flocked to him for healing. He healed many and still remembered his crucial purpose (Mark 1:38). When it comes to doing God's work Jesus unforgettably gave it priority. In Mathew 4:4 he says man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. He demonstrated his hunger to see nations change and give their lives to God when he cursed (punished) the fig tree (disobedient nation) that withered mysteriously (Mark 21:18-19).

Because he was wise, compassionate, just and caring; Jesus did not condemn the Samaritan woman for her sins in the same way that he did not condemn the woman who was brought to him by hypocritical men accusing her of adultery. Instead, Jesus unprecedentedly gave the Samaritan woman full attention throughout their encounter because she needed to be thoroughly equipped so that she could effectively apply the Word in her life-changing evangelism. Paul states in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that all Scripture is derived from the inspiration of God and is useful for doctrine (teaching), rebuke, correction and instruction in righteousness, so that a servant of God may be complete and fully equipped for every good work.

Jacobs (2012) and Jaynes (2010) point out that the historic conversation Jesus had with the woman was the longest he had ever had with anyone. Evidently, Jesus took this woman and his mission seriously because he had been inspired by God to address structurally entrenched injustice based on gender, class, race, lifestyle, culture and religion. Thus, he was laying a solid foundation for social emancipation he still exhorts his followers to emulate today.

Jesus inspiringly led by example (1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1, Mathews 11:28). He lovingly promoted just treatment for all (Romans 2:1, Galatians 3:28, 2 Corinthians 5:16 &17). Hence, he radically entered Samaria to remove the walls of division based on the structural locations occupied by the residents there. Clearly, the fact that Jesus wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4), and the fact that he expects Christians to practice radical forgiveness against those who persecute them, or use them spitefully (Mathew 5:44), means that in the kingdom of God there is no room for discrimination and abuse against other humans.

The Transformative Potency of God's Word

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness, so that a man of God may be complete and be equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

"And do not conform to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

Jesus' encounter with the woman shows us the omnipotence of God's spirit-filled Word. Just by sharing the living Word with the woman, Jesus was able to open her spiritual eyes and spiritual ears, and inspired her to go and urgently witness to multitudes in her community. Like Jesus' disciples, she learned to be to be a fisher of men (Mathew 4:19) and to be rich in good works, ready to share what she learned from her Master (Timothy 6:18). She became the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Jesus has urged all his followers to go into the world and make disciples of all nations and teach them everything he taught them (Mathew 28:18, Mark 16:15, Acts 1:8). This assignment, which the woman executed excellently, is called the Great Commission.

Previously, the Samaritan woman had low self-esteem because in the eyes of many people, she was a worthless person and her assimilation of their negative attitudes toward her made her develop low self-regard. She had been scandalously married and divorced five times. And according to Jesus, the man she was currently involved with was not her husband (John 4:18).

This woman was a resident of a community in which women were lowly regarded. People gossiped about her as they considered her ways morally repugnant. Although other women used to go in groups to fetch water at Jacob's well, she internalized her rejection by community members to the extent that she became a loner who feared to join other women when they went to draw water. The worth and dignity of the Samaritan woman and (others in the same boat with her) had been damagingly diminished by artificial or socially constructed structural impediments.

But Jesus' radical-transformative intervention in the life of the woman demonstrates that God's Word is alive and all-powerful, and is sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrew 4:12). The Word radically transformed her by imbuing her with supreme confidence, courage and determination that made her urgently go out to win the minds and hearts of many for Jesus Christ. She became the first disciple of Jesus in Samaria because Jesus had figured out that despite the rejection she had been subjected to, her heart was in the right condition for ministry.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that blessed are the poor in spirit for they shall inherit the earth (Mathew 5:1). Interestingly, Jacobs shows that Jesus chose to reveal himself to the woman as the Messiah. He anointed and appointed her as an evangelist despite the fact that there were many so-called high profile male rabbis in the community. She makes the following remarks:

"The Samaritan woman became the first evangelist. She preached the message to the whole city, to men and women. Surely Jesus could have gone into the city and found a Samaritan man, but no, he chose a woman from the lowest class of society and gave her value as one worthy to spread the good news.....Respected rabbis were expected to keep their distance from sinners, but Jesus spoke directly to sinners about matters of the kingdom. This was very unusual for a rabbi in his day" (Jacobs, 2012:271).

Jacobs states that the selection of the woman for evangelism was clearly an expression of Jesus' outright rejection of gender and racially based prejudice. She also reveals that because Jesus took a very serious view of the way women were mistreated, he typically opposed hypocrisy and its resultant double standards of misconduct and punishment for men and women in the matter of a woman charged with adultery (John 8:1-10).

The living Word eliminated the woman's fear, self-doubt and the feeling of discouragement. The immutable Word transformed her into a dynamic agent for Christ. It made her forget that she was an outcast with no sense of mission or purpose. All the hopelessness, powerlessness and helplessness she felt before Jesus came into her life dissipated. The transformative redemption and salvation she received made her desire to make her new life contribute something positive to the lives of others. These people, men and women, gave their lives to the Lord in droves. John 4:38 states that:

"And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in him because of the word of the woman who testified".

The transformative experience of this woman is comparable to that of other people who had a similar encounter with Jesus. After his resurrection, Jesus met his half-brother James. James changed radically and ended up becoming a significant pastor at the church in Jerusalem. The work of Towns (2008) suggests that James, who had nothing to do with Jesus' ministry before resurrection, received miraculous anointing for ministry from Jesus immediately after his resurrection. The same applies to Jude (also Jesus' half-brother).

Women's Great Potential for Spiritual Leadership

The Samaritan woman did not just passively hear the Word like most Christians; she faithfully exercised spiritual authority by confidently reaching out to members of her community to evangelize, thus carrying out the Great Commission. According to this Commission, Christ's followers are delegated authority to go into the world to make disciples of all nations, and teach them according to what Jesus asked them to teach (Mathew 28:18-19).

Many men and women got to know about Christ through the Samaritan woman (John 4:29). So, Christ has demonstrated that women can also provide sound spiritual leadership as long as they have been spiritually empowered and appointed by God. Said differently, anybody can become an asset to the kingdom of God if they allow God to activate the capacity He has already endowed them with. Serving God is not a gender issue. It is about faithful execution of His call under His teaching and inspirational exhortations, guidance and counseling. As for women, Jesus values them so much because at the end of the age they will partner and co-labor with men under him to deliver the final blow against the Satanic kingdom (Silvos:2006).

The awesome experience of the Samaritan woman dovetails with that of Judge Apostle Emmy Kgaswane, the leader of Unceasing Prayer Centre (UPC) which is based in Mochudi in Botswana. This woman practiced as a traditional doctor for fifteen years before she gave her life to the Lord. The Lord taught her that, like the Samaritan woman, she should not be mentored by anyone but Jesus Christ. The Lord has taught her directly and continues to teach her great and mighty things. He has powerfully anointed and appointed to serve His kingdom miraculously.

Despite the fact that many spiritually illiterate people still despise and ridicule Kgaswane (Ditlhase:2013), on the 26 November 2013 the Lord officially ordained her as a spiritual Judge, not just for Botswana, but for the whole world (Ditlhase:2013). She is the second woman after Esther in the Old Testament to be installed Judge, authentically representing heaven on earth. Her role or function is not to condemn sinners, but to bring them to the Lord in accordance with Christians' ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). Clearly, her historic appointment also bears testimony to the fact that God still has confidence in women and obedient people the world considers nonentities. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:27:

“But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put shame to the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty”.

Jesus' anointing and ordination of the Samaritan woman, and other women of purpose and impact, dispels the divisive patriarchal mindset that is so prevalent in many churches that sexist or carnally minded leaders use as an excuse to deny women an opportunity to ascend to leadership positions. A well known example in Botswana is that of Reverend Mmoniemang Kgosiemang. She was once a member of the Dutch Reformed Church in Mochudi. She was controversially and violently deposed by male protesters, saying it is unscriptural and unbecoming for a woman to lead a patriarchal congregation.

Jacobs confirms that sexist attitudes intimidate many women who end up being discouraged to accept God's call to leadership. She shares her personal experience:

“I struggled intensely with accepting the call of God upon my life as a minister of the gospel. It took me two full years before I even admitted to anyone that I was a minister – even after I was licensed” (page 107).

Bailey (2003:173) also raises concern about the mistreatment of women in ministry:

“I have personally witnessed unfair treatment toward women in ministry, and I am pleased whenever I discover women who are overcoming the limitations that men in positions of authority have placed on them”.

Evidently, the doctrines and philosophies that promote spiritual derailment or sexism in the church as an institution are firmly rooted in both culture and religion that fuel and perpetuate patriarchal hegemony and resistance. Men's prevailing mental assent and reactionary posture also emanate from their spiritual immaturity. This immaturity is to some extent linked to gross distortion and misinterpretation of Paul's assertion that women should remain silent in the embattled church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

However, Reverend Obed Kealotswe, a religious studies academic at the University of Botswana, has argued very strongly that the Anglican Church's decision not to ordain women into priesthood is not so much a result of theological motivation, but a function of culture, or the prevailing social, political and economic attitudes toward women (Pheage:2014).

Paradoxically, this church is headed by the Queen who is a woman. But recently, when its Central African Province (which includes Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia and Botswana) rejected the clarion call for women's ordination into priesthood, some ignorant members went off tangent and justified their oppositional vote by saying “Jesus' disciples were men and not women”(Pheage, 2014:3).

Jacobs wants us to put what Paul says about the Corinthian women having to remain silent in church in a proper context because “it is very easy for people to misread what was happening in the Early Church through the filter of our own modern-day church buildings and auditoriums”(Jacobs 2012:228). At page 230 she states that “it is unlikely that the first-century church shared our preoccupation with ecclesiastical structures and status”.

God's Word on women and His high purpose for their lives remain immutably progressive and transformative. The work of Jaynes (2010) clearly shows that God has positive thoughts about women and wants to use them to build His kingdom. Prejudice and discrimination based on gender or sex and other social constructs like race and culture is ungodly since believers of different social backgrounds are one under Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28). Thus, from an authentic Christian perspective, all human beings have a transcendental (immeasurably superior) value and deserve to be treated with love and respect. Jacobs (2012:275) buttresses this godly point of view:

“The power of the cross cuts through the walls of division and brings dignity to men, women and children... .. God loves all His children the same – no matter what their age, gender and race”.

Jaynes (2010) also says God extends His grace, love and power to all people irrespective of rank or race, gender or generation. These people are sons and daughters, young and old, men and women.

And as far as women liberation and empowerment are concerned, Jesus has always been the Master progenitor of these values, long before the emergence of the women's liberation movement. For this reason Lutzer and Lutzer (2006) refer to him as the "original feminist". And it is sufficiently important to recognize that Jesus is not approaching women liberation and empowerment from a constricted or gender-centric perspective, but from a structural analysis that motivated his intervention in Samaria to be about the "bigger picture", and not just a gender affair.

Furthermore, it is God's desire that all men and women in the church everywhere in the whole wide world should not conform to the misleading ways of the world, but be radically transformed by the power of the spirit in His Word and the blood of the Lamb, so that they may know how to serve His kingdom as a united, glorious and triumphant church.

Counter-productive divisions between men and women based on any social factors are devilish and not godly. Contrary to feminist political arguments, God cannot condone female abuse because He purposefully created males and females in His own image (Genesis 1:26). Fundamentally, this means that God is inherently male and female in outlook. If He is insensitive to the plight of women He fearfully and wonderfully made in His own image and likeness, as anti-Bible feminist argue, it would mean He practically disqualifies Himself from being true God. We all know that because of His impeccable integrity, God cannot contradict His immutable Word, nature/character and will (Hebrew 13:8).

The structural analysis of power relations in Samaria and other places in our contemporary nations clearly shows that it is not God who causes pain and suffering women and other disadvantaged people are experiencing. Rather, it is the ham-handedness of the institutions created and operated by corrupt and sinful man that produce deplorable conditions that destroy the inherent worth and dignity of humans. God has said whatever institutions we build that lack His foundation will not succeed (Psalms 127:1). The disobedient man's dehumanizing existential conditions that give rise to oppression and underdevelopment based on gender, class, race, culture, traditions and religion are socially manufactured. God wants to rescue and prosper all His people (men and women) everywhere as the Scripture cited below shows:

"If my people who are called by my name would humble themselves and pray, seek my face, and turn away from their wickedness, I will hear from heaven. I will forgive their sins and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

God's method of intervention requires that man should trust His understanding so that He may rescue him by directing his paths (Proverbs 3:5-6). The dramatic evangelism the Samaritan woman used to propagate the Word of God in Samaria was meant to help people to get saved and achieve the life Christ wants them to experience.

Key Lessons for Christian Change Agents

1. The Word of God is inherently powerful. Although it never changes (Hebrew 13:8, Psalms 119:89), those who learn it, assimilate it and put it into practice, like the Samaritan woman, can radically change their own outlook and influence other people to achieve the same.
2. No matter how fluent people are in the Word of God, or how high they are in the church hierarchy, if they perpetrate prejudice and discrimination based on gender and other socio-cultural constructs, Jesus cannot approve them as his followers because such discrimination can only be encouraged or condoned by the anti-Christ spirit. Thus, Christian male leaders who discriminate against women in the church and other social institutions are not authentic followers of Christ. The Bible warns us about such deceivers and manipulators (Colossians 2:8).
3. Every human being, including the wretched of the earth, has tremendous potential to be used by God to change the lives of others. God does not focus on people's physical appearance, gender, race, socio-economic status and other criteria societies use to determine the worth and dignity of people. In fact, God would use even the most despised people to accomplish His mission. Jesus himself suffered right from the time of his birth and was rejected by the very people he was dispatched on earth to redeem and save. But God used him mightily to reconcile humanity to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18) as we see in the case of Samaria.
4. Change agents need to adopt the submissive humility of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5-8). Though he was God, he made himself of no reputation. He humbled himself before God the Father and man. This enabled him to change and impact the world. Though he was different from the poor he came for, as a matter of principle, he made sure that he was meaningfully relevant to them. For instance, when the people who received Good News from the Samaritan woman asked Jesus to spend two days in their city, he gladly accepted their invitation (John 4:40). Jesus was also baptized with sinners by John the Baptist (Mathew 3:13) as a way by which he identified with the people he was sent to save (Fernando:2002).

Evidently, Jesus interaction with the people in Samaria helped him to get to know them better and minister to them. Unlike Jesus, many change agents, including Christians, exude social chauvinism that hinders them to come down to the level of common people. Their lack of “voluntary simplicity” is a result of weak service mentality stemming from the fact that change agents refuse to die to self and endure hardships as good soldiers of Christ.

5. Christians have been told repeatedly that they should be faithful doers of the Word, and not just be mere hearers of the Word (James 1:22). Jesus himself heard from the Father and went out to do and finished his assignments (John 4:34). The Samaritan woman received powerful inspiration from Jesus and went away to carry out her Great Commission project that resulted in many people giving their lives to the Lord. It is the lack of a clear sense of purpose and action orientation among many Christians today that renders them lukewarm, irresponsible and unproductive.
6. Christian change agents and their collaborators should place a high premium on structural change. For instance, if they want to improve the status of women, they should realize that if other intertwined structural sites in which women are located such as race, marital status and culture are not addressed in a radical-transformative manner, real empowerment of women in most of Africa and other economically marginalized nations would remain a pie in the sky.
7. The case study of Jesus’ intervention in the life of the lowly regarded Samaritan woman teaches that it is not enough to liberate the oppressed or captives; liberators must ensure that those who are set free are also empowered so that they too, like the Samaritan woman, can become agents of change and transformation in the lives of other people.
8. Many people have enough potential to cause dramatic changes in their lives and the lives of other people. However, if these people lack the Holy Spirit, they remain powerless, helpless and hopeless like the Samaritan woman before her miraculous encounter with Jesus. When they receive the phenomenal and enabling power of the Holy Spirit, they become energetic, enthusiastic, creative, courageous, productive and transformative agents of change.
9. The fact that Jesus has shown that God loves women (just like men) and wants to use them to expand His Kingdom, means women should arise and shine. They should not cling to incapacitating excuses and indulge in self-disparagement, self-pity, and succumb to defeat imposed by existential crises. Like the Samaritan woman, they should discard the mentality of victimhood and depend on the power of God to surmount the effects of the storms of life. Bailey (2003:173) offers women a word of encouragement:

“Sadly, a great number of women have allowed man-made traditions to stifle God’s gift of ministry within them. This mental posture deeply grieves God. I believe He calls us to go beyond all perceived limitations. Whatever your limitation seems to be, God has allowed it for a purpose not to deter or discourage you, but rather to bring glory to His name as He works in you to march around that limitation”.
10. For leaders to diligently and excellently serve God who rewards them (Colossians 3:23-24), they should not only have indomitable passion for their work; they should also readily and constantly cooperate with the Holy Spirit just like Jesus Christ. He went to Samaria to cause a revolution after hearing from God that he needed to go through this community for a significant assignment. Thus, though change agents are educated according to their particular professional fields, it is imperative that they should be acutely sensitive to the voice of God who wants to help them carry out their duties.

7. CONCLUSION

Jesus’ crucial mission in socially torn Samaria demonstrates God’s acute sensitivity to the suffering inflicted upon His people by fellow humans in a world consumed by spiritual ignorance, hardheartedness and sin. Where-ever prejudice, discrimination and other negative tendencies prevail, Satan uses them to divide men and women and separate them from God.

Because God created women to be the “weaker sex” (1 Peter 3:7) so that they may submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22), Satan has adroitly deceived and misled men who manufacture culture that oppresses and disadvantages women. Women and other victims of social exclusion end up failing to develop and become what God wants them to be. Even if church leaders are aware of prejudice, discrimination and injustice, as was the case in Samaria, they lack spiritual authority to turn things around because their counter-productive religiosity has blinded them and disconnected them from the real source of authentic empowerment – Jesus Christ.

In fact, male religious leaders who are uncritically steeped in culture craft or succumb to doctrines and philosophies that violently promote abuse against women and other sections of society. Unless they faithfully surrender to Jesus for proper teaching, their churches would remain irrelevant and worthless. The fact that the liberated and empowered Samaritan woman ended up preaching to men (John 4:28) who got converted is meant to show us that men's marginalization and oppression of women is not just a function of existing material conditions; it is a function of spiritual conditions that necessitate Jesus' intervention.

We learn from the case study of Samaria that instead of being women-centric in his intervention, Jesus sees the bigger picture. He understands that people are not simply men and women. They are occupants of man-made multiple locations or social categories in the social structure such as gender, class and race. Desirable interventions are those that obliterate these barriers to enable people to have a peaceful and enabling environment in which they can develop and grow to become what they are potentially capable of becoming. The psychologist Abraham Maslow has said what a man can be, he must be.

Jesus' choice of a despised Samaritan woman does not mean he favors women. His exemplary liberatory action serves to encourage Christian change agents to be constructively sensitive to the plight of the wretched of the earth in every setting where there is structural or systemic oppression. All men and women are equal in God's eyes (Galatians 3:28). Authentic Christian leaders should eliminate anything that imposes a wedge between and amongst people in order to achieve gender reconciliation and peaceful co-existence that are imperative for humanity to have truly safe, secure and healthy societies. This is the will of God.

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