

FAITH AND HOPE

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In a world of ever changing conditions, we can have hope and faith in the One who never changes. He is unmoved by circumstance or chance. All of creation is before Him; and He is always involved in His work and glory: *“to bring to pass the immortality, and eternal life of man”* (D&C 22:23b).

In the scriptures, we find men and women of great faith whose hope is in the Lord. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, John the Beloved, Nephi, Ether, and the brother of Jared are many of the names that come to mind. There are many women as well - Esther, Ruth, Sarah, Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha. There is a woman of scripture that I want us to remember who is a wonderful example. This person's life was changed by the hope that God caused to spring up in her and her faith in the Holy One of Israel. She was not a woman of a great family. Her name is not even mentioned. She was not an important person in the society in which she lived. In fact, she was considered an outcast by the religious people of her day. But God in His infinite wisdom and mercy reached down from heaven and touched her life with such miraculous power that she was forever changed.

It seems that in every age, people are more concerned with outward appearance than in the inner person. We even judge ourselves by all the expectations placed on us by others. Many of these expectations have no eternal value and yet we, as women, carry on our shoulders and in our hearts, many misconceptions of God's expectation of us. This may cause us to lose hope and therefore, weaken our faith. The good news is that our hope does not rest in how well we meet the expectations of others. Our faith is not to be based on how faithful we are on our own, but in how faithful and steadfast is the Lord God Almighty and His precious Son. Only God, through His Son, can cleanse us and strengthen us that we may grow into that perfect image of Christ. Many of us have believed a powerful lie - that we must first make ourselves clean and perfect before we can approach God. What a terrible burden and impossible task! Jesus says, *“Come unto me...”* (Matthew 11:29-30). It is only when we put aside our foolish pride and acknowledge our weaknesses at the feet of Jesus that we are forgiven, and given the strength required to fully commit ourselves to the will of God. It is not a one time occurrence! We must continually come unto Christ who is the *“author and finisher of our faith”* (Moroni 6:4-5) the *“Alpha and Omega”* of our lives (III Nephi 4:47-52).

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

“The woman said unto him, Sir, give me of this water that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.” (John 4:17)

Background - The People of Samaria

When Joshua entered the land of Canaan, the land was divided among the twelve tribes of Israel. In as much as they obeyed the Lord, they were successful in conquest of the land and its cities. They never reached anywhere close to the borders promised by God because they were not willing to fully submit to God's will. Under the faithful leadership of King David, the Israelites gained more land and solidified their presence in the land. But by the end of the reign of David's son, King Solomon, the people had followed their leaders into idolatry. Israel became divided into two main groups - the Northern Kingdom called Israel and the Southern Kingdom called Judah.

The Temple was located in Jerusalem which was in the Southern Kingdom. Since the Temple was the only place where the people could formally worship God, most of the priesthood moved into the Southern Kingdom. Moved with fear that the people would reject him and reunite with the Southern Kingdom, the King of the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam, created his own places of worship and ordained his own priesthood. This religion was a crude copy of the rightful worship of Jehovah taught by those called of God.

A city called Samaria eventually became the capital of the Northern Kingdom and later the whole land became known by that name. In approximately 721 BC, Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom and carried away the people from all the cities. All government, social, and religious leadership were deported to another conquered area. Then captives taken from other lands were brought in and forced to settle in what was then called the land of Samaria. These people intermarried with the remaining scattered people of Israel which mixed their religious beliefs even further. They accepted Jehovah as the "God of the Land" and worshipped Him in addition to the imported gods.

By the time of Jesus, many clashes had occurred. The Jews (as they had come to be called during their captivity in Babylon) considered the Samaritans to be defiled and corrupted. The Samaritans in response to the Jewish rejection, did everything in their power to hinder the Jews. The Jew's hatred of the Samaritans increased to the point where the Jewish religious leaders announced that of all of the peoples God had created, only the Samaritans were beyond redemption. They declared that a Samaritan woman was "menstruous from the womb." Jewish law was very specific about blood and its ability to make one clean or unclean. The law stated that a woman was "unclean" during her monthly cycle. Therefore, the Jewish Rabbis had effectively made all Samaritan women, everyone who came in contact with them, and everything they touched "unclean." In light of this, John 4:6-45 is a most remarkable testimony of hope and grace.

In the Middle East, it is the husband that divorces. The wife does not have the right to divorce her husband. Grounds for divorce during the time of Christ could be something as simple as not preparing food the husband accepts or speaking to him in a public place. The most common reason however, was if the woman was not able to bear children. She was often considered cursed of God if she was barren. The woman at the well had been rejected by five husbands. The man she was living with who provided her with a home, would not honor her with his name. She came to the well during the middle of the day perhaps because most women would come in the early morning. She met there the one person who would never reject her. Hope was waiting at the well.

A NEW CREATURE IN CHRIST

At all times, Jesus followed the leadings of the Holy Spirit. In John 4:5-6, we read that Jesus left Judea and to go to Galilee. As He did, He said the most amazing thing to His disciples, ***“I must needs go through Samaria.”*** This seems on the surface to people of our day to be a very simple statement. However, remember that the Jews hated the Samaritians. They traveled many miles out of the way in order to keep from going through their country even if it was the most direct route. Jesus was about His Father’s business in all He did and wherever He went.

When the disciples and Jesus reached Jacob’s well, it was midday. Jesus was hot, tired, hungry, and thirsty. He sent His disciples into town to buy food (this was also very unusual). After they left, Jesus met the reason for His journey through Samaria.

She came at midday to the well when all the other women were gone. Each day the women would meet early in the morning to draw water to meet the needs of their household. It was a pleasant time in the cool of the morning. There was much visiting and sharing. But this woman was not a part of the women’s fellowship. Probably she was shunned by the respectable people of her city for she did not come up to their standards.

When Jesus spoke to her, it broke at least two important traditions of His day. First of all, she was a woman in a public place. This was not allowed by the teaching of the religious leaders. Second, she was a Samaritan and, ***“The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.”*** (John 4:11). That she was a Samaritan “woman” made this breach in tradition compounded. She was amazed that He would speak to her and that He would ask of her water. Her amazement continued to grow as she talked with Him for He offered her, a woman outcast, living water - salvation.

She wanted to hear more and Jesus told her to go and get her husband. Jesus upheld those traditions that were correct for the husband is the head over his wife. But this was a sore trial for the woman and a deep shame for she had had five husbands and she was not married to the man she was living with. When she told Him that she was not married, Jesus once more astounded her. He told her of her past.

You can almost imagine the excitement that welled up in her for Jesus did not condemn her in His tone. We know this for the woman did not leave rejected but instead asked of Him the answer to a deep spiritual question that was troubling her - where should she worship God? Her desire to worship God did not depend on her correct social standing but on her inner longing to draw near God. This longing is placed in the heart of every soul God creates. He waits on us to ask of Him and He freely gives of Himself.

Jesus answered the woman’s question of where to worship by revealing “who” to worship. When Jesus said to her, ***“I who speak unto thee am the Messiah.”*** (4:28), she excitedly left her waterpot at the well (for temporal water and possessions were unimportant to her now) and ran into the city to share the wonderful news - the Messiah has come; the One they had been longing for was here! Her testimony was so filled with the Holy Spirit (who testifies of God and Christ) that many believed her words that the Messiah had come (4:41). What a change! This woman who was an outcast in her town and culture, rejected by the traditional Jews, was a new creature. She was no longer rejected and unwanted for the King of Kings and Lord of Lord has visited her and given her living water and she would never thirst again.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES - FAITH

Mark 4:30-33

1 Peter 1:3-9

1 John 5:4

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES - HOPE

Romans 15:13

1 Peter 1:13

Ephesians 3:14-21

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
Hebrews 11:1

What is our faith based on? What is our hope based on?

What do you know to be truth about God? Do you know what the scriptures say about God? Do you know what God says about Himself?

Can what you feel or your circumstances change who you think God is or how He will act?

We must rely on the Word of God to help us grow in our understanding of God. We must ask Him to reveal Himself in our lives. *Draw near unto Me and I will draw near unto you.* (James 4:8) We can place our trust in what God says He will do and in who He says He is. We can trust Him to fulfill all of His promises and He will make of us new creatures fit for His Kingdom.