

Equipped to be surprised

A few years ago, WWJD bracelets were very popular and reminded the people wearing them to ask “What would Jesus do?” when they were in an uncertain situation. Bringing Jesus into our decision-making is highly commendable but I wonder how often we can be absolutely sure of how he would act. We know he would always do what was right but sometimes his responses were quite surprising. Take, for example, his encounter with the woman at the well recorded in John 4. As Jesus and the woman talk with each other, he injects several surprising comments into their conversation. Let’s take a look at seven of these surprises...

Surprise #1: Jesus asks the woman for a drink (v.7). In so doing, Jesus overcomes three barriers: racial (he is a Jew, she is a Samaritan); gender (he is a man, she is a woman); and ceremonial (first-century Jews didn’t use the same utensils as Samaritans). In order to connect meaningfully with people, particularly those who are different from us, there will be times when we, too, might need to break with convention, but without compromising biblical principles.

Surprise #2: Jesus indicates he is the source of living water (v.10). The one who asks for a *drink* of water to satisfy his *physical* thirst is the same one who can provide a *spring* of water to satisfy *spiritual* thirst. In searching for satisfaction, have you come to Jesus to quench your thirst? His invitation to come to him and drink is still open.

Surprise #3: Jesus promises eternal satisfaction (vs.13-14). The woman hasn’t yet grasped that Jesus isn’t speaking of actual water, but symbolically of the salvation that he brings, but she still wants what he offers. Put yourself in her position. Wouldn’t *you* want something that you thought would make your life so, so much easier? But the reality is Jesus doesn’t offer us an easy life - he offers us eternal life. And he’s the only one who can do this.

Surprise #4: Jesus issues an unexpected command (v.16). The woman tries to close down this avenue of conversation because it’s now starting to get personal. Ever been there? Perhaps, like the woman listening to Jesus about the benefits of living water, you’re interested in hearing about the benefits of Christianity as long as you can keep certain lifestyle issues under wraps.

Surprise #5: Jesus describes the woman’s personal life (vs.17-18). The woman’s personal life is no secret to the stranger at the well. Who is this man who knows these things about her? What else might he be able to tell her? She now begins to view him as a prophet (v.19), so perhaps he can clarify a question she has about worship.

Surprise #6: Jesus lifts the lid on worship (vs.21-24). Jesus revealed to the woman that worship is not restricted to a designated *place*, but to a designated *person*. And that person is Jesus Christ who claimed to be the way, the truth and the life and said that no-one can come to the Father except through him.¹

Surprise #7: Jesus tells the woman he is the Messiah (v26). Both Jews and Samaritans looked for a coming Messiah who would be able to *deliver them from oppression by enemy nations*. They didn’t conceive of a Messiah who would be able to *deliver them from their sins*. Jesus isn’t always who we think he is, right? That’s why asking what would Jesus do doesn’t necessarily give us the answer we expect.

However, there are situations when we know precisely what he would do because the bible tells us. We know that he will never turn away anyone who comes to him;² he is preparing a place in heaven for his followers;³ and he will return to take them to their heavenly home.⁴ These are just some of the things that Jesus will most definitely do!

¹ John 14:6

² John 6:37

³ John 14:2

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17