

JESUS TALKS WITH A SAMARITAN WOMAN

John 4:1-26

Key Verse: 4:10

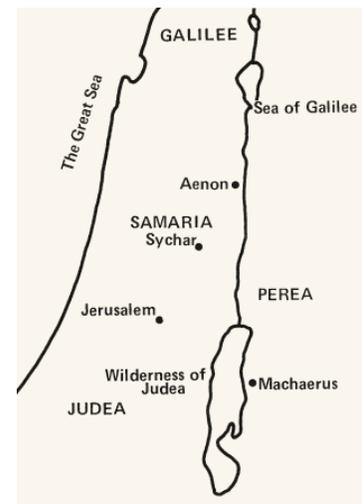
Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

Today's passage is about a conversation between Jesus and a lonely woman. This woman was thirsty for love, but no one could satisfy her thirst. No one even tried to understand her. But Jesus understood her and led her to living water to quench her thirst. She began to smile for the first time in a long while. May the Lord who talked with this woman come and talk with us personally!

I. "WILL YOU GIVE ME A DRINK?" (1-15)

This event took place at the Jacob's well near the town called Sychar, Samaria. How did Jesus come to be in this place? Look at verses 1-3. *"The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee."* As Jesus' ministry grew in popularity, the Pharisees began to put political pressure on Jesus. The Lord did not want to have confrontations with the religious leaders at the beginning of his messianic ministry. So he left Jerusalem and was on his way to Galilee.

Look at verse 4. *"Now he had to go through Samaria."* Galilee was located in the north, Judea was in the south, and Samaria lay in between. The most direct route from Judea to Galilee was through Samaria, about a 70 mile trip. Using that route, the journey took three days. But because of the centuries-old feud between Jews and Samaritans, Jews refused to take the direct route. The alternate route was to cross the Jordan River, travel up the east bank, then re-cross the river and enter Galilee. This route took twice as long. It was not easy to travel such distances in the hot climate. But the pride of Jews would not allow them to pass through Samaria. Even if they had to suffer the scorching heat of the desert for many days, they avoided Samaria. They despised Samaritans so much that they were willing to suffer just to avoid them.



But Jesus passed through Samaria, ignoring the pride and prejudice. Why? Was it because he wanted a short cut? No. Jesus intended on breaking down the human barriers (Eph 2:14). Verse 4 says he "had to" go through Samaria. Jesus came to save not only the Jews, but also all peoples of the world. Jesus' footsteps going through Samaria demonstrated the love of God toward all of us. His journey declared that he is the God of both Jews and Samaritans, and of the whole world.

“So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there” (5,6a) Jacob’s well was known as a well of romance. Jacob met Rachel by this well for the first time. It was love at first sight. On seeing Rachel, Jacob wept. We don’t know why he wept. But he worked for 14 years without pay just to marry her. His love for Rachel lasted until he died.

Look at verse 6. *“Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.”* Jesus was tired after walking a long distance under the hot sun. His disciples had gone into the town to get food (8). They were hungry. Jesus sat down by the well to enjoy the quiet moment. It was 12 noon (the sixth hour by Jewish time). Someone disturbed his quiet time. A Samaritan woman had come to draw water (7). Who was this woman? What kind of woman came to draw water alone in the heat of the day? In summary, this woman was lonely and thirsty.

Women usually came to draw water in the cool of the evening to avoid the heat (Ge 24:11). They came in groups, carrying water jars on their heads. It was a social occasion. They exchanged gossip at the well. It was their version of Facebook. Perhaps this was the only time these women were free from their burdensome roles at home in the male-dominant society. It was a happy time of fellowship among women.

But this woman came by herself in the heat of the day. Why? Verse 18 gives us a clue. This woman had had five husbands and was now living with a man who was not her husband. Given the legalistic society she lived in, there is no doubt her neighbors viewed her as an immoral woman. They treated her like a prostitute. No one wanted to be friends with her. No one wanted to even talk to her. Samaritans were despised by the Jews. This woman was despised by her fellow Samaritans. In those days, women were also looked down on by men. This woman was despised by the Samaritan women because of her immoral life. She had no one to talk to. She was lonely.



In this situation, she wanted to avoid any contact with her village people. That’s why she came to draw water in the heat of the day. As much as she hated to come to the well, this woman had to come to draw water. She was thirsty. She needed water to quench her thirst. She was thirsty for water. She was also thirsty for love. Her soul was thirsty.

After going through five marriages, she had enough men around her. But none of them really satisfied her thirst for love. By this time, she was no longer a young woman. When she was a teenager, she was pure and beautiful. She had many dreams. Like many young girls, she had a dream of marrying prince charming and living happily ever after. When she first married, she was very happy. She gave her heart to her husband. She wanted their love to last forever. But things did not go well. Finally, she and her first husband were divorced. Whatever the reason for the divorce, it left a deep wound in her heart.

Someone said that divorce is like trying to separate two sheets of paper which are glued together. Neither of them can come apart in complete pieces. Women especially are hurt by such experiences. Perhaps the Samaritan woman had been very attractive when she was young, like Elizabeth Taylor was. Many men wanted her. So she went through five husbands. She was broken again and again. Now she was left with wrinkles, wounds and scars. She had had five husbands, but not one of them really understood her. None of them truly loved her. None of them satisfied her for long. Her soul became thirsty again and again. Her coming to draw water in the heat of the day was symbolic of her unquenched thirst. Likewise, all of us have thirst for some things of this world such as money, boyfriend or girlfriend, human recognition, video games and other pleasure-seeking activities. Many college students try to quench their thirst by going to parties and getting drunk. We try to quench our thirst on our own, not knowing that nothing in this world can truly satisfy our thirsty souls. Like this woman, we have to keep coming to Jacob's well. How did Jesus help the thirsty woman? We can learn the deep love of God here from how Jesus helped this woman.

First, Jesus asked her, "Will you give me a drink?" Look at verse 7b. *Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"* This was an amazing thing Jesus said to the woman. Jesus humbled himself and asked a favor of this woman. She was a sinful woman. And who was it that spoke to her? It was the Heavenly Prince. Jesus had no need to talk to this woman. But Jesus humbled himself and talked to her first. We call this "God's initiative." We did not love God first. God loved us first; he sent his one and only Son to die on the cross for our sins. Jesus stands at the door of our hearts and waits until we invite him in (Rev 3:20).

The Samaritan woman was deeply wounded. She was full of bitterness. She was withdrawn. No one could talk to her easily. If you met her on the street and said, "Hi," she would have shot a cold stare at you. So what did Jesus do? He asked gently, "Will you give me a drink?" He asked this to break the ice so that he could help her. It was to lead her to the spring of water welling up to eternal life (14).

What was her reply to Jesus? Look at verse 9. *The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?"* She talked about the barriers between Jews and Samaritans. She reminded him that Jews did not associate with Samaritans (9b). About 720 B.C., the Assyrians invaded Samaria, the capital of Northern Israel. They took the Israelites to Assyria. These Israelites (Samaritans) intermarried with the gentiles there. People from other parts of the Empire were also brought to Samaria to settle there. So these Israelites lost their racial purity. They became the ten lost tribes. Sometime later the people of Judah in the south were also carried off to captivity in Babylon. However, they did not lose their identity. Since then the Jews despised the Samaritans. There was another barrier between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. She was a woman and he was a man. The Jews did not talk to women in public. But Jesus talked to her. He broke down that barrier as well.

Second, Jesus offered her the gift of God. How did Jesus respond to her resentment? Jesus talked to her with a gentle voice: *"If you knew the gift of God and*

who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water" (10). Jesus offered her "the gift of God." The gift of God is the living water—eternal life through Jesus. Romans 6:23b says, "... but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." God gave us his one and only Son so that by believing in him we may not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). If this woman had known the gift of God, she would have been really happy. But she was not yet ready to accept his offer.

She was puzzled by Jesus' offer and said, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? ..." She saw Jesus from a human point of view. She wanted to know if he had a bucket and if he was greater than Jacob. She did not know how the living water from Jesus was different from the water in Jacob's well. The water in Jacob's well percolated up from the subsoil. The living water that Jesus gives comes from God. John says in Revelation 22:1 that it flows from the throne of God.

What was Jesus' reply? Look at verses 13-14. Jesus said, "*Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*" Why can only Jesus quench our spiritual thirst? John 1:4 says, "In him was life." John 7:38 says, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." Jesus is the Creator God. He is the source of our life. If a person has no relationship with Jesus, he is like cut flowers in a vase. He may look good outwardly, but there is no life in him. But when we are in Jesus, our lives become abundant and fruitful. In him we have a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Jesus satisfies our souls for eternity.

The woman's attitude toward Jesus gradually changed. Look at verse 15. *The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."* She admitted that she was thirsty. She asked for Jesus' help. It was a sign that she was opening her heart.

II. "I WHO SPEAK TO YOU AM HE" (16-26)

The conversation between Jesus and the woman was going well. The woman really enjoyed the 1:1 Bible study and began to open her heart. Then Jesus suddenly said something to her that made her squirm. Look at verse 16. *He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."* Jesus touched on a very sensitive area of her life. Jesus knew that this was a painful subject to the woman. So why did he bring this up? What can we learn from Jesus?

First, Jesus helped her to solve the sin problem. These days, people are reluctant to talk about others' personal problems, especially sin problems. "Mind your own business" is the basic attitude. This is true even with some parents and their children. It is because people don't want to offend others by bringing up painful subjects. They even use euphemism to dilute guilty feelings, sometimes calling sin 'alternative lifestyle.' But sin in any other name is still sin. Sin separates us from God, the source of our life. Sin brings death to mankind. So Jesus endured the pain of exposing this woman's sin problem so that she might repent of her sins and receive God's grace of forgiveness.

“Go, call your husband!” Humanly speaking, this was an intrusion to her private life. However, Jesus pained himself to talk about her spiritual problem in order to bring healing to her soul. Her real problem was not the legalistic society or the judgmental neighbors. Sin was her problem. God had created her in his own image to fulfill a purpose in him, but she only followed her sinful desires, ignoring God in her life. “Go, call your husband!”—This was the voice of Jesus who had true and deeper love for the woman. When Jesus said, “Will you give me a drink?” he was full of grace. When Jesus said, “Go, call your husband,” he was full of truth. Jesus is full of grace and truth (1:14).

How did she reply to Jesus’ command? Look at verse 17. She said, “*I have no husband.*” She basically said, “I don’t want to talk about it.” But Jesus said to her, “*You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband.*” The woman tried to evade the question, but Jesus said, “You are right.” Jesus understood her deep agony. She had had five husbands, but none of them could be her real husband. None of them could satisfy her soul.

The woman was amazed at Jesus’ insight and especially at how deeply he understood her. She also liked Jesus because he cared about her, knowing fully well her sinful life. She said, “Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.” She recognized him as a man of God, and asked him about worship. Why did she suddenly talk about worship? Maybe she asked this question because Jews and Samaritans differed about the place of worship. It was natural for her to ask a man of God about a spiritual question. She was a sinful woman. Amazingly she had a sense of problem on spiritual matters deep down in her heart. This shows that this woman, too, was created in the image of God, although the image had been marred by her sins.

Look at verse 21. *Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.”* Jesus taught her that the location of worship is not as important as the attitude. She must worship the Father wherever she is. Look at verse 22. “*You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.*” Jesus taught her that God sent the Savior of the world from the Jews. Jesus, the Savior of the world, introduced himself to the sinful woman.

Second, God seeks true worshipers. Look at verse 23. “*Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.*” The Samaritan woman was a middle-aged woman, falling apart after her five failed marriages. She wasn’t attractive any more. But Jesus was not looking at her appearance. Jesus saw her with the eyes of God. Jesus saw the potential in her to become a true worshiper of God. It is easy for us to see a sinful woman like this with legalistic eyes. But Jesus saw her with the hope of God. Jesus is a good shepherd.

Jesus told her that the Father is seeking and waiting for his prodigal children to return to him. It was a great surprise to her that God was seeking a person like her, when her own people ignored her. We see this same picture of God in the parable of the

prodigal son (Lk 15). The father waits for his son's return day and night. God is seeking those who have gone astray until they come home.

Let's read verse 24. *"God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."* God is spirit. God is not flesh. He is not confined to the limitations of time and space. He is the eternal and infinite God. This truth reveals what the woman's real problem was. She had given her purity, devotion, and love to several men. She blindly pursued happiness and security in men. The Bible teaches that it was because of her cursed desire. Genesis 3:16 says "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." Since sin began to reign over mankind, this sinful desire has tormented many women. We see many young women whose desire is only for men. They ruin their lives because of this sinful desire. The Samaritan woman's real sin was that she had given her heart to men, not to God. Also, she did not live by the word of God, but by her sinful desires. We learn from today's scripture that all Samaritan women must worship God instead. And this is true for all Samaritan men. Only God can satisfy our souls and give us true happiness and security.



Third, Jesus declared "I am he." Look at verse 25. *The woman said, "I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."* She said she had been waiting for someone who could answer all her questions about life. She yearned for someone who could be everything to her. Who in the world could satisfy a woman like this? Certainly not her ex-husbands or her boyfriend! Only Jesus the Son of God was the answer. Isaiah the prophet said that Jesus is the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace..." (Isa 9:6) Jesus is the Messiah that God promised to send to save the sinful humanity.

Look at verse 26. Finally, *Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."* Jesus wanted her to meet the Messiah who could quench her thirsty soul. Now we know why Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband." It was to introduce to her the Messiah. It was to save her from her sins and give her the gift of eternal life.

May God help us to hear the voice of Jesus who says, "Will you give me a drink?" "Go, call your husband," and "I am he." May God help all of our Bible students to respond to Jesus' words as they study the word of God with them! May God give each one of us the gift of God, the living water that is welling up to eternal life!