

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

John 4:1-26

Warm-up Question: Share a time when you met someone from a different culture or country. What differences did you notice?

¹ The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, ² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. ³ When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. ⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 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. ⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) 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?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) 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." ¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" ¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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." 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." ¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." ¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 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. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." ²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

Understanding the Enmity of the Samaritans and the Jews

About seven hundred or so years before this conversation between a Jew and a Samaritan woman occurred, (723 BC), the northern 10 tribes of Israel had been deported to Assyria. The whole region was at that time called Samaria. The king of Assyria resettled the land with people from five different nations who all worshiped different false gods (2 Kings 17:24). Because of their worship of false gods, the scripture says that the Lord sent lions amongst them and they killed some of the people (2 Kings 17:25). The king of Assyria sent a priest from the Israelites to teach the people how to worship the Lord, but what came about was a mixed false religion in which they worshiped the Lord, but they also served their own gods from the lands of their origin (2 Kings 17:33). Their false worship was centered on Mount Gerizim where the Samaritans built a temple; quite close to Jacob's well, where Jesus now sat down resting. In the year 129 B.C., the Jewish general, John Hyrcanus, led an attack against Samaria and destroyed their temple on Mount Gerizim. The Jews regarded the Samaritans as worse than Gentiles (non-Jews) because of their corruption of true Judaism. Often if a Jewish person was travelling from northern Israel, the Galilee and Nazareth area, to Jerusalem for one of the feasts, they would go completely around Samaria by going down into the Jordan valley and coming up to Jerusalem near Jericho, just north of the Dead Sea in order to avoid the Samaritans. This meant an extra two or three days journey. If a person was to walk from Jerusalem to Nazareth without taking the long way around, it was approximately seventy five miles, and it could be quite cold depending on the time of the year, since Sychar was up in the mountains of Israel. Click below if you would like to see a map of the terrain:

http://bibleatlas.org/full/road_to_jerusalem.htm

If a Jewish person was travelling through Samaria from the north toward Jerusalem, they were often not welcome to stay (Luke 9:53), such was the hatred of Samaritans for Jews and Jews for Samaritans. By the time Jesus sat down at the well, the enmity was more than four hundred years old.

What do you think John meant when he wrote that Jesus had to go through Samaria? (verse 4)

It was of a necessity for Jesus to go through Samaria, rather than the round about way of the Jordan valley. Some would say that Jesus was trying to maximize time by going that route, but it is evident that some other previous engagement was not on His mind because, when the Samaritan lady went into the village and told the people, He stayed an extra two days with them (verse 40). The reason He had to go through Samaria was to meet the needs of this Samaritan woman and those she also led to the Savior. Jesus always had time for people, and no matter what sin they had committed, no matter what their lifestyle was, He would reach out to them.

Jesus the Evangelist

Scholars have identified Sychar with both Shechem and the hamlet now called Askar on the southeastern slope of Mount Ebal. The sites of Shechem, the village of Askar, and the well form a triangle with each side measuring about a half mile. We are told that the disciples went into the town together to get food while Jesus rested at the well. One wonders why all of them did not go together; surely it would have provided an excellent opportunity for some quality time for Peter, James or John, the beloved disciple to get some alone time with Jesus? It's almost as if Jesus knew that the Samaritan woman was on her way to the well, probably passing the disciples as they walked the half mile into town. Did He send all of them in to town without Him so that He could talk with the woman without distraction? This doesn't seem to be an accidental opportunity, but one that was prearranged by the Father for the woman to come at the same time that Jesus sat beside the well. Of course, there is also the possibility that the disciple John was there and witnessed the whole event, almost as a fly on the wall, rather than being told by the woman during the two days after the event had happened.

In those days, women would normally gather water at dawn or dusk. It was a time when the women would gossip and share news and spend a bit of time with each other. Why do you think this woman would come to get water at the sixth hour, midday, the hottest part of the day, when most people would be taking a siesta?

It's helpful for us to understand how women were treated in Middle Eastern culture in those days. William Barclay, in his commentary on the Book of John, tells us:

“The strict Rabbis forbade a Rabbi to greet a woman in public. A Rabbi might not even speak to his own wife or daughter or sister in public. There were even Pharisees who were called “the bruised and bleeding Pharisees” because they shut their eyes when they saw a woman on the street and so walked into walls and houses! For a Rabbi to be seen speaking to a woman in public was the end of his reputation—and yet Jesus spoke to this woman. Not only was she a woman; she was also a woman of notorious character. No decent man, let alone a Rabbi, would have been seen in her company, or even exchanging a word with her—and yet Jesus spoke to her.”¹

Notice how He initiated the conversation, He asked her to help him with something. He asked her for a drink—from her water bottle. This was totally shocking for her. She could tell that this man was a Jew simply by looking at His clothing, his prayer tassels, the hem of his prayer garment and perhaps also His forelocks not being cut in accordance with the law (Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard, Leviticus 19:27). Not only was she a Samaritan, but she was a woman, yet he was asking to drink from her water bottle, a thing that was normally disgusting to a Jewish person. But this was Jesus, and the normal cultural barriers did not bother Him. She was a woman in need and so He reached out to her.

When Sandy, my wife, and I were younger, we used to work with teams of people in our church who would go out on the streets in England to engage people in conversation about spiritual things. We also used other methods of communication like drama, sketchboard preaching and a whole host of other ways to reach out to people. This is easy to do in England, as the towns are designed for pedestrians and in the town centers, cars are often not allowed. People pass their time in

¹ William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of John, Published by Saint Andrew Press, Page 151.

the town center. One of the things we used to do was a survey. We asked people if they had time for a two or three minute list of questions. Most English people are used to being asked to help in a business survey, so we used a survey which contained a list of questions about spiritual topics, or questions that could lead to a conversation about Christ and His claims. People are generally much more open when they are asked for their help with something. Jesus was a master of conversation and He knew just how to reach people at their point of need. Jesus started out by asking for her help. He had a practical need; water. Jacob's well in Sychar was over a hundred feet deep and he had no bucket, rope or pitcher. He would not mind drinking from her water bottle. He desired to give her living water, something far more important. His conversation with her piqued her curiosity and aroused her spiritual hunger.

The Samaritan woman is completely shocked that this young Jewish, thirty year old man is conversing with her, asking her for a drink. She is not used to being spoken to by men in public, and certainly not a Jewish man. She would not expect to be acknowledged, but Jesus not only asks her for water, but offers her Living water. He makes a statement about the gift of God designed to provoke her to ask Him for a drink of this Living water. We see Jesus lead this woman into a conversation which opens her heart. This is very unusual when you think about it. Not only did Jesus cross cultural boundaries, but he also ventured out into topics that were controversial with people. If you have never attempted that, it can be a very rewarding experience. If it is done with the right motives, the love of Christ will shine through. Jesus wanted to open this woman's eyes to the Gift of God and show her that she could be forgiven, and have Living water for her soul. I remember times when Sandy and I would attempt to engage people in conversation and ask them if they had ever been told about the gift of God. It would often open up a person for further discussion concerning the claims of Christ. Here is an example of the kind of questions that we would hope would result in dialogue:

- Are you interested in spiritual things?
- What would you consider man's greatest need to be today?
- Has anyone ever told you about the gift of God?
- If someone was to ask you, "What is a true Christian?" what would you answer?
- Have you ever personally discovered Jesus Christ,

or are you still in the process?

- Do you think it is possible to know for sure before you die that you are going to heaven?
- Some day when you stand before God, what reason are you going to give him as to why he should let you into His kingdom?

The hope in engaging people in this type of conversation was that a deeper level of conversation would be reached. Sometimes it happened, and sometimes it did not. But whatever people thought when they walked away, it was worth the time for those who responded. We often had a chance to pray for people at their point of need. For some, it was definitely a divine appointment. Let's look closer at this divine appointment Jesus had with the Samaritan woman.

Jesus said to 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" (verse 10).

What is a gift and what is meant, do you think, by the gift of God? And why does a person have to ask for the gift of God?

A gift is something that is given completely devoid of works done to earn what is being given. To use an example, think of a family at Christmas time. Gifts are given on the basis of the grace of the parents not on whether or not the child did anything to earn what is given. Even if a child was to do something very naughty on Christmas Eve, it is still rare indeed for parents to withhold from them a gift on Christmas morning. There are two different things in the scriptures that are referred to as the gift of God; the gift of eternal life and the gift of the Spirit. There are also gifts of the Spirit, but there is **the** gift, the gift of eternal life as the Spirit is invited into one's life. Both are essentially the same. You cannot have one without the other. Eternal life is the product of being born again of the Spirit of God (John 3:3); it is the gift of a merciful loving God. Nothing can be done to earn this gift. It is given completely devoid of doing anything in order to earn it by one's way of life. It is given when one believes on and trusts in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, **it is the gift of God**—⁹

not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Can you imagine the boasting that would be going on in heaven if you could get to heaven by being good? How good would you have to be, if God were to judge us wholly on our own merits or virtues? Think about it! If God were to reward people on the basis of their good works alone, how many good works would you have to do in order to attain heaven and obtain eternal reward instead of punishment? Is there a magic number of good deeds? Do they all count the same? What if one person does one less good deed or kind action than another, would there be a point where one would go to heaven and the next person be rejected by the Father for eternity? It is clear that this would not make sense. However, we can trust the Father knows each person by heart and understands their heart. He knows exactly what has been given to them in this life. It only makes sense that God would judge people by the response of their hearts to His gift of eternal life through His son, who is perfect. We can never attain perfection, but Jesus has already attained it, and has given His life in our place.

I once spoke to a person about becoming a Christian and he replied by saying that he was quite confident that he would go to heaven when he died because he had pulled two men out of a crashed plane. God would surely look on his ungodly lifestyle as okay, because of his bravery in risking his life to save others. I tried to point out to him that salvation was a gift that one received rather than some deed that a person did in order to earn eternal life in heaven, but he would not see it that way. He was quite confident in his acts of bravery, that they would be sufficient to save his soul. This gift of God; Eternal Life through Jesus Christ our Lord, is given as one is confronted with his spiritual bankruptcy before a holy God and repents, thinks again, or turns around toward Christ and lives to please God, not self:

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the **gift of the Holy Spirit** (Acts 2:38).

The gift of God, the Holy Spirit, when He comes into a person’s life, brings a newness of life. Until we experience this being “born again,” (John 3:3) we are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1, 5) and incapable of knowing God in a spiritual sense. The Spirit of God living within

you is seen as spiritual living water springing up to eternal life (John 4:14).

Looking again at the conversation Jesus had with the woman at the well, we see how after He had created curiosity within her, Jesus made her even more curious by saying:

“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” (John 4:13-14).

What did Jesus mean by saying that a person that drank the water that He gave would never thirst again?

Jesus is speaking in spiritual terms of the Spirit, but the woman is still thinking that he is talking about water. He says that a person who receives the Living water will never thirst. In the Old Testament, many verses speak of thirsting after God as one thirsts for water (Psalm 42:1; Isaiah 55:1; Jeremiah 2:13; Zechariah 13:1). Thirst and hunger of our body in scripture is seen as analogous of our spirit being thirsty or hungry for God or spiritual things that God wants to give us to restore us to Him. There are times when a person is aware of a “missing piece” in their lives, but just cannot put their finger on what it is that is gnawing at them. Prince Charles of England, several years ago, spoke of his belief that, for all the advances of science, “there remains deep in the soul (if I dare use that word) a persistent and unconscious anxiety that something is missing, some ingredient that makes life worth living.” The Bible calls that persistent and unconscious anxiety of the soul **thirst**. It is an inner longing for something that one cannot quite get a handle on. God has “hard wired” us for a relationship with Himself, and until we are united with Him by repenting of sin, and receiving Christ, we will continue to have this inner longing for something and yet remaining unfulfilled. We try to fill the gap by sex, drugs and rock and roll, cars, houses, jobs, and many other things, but nothing quenches our thirst, apart from God.

What things have you tried to fill your life with in the past but have proved to be empty?

Later on, during the Feast of Tabernacles, on the last and greatest day of the Feast, the nation would remember the time when Moses brought forth water from the

rock while Israel was in the dry and barren wilderness (Exodus 17:6) after coming out of Egypt. They also looked forward to a prophetic time of which Ezekiel the prophet spoke of (Ezekiel 47:1-12), a time when a river of life giving water would flow from the navel of the earth, Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea, which would become teeming with life, because of this river. According to Rabbinic tradition, Israel was at the center of the earth, and Jerusalem was the center of Israel, with the Temple being the center of Jerusalem. The High Priest, accompanied by thousands of people watching, would take a cup to the Pool of Siloam, and fill it with water. Once a year, at this Feast, the High Priest would pour this water out through a funnel in the west side of the altar, and into the ground, in anticipation of this great river that would flow from under the threshold of the temple in Jerusalem. It was that very moment that Jesus chose to stand up in the midst of the thousands in the temple courtyard, and shout in a loud voice:

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive (John 7:37-39).

Jesus was saying that He was the prophetic fulfillment of the Ezekiel passage. That as people came to Him and drank of the life giving water of the Spirit of God, they would experience inner life flowing from the center of their being, the center of the temple of their bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19). The only thing that God requires of us is to be thirsty for Him and to come to Him and drink.

The Conversion of the Samaritan Woman

When the woman replied that she wanted this living water, Jesus said to her “Go, call your husband and come back” (verse 16).

Why did Jesus ask her to bring her husband?

The woman wanted to drink of this life giving water, but to drink of the life that Jesus offered her; the issue of her sin must not be bypassed. Jesus told her to bring her husband, knowing that she had no husband. Unless a person faces his or her sin and forsakes it, looking to Christ, he cannot be delivered to experience new life in Christ. Jesus said that no man can love two masters, (Matthew 6:24), that was the same way that the Samari-

tan religion had come about, where they worshiped the Lord, but they also served their own gods from the lands they were brought from (2 Kings 17:33). You must forsake sin and rely on Jesus to give you the power to help you overcome. When you acknowledge your sin—He will forgive you and cleanse you of it:

Then I **acknowledged** my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD — and you forgave the guilt of my sin (Psalm 32:5).

Jesus then began to show the Samaritan woman who He was, the Messiah of Israel. He told her things about her life that only God could know. John only mentions one, the fact of five previous husbands and that the man she was now living with was not her husband. In actual fact, later on we are told that the woman went to the other townfolk saying: “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did.” We so not know the whole story; we only get a glimpse written down for us by John the apostle. There may have been much more of this conversation that we do not have written down. We do know that Jesus spoke to her of her past life of sin, but loved her anyway and offered her the gift of Eternal life.

The Evidence of a Changed Life

What joy now flooded her soul! She could not contain herself as she completely forgot her water bottle (verse 28) and ran to the town. Her immediate thought was of others. She did not care one iota concerning how she had been shunned for her promiscuity by the townfolk. She had to tell them about Him. She called for them to come to Him. Her hardness was gone, her sin was forgiven, and she was free from guilt and shame as she went from one house to another, calling them all to come to the well to meet Him. This woman was now full of the Spirit! She could not contain herself. Her one encounter with the Son of God and her experience of His love for her changed her life instantly. Her immediate desire was for others to encounter the “One who told her everything she ever did.” “Could this be the Messiah?” she exclaimed. She was so lit up by the Spirit that her passion and new life immediately grabbed the attention of many of the Samaritans of the town, and they came to meet this Jewish Rabbi. Later on they testified that they had believed just on the strength of her changed life and testimony, saying, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have

heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world” (verse 42). Never underestimate the power of your simple story of how Christ came to your soul and changed your life. Many around us are thirsting for a new life and all that they need is for someone to tell them that they too can experience this Gift of Eternal Life through Christ.

*Who can you pray for concerning their need for Christ?
Who can you tell your story to?*

Perhaps you can close your time tonight praying for in-

dividuals in your circle of friends or relatives, that they might be open to your story of how Christ changed your life.

Prayer: “Father God, open my eyes to those around me who are spiritually hungry. Give me the right words to say to them to stir their spiritual hunger. Use me to help draw them to you, Father. Teach me to be sensitive to other people’s needs and show me how to communicate your love to others. Reach out to others through me. Amen.”

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