

JESUS TALKS WITH A SAMARITAN WOMAN

John 4:1-26

Key Verse: 4:7

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"

In today's passage, Jesus talks with a nameless, ordinary woman. This woman was a lonely woman. She was hurt and she was thirsty. She was a woman with a life problem. But no one knew her problem. No one understood her. No one even tried to understand her. But Jesus talked with this woman. He understood her and helped her to solve her problem. He made her a heavenly princess. 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 by Jacob's well near the town called Sychar, Samaria. How was it that Jesus had come to 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." Jesus was on the way to Galilee from Judea. He wanted to avoid political confrontations with the Pharisees as their hostility was growing along with his ministry.

Look at verse 4. "Now he had to go through Samaria." Galilee was to the north. Judea was in the south. Samaria lay in between. The most direct route from Judea to Galilee was through Samaria. Using that route, the journey could be made in three days. But because of the centuries-old feud between Jews and Samaritans, Jews usually did not take the direct route. The alternate route was to cross the Jordan River, travel up the east bank, then recross the river and enter Galilee. This route took twice as long. It was not easy to travel such distance in the hot desert area. But the pride of Jews would not allow them to pass through Samaria. Even if they had to suffer scorching heat in the desert for so many days, they avoided Samaria. Jews, though they were the same people, despised Samaritans so much that they were unwilling to look at them.

But Jesus passed through Samaria, ignoring human pride and prejudice. Why? Was it because he wanted to take a short-cut? No. It was because in him there was no human barrier or prejudice. Jesus came to be the friend not only to the Jews, but to all kinds of people. This one act of Jesus reveals the grace and truth of God. Jesus' footsteps going through Samaria demonstrate the love of God. His journey declares that he is God both of Jews and Samaritans, and of the whole world.

Look at verses 5,6. "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" Jacob's well was known as a well of romance. Jacob, a mommy boy, met Rachel by this well, and fell

in love. On seeing Rachel, Jacob wept. We don't know why he wept. But he worked for 14 years to have her as his wife. His love for her lasted forever.

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." At that moment, Jesus may have looked up at Mt. Gerizim, the mount of blessing, then turned his eyes to Mt. Ebal, the mount of curse, which stood awesomely, creating a valley that was a fountain of Jacob's well (Dt 27:12,13). Perhaps his eyes tracked with the memories of his forefathers, through the chain ranges of mountains around him. The panorama of history must have pictured through his mind as he sat there by the well. Jesus was tired. It was 12 noon, the sixth hour by Jewish time. It was the heat of the day. Someone disturbed Jesus' reverie.

Look at verse 7. A Samaritan woman had come to draw water. Who was this woman? What kind of woman came to draw water alone in the heat of the day?

First, she was a lonely woman. We are told that women usually came to draw water either in the early morning or in the cool of the evening, to avoid the heat. They came together, perhaps as many as 20 or 30 at a time, carrying water jars on their heads. It was a social occasion. We can imagine their yakety-yakety talking and laughing by the well. Perhaps this was the only time these women were free from their burdensome roles at home in the rigid society. It was a happy time of fellowship among women.

But this woman came by herself. Why? Why did she come in the heat of the day? Verse 18 gives a clue. This woman had had five husbands and was now living with a roommate. In the strict society, she must have been considered to be a very immoral person. She was classified as a sort of prostitute. No one wanted to be friends with her. No one wanted to even talk with her. In those times, Samaritans were despised. But this woman was despised by her fellow Samaritans. In those days, men looked down on women and treated them like servants. But this woman was despised by the despised Samaritan women because of her immoral life.

Second, she was a thirsty woman. As much as she hated to come to the well, she had to come to draw water. She was thirsty. She needed some water to quench her physical thirst. But she also needed spiritual water to quench her thirst in her soul. After five marriages, she might have been in her middle age. When she was a teenager, she must have been very pure and pretty. She must have cried many tears when she read classic novels. She must have recited many poems while walking by herself under the moonlit sky. When she first married, she must have been happy with many dreams. She gave her heart to her husband. She wanted his love. But things did not go as she had desired. Finally, she and her first husband were separated. Whatever the reason for the separation, she must have been deeply wounded.

The mother of my older daughter's friend once married, divorced and remarried.

The second marriage did not work out for her. Although she is a strong person, she may still feel pain when she remembers about her broken marriages. Perhaps the Samaritan woman had been very attractive. So she ran through five husbands. She was broken again and again, until she was beyond recovery. Now she was left with wrinkles, wounds and scars. Even though she had had five husbands, no one really understood her. No one truly loved her. No one satisfied her. Her soul became thirsty. Her coming to draw water in the heat of the day was the exact expression of her thirsty inner life. Likewise, we human beings have many kinds of thirsts: for political power, scholarly achievement, human recognition, money, or pleasure. We struggle very hard to quench our thirsts, not knowing that nothing in this world can truly quench our thirsty souls. Like this woman, we have to keep coming to Jacob's well. How did Jesus help the thirsty woman? Look at verse 7b. "Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?'" Here we can learn who Jesus is.

First, Jesus humbled himself and asked her a favor by saying, "Will you give me a drink?" Sinful human beings are so proud that no one wants to say first, "I am sorry." Many marriages are broken because husbands and wives refused to say, "Honey, I am sorry." But Jesus humbled himself and asked a favor of this lowly woman. She was a lonely and thirsty woman, broken and smelly because of her sinful life. And who was it who spoke to her? Jesus is the eternal God (Jn 1:1-3), the Heavenly Prince. This was the meeting between the Heavenly Prince and a dirty, sinful woman. He had no need to meet this woman. But Jesus humbled himself and talked to her first. This is called God's initiative. We did not love God first. God loved us, so much that he gave his one and only Son for our sins, to die on the cross. He stood at the door of our hearts and knocked. (Rev 3:20)

Second, "Will you give me a drink?" was the life-giving word of God. The Samaritan woman was so hurt and wounded and close-hearted. She was full of hatred and bitterness. No one could even talk to her. If you just passed her on the street and said, "Hi," she would say, "What do you mean by that?" Suppose Buddha had met this woman. He might have said, "Forget about everything. Just think as if nothing happened." She was full of wounds and scars. She was rejected time and again. How could she forget about everything as if nothing had happened? Suppose Confucius had met this woman. He might have said, "After you are seven years old, you should not even sit in the same room with a boy." His legalistic words could only offend her. And what would Socrates have said? "Know yourself." That would be an insult to this woman. She might respond, "Know yourself? You know yourself!" None of these great men or their words could win her soul. Jesus asked quietly, "Will you give me a drink?" He said this so that he might open her closed heart so that he could talk with her. When Jesus said, "Will you give me a drink?" it was to lead her to the spring of water welling up to eternal life (14).

What was her first response to Jesus' request? 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 human barriers between Jews and Samaritans. At that time, Jews did not associate with Samaritans. About 720 B.C., the Assyrians invaded Samaria, the capital of Northern Israel. They transported practically the whole population to Media and they intermarried with the people there. People from other parts of the Empire were brought to Samaria. They also intermarried with the incoming foreigners. They lost their racial purity. They became the ten lost tribes. Sometime later the people of Judah in the southern kingdom of Israel were also carried off to captivity in Babylon. These people, however, 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 even speak with a woman in public. But Jesus spoke to her.

How did Jesus respond to her resentment? Look at verse 10. Jesus talked to her with 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.” Jesus was offering her “the gift of God.” The gift of God is the living water -- Jesus himself. There are many kinds of gifts or favors which seem to be free. However, they all have strings attached, as we discover sooner or later. There is only one real, free gift. It is the gift of God, Jesus Christ. 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 as a gift. If this woman had known the gift of God, she would have been really happy. But she was not yet ready to accept him.

She was puzzled 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 material point of view and a human point of view. She wanted to know if he had a water bucket -- and if he was greater than Jacob. She did not know how the living water Jesus gives is 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.

Jesus knew that her soul was thirsty. So he answered, “Everyone who drink 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 does Jesus quench human 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 source, the origin of life. If we have no Jesus, we are like cut flowers in a vase. But when we abide in Jesus, our lives become abundant and fruitful. He satisfies our souls.

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, weary with life. She asked for Jesus’ help.

II. "GO, CALL YOUR HUSBAND" (16-26)

The conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well was a beautiful love story. The woman may have felt as if she were dreaming. But look at verse 16. "He told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.'" It is surprising that gentle and kind Jesus would say this to her. He touched on a very painful spot on her life. He put his finger in the problem that was eroding her life away. Jesus knew that this was a painful subject. So why did he bring up this problem? We can learn two things from Jesus.

First, Jesus wanted to solve her spiritual problem. These days, people are very reluctant to talk about others' personal problems. 'You mind your own business' is their basic attitude. This is true even with some parents and their children. It is because people want to hide something. But Jesus endured the pain of exposing her inner spiritual problem so that he might, by any means, help solve her problem.

"Go, call you husband!" Humanly speaking, this was interference with her private life. However, Jesus could not but talk about her spiritual problem in order to heal her sick soul. Her real problem was a sin problem. Because of her sinful desires, even though she married, she could not solve her marriage problem. Her cursed desire for a husband grew and grew in her. As a result, she married five times and divorced five times. Her life was a cursed one because of her cursed desire for man (Ge 3:16). "Go, call your husband!" -- This was Jesus' true and deeper love. This was Jesus' love of her soul. In part I, when Jesus said, "Will you give me a drink?", he was full of grace. In part II, when Jesus said, "Go, call your husband," he was full of truth. The author said in 1:14, "he was full of grace and truth."

How did she reply to Jesus' command? Look at verse 17. She said, "I have no husband." 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." Jesus said, "You are right." Jesus understood her deep life problem. She had had five husbands, but none of them could be her real husband. But the fact was that she had had five husbands.

The woman was amazed at Jesus' spiritual insight and especially at how deeply he understood her. She also liked Jesus because Jesus really wanted to help solve her problem. She said, "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet." She recognized him as a man of God, so she 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 religious problem, that is, a life problem. She was a sinful woman. Amazingly, she had a sense of problem on spiritual matters deep down in her heart. This shows that she was still a human being, created in the image of God. Only the image was marred by her sins.

Look at verse 21. Jesus clearly told her that the place of worship is not important. She must worship the Father wherever she is. In verse 22, Jesus taught her that salvation comes from the Jews. In this verse, Jesus introduces himself to be the Messiah.

Second, Jesus talked about God who is seeking her. 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.” In this verse, we learn Jesus’ view of human beings. The Samaritan woman may once have been pretty. Now she wasn’t so attractive. But Jesus was not looking at her appearance. Jesus saw her with the eyes of God. Jesus saw her spirit and truth. He saw the possibility that she could be a true worshiper, a true child of God. How easy it is for us to despise this woman who had had five husbands. Jesus loved her soul.

Jesus also introduced who God really is. The Father is seeking and waiting for his prodigal children. He is waiting for those like the Samaritan woman. It is a great surprise to her that God is seeking a person like her, when all the people of the world turned their faces from her. We see this same picture of God in the parable of the prodigal son. The father waits, longingly, for his son’s return, waiting day and night. God is seeking those who have gone astray so that they might come home.

Third, Jesus taught her God’s nature. Let’s read verse 24. “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” When Jesus said, “God is spirit,” he meant that God is not flesh; God is spirit. He is not confined to the limitations of flesh. He is the eternal and infinite God. We can love God who is spirit.

This truth also shows us what the Samaritan woman’s real problem was. She wanted to worship God. She had given her purity, devotion, love and woman’s faithfulness -- all she had -- to men. And she wanted in return love and satisfaction from them. She had almost worshiped men, who were merely flesh. The Bible teaches that men can receive help from women (Ge 2:20), but they can never satisfy a woman’s desire for happiness or be a permanent security for a woman.

Why did then the woman blindly pursue happiness and security in men? The Bible teaches that it is because of her cursed desire. Genesis 3:16 says “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” Since sin reigned over mankind, this sinful desire has tormented women. We see around us many young women whose desire is for men. They ruin their lives because of this sinful desire. They must worship God in spirit and truth. God who is spirit is alone worthy to accept a woman’s sincere heart, her purity, love and her life. Only God who is spirit can satisfy a woman’s desire for happiness and be her permanent security. He is the one who planted the Garden of Eden, paradise.

Look at verses 23,24. Jesus’ words were from the deep sea of the mystery of

truth. When she heard him, she said, "I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Evidently, she had had communication problems with her ex-husbands. She wanted to talk about everything with someone. She yearned for someone who could be everything to her. Who in the world could satisfy a woman like this? Only Jesus, the eternal God. Jesus is everything to us. Isaiah the prophet said of Jesus: he is the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace..." (Isa 9:6).

Finally Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he." Jesus wanted her to find the Messiah, her true husband.