

Living Water

December 16, 2012

John 4:1-19

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Introduction: This is now the second time that John has recorded a personal encounter with Jesus. The first one was with Nicodemus and this second one is with a Samaritan woman coming to draw water. Nicodemus was religious, moral and a Jew. He came seeking information from Jesus. The Samaritan woman was not religious, she was immoral, she is not a Jew and she was not seeking Jesus. These two stories provide great insight into the mind of God concerning humanity. I want to begin by giving you that insight right now:

It is not so much what you do that concerns God, but who you are. This is not to say that behavior does not have consequences or matter to God, but to point out that Christ is always concerned with the heart that motivates and creates the behavior. According to Jesus it is what is in you that defiles you....and what is in you does come out as you move through life.

Mark 7:20-23 ²⁰ And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. ²¹ "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²² deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness. ²³ "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

So it is not surprising then that Jesus directs the conversation with both of these people away from religion and performance and toward the inner man. That is where you and I meet with God. We can work hard to appear okay on the outside, but it is your inner man that Christ is concerned with. Here is the setting:

- **John 4:1-6** Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ² (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), ³ He left Judea and went away again into Galilee. ⁴ And He had to pass through Samaria. ⁵ So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; ⁶ and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

It is the very early months of Jesus' public ministry. He wanted to reveal Himself but on His timetable. He also did not want too much opposition from the religious leaders so He suspends His preaching and baptizing in the countryside east of Jerusalem and heads back north to Galilee.

There was a long road that went around Samaria. This is the one favored by the Jews because, as we will see in a moment, the Jews hated the Samaritans. They were living right in the middle of Israel but they were not Jews. So...who were they?

When the ten northern tribes were carried away into Assyria the King of Assyria imported other people from his kingdom to inhabit that land.

2 Kings 17:22-24 ²² The sons of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them ²³ until the LORD removed Israel from His sight, as He spoke through all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away into exile from their own land to Assyria until this day. ²⁴ The king of Assyria brought *men* from Babylon and from Cuthah and from Avva and from Hamath and Sephar-vaim, and settled *them* in the cities of Samaria in place of the sons of Israel. So they possessed Samaria and lived in its cities.

The King of Assyria sent an exiled Jewish priest to teach these gentile people some of the things concerning the Law of God. He taught them from the books of Moses. They then built a temple in Samaria that they claim was designed by Moses and recognized only the first five books of the Old Testament as Scripture. They also kept many of their pagan customs and idols.

Centuries later after the two southern tribes had been carried away into Babylon...Ezra and Nehemiah returned to rebuild the city, its walls and the temple. When they did the Samaritans tried to stop them

As I said there was a long way around Samaria and then there was the short route that went right through the country and the capitol. This was the one that Jesus chose to travel. It was necessary in this sense; If he went around Samaria He would not have met this woman and revealed Himself to the Samaritans. John records it this way:

- **John 4:4** ⁴ And He had to pass through Samaria.

The account then is of Jesus and one solitary woman. Jesus begins the conversation simply.

- **John 4:7** Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink."

From there the conversation takes a number of twists and turns, covers several topics but ends up with Jesus saying the same thing He said to Nicodemus. "What you most need for life and contentment, you cannot find in this world apart from me." So let's listen to this conversation and see what we can learn from it.

- **John 4:9** Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

The woman responds with surprise. Not only is it very strange for there to be a Jewish man sitting alone at the well at noontime [it was the sixth hour], but he is actually speaking to her and requesting a neighborly favor. "Could you please give me something to drink from your water bucket." Men did not speak to women in public. Jews did not speak to Samaritans period and Jews did not eat or drink anything handled by a Samaritan. It might be safe to say she was shocked by the request!

All this is summed up in John's explanation...Jews have no dealings with Samaritans! Grudges and tribal hatred endure a long time in that region of the world to be sure. As of January 1 of 2012 there were still 751 of them living on Mount Gerizim right next to the location of our Scripture account today. They still maintain the customs of Jesus' time.

The woman does not respond to the request. She instead expresses shock that the request was even made. This is in a way a microcosm of everything God has done in Christ. This woman is looking for water for her short term physical needs. She is busy protecting her privacy and keeping a low profile as we will soon see. She is not looking for God...and she is certainly not expecting God to come looking for her. BUT this is exactly what Christ who is God the Son did in the world. He came looking for men and women because He knew they would not be looking for Him.

Luke 19:9-10 ⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Luke 15:4-7 ⁴ "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? ⁵ "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' ⁷ "I tell you that in the same way, there will be *more* joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Christ makes the initial contact in a most mundane way and then offers her satisfaction for the deepest longings of her soul. The conversation has taken an immediate turn away from physical thirst and even the breaking of cultural taboos! In two sentences it is now on a different footing altogether.

- **John 4:10** Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

Before Jesus was the thirsty one and she had the water, but now Jesus has the water and she is the thirsty one. There are two things about Jesus offer here that go over her head. What Christ offers to humanity still goes over our physical heads. He offers salvation and satisfaction to your inner man. The physical world does have things to satisfy our physical desires. We would be foolish to deny that. The problem is deeper than that though. Jesus offers:

A Gift from God: The woman was probably accustomed to speaking about God and could have thought that the physical well was the gift from God. She would not be wrong about that either. God gives His physical beings many physical things to sustain their life BUT....with the next offer Jesus makes it clear that it is not that water He offers.

He would have given you living water: Living Water....whatever that is....is free for the asking. But there are two requirements and they are both clearly seen here. It is a gift

and not a wage. You do not earn this living water or merit. Neither can you be so bad as to never be able to receive it. If you are a self-righteous Jew like Nicodemus or a broken Samaritan woman it is all the same to God. God gives gifts apart from our abilities or merits.

If you knew....who it is who says to you: This is the second thing. If it is a gift from God then it is not a gift from man. Jesus' intention here is revelation of God to this woman. In other words, "There is a gift from God that I am able to give to you because it is mine to give. It will satisfy your life to the fullest.

He would have given you living water: Jesus was a preacher, but with a twist. He preached the Scriptures then claimed to be the fulfillment of them. He acted in such a way as to force that conclusion on men. Here Jesus is preaching this Old Testament Truth:

Jeremiah 2:12-13 ¹² "Be appalled, O heavens, at this, And shudder, be very desolate," declares the LORD. ¹³ "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water.

Jeremiah 17:13 ¹³ O LORD, the hope of Israel, All who forsake You will be put to shame. Those who turn away on earth will be written down, Because they have forsaken the fountain of living water, even the LORD.

Isaiah 55:1 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;

Revelation 21:6 ⁶ Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.

- **John 4:11-12** ¹¹ She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?" ¹² "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?"

Like Nicodemus she takes Christ's metaphorical words literally and marvels. "How are you going to get water with no bucket?" "Even our ancestor Jacob had to dig this well and use a bucket to get water." "Are you greater than Jacob that you can get water without a bucket?"

"Misunderstanding combines with irony to make the woman twice wrong: the living water Jesus offers does not come from an ordinary well, and Jesus is in fact far greater than the patriarch Jacob" *DA Carson*

- **John 4:15** ¹⁵ The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw."

This lady has not, like most humans even today, understood this truth from God. The physical world can satisfy your physical desires, but only God can satisfy the deepest longings of your inner man....your spirit. You can have running water piped right into your house today and we do, but what about our souls. What keeps them for thirsting or yearning for something? What can satisfy the inner man?

When Jesus spoke this way, many did not understand. When He spoke of “Bread that comes down from Heaven” they responded by saying,

John 6:34 ³⁴ Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."

To which Jesus said again,

John 6:35 "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

Jesus is now going to teach her this reality from her own life. She wants the water but she doesn't realize that it is spiritual....that she is not just a physical but also a spiritual being. We are physical to be sure....so was Jesus from the incarnation forward. Being physical is not our problem! LISTEN....Our problem is being ONLY PHYSICAL! The belief that something on this earth can satisfy the deepest longings of our spiritual beings. This is humanities greatest need. The quest for inner peace knows no bounds and in the end those who obtain everything physical still die and leave it all behind....but not before discovering that none of it ever truly satisfied their souls.

Ecclesiastes 2:18-19 ¹⁸ Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. ¹⁹ And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun.

What Jesus is teaching here is hugely misunderstood by mankind in two ways:

The first ignores all things spiritual and actually pushes them aside. They declare them non-existent, un-provable and move on with a quest for meaning totally apart from the spiritual world.

The second ignores all things physical and seeks to push them aside: They the physical is evil and seek meaning totally apart from the physical world. These are the people that don't like music that makes them happy or makes want to dance. It effects your physical side and is therefore suspect to them. Their list of don'ts is longer than Lucy's list of Charlie Brown's character faults. SO....Jesus says to this woman....

- **John 4:16** ¹⁶ He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here."

The woman wants to keep the conversation on a certain level. She is comfortable there. She is talking about something she knows....water, wells, physical thirst and drinking. Jesus....just like with you and me....always move the discussion to the inner person. Like the initial request for a drink, this one seems simple enough on the surface..."If you

want me to give you this water then go and get your husband and come back here and I will give it to you.”

- **John 4:17-18** ¹⁷ The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."

Although this conversation reveals a lot about this woman's sorted life, it is not primarily a teaching on serial monogamy or adultery. Jesus says nothing about the morality of her life. His purpose is to reveal that He knows everything about her and that she is extremely dissatisfied with her life. Her life is now exposed...just like yours and mine before God.

But Jesus never does the expected. Just like the woman taken in adultery, Jesus moves forward with the message of the Gospel. “There are no men or women without sin! There are none who can save themselves and there is nothing in this world that will satisfy their thirst for peace, joy, satisfaction and meaning...BUT.... I can and will give you salvation for the asking.”

- **John 4:19** ¹⁹ The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.

This woman started off surprised and shocked. She indulged in a little sarcasm about Jesus' offer to give her water when He had no bucket. She came close to derision with the question about Jacob....”you are surely not saying you are greater than Jacob, are you?”

But now Christ does what only He can do. He lets her know that He knows every sin and thought of her life. The just judge of the universe, who should now condemn, is instead offering free salvation to her for the asking. And it is clearly more than just not going to hell. It is life....a life with meaning in which you don't wake up every morning wondering, wanting, longing for something that always seems to allude. Jesus put it this way in John 10:10

John 10:10-11 ¹⁰ "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly. ¹¹ "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

CONCLUSION

Give a sense of finality: This is only the first part of Christ's encounter with this woman, but it is definitive nevertheless. He has shown her the two vital things that we must all know. Who Christ is and who we are. Christ is the one who knows every sin, weakness, grief and failure of our inner man. No matter how we hide them from each other...Christ knows them fully. We are the ones who are in need. In need of love, inner strength, joy and hope in our inner man. We are hungry and thirsty for something to satisfy our souls.

It is dangerous to compare ourselves with others. We do that in the hope that our lives will be more worthy and meritorious to God. But God knows our hearts.

Ask for a verdict: Life is going to change for this woman. God intends the same for you. It is going to get better. It is coming out into the light of Christ. Most men hide from Christ and the preaching of the cross because we believe that if God knew our hearts we would be condemned. This woman is about to find out differently. She is about to discover Grace and Mercy. The God who knows all our sin still offers to pay for it Himself. He gives spiritual water to satisfy our thirst for freedom of the soul. It is His gift to you for the asking.

John 7:37-40 ³⁷ Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified. ⁴⁰ *Some* of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet."

The Apostle puts the exclamation on Christ's statement this way....

Titus 3:3-7 ³ For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.