

⁵So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the piece of land Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there. Then Jesus, being tired from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸(His disciples had gone into town to buy food.)

⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

¹¹“Sir,” she said, “you don't even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this living water?” ¹²You are not greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us this well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his animals.”

¹³Jesus answered her, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty ever again. Rather, the water I will give him will become in him a spring of water, bubbling up to eternal life.”

¹⁵“Sir, give me this water,” the woman said to him, “so I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

¹⁶Jesus told her, “Go, call your husband, and come back here.”

¹⁷“I have no husband,” the woman answered.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say, ‘I have no husband.’ ¹⁸In fact, you have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

¹⁹“Sir,” the woman replied, “I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews insist that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

²¹Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will not worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. ²³But a time is coming and now is here when the real worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for those are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.”

²⁵The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (the one called Christ). “When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

²⁶Jesus said to her, “I, the one speaking to you, am he.”

Jesus was traveling from Judea to Galilee as he and his disciples moved northward. But this journey allowed Jesus to make an important stop. As he came into the town of Sychar, he found a well built two thousand years prior by Jacob, one of the great patriarchs of Israel. It seems this well was the lifeblood of the town. This is where Jesus chose to take a load off and send his disciples into town for a shopping run. It was about noon, and because it was the hottest part of the day, everyone who was going to use it that day had either stopped by earlier and beat the heat or would come when the sun began to set. Everyone but one.

A Samaritan woman came to get some water at this seemingly inopportune time. And Jesus spoke to her: “Give me a drink.” This sounds normal to us. It sounds no different than how we order food at the drive through. But Jesus was breaking more than a couple societal norms. The woman pointed them out: “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” We could spend a lot of time talking about the common history of the Jewish and Samaritan people in the Old Testament, but here’s the short version: The Jews looked down on the Samaritans because the Samaritans neglected God’s commands to not intermarry with Gentiles or pervert his worship laws. Because of this, Jews and Samaritans interacting was wholly inappropriate.

But there was another level of abnormality in this interaction. She was a woman. And the society of the day held a very strict separation between men and women. And so, Jesus, a Jewish man, asking this woman, a Samaritan woman, for water would have been viewed as deeply unseemly by anyone who caught sight of it. But Jesus was not there for anything inappropriate. Jesus was there to help this woman.

He said to her: “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” Jesus was asking for water from her, but now he was offering her the water. In her confusion, she responded, “Sir, you don’t even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us this well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his animals.” Jacob was a great man of God. He was the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. So, how could this Jewish wanderer provide for her a better well than Jacob’s?

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty ever again. Rather, the water I will give him will become in him a spring of water, bubbling up to eternal life.” Now this...this sounded pretty good to the woman. She replied, “Sir, give me this water so I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” A water that would quench thirst. A water that would keep her from ever having to come back to this watering hole in the sweltering heat. That would be incredible!

But now it was time for some answers. Why was it that the woman was picking the worst time to come to the well? Why was it she was all alone and not with the other women? Jesus made a simple request: “Go, call your husband, and come back here.” Was this because he wasn’t comfortable sharing the living water with her? Did she need her husband with her so Jesus could explain it to him and her husband to her? The woman replied: “I have no husband.” But that wasn’t the whole truth. So, Jesus pushed further: “You are right when you say, ‘I have no husband.’ In fact, you have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

There it was: the reason she was out at the well when no one else was. It seems this woman had become a pariah in town. We’re not told what happened with all those marriages, but Jesus clearly knew. And he was poking the sore spot, probably the aspect of this woman’s life that brought her the most pain. I don’t think it’s reaching to assume that this Samaritan woman felt an emptiness in life that she was always trying to fill with a man. And, obviously this hadn’t worked, because she was on her sixth man, and this one she hadn’t even gone through with marrying and was just shacking up with.

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You can tell she didn't want to talk about it. She changed the subject: "I see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews insist that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus didn't force her back onto the sensitive subject. He wasn't there to condemn her, but to save her. So, he answered her deflective question: "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will not worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. But a time is coming and now is here when the real worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for those are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." The Old Testament was all about God's people worshipping him in the right place and at the right time and in the right way. But God's New Testament would change that. True worship would no longer be about gathering on this mountain or that. It would not focus on all God's rules and regulations for their worship life and the sacrifices they would bring. True New Testament worship would be in spirit and in truth.

And then a little light of faith shined through. The woman said: "I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." She knew God promised a Savior, one who would come from God and explain all things to her. He would come and tell her why the things she thought would quench her thirst in life weren't working. He would show her where true fulfillment would come from. If only he would come and tell her soon. And Jesus spoke: "I, the one speaking to you, am he."

What a glass-shattering moment it must have been! To have some stranger come up to you and understand your restlessness. And not just understand it but keep from judging you for it and instead help you with it. Do you think she put it together right away? Do you think she understood why he called out her unfulfilling lifestyle? Do you think she got what he was talking about with living water? We'll come back to check on her in a few minutes.

But now it's your turn? What do you thirst for? Maybe it's community. Maybe it's the feeling of being loved or honored or needed or respected. These are human needs, the kinds of things that all of us want. We thirst for these things, but our thirst often leads us to try and quench it in ways that are not so healthy.

What are the foolish ways you try and quench the thirsts of your life? Do you chase relationships, moving from one to another, believing that the next one will finally make you feel whole? Do you try and numb the pain of the past with substance abuse, telling yourself you just have to get through today? Do you fill your life with hobbies, believing that if you just had more time to fish or hike or travel, your cup would finally be filled? We could go on for hours, and I'm sure you can think of what it is in your life that you hope will fill you up but still hasn't yet. No, you may not stand at the well alone in the heat of day, but you know the feeling of needing something that just seems like it can't be found.

But part of the problem is that we think in external terms. We think the problem is that we don't have what we need around us. We just haven't surrounded ourselves with the right people yet. We just haven't accomplished enough in life yet. We just haven't found the property or activities that will make life feel just right. But these problems are not external. They're internal. It's not the things that make

life unsatisfying. It's the disordered inclinations of our hearts. It's the fact that you and I are sinners who are deeply flawed in every way. We never truly feel full because we ourselves are broken.

Jesus comes to us and offers the water of life too. He does this so that we would never thirst again. This is forgiveness. This is him fixing everything that ails us down to our very souls. The water he gives is his own perfect life, the payment for sin, the payment that makes us right with God. Because isn't that what we're truly chasing? Wasn't that what the woman at the well was chasing? Sure, we need community and people, but what we need most is the love and honor and approval and respect of the God who made us. That's why Jesus pours out his life for ours. That's why he doesn't stay with the woman at the well, but keeps journeying to the cross; to bring us peace, forgiveness, and a life that is filling.

But I want to go back to the worship of God being in spirit and in truth. The woman tried to use this as a smokescreen, but it's an important question. What does it mean to worship God in spirit and in truth? Well, the woman's story isn't over yet. Later on in the chapter we hear this: "Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony: 'He told me everything I ever did.' So, when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them. And he stayed there two days. Many more believed because of his message. They told the woman, 'We no longer believe because of what you said. Now we have heard for ourselves. And we know that this really is the Savior of the world.'" Jesus promised water that would become a spring and bubble up to eternal life. We see that water bubbling in the woman as she went back to those who shunned her, wanting even her enemies to know about the one who had dealt with her with such attention and love.

The gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection for you also causes your faith to bubble up. You find peace with God in Jesus, and you don't just want it for yourself. You want it for everybody you know and love. And you even want it for those you've butted heads with in life. Because the gospel doesn't just help you deal with life for a while, like all those empty things we mentioned before. It is your constant anchor. When relationships fail, you know that God still loves you. When you make a mistake and it feels like you just threw a grenade into your own life, you know where forgiveness is found. And when you realize that all the wells you've been going to eventually run dry, you know where to go to find living and bubbling water. Amen.