

## The Woman at the Well: John 4:4-42

**Introduction:** There is a saying: 'you never know what a day will bring forth.' That was certainly true for the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at Jacob's Well, as recorded in John 4. Her life was changed, as were the lives of many people in Samaria as a result of her encounter with Jesus.

First, the setting: Samaritans are hostile for Jews. Why? Because Samaritans were considered of mixed blood and with an heretical form of Judaism. Jesus was tired. It was noon and very hot. The disciples had gone off to buy food and he was on his own. A woman comes to the well to draw water and Jesus asks her for a drink.

Who was this woman? She was a Samaritan, who held an unorthodox form of Old Testament religion, and she was a 'loose' woman. All this makes this an unlikely conversation for those times. Jews were not supposed to speak to Samaritans, yet Jesus spoke to her. Jews did not speak to loose women, yet Jesus spoke to her. Typically, Jesus puts the *person* first.

Now to the conversation: From the beginning they seem to be at cross purposes. She keeps taking him literally, he keep talking figuratively. She thinks in material terms, he thinks in spiritual terms.

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Verse 7-9, Jesus asks her for water. This takes her by surprise, verse 9: 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink, for the Jews do not associate with Samaritans?' But Jesus takes the lead from her response, verse 10: '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.' In other words, 'if you only knew who was speaking to you, you would not quibble.'

What was on offer in this statement? It was the gift of God expressed in terms of 'living water.' The phrase, 'gift of God', refers to its cost to us, nothing. It is a gift. The phrase, 'living water', refers to its character, spiritual life. And who is making the offer? It is the Messiah himself.

What he is saying to her is this; if you really knew who I was, the eternal Son of God, the Christ, and if you really knew what I could give *you*, the free gift of eternal life, described here figuratively as 'living water', you wouldn't be worrying about a drink from this well. If you knew who I really was you wouldn't be worrying about the fact that I was a Jewish man and you were Samaritan woman.

Ignoring her banal remarks in verses 11 and 12, Jesus continues with what he really wants this woman to know; 'everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of 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.'

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Notice that the thing represented by the image of water satisfies our deepest needs, permanently. Notice that this is like a beautiful spring welling up from within. This is a reference to the Holy Spirit of God who comes to us and refreshes us with a new quality of life.

Still the woman missed the point. Verse 15; 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and keep coming here to draw water.' They are clearly talking at cross purposes, yet Jesus continues with her. His concern is for her *eternal* welfare and it is not diminished by her spiritual blindness.

That is good news for us because we sometimes struggle to understand the things of God. Persevere and you will be amazed what you will learn.

At last Jesus takes off the gloves and addresses her very directly, verse 16 -19. This refers to the fact that she had had five husbands and that the man she was living with at that time was not her husband.

How did he know that? She thinks it could only be that he was a prophet, verse 19. She is embarrassed at this disclosure and tries to divert the conversation to an inane theological discussion about Samaritan worship and Jewish worship at Jerusalem.

How often is it that when we are conscious of God's word or will, we will divert our thinking onto the trivial or less important matters?

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Again Jesus goes to the heart of the matter. Verses 21 and 23; 'Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. --- A time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.'

This of course is a reference to the fact that Jesus had come into the world to lay down his life and send his Spirit to guide and fill us with his presence and help.

What is very unusual about this incident is that it contains the only disclosure that Jesus *is* the long awaited Messiah, (apart from the private disclosure to the disciples at Caesarea Philippi) before his trial in front of the Jewish council. Verse 25, 'The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) is coming." When he comes, he will explain everything to us" Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

So, from the beginning of a conversation about wanting some water, this tragic, pathetic, misguided woman encounters someone who turns out to be not just a prophet but the Christ himself who offers her salvation.

It appears from the rest of the passage that she accepted Jesus and then became the instrument of bringing her neighbours to the same faith. Verse 39; 'Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony.'

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**Conclusion:** In this passage we see the love of Christ displayed towards a woman of no social standing and who had followed the way of sin for a long time. We see the offer of salvation expressed under the image of 'living water', referring to the new spiritual life imparted to those who believe. We see Jesus affirming the need for true, spiritual worship based on truth and we see salvation come to people who were not even seeking it, but had the insight to recognise it and grab it when it came their way.

Can you see yourself in this story? What happened to them can happen to you, if you respond to Jesus the way they did.