

The Woman at the Well

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[0 : 00] 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. The woman said to him, Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty. I have to keep coming here to draw water. He told her, Go call your husband and come back.

I have no husband, she replied. 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. What you have said is quite true. Sir, the woman said, I can see that you are a prophet. And we'll finish there. There's more to her story, and we'll be looking at it this evening.

So I know you've been going through the Gospel of John, and in John chapter 1, verse 14, we read these words. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Now in our reading this morning, during this early period of his ministry, though he said little and did more, the people began to hear and see something of the grace and truth of Jesus.

[1 : 38] He didn't have to say much. What he did was enough for them to see that there's grace in him, and there's truth in him. We've heard John declare Jesus to be the Lamb of God, and so Andrew, then Simon, then Philip, and then Nathaniel begin to follow him, and they get to see his first miracle, when to save the reputation of newlyweds and to shield their family from lifetime shame, he turned water into wine.

And you know what? When he did that for that couple and for that family, he showed them grace. I was graceful. And later, as he confronts the corruption he finds in the temple, they get to see something of the intensity of his heart. His early disciples knew that they were with someone who had an intensity in his heart, and the sight is so vivid and so remarkable to them that as they watch him and hear him speak up for righteousness in that corruption, they couldn't help but remember the psalmist's words, sail for your house will consume me. And you know, when they saw him that way, and when they heard him speak that way, facing corruption, that was truth.

So they're seeing grace and truth in him. No doubt all this and more drew Jesus to the critical and suspicious gaze of the Pharisees. And if you speak up for truth, if you show grace, you've drawn towards you, and some of that will be good, and some of that will be negative.

Pathetic and curious came to Jesus by night to talk with him, and that was a profound encounter that they had together. And Jordan's disciples left Jerusalem for the Judean countryside, where John and his own disciples were ministering and baptizing people.

And Jesus' disciples began to baptize, and the Lord's numbers began to increase more than John's. And from John's perspective, that was all right. He said, I must decrease, he must increase.

[3 : 49] But from the Pharisees' perspective, it was either a growing problem for them. They're looking, they've got John now, they've got Jesus now, they're gathering people together. It might be a growing problem for them. Or, as they heard about the growing numbers in Jesus' camp, rather than John's, they maybe saw a problem germinating between the two groups of disciples, and saw a potential opportunity to bring division among them.

And we're told when Jesus learned that the Pharisees knew about this, he decided to leave the area, and the disciples headed north to Galilee. And we read in verse 4, now he had to go through Samaria.

Now in those days, if you wanted to take the most direct route to get to the north of Israel, or back to the south of Israel, the most direct route, i.e. the fastest route, you had to go through Samaria.

And there were a couple of other routes that avoided Samaria, which people did so, because they wanted to avoid the Samaritans. People would go the long way round to avoid the Samaritans, but

for the most part, the road through Samaria was the most popular, because it was the fastest, and it was the quickest.

And though most were happy to travel through, and they were happy to eat their food, and to drink their water from the wells, beyond these practical necessities, everything else was out of the question.

[5 : 21] Buy their food, drink their water, use the roads, we'll have nothing to do with you. The differences between them were too great, and the history between them was too long.

You see, while the Jews and Samaritans shared a common ancestry through Jacob, the Samaritans were also descendants of those who were intermarried with Gentiles.

There was a time, hundreds of years before this, where there was an exile, and those who remained, the very poorest of the northern kingdom of Israel, they remained, and then the conquerors came in, and they intermarried with those who remained there.

And so though they could claim they had similar ancestors, the Samaritans were also descendants of Gentiles. And though they both believed and worshipped Yahweh, both of them believed and worshipped the same God, Yahweh.

The Samaritans did not see Mount Moriah or the temple that rested there as the epicenter of that worship. They had their own mountain, and they had for a time their own temple.

[6 : 29] By the time Jesus is speaking here with the Samaritan woman, it was already destroyed. They had their own traditions. And though they both believed in the same scriptures, the Samaritans accepted only the first five books and nothing beyond that.

It went up to Deuteronomy and not beyond that. And though they all believed in the coming of a Messiah, for them he would be a prophet like Moses, and he was referred to as the prophet.

The Jews believed that he would also be a prophet like Moses, but he would also be a priest and king. And so over the centuries, for these differences and more, and perhaps mixed with an unhealthy dose of prejudice on both sides perhaps, as John notes in verse 9, they weren't close.

They weren't close at all. I mean, the opinion held by some was so low of the Samaritans that when Jesus' adversaries wanted to insult him and slander him before the people, like in John 8, verse 48, they accused him of being demon-possessed and a Samaritan.

Imagine that. They see a Samaritan on the same level as someone who's demon-possessed.

That's how low many people thought of the Samaritans, and that's what they were accusing Jesus of being, to slander him.

[7 : 50] So when he told the story, who our neighbour is, and showed the hero to be a Samaritan, the hero to be a Samaritan, it would have sent a shockwave through the crowd.

It probably would have angered a few people too. Why couldn't a Samaritan be the hero, a good neighbour? So Jesus is aware of all this. He's aware of the direct route. He's aware of the history. He's aware of the tension between the groups and the reputation of the people there, and yet he believed, he felt it was necessary for him to travel through Samaria.

Now you could say hundreds, maybe thousands of others who were aware of all the same things did the same. What's different here? And lots of others would have known it was the quickest route. What's different here?

But when did we ever see, anybody who looks at the Gospels, when do we ever see Jesus doing something because it was easy? Or the quickest?

[8 : 49] Or when do we ever see the Lord do something because the crowd was doing it first? We never see that. Now we may look for shortcuts.

We're always looking for shortcuts. What's the easiest? Getting here today, what is the easiest way to get here? When we were given an option to go a longer route, we're not going that way. We may look for shortcuts, but he never does.

He never does. Every word he spoke, every action, and every step he took in his ministry was deliberate and filled with purpose. It was purposeful. Every word, every action, everywhere he went, it was a deliberate move, and it was full of purpose.

We may drift. We may procrastinate. We, at times, may not know what to do, or to say, or we might be in the habit to waffle on, but not him.

If he thought and felt it was necessary for him to go through Samaria, then believe it, it was for a greater reason than for a shortcut to where he really wanted to go.

[10:04] No, he really, really wants to be there. And we see this reflected in the words, had to, in verse four, which literally means necessary.

It's the same word that Jesus says to Nicodemus in John 3, 17, when the Lord told him, you must be born again. It is necessary if you want to enter the kingdom to be born again.

It's the same word in John 3, verse 14, when we read, just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the son must be lifted up. It is necessary to be lifted up.

And it's the same word in John 3, 30, when John says, he must become greater and I must become less. It is necessary that he becomes greater.

It is necessary that I become less. As all this was necessary, so too in the mind of the Lord it was necessary to go to Samaria. And I'm laboring this point because the person that he meets there, it may appear to be a coincidence, a happy chance, a fluke.

[11:24] But he wanted to go there because ultimately he wanted to meet her. He wanted to meet her. When she left the town that day to get the water, as she always did, the day before, she was thinking about the day after that, she had no idea about this.

But he traveled all that way and other people would have been looking on saying, ah yes, we know what Jesus is doing. He's taking the shortcut like everybody else. But he's traveling all that way. He's bearing the heat. He's suffering the hunger. He's tired. He's thirsty. And he's doing it all because he wants to meet her. Let us all be assured of the same.

Wherever we have been, whatever our differences, whatever divisions or walls that previously existed, real or imagined, he met with each of us.

And when we found Jesus, as one songwriter says, we saw that he was beside us. So Jesus arrives at the well.

[12:33] He's been traveling sometime. And he's wearied. And he's hungry. And he's thirsty. The disciples leave him there, rest upon the well while they go and buy food.

And it was then that the Samaritan woman arrives. Now it's a way to the town. It's maybe a 10 minute walk or so in the town. And I wonder, did his disciples pass her? Did they pass each other? Did they each avoid each other looking at each other in the eye contact? I don't know if you've, when you're today, if you don't want to see, talk to someone, it's mobile phone comes out, doesn't it?

Or you might be like looking in your bag or something like that. I wonder if they avoided eye contact. Maybe they pretended not to see each other.

And maybe when she, she expected the same when she got, she arrived at the well and saw Jesus sitting there. But Jesus, with a few words, sets aside centuries of enmity and division when he asks her for a drink of water.

[13:36] And you know, that was genuine. There was only two occasions when Jesus asked for help. He's asking for help here. There's only two occasions when he asked for help because he was thirsty.

Here, and later in John 19, verse 28, when he was on the cross. His thirst is real. It's genuine. And I think his request for help is genuine.

He's not simply using that request as a platform to share his message with her. It's real.

I'm thirsty. Can you give me something to drink? I recall someone saying to me some years ago that he was only friends with people because ultimately he wanted them to become Christians.

Right? And I said to him, you like playing golf, don't you? He says, yeah. I says, what if he found out that after a while I'd been playing golf with you and spending time together and having good laughs together and he found out the only reason I was spending time with you was because I wanted to learn golf.

[14:44] And he says, I said, how would you feel about that? He says, I would feel used. I says, how do you think people would feel then if they found out the only reason you were interested in them is because you wanted to share a message?

His thirst is real and his request is real and as his thirst was real and his request was real and yes, his desire to share his message was real, let us always aim to be genuine, genuine in our interest and care for others.

At the heart of the gospel is not duty, it's compassion. There's a command and compassion. Let us be always genuine in our interest and care for others as we also share with them the good news.

Amen. So, in response to Jesus' request, the woman reminds Jesus, hold on a minute, you're only on that side and I'm on this side.

Why are you asking me for a drink? But Jesus, putting aside his own thirst and need and the wall of division that was supposed to exist between them, instead says to her in verse 10, if you knew the gift of God and who it is to ask you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

[16:05] Now, the word John uses here for new means to see or perceive with the eyes of the mind. It is a deeper intuition, it's intuitive awareness which goes beyond physical appearance, something deep, you just know it.

It's a deep feeling, a deep knowing and we all have that. We often ignore it but it's there. We go by appearances, what we think, we see and know, that's what it is but this is a deeper thing, a perception.

She sees someone, she's already made up her mind about him but she doesn't rightly recognize who he truly is. She thinks she does but she's not perceived correctly but what Jesus is saying here is not a negative.

He's not saying you can't see correctly. It's not a negative. He's saying this, if she could truly see him as he truly was and what the gift was, she would ask him for it and he would give her the gift of living water but she cannot ask that and she does not ask for that because she sees not.

She doesn't perceive right. What did the Lord say to Paul when he wanted to work for him in Acts 26, 18? He wanted to open their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God and that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in him.

[17:42] and all that commences when the eyes of our heart and mind are open and we begin to see clearly. Now just a moment ago he's asked her for water and has prepared to use her water utensil.

When she says Jews do not have any dealings with Samaritans, it literally means that we don't share utensils. We don't share things. You don't drink out of my cup.

I don't drink out of your cup. He's prepared to drink out of her cup. But she halts and questions him about it and reminds him about it and objects to it.

But he responds with this, ask me for living water and I will give to you. He does not halt. He does not question in it. He doesn't offer any objections.

He just says to her, ask and I will give it to you. What's halting her? What is it that halts us? What stops us?

[18:45] What prevents us? What is it that is that obstacle that keeps us from asking him? What is it that keeps our loved ones from asking him? What is it our dear friends or our neighbours?

What is that thing that prevents them from asking him? And I think whatever that may be, whatever that thing halts us, stops us, prevents us, I think it's probably linked to what keeps us from perceiving who he really is.

It's to do with their perception, our perception of him. But if we could see, if others could see truly who he is, they would ask.

That thing, I don't know what it is, what it, for you or for others. It could be pride or unbelief. It could be hurt and shames. But I would say, let no obstacle keep you from the Lord Jesus.

Open the eyes of our heart, Lord. We want to see you. Amen. So this gift is living water, but it can also be spring water.

[19:55] And so when she heard him say, I'll give you living water, she may have thought he meant the water that's right the way down at the source of the well and not the water at the top of the well, which explains the problem she perceives.

How do you reach it? You don't have anything to get it. And it's also too deep for you to get it. But the Lord's mind is soaked in the Old Testament and all that the scriptures say of water, some amazing things about it, but he knows also God as the spring and fountain of living water.

Says that. God is, she's right, it is deep. It's too deep, it's 100 feet down probably. She is right, it is deep, but he can reach it for living water.

What does John say of him in chapter 1? In him was life. He can reach it. He is the source. She's thinking of the source of the well. Nobody can reach that, but he can reach it.

He's able to gift it because he gifts it, gifts it off. Now what is living water? He doesn't say here. But in John 7, verse 37 to 39, Holy Spirit.

[21 : 17] And it is the spirit in John 6, verse 63, that Jesus says, gives life. And what life is this? John 4, verse 14, called, the Holy Spirit gives life that is eternal.

eternal. Now, what does think of eternal life? A long life? An endless life? What does the Lord mean? By eternal. Now this is eternal life.

This is Jesus' own definition of eternal life. This is eternal life. The only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. It's not just longevity. An endless life.

A life that it grows from an intimate knowing, a seeing, a right perceiving. For as water sustains physical life, so does the spirit sustain eternal life.

It says, we have all been given the one spirit to drink. Causes the presence and the power of God to come close to us, doesn't it?

[22 : 23] You know, when we are close like that with him, when we allow ourselves to be close like that, we're satisfied. The spirit quenches thirst, our desire for the presence of God, but in the sense of satisfying that desire.

For he is an eternal within us. It's only when we look away. It's only when we become distracted. It's only when we look not only from others, but from him.

And shut down, returns. And like the ancients in Jeremiah 2, verse 13, rather than living waters, we forsake him.

And we dig our own sins. We dig them in doing something like work or ministry, family, friends, entertainment, whatever it is, all these things have their place.

Because we're thirsty. We're thirsty. We're digging deep for it. But as and they can't hold water, they are unable to satisfy.

[23 : 35] They might and satisfy but they are ultimately unable to satisfy the deepest part of our beings, our inner person. You have made us for yourself, Augustine said.

You have made us for us so restless until they rest in you. Amen. You who are thirsty come to the waters.

Right. I'm nearly finished. All this. And it's all wonderful, isn't it? But the only problem is is that the Samaritan woman doesn't.

Because her knowledge of scripture doesn't go beyond Judah or them. All the things she doesn't know what he's talking about. So her attention remains on the well and so the Lord closer to her and ramps things up a little bit to her life and asks her call your husband and come back here.

Now this seems to catch her. It seems to be very quickly I have no husband. Jesus responds with husbands and the man you now have is not your husband.

[24 : 50] Now she might not know all those things that we talked about that we can take for granted because we've read them maybe. She doesn't know all that but she knows her own life right now doesn't she?

Now the word John uses here for have it describes as in with somebody you're betrothed to engaged to or married to.

Betrothal and marriage they aren't arranged by the man or the woman they're arranged by the family. Sometimes this has happened. The family had been involved in arranging these intimate relationships and presently she has such an intimate relationship with another who is not her husband and not that he is not her husband yet or and this at this point this is when commentators and writers read into show and defame her.

Do you remember Mary Magdalene now has been known as a prostitute and she's been shown that in books and pictures and films and so forth and yet the scriptures never talk about that.

They say that she was delivered by the Lord Jesus of seven demons and people in church history thought what could a woman who's been rescued of seven demons have done that is so terrible.

[26 : 28] Ah we know and so they read into that and defamed her. They look at the multiple marriages and the present relationship and see her as a morally questionable.

They point to the multiple relationships and even the time in which she arrived at the well they say it's the sixth hour and they say that's noontime and at the hottest part of the day and the woman came here then alone because of the shame she must have seen and felt in the eyes of others and what other people thought about her.

Well if John uses, there's two ways to tell the time back then. If John uses Jewish clock which begins at 6am it would indeed be 12 noon and that would be unusual for her to be there and the other gospel writers seem to use the telling of time the Jewish clock.

However John who is writing from a Gentile city to mainly Gentile people if he's using the non-Jewish time clock but the Roman time which begins at midnight same thing for us today then the sick fire it wouldn't be noon it would be 6pm and that is in character and normal when the women will come out to get water going alone isn't unheard of in scripture Rachel and Rebecca it would make sense wouldn't it if it was 6pm that he sends his disciples to go and get food it would make sense later on when they say to when he meets the other smarter to say why don't you stay with us because it's the end of the day and just look at the response of her neighbours later when she tells them about the Lord do they ignore her do they say we don't believe you you've shamed us no they believe her so the time in

Jews by John if he used the Jewish clock they're all in line with the gospel writers but if they're not in line if they use the Jewish clock but if he uses the Roman time then John comes in line with what the other gospel writers have said but the greatest evidence I would suggest that the Lord is not rebuking her is that he doesn't he doesn't rebuke her the reality is that we can't be certain what was going on here in her life but we can be certain that she knew what was going on in her life and she knew that he now knew and I think that's the point here for her that he that he knew her that he knew her he was aware of her past he he was aware of her present and it seemed like later on that that awareness was her whole life see come meet a man who's told me everything

[29 : 42] I've ever done and in that moment something so profound occurred within her and she says in verse 19 I see you are a prophet she is beginning to see who the Lord is she's beginning to rightly perceive him to understand him to intuitively see who he is it is her Nathanael moment when in John 1 verses 47 to 49 the Lord in meeting him said here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false and he says how do you know me Nathanael asked Jesus answered I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you and that was enough that that there was enough for Nathanael that personal encounter with Jesus I saw you under a fig tree that was enough for him to declare Rabbi you are the son of God you are the king of Israel his eyes have been opened to him we can't be certain what Jesus really meant when he said that to her but it was as if he saw right into her and that was enough for her to say

I see that you're a prophet you've been sent my God we can't really be certain what it meant for Nathanael when he was under that tree maybe he was thinking of something maybe he was doing something and when the Lord said I saw you he understood what was really going on but these encounters opened their eyes his eyes are open her eyes are beginning to open and now we begin to see what's truly in her heart and it's just the beginning of her we'll continue about this evening we begin to see what's in her heart and it's this worship so Lord open the eyes of our hearts we want to see you amen