

The Woman at the Well



Jesus left the Judean countryside and went back to Galilee. To get there, he had to pass through Samaria. He came into Sychar, a Samaritan village that bordered the field Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob's well was still there. Jesus, worn out by the trip, sat down at the well. It was noon.

A woman, a Samaritan, came to draw water. Jesus said, "Would you give me a drink of water?" (His disciples had gone to the village to buy food for lunch.)

The Samaritan woman, taken aback, asked, "How come you, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (Jews in those days wouldn't be caught dead talking to Samaritans.)

Jesus answered, "If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water."

The woman said, "Sir, you don't even have a bucket to draw with, and this well is deep. So how are you going to get this 'living water'? Are you a better man than our ancestor Jacob, who dug this well and drank from it, he and his sons and livestock, and passed it down to us?"

Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst--not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life."

The woman said, "Sir, give me this water so I won't ever get thirsty, won't ever have to come back to this well again!"

He said, "Go call your husband and then come back."

"I have no husband," she said.

"That's nicely put: 'I have no husband.' You've had five husbands, and the man you're living with now isn't even your husband. You spoke the truth there, sure enough."

"Oh, so you're a prophet! Well, tell me this: Our ancestors worshiped God at this mountain, but you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place for worship, right?"

"Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you Samaritans will worship the Father neither here at this mountain nor there in Jerusalem. You worship guessing in the dark; we Jews worship in the clear light of day. God's way of salvation is made available through the Jews. But the time is coming--it has, in fact, come--when what you're called will not matter and

where you go to worship will not matter.

"It's who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself--Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration."

The woman said, "I don't know about that. I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we'll get the whole story."

"I am he," said Jesus. "You don't have to wait any longer or look any further."

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked. They couldn't believe he was talking with that kind of a woman. No one said what they were all thinking, but their faces showed it.

The woman took the hint and left. In her confusion she left her water pot. Back in the village she told the people, "Come see a man who knew all about the things I did, who knows me inside and out. Do you think this could be the Messiah?" And they went out to see for themselves.

John 4: 4-30

The Background

One day Jesus and his disciples left the Lake Galilee regions in the north and headed south toward Jerusalem. Their journey took them through some rugged countryside. They even passed through what many considered to be a foreign county, Samaria. As they neared the town of Sychar, Jesus sent his followers on ahead to look for food while he rested by an ancient well.

Jesus had already caused a transformation in the lives of his disciples. Months before they would have avoided the people of Samaria. Now the disciples looked to these same people for food and nurture. Jesus was always breaking down the walls that separate humankind.

The Gospel of John does not hesitate to tell us that Jesus was fully God as well as fully human. This passage makes it clear that Jesus had divine insight, but he also was quite tired and thirsty. The original Greek text goes as far as to say that Jesus was "beat." He sat beside the well filled with water, but he had no way of retrieving it.

Soon, a lone woman came to the same well to gather water. It was high noon, the brightest and hottest time of the day. Jesus asked her for some

water. At first she was shocked that a Jewish religious leader would ask a Samaritan for anything, let alone speak to a woman, but she recovered. She teased him a bit for not having a bucket and rope. The well was over 100 feet deep. No one could acquire water without the right tools.

Jesus responded that he had something much greater to offer her. Jesus had the wherewithal to nourish her life with everlasting spiritual waters. Jesus had found a way to effectively engage the woman in conversation. In an act of kindness, she gave the tired man from Nazareth a drink. Her act of service led to a fascinating conversation as she moved from being a servant to being a disciple.

It soon became apparent to the woman that this was a gifted messenger from God. Jesus spoke of the struggles she had known in her life. She'd had five husbands and she was currently living with a man who was not her husband. She was an outcast. Women usually gathered water in the cool of the morning or close of the day. She may have come to the well in the heat of the day to hide her embarrassment. She was amazed at Christ's ability to see into her inmost being and yet accepted and cared for her.

Jesus did not dwell on the past or seek any explanations. There may have been reasons for her marital history other than moral laxity. Perhaps she was innocent like Tamar ([Genesis 38](#)) who was trapped in a levirate marriage ([Deut 25:5-10](#)) where the last brother in the family line refused marriage obligations. Jesus did not condemn her or attempt to shame her. Christ was interested in addressing more important issues.

The Samaritan woman and Jesus spoke of the fact that the Samaritans did not have a place to worship. Hundreds of years ago these people were considered faithful Jews. Foreign countries had invaded Samaria and the people adapted by marrying people from other religions. Samaritans became detested by Jews and were not allowed to worship in Jerusalem at the Holy Temple.

This town of Sychar (and the well) stood at the foot of Mount Gerizim. Tradition indicated that this was a holy spot where Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Joshua had worshiped. Here the Samaritans built a temple and worshiped Yahweh, the one true God. Jerusalem maintained they had a monopoly on worshipping God. Jewish temple guards came and destroyed the Samaritan worship center on the mountain. The Samaritans had no

center for their lives and considered themselves to be spiritually ruined. The remains of the temple would have been visible from the spot where Jesus and the woman conversed.

Reflections

Jesus states that God is more interested in “true” worship than any “correct” location. He says the time is coming when all temples of God will be destroyed but the greater power of the Spirit will be made known. God’s Spirit is available in all places and at all times. Jesus’ words assured the woman that the Samaritans were just as important as the people of Israel in God’s kingdom.

Christ also speaks about quenching the deep thirst she has in her soul. He offers her living water. Just as she dipped deep into the ground to refresh Jesus’ thirst, Jesus dips deep into her life and brings her spiritual refreshment. Christ is more interested in the present and the future than any mistakes of the past. We call this acceptance God’s loving grace. The woman welcomes this gift and her life is changed forever. This is the power of Jesus to transform our lives.

Now the woman is no longer just a student or a disciple; she becomes an evangelist. She has a sense of mission. In her excitement she forgets her bucket and rope and runs into town proclaiming the arrival of the savior. If she came to the well in the heat of the day in order to hide from people, she was now filled with courage to speak to everyone. She proclaims the good news by stating that “he knows me” and yet, “he accepts me!” She tells the village to “come and see for yourselves!” The townspeople are intrigued and come. Many accept Jesus as their savior. If Jesus will accept this person, maybe there is hope for us too!

“The Samaritan woman's successful evangelization of her town belies the myth of the privileged position of men as witnesses and disciples. Because of her witness, the number of persons who believe in Jesus grows. Jesus treats her as a serious conversation partner, the first person in the Gospel to whom he makes a bold statement of self-revelation. The Samaritan woman's story summons churches to reexamine the boundaries they set around women's witness and work.”¹

This entire story was an adventure of new discovery for the Samaritan woman (*and us*):

- She thought Jesus wanted something from her. She came to realize that he offered her the world's greatest treasure (*God gives us so much and asks so little in return*).
- She assumed Jacob was greater than Jesus; not realizing Jesus was the savior of all (*sometimes we cling to established traditions over listening anew to God*).
- She came to the well to get a simple drink of water and left with a spring of life eternal (*our baptisms may appear quite commonplace but they have the power to change lives*).
- The rejected and lonely woman was transformed and became a faithful follower filled with joy (*just imagine what God can do with all the problems in our lives!*).
- She did not tell the townspeople that she had all the answers or knew the "right" truth. She invited them to come and see (*sometimes our greatest witness is evident in our manner of actions and not our words*).

The disciples returned from town with the food. No one followed. The disciples attended to their own needs and neglected to invite the townspeople to "come and see." Jesus declined the disciple's food. Jesus may have been upset. The Samaritan woman proved to be a better evangelist than his own disciples. We should never take our own relationships with God for granted. It is important to share the Good News with others.

We never really find out this woman's name, but we know more about her than most of the disciples. Because of her, we know that Jesus has the power to lift any of us up from shadow into light. As the baptized people of God, we become part of the living water that refreshes the thirst of the world. These are the waters that bring eternal life. Encountering Jesus changes everything.

Strength Finders talent: Context

<https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252209/context-theme.aspx>

The woman at the well demonstrates that "context" was one of her leading strengths. This strength is appreciative of those predecessors, prior events, and historical practices. Her discussion about Jacob (above) help us understand that the past helps her interpret the present and possible future.

She is also very aware of the historical tensions that have existed between Jews and Samaritans. That relationship has been dysfunctional for many decades. Jesus meets her where she is at (geographically, spiritually, and psychologically) and partners with her to make a change.

Sevens can also be engaging speakers or teachers. They can blend intelligence with joy filled pedagogy. Her message to the towns people was quite effective; everyone came to see and hear and learn from the ultimate teacher; Jesus.

Enneagram connections: Seven

The Samaritan woman comes across as a seven which includes people who are very clever and greatly value their freedom. She shows she is a health seven because of the hospitality and genuine curiosity she shares with Jesus. Sevens tend to move on when uncomfortable. We do not know why she had multiple husbands but here was a rational thinking person who was willing to make decisions for herself. Unfortunately, women often had lived in a difficult or abusive culture some two thousand years ago. Her acceptance of Jesus and willingness to share that good news with others demonstrated she had finally found many answers she was seeking.

<https://cpenneagram.com/enneagram-type-seven>

SAMARITAN WOMAN.

*How can it be that thou,
Being a Jew, askest to drink of me
Which am a woman of Samaria?
You Jews despise us; have no dealings with us;
Make us a byword; call us in derision
The silly folk of Sychar. Sir, how is it
Thou askest drink of me?*

CHRISTUS.

*If thou hadst known
The gift of God, and who it is that sayeth
Give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of Him;
He would have given thee the living water.*

SAMARITAN WOMAN.

*Sir, thou hast naught to draw with, and the well
Is deep ! Whence hast thou living water?
Say, art thou greater than our father Jacob,
Which gave this well to us, and drank thereof
Himself, and all his children and his cattle?*

CHRISTUS.

*Ah, whosoever drinketh of this water
Shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh
The water I shall give him shall not thirst
Forevermore, for it shall be within him
A well of living water, springing up
Into life everlasting.*

CHRISTUS: A MYSTERY, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1872

Questions

1. This hymn's third verse was composer Sir Henry Baker's dying confession of faith. What words comprise our confessions of faith? Do our lives proclaim this message?
 1. The King of love my Shepherd is, Whose goodness faileth never,
I nothing lack if I am His. And He is mine forever.
 2. Where streams of living water flow. My ransomed soul He leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow, With food celestial
feedeth.
 3. Perverse and foolish oft I strayed, But yet in love He sought me,
And on His shoulder gently laid, And home, rejoicing, brought
me. (1869)
2. Jesus approached this woman who was rejected by others. Who can we reach others in Christ's name? Why is growth in faith usually about relationships with God or one another?
3. We must each be intentional about our discipleship. This women actively sought answers from Jesus. She had a deep desire to learn. How do you continue to grow in the faith?