

"The Gift of God"

There are many interesting facets to the story of Jesus and the woman at the well. First of all it shows us how God deals with each of us as individuals. One of the accusations some people have brought against Christianity is that it is oppressive to women. What do we learn as look at Jesus and *this* woman? Do we see oppression or compassion? The woman in the story is a Samaritan. They were mix race group with a different religion. What can we learn from Jesus as he relates to this outsider who is a Samaritan? There is an interesting variety of issues at play in this one conversation: worship, sin, sex and the search for life in the wrong places are all themes in this story. Throughout the whole story there is this metaphor, symbol of the water of life that can quench our thirst. We all need that.

Last week, in **John 3** we saw where Jesus met with a religious leader named Nicodemus. He told him that he needed to be born again. The gospel of John tells us that after Jesus met with Nicodemus he continued in the area of Judea in the southern region of Israel teaching and ministering to the people. People started coming to him. They were being baptized. Some of the disciples of John the Baptist came and told him thinking he would be upset that more and more people were going to Jesus. But John said, He's the bridegroom: I'm just the friend of the bridegroom. He must increase I must decrease. It's right after this that two things happen. 1st John the Baptist is thrown into prison. There were all kinds of political parties in the days of Jesus but John the Baptist and Jesus are God's spokesmen so they call out evil were they see it. King Herod who is an arrogant and evil man receives John's scathing rebuke and so he throws John into prison.¹ 2nd Jesus learns that the Pharisees, the religious leaders, have heard that crowds are coming to him to be baptized. He knows they now see him as a threat. He doesn't want that confrontation to escalate yet so he leaves Judea in the South to go to Galilee in the North. Samaria lies between Jerusalem and Galilee. It was a hostile area often avoided. Jesus chooses to go right through it. That's where this story takes place.

I want to draw your attention to three key statements in this story. Each of one teaches an important lesson. The first of these is found in **verse 10**: when Jesus says to the woman at the well: *"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."

The first thing we are taught here is that...

I. GOD HAS A GIFT OF LIVING WATER TO GIVE TO THOSE WHO WILL ASK FOR IT.

In the ancient world and in an arid land thirst is a common experience and water is a crucial need. The Bible uses this familiar experience to talk about a thirst quenching, life-giving relationship with God.

A. In the Bible the water of life is a gift given to all who believe.

Listen to what Jesus says just a little later. **John 7:37-39:** *On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" "Living water" - means more than just a condo in heaven when you die. "Living water" is a symbol for a quality of life now that continues into eternity. Part of the human condition is a desire, a thirst for life, for love, significance, purpose, and peace and for eternal life. Living water is a quality of life that meets those needs those thirsts. It isn't a quality of life or a promise of eternal life that is earned or deserved. It is "the gift of God" because Jesus purchased it for us through his dying on the cross to pay for our sins.*

B. The living water Christ offers doesn't exempt you from the suffering that is so much a part of life. It sustains you in them.

Isaiah 58:11 *And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.* The Water is a source of unfailing life that nourishes and makes you strong and fruitful - like a watered garden. But notice Scripture says this can and will happen even in *scorched places*.

I think it is fair to imagine this woman had scorched places in her life. Later it turns out she has had five husbands and is living with a sixth man. Maybe the reason she'd been with so many is because they hadn't been so great. Maybe she had suffered abuse at some level. If they had been great how traumatic would it have been to lose five husbands? No matter how you imagine her story it hadn't been easy. Is Jesus promising her that if she believes in him it will be easy – "smooth sailing" from here on out? No. What he offers operates at a

different level: a deeper level. She *can be* like a watered garden in a scorched place. He can give her an unending supply of the water of life.

The resurrection of Jesus shows us that God can bring breathtaking goodness and beauty out of horrible hardship and pain. But the resurrection is a picture of what God will one day do with all of creation. We're not there yet. Jesus said in this world you *will* have tribulation. But he offers us a deep source of life now – the water of life. It can satisfy you even in the scorched place of painful sickness, emotional strain, relational hurt, loneliness, injustice, uncertainty, anxiety, shame, whatever kind of scorched place you find yourself in. In that place you can be like a watered garden. That's the gift of God.

It happens often that Jesus says something and at first the person doesn't get it. They take him too literally. That's happens here. Jesus mentions water and thirst. The woman talks about how deep the well is. Jesus cuts through that in **verses 13-14** and says, *“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*

The point here is that

II. GOD'S WATER OF LIFE IS SUPERIOR TO ANYTHING THE WORLD OFFERS.

Jesus is talking about the deeper thirst of the human heart.

A. There is a craving – a thirst in the human soul that cannot be satisfied by anything in this life

No accomplishments, experiences, possessions or relationship satisfy it. The Philosopher Albert Camus wrote a novel titled, *The Fall* in which the main character says this: *“Because I longed for eternal life, I went to bed with harlots, I drank for nights on end, I soared in bliss but I awoke with a bitter taste of the moral state.”*

The woman in this story seems to be a vivid example someone with this deep unsettled thirst. She may have lost some of her husbands to tragedy but the implication of the story is that she was going from man to man trying to find happiness. Maybe each time she got married she thought to herself - this is the one who will make me happy and fulfill my life. But five times - it didn't happen and now she was living with someone who was not her husband. Why was she taking this path - did she just want to be a bad girl? No. She was thirsty - she had hopes

and wants and wishes - she was desperately trying to find happiness. She was lonely. She maybe didn't feel she had much of an identity without a man. She would take a lot of risks and keep trying to satisfy that thirst. She's just like you and me.

In Nicodemus we see a very respectable man who needs to be born again. In the woman at the well we see a dissatisfied and not-so-respectable woman who needs the water of life. In both stories we see Jesus moving into the lives of real people to meet the deeper needs of their lives. Those needs are unsettling, discomposing them even though they themselves only vaguely understand something's wrong.

B. Our most painful, difficult emotions, temptations and struggles are related to a thirst that only God can satisfy.

Maybe the things we want and in that sense "thirst for" are not even bad things but if we depend on those things we will be so vulnerable to disappointments and worse. The Christian life is a continual choice to recognize the inadequacy of all our earthly fountains and to turn continually to Christ for the living water. When the spiritual refreshment of the water of life seems the farthest thing from your earthy experience that's when you most need to drop everything and send the bucket down deep again - believe, sing, stand and drink.

Notice what Jesus does next. Jesus asked the woman to get her husband. She said: "I don't have one." He said: "That's right but you have had five husbands and you're living with a man now who is not your husband. In **verse 19**: *The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Jesus knew exactly what he was doing when He said: Go, call your husband and come back."* He was asking her to face the truth about her life.

This is a very important part of what Jesus is teaching here...

III. BEFORE WE CAN ENJOY THE WATER OF LIFE WE HAVE TO FACE THE TRUTH ABOUT OURSELVES.

Against the background of all this talk about thirsts and living water Jesus is saying something more than just "you have been very naughty." He is saying: *"You've tried to quench the needs of your soul in a string of unfulfilling relationships."* One reason people get stuck and fail to find the water of life is that many people are unwilling to face the truth about themselves.

A. It's human nature to want to think of ourselves and present ourselves in the best possible light.

Look at the phenomena of Facebook and Instagram, not to mention all the other social media and dating apps out there. But spiritual growth only comes when we are willing to lay aside the persona we want to present and face the truth about ourselves. *This is one of the reasons it is important as part of our worship to praise but to take the time to confess our sins and receive His grace again and again.*

B. If Jesus wanted to help you see where you are trying to find life and happiness what might he say to you?

You are different from this woman. But if Jesus wanted to surface to your consciousness the issue that holds you back, that you don't even clearly recognize, what would he ask you to do? Go get your iPhone, checkbook, calendar, wife... What would he say? *Would you listen?*

Sometimes it's hard to face the truth about ourselves in this area. I know of a mother who became very upset when her teenage daughter began to give in to peer pressure in junior high school. It seemed that the girl couldn't say "no". When the family went to a Christian counselor he asked the mother to take an honest look at her own life. What she discovered wasn't very easy to face or admit. What she discovered is that in her own circle of relationships in the church to which she belonged she was always working to make an impression on others. She always wanted to appear very competent and committed to God. She couldn't say "no" to any other request to make potato salad but she would get off the phone and complain because she overcommitted once again. She would voice concerns like, "I hope I get invited, chose, asked...." "Or, what will people think?" She wanted everyone to think that she was one of the most deeply spiritual and sacrificial person in the church. To make this work she needed to be able to display ideal Christian children. So in a lot of subtle ways a lot of pressure was placed on them to always make their mother look good. It was hard for the mother to admit that her daughter, who on the surface was rebelling against her, was really *just like her*. They were both totally committed to the approval and admiration of their peers. They just had two very different peer groups - the ladies at church and the girls at school. Neither the mother nor the daughter were drinking the water of life the - love and acceptance and significance that comes from a relationship with Christ. For that mother, being confronted with that truth was a moment not, unlike that the woman at the well faced when Jesus said; "go get your husband

and come back". *Before we can enjoy the water of life we have to face the truth about ourselves. How are you like the woman at the well?*

Conclusion

Take a fresh honest look at yourself every day. Look deeply, fearlessly, prayerfully, honestly. Look at the patterns, the pain, the problems the passions in your life. Do they speak at all to the issue of where you are trying to satisfy that deeper thirst we all share? Let every insight into your sin and self lead you back to faith in Christ! Confess, repent and believe with joy over and over again knowing the Lord wants you to face your sins so that he can give you to drink from the water of life.

This story coming early in the ministry of Jesus is ultimately a call to deeper faith for all of us. We won't get very far unless we believe. Maybe you have grown cynical or even bitter. Let this story challenge you to think about the fact that Jesus is the one talking about this spiritual water that satisfies your soul. It's big theme in the Bible from Psalms through Isaiah in the words of Jesus. Maybe you are not feeling it right now. We all go through dry seasons. But don't let cynicism, or weariness keep you from believing. If Jesus is Jesus and we are living in dryness we need to diagnose the cause of that and make adjustments no matter how radical they might seem because he is clearly saying God has a gift to give us of living water.

What a gift! God came into our world in Jesus because our sins really are a big deal. Our sins separate us from God and bring his righteous condemnation. We need to be reconciled to God. We need the new birth, the forgiveness of sins and the water of eternal life. You can't earn what you most deeply need. Jesus doesn't call this woman to a life of self-improvement. Look at **verses 13-14** again. He offers a gift to receive. Receive it and let it be the source of life for you.

Amen

Prayer of Response

Almighty God, our Creator and Savior. You have revealed yourself in history, making your love known to us in Jesus. Forgive us for turning from you to foolishly seek satisfaction elsewhere. Help us to learn from our mistakes, passions, temptations and emotions so that we will so that we will turn continually to Christ to believe and rejoice in him. In

him you offer thirsty souls the water of life. For this we give you thanks and praise. In Christ's name, Amen

¹ John doesn't mention this but all of the synoptic gospels do and they link it to Jesus' decision to go North to Galilee. See Mark 1:14, Matthew 4:12, and Luke 4:14.