

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL PART I

(John 4:1-14)

The last recorded event of Jesus while he was in Jerusalem was his conversation with Nicodemus. And now we are going to find that He will have a conversation with a woman from Samaria. And it is hard not to notice the stark contrast.

Nicodemus was a very learned man. There is every reason to believe that this woman in Samaria was unschooled. Nicodemus was a powerful man. He was a ruler of the Jews. The woman was powerless. Nicodemus was highly respected. He walked down the street with his head held high in pride. The woman was a social outcast. Nicodemus was an orthodox Jew, a highly trained fundamentalist in the Jewish religion and he worshipped in Jerusalem. The woman was trained only in the folk lore and superstitions of the Samaritans and she worshipped on Mt. Gerizim.

And all of this shows that God is not a respecter of persons.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:16

It is interesting that Jesus adapted his evangelistic method to the level of his subject. Jesus communicated with Nicodemus on a theological level. He taught him about the necessity of the new birth and scolded him for not knowing such things from the Old Testament record. And he taught Nicodemus about redemption by using the Old Testament type of the serpent raised up on a pole.

But now, Jesus encounters a woman who is on the opposite end of the social scale. Jesus communicates with her on the most basic level. He asks her to give him a drink of water.

Such is the love of Jesus. He will come and get you wherever you are. If you are an academician, he will come to the university and find you. If you are homeless, he will come under

the bridge where you live and find you. And he will teach you the way of salvation in terms that you can understand. This is his mission - to find his people wherever they may be.

And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:39, 40

Now Jesus found Nicodemus in Jerusalem but there are others whom he will find scattered here and there throughout the world. And he will gently gather them in.

After all, he had told Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son."

The Providential Circumstances That Brought Jesus to a Woman in Samaria

I. The Circumstances in Jerusalem

You might remember that the disciples of John the Baptist were beginning to resent that many were transferring their membership from John's congregation to Jesus' congregation. And there was a groundswell of interest in Jesus among the people that was not only threatening to John's disciples but also threatening to the Pharisees.

When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more people than John, (though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee.

John 4:1, 3

So, it seems that Jesus left Jerusalem for at least two reasons of circumstance. Perhaps he did not want to overlap the ministry of John. And then also, he perceived that the Pharisees were becoming agitated.

I want you to notice the greatness of the ministry of Jesus. In about two weeks, or at best a very short time, Jesus had baptized more disciples than John. Apparently the undeniable authority of Jesus and the full attendance of the Holy Spirit upon his words and works created a vast difference between his ministry and that of John. Not to diminish John, but Jesus is the Savior of the world himself and his ministry is vastly superior to all the prophets.

II. The circumstances in Samaria

But there is another reason that Jesus left Jerusalem. There was a poor woman in Samaria who needed a Savior. And Jesus set out on foot to find her and to bring her into the kingdom.

Now you will notice that it says,

He must needs go through Samaria.

John 4:4

Now the primary meaning is that it is necessary to travel through Samaria in order to get to Galilee. Samaria lay in between Judea and Galilee. And therefore, Samaria was in the way. But we know from the subsequent narrative that there was a spiritual reason why Jesus “must needs go through Samaria.” He “must need go because there was a sheep there.” And you can be sure that where there is a lamb, Jesus will go.

The Historical Situation in Samaria

When Israel divided into two kingdoms after the reign of King Solomon, there was Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Israel in the north had wicked kings and the people followed in the ways of idolatry and wickedness. And eventually they made Samaria the capital city of the kingdom of Israel. And it stood in contrast and in competition with Jerusalem which was the capital city of Judah.

A few hundred years later, in 722 BC, the Assyrians overran Israel and captured the city of Samaria and they deported all of the Israelites of substance. That is, anyone who was anyone was deported and the dregs were left behind. And

the Assyrians then moved in foreigners into Samaria and over the years they intermarried with those vagabond Jews who were left there. And so, the Samaritans were ever after viewed as half-breeds. They lost their pure Jewish identity. They were viewed as worse than the heathen and they were unclean. They were so despised that the Jews would not even talk to them. And the territory of the Samaritans was avoided like leprosy. Many times the Jews would circumvent Samaria by travelling to and from Jerusalem on the east side of the Jordan river. This is how violently they hated them.

In about 400 BC the Samaritans built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim. This of course was a rival temple to the one in Jerusalem. And the Samaritans argued that their temple was the true place of worship. Unfortunately for the Samaritans, their temple was destroyed a couple of hundred years before Christ.

So, when Jesus walked the earth, there was Herod's temple in Jerusalem, but there was no temple in Samaria. But the people of Samaria still viewed Mt. Gerizim as the holy place and the proper place of worship.

One other interesting note about the Samaritans: they determined their own canon of Scripture. They rejected everything but the first five books of Moses. They rejected all the writings of the prophets and the writings of David and Solomon. And so, you can see how there was great religious and theological animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans. And this serves as the setting for the meeting between Jesus and this Samaritan woman.

On his way to Galilee Jesus came to a city of Samaria called Sychar. This city is not mentioned in previous literature and we wouldn't know where this city was except that it is identified by a very distinctive landmark.

Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.

John 4:5

The reference here is to Genesis 48:22 where Jacob, on his deathbed, gave a gift to his son Joseph. And Jacob gave him

a ridge of land that Jacob had won in battle. And on this land tradition says that Jacob dug a well.

This well is not mentioned in the Old Testament, but it is mentioned here in John and it says,

Now Jacob's well was there.

John 4:6

So it is fairly evident from tradition and it seems to be confirmed in Scripture that this well was dug by Jacob. The well is still in existence today, and if you were to travel to Israel you could go and visit it in the present day village of Askar near Mt. Ebal opposite Mt. Gerizim. If you go and visit this well they will tell you that the well is nine feet in width and 100 feet deep. And when Jacob reached a certain depth he tapped into an underground spring which supplied the well with fresh, clean water.

The Meeting Between Jesus and the Woman

Jesus, therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.

John 4:6, 7

It was about a two day journey from Jerusalem to Samaria and Jesus arrived at Jacob's well at the sixth hour which was noon in Jewish time. This was probably late spring or early summer and it was probably hot by this time. And Jesus, being wearied, sat on the well.

You will notice that it says he "sat thus on the well." He was weary and he sat "thus" on the well. That is, he sat in a weary fashion. I suspect this means that he sat down with a sigh, his shoulders may have been slumped over with weariness and he was thirsty and he sat down and waited on the side of the well.

What a picture of our Savior who became a man in order to save us! He never was weary in heaven and he never was thirsty. Even after he created the heavens and the earth he was

not weary. But he had real weariness and real thirst here. This shows us the utter humanity of Jesus.

It says a woman came to draw water. Now this woman thought she came to the well routinely and at her discretion. What she didn't know was that she came by appointment. She had a divine appointment with Jesus.

A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps.

Proverbs 16:9

Here in one verse we have the free agency of man and the sovereignty of our great God. And the Lord directed the steps of this woman to Jacob's well on this day, at this hour, for a divine appointment with Jesus.

The woman came to the well alone and she came at an odd hour. Most of the women came in the early morning or the late afternoon when the heat of the sun was not so fierce. It could be that this woman's shame prevented her from socializing with the other women, for she had five previous husbands and was living with a man who was not her husband. (John 4:18) But when she came to the well, Jesus was sitting on the well.

Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.

John 4:7

This request seems simple enough, but this was extraordinary for a Jew to speak to a Samaritan and especially to a poor Samaritan woman. But this further demonstrates that Jesus was not a respecter of persons. (Acts 10:34) He would just as soon speak with her as with Nicodemus. He would just as soon speak to a Samaritan as a Judean. He would just as soon speak with a homeless person as with a homeowner; with a woman as with a man; for he came to seek and to save that which was lost. (Luke 19:10)

The disciples were gone into the city to buy food. This in itself was probably a breach of Jewish etiquette because food prepared by Samaritans was unclean. But this shows that Jesus was not so bound by the self-imposed ceremonial regulations of the stricter Jews. Jesus obeyed all of God's laws, but he was

never too concerned about the extensions to the law which were the imaginations of men.

Jesus began the conversation by asking for a drink of water. And water will become the subject of conversation. You might remember that Jesus also used the figure of water with Nicodemus when he said,

Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

John 3:5

Now when he spoke of water with Nicodemus, he clearly spoke of the Holy Spirit as the source of regeneration. And we are going to find again, when Jesus speaks to the woman, he speaks of water as a figure of the Holy Spirit.

Now the woman is startled that Jesus has spoken to her because as verse nine says,

The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

John 4:9

But Jesus has something to offer her that goes beyond the bounds of petty, national and religious differences. He has come to bring her eternal life. And she has no idea to whom she is speaking.

Jesus answered and said unto her, if thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

John 4:10

Here Jesus gives this woman the first hint that he is somebody special and he has something very special to offer her. He tells her that he is the gift of God. And so he was.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.

John 3:16

Jesus was the gift that would take away the sin of the world. He was God's gift to Nicodemus and he was God's gift to this woman. And what she didn't know was that Jesus had water to offer.

Jesus calls his water "living water." Now this expression living water has two levels of meaning. In the physical realm living water meant running water from springs. Now some wells were only containers for water. And the water would be stale and stagnant because there was no movement to the water. But the water from springs and streams is fresh and clean. And Jesus said, "I would give you living water."

Now the woman had access to this kind of living water. She had a bucket and she was prepared to lower the bucket into the well and draw living water from the well. But Jesus said *he* had living water. But he had no bucket. So she perceived that he spoke of some other living water which she knew nothing about.

But, of course, Jesus spoke of a very special "living water."

We already saw with Nicodemus that water was a reference to the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. And now, with this woman, we are going to see that water is the Holy Spirit that springs up into eternal life.

Let's see what we can determine about this water that Jesus offers.

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

John 4:14

We see first that it is water that is a once for all watering, for it says, "he that drinketh shall never thirst." It is a water that will quench spiritual thirst for all time. It will satisfy your soul for now and for all eternity. Never again will you dry up spiritually. The deepest longings of your soul will forever be satisfied, for he will be a well of water springing up within you.

And I would say that there are many old saints, even here in our congregation, who would testify to the fact that the water of the Holy Spirit has not left them in all these years. After all these years He is still their helper. He is still their keeper.

Not only is this water once for all and forever, but this water shall be in you. Notice that it says,

But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

It shall not be found in outward works or in a baptismal pool or even in a church building, but it will be inside of you. This is the marvelous gift of the Holy Spirit which is given to every believer.

You may wonder how you will ever live the Christian life if you believe in Christ. You know your heart and you know your propensity for sin. But the promise is that when you believe in Christ, God will shed forth in your heart the Holy Spirit of God. And he will be your helper for now and forever.

Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

II Corinthians 1:22

So, the water is for all time, and it is found in us who believe. And now notice that it is a moving, working water.

A well of water springing up into eternal life.

This water is no stagnant water. It is running water. Jesus called it "living water." And so this water that Jesus gives is inside of you and it is the living, moving, working Holy Spirit of God. He will work a work in you and he will sanctify you. He will make you fit for the kingdom of God.

He will also go to war with the flesh.

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary one to the other.

Galatians 5:17

So, Jesus told this woman, I have water to give you. It quenches thirst once for all, it will reside in you and it will be moving water. But notice that this water that Jesus gives produces something very special. It produces eternal life.

Remember that salvation is more than merely a legal declaration that you are not guilty. Now it is true that God freely forgives you. It is true that He casts your sins as far as the east is from the west. It is true that He will not impute sin to your account. It is true that there is a legal declaration in heaven that declares you justified in the eyes of God. But salvation is so much more. He also changes you on the inside. And He does so by the mighty power of His Spirit. This change is a holy change and it is a change that makes you fit for salvation. As John puts it, it springs up into eternal life.

But look carefully at verse 14 and you will see that this water is a gift of God. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit which brings salvation and life is not something that is achieved by the efforts of men. It is not a reward for clean living or moral uprightness. It is a gift of God. It is a gift which actually produces clean living and moral uprightness. It produces something in you which could never be produced otherwise. There is one power and one power alone that can produce inward holiness and that is the power of God.

Isn't that the very nature of salvation? God finds helpless sinners and makes them alive by the regenerating force of the Holy Spirit. Then, He gives the ultimate gift for daily living which is the indwelling power of the Spirit. And Jesus told this woman,

Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

But also notice that the water of the Holy Spirit is appropriated by drinking.

Whosoever drinketh . . . shall never thirst.

The gifts of God are always appropriated by faith. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." So when it says, "Whosoever drinketh," it means "whosoever

believeth.” This is always God’s mechanism of appropriation. He makes you alive. He turns the inclination of your heart. And you believe. And the moment you believe, the benefits of salvation are appropriated. And they flow within you like a spring of water springing up. The Holy Spirit is a spring of water that enlightens your mind, that bends your will, that melts your heart. In short, it is the Holy Spirit of God that is your constant helper today, tomorrow and forever. And Jesus said,

Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into eternal life.

I tell you, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, there is great, great hope for you because he doesn’t leave you helpless. The world may seem overwhelming to you. Your circumstances may seem insurmountable. Your old nature may seem too powerful. But there is One who lives within you that is stronger than all of these.

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

I John 4:2-4

John has selected two discourses of Jesus in order to instruct in the way of salvation. He spoke with Nicodemus and then he spoke with the woman of Samaria. And this is basic doctrine. This is the fundamentals of salvation. If we get our doctrine right here, then we have an understanding of the very nature of salvation.

Let me just review what we have learned from these two discourses.

We have learned that the starting point of salvation realized is the new birth. Jesus told this very religious man, Nicodemus,

Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

John 3:3

This new birth is an act of the Holy Spirit of God upon a sinner's heart. It is a powerful act upon a heart that has no spiritual life. It is an act of God that makes a heart alive and causes it to receive the Word of God.

The sinner is passive in this act of regeneration. It is a creative act of God. And this creative act of God makes the sinner a new creation. This is why Jesus used the passive voice with Nicodemus. "Ye must be born again." It is not something that the sinner does, but it is something done to and for the sinner.

And so, we must acknowledge that salvation begins with a creative act of God in the heart of man and all spiritual blessings flow from this act.

I wish all men everywhere would know that there is nothing they can do to save themselves. They are wholly dependent on the moving of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts. But sinful men will always maintain that they will somehow climb to heaven to find God when the truth is that heaven must come down to find them.

And so, Nicodemus, you must be born again.

Ah, but there is something a man does after all! He believes in the One who has been lifted up.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

John 4:14, 15

Believing is our duty. But it is also logically subsequent to the new birth. Jesus didn't teach Nicodemus, "Believe and be born again." But he taught, "Be born again and believe." Read chapter three and notice which is first.

But believing is a necessary consequent of the new birth. It is the evidence of the new birth. It is the instinctive reaction of the heart of man to being made alive. True faith demonstrates not only that a man has been born again, but also that God has ordained that man to eternal life. Only those whom God has ordained to eternal life will believe. (Acts 13:48) Only those whose heart has been opened will believe. (Acts 16:14) But believe they must for Jesus told Nicodemus, "Whosoever believeth shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

And then, Jesus instructed the woman. And he said, Ask of me and I will give you living water to drink, That is, I will give you the very Spirit of God once for all. You will never thirst again. And Jesus told her that he would put this water in her. That is, "I will put my Spirit in you." And so Jesus taught this woman, and the New Testament teaches elsewhere that believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1:13) This Spirit in us is a fountain springing up into eternal life.

Here is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus died as a substitute for sinners. He took the guilt of sinners upon himself. And I offer Him to you today. If you will have him by faith, then God will justify you in the court of heaven.

Would you be free from the burden of sin, then believe in Him. Would you have your sins forgiven, then believe. Would you have a part in eternal life, then believe.