

## **The Woman at the Well John 4**

Imagine if you will, an area of land, just more than 120 miles from the north to the south. That was Palestine. In the north was the region of Galilee. In the south, the region of Judea. Both of these were Jewish settlements. Smack in the middle, between these two regions was Samaria. There was more than 400 years of war, bitterness, and resentment. The Jews in the north and the south hated the Samaritans and looked down on them as less than second class citizens.

Jesus had left Judea for Galilee. The quickest route was through Samaria. Jesus was weary. It was hot. At a fork in the road, Jesus stopped to rest, at what was known, and is to this day, as the well of Jacob. This is a very historical place, rich with many important Jewish memories.

The well was deep...more than 100 feet to the water. A rope and bucket were required to get water from this well.

Jesus was travelling, as he always was, with his disciples. As he rested, the disciples went into a nearby Samaritan town to get some food. This is significant. It is obvious that Jesus was having an effect on those who travelled with him. To buy anything from a Samaritan would have been unheard of. Jews wanted absolutely nothing to do with Samaritans, and putting money in their pockets was the last thing they would ever do. Spending time with Jesus was softening their hearts.

While he was resting, a Samaritan woman appears. She is coming to the well. It was at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from Sychar, the nearest town. This is curious. There would have been a well there. Why would this woman walk so far out of her way to carry a bucket of water a  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile? The thought is that this woman was a social outcast. The local women would have driven a woman of ill repute away from the well in Sychar.

We need to read this Scripture as we would read minutes from a meeting. It is a precis – the highlights. All of the discussion, the details, the nuances are not printed. John is telling this story like minutes from a meeting. Just the highlights. There is considerable conversation between Jesus and this woman that we must assume had taken place but which is not included in the text.

The woman approaches the well. Jesus is sitting by the well, perhaps his back pressed against it for support.

In the bit of conversation that is reported, he asks her for a drink. The woman is astonished. She is astonished that he is not aggressive toward her. She is astonished that he is not rude or abusive to her. That is what she is accustomed to.

After all, she is a Samaritan. She is a woman. He is not only a man, but a rabbi.

Perhaps she saw the kindness in his eyes. Perhaps she sensed that he would not attack her with critical superiority. She opened her heart to him.

Remember when Jesus met with Nicodemus? Nicodemus asked Jesus what he must do to receive the gift of eternal life. Jesus told him that he must be born again. Nicodemus was confused. He took Jesus literally. How could a grown man be born again?

The same is true with the woman at the well. Living water? What in the world is Living water? Something you drink and are never thirsty again? That's confusing!

Jesus often taught this way. Rather than simplify it, or dumb it down, in order to give it the full magnitude it warranted, Jesus used the power and the breadth of the metaphor. That way, the listener had to dig in, and work hard to discover for themselves the truth and power of what He was saying. People gravitate to

literal, rather than spiritual interpretation. It is easier, less work.

The first inclination of both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, was literal interpretation.

The woman is confused as to why a man, who is a Jew would ask not only a woman, but a Samaritan woman for a drink of water. Why, under any circumstances, would a Jewish man speak to a Samaritan woman?

Jesus says, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you Living Water.

The woman is even more confused and perhaps getting annoyed - "You have no water. The well is deep. Where is it that you get this Living Water? Who do you think you are anyway? Do you think you are greater than our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well?"

Probably looking at or pointing to the well, Jesus says, “Whoever drinks this water, will be thirsty again. But everyone who drinks from the water that I will give them, will never be thirsty again!” We must admit, that is perhaps confusing to even us!

Whether her response came immediately, or some time later, the Samaritan woman responded, “Sir give me this water, that I may never be thirsty again.” And then her literal understanding of what he had to say becomes even clearer, “And besides, that will mean that I never have to walk here again and draw water from this well”.

It is important to know that the term Living Water is frequently used throughout the Old and the New Testament. Jewish language was filled with pictorial language like this. Rabbis thought of Living Water as the wisdom of the law and the work of the Holy Spirit. Thirst of the soul, thirst for God, is

quenched by Living Water....God's gift. Sadly, much of this was lost on this woman. She thought he was mad. "Give me this water so that I will never be thirsty again, and I will never have to draw water from a well again!"

In the human heart, there is a thirst for something which only God can satisfy. Deep and lasting happiness, peace that endures all of the joys and the struggles of life, can never be achieved by human design.

How are you feeling about this? What would you say is the condition of your soul? Is there any thirst?

How would you describe your relationship with God? For some of us, it is in the head, for some the heart, for others some of both. However you would describe your relationship with God, is there any thirst? Do you want that relationship to grow? If so, what are you doing about it? If not, what are you doing here?

I am just back from spending a week as Chaplain at Gracefield Camp. I lead Staff Bible study. I lead the Morning watch for the campers, sitting on a beautiful sloping rock that lead into the clear waters of Lac Castor. I sat in and helped out with the Bible studies that the counsellors lead with their cabins. I gave a presentation for opening and closing worship. In the meantime I was available for the camp staff and campers.

It was a good education for me. I was with keen young adults who were all at various stages of their spiritual growth. They had a thirst. Some were taking things literally, others, more metaphorically. They were all longing to learn how to live out their faith authentically in the midst of their daily life, at camp and away from camp. They all wanted God to make a difference in their lives and they wanted to make a difference in the lives of their campers, by God working through them. They strove to be kind, patient, fun, helpful. They wanted the best for their young



charges. All of this in the stunning beauty of God's amazing creation.

How about you? Where are you in this search for Living Water?

God's grace and peace to you as you travel the road.

Amen