

Thirsty Anyone

Part I

John 4:1-42

Introduction

Jesus Christ, as recorded in John, chapter 3, has just ended a conversation with one of the most respectable men in the Jewish community – a man named Nicodemus. Now, in the next chapter, he will talk with one of the most unlikely characters in the New Testament – an unnamed, adulterous, Samaritan woman. The funny thing is, Nicodemus, the moral, religious man, refused to be saved, but this woman will place her faith in Christ within a matter of minutes!

Turn, in John's gospel, to chapter 4. Let us begin our study with verses 1 through 6.

When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee. And He had to pass through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; and Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from his journey, was sitting thus by the well. . . .

Few sites in the Holy Land enjoy a better claim to antiquity and authenticity than Jacob's well. The well today, is deep and noted for its delicious, cool water. It was here that Jacob, centuries earlier, had dug a well for his family and flocks. It was this very ground which Jacob bequeathed to his son Joseph. And it was

here that Joseph had requested to be buried and indeed, was.

Now, the Son of God is resting on the ground, or perhaps He is sitting on the edge of the well. He is waiting. He has an appointment with a woman who does not know it yet.

Notice the last phrase of verse 6 through verse 7.

. . . It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink."

Three Traditional Taboos

Now, as unbelievable as it may sound, with the utterance of that request, Jesus stands to break three traditional taboos.

In order to understand the impact, let me go back into ancient history. Over seven hundred years before Jesus' birth, the Assyrians attacked the northern tribes of Israel. They captured and took a great majority of the Jews into captivity.

The people who remained in the country intermarried with the incoming Gentiles. That was the unforgivable crime – to the Jew. In a strict Jewish household, even to this day, if a son, or daughter, marries a Gentile, his, or her, funeral service is carried out. Such a person is dead in the eyes of orthodox Judaism.

Later, when Ezra and Nehemiah came to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city, the Samaritans offered their help. They were refused.

Years later, in bitter anger, they built their own temple on Mt. Gerezim. They were given permission by Alexander the Great, who was ruler at the time.

This was quite a feud! According to the *Mishnah*, which is a compilation of the traditions of the elders and the Pharisees, the Samaritans were deemed, “unclean from their cradle”.

There were even some Pharisees who prayed that no Samaritan would be raised in the resurrection, “Ha! Keep ‘em down Lord!”

So, by the time of Christ, this bitter feud was in full sway.

Taboo #1 – Talking to a Samaritan!

1. And here Jesus is, committing taboo number one – talking to a Samaritan!

Taboo #2 – Talking to a woman!

2. And, taboo number two – He is not only talking to a Samaritan, but He is talking to a Samaritan woman!

Now, as hard as it may seem to understand, the men and women of Jesus’ day lived separate lives. The women were beasts of burden; they were property to be bought and sold.

It would be the gospel and Christianity that would give women equal value. It would be the New Testament that taught, in Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 33, that a man should, “. . . love his own wife even as himself . . .”.

In Jesus’ day, however, it was far different. A rabbi was forbidden to even greet a woman in public.

Well, here is Jesus, the Rabbi, carrying on a conversation with this woman in public. And, not just any woman, but a woman of ill repute. Look at verse 18, where Jesus said to her,

for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband . . .

By the way, did you notice that she has come to draw water at noon, the hottest time of the day? Why not with the other women, who come in the cool of the evening? Because five of the women are probably married to her five former husbands. They will talk and laugh and gossip, as they draw water, and she will be the object of their gossip. So she draws water at a time when she supposes no one else will be there to

stare, or laugh, or sneer at her – five times divorced and now living as an adulterer.

Here is a woman who is lonely, sinful, needy, thirsty – for something real; for something that will last!

So, she is coming toward the well and she sees this young Jewish man, about thirty years of age, wearing the traditional rabbinical robe, sitting with his back against the cool stones that form the mouth of the well. Should she approach and draw water? Yes, she will. And, as she walks up, He turns and looks at her, and says, “Give me a drink.”

That leads me to the third taboo!

Taboo #3 – He asked her for a drink of water!

3. Taboo number three – He has just asked her for a drink of water!

According to popular opinion of the day, to receive food or drink from the hand, or vessel, of a Samaritan, would be to share in their impurity. To the Jew, this was an amazing story. Here was the holy Son of God breaking down the barriers of race, sex, and orthodoxy.

But, this is the application of his conversation with Nicodemus – “For God so loved the world . . .” – not in theory, but in action!

Now look at verses 9 and 10.

The Samaritan woman therefore said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”

Now, in the Greek language, living water and running water could be translated from the same words. Continue to verse 11.

She said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?”

In other words, the woman is saying, “Look, you don’t even have anything to draw water with from this well,” (still water), “where are you going to get pure stream water, and with what?”

And, she is actually curt with Jesus. Look at verse 12.

You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?

The woman is saying, in effect, “This is blasphemous talk. Jacob, our great ancestor, when he came here, had to dig this well to get water for his family and his cattle. Are you claiming to be able to get fresh, running stream water? If you are, you are claiming to be wiser and more powerful than Jacob.”

In other words, she is saying to this young man, “Just who do you think you are?”

In a moment, He will tell her! But, for now, Jesus ignores her remark and instead, describes this running, or living water. Jesus points at the well and says to her, in verses 13 and 14,

Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.

Her immediate response is in verse 15.

The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty, nor come all the way here to draw.”

Jesus is talking about spiritual water; this woman is thinking only of physical water.

Here is a woman who is without any spiritual insight. She is missing the connection – a connection, by the way, that repeatedly surfaces in the Old and New Testament!

- Isaiah prophesied, in chapter 12, verse 3, that the chosen people would draw water with joy from the wells of salvation.
- The Messiah prophesied through Isaiah, as recorded in chapter 44, verse 3, “. . . I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground . . .”.
- Zechariah prophesied, in chapter 13, verse 1, that in the heavenly kingdom there will be a cleansing fountain opened and that water will flow forth from Jerusalem.
- Jeremiah declared, in chapter 17, verse 13, that it is the Lord who is the fountain of living water!

- David wrote, in Psalm, chapter 42, verse 1, that his soul thirsted for God, just as a deer thirsts for water.
- The Psalmist wrote, in chapter 36, verse 9, “. . . with Thee is the fountain of life . . .”.
- In Revelation, chapter 22, verse 1, we are told that a river of the water of life is to flow from the very throne of God.
- The glorified Lamb speaks from His heavenly throne in Revelation, chapter 21, verse 6. “. . . I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.”

The world is thirsty!!! Only God can satisfy!!!

Now, back in John, chapter 4, verses 13 and 14, we have a significant characteristic. In the original text, these verses are written with tenses that could be paraphrased in this way, “Everyone who continues to drink of this earthly water will thirst again; but whoever takes just one drink of this heavenly water that I shall give him will never thirst again!”

Sinclair Lewis, in one of his books, draws this truth into novel form as two of his characters are talking. One is a respectable businessman who is successful in life. He is talking to the beautiful girl he is in love with. She says to him, “On the surface we seem quite different, but deep down we are fundamentally the same. We are both desperately unhappy about something – and we don’t know what it is.”

In this text of John, there is, evidently, an attractive woman who has had a passing parade of men, with the latest being a live-in affair. None of them have been lasting, none of them have brought fulfillment, and none of them have been meaningful.

What a symbol of our own age – people who are restless and are seeking satisfaction somewhere . . . anywhere! They are looking for that belonging. They go from one hobby to another; one activity to another; one relationship to another. Why? Because they are literally dying of thirst! And they think, “Maybe this new thing will satisfy my thirst!”

Like the billionaire who weighed only one hundred twenty-five pounds, whose fingernails were long and curved, and whose emaciated body was riddled with needle marks from his addiction – Howard Hughes, who once had the world.

Like the millionaire tennis star who was caught shoplifting a fifteen dollar ring.

Likewise, this Samaritan woman was drinking from a well and, in fact, had drunk deeply, but she was always thirsty! Look back at verse 15.

The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty, nor come all the way here to draw.”

In other words, “Hey, if you can give me something that will make my life easier, I’ll take it. Where do I sign?”

What can Jesus say to make her wake up? What can He do to make her look deeper and recognize her thirst? I’ve got it! He can let her in on the fact that he knows everything about her!

It is like you and I in the course of life. You sit in church, or in a Sunday school class, next to someone you do not know very well. You talk about religious things – how you found the church, the crowded parking lot, the weather, the way your favorite team got smeared yesterday, the terrific preaching – just thought I would suggest that one! But, suppose you knew that this man’s eighteen year old daughter had just run away from home and left a note explaining why. Do you really want to help? Then, you might say, “Hey, friend, have you got any struggles on the home front that I can join you in praying about?”

You will move right past the weather and the latest sports news and get right to the heart of the matter.

So, what does Jesus say, to get past the façade? Continue to verses 16 and 17a.

He said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.”

Did you notice that this is the shortest sentence this woman speaks?! She has just been gabbing away, but, all of sudden, as if she has just been shocked, she answers quickly, perhaps looking away or brushing dust from her clothes, “I have no husband.”

Now look at the last part of verse 17 through 18.

Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband . . .”

“Well, ah, um, you see, I, well . . .”, “How’d He know that?”

Suddenly, she has caught sight of herself. She has just had someone, in loving authority, point their finger in her face and say, “You’ve gone from one man to another and another and another and another . . .”.

Has it ever occurred to you that the first thing Jesus Christ does for a person is force him to do what he has spent his life refusing to do – look at himself?

You get into your car and turn on the radio, lest you think about your life, “Distractions please, somebody! I don’t want to think about where my life is taking me!”

Now look at what she does in verses 19 through 20. It is classic!

The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”

Do you know what she has just done? She has brought up the five hundred year old religious debate between the Jews and the Samaritans, “Should we worship on Mt. Gerezim with the Samaritans or in Jerusalem?”

Zooooom – left turn! I imagine that, at least a dozen times, I have been pressing the gospel to someone and I can see that recognition of biblical truth beginning to take root. Then, at the very moment when they would break, in humility, and say, “Yes, I need Christ!” what do they say?

- Zooooom! “What about all those people in China who have never heard?”
- Zooooom! “What about the hypocrites in church?”
- Zooooom! “What about all the hunger in the third world countries?”

The truth is, “What about you?! Let’s talk about you. Let’s leave the Chinese and the hypocrites and the third world alone for a minute! What about you?!”

She brings up this religious debate. It is much more comfortable to discuss religion than to face your sins.

In verses 21 to 24, Jesus answers her briefly, by telling her that there is coming a new age, or a new dispensation. We will cover the matter of worship, in detail, in a later discussion.

While Jesus was speaking about true worship, this woman was evidently listening. Look at verse 25.

The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.”

It is as if this woman sighed and said, “You know, it will be wonderful when the Messiah comes. He’ll answer my questions. He’ll bring meaning to life.”

The Samaritan Messiah was referred to as the, “Tacheh,” a term explained as the “restorer”. According to Samaritan tradition, the Messiah would come as the “restorer of true worship,” “Just wait until the Messiah comes!”

Now look at verse 26.

Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

The Greek words are forceful and illuminating. You may have noticed, in your Bibles, the word “He” is in italics. That means the translators supplied the word in order to make sense of the Greek text. Most of the time it helps, but sometimes it clouds the impact. In this verse, it does just that.

The Greek reads, “ego eimi,” literally translated, “I am.” It is the same construction found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Exodus, chapter 3, verses 13 and 14, where Moses asks God, “What is your name?” and God says, “My name is I AM,” or “ego eimi.”

Jesus is using the divine title in reference to Himself. You could translate this verse, “Jesus said to her, “It is I AM speaking to you.”

Did Jesus Christ claim to be just another rabbi – a good teacher? Did He claim to be what a book that was highlighted in our local newspaper said, that Jesus was just a social revolutionary? Dr. John Crossan said, “Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah.”

I called Dr. Crossan’s office at DePaul University in Chicago. He never returned my call.

Jesus said, “I am God!”

He is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in chapter 9, verse 6b, which declared, “. . . His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty GOD, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”

Jesus chose to reveal his divine identity to a woman. The rabbis, of Jesus’ day, thought so little of

women that they taught it was better to burn the words of the scriptures than to deliver them to a woman.

But God spoke to a woman. He revealed divine truth to a Samaritan woman – to an immoral, needy, thirsty Samaritan woman.

Look at verses 28 and 29.

So the woman left her waterpot, . . .

This reveals two things – she is in a hurry and she plans on coming back!

. . . and went into the city, and said to the men, “Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done . . .”

I am sure most of the city wanted to hear the stories of everything she had done. I will also bet there were some rather nervous people who were not sure they wanted public awareness of everything she had done – like in Senator so and so’s diary and Madame so and so’s phone directory. There were probably a few nail biters in Sychar that day!

But what news – this woman turned evangelist – “This man must be the Messiah!”

They respond in verse 30.

They went out of the city, and were coming to Him.

This, literally, means that they went out of the city and were continually coming . . . continually coming . . . continually coming to Him.

Who were these people? I will tell you, they were thirsty people too! And they were coming for a drink of living water!

Now look at verses 39 through 42.

And from that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all the things that I have done.” So when the Samaritans came to Him, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world.”

It is interesting, “the Savior of the world” – a title that appears only in John’s writings, and only once in this gospel. Perhaps it is a unique title to John because, at the time John was writing, the Roman

Emperor had recently been given the title “Savior of the World”. It is as if John said, “Here’s the real Savior!”

The truth is, ladies and gentlemen, you are surrounded by thirsty people who are drinking from wells that will never satisfy. You have to come to Christ and face yourself and your sin and realize that this water of eternal life is freely given to all who will believe and admit their need of saving.

I cannot force you to drink, but I can tell you where the water is and I can also tell you that the world will only make you thirsty for more.

I read the story of a sports reporter going to the estate of, once great, Cassius Clay, or Mohammed Ali. The reporter was invited, by Ali, to walk to the back where there was a huge barn. It had been converted to house Ali’s trophies and memorabilia. It was filled with pictures, articles, plaques, and trophies. On one wall, there were a number of pictures that had appeared on the covers of magazines. Ali, by the way, still has the record for having his face on more sports magazine covers than any other athlete. The color pictures had been enlarged to life size and were framed in glass. They were hanging on one wall. Ali went over to them and, peering up at them, he noticed the traces of bird droppings made by birds that still made their home in the barn. He seemed upset, mumbled a few things and then, went and stood at the doorway of the barn. He peered, rather listlessly, toward the horizon and the reporter heard him mumble something. He asked him what he had said, and Ali, now a slow moving, thick tongued, aged superstar, slurred, “I once had the world . . . and it was nothin’!”

In other words, “I once had it all . . . but it never satisfied my thirst!”

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink and live.*

*I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.*

My friends, that is the story – that God came down to offer living water to a thirsty world.

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