

Series: "Encounters With Christ"
"The Woman At the Well"

In this series of messages we're looking at various encounters people had with Jesus, as found in the Gospel of John. Today's story comes from the fourth chapter of John.

It's about 12 noon. Jesus is tired and thirsty. He had been in Judea with His disciples, but when He hears that some of the Jewish religious leaders are beginning to question Him more, He heads north to Galilee. In this trip north He does something hardly any devout Jew would do: He goes right through Samaria. Devout Jews hated Samaritans, and had no dealings with them. They were regarded as half-breeds – a prejudice that went back hundreds of years. So, most Jews would by-pass Samaria, even though it could take them twice as long to get to where they wanted to go. *But not Jesus!*

He comes to a well outside the town of Sychar, and He sits there in the hot noonday sun, while His disciples go into town for food. A woman comes to the well – a Samaritan woman. It's surprising she's there at that time of the day. Why come at noon, when most women went there in the morning or evening, when it was cooler? Hold on to that question; we'll come back to that.

Jesus says to her, "Give me a drink" (John 4:7). Now it's hard for us to appreciate what an astounding thing Jesus just did! First of all, Jesus was a Jew, and was associating with a Samaritan. As I said, Jews just didn't do that! Also, Jesus was a rabbi, a teacher (and of course, a male). Rabbis were forbidden to greet a woman in public, even their own wife or daughter or sister. But that didn't stop Jesus from talking to this lady! It doesn't matter who you are, or what kind of person you are, Jesus will talk to you and associate with you! He isn't hung up on the prejudices that we have. He doesn't shy away from people who are unlikeable, or "not our kind"!

So, He says to the woman, "Give me a drink", and she answers: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (John 4:9). She's aware of the distaste that Jews have for people like her. Check out Jesus' response: "Jesus answered her, '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'" (John 4:10). Jesus tells her, "If you knew who I am, you would have asked me, and I would give you *living water!*" The prophet Jeremiah spoke of God as the "fountain of *living water*"(Jeremiah 2:13). In other words, Jesus is beginning to talk to her about *spiritual thirst*.

She doesn't get the point! She thinks Jesus is talking about *running water* as opposed to *stagnant water*. She says to Him, "You don't have any bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get this running water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who built this well because there was no other water nearby?" Look at Jesus' reply: "Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life'" (John 4:13-14). Jesus tells her, "I can give you something to satisfy your deepest need for God, something that will last you for all eternity. The woman replies, "Give me this water, so that I won't have to keep coming back here every day to the well!" *She still doesn't get it!*

There are a lot of people like her! Spiritually clueless, with no spiritual foundation for their life. No spiritual understanding. The Bible says the unsaved person cannot grasp the things of God, the things of the Spirit.

Jesus doesn't give up on her! He tries a different approach. "Jesus said to her, 'Go call your husband, and come back'" (verse 16). Whoops. "I don't have a husband," she answers. She's right about that! But she omits the rather dirty details! "The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"' (verses 17-18). "You're telling the truth!" Jesus says! (I can't help but wonder if a faint smile came across His face)! *So that's why she came to the well at noon, when probably no one else would be there.* She didn't want to have to put up with the dirty looks, the whispering behind her back: "There's that town slut! Rumor has it she's working on husband number 6. Hahaha!" Jesus, you sure know how to cut to the chase! No beating around the bush with You! (If you think back to the sermon on Gracie and Truthie, Gracie had shown up, with Jesus even associating with this Samaritan woman, and talking with her. But now Truthie shows up: "Go call your husband!"

We don't know all the details about this lady's life, and her 5 husbands. But every indication is that she isn't exactly a model of morality, or the poster girl for happy marriages. Jesus wants to change this woman and give her abundant life, but He knows in order for that to happen she's going to have to own up to her sin and shortcomings. I mean, *5 husbands!* And apparently living with some guy who could be number 6! We can understand if, maybe, one marriage goes sour. Everybody makes mistakes. If a *second marriage* fails, well maybe you begin to wonder if it's really "the other person's faults" that's the problem. But *five marriages* down the toilet! I think of a couple I had in therapy. As I recall, they had recently married. For the man, it was, I think, his 4th or 5th marriage. In the sessions, it wasn't long before this guy began to complain about all his wife's faults, all she was doing to make life difficult in their marriage. And I thought, *hello!* Maybe some of the problem is *you!* And when I gently began to suggest that, he just couldn't see it.

So, you would hope Jesus' bluntness in calling out her situation with the husbands would prompt some deep soul searching on her part, some honest self-evaluation. But is she ready for that? Apparently not. "The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem'" (verses 19-20). Er...ah...let's not get into my personal life here...ah...let's talk about *religion*, and what's the appropriate mountain to worship on! I think you would call this diversion. Let's change the subject! She'd rather get into a theoretical discussion on which is the proper mountain to worship on, rather than looking at her own sin and need. *Sometimes you and I can use church involvement and religion as a way to avoid taking responsibility for our life, and coming to grips with our need to change!*

Before Jesus can live in us and begin to take control of our life we have to own up to the things in our life that are wrong and sinful. There's no salvation without true repentance, and a willingness to change. Someone has said, "Jesus will forgive sin, but only if we face it and admit

it. He will not tolerate our deceitfulness." Jesus pretty much brushes off her diversion tactic – which mountain to worship on – and He zeroes in on the condition of her heart and soul. "Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews'" (verses 21-22). Something Jesus says begins to touch this woman's soul: "The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us'" (verse 25). Then Jesus' great claim: "Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you'" (John 4:26).

At that point, Jesus disciples get back. "Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?'" (John 4:27). There is this awkward moment when they see Jesus talking to this woman, and they are so startled that they don't know what to say! (It's sort of like you open the door to a room at work and there are 2 employees in there kissing!). She leaves her water jar there, and heads off.

Whatever happens to this lady? Something Jesus said must have gotten through to her. "Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him" (John 4:28-30). Her testimony and witness affects a whole city! "Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony" (John 4:39). How about that! Jesus got through to her after all!

Do you fit into this story at all? Are you in any way like this woman? You're probably thinking "Heavens' sake no! Don't insult me like that!" But we don't have to be immoral or a scum bag to be far from God, or spiritually dull, or lost in our sins. There are sins of the flesh – sexual sins, filthy language, lying and cheating. Rather obvious behaviors. But there are also sins of attitude and spirit that can be just as bad. Galatians 5 lists some sins that are typical of the unconverted person, or sins present when God is not in control of our life: "When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these" (Galatians 5:19-21 NLT).

Note, it's not just lustful pleasures, drunkenness, wild parties. It's also sins of attitude and spirit, things like jealousy, selfish ambition, dissension, envy. Lloyd Ogilvie was a prominent pastor and author, Chaplain of the U.S. Senate, and pastor of historic First Presbyterian Church in Hollywood, California for 23 years. Before he went to Hollywood he was pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Bethlehem, PA, a large congregation made up of many affluent people. I once heard him speak at a clergy session, where he said we need to share the gospel not only with the down-and-outers, but the "up-and-outers" too. All of us are sinners, in need of redemption, not just the woman-at-the-well types.

The woman at the well. What a great story this is! *It shows us that Jesus loves all kinds of people and wants to offer life to all.* Most people back then would have gone out of their

way to avoid contact with this lady. Not Jesus! He got up close and personal to offer her new life, eternal life.

On one of my trips to Kenya I preached late one afternoon at an open air service, an evangelistic service. I used the Scripture we've looked at today as my text. During the week in the preaching course I taught, 3 or 4 of the students preached. I noticed their messages tended to be negative and judgmental. I tried to remind them that the gospel is "good news" – we are heralds of good news! So, I wanted to emphasize that in my message that afternoon. I talked about how Jesus saw potential in this woman, and how He brought the best out of her. I tried to make my message positive and hopeful. Some of the people listening to that message were men who made their living by transporting people on their bicycles - sort of a "bicycle taxi service." Their "station" was very close to where our service was, and they could easily hear the music and the preaching. Someone told me afterwards that some of these men said that's the first time any preacher had ever spoken and not condemned them because they were on the lower end of the spectrum as far as their occupation, and they didn't make much money. I felt good about that, because Jesus was one who reached out to all kinds of people and offered them life and hope! No matter who you are, what you are, what you've been, Jesus cares and loves you!

Then too, Jesus wants to give us water that will quench our souls for all eternity. Jesus said to the woman, You drink from this well here and you'll be thirsty again. But you drink from the water that I give you, and you'll never be thirsty. The water I give will become in you a spring of water gushing up to eternal life!

There was a newspaper article about a criminal on the run, who gave himself up because he was thirsty! Police had the man surrounded, and he gave up and came out of his hiding place when they offered him a Pepsi! Some of us may be running from God, and we're spiritually thirsty. Jesus has something better than a Pepsi to offer us! The songwriter put it this way:

"Like the woman at the well I was seeking, for things that could not satisfy;
And then I heard my Savior speaking: 'Draw from My well that never shall run dry.'
Fill my cup, Lord, I lift it up, Lord. Come and quench the thirsting of my soul;
Bread of heaven, feed me 'til I want no more – Fill my cup, fill it up, and make me whole."

Also, once an encounter with Jesus changes us, it's something worth sharing. That's what she did! You've heard of Mr. Heinz and his 57 varieties. One day after an evangelistic service the speaker turned to him and said, "You're a believer, but with all your energy why aren't you up and at it for the Lord?" Heinz went home angry. That night he couldn't sleep. At 4 o'clock in the morning he prayed that God would use him to lead others to Christ. A day or so later at a meeting of bank presidents, he turned to the man next to him and told him of his joy in knowing Jesus. His friend looked at him in surprise and said, "I knew you were a Christian. I've wondered many times why you never spoke to me about salvation." That man became the first of 267 converts, people from all walks of life, whom Mr. Heinz won to Christ!

