

JESUS, THE SPRING OF LIVING WATER

John 4:1-30

Key Verse: 4:13,14

“Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’”

Last Sunday we studied John’s account of the transition in God’s history from John the Baptist to Jesus. All the gospels deal with this transition. However, John’s gospel has a unique emphasis. While Luke, for example, teaches us to have a sense of God’s history, John focuses on having a right inner motive. John the Baptist said, “He must become greater; I must become less.” It meant that we must live for the glory of Jesus in doing God’s work. When we serve gospel ministry with a pure desire to glorify Christ, we find meaning and joy in any situation. May God give you a clear life principle that Jesus may be glorified in and through you. This is the secret of true happiness.

In today’s passage Jesus meets a Samaritan woman by a well in Sychar, Samaria. In this timeless story, Jesus, the Son of God, the prince of heaven, meets a lonely and thirsty woman who had had five husbands and at least one boyfriend. Jesus gives her living water welling up to eternal life. Jesus satisfies her thirsty soul completely. Let’s accept Jesus who is like living water in our souls.

First, “Will you give me a drink?” (1-7).

Look at verses 1-3. “The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.” As we studied last time, when Jesus’ ministry grew, John became more and more joyful. On the other hand, the Pharisees became more and more envious and suspicious of Jesus. Jesus was not afraid of them. But his disciples were too young to deal with their poisonous persecution. The disciples were like children who needed protection and nurture to grow strong. So Jesus took them out of harm’s way. He withdrew with them to Galilee.

Look at verse 4. “Now he had to go through Samaria.” The most direct route from Judea to Galilee was through Samaria. Jesus was compelled to take this route. But it was unusual. Many Jews did not venture into Samaria due to their religious prejudice. The people of Judea had kept their national identity as God’s chosen people; they had kept the law of God as their standard of faith and life. On the other hand, the Samaritans had mixed with people of other religions. They had become pluralistic and relativistic toward the law of God. So in order to protect the purity of their faith, the Jews began to practice a policy of segregation. Their initial motivation may have been good. But as time passed, they no longer regarded Samaritans as the same human beings as them. Rather, they despised and disparaged them. They would not even use the same cup that a Samaritan had used. Jesus’ deliberate journey through Samaria was to break down religious prejudice. There is no prejudice in Jesus. We who are Jesus’ people must practice the universal love of God toward all people, including gays and Muslims.

Jesus came to the outskirts of a town called Sychar in Samaria and sat down by a well. It was a place rich in history for the people of Israel. Jacob’s well was there and Mt. Gerizim was nearby. On that mount, six tribes of Israel read blessings from the Law as they entered the promised land. In the time of Ezra, Samaritan people were prohibited from helping rebuild the Jerusalem temple. Then they built their own temple on Mount Gerizim. Thus, it became the national place of worship for Samaritans. Jesus sat alone by the well, tired, hungry and thirsty. It was noon, the sixth hour by Jewish time.

Look at verse 7. “When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’” It was unusual for a woman to come by herself to draw water during the heat of the day. Women usually did this together in the early morning or the cool of the evening, talking and laughing in intimate fellowship. But this woman dared not join them, because she was a social outcast due to her past life. She had had five husbands; she was presently living with someone. It is quite unusual for a woman, even in our time, to have had five husbands. She must have been an attractive and able woman. So, many men were interested in her. But somehow, she could not maintain her marriage relationships. Perhaps she fell into depression frequently and became a burden. Perhaps she had a temper that could erupt at any moment, shaking the world around her. Or perhaps she totally overpowered every man, crushing even the most gentle and kind men unintentionally. Whatever the reason may have been, she

went through five husbands, breaking one relationship after another. Now, for each broken relationship, there was a network of wives, mothers and sisters who blamed her unconditionally. They might have attacked her with harsh words that irritated her wounded soul, like salt in an open sore. She could not bear it. So she came to the well by herself. She was a most despised woman. She was a lonely woman.

When this woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” At first, Jesus’ request may seem ordinary and rather casual. But when we remember who Jesus is, we find profound meaning in his question, “Will you give me a drink?” Jesus is God. John 1:1,2 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.” Though Jesus is the Almighty God, Jesus is humble. Jesus is full of grace. Jesus did not despise this woman. Instead, Jesus spoke to her with gentleness and respect. Jesus spoke first, taking the initiative. Jesus asked a favor of this woman, making himself vulnerable. It was to make a relationship with her. Jesus came down from heaven to meet this woman.

Second, “the water I give will become a spring of water” (8-14).

How did the woman respond to Jesus’ humble and gracious words? Look at verse 9. “The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?’” The Samaritan woman seems to rebuke Jesus for violating social norms. She probably enjoyed the chance to snap at a Jewish rabbi. She was feisty and spoke her mind freely. How did Jesus respond?

Look at verse 10. “Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.’” Jesus spoke indirectly, in the subjunctive mood, to avoid clashing with her. Jesus mentioned a gift, the gift of God. As we know very well, women like to receive gifts. An unexpected gift at the proper time has magic power to open a woman’s heart. Jesus also piqued her curiosity about himself. Jesus alluded that he was someone special and great. Jesus presented himself as a man of mystery, that is, holy mystery. Jesus made it clear that he did not really want a favor from her; Jesus did not need anything from her. But Jesus wanted to give her something great, the gift of God, the living water. Jesus spoke to the need of her soul.

Look at verses 11-12. “‘Sir,’ the woman said, ‘you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our Father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?’” The woman began to address Jesus as “Sir.” She began to respect Jesus. She was also very interested in the living water. But she still felt somewhat superior because she had a water jar and she knew how deep the well was. She was like a modern teenager who knows more about computers than her parents. Still, she began to think about who Jesus was. She felt that Jesus was somebody and wondered if he were greater than Jacob.

Look at verses 13-14. “Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’” Jesus compared the water in Jacob’s well to the living water that he gives. The water in Jacob’s well would quench thirst for a short time, but soon a person would be thirsty again. However, the living water that Jesus gives quenches one’s thirst permanently. Not only so, but it becomes a spring of water, that is, a source of water that bubbles up and overflows to others. The water of Jacob’s well symbolizes the things of the world. These things bring temporary relief, but never lasting satisfaction. This woman was thirsty for human love. She tried to quench her thirst by finding the right man. She had done this again and again. Still she was unsatisfied. The thirst for human love can make a person’s soul like a black hole. No matter how much they are loved, they feel completely empty. They can devour another person’s love to the degree that they nearly suck the life out of him or her. Still, they are thirsty. Some people are thirsty for human honor. But the more praise and honor is poured into a thirsty soul, the drier that person becomes. Some people are thirsty for human freedom. Their one desire is to turn 18 and abandon all human limitations on their conduct. Some people are thirsty for knowledge and information. They surf the internet endlessly but only become more restless. Nothing in the world brings lasting satisfaction to a human soul.

However, Jesus can give living water that wells up to eternal life. Whoever drinks this living water that Jesus gives will be completely satisfied forever and will never be thirsty again. This living water is Jesus himself. Jesus is the gift of God. When Jesus comes into our hearts he satisfies our souls to the very depths. The life that Jesus gives is

refreshing and it is so vibrant and dynamic that it overflows. It makes us a source of blessing to others. Let's see how Jesus helped this thirsty woman to accept the spring of living water in her soul.

Third, "I who speak to you am he" (15-30).

Look at verse 15. "The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.'" The woman admitted to Jesus that she wanted the living water. She asked him for the living water, believing that he could give it to her. Here we can see that she trusted Jesus and took him at his word.

Look at verse 16. "He told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.'" Until now, their conversation was sweet. But suddenly Jesus asked her to call her husband. Jesus touched her sore spot. Jesus did this deliberately. It was not to humiliate her. It was to expose the truth about her. How did she answer? Look at verse 17. She said, "I have no husband." Legally speaking, this might have been true. But she was not telling everything to Jesus. Jesus could have rebuked her for hiding the truth. But he did not. Jesus accepted her answer. He said, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." Jesus revealed to her that he knew everything about her. He knew her wretched past life in detail. But Jesus did not condemn her or despise her. Jesus accepted her. Jesus spoke to her so kindly when she was completely vulnerable. Jesus deeply understood her. She was empty and thirsty. Jesus did not tell her to repent or to write a long confessional testimony. But Jesus did expose the truth as it is. It was to help her realize that even though he knew everything about her, he accepted her just as she was, and wanted to give her the spring of water in her soul.

Then the woman said, "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet." She did not deny that Jesus was telling the truth. She accepted Jesus' words. She also realized that Jesus was not a mere man. He had spiritual insight that could only come from God. Then she said, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." She began to talk about the worship problem. Jesus taught her how to worship God.

Look at verse 21-24. "Jesus declared, 'Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.'" Jesus taught her that the place of worship was not the problem. Rather, the attitude of the worshiper is important. God does not belong to the realm of flesh. God is spirit. God is invisible, infinite, eternal, and spiritual. To worship God we must worship in spirit, that is, from our hearts and in truth, that is, according to the Bible's teaching. In fact, Jesus revealed that the woman had a worship problem. She had been worshiping men by giving herself to them in the hope that they could satisfy her soul. But flesh can never satisfy a person's soul. Only God who is spirit can truly satisfy one's soul. It is amazing to know that God is seeking true worshipers. That is why Jesus was there with the Samaritan woman. That is why Jesus had to go through Samaria.

The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." This woman was actually waiting for the Christ. She knew that the Christ would be able to solve all the difficult spiritual problems and lead people back to God. Look at verse 26. "Then Jesus declared, 'I who speak to you am he.'" It was a confession of his true identity. Jesus entrusted himself to this woman. Jesus did not trust those who came to him seeking miracles. But Jesus entrusted himself to this woman whose heart had been laid bare before him and who really wanted to meet the Messiah. Through one conversation, Jesus became her Messiah, the spring of living water for her soul.

Just then Jesus' disciples returned. They were surprised to find Jesus talking with her. But they did not say a word. They respected Jesus absolutely. They accepted the woman without comment.

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" This woman had changed. She was no longer a woman of broken relationships. She testified boldly to her townspeople, "See a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be

the Christ?" When she met the Messiah personally, she was free indeed. The townspeople were so amazed that they came out of their towns and made their way toward him.

Today we see that human beings are thirsty for something. But we are never satisfied with things of the world. Only Jesus, the eternal God, who is like a spring of living water, can satisfy our souls completely. Let's accept Jesus' word and have a spring of living water in our souls.