

JESUS TALKS WITH A SAMARITAN WOMAN

John 4:1-30

Lesson 9

Key Verse: 4:7,14

"...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' early ministry in Judea was very successful. In fact, he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John--although Jesus himself did not baptize anyone. Jesus did not want to compete with John, nor was it the right time to stir up the Pharisees--so he decided to go back to Galilee. Samaria lay between Judea and Galilee. The Samaritans were a mixed race with a mixed religion since the Assyrian occupation in the 6C B.C. Most Jews, in making this journey to Galilee, crossed the Jordan and made their way north on the east side of the Jordan--in order to avoid Samaria. But John tells us that Jesus had to go through Samaria. He had no reason to avoid Samaria, for the Samaritans were human beings, too.

1. Will you give me a drink? (1-15)

Jesus and his disciples reached to outskirts of the Samaritan city of Sychar about noon. They were hungry, so as distasteful as it must have been for them, the disciples went into the city to buy food. Jesus was tired and thirsty. He sat down by the famous Jacob's well. This was a place rich in the history of God's people. He thought about his ancestor, Jacob, who had given this plot of ground and the well to his favorite son Joseph (Ge 48:22). He looked up at Mount Gerizim, the mount of blessing in the time of Moses and Joshua (Dt 27:12). He may have remembered how this land had been ravaged by the Assyrian army, its people deported and scattered. (2Ki 17:5,24)

Jesus' reverie was interrupted by the approach of a lone woman coming to the well to draw water. Women usually came together to the well, either early in the morning or in the cool of the evening. It was a time for socializing. This woman came alone at mid-day. She was a lonely woman, despised even by her own people. Verses 17 and 18 give us a clue as to why. She was woman of low moral character and reputation. She had had 5 husbands and was now living with a man who was not her husband. It would not be hard for anyone to see what kind of woman she was, and Jesus, the Holy Son of God, who knows all things, knew all about her.

She would have ignored him, but he spoke first. He said, "Will you give me

a drink?" Buddha would have said, "Forget about your troubles." Confucius would have said, "Men and women should not sit in the same room after the age of seven." Socrates would have said, "Know yourself." Jesus said, "Will you give me a drink?" The Prince of Heaven was humbly asking a favor of a worthless and despised woman. She was so surprised that she said what was really in her mind: "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan. How can you ask me for a drink?" She knew that Jews had no dealings with Samaritans--they would not even use dishes the Samaritans had used. But this was her turf. She resented his being there. Her reply was almost a retort.

Jesus had humbled himself to ask her a favor. Now he ignored her retort and offered her a gift. (Everyone and especially women like to receive gifts.) He said, "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 the living water."

This woman was thirsty. She had thought that her thirst could be quenched by love, so she looked for the perfect husband, one who could love her enough to satisfy her. She did not know that human love alone can never satisfy one's soul. So she had moved on from one husband to another. Now, she didn't bother to marry--she just lived with the man. God made man for himself, and until God's love is poured into our hearts, we are never satisfied. Those who deny the spiritual side of life and seek to find satisfaction in the pursuit of material things or physical pleasure cannot but become more and more thirsty. Some people try to quench this thirst with study and knowledge; others with money; others with success and fame. But only God can satisfy the thirsty heart. No human love, however deep and satisfying it may be, can satisfy the thirst of the soul. Jesus was offering this undeserving woman the gift of life that is life indeed. And he, the Christ of God, the Creator to whom life belongs, is the only one who could offer and give this gift. "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 the living water."

The woman's attitude toward Jesus began to change. She addressed him as "Sir." She still knew, however, that this was her turf. She reminded him their common ancestor, Jacob, who had dug this well. And she reminded him that she had the only bucket with which to draw water. He had promised to give her water, if she asked. Was he going to dig another well?

Jesus did not answer her questions. He told her more about the living water. It was not like the water from Jacob's well. It was living water. Furthermore, Jesus promised to put the source of the living water, the well-spring, in her own heart. She would not have to go here and there looking for love. She would not have to depend on someone else for the satisfaction of her deepest needs. The well of eternal water is Jesus himself. He is the one who

made us. He is the one who quenches our thirst. His love saves and satisfies.

The woman did not fully understand, but she knew one thing--she wanted the water Jesus spoke of. She hated coming to that well alone in the heat of the day. It was the time each day when her alienation and thirst, her loneliness confronted her with painful reality. She asked Jesus for the living water. He had stooped to ask her for a drink; now, the role was reversed: She asked him for a drink. Jesus never refuses those who ask.

2. Go, call your husband (16-24)

Jesus response took her off guard. He said, "Go, call your husband and come back." He did not avoid her real problem. He risked the fragile relationship of trust that he had established. She answered, "I have no husband." It was a half truth, and an invitation to a man. Jesus ignored the invitation and cut through the deception to the real truth: "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." He told her the truth about herself. Legally, she had no husband, since she was living with her boy-friend. In a deeper sense, she had never found the one who could be a true husband to her--the one whose love was big enough to really satisfy her heart and soul. So she had no husband.

She did not run or cover up or deny anything. She stood exposed in the light of Jesus' word of truth. She acknowledged everything: "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet." Then she realized that her real problem was not a love problem. It was a worship problem. She did not need more human love; she needed to find the one worthy of her worship. She needed to pour out her heart and soul to one who was worthy of her trust and love and worship. So she asked him, "Where can I go to worship God?" She knew that the temple was in Jerusalem, and that she a Samaritan woman would not be welcome there. Her people worshiped on Mount Gerizim. Jesus then taught her about God and about the kind of worshipers he seeks. God was seeking her. God is a Spirit. The place is not important, but we must worship him in spirit and in truth. Furthermore, we must come to him in the way he has prepared--not in our own ways. Jesus told her clearly, "Salvation is from the Jews." No one can know God if he tries to come to him in any way other than God's way. God had worked through the Jews since the call of Abraham. He gave the world the Bible through them. He sent Jesus through them. This woman didn't like the Jews, but she loved the truth and she confessed that she, too, was waiting for the Messiah. Jesus said, "I who speak to you am he." Jesus revealed himself to her as the Messiah, the Christ, and she could drink deeply of the water of eternal life. She forgot about her water jar and went back to the city to share good news with the people who despised her. She had tasted the love of Jesus who knew all about her, but still welcomed her as a

daughter. Her testimony rang true and the towns people came out to meet Jesus.

One Word: Come all you who are thirsty! Come and drink.