

BUT WHOEVER DRINKS

John 4:11-26

Jesus and His disciples had been ministering in Judea and many of the religious leaders were disturbed about so many people who were turning to Him. Sometimes Jesus and His disciples left an area when there was danger of physical harm. At times the Roman authorities posed a threat and at other times it was the Jewish leaders that Jesus avoided. In an effort to let things cool off somewhat (after John the Baptist was arrested and put into prison), Jesus and His disciples left Judea and went back to Galilee. In going from Judea to Galilee most Jews would have avoided going the direct route since that would have taken them through Samaria. They would have walked many miles and crossed the Jordan River twice because of the prevailing prejudices regarding the Samaritans. This dislike was rooted in the rivalry between the northern and southern tribes of Israel. This rivalry became even worse when the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom. Many of the Israelites were taken into exile (B.C. 721) and non-Israelites were moved into the area in B.C. 677. These “imports” intermarried with the Israelites who were left behind and the result was the Samaritan people.

In earlier comments from John we read that Jesus came to show the glory of God and draw people to God. Because He was always on this mission, Jesus chose to go through Samaria. He chose to wait at Jacob's well. He chose to send the disciples into town to buy food. He did all this because He wanted the person that we know as "the woman at the well" to come to know Him. Even today, Jesus takes the initiative in making Himself known to people.

As Jesus was sitting by the well, a woman walked up with a rope and a bucket, and He asked her for a drink of water. This seems like a perfectly normal thing for a person to do. Wrong! Not in that country and not in that day and time. It was not proper for a man to start a conversation with a woman that he did not know and it was really out of place for a Jew to ask a Samaritan for anything. When a society gets into discrimination of one class of people versus another, then many situations become awkward and for no good reason. That issue was at work in this situation in addition to the man – woman barrier that was there. Jews just did not associate with Samaritans because of something that happened hundreds of years before. Jesus did not let such barriers stand in the way of what He came to accomplish. In fact, one of the things he wanted to accomplish was to knock down such barriers and He began by asking her to do something for Him. It was simply “Help Me get a drink of water.”

Should we see any incongruity in the situation that the Creator of the Universe is thirsty and needs to ask a person such as this Samaritan woman for water to quench His thirst? Does this not show weakness rather than power? Keep in mind that Jesus is the living “Word of God” and that His actions were designed to help us understand more about the character and nature of God. In order to communicate this message it was necessary that He take on physical, human form. Scholars tell us that Jesus was fully God and fully man. His thirst and His request for help in meeting His physical body needs were expressions of His humanity. While such a request did show physical weakness and limitations, it was for a purpose of showing His strength in the spiritual realm. This should remind us of what God revealed to Paul when Paul asked for relief of his “thorn in the flesh” – that message was “My strength is perfected (or manifested) in weakness.”

What Jesus did was also a lesson in dealing with people: If you want someone to have a good sense of their self-worth, then get them do something for you. Every normal person wants to be useful because being useful gives a sense of value to the individual. If you will accept help from me, then that acceptance is interpreted by me as an acceptance of me as well as my worth as a person. There is a corollary to this lesson in dealing with people. If you want a person to have a poor sense of their self-worth, then you do **everything** for them and make them completely **dependent** on others.

Her automatic response (because of past interactions with Jews) was something to the effect of “Why would you ask me to help you? Don’t you hate me?” Jesus’ response was essentially “I’m not like any Jew you have ever met in the past.”

Thirst Quenched – 4:11-15

¹¹ The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” ¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” ¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.” John 4:11–15 (ESV)

Another hindrance to communication is what I would call "being on different wavelengths." In this situation, Jesus was trying to communicate spiritual truth and the woman was operating and thinking in physical terms. Much of the teaching of Jesus was involved in using physical examples to explain spiritual truths. If a person concentrates only on the physical and cannot or will not make the transition to the spiritual, then communication is not possible.

Notice how Jesus used the situation at hand as a means to introduce the principles of the Kingdom of God. While He was undoubtedly thirsty, His real motive was to bring the Good News of salvation to this woman and others. It is interesting that Jesus did not bother to directly answer the question that the woman posed as to “why he asked her for a drink.” Jesus' reply was that He had water that was better than what she could get from Jacob's well – what He called "living water."

Jesus was building a bridge from the known to the unknown which is an excellent teaching method. The woman could understand “physical water” and “physical thirst,” but she had probably not spent much time thinking about spiritual thirst and what it takes to quench it. She had not thought about it directly, but had actually spent most of her adult life in a search for something to satisfy a spiritual longing that she had. This was why she had been married five times and even then she was living with a man who was not her husband. Many people are like this woman – not that they get married five times – but that they have spiritual thirst and do not know what it is and they do not know where (or to whom) to turn to have that thirst satisfied. They realize that something is missing in their lives and they search for something to quench the thirst. When Jesus promised to provide "living water" that would fix a person's thirst so that they would never be thirsty again, He was really referring to Himself. He is the Living Water that comes to us in the Person of the Holy Spirit and dwells in us to produce even more living water to flow out to others.

Knowing to whom we should turn for help in life is the beginning of the process to bring us to where we need to be. This first step is evident in the response of Jesus to the woman when He said (in verse 10) “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.” Knowing Who to ask is critically important and knowing that we need to ask is also essential; however, the next step is absolutely necessary and that is to receive what is provided.

When the Gift (Christ Himself) is received, then (as we read in verse 14) that the supply of the Living Water flows from within us since the Source is dwelling in us and the ultimate benefit is that the uncreated life of God belongs to us and functions through us to impact the world around us. The Samaritan woman was eager to have such a benefit and asked Jesus to give that “water” to her. Unfortunately, she was still thinking in terms of the physical realm and physical benefits and had not made the connection to the spiritual reality of what Jesus meant.

Sin Exposed – 4:16-20

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” ¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you

now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” John 4:16–20 (ESV)

This Samaritan woman had encountered the Source of “living water” and she had been provided information regarding the benefits of this “living water” and concluded that she needed that in her life. She was essentially exposed to a completely new (to her) idea that sounded great but how would it compare to the temporary pleasures and benefits she was experiencing in the relationship she was in with the man with whom she was living. Obviously, she had embraced that situation and it was probably a source of some degree of security and some degree of acceptance that she did not sense in the wider community in which she lived. She was putting her reliance on that relationship for her “happiness.” Another obvious point in the account is she was not totally satisfied with her present situation which was evidenced in the fact that she would go to draw water when no one else in the community was around.

You're familiar with the story how, when the woman asked for some of the "living water" Jesus told her to first go get her husband which was the issue in her life related to her own attempts to find meaning in life. This woman was searching for happiness or satisfaction in relationships and she realized that she needed something else. That “something else” was available to her if she would simply receive it and allow it to become that on which she relied. The idea of receiving something included more than just having access to or just knowing about something. It encompasses the idea of grasping with both hands and using what is offered. If we are holding on to something else for our security in life, then we must first “let go of” the former or old thing and embrace the new thing. Warren Wiersbe wrote

The only way to prepare the soil of the heart for the seed is to plow it up with conviction. That was why Jesus told her to go get her husband: He forced her to admit her sin. There can be no conversion without conviction. There must first be conviction and repentance, and then there can be saving faith. Jesus had aroused her mind and stirred her emotions, but He also had to touch her conscience, and that meant dealing with her sin.

“I have no husband” was the shortest statement she made during the entire conversation! Why? Because now she was under conviction and her “mouth was stopped” (Rom. 3:19). But this was the best thing that could have happened to her!

When Jesus told her things about herself, she was amazed and realized that Jesus was indeed a truly special Person – she thought He was a prophet. However, to avoid facing her own guilt, she tried to steer the conversation to religious controversy. People would rather argue about religion than face the serious questions of God's claims on our lives. That is as true today as it was 2000 years ago. Questions such as where to worship, whether or not to have music, and such things are not the real issues. The real issue for each of us is to make sure that our perceived “wishes” do not get in the way of our actual “needs” when it comes to vital decisions in our lives.

True Worship – 4:21-24

²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:21–24 (ESV)

Jesus did not simply ignore the question that the woman introduced as a diversion but He said enough to set the record straight. The issue is Who is God and what is His nature. Jesus came to reveal God to us as “the Living Word.” True worship of God involves communing with God on a spirit-to-Spirit basis. To do that we must have a “spiritual birth” or be born again of the Spirit. This is the new birth and the new life for which Jesus came to give to us. He has done His part in making the “Life” available to us, but we cannot personally (individually)

benefit from this if we do not receive it, embrace it, and give up whatever it is we are clinging to for our security (salvation).

The explanation that Jesus gave to her was directly related to the previous truths He had related to her regarding “living water” that wells up inside of those who will receive Christ Who is the “Water of Life.”

True Faith – 4:25-26

²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.” John 4:25–26 (ESV)

The woman knew that the Messiah was to come. Her understanding of the evidence of the advent of the Messiah was that He would tell (or explain) all things. Since the Samaritans accepted the first five books of the Bible as their “scriptures,” she was likely thinking about the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15 that predicted that the Lord would raise up a prophet like Moses from among the people of Israel to whom the people must listen. Some commentaries suggest that she said this since she did not agree with Jesus’ assessment of the proper place to worship and she was going to wait until the Messiah came before she would change her opinion about such matters.

What she needed to know was that she was already having an encounter with the Messiah and that He had just told her what she needed to know. We need to be ever alert to the fact that we can encounter God in every situation in life if we are open to Him and He can make it very plain to us when we do have an encounter with God. Apparently, it finally dawned on her that was exactly what she had just experienced because when she returned home she began telling anyone who would listen that she had just met a man who “told me everything I ever did.”