

## **Jesus is the Source of Living Water**

John 4:4-15 and John 7:37-39

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Unfolding Jesus: The Great Self-Revelatory Statements in John.

The little baby in the manger grew up. For the next few weeks we want to take a closer look at what Jesus said about Himself. Today we will consider what He meant when He said that He was the source of living water. We will look at his conversation with the Woman at the Well and His words and actions at the Feast of Tabernacles.

In order to better understand what Jesus meant, we need to climb more fully into His context and the moment of each story. So I invite you to use your imagination as we paint a picture in our minds of what these two interactions were like.

### **Context and Background**

John 2:25. Jesus knows the hearts of all people. He knows what is in a person.

- Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. Was he ashamed to be seen with Jesus?
- Jesus goes to the woman at mid-day. He is not ashamed to be seen with her.
- The contrast between the learned, respected, Jewish male leader Nicodemus and the unschooled, despised, female Samaritan outcast is clear. Both extremes, and everyone in-between, need Jesus.
- Jesus easily broke social and religious barriers to reach them both (and all of us).
  - Jesus ate with sinners and had no formal training so Nicodemus was well-trained in the full Torah and was not supposed to go to Him. Perhaps that's why he came at night?
  - The woman was female and a Samaritan who had made a moral mess of her life. Jesus was not supposed to go to her and was not supposed to talk to her I public.
    - As a Samaritan, her knowledge of scripture was limited to the Pentateuch alone.
- These barriers are all irrelevant to Jesus.
- What matters more is the person.

Notice how Jesus changes the direction

- Far from being defiled by what is unclean, Jesus sanctifies whatever He touches.
- While others touch a leper and are made unclean, Jesus touches a leper and makes the leper clean.
- Since Jesus lives in us, what impact does this have on the places we can go and the people we can connect with?

John lets us know that pressure against Him in Judea was mounting so Jesus leaves Judea for the more welcoming Galilee. Going through Samaria was the shortest route. The text says that He had to go through Samaria. There was another, albeit longer route. But I wonder how much of His need to go through Samaria was because of an appointment He had to keep?

It was now noon. The sun is high; the day is hot. Jesus and His disciples had been walking for about six hours when they came to Jacob's well.

## **Jacob's Well**

### Location

- Scholars and archaeologists are confident that we know exactly where this is as there is only one 4,000 year old well in Samaria and this one is right where the Bible says it should be.
- Located at a fork in the road. One way led to western Galilee and the other went northeast to Beth Shan and the Lake of Galilee
- It was, and it is, a deep well, currently measured at more than 100 feet deep.
- It is a dug out well that is fed by an underground spring.
- We don't know the location of Sychar but can be sure it was one of two places, either close to one mile away, or 250 feet away.<sup>i</sup>

Jesus sent all of His disciples in to get some food while He rested by the well.<sup>ii</sup>

It is noon in the heat of the day. Jesus is alone at the well. Let's go to the text and I'll amplify as we move through this familiar story.

### **TEXT**

<sup>7</sup> When a Samaritan woman came to draw water,

[Women usually arrived in groups at morning or evening. She came alone in the heat of the day.]

Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"<sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

<sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

- FOOTNOTE: "Jews do not use dishes Samaritans have used." This is more likely. The woman saw that Jesus did not have his own vessel and knows He is not allowed to use hers. How could He even ask? Is He *that* desperate?
- The woman speaks boldly and forthrightly with Jesus, her lack of deference would have been seen by some to be rude. But the point is she does respond. She does not ignore Him.

<sup>10</sup> 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 has her in a conversation now and He begins by building a bridge that will take her from where she is to the place she needs to be.

Living and running water is something that is good and to be desired.

- Jesus is offering an asset here, something worth having
- Physical—moving water as opposed to still, stagnant. Resource of help, refreshment and strength.
- Spiritual—resource of help, refreshment and strength.

The Old Testament prophets spoke about living water many times.

- Jeremiah 2:13. The people preferred their own cracked and empty cisterns to the living water that God provides.
- Zechariah and Ezekiel spoke of a time when living water would flow from Jerusalem (Zc 14:8; Ezk 47:9)
- The living water of God in the OT promises cleansing, life and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.
- The gift of God was the Torah. Being limited only to the Pentateuch, these descriptions of living water are all things the woman would not have known.

"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you'd be asking me for something."

- Compare the rebuke He gave to Nicodemus who was trained in the Torah to know better (3:10, are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not know these things?)
- Jesus is very gentle with her. He knows she does not know.
  - He is gentle with us, too.
- While this is still about water that the woman wants, Jesus adds a new element to the conversation—the person she is speaking with.
- I think it significant that she becomes polite at this point, calling him sir.

<sup>11</sup> "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? [She knows there is no river or spring nearby and that this well is the only source of water] <sup>12</sup> 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?" [He gave us this water and you have no way to give us a river or spring!]

- Her question is like Nicodemus who asked how a person could enter into his mother's womb to be born again. How can you get this water?
- The questions are important! When the Lord engages you, keep asking your questions. He will lead you along the way. Don't go silent on Him. When He responds in a way that may not initially make sense, keep engaged!

<sup>13</sup> Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

- Jesus clarifies for her. It is water from an inner spring that keeps filling the well until the water comes to the surface and flows out of the top so it is easily accessible, wells up to eternal life.
- Jesus is saying to her that God's gift of living water is greater than Jacob's gift of this water.
- In John 7 Jesus speaks of this water again and it is very clearly a reference to the Holy Spirit (7:39).
- Through His Holy Spirit, Jesus comes to live inside of us and becomes for us a spring of water that we may thirst no more.
- Pascal said there is a God-shaped vacuum in every human being that can only be filled by God. This vacuum is the thirst that the Holy Spirit quenches and satisfies.

- “When one receives Jesus, one receives the sum total of all that one needs spiritually.” (Craig Keener, Commentary on John)

Jesus meant spiritual. She heard physical (because that was her focus at the time.)

Jesus has piqued her curiosity. She sees him as a weary Jewish traveler and not yet as the Messiah. This guy is not great than Jacob, is He? But he is offering something that she knows she needs and so we read,

<sup>15</sup> 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.”

Even though she does not yet understand what Jesus is offering, she asks for His help to receive it. And so Jesus approaches it from a different angle, asking her about her life at home and revealing that He already knows her heart and need.

This was a private conversation with one person at a well. The next time Jesus spoke about living water was in front of thousands at the temple on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. John 7:37-39.

<sup>37</sup> On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”  
<sup>39</sup> By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

When you are reading narrative portions of scripture always note the details. Jesus chose this moment on purpose. John tells us that “on the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and proclaimed in a loud voice....:” Let’s try to imagine this moment and to enter into it, we first have to understand a little about the Pool of Siloam.

In Hebrew, the pool’s name means, “The Pool of the One Who Will Be Sent.” In other words, it is the pool of the Messiah. It was located about two-thousand feet south of the Temple Courts and dropped in elevation some 380 feet. A broad boulevard connected the Pool of Siloam to the Temple Mount. The people regarded this pool as a prophetic symbol of how the Messiah will pour water upon the desert and the Holy Spirit upon His people.

With this in mind, let me read from a summary that aligns with other details I have found.

“Each fall the Jews celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. [This is the last of the feasts given to Moses, so it was a big deal.] The last day of this feast is called “The Great Day of the Feast.” On this day, the priests would perform a special ritual in which the nation would cry out for their Messiah to come.

Beginning at the Temple located at the top of Mt. Moriah, the High Priest would lead a long line of priests [and many others too] as they sang their way [Psalms 113-118] down a wide descending boulevard to the Pool of Siloam, located at the bottom of Mt. Moriah.

At the pool the High Priest would fill a special [golden] pitcher with water. With great pomp and ceremony, the High Priest would then take the long climb back up the boulevard to the Temple at the top of Mount Moriah.

He then would take the pitcher of water to the Brazen Altar of Sacrifice and pour the water on it while reading Isaiah 44:3 about the future Messiah coming to Israel:

*"For I will pour out water on the thirsty land  
And streams on the dry ground;  
I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring  
And My blessing on your descendants;" Is. 44:3*

The crowd would fall silent as they prayed for the Messiah to come and pour His Spirit on them."

And I wonder, after all the pomp and singing and walking, as the echoes of their petitions faded into silence, I wonder if it was at the moment that the high priest was pouring the water into the alter and the last drops of water could be heard splashing on the alter, was it at this moment that Jesus stood and broke the silence in a loud voice,

"If you are thirsty, come to me and drink. If you do, you will be filled with streams of living water and you will experience the fulfillment of the very Scripture you have just been singing and reading!"

Yes! Jesus did this! Can you imagine the shock on everyone's face? He used this moment and these words to make a clear point. The One Who Will Be Sent had arrived. You no longer need to go to His pool. Jesus' meaning could not be missed.

Some have said that Jesus never said He was the Messiah or God. Well, with all due respect, I have to wonder if those who make that claim have ever carefully read the gospels. It seems pretty clear to me. But it doesn't end here.

In Exodus 17 and Numbers 20 we read how God gave His people water from a rock and invited them to come to the rock to drink. In John 7, as the people recalled these very events, we read how Jesus invited the people to come to Him and drink. Paul understood what Jesus meant.

In I Corinthians 10:3,4 Paul described the events of the Israelites in the wilderness and said, "They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ."

By saying what he did, Jesus proclaimed that their prayers for God's Holy Spirit to pour out His life-giving water had been answered in unbelievable abundance...in Him.

To the woman at the well Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks [the water from Jacob's well] will be thirsty again, but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The interesting thing about this water is that, when you drink it, you become a source for the water! Unlike the Israelites in the wilderness or the Samaritan woman at the well, you don't have to go someplace to get the water because the Rock, the Spring, is inside of you! When you come to the Source to drink, the Source then comes with you.

This is a physical symbol that points to a spiritual truth so John helps us understand by adding his note in verse 39. "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified."

Just like the woman at the well, the people were a little confused. Who is this guy? Is He greater than Jacob? Is He the Prophet like Moses? Is He really the Christ?

Out of fear of punishment from religious leaders, the entire city whispered the question, "who is he?" In confidence Jesus cried out openly, publicly, without fear, "I am the True Rock. Come to me and drink living water."

The invitation Jesus gave to the woman and to the crowds is the same one He gives to us. Come to me and drink. Those who put their trust in Him, who believe that He is who he says He is, they too will become a source of living water. A source which refreshes others, even as they themselves are refreshed.

When the woman's eyes were opened and she began to hope that Jesus was the promised Messiah, her spiritual thirst overwhelmed her earthly thirst, she left her empty water pots at the well to go tell others about what she had found.

When we drink deeply, we cannot help but share the water we receive with others.

Nicodemus, the woman and the crowd were all just going about their daily tasks. They thought they knew what to expect when suddenly Jesus appeared to say or do something that drew them up short and caused them to stop and to ponder a moment. And when He did, each person faced a choice. What would they do? How would they respond?

I wonder how many times I get so caught up in the daily grind and struggle that I miss what Jesus is saying to me? I wonder how many times He seeks to engage me in conversation, and I allow the concern of the moment to silence my reply.

I wonder if the same thing happens to you? COVID, inflation, stock market, politics, and international concerns flood our news feeds. On a personal level, it is another diaper, another bill, another meeting, another Zoom call...just another daily trip in the heat of the day out to that lonely well to do what you gotta do.

Jesus overcomes any barrier to come to you. He will meet you wherever you are so always be open to engage Him in conversation. And as you travel, be aware that, through your faith in Christ, the water you may be seeking is something you already possess.

The Holy Spirit is the source of living water and scripture says it is possible for us to grieve or quench the Spirit. Adapting these analogies to the current example, it is possible for us to slow those living waters in us by erecting barriers and dams.

No matter where you are, ask Jesus to help you to more fully access the Water He gives and show you who He really is. And then be ready because when He does, you may need to leave your own water pots behind in order to share what you suddenly realize you have with others.

### **Closing Prayer**

Just like Nicodemus and the dear woman, please tear down any barrier to engage us and show us who you are. Even through the din of busyness or the monotony of the day or the worry of the moment, help us hear your words and engage you with our questions and confusion and fear and worry. Help us enter this new year with expectant and yielded hearts, expecting you to be actively present and yielding to your love.

Jesus, you have been glorified and the Spirit has been given so we know that, even if it is with just a mustard seed of faith, the water is flowing in all who profess you as Lord.

Unfold for us and let us see who you are...and change us. Let your glory be known to us and through us. Let your peace be felt in us so that we may share the gift of your living water with others.

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<sup>i</sup> Sychar has been identified with modern Askar, just under one mile from Jacob's well (0.93 miles or 1.5 Km). Some think Sychar was more likely what we call Shechem today, about 250 feet from the well.

<sup>ii</sup> Jesus was tired and thirsty, both indicators of His humanness. Jesus is the incarnate Word of God. (1:14). He knows the hearts of all people and yet gets weary, worn out and thirsty. And by the way, The word "tired" is labor, (kekopiakos, lemma kopiao)) is only used one other time in this gospel and it has to do with labor for the harvest (4:38). Also interesting: At midday people took breaks from most agricultural work, from hearing legal cases, from hunting, from allowing animals to graze and sometimes from battles. One exception to the mid-day break was the urgency of the harvest.