



FOCUS VERSE

John 4:14

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

LESSON TEXT

John 4:6–14, 21–30

6 Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.

7 There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.

8 (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)

9 Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

11 The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?

12 Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?

13 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:

14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

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21 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.

22 Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.

23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

25 The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.

26 Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.

27 And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?

28 The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men,

29 Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?

30 Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.



FOCUS THOUGHT

Jesus is the source
of living water—
eternal life.



CULTURE CONNECTION

How's Your Family?

Recently I've heard the phrase "family is everything" repeated in several contexts. Usually it is given as the reason for sacrifices to help or defend relatives. We will often make allowances for family members that would seem unthinkable for others. Family helps shape much of our self-identity. Perhaps both the greatest strengths and deepest hurts we carry with us are those we sustained at the hands of family.

We also have the capacity to form family-like groups outside of our immediate relatives. These can be close, caring groups that provide sustenance and acceptance or demanding and abusive groups such as urban gangs. In the church we find a welcoming family of spiritual brothers and sisters. As a

biological family is united by shared blood, so our church family is united by the blood of Jesus.

But actually, the entire human race is a single family, descended from our first parents, Adam and Eve. Humans—in all of our variety of shapes, sizes, skin tones, and languages—are all blood cousins. That is the reason I usually hesitate when an application or information form requests my race. I look for the box to check that says "human." I don't really expect it to be there, but I'm hoping one day we will realize there is but one race, one kind, one family. There is much more that unites us than divides us. We are the human family. And family is everything.

OUTLINE

I. WOMAN AT THE WELL

- A. Jesus Chose to Go through Samaria
- B. Jesus Initiated a Conversation with the Samaritan Woman

II. THE LIVING WATER

- A. Jesus Revealed the Woman to Herself
- B. Jesus Revealed Himself to the Woman
- C. Jesus Promised Living Water

III. WOMAN'S TESTIMONY

- A. Testified of Jesus
- B. Brought Others to Jesus

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Samaria was a Roman province of Palestine located between Judea to the south and Galilee to the north. It contained most of the territory of the old kingdom of Israel and was named for that kingdom's capital city. As a result of the defeat of Samaria in 722 BC, most of the inhabitants of Israel were taken into captivity by the Assyrians. After this

deportation the Assyrians settled Gentiles in Samaria (II Kings 17:24-28). When the Lord sent lions among them, the Assyrian emperor sent a Jewish priest to teach these new residents "the manner of the God of the land" (II Kings 17:27).

The new settlers intermarried with the remnant of Jews left in the land and eventually considered themselves to be true Israelites, descendants of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (II Chronicles 34:9). However, like the kingdom of Israel before them, their worship of Jehovah was mixed with idolatry. "They feared the LORD," II Kings 17:33 tells us, "and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence."

Over the next century, the kingdom of Judah attempted to bring Samaria and Judah into unity, culminating in the great religious reform under Josiah (II Kings 23:15-20). Following this reform, the people of Samaria and Judah joined together in Jerusalem to hold a great Passover celebration (II Chronicles 35:18-19). But this accord was cut short by the fall of Jerusalem in 621 BC.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

During the Babylonian captivity, most of the territory of the kingdom of Judah was added to the province of Samaria. The Samaritans developed their own truncated version of the Hebrew Bible, the Samaritan Pentateuch, which is very similar to the first five books of the more widely accepted Hebrew Bible, but makes Mount Gerizim the location chosen by God for the Temple. The Samaritans claimed that their version of the Pentateuch was the original. They believed the Jews had corrupted true Judaism while under Babylonian captivity, adding the other books of the Old Testament and the rabbinic traditions. To them, the Jerusalem Temple was a cultic center for false worship (Luke 9:51–53).

Inevitably, when the Babylonian captivity ended in 538 BC, the Samaritans came into political and religious conflict with the returning Jews (Ezra 4:11–16; Nehemiah 4:1–6). To call someone a Samaritan was a great insult to the Jews (John 8:48). Regarding laws of separation and Temple worship, Samaritans were treated as Gentiles. Intermarriage was forbidden and socializing was greatly restricted. The animosity continued to escalate when, in c. 400 BC the Samaritans built a temple to Jehovah on Mt. Gerizim (John 4:20) and helped the Jewish exiles in Egypt rebuild another temple at Elephantine.

During the intertestamental period, the Jewish ruler John Hyrcanus invaded Samaria and destroyed the Gerizim temple. After that, Jews traveling between Galilee and Judea frequently were attacked by Samaritan mobs. A few years before the boyhood visit of Jesus to the Jerusalem Temple, Samaritan patriots desecrated it by spreading human bones on the porches and in the sanctuary. Throughout the New Testament period, violence continued to escalate until the massacre of a group of Jewish pilgrims in AD 52 resulted in Jewish zealots invading and systematically wiping out Samaritan villages. Although the Romans put down the violence and executed the leaders on both sides, guerilla warfare persisted.

It is against this backdrop of centuries of prejudice, hatred, and violence that the encounter between Jesus and an unnamed Samaritan woman took place at Jacob's well.

I. WOMAN AT THE WELL

A. Jesus Chose to Go through Samaria

When the Pharisees became alarmed about Jesus' popularity, He decided to move His base of operations temporarily from Judea to Galilee. The Scriptures tell us, "And he must needs go through Samaria" (John 4:4). The specific word used in this verse indicates that this was a matter of obligation or coercion rather than a simple choice. Although the direct route from Judea to Galilee was about a three-day journey through Samaria, Jews often took a route around Samaria, even though it took twice as long. Given the level of animosity and threat of violence, the longer route was frequently the more prudent. The "must needs" does not indicate there was no other way to get to Galilee, but that Jesus was acting on a spiritual compulsion. Unknown to anyone but Himself, He had a divine appointment to keep.

B. Jesus Initiated a Conversation with the Samaritan Woman

When Jesus reached Jacob's well on the outskirts of Sychar, He sent His disciples into the village to purchase food while He sat down to rest. It is noteworthy that being with Jesus had influenced the disciples to the point that they apparently had no objection to eating food purchased from Samaritans. According to rabbinic law, any Jew who ate or drank from a Samaritan's dishes would be made ceremonially unclean (Bible Knowledge Commentary). Obviously, it did not take all of His disciples to buy and carry back their food. Jesus was setting the stage for His encounter with the person He knew would soon be arriving.

When a Samaritan woman came to the well to fill her water jug, Jesus asked her to give Him some water to drink. Thus He began His interaction with the woman by placing Himself in an inferior position. He admitted to a need only she could meet. This was not an artificial device intended to open the conversation. He was truly thirsty and had no means to draw water from the well on which He sat.

Jesus' simple request startled the woman. Social convention forbade a man to speak

to a woman in public. This taboo was compounded by the fact they were alone at the well. From His accent and clothing, she could tell He was a Jew, and she knew the Jews “have no dealings with the Samaritans” (John 4:9). She knew that a typical Jew would rather go thirsty than drink from a Samaritan’s water jug. However, Jesus was not a typical Jew.

It is possible to remain thirsty while sitting atop a well because one lacks the ability to draw the water. So it is also possible to remain spiritually unsatisfied while sitting on a church pew for fear of drinking from a heretical jug. Fear of heresy may also keep some individuals from offering spiritual water to others. Social convention may teach us to be self-sufficient and never humble ourselves to our “inferiors.” Religious pride may teach us there is nothing good to be gained from association with those who err in their doctrines.

However, God challenges us not to be typical in our responses to others. Accepting and admitting our need for those who differ from us is an excellent way to open a dialogue that may result in bringing them to greater truth.

II. THE LIVING WATER

A. Jesus Revealed the Woman to Herself

The Samaritan woman came alone to the well about noon, which was unusual on several points. Women of a village would usually go as a group to provide each other company and protection. They had to transport enough water for their family needs in large clay jugs they balanced on the shoulders or head. At about eight pounds per gallon, that was a back-breaking task. Fetching water was not something one would ordinarily do in the heat of the midday sun.

Moreover, according to the Madeba Map (discovered in 1884), Sychar was a small village on the slope of Mount Ebal about three thousand feet north of the well (Howard Voss, Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Manners and Customs). Sychar had its own source of water, yet the Samaritan woman walked more than a mile round trip to fetch water at Jacob’s well. All of these facts are clear evidence that this woman was a social outcast. Likely, the other women of her village would have nothing to do with her.

Jesus did not confront the woman with this evidence. Instead, He treated her as if her gender, ancestry, social status, questionable past, and heretical beliefs made no difference to Him. He promised her that if she had known who He was, she would have asked of Him, and He would have given her living water. His promise did not come with any conditions except to know Him and ask Him. But not only did she not know who He was, she did not know what He was offering to her, and at most had only a vague idea of her need for it. How often have we heard the voice of the One who could quench our thirsty souls, but we went away unsatisfied because we did not ask?

B. Jesus Revealed Himself to the Woman

The meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well was far from accidental. Each step was intended to reveal Himself to her that He might meet her need for salvation. In spite of this, He did not reveal Himself to her until she was ready to receive the revelation. His revelation of Himself came by incremental steps rather than sudden enlightenment. At most of these steps He was met by resistance coming from her expectation of what kind of man He might be.

His request for a drink of water was met with “thou, being a Jew.” His offer of living water elicited, “Art thou greater than our father Jacob?” But when He used more precise symbolism for His offer, she experienced her first breakthrough. While the Samaritan woman’s response, “Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw” could be understood to mean that she still did not understand His offer, it is probable that she was merely using the symbolism Jesus introduced to express the longing of her soul to have a permanent change of life. The symbolism Jesus used was common even among pagans. Her longing not to “come hither to draw” expressed her daily humiliation and constant reminder of how far she had fallen.

At her request, Jesus pushed the limits further by demonstrating supernatural knowledge of her life, causing her to see He was a prophet. However, this put her on guard once again, and she tried to divert attention from herself to a theological debate: “Our

fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship” (John 4:20). The word “ye” is plural, indicating that she was once again lumping Jesus in with all the other Jews. In essence she was saying, “I’ve heard all your old arguments before. You have nothing new for me.”

Putting aside symbolism, Jesus directly responded to her challenge telling her that the Samaritan beliefs were wrong. “Ye worship ye know not what,” He replied. “We know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). However, He surrounded this statement with a powerful message concerning true worship, assuring her that the longstanding argument was inconsequential in the long term. He was ushering in a coming hour when both Jews and Samaritans would worship in spirit and truth.

Finally, the woman tentatively ventured a theory concerning who Jesus might be. “I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things” (John 4:25). Upon hearing her hesitant statement of faith, Jesus was ready to reveal Himself. “Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he” (John 4:26).

The Samaritan woman was privileged beyond most people who came into contact with Jesus during His ministry before the Cross. Although others testified of Him, He seldom revealed to anyone His identity as the long-awaited Messiah. In fact, the very theological differences that caused the Jews to hate the Samaritans made them uniquely suited to be among the first to believe Him. Because they knew only the first five books as their Bible, they did not have the fullness of the rich prophetic vision concerning the coming Messiah. They knew only that the promised Messiah who would crush the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15) would be a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15, 19).

The Jews, on the other hand, because of the prophecies concerning the second coming of Jesus, were expecting the Messiah to be a political and military figure who would restore the throne of David. They were not ready to receive a Messiah who proclaimed a revolution of the soul which included loving their enemies.

Often a revelation of the identity of Jesus comes in small steps over a period of time. Because of this, we may go our way after an encounter with a thirsty soul thinking we have failed to make a difference. However, we may never know if a seed lovingly planted in a life will spring forth in full bloom when the time is right. We need simply to do our part to plant or water and then depend on God to give the increase (I Corinthians 3:7).



One young man had a “green thumb.” It seemed he could make anything grow. But such had not always been the case. As a child he failed miserably with his first attempt to grow a vegetable garden because every day after school, he would rush home and pull up his plants to see if they had taken root.

We are called to be planters and reapers, not to be root inspectors.

C. Jesus Promised Living Water

At first the woman was confused by the offer of living water. Unlike other wells in the area, which got their water from cisterns or rain-filled caverns, Jacob’s well was a shaft more than one hundred feet deep to an underground stream. Because of this constantly refreshed water, the well was a source of “living” or flowing water. But reasoning aloud, she pointed out that Jesus had nothing with which to draw from the well. Where would He get the living water He offered to her?

Probably suspecting Jewish sophistry, she intentionally challenged Jesus with a claim most Jews would not have allowed to pass. “Art thou greater than our father Jacob?” (John 4:12). It was central to the religious claims of the Samaritans that they were the true descendants of Jacob through the sons of Joseph, and they carried on the pure religion of Jehovah while the Jewish religion had been adulterated by their adoption of Mesopotamian culture during the Babylonian captivity. To the Samaritans, the Jews had no claim on Jacob’s well and no claim on Jehovah. However, Jesus did not take the bait. Until she understood who Jesus was, she was not ready to hear the truth concerning

her heretical beliefs. So it is that our responsibility is not to argue doctrine but to bring the erring one to a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ.

There are certain truths that cannot be taught; they must be caught. They are of a depth that cannot be merely accepted; they must be discovered. Jesus used the same technique with the Samaritan woman as He used with Nicodemus in the previous chapter of John. Jesus began with a spiritual statement couched in allegorical terms. Like Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman mistakenly took His statement as literal. He then expanded the allegory, expressing it in more direct terms while maintaining the symbolism. He was not deliberately obscuring the meaning. Rather He was using language to paint a picture far too sophisticated for plain speech.

Words cannot express the power of the Spirit to meet an individual's needs. Neither can words adequately communicate the depth of need we have for Him. We may get bogged down in theological disputes and questions of doctrine, but Christ cuts through all of those things that create segregation and rancor to get to the fundamental need of the soul. True beliefs, the pure Word of God, and right worship are all vitally important, but they are not intended to keep us from sharing and receiving the simple promise of the living water.

III. WOMAN'S TESTIMONY

A. Testified of Jesus

Upon receiving the joyous revelation of the identity of Jesus, the woman's first thought was to share this joy with others. She forgot about her daily chores. She forgot the racial and doctrinal differences that separated her from the man at the well. She forgot her lowly social standing and sinful lifestyle that separated her from the other villagers. She only knew that she had found the Messiah. Leaving her water pot at the well, she carried the news of the "well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14) into her village.

Her testimony was a simple one based on her direct experience and the shared Samaritan understanding of the marks of the Messiah. In her excitement, she even exaggerated her claims, saying that Jesus told her

"all things ever I did" (John 4:29). God does not need a theological scholar, recognized celebrity, pillar of the community, or spiritual giant to testify of Him. In our witness, we may stumble about and get details wrong, but our witness is more than the words we say. The passion and excitement of a changed life must have shown through the woman. Otherwise it is doubtful that the men of her village would have listened to her at all and ventured out of the village to Jacob's well.

B. Brought Others to Jesus

The Bible clearly states that many of the Samaritans of the village believed on Jesus because of the testimony of the woman. The men of the village not only went to the well to meet Jesus, but they also asked that He stay with them for a time. Jesus accepted their invitation and remained in the village two days, during which many more believed that He was "indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). Thus one apparently random meeting with a stranger became the catalyst for the salvation of an entire village.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Jesus demonstrated by His words and deeds that He recognized the falsehood of the Samaritan system of belief. In His instructions to the twelve before He sent them out (Matthew 10:5-6), He specifically excluded the Samaritans from the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." In contrast, He also went out of His way to show the value of Samaritan lives and the evil of the social and religious hatred engendered by their ethnic and religious differences. He would not allow such prejudices to dictate the limits of His ministry. He felt compelled to go through Samaria so He could meet a Samaritan woman who was excluded even by her own society.

Jesus still offers the living water to anyone who knows Him and asks of Him. "And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely" (Revelation 21:6). We do not need to clean ourselves up, improve our social standing, or even correct our false beliefs as a prerequisite for coming to Him;

we need only to be thirsty. He has promised that the changes we need will come as we encounter Him in our daily lives. Often these changes will come in unexpected ways, but they will come as a result of the “well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

The Samaritan woman forgot her natural need for water when she found Jesus to be her well of spiritual water. So too, Jesus forgot His natural thirst and hunger at the excitement of fulfilling His mission. When His disciples urged Him to eat, He responded, “I

have meat to eat that ye know not of” (John 4:32). He went on to explain that His sustenance was to “do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:34). Just as our thirst can be quenched by the living water of His Spirit, so our hunger is satisfied by working in His field of harvest. At the well, Jesus told His disciples, “And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together” (John 4:36). ■

REFLECTIONS

- Jesus did not refrain from using symbolism and allegory even though He knew it would confuse many of His hearers. Discuss some reasons for this and its implications for witnessing.
- Speculate on what might have transpired during the encounter at the well if Jesus had begun His witness with John 4:22, “Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.”
- Throughout most of the encounter at Jacob’s well, the Samaritan woman assumed Jesus was just like the other Jews: condemning, self-righteous, and intolerant. Today, Christians often face the same accusations. Discuss some specific ways we can improve our witness by demonstrating that these stereotypes do not apply to us.
- Discuss some specific ways in which a local church can stand for truth and righteousness without standing against those who have not yet come to a fuller understanding of these vital concepts.
- Ask a few members of the class to share what was the most influential witness in bringing them to Christ. In what ways was it similar to or different from the encounter at Jacob’s well?