

Lessons from the
Woman

at the
Well



I can still recall the images of people walking aimlessly through the great fog of soot, mingled with papers and glass and dead bodies. I remember the weeks that followed as people held up pictures of faces as they sought desperately for their missing loved ones. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, everything that we once thought was important was buried under the rubble, and Americans realized that there was more to life than the meaningless pleasures we had been aimlessly pursuing. At ground zero, we were able to take inventory and find out what was really important in life, just like the woman at the well. Her life had crashed, and she was just going through the motions, wandering about through the rubble of the wreck she had made of her life when Jesus appeared on the scene.

Jesus and His disciples were traveling abroad, teaching and preaching, when they “came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave his son Joseph” (John 4:5). This was the well that the ancient patriarch Jacob had dug, and there was much national pride associated with it. As the little group stopped to camp, the disciples went off to buy some food in town while Jesus, “being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well” for a rest (John 4:6). This is where the story gets interesting. This is where “she” enters the

picture. We are told that as Jesus rested, “a woman of Samaria came to draw water” (John 4:7). This woman had regularly come to the well for water, but the water only quenched her thirst temporarily, as water does, and she had to continually come back to the well every day. Jesus chose to use this scenario to illustrate a deep spiritual lesson still relevant to us today. It is a lesson so profound that it begs us to evaluate everything our lives stand for. Check it out.

As the woman approached the well, Jesus turned to her and said, “Give me a drink” (John 4:7). In asking for a drink, Jesus was not simply seeking to get water, but more than that, he was trying to break through the prejudice that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. The woman was startled by the request, and inquired, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman” (John 4:9)? Hoping to draw her into a deeper conversation and point her attention to more eternal things, Jesus replied, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” (John 4:10). Upon hearing these words, the curiosity of the woman was stirred. While the woman did not fully understand what Jesus referred to, she sensed somehow that His words were of great importance and inquired, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and

the well is deep. Where then do you get that living water” (John 4:11)?

Jesus used the water that the woman collected daily to illustrate the pleasures of life and how they merely satisfy for a little while, leaving the soul longing and thirsting for more. He was simply saying what all of us already know; that true happiness does not come from the wells of drugs, alcohol, sex, food, money, relationships, material pleasures, and other things. These things will never fulfill the deeper longings of the soul, yet many continue to go down the same road to ruin while Christ is right here offering us true peace. Like the woman at the well, we continue to chase after the passing pleasures of sin, hoping it will bring happiness, peace, and fulfillment, but these things only satisfy for a little while, then leave the soul thirsty and searching for more.

Recognizing a spiritual element in the words of Christ, she decides, ‘This is getting too preachy,’ and attempts to change the topic asking, “Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well” (John 4:12)? Referencing Jacob, she looks back in her history to her nation’s past glory as so many of us do. Often missing true fulfillment in the present, we linger in our past glories and relish in “the good old days.” We often live in the past and remember our youth as being better than it actually was.

In spite of her effort, Jesus ignores her attempt to divert the conversation and says, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). The Savior read the very longing of her soul. Her life was dried up. The wells of the world, which brought short seasons of pleasure, didn't really satisfy the longings of her soul. Her past was a history full of unfulfilled hopes and shattered dreams. True and lasting happiness was lost somewhere in the distance and peace alluded her, but the words of Jesus now sprung up within her as a well of hope, and she appealed, "Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw" (John 4:15). She had tried the wells of this world, which always left her empty, and she was ready to draw from a different source.

As Jesus continued to talk to the woman, her mind was drawn to the prophecies of a coming Messiah. The common belief that a Messiah was to come was adopted even among the Samaritans, and the woman said, "I know that the Messiah is coming," adding, "When He comes, He will tell us all things" (John 4:25). Now the woman points forward to the glorious future hope as we so often do. While things

may not be great now, in the future, everything will be good. When I graduate. When I get the new job. When I buy that new thing. When I get married or have a baby. When I buy that house. Somehow things always look better in the distant future, but when we get to the future, it's still not enough. The lesson from the well is that all the things we are striving for are not enough. When we reach our goals, they may satisfy for a little while, but they will end up dry like all the other wells, and we will keep striving for something more because the things in this life don't really satisfy the true longing of the soul. God has been trying to tell us that the things of this life do not really satisfy, but we keep closing our ears, hoping that somehow our temporary pleasures will bring us peace in the end. So we keep striving, but these passing pleasures continue to leave us empty and dry.

The woman at the well was looking for happiness, peace, and fulfillment in life in all the wrong places. She lingered and lived in the past "good old days," while she looked forward to the "future glory" when the Messiah would come and make everything better, while she continued to drink from the wells of sin, hoping to find some kind of fulfillment but always turning up dry and empty, longing for something more out of life. Don't you want something better? The good news is, a better life is

waiting. There really is more to life than this. As this woman sought her past glories, present sinful pleasures, and future hopes that somehow things would get better, Jesus was sitting right in front of her, and she almost missed it. So many of us keep looking to the wells of this world, while true fulfillment, the Living Water, is right in front of us.

In sympathy and pity, Jesus looked at this woman, wearied by life, and said, "I who you speak to am He" (John 4:26). Nothing in this world satisfies like a relationship with Christ. While we try so hard to avoid turning to Christ, chasing after the many wells that the devil has placed throughout the world, in hopes of finding happiness and fulfillment, Jesus waits patiently on us, asking, "Aren't you tired yet? Aren't you ready to try something new?" God is promising us a better life. He longs "to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). So many, like the woman at the well, chase after the same old things which satisfy for a little while and then leave us longing for more, while God is offering us living water. Aren't you tired of drinking from the same old wells that leave you empty? Why don't you pick up a Bible and try drinking from a new well?

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