

The Gospel of John

Lesson 6: The Woman at the Well -- John 4:1-42

It is noon, the hottest part of the day, and a woman comes alone to the well. That detail matters. Women drew water in the cool of the morning or evening, and they came together, talking and laughing as they worked. This woman comes at noon, by herself, and you do not have to read far to understand why. She has had five husbands and is now living with a man who is not her husband. She is the woman the town talks about, the one the other women avoid, and she has arranged her whole life around not being seen. And there, at the well, sitting in the heat, is a tired Jewish man who is not supposed to speak to her at all, and who says, of all things, "Give me a drink."

What follows is the longest recorded conversation Jesus has with anyone in all four Gospels, and He has it with a Samaritan woman of ruined reputation whom every rule of His culture said He should ignore. He crosses every barrier to reach her, barriers of race, of gender, of religion, of morality. He talks with her as though she matters, because to Him she does. And slowly, gently, He moves the conversation from a bucket of water to the thirst underneath her thirst. "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again," He tells her, "but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again." She has spent her life trying to fill an emptiness that no well, and no husband, could ever fill, and Jesus offers her the living water she has been dying for.

Then comes the moment she has been dreading her whole life. He names her secret. "You have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband." But notice what does not happen. He does not recoil. He does not lecture. He does not walk away. He simply tells her the truth she has been hiding and keeps talking to her, keeps offering her living water. To be fully known and not rejected, that is the thing her heart has never dared to hope for, and Jesus gives it to her right there in the noonday sun. And before the conversation is over, He tells this outcast woman something He has told almost no one: "I who speak to you am he," the Messiah.

She runs back to the very town she has been hiding from, leaving her water jar behind, and becomes the first evangelist in the Gospel of John. "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did." And the people come, and many believe. This is the kind of God we follow, the One who sits down beside the very people the world writes off and offers them living water. Read this story slowly, and let it find the place in you that is still thirsty, still hiding, still afraid of being fully known, and hear the same offer Jesus made to her.

Group Discussion: Jesus crossed every social and religious barrier of His day to reach one woman at a well (vv. 7-9). Who are the people our culture, or even our church circles, tend to write off, and what would it look like to follow Jesus across those barriers?

Personal Reflection: Jesus offered the woman “living water” so that she would “never be thirsty again” (vv. 13–14). Where have you been trying to satisfy a deep thirst with things that cannot finally satisfy, and what would it mean to bring that thirst to Christ?

Read John 4:1–42

Study Questions

1. Jesus tells the woman that the water He gives “will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (v. 14). What is this “living water,” and how is it different from everything else people use to try to satisfy their souls?
2. The woman had sought satisfaction in a series of relationships, yet remained empty (vv. 16–18). What are the “wells” you most often return to for satisfaction, and what has been the result?
3. Jesus told the woman, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (v. 24). What does it mean to worship in spirit and in truth, and why does true worship depend on both?
4. When Jesus gently named the woman’s hidden life, she was fully known and yet not rejected (vv. 16–19). What in your life do you most fear being seen, and how does the way Jesus treated this woman speak to that fear?
5. The woman raised the old dispute about the right place to worship, and Jesus pointed beyond it: “the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (vv. 20–23). How does Jesus shift worship from a place to a Person and a manner, and what does this teach about worship under the New Covenant?
6. The woman left her water jar and ran to tell others, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did” (vv. 28–29). What does her eagerness to tell others reveal about what happens when we truly meet Christ, and how does your own eagerness compare?
7. When the woman wondered about the Messiah, Jesus said, “I who speak to you am he” (v. 26). Why is it significant that Jesus made this clear self-revelation to a Samaritan woman of poor reputation, and what does it tell us about who the gospel is for?
8. Jesus told His disciples, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me” and spoke of fields “white for harvest” (vv. 34–35). Where are the “fields” around you that are ready for harvest, and what keeps you from seeing them or laboring in them?
9. The Samaritans came to say, “we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world” (v. 42). How does this title, “Savior of the world,” deepen our understanding of who Jesus is and the reach of His salvation beyond any one nation or group?
10. Look back over this story, from the thirsty woman at noon to a whole town believing. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you, both to drink deeply of His living water and to point others to the well?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 55:1-3, an invitation to come to the waters and be satisfied without price; Jeremiah 2:13, forsaking the fountain of living waters for broken cisterns; Psalm 42:1-2, the soul thirsting for the living God; John 7:37-39, the living water of the Spirit for all who come to Christ; Revelation 22:17, the free offer of the water of life to all who are thirsty.