

The Woman, Well, and Living Water – *John 4:1-26*

Introduction – We are learning to look more carefully at the scenes of these stories John is giving us about Jesus (the water-wine incident at Cana, the conversation with Nicodemus, etc). They are straightforward stories by themselves but there are double-meanings, multiple layers, OT symbol allusions, and hints at prophecies that, with a little more study, unpack far more than John is telling us about Jesus (John 20:30-31). We have already talked about water, the temple, and weddings, but John isn't done.

The “Bible Story” – The short story is that Jesus was travelling and stopped in Samaria to rest. At a well, he spoke with a woman, asking her for a drink. He went on to tell her that if she knew who He was, she would have asked and He could give her living water, water overflowing with eternal life. The woman asked for that water and Jesus said for her to go get her husband. He already knew that she had five husbands previously and the man she was living with now was not her husband. The woman was amazed that Jesus knew this and claimed He was a prophet. She then had questions about the differences that her people and Jesus' people had about worship, and Jesus answered that a time was coming when all those differences would be put aside. The Father was seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Suspiciously, the woman said that when Messiah came he would explain everything. Then Jesus told her that He was the Messiah.

A Woman at a Well – Something about this meeting seemed quite strange to Jesus' disciples when they returned (v27). It may have been that Jesus was speaking with a woman and that she was a Samaritan, but they would see Jesus speaking to many other women and even foreign women at other times – yet at this scene they “marveled.” Remember, a servant of Abraham goes to a foreign city and while at a well, finds a woman who becomes Isaac's wife (Gen 24:10). Jacob is fleeing from Esau and in a foreign land comes to a well where he meets Rachel whom he marries (Gen 29:1-12). Moses protects Jethro's daughters at a well and ends up marrying one of those foreign daughters (Ex 2:16-22). In Biblical literature, when a man meets a foreign woman at a well, a wedding is not too far off. In this gospel, we have just come from a wedding in Cana and a declaration of Jesus being a bridegroom (John 2-3). And here is Jesus speaking to a foreign woman at a well about her husbands.

A Samaritan Woman and Her Five Baals – The enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans went back centuries. After the Assyrians conquered the ten tribes of the north (Israel) in 722BC they left a small number of Jews there and brought in many others from other nations they had conquered to take care of the land. The intermarrying resulted in this mixed breed that eventually became known as the Samaritans. They practiced a syncretistic religion using only the Pentateuch from the OT, along with other pagan rituals and beliefs, building a temple on Mt Gerizim which was then destroyed by a Jewish king in 128BC.

So, who is this Samaritan woman? She has had a rough life, losing five different husbands (probably at least some from divorces). *“Now, it is interesting that the Hebrew word for husband is baal, the same word that is used to describe the pagan gods (Hos 2:16-18). Samaria was filled with the false baals of five nations (2 Kings 17:24-40)”* – Merkle.

In addition, we should notice the stark difference between Nicodemus, the uber-moral Jew, and this Samaritan woman, divorced far too many times. He is a ruler of the Jews, she is an outcast even among the Samaritans (she is alone at noon getting water). He was a man. She was a woman. He came by night. Jesus sought her at noon. If Nicodemus represented the Jews, this unnamed woman represents the Gentiles. The only thing they have in common is that neither understand what Jesus was saying to them – at least at first.

And so, Jesus corrects her syncretism, *“...salvation is of the Jews”* (v22). And yet, they were mistaken as well. Although they had the truth, they did not have the Spirit (3:6-8). This is how the unbelieving heart misunderstands the words of Jesus. But Jesus gets to the heart of the matter, *“Go, call your husband and come here”* (v16). This calls out her personal problem and the problem of the Gentile baals, our baals.

Living Water – The OT allusions continue. Running water (literally “living” water) was required in ceremonial washings for impurities (Num 19:17-20). While they wandered in the wilderness, Jesus was that Rock that provided a fountain of water (Ex 17:5-7, 1 Cor 10:4). God is the spring of living water which Israel had forsaken (Jer 2:13). In Psalm 36:9 God is described as *“the fountain of living waters.”* Isaiah 44:3 tells of the coming day of salvation with *“I will pour water on the thirsty land...I will pour*

my Spirit upon your offspring.” Ezekiel connects the sprinkling of cleansing water with the giving of the Spirit as well (Ezek 36:25-27). Jesus says to the woman that He has this living water for her for the asking (v10, 13-14).

The Temple and the Living Water - There is even more to contemplate. In Ezekiel we have an extended prophecy of a new temple to be built (Ezek 40-48), a temple that has never been built. But Jesus said that He was the new temple (John 2:19). In Ezek 47, the prophecy focuses on healing waters, living waters, that flow out of the side of the new temple. The waters flow out, growing deeper and deeper until it was a river that could not be crossed, healing all the other waters (Ezek 47:1-8). Zech 14:8-9 prophesies something similar that will occur *“in that day.”* If you look back to Zech 12:10, you find out when *“that day”* is: *“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced.”*

When Jesus died on the cross, they pierced His side with a spear *“and blood and water came out...”* as the Scripture says *“They shall look on Him whom they pierced.”* (John 19:32-37). (HT Merkle).

A Deeper Bible Story - The story continued with the conversion of this poor woman and her testimony to her town about the Messiah who has come (vv27ff, esp. v42). What do these images point to? An old world made new, a dead woman made alive, a bride that is made up of Jew and Gentile alike, the end of enmity between God and man, along with all the nations coming together, worshipping by means of the Spirit and the Truth. We are somewhere along in this River of Life that is flowing out to all the nations and healing all the waters. Jesus comes here, Emmanuel, God with us, and makes that which is unclean clean with the cleansing water of baptism, the spilling of His blood, the outpouring of His Spirit.

St. Augustine said, *“You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”* Jesus said, *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink”* (John 7:37).