



The Woman at the Well

John 4:1-26

Notes: References used in developing this Bible Study were the *MacArthur Study Bible* by John MacArthur and the *Life Application Commentary*. The Scripture references in this Bible study are taken from the New King James Version.

4:1-3 – What caused the Pharisees to take an interest in Jesus?

Jesus was attracting a larger following than John. If they were interested enough in John's ministry to send emissaries to check him out, they'd be all the more interested in Jesus.

Why did Jesus leave Judea?

Jesus probably left for at least two reasons: (1) to avoid conflict with John's disciples and (2) to avoid conflict with the Pharisees.

Why was there risk of conflict with John's disciples?

Some of John's disciples were jealous that Jesus was attracting a greater following than John. Their pride in their initial decision to follow John got in the way of them fully understanding the implications of John's message. They were caught up in the movement itself rather than the reason for the movement.

Why was there risk of conflict with the Pharisees?

The Pharisees were advocates of salvation through observing the Law. Since they interpreted the Law for the people, this gave them power over their constituents. To remain in power, it was necessary to challenge anyone who taught something that contradicted their teaching.

Jesus did not shy away from conflicts with the Pharisees, so why did He avoid them at this time?

This was early in His ministry, He did not want to accelerate the course of events because His "hour" had not yet come (John 2:4).

Why did Jesus go to Galilee?

He was from Galilee and most of His disciples were from that region. The reason He was in Judea was begun by His coming to Jerusalem for the Passover (John 2:13).

4:4 – Why did Jesus need to go through Samaria?

The most direct route between Judea and Samaria went through Samaria so this would be the fastest way. An even greater reason Jesus "needed" to go through Samaria is that He had a mission there...

What mission did Jesus have in Samaria?

By going to Samaria and bringing the gospel to the despised Samaritans, Jesus showed that He was above the Jewish prejudices.

Why were the Jews prejudiced against the Samaritans?

When the nation of Israel split politically after Solomon's rule, King Omri named the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel "Samaria" (1 Kings 16:24). The name eventually referred to the entire district and sometimes to the entire northern kingdom, which had been taken captive by Assyria in 722 b.c. (2 Kings 17:1-6). While Assyria led most of the populace of the 10 northern tribes away (into the region which today is northern Iraq), it left a sizable population of Jews in the northern Samaritan region and transported many non-Jews into Samaria (2 Kings 17:24). These groups intermingled to form a mixed race through intermarriage. Eventually tension developed between the Jews who returned from captivity and the Samaritans. The Samaritans withdrew from the worship of Yahweh at Jerusalem and established their worship at Mt. Gerizim in Samaria (vv. 20-22). Samaritans regarded only the Pentateuch as authoritative. As a result of this history, Jews repudiated Samaritans and considered them heretical.

4:5 – What was the significance of the well at Sychar?

This well was highly valued by the Samaritans who claimed Jacob as one of their patriarchs (John 4:12).

4:6 – What kind of condition was Jesus in when He reached the well at Sychar?

Jesus was wearied from *His* journey.

What does this tell us about Jesus?

The fact that Jesus was weary from His journey shows His humanity. He suffered physical limitations as we all do.

Did the limitations Jesus take on in becoming human undermine His claims to be Son of God?

No, seeing evidence of His humanity helps us to better identify with Him and appreciate the sacrifice He made all the more.

What is the significance of the time of day that is given?

It was the sixth hour, John certainly used the Jewish reckoning of time which is calculated from sunrise at about 6:00 a.m., so the time was about noon, the hottest part of the day.

4:7 – Given that women generally came in groups to draw water either earlier or later in the day to avoid the sun’s heat... Why did the Samaritan woman come alone at the hottest part of the day?

This probably indicate that her public shame from her lifestyle caused her to be isolated from other women (see John 4:17-18).

Why did Jesus ask the woman for a drink?

This reinforces Jesus’ humanity, He was in fact thirsty and He did not have a container for drawing water from the well.

Where were the disciples when Jesus encountered the woman at the well?

They had gone into the city to purchase food so thus Jesus was able to have a private conversation with the woman.

Since the disciples were not present, how was the Apostle John able to report on this encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman?

Either Jesus or the woman had to tell John about what happened. Since the woman demonstrated her eagerness to proclaim to everyone that Jesus was “*a man who told me everything I ever did*” (John 4:29), we can assume she shared the story with the disciples.

How does hearing about the experiences of others seeing God working in their lives impact our spiritual growth?

The insights, lessons, and corrections we receive from God can help and encourage other believers. Proof that God is working in the lives of others reinforces that He will likewise work in our lives.

4:9 – Why was the woman surprised that Jesus asked her for water?

For a Jewish man to speak to a woman in public, let alone to ask from her, a Samaritan, a drink was a definite breach of rigid social custom as well as a marked departure from the social animosity that existed between the two groups. The Jews regarded the Samaritans and everything they touched to be ceremonially unclean. Further, religious leaders did not hold conversations with women of ill-repute (v. 18).

Why did Jesus break the social protocol to speak with the woman?

Jesus went out of His way to demonstrate that man’s way was not God’s way. The gospel is for everyone regardless of race, social position, religious orientation, or past sins.

What lesson should we learn from the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman?

We too should be looking for opportunities to share the gospel at any time and at any place with any one. We should especially be open to sharing with those who are

outcasts from society and we should not be intimidated by societal barriers that may exist.

4:10 – What was the living water that Jesus offered the Samaritan woman?

Jesus offered the woman the gift of eternal life, the resurrection of her human spirit (see John 4:14). This would give her the ability to receive the Holy Spirit which is often symbolized by water: living water that would quench her thirst forever. For example:

Jeremiah 17:13 - O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake You shall be ashamed. "Those who depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters."

What was Jesus claiming when He said He could give the woman living water?

Living water could only be given by God, so Jesus was claiming to be God Himself.

Is Jesus saying here that all who ask God for eternal life will receive it?

Yes, the Lord wants us to reach the point in our lives where we realize we can not save ourselves, that if we are to be saved that it is God who will save us...

Romans 10:13 - For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

4:11 – What did the woman think Jesus was talking about when he referred to giving her living water?

She did not immediately sense the depth of Jesus’ words, she thought He was talking about well water. However, this bold statement got her to probe the identity of this stranger.

4:12 – Why did the woman ask if Jesus was greater than Jacob?

The bold claim that Jesus had made about living water got her to start thinking that He might indeed be greater than their patriarch Jacob. The fact that Jesus showed her exceptional acceptance revealed that He was no ordinary man and this would have challenged her thinking.

4:13 – What distinction did Jesus make between living water and well water?

Well water only temporarily satisfies a physical thirst, living water geminately satisfies a spiritual thirst. God has given each of us a thirst for a personal relationship with Him that my only be satisfied by trusting in the work of Jesus on the cross.

What kind of things do people attempt to substitute for living water to satisfy what they are thirsting for?

People seek after careers, money, love, sex, security, and approval attempting to fill the void that only a relationship

with Jesus can satisfy. These worldly attempts to satisfy our spiritual thirst can only lead to disappointment and despair.

4:14 – What did Jesus say here that gives us eternal security?

Jesus said that the living water He gives us will satisfy our thirst forever. This means that if Jesus has saved you, you can't lose your salvation.

Why is the idea that you can lose your salvation really salvation by works?

If you can do anything to fall out of favor with God so that you lose your salvation, then you are also thinking that you earned your salvation by what you have done.

What image does a spring of water gushing up portray?

This image suggests the availability, accessibility and the abundance of a life knowing the Lord which leads to eternal life for believers.

John 10:10 - I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

The abundant life more than the length of life related to eternal life, it is the quality of life that begins immediately upon receiving Jesus into your life.

Note that many people who claim to be Christians admit they feel unhappy and dissatisfied over the same problems that unbelievers mention. Are the differences between Christians and non-Christians merely superficial?

This misinterpretation is the same as the Samaritan woman expecting physical thirst and all life's other physical needs to be satisfied by the living water Jesus offered...

John 16:33 - "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

So what is the difference in the mortal lives of believers versus that of unbelievers?

The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives should make a difference in the way we respond to things that happen in our lives. Living water gives us power to face the challenges of life, not escape from them.

4:15 – Was the woman bought into the concept of living water?

The woman, like Nicodemus (3:4), did not realize that Jesus was talking about her spiritual needs. Instead, in her mind, she wanted such water in order to avoid her frequent trips to Jacob's well.

What was the problem with the woman's thinking?

The woman was accepting Jesus' message for the wrong reason, she thought the living water He offered here would just make her life easier.

How does the woman's misunderstanding show how people misunderstand the gospel?

As the woman expected Jesus to meet her temporal needs but missed the spiritual implications, people do not realize that Jesus did not come to take away our challenges but to change us on the inside so that we may be empowered to deal with problems from God's perspective.

4:16 – Why did Jesus tell her to call her husband?

Since the woman failed to understand the nature of the living water He offered (v. 15), Jesus abruptly turned the dialogue to focus sharply on her real spiritual need for conversion and cleansing from sin. He also used this to reveal His knowledge of her personal life (v. 17).

4:17 – Was the woman truthful about having no husband?

The woman spoke the truth without any explanation.

4:18 – What was skillful in the way Jesus confronted the woman's sinful life?

Although Jesus confronted the woman for her sinful life, He affirmed her truthfulness. He did not accuse or excuse, he simply described her life to let her draw her own conclusions about how she was living.

Did Jesus recognize common-law marriages?

By such an explicit statement, our Lord rejected the notion that when two people live together it constitutes marriage. Biblically, marriage is always restricted to a public, formal, official, and recognized covenant.

How do we err when we draw conclusions about other people's lives ourselves?

We either accuse people which raises their defenses or we excuse them which reinforces their denial.

Note that Jesus used an accepting confrontation that was intended to invoke a positive response... how may we apply this ourselves?

We should limit what we say to what we know, not drawing any conclusions.

4:19 – Why did the woman think Jesus was a prophet?

His knowledge of her life indicated He had supernatural inspiration since He was able to see the hidden past as well as the future.

4:20 – Why did the woman change the subject here?

The woman may have been trying to avoid further disclosure of her sinful life.

What mountain was the woman referring to?

Both Jews and Samaritans recognized that God had commanded their forefathers to identify a special place for worshiping Him (Deut. 12:5). The Jews, recognizing the entire Hebrew canon, chose Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7:5–13; 2 Chr. 6:6). The Samaritans, recognizing only the Pentateuch, noted that the first place Abraham built an altar to God was at Shechem (Gen. 12:6, 7), which was overlooked by Mt. Gerizim, where the Israelites had shouted the blessings promised by God before they entered the Promised Land (Deut. 11:29, 30). As a result, they chose Mt. Gerizim for the place of their temple.

What was the unspoken question that the woman asked regarding worship?

She was probably wondering that if Jesus was a prophet, who was right in their place of worship, the Jews or the Samaritans.

4:21 – What assumption did both the Jews and the Samaritans make about worship?

They thought that they had to worship God in a geographical location.

What was Jesus referring to by saying that she would not worship on either mountain?

Personally, the woman would be saved to be able to worship in the spirit everywhere she was. All who put their trust in Jesus would likewise not be confined to worshiping God in a geographical location. And Jesus knew that the temple in Jerusalem would soon be destroyed.

What is the application in this for us?

We should ask ourselves if we depend on a physical building or specific setting for the proper worship environment. The location of the worship is not nearly as important as the attitude of the worshipers. Since we have the presence of the Holy Spirit (our bodies are a temple), we have the capacity to worship God where ever we are.

4:22 – What was the problem with the worship of the Samaritans?

The Samaritans did not know God. They did not have the full revelation of Him since they did not recognize the complete Old Testament, and thus could not worship in truth.

Why did the Jews know who they worshiped?

The Jews did have the full revelation of God in the Old Testament; thus they knew the God they worshiped.

How is it that salvation is from the Jews... is Jesus saying that only Jews may be saved?

No, Jesus is referring to the Messiah would come from the Jewish race.

4:23 – How is the hour both coming and is now here?

The new worship is now here among the followers of Jesus and the end of the worship in the Jerusalem temple or on Mount Gerizim was still future at that time.

How did Jesus define true worshipers?

In the light of His coming as Messiah and Savior, worshipers will be identified, not by a particular shrine or location, but by their worship of the Father through the Son.

How did Jesus define true worship?

True worship is in spirit and truth.

What does it mean to worship in spirit?

All who have been saved have a born-again human spirit that is alive to God's Spirit. To worship in spirit means to commune with God by being open to His Spirit guiding us, prompting us and giving us wisdom.

What does it mean to worship in truth?

True worship requires that we recognize God's character and nature as well as our own need for Him. We worship in truth because we worship what is true.

What are some examples of not worshiping in truth?

We are not worshiping in truth when we pretend to be someone we are not, by having prejudice against others also made in God's image, by practicing self-righteousness by denying our constant need for God's mercy and grace, worshiping in ignorance or superstition without knowing the reality for ourselves, and blindly worshiping out of habit with no genuine devotion.

4:24 – What does this tell us about the nature of God?

God *is* Spirit. God is not a physical being limited to time and space as we are, He is invisible.

What are some examples of true spiritual worship?

Obedying God with the right attitude (out of gratitude for what He did for us)... acting is submission to what He has revealed of Himself... praise to Him for what He has done... confessing our sins that He has revealed to us... thanking Him for His provision... asking Him to give us wisdom, faith, and spiritual growth...

4:25 – How the conversation the woman had with Jesus have reminded her about the coming of the Messiah?

Talk of a new kind of worship certainly anticipated the Messiah and Jesus, comments made her wish for the Prophet who would explain everything.

4:26 – Who did Jesus tell the woman He was?

Jesus said He was the Messiah the woman looked for.