

In last week's sermon, we heard about a foreigner who came to Israel to be cured of leprosy. Without payment or price, Naaman, the Syrian commander, obeyed the word of the Lord. He washed himself in the waters of the Jordan River, and he was made clean. God washed us in the waters of Baptism making us pure and clean children of God through the perfect life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Today, we look at another journey and another foreigner who learned about God's kingdom through water. We begin in John chapter 4 where we read how Jesus, "left Judea and departed again for Galilee. And He had to pass through Samaria. So He came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as He was from His journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour." (John 4:3-6)

When Adam and Eve sinned, God put a curse on the ground. Since then, all of us in the human family have suffered as a result of that curse - including that Son promised to us back in Genesis 3. God's Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, experienced the curse on the ground just as we do. He knew what it was to be hungry, and to be thirsty. Jesus was so exhausted from this journey, He stopped by a well to rest while His disciples went into town to buy lunch. The water was probably very inviting, but the well was deep, and Jesus had nothing to draw the water with. That's when He saw a woman approaching Him. Verses 7-9 continue, "A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her: 'Give Me a drink.... The Samaritan woman said to Him, 'How is it that You, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?'"

There was a long and bitter history between the Jews and Samaritans. It all started as punishment for King David's son Solomon, who married many foreign women and built places of worship for their false gods in Jerusalem. After Solomon's death, God split the kingdom of Israel into two: Judah in the south and the ten tribes of Israel in the north. The capital of Judah was Jerusalem, and in time, the capital of Israel became Samaria, its inhabitants called Samaritans.

When the Northern Kingdom rejected God and worshiped the gods of foreign nations, He sent them many great prophets, like Elisha, who healed Naaman the Syrian. But when Israel and its kings refused to listen to these prophets and return in repentance to the God of Israel, He brought in the Assyrians who captured Israel and took the survivors into exile, where they were lost to history—the lost Ten Tribes.

In their place, the Assyrian king brought in exiles from other nations he had conquered. These Gentiles lived in Samaria & married the few Israelites who remained in the land. The people in the Southern Kingdom of Judah considered them half-breeds & treated them with contempt.

Later, Judah was exiled to Babylon for its **own** idolatry. When God returned them to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple after 70 years, the Samaritans wanted to help, but the people of Judah refused. The Samaritans became hostile, obstructing their work and making serious threats against them. The people of Judah never forgot, and the hostility between Jews and Samaritans continued up to Jesus' day. No wonder the Samaritan woman asked Jesus, "How is it that You, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (v.9)

And how did Jesus respond? He said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (v. 10).

Jesus is turning the conversation from physical things like water to spiritual things, but the woman missed the turn. She thought He was talking about some special water much sweeter and purer than the water from this well. She said, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." (vv. 11-12)

She knew Jesus was talking about a different kind of water. But she took great pride that this well had been dug by the great patriarch Jacob - of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob fame. He even drank from the water himself and gave it to his twelve sons, the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Was this Jew, this stranger, claiming to be greater than Jacob? You can sense the skepticism. Verses 13-14 follow, "Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"

Now it's clear that Jesus has made the turn to spiritual things - living water that can satisfy our parched and thirsty soul. But the woman was still thinking of earthly, physical water, and said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." (v.15)

It took a lot of work to carry the water jar to the well, draw up the water, fill the jar, and carry it back home. This woman was still thinking Jesus was talking about earthly water—maybe some sort of indoor plumbing like we enjoy. Jesus had to turn the conversation a little more to get her to understand. In verses

16–18 He says, “‘Go, call your husband, and come here.’ The woman answered him, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.’”

Now we begin to see her deep spiritual thirst that Jesus wanted her to realize. He gently revealed her sin. Having had five husbands did not automatically make this woman a terrible, sinful woman. In that day, men could divorce their wives for almost any reason. If a man saw a younger, more desirable woman, or if his wife was unable to give him children, he could divorce her. This woman could have been totally innocent in losing five husbands. But now she was in a relationship, living with a man to whom she was **not** married. Jesus was clearly pointing out how she was breaking the Sixth Commandment, “You shall not commit adultery.” Living together before marriage was wrong then - and it is wrong now.

But Jesus didn’t hammer her over the head with it. His goal was not to humiliate and embarrass her, but to bring her to repentance and faith. All she needed was for Him to point out that the man she had was not her husband. The Law had done its work, and she had been truthful when she said, “I have no husband.”

But these were private details of her life that no stranger should be able to know. That’s when she made a bold statement about Jesus: “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship” (vv.19-20).

Was the woman switching subjects because Jesus had hit so close to home when He said “the [man] you now have is not your husband” (v. 18)? Maybe. But more likely, she was second-guessing her life. If she had been so wrong to be in her relationship with this man without being married to him, was she and her Samaritan neighbors wrong about the place where they worshiped God?

That was also a long running argument between the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. God had told Israel there was one place for them to worship, where the ark of the covenant stood inside the tent of meeting, and later the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. When the ten northern tribes broke away from Solomon’s son, their new king, Jeroboam, had built two temples with golden calves and told his ten tribes to worship God there.

Now she could ask this prophet if she and her people had been wrong all this time. Jesus answered her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when

neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, & is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (21–24)

God had a very good reason for requiring one place of worship through the time of the Old Testament people Israel. His sinful people were inclined to worship God where they thought best and in ways they thought would be best. God knew how easily Israel’s worship could turn to a Law-centered, works-dominated religion that would make them think they earned God’s favor by their works—including the false notion that their offerings obligated God to protect and defend them.

God had carefully prescribed the one place they could find Him and exactly what was required for them to enter His presence, through the death of a substitutionary sacrifice—a lamb, goat, or bull that was killed for their sins and shed its blood in place of the blood they should have shed. All through the Old Testament, God’s people were saved through faith in God’s promised Savior, the Christ who would take their sins upon Himself and suffer and die in their place, the Lamb of God who carried away the sins of the world.

Now with His coming, Jesus showed that the Old Testament temple had fulfilled its purpose because its only purpose was to point ahead to **Him**. Jerusalem had been the only place to worship God because it pointed to Jesus, who said of Himself, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

That is why Jesus revealed to the woman that the **place** where we worship God is not the important thing—whether we come together in this beautiful building, or in Jerusalem, or Rome, or any city on earth. God is not confined within a church altar or a temple. He is spirit. He fills the earth and all of His creation. The important thing is not **where** you worship; it is **who** you worship—and the only way to worship God the Father is through His Son, Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah. Verse 25 continues, “The woman said to Him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things.’”

The blossoming of this woman’s faith is so amazing. She made the turn from physical water to spiritual water. Imagine her heart burning within her when Jesus replied in verse 26, “I who speak to you am He.”

Like this Samaritan woman, we all have a deep spiritual thirst. Our sinful nature drives us away from God to seek our satisfaction in people, possessions, and actions that we ***think*** will quench our thirst. But we can never fill that empty spot inside. It is the place God created in us where He alone can dwell, satisfying us with living water, forgiving our sins, and bringing us true peace, joy, and contentment. Jesus came to us and has restored our right relationship with God, our Creator and Father. And He did it through His innocent suffering and death.

We have access to God through Jesus Christ. God grant us this living water always. In Jesus' name. Amen.