

## The Living Water Prepares us for Eternal Life!

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Lesson Scripture: John 4: 1-26

Background: 2 Kings 17

### I. Introduction

Let's set the scene for our text today. Israel is only 120 miles long from north to south, but within that 120 miles there were three definite divisions of territory. In the extreme north is Galilee; in the extreme south is Judaea; and in between them is Samaria. We can infer that Jesus did not wish at this stage in his ministry to be involved in a controversy about baptism; so he decided to leave Judaea and go to Galilee. There was a century-old feud between the Jews and the Samaritans, the cause of which we will shortly see. The fastest route to travel from Judaea to Galilee is to go through Samaria. Using this route, the journey could be done in three days. The alternative route was to cross the Jordan, go up the eastern side of the river to avoid Samaria, cross the Jordan north of Samaria and then enter Galilee. This route which took twice as long (six days). Therefore, Jesus traveled through Samaria as if he wished to take the shortest route to Galilee.

On the way they came to the town of Sychar. Just short of Sychar the road to Samaria forks. One branch goes north-east to Scythopolis; the other goes west to Nablus and then north to Engannim. At the fork of the road there is a well known as Jacob's well. This was an area which had many Jewish memories attached to it. There was a piece of ground there which had been bought by Jacob (Genesis 33:18-19). Jacob, on his deathbed, had bequeathed that ground to Joseph (Genesis 48:22). And, upon Joseph's death in Egypt, his body had been taken back to Palestine and buried there (Joshua 24:32).

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### II. The Lesson: The Living Water Prepares us for Eternal Life

#### 1. Verses 6 - 9

When Jesus and his disciples came to the fork in the road Jesus sat down to rest, for he was tired from the journey. It was midday. The Jewish day runs from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and the sixth hour is twelve o'clock midday. So the heat was at its greatest, and Jesus was weary and thirsty from travelling. His disciples went on ahead to buy some food in the Samaritan town. Something was beginning to happen to them (Disciples). Before they had met Jesus it is entirely unlikely that they would have even thought of buying food in any Samaritan town. Little by little, perhaps even unconsciously, the barriers were being torn down.

As Jesus sat there, a Samaritan woman came to the well. Why she would come to this well is something of a mystery, for it was more than half-a-mile from Sychar where she must have stayed and there was water there. May it be that she was so much of a moral outcast that the women even drove her away from the village well and she had to come here to draw water? Jesus asked her to give him a drink. She turned in astonishment. "I am a Samaritan," she said. "You are a Jew. How is it that you ask a drink from me?"

This text allow us to see Jesus character.

- a) First we see his humanity. Jesus was weary from his journey, and he sat by the side of the well exhausted. It is very significant that John who stresses the sheer deity of Jesus more than any other of the gospel writers, and stresses his humanity. John does not show us a figure freed from the tiredness and the struggle of our humanity. He shows us one for whom life was an effort as it is for us; he shows us one who also was tired and had to go on.
- b) It shows us the warmth of his sympathy. From an ordinary religious leader of the day, the Samaritan woman would have fled in embarrassment. If by any unlikely chance he had spoken to her she would have met him with ashamed and/or silence. But it seemed the most natural thing in the world to talk to Jesus. She had at last met someone who was not a critic but a friend. Someone who did not condemn her, but who understood her.
- c) It shows us Jesus as the breaker down of barriers. The quarrel between the Jews and the Samaritans was an old, old story. Away back about 720 B.C. the Assyrians had invaded the northern kingdom of Samaria and had captured and subjugated it. They did what conquerors often did in those days--they transported practically the whole population to Media (**2 Kings 17:6**). Into the district the Assyrians brought other people--from Babylon, from Kuthah, from Avva, from Hamath and from Sepharvaim (**2 Kings 17:24**). Now it is not possible to transport all the people. Some of the people of the northern kingdom were left. Almost inevitably they began to inter-marry with the incoming foreigners; and thereby they committed what to the Jew was an unforgivable crime. They lost their racial purity. So then the great majority of the inhabitants of Samaria were carried away to Media. They never came back but were assimilated into the country into which they were taken. They are the lost ten tribes. Those who remained in the country inter-married with the incoming strangers and lost their right to be called Jews at all.

## 2. Verses 10 – 15

We have to note that this conversation with the Samaritan woman follows exactly the same pattern as the conversation with Nicodemus. Jesus makes a statement. The statement is taken in the wrong sense. Jesus remakes the statement in an even more vivid way. It is still misunderstood; and then Jesus compels the person with whom he is speaking to discover and to face the truth for themselves. That was Jesus' usual

way of teaching; and it was a most effective way, for, as someone has said: "There are certain truths which a man cannot accept; he must discover them for himself."

Just as Nicodemus did, the woman took the words of Jesus quite literally when she was meant to understand them spiritually. It was living water of which Jesus spoke. In ordinary language to the Jew living water was running water. It was the water of the running stream in contradistinction to the water of the stagnant cistern or pool. This well, as we have seen, was not a springing well, but a well into which the water percolated from the subsoil. To the Jew, running, living water from the stream was always better. So the woman is saying: "You are offering me pure stream water. Where are you going to get it?"

She goes on to speak of "our father Jacob." The Jews would, of course, have strenuously denied that Jacob was the father of the Samaritans, but it was part of the Samaritan claim that they were descended from Joseph, the son of Jacob, by way of Ephraim and Manasseh. The woman is in effect saying to Jesus: "This is blasphemous talk. Jacob, our great ancestor, when he came here, had to dig this well to gain water for his family and his cattle. Are you claiming to be able to get fresh, running stream water? If you are, you are claiming to be wiser and more powerful than Jacob. That is a claim that no one has any right to make."

When people were on a journey they usually carried with them a bucket made from the skin of some beast so that they could draw water from any well at which they stopped. No doubt Jesus' disciples had such a bucket; and no doubt the disciples had taken it into the town with them. The woman saw that Jesus did not possess such a traveler's leather bucket, and so again she says in effect: "You need not talk about drawing water and giving it to me. I can see for myself that you do not have a bucket with which to draw water."

Jesus went on to make a still more startling statement that he could give her living water which would quench her thirst forever. Again the woman took this literally; but in fact it was nothing less than a Messianic claim. In the prophetic vision of the age to come, the age of God, the promise was: "They shall neither hunger nor thirst" (**Isaiah 49:10**). It was with God and none other that the living fountain of the all-quenching water existed. "With you is the fountain of life," the Psalmist cried (**Psalms 36:9**). It is from the very throne of God that the river of life is to flow (**Revelation 22:1**). It is the Lord who is the fountain of living water (**Jeremiah 17:13**). It is in the Messianic age that the parched ground is to become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water (**Isaiah 35:7**). When Jesus spoke about bringing to men the water which quenches thirst for ever, he was doing no less than stating that he was the Anointed One of God who was to bring in the new age.

Again the woman did not see it. And I think that this time she spoke with a jest, "Give me this water," she said, "so that I will never be thirsty again and will not have to walk to the well day after day." She was jesting with a kind of humoring contempt about eternal things.

Jesus now flips the script on her and presents her with evidence of her past misdoing. "Go," said Jesus, "and fetch your husband and come back with him." The woman stiffened as if a sudden pain had caught her. She was suddenly compelled to face herself and the looseness and immorality and total inadequacy of her life. There are two revelations in Christianity: the revelation of God and the revelation of ourselves. No man ever really sees himself until he sees himself in the presence of Christ; and then he is appalled at the sight. There is another way of putting it--Christianity begins with a sense of sin. It begins with the sudden realization that life as we are living will not do. We awaken to ourselves and we awake to our need of God.

### 3. Verses 15 – 21

**Let's take a deeper look at the story for a better understanding. This story could really be seen as a parable. The woman in the text is actual the people of Samira, and her five husbands are actually the five groups of people that were brought to Samaria. We see that, when the people of Samaria were exiled and transported to Medes, people from five other places were brought in. These five different groups of people brought in their own gods (2 Kings 17:29); and it has been held that the woman stands for Samaria and the five husbands for the five false gods whom the foreigners brought to Samaria. The sixth husband stands for the true God. They worship him but did not commit to him; therefore they are not married to him. This is a reminder of Samaria infidelity to God.**

The woman's question comes strangely to us. She says, and she is obviously troubled when she says it: "Our fathers say--that we ought to worship here on Mount Gerizim; you say that we ought to worship in Jerusalem; what am I to do?" The Samaritans adjusted history to suit themselves. They taught that it was on Mount Gerizim that Abraham had been willing to sacrifice Isaac; they taught that it was there that Melchizedek had appeared to Abraham; they declared that it was on Mount Gerizim that Moses had first entered an altar and sacrificed to God when the people entered the promised land, although in fact it was on Mount Ebal that was done (**Deuteronomy 27:4**). They tampered with the text of scripture and with history to glorify Mount Gerizim. The woman had been brought up to regard Mount Gerizim as the most sacred spot in the world and to despise Jerusalem. What was in her mind was this. She was saying to herself: "I am a sinner before God; I must offer to God an offering for my sin; I must take that offering to the house of God to put myself right with him; where am I going to take it?" To her, as to all her contemporaries, the only cure for sin was sacrifice. Her great problem was, where was that sacrifice to be made? By this time she is not arguing about the respective merits of the Temple on Mount Gerizim and the Temple on Mount Zion. All she wants to know is: Where can I find God?

Jesus' answer was that the day of the old man-made rivalries was coming to an end; and the time was on the way when men would find God everywhere. It had been Zephaniah's vision that men shall worship God "each in his place" (**Zephaniah 2:11**). It was Malachi's dream that in every place incense would be offered as a pure offering to the name of God (Malachi 1:11). Jesus' answer to the woman was that she did not need to go anywhere special to find God, neither to Mount Gerizim nor to Mount Zion. She did not need to offer sacrifice in some special place; true worship finds God in every place.