



Living Water

John 4:1-42

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Have you ever tried to draw a picture of what a character from the Bible looks like? If you have the artistic ability that I do, you'd end up with stick people. For the next couple of moments, I want you to paint a mental picture or draw a real picture of what you imagine the woman at the well looks like. It might seem like a silly exercise until we realize that when we think about who she was and begin to draw a picture, the first impression and actual picture may vary a great deal.



Let me give you some clues as to how I picture her. I imagine she is wearing an old and worn out dress. She wasn't wealthy, in fact, she was pretty poor. She had no friends, only a few people would even acknowledge her presence. Her head and shoulders drooped. She tried to take care of her body, but the years were catching up to her. In my eyes she is only 35 - 40 years old. She's been through 5 husbands and is living with a 6th man. Who knows how many others there have been. When she was 20 years old, she was beautiful, but had no self esteem. 15 to 20 years have passed and some of the beauty is evident. Even though the years have caught up to her. . . behind the weary and beaten face is a beautiful woman.

As I picture Jesus, He's tired and weary. He's thirsty and hungry. His cloak is

probably a little dirty and worn from his travels and He sits down beside this well, as the disciples go into a nearby town to get food.

Maybe Jesus fell asleep or was in prayer or was just enjoying the shade of hiding behind this well. . . when suddenly He's startled and this woman appears.

That is the background. For the past week we have been looking at this concept of living water in our Monday night bible study. So, now let's take a look at this story of Jesus and the women at the well. Let's see if there isn't something in this story that we can take with us that very well may help to fill our parched souls.

There are a number of subplots in this story which bring out the beauty of the story. If you would look at your Bible insert, you will notice a map of the land of Israel. It is vital to understand what is happening because of the history of Israel. According to **verse 3**, Jesus had been in Judea and was now on His way to Galilee. However, in order to pass from Judea to Galilee, you had to pass through Samaria. And that was the problem. You see, the Jews from Judea despised the Jews from Samaria. The people who lived in Samaria were considered half-breeds because when that land was taken captive by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. the Assyrians repopulated the area with a mix of many different peoples. The Jews who were left in Samaria began to intermarry and began

to include aspects of other religions within theirs. Also, the Samaritans only held onto the first 5 books of the Old Testament, while the Jews in the Judea accepted the entire Old Testament.

Since the Jews of Judea despised the Samaritans when they had to travel to Galilee and areas further north, they would not pass through Samaria. Instead, and again look at your maps — they would go to the Jordan River, cross it and travel along the river until they passed the town of Salim, then they would begin to cross over the river. To show how much hatred existed between these people, by taking this alternate route in essence the trip extended from a 3 day journey to a 7 day journey.

Now, with that in mind we can understand why this woman looks at Jesus and says you are a Jew and I am a Samaritan. Furthermore, according to social customs a single man was never supposed to engage a single woman in conversation when no other chaperones were present.

Jesus was breaking political, religious and social customs by having this conversation. It becomes especially intriguing as we discover what type of woman this is. . . she's had 5 husbands and 5 divorces and is living with a 6th man. And who knows how many other men she had been with. Many men had initiated conversations with her in the past. But in those instances, they had one thing on their mind. And most of the time, she delivered. As far as she knew, that's why Jesus had approached her on that day.

John tells us that she came to get water at the 6th hour of the day. In middle eastern vernacular, that means it was 12 noon. This was not the time women would come to the well to get

water. The normal time was in the early morning or in the evening — when the weather was cooler. But this woman doesn't come when all the other women did, when they would be able to gather water and talk to one another. This woman is an outcast, she's despised by all the other women in Sychar. She's been branded, as if with a "Scarlet A." No woman who considers herself respectful will associate with her. When they see her walking on the sidewalk, they cross to go to the other side.

Jesus was risking a lot by reaching out to her and not following the social norms of the day. His reputation would be under attack if anyone found out and chose to follow their own interpretation of the events that took place at that well. Near the end of their conversation when Jesus' disciples returned, they were surprised to find Him talking with a woman. Why was Jesus willing to lower himself to talk to a woman and face the ridicule of others? Because Jesus is love.

That's a lot of background for one Bible story, but without it, the true meaning and amazing way in which Jesus reached out to this woman would never be fully understood. And we would lose the significance this message has in our lives.

Jesus asked her for a simple drink of water. And they became engaged in a conversation that would change her life forever. He gives her a hint that she's not just talking to a weary stranger, but this is the Messiah, and if she understood that, she would most certainly ask Jesus for His "LIVING WATER."

But, this question confused her. She couldn't figure out how Jesus was going to get his own water. That

well has been measured to be over 100 feet deep. You see, when people traveled, they carried containers so they could get water out of a well. But Jesus didn't have one.

Again in **verses 13-14**, Jesus offered her living water, saying, "Everyone who drinks from this well will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst." Once again she didn't understand what Jesus was getting at. Even when He said, "the water I give you will become like a spring of water welling up to eternal life," she still was lost.

In fact she thought what Jesus was saying was going to make her life easy. She thought she would not have to return to the well each day for water, that Jesus' water would fully quench her thirst. Obtaining water was hard work and it often required making 2 trips and carrying heavy jars full of water.

The plot now thickens as Jesus takes the discussion up a huge level. He begins to force her thinking. He tells her 'go get your husband.' What a strange request in the middle of this conversation. Yet, Jesus has a plan. She's hiding who she really is and Jesus knows it.

You see, Jesus knew that her need was far deeper than just wanting an easy way to get water, she needed to find forgiveness and she needed to find what it meant to have someone truly and unconditionally love her. And that would be Jesus.

She correctly answered that she had no husband. And Jesus pounced on that answer. 'You're right you don't have a husband, you've had 5 husbands and now you're living with a man who isn't your husband.' Her

facade has now been uncovered. She is forced to admit the truth.

And what is our natural tendency when this happens? It's to cover up who we are. We hide the truth from ourselves and others. We put on our mask and go about our make-believe world. We play the pretender, just as the woman at the well did with Jesus. She presented another self to Jesus, the one she wanted Him to see, and hid her true self. Until He removed her mask by confronting her with the truth, and made it impossible to be an imposter any longer. What must have been just as unnerving was that when she realized Jesus saw the real her, He did not condemn her. Jesus knew all about her sin — and He loved her. She felt His pure love. If she had felt condemned, she would have left.

Jesus revealed the complete truth about her and completely accepted her at the same time. The saving factor in this woman's life was that she did not deny the truth. Jesus will forgive our sin, but only if we face it and admit it. He won't tolerate our deceitfulness. He won't allow us to be imposters. The truth must be understood and owned. And it is only through the truth that we experience the love of God. We don't find God by pointing out our strengths, but by admitting our weaknesses.

Brennan Manning quotes Sister Barbara Fiand as saying, "Wholeness is brokenness owned and thereby healed." Wholeness is not the absence of brokenness. Wholeness is facing the truth of our brokenness and finding healing in that act of honesty. Admitting who we are and what we have done seems frightening, but in reality it is freeing. There is no other way to find God.

Notice what the woman does!! She changes the subject. Ever been down that road before? Someone gets a little too personal, they get a little closer to the real you than you want to reveal? What you do? Change the subject. That's the best answer, and most people will go along with you, but not Jesus. She questioned the place of worship. The Samaritans worshiped on a mountain and the Jews in Jerusalem.

Jesus is blunt, He tells her the Samaritans were worshiping what they did not know. He told her everything she believed had been wrong. He said, "**Salvation is from the Jews.**" She was uncomfortable and thought she would change the subject again. Being familiar with Jewish beliefs, she said, "I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes he will explain everything to us." Again, Jesus confronted her with a searing truth that began to burn its way into her brain. He said, "**I who speak to you am He.**" He proclaimed that He was the Messiah, the Son of God. She assumed He was a prophet, but Jesus proclaimed He was the living God.

To wrap up the story, the disciples came back and questioned why in the world Jesus would talk to a low life Samaritan woman. She left her water jar, I assume for 2 reasons, 1st she wanted to run and carrying a water jar wouldn't allow her to run fast and 2nd she was going to return with people of the town. Notice her boldness. She hid from the town by getting water during the day and now she wants to share the Good News of Jesus with the people.

OKAY!! WHEW!! That is the story of the woman at the well.

So, what can we take from this

amazing story? When you feel Jesus is confronting you, are you running away or are you staying in that relationship with Him? You see, it's all too easy to run and hide, just like Adam and Eve did, they can run and they could hide, but they would always be found. In the same way, we will always be uncovered by God. Sometimes the uncovering can be pretty scary. We don't want to reveal our real selves, but think about it, God already knows who we are, "the good, the bad and the ugly."

Instead of running from Jesus, what if we were to reveal more of ourselves to Him? What if we were to say —
Lord, despite all of my imperfections, here I am.
Despite my sinfulness, here I am.
Despite my vulnerabilities, here I am.
Despite my helplessness and insecurities, here I am.
Even, despite myself, here I am.

You see, if we ever want to be fed by Christ, if we ever want that deep longing in our soul to be filled then we must be able to stand toe to toe with Jesus and admit who we are. The more we run the more empty we will feel.

Blaise Pascal said, 'each human being is born into this world with a God-shaped vacuum inside. We all have an emptiness inside us that is shaped like God himself. Contrary to what the world says, nothing else will fill it adequately. No accomplishment, relationship, wealth, or status will ultimately satisfy us because the shape of our hunger is the shape of God. This woman was thirsty in a way that she did not understand. That was what Jesus had been talking about all along: "I can give you life itself. If you knew who was speaking, if you



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knew the gift of God, you would ask to have your heart's longing, your spiritual deprivation met, and he would meet it for you."

How about you? How are you going to fill that emptiness in your soul? You have 2 choices, come to Jesus and bare your soul or you can run. The decision is yours.



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