

## Opening Words

Jesus is making His way to Galilee. He travels through the province of Samaria and at a well near the village of Sychar enters a discussion with a woman that would reveal the depths of her heart and change her life forever.

### The Thirsty Woman – Part 1

A man lifted a ladle from a pitcher to pour himself a drink. But the ladle scraped the bottom of the jar and came up empty. “No water,” he said to the woman in the house. “Where is our water?”

“You used all of it last night to wash yourself.”

“Well, why haven’t you gotten more? You know that is your responsibility. Am I to die of thirst because you won’t do what you are supposed to do?”

“You know I never go to the well in the morning. I can’t stand the way the other women look at me or the things I know they say behind my back.”

“Is that any way to answer me, woman? Your insubordination is beginning to grate on me. No wonder you can’t stay married. How many times have you been married before? Three times? Four?”

“If you must know it’s been five times, but I hardly think that matters now. Who’s counting? I’ll get you some water in a while. I can’t go when the others are there and it’s too hot right now. I’d like to wait just a little.”

The man lifted the jar and shoved it into her arms. “You will go now. I don’t care how hot it is. If this is the way you treated your husbands, no wonder they divorced you. You should be grateful that I have taken you in, so you don’t starve. Water ... now! I’m thirsty!”

“I’m thirsty, too” she said.

“Good, then maybe you will do something about it!”

She was thirsty. But she was talking about a different kind of thirst. Her thirst was far deeper than any water this world could satisfy. She was thirsty for love, for companionship, for joy, for meaning in life. Life had not turned out the way she had hoped when she was a little girl. The dreams of a happy family and enjoying the friendship of others was just that – a dream. Far too much had happened through the years to rescue her dream. Life had settled into an endurance trial – surviving one day after another – with little purpose, little joy, and no peace.

“Oh God,” she said. “Oh God of my fathers, please help me. Please speak to me. Please come to me. I don’t care how you do it. Just come.” She looked to the heavens, but they spoke no word.

She placed the large pitcher on her shoulder and headed for the well outside the village. She was sure no other woman would be there at this hour. How lonely she felt. Rejected by the men who had promised so much, who had pretended to love her. Enduring the man who gave her a roof over her head for the favors she provided.

Is this all life could afford her?

She lived in Sychar in the province of Samaria, and it had a rich tradition in which the people had taken much pride. It was in this area where the great patriarch of Israel, Jacob, gave his son Joseph a piece of land and there was also a well Jacob had dug so many centuries before. It was to this well, this ancient well, hallowed by Jacob, that the people of Sychar had gone for water as long as they could remember.

The day was hot, and as the woman made her way through the village, she was surprised by an argument coming from one of the food stalls. “What are Jewish men doing in a Samaritan village?” She counted them, “One, two, three, four, five. Why are five Jewish men buying food here in Samaria? At least they are drawing attention to themselves. Maybe people will leave me alone.”

She never got used to the cold stares and whispered insults of others who despised her. Not that everything everyone said was true. But who would believe her side of all the conflict with all the men she had had in her life? And now that she was living with a sixth man and not even married, there was nothing she could say that anyone would seriously consider.

At least there would be some solitude at the well. She looked forward to being alone where she could snatch some serenity from the peaceful surroundings.

As she approached, she noticed someone was there, a man, and by his dress, a Jewish man. Another Jewish man? “Oh Lord. What does he want? What is he doing here? We’re being overrun by Jewish men today! It doesn’t matter. He’s a man. I’m a woman. He’s a Jew. I’m a Samaritan. – there won’t be any conversation with him. Just as well, those Jewish men believe we Samaritan women are unclean from the cradle!” She scoffed. “What nonsense! Men!”

The woman set her pitcher down. She began to draw water from the depths when the Jewish man startled her. With a tender tone in his voice he said, “Please, may I have a drink?”

The woman stopped. She stared at the man. It had been a long time since a man had spoken with any kind of respect to her – “please?” She started to comment on that, but instead, with an edge in her voice as if by reflex she said, “You are a Jewish man. I am a woman, and a Samaritan. You people think we are unclean from birth. Why are you asking me for a drink?”

That settled that! He would not dare to speak to her again! But as she turned from him and continued lowering the water bucket into the well, he spoke again! As he spoke she looked and noticed he was smiling. There was a slight lift in his voice – not mocking– but a joyful mirth as if he did not have a care in the world and was full of peace and lightness of heart.

“Oh woman. If you only knew the gift that God has for you, and if you knew who was speaking with you now and who is asking you for a drink, you would be asking him for a drink and he would give you living water that would quench your deepest thirst.”

The woman stepped back and stared. He continued to smile, and she felt like he could see into the depths of her heart.

Had she not come to the well with a different kind of thirst. Yes, she had come because she and her household would need water. But the thirst inside her was far greater and it was to this need that he seemed to be speaking. How did he know? Why was he offering her living water, the kind of water the rabbis and teachers of the law said was required to wash people from their impurities and sins?

The thirsty woman knew this Jewish man was claiming special power because he talked of *living* water. What was this living water? He had no jar. He had no water of any kind she could see. What was he talking about? But she was not ready to bare the deep needs of her heart. She had done this so many times before to men and lost. Would he be any different? She decided to play along and said,

“Sir, you have nothing to draw water with from this well, and the well is deep. Where do you get your living water? Our father Jacob built this well. Are you claiming to be someone greater than he?”

By this time, the woman had finished bringing up the water from the depths of the well. She poured it into her jar. But she also had a small cup with her and she scooped some and handed it to Jesus. She said, “You know that Jacob gave us this well. He drank from it himself with his sons and with all their cattle. This is a special place. But your water, I’m curious - where do you get your living water?”

Jesus received the cup from the woman and drank deeply. When he had finished he looked into its emptiness and said, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again. They must return each day to get water that can never quench a person’s deepest thirst.”

He handed the cup back to her and said, “But whoever drinks the water that I give shall never thirst. The water that I give will become in the one who drinks a well of water that springs up to the age of all ages.”

“A well of water’ you say? You don’t just give water, but, a well of water?”

The woman knew Jesus was not talking about physical water, but she couldn’t help herself. Rather than think on her deepest needs her mind turned to her miserable living conditions and all the shame she had endured. How often had she trudged this path and endured the disgrace that others threw upon her? How nice it would be to find another source of water that freed her from dealing with these mean people!” And so, she said, “Well, then, sir, give me this water. I will then have my own well and never thirst again and never have to come all the way here to get water for my family.”

What a shrewd person this woman had become! She had to be this way because of all she had endured. But now, it threatened to rob her of what she needed most – living water to quench her deepest thirst.

She had assumed that this man would not speak to her at all. But he surprised her and spoke. When she had brushed him off with a rude comment, he was not offended and did not reply in kind but continued to speak with tenderness about a gift from God. Had she not just prayed for God to speak to her? He was talking about the very thing that she had prayed about! But did she dare reveal her secrets to this mysterious man?

And when she did pry, just a bit into who this man was, by comparing him to Jacob, his reply had stunned her – he talked about living, spiritual water from God that could quench the deepest cravings of her soul.

Why was she so hard? Why was she being so coy with this man who was so different from all others? Why did she not just admit her deepest need and ask him for help. Instead, she asked for a private well for her family! She was about to miss what she needed most.

But Jesus was not put off by her rudeness, her sarcasm, her evasions.

He looked upon the woman and peered deeply into her heart. He saw her struggle. It was time to open the wound.