

Opening Words

Spirit and Truth – God says we need both if we are to worship him.

02 The Thirsty Woman – Part 2

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.

“You want a well of water? OK, but first – go call your husband and come back with him.”

Husband? The statement pierced to the depth of the woman’s heart and to all her pain. She did not want to go there in this discussion. She wanted his living water and then to be left alone. Why did this man have to talk about this subject? He had no idea what she had been through. He was a man. Men did not understand these things. Men rarely wanted anything but the obvious. And who is to say that if she tried to explain what she had been through with her five husbands that he would understand. He would surely take the man’s side.

No, she would not go there with him. She would sidestep this as well and so she cleverly said, “I have no husband.”

The woman breathed a sigh of relief. She silently congratulated herself for escaping his revealing request. But her cleverness was no match for the One to whom she spoke, and Jesus said,

“You are right. When you say you have no husband, you are right. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you sleep with now is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

Oh ... things are a little more complicated than she first thought. And they are often a little more complicated with us.

The interaction between Jesus and the woman reveals two things about the stories we all have.

1. Our stories are complex and multi-layered. Think of her story.

She was a Samaritan in a predominately Jewish part of the world. – She was a minority.

She was a woman in a man’s culture. – completely dependent upon the provisions of men.

She still had to survive – she had to come to the well to draw water and she was looked down upon by others for she had slept with at least six men in the village. She was never invited to anything the other women enjoyed. She was an outcast in her own town.

All these sufferings intertwined like weeds and slowly choked the life from her heart. And all of us have the same – silent sufferings and shame that wound our soul which slowly loses its life.

2. Despite the many layers and complexities of our stories, we usually focus on our surface needs and do everything we can to avoid the destructive layers underneath.

She, only slowly and reluctantly, opens to Jesus and then shuts the door again. She knows Jesus has something she needs, but she foolishly brings the conversation back to her physical needs – she wants a private well of water. He places his finger on the area of her deepest hurt, but she pushes it away with a clever comment that she has no husband.

That, my friends, is the way it is with us. We have needs like food and water, jobs and a place to live, where to put the kids in school. And we also have deep issues like shame, the pain of prejudice, and loneliness, but we are very slow to bring those issues up and we continue to focus on what will get us by today.

But – though we can fool one another and hide from one another, we cannot hide them from the Lord.

We need to be honest with God. Why are we not honest with God? Why do we work so hard at sidestepping Him or avoiding Him or changing the subject? Shame, fear of rejection, too much pain, fear that if I am honest He is going to ask me to face something I can’t bear to look at.”

But my friends, until we are honest with God we are not going to identify our greatest needs and we are going to continue to focus on “getting water” while our greatest needs go unmet.

What were her greatest needs?

How about the need to be cherished? She had married and divorced five times. She had been used and discarded ... used and discarded ... used and discarded ... used and discarded ... used and discarded.

How does that make one feel? Like a piece of trash, like a plaything for a man’s pleasure rather than a whole person who has much to offer and one who longs for a relationship? What does that do to a person over time when they are treated this way?

Now, despite the way she had been treated, she is with another man and this time does not even bother with a ceremony. They are just living together. Apparently, she had lost hope of ever having any kind of happiness.

The fountainhead of her life, those deepest areas that were made for joy were blocked by the pain of her life experiences, and Jesus wanted to flood His water of life at the place in her thirsty soul to unblock the dam that was depriving her of life and slowly killing her.

One would think at this point the woman would have fallen on her face, weeping and said, “you are right. You are right. I have had so many problems and disappointments, and I am a sinner. Please have mercy on me and help me.”

And while that happens with some, it doesn’t happen with others because some people are just hard cases. People’s stories and their pain is complex and multi-layered. This woman was one of these hard cases and she said,

“Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, Mt. Gerizim, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

Can you believe it! The woman has just had her heart exposed, the deepest needs of her life revealed, and she tries to sidestep them with a theological issue!

The Samaritans believed the place to worship was Mt. Gerizim. They believed in the five books of the Law of Moses and in those books, there is a statement that God’s people were to build an altar to the Lord on Mt. Gerizim near the city of Shechem in the area that became known as Samaria.

The exact origin of the Samaritans is not conclusively known, but what we know today is that they most likely were a remnant of Jews from the northern kingdom of Israel who had survived the Assyrian conquest in 722 BC. Many centuries later, when Ezra and Nehemiah were enacting their reforms in the little kingdom of Judah to the south, some of the Jewish priests were expelled from the Temple and made their way north to this place where these people lived. They eventually built a rival temple to the one in Jerusalem and through the centuries developed the conviction that the Temple in Jerusalem was led by a group of wicked priests and that their practices at their Temple on Mt. Gerizim were pure before God.

Hatred intensified between the Jews and Samaritans. In 128 BC a group of Jewish warriors attacked the Samaritans and destroyed the temple on Mt. Gerizim. In the year, AD 6 or 7, a group of Samaritan men dressed up like Jewish priests, hid bones of dead people in their garments, went into the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and scattered them about the Temple grounds to defile the Temple. One wonders if they laughed at this prank all the way back to Samaria! But it was much more than a prank, to a Jew no greater insult could be leveled than to desecrate the holy temple of God.

Back and forth it went between Jews and Samaritans. Who was right? How could one follow God with certainty? How could she follow God with certainty? How could she make her life right even if she wanted when there were so many different ideas about how to approach God?

And so, she asks, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet (for who but a prophet could see into her life with such clarity and reveal her sin). Please tell me who is right? Is it our Samaritan fathers who have sought to hold fast to the Law of Moses and say that we must worship on Mt. Gerizim or is it you Jews who say we must worship in Jerusalem. Even if it were possible to get my life right with God, I wouldn’t know where to go.”

And when Jesus replies to her, he gives an answer that would set her free and set all others free who face such dilemmas. He said,

"Believe me, woman, a time is coming and has even now started, when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain in Samaria nor in Jerusalem. I must set the record straight - you Samaritans do not worship properly. The true temple was not to be on Mt. Gerizim. Salvation does come from Israel. Yet, all that is now in the past. The time has now come when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. These are the worshipers God seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

The words were an earthquake for the woman’s heart. And they were an earthquake for the world. We must break down what Jesus said.

1. At one point in history Jerusalem was the place to worship God, not Mt. Gerizim. God had designated one city where his worship and where sacrifice would be offered – Jerusalem. Salvation came from Israel, not Samaria. And while the goal was to make worship world-wide for all people, all people still needed to know that there were right and wrong ways to approach God. The Samaritans had it wrong and needed to change some things.
2. But did you notice that Jesus did not dwell on this? He quickly focused on the goal of getting to the woman’s heart and he announced to her the joyous news that the time had now been inaugurated when it no longer mattered what city one worships in. This is our second point. True worship of the true God can happen anytime, anywhere.
3. Third, Jesus explained what true worship is about. It consists of two things: truth and spirit, and people needed to embrace both. Jesus said the true worshippers will worship God in spirit and in truth. Both are needed. The Jews did have the truth. The Samaritans did not. But the Jews did not have the right spirit. They didn’t need to destroy the temple in Samaria. They didn’t need to hate them. God was looking for people who had both truth and spirit. God was looking for people who were committed to the truth of His word but who also worshipped with the right heart – the right spirit.
4. Fourth, it teaches us what God really wants. He wants our heart and our worship. Jesus said, “Such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers.” The world was full of lies and

hatred, animosity between groups such as the Samaritans and Jews and false ideas like the ones the Samaritans had. But the time had now come to correct all errors of the mind with the truth and to heal the hatred of the heart with the forgiveness and the love of God. And such is the desire of God today as He seeks for people who will worship Him in spirit and in truth.

The conversation between Jesus and woman of Sychar has plunged into deep waters. He has put His finger on her deepest need and he has solved a perplexing religious issue of her day. What would she say to him and what would she do?