

SM008 – The Thirsty Woman I

You're listening to Stories of the Master.

The stories of Jesus have reached into the hearts of millions. They have changed people, families, and nations. Not all have loved the stories Jesus told. Not all have honored the life He lived. Some were angry with Him, the things He did and the things He said. Others were deeply moved and found hope. What will your response be?

Today on Stories of the Master – The Thirsty Woman – Part I and it is taken from the Gospel of John Chapter 4: 7-25. Today's story is the first of two stories on this famous and important part of your Bible. I hope you will follow along in your own Bible.

My name is Jonathan, and I will be your Storyteller and Teacher.

I'm so glad you're here. Gather your friends, come close and listen. It's time for the world to hear again the stories of the Master.

And now – The Thirsty Woman – Part 1

Part 1

She was thirsty and taking her large pitcher she headed for the well outside the village. She had made sure she would be at the well when the other women would not be there. She could not consider the other women her friends because of the life she had lived and still lived.

The village was 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 that the great patriarch of Israel, Jacob, gave his son Joseph a piece of land and there was also a well that Jacob had dug so many centuries before. It was to this well, this ancient well, hallowed by Jacob, that the people of the village of Sychar had gone for their water.

As the woman trod the familiar path to the well outside the village, she ignored the stares of others who despised her for her sin. She was used to it. Life had not turned out the way she had hoped when she was a little girl. The dreams of a happy family life and enjoying the friendship of others was just that – only a dream. Far too much had happened through the years to rescue her dream. Life had settled into an endurance trial – simply surviving one day after another – with little purpose, little joy, and no peace.

At least there would be some solitude at the well. She made sure that she went when others were not there. Every insult that could be said to her had been said. Now she looked forward to being alone at the well where she could snatch some serenity from the peaceful surroundings.

But as she approached she noticed someone was there, a man, and by his dress, a Jewish man. "I wonder," she thought, "if he is connected with the other Jewish men she had passed in the village who were buying food?" It didn't matter. He was a man and she was a woman – there would be little if any conversation and besides, he was a Jew and she was a Samaritan and a Jewish man would have no

dealings with a Samaritan woman. Did not the Jews believe that Samaritan women were unclean from the cradle?

The woman came to the well and set her pitcher down. She started to draw water from the depths when the Jewish man said, "Give me a drink."

The woman immediately stopped. She stared at the man and said, "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?"

And Jesus said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is who is asking you for a drink you would have asked Him for a drink and he would give you living water."

Jesus always and quickly comes right to the point. The woman had come to the well because she was thirsty and she and her household would need water for their daily activities. But the thirst inside the woman's soul was far greater and it was to this need that Jesus was speaking. She needed living water and only He could grant this to her.

The thirsty woman knew that this Jewish man was claiming some kind of special power. What was this living water that he was talking about? He had no jar. He had no water of any kind she could see. What was he talking about? She decided to play along and said,

"Sir, you have nothing to draw water with from this well, and the well is deep. Where then do you get this living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob are you? You know that he gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and with all their cattle? This is a special place. Where do you get your living water?"

And Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water from Jacob's well will thirst again and they will have to come back again and again to get water that can never completely quench man's thirst. But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst again. The water that I give will become in the one who drinks a well of water that springs up to eternal life."

The woman looked at Jesus and thought about her life. How often had she trudged this path and endured the shame that others threw upon her for her lifestyle? How nice it would be to find another source of water that would forever quench her thirst and those with her. She would love to have this water! And so she said,

"Sir, give me this water so that I will never thirst again and not have to come all the way here to this village well to get water for my family."

Can we stop the story here for a moment? I have been retelling you this famous story taken from John's Gospel Chapter 4. I hope you have been following with me in the text as we have sought to make it come alive by entering into the thoughts of Jesus and the woman and by including details from our knowledge of ancient history and culture.

But I would you to imagine with me for a few moments that the Gospel of John doesn't exist and therefore this story doesn't exist. And imagine with me that you and I are on an archaeological expedition in the Middle East and we make a stupendous discovery. We discover a manuscript that has this story but the story ends right here where the woman asks Jesus for His water.

What would your impression be of this story? I know what I would think. I would think that Jesus was having a positive impact with this woman. I would think that Jesus has made great progress with her in helping her to understand her deep spiritual need.

Look at what he has done so far. He has already overcome a social barrier – a man talking with a woman in public. He has already overcome a cultural barrier – a Jew is having a conversation with a Samaritan. And then He wisely turns the conversation from physical water to spiritual water and when the woman hears what he says, she replies that she wants this living water of which Jesus speaks.

It all sounds so good. If you and I had an encounter like this with someone we might go back to our friends and say, "Hey, God has really given me an open door with this person and she seems very interested in what I have to say."

But we would be so wrong. And so let's put our imagination aside and get back to what happened. We have more than this fragment. We have the rest of the story in the Gospel of John. And we will see what is really going on in the heart of this woman right after our break.

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." And He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

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 but why did Jesus have to talk about this subject. He had no idea what she had been through. She thought quickly. How could she avoid this? And she cleverly said, "I have no husband."

Who knows, the woman may have breathed a sigh of relief because what she said was true and perhaps it was enough to divert Jesus from probing further into her private life. 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. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

Oh ... things are a little more complicated than we first thought. Now we see that she doesn't really want Christ and what He offers, but she just wants a convenience to make her difficult life easier while she continues in her destructive lifestyle.

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

1. People's 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. – She was completely dependent upon the provisions of men.

She still had to live – she had to come to the well to draw water and she was probably looked down upon by others for she had slept with at least six men in the village. She probably was never invited over for a quilting party, or a baby shower, or a lady’s tea. She was isolated.

The interaction between Jesus and the woman reveals a second truth about the stories we all have.

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

So when she says, “give me this water,” she isn’t asking for spiritual water, for a relationship with the living God. She wants her immediate, physical, felt needs met.

And, my friends that is the way it is with most people in the world. People have surface needs like food and water, jobs and a place to live, where to put the kids in school. And they also have deep issues like shame, the pain of prejudice, and loneliness, but they are very reluctant to bring those issues up and they continue to focus on their surface, felt needs – what will get them by today.

People can fool us and hide things from us, but they cannot hide them from the Lord and when we come back, we will see what happened next in the conversation between Jesus and the thirsty woman.

Interlude

Today’s story is taken from John 4 and I hope you will read the story for yourself in your Bible. If you do not have a Bible, we invite you to our Resources page on our website where you can obtain one for your own reading. Our website address is www.storiesofthemaster.com

Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, Speak where we desire to retell the Story of Jesus and the stories He told to the whole world. As you listen to these stories, it is our hope that you will want to learn more about this man Jesus, His stories, His life, and what He came to do. And as you listen, we also hope you will want to learn more about all that we offer at WGS. At Word of God, Speak we help you connect to advance change in your life, build a biblical worldview, and to connect to the Story of God.

We hope you will write to us at Stories of the Master at PO Box 90047 in SA TX 78209 in the U.S. to learn more about this ministry.

We also invite you to take advantage of the several resources we have to help you in your discovery of Jesus, including a CD of today’s story to listen to it again and to share it with a friend. And our Bible studies will help you to go in greater depth and receive the touch of Jesus in your life. You can find it all on our website at storiesofthemaster.com.

Jesus and a woman from the village of Sychar have engaged in a conversation about water. She is thinking about physical water. He is thinking of the greater need in her life – spiritual water. Let's get back to our story and see how what happens next.

Part 2

The woman said to Jesus, "Sir, give me this water..." but Jesus is not fooled. And he moves beyond her immediate need of water and even deeper than her social problems of being a woman in a man's world and a Samaritan in a Jewish culture and goes right for the deepest need in her life. He says,

"Go, call your husband and come back" knowing that the man she is living with is not her husband and she is in sin.

But the woman tries to sidestep the issue and she tells Jesus a half truth. "I have no husband."

And Jesus, for a moment, plays her game and says, "You are right. You have no husband." And again the woman breathes a sigh of relief knowing that she escaped this man who is making her very uncomfortable, but this relief is short-lived because Jesus then moves in for the kill.

"Woman, you have had five husbands and the man you are sleeping with now isn't your husband."

We really need to be honest with God, don't we? 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 do something I can't afford to do." I'm sure we could all come up with quite a list of reasons why we try to avoid Him.

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, we are going to continue to focus on convenient surface things while our greatest needs go unmet.

What were her greatest needs?

How about – the need to be cherished – she had married and divorced 5 times. She had been used and discarded. She had been 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 physical object 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?

And now, in spite of the way she had been treated, she is with another man and this time didn't even bother with a ceremony. They were 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 up by the pain of her life experiences, and Jesus wanted to get His water of life down to this place in her thirsty soul and to unblock the dam that was depriving her of life and killing her.

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

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

"Sir, I can 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." 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 on Mt. Gerizim. They believed in the first 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 a remnant of faithful 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 for centuries 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). Sir, I see that you are a prophet, so 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 hold fast to the Law of Moses and say that we must worship in Jerusalem. Even if I wanted 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 when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Let's break down what Jesus said:

1. A time was coming and had even then started when it would no longer matter what city one worshipped in. That's comforting to know in this day when people live all around the globe, to know that the worship of the true God can take place anywhere!
2. Jesus did correct the woman. Mt. Gerizim was not the place that God originally designed for His people to worship. Before worship could go worldwide, God designated one city where His worship and where sacrifices would be offered – Jerusalem and not Mt. Gerizim. Salvation came from the Jewish people and not from the Samaritans. And this does show us that while Jesus' goal was to make the worship of God a worldwide experience for all people, all people still needed to know that there were wrong ways of approaching God and right ways of approaching God. The Samaritans had it wrong and needed to change some things. But Jesus did not dwell on this for he quickly refocused on the goal of getting to the woman's heart.
3. But third, Jesus shows us that worship consisted of two elements. It consisted of truth and spirit and people needed to embrace both. Jesus said the true worshippers will worship God in spirit and in truth. Both were 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. As Jesus said, "Such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers." The world was full of lies and hatred, animosity between peoples 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?

And for this, we have to wait for the next episode of Stories of the Master.

Ending

I hate to end today's story here, but we must. We have entered into a conversation Jesus had with the woman of Sychar at a well. She was a thirsty woman but the thirst in her soul far exceeded the thirst of her body and she was learning that the man to whom she spoke might have what she had longed for all her life.

How about you? Are you thirsty? Why not drink from the water that Jesus offers? Why not enter into a conversation with Him, tell Him all your problems and let Him bring healing, forgiveness, and life to your deepest needs.

If you do this, write to us and tell us what He has done for you.

Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, Speak where it is our desire to take this story and the other stories of Jesus to a world that desperately needs to hear the stories of the master. You can join us in this great mission by praying for us and by sending your tax-deductible gifts to WGS at PO Box 90047 in SA, TX 78209 or donate using our web site StoriesoftheMaster.com

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My name is Jonathan Williams and next week we will continue the story of the thirsty woman. Until then, may the Master Himself bless you, and we look forward to you joining us for another edition of Stories of the Master.