

**Introduction:**

On a hot day, there's nothing like a cold refreshing glass of water. It's just what we need. In the same way Jesus, who is described as having the water of life, can quench our spiritual thirsting. But first things first, someone must offer us a drink.

Today, we'll take a look at one of the most illuminating stories from the Bible in John chapter 4 – the woman at the well.

When it comes to the Bible, I think that the greatest appeal is its constant relevance. It doesn't need to be 'made' relevant. It is relevant. More than any other book I've read, this book continues to speak to my needs and my situations. More than any other publication, newspaper story, or online article. And so over my years, I have enjoyed instructing people from the book that never fails. Whenever I preach, I always have three objectives: accuracy, clarity, and practicality. In that order too. And with a book like the Bible, you just can't lose. Like one man said, "The Bible scratches you where you itch." If your itch is loneliness, it scratches you with companionship and encouragement. If you sense your sinfulness and guilt, it shows you that there is forgiveness available. This morning, if you have a need for instruction in witnessing or sharing the gospel with the lost, it scratches you there.

Chapter 4 of John is perhaps the best biblical material on the subject of soul-winning – better than any other book available. It gives you a technique that is flawless. One that works. In fact, it is so good because it is Jesus who is doing the witnessing, leading by example. When you read this chapter, you go away with the sense that it works – "yes, I will apply that in my evangelism." At least, that's what it should do.

**THE SETTING (vv.1-6)**

So in the first two verses, we find the Pharisees getting news of Jesus' rising popularity. So Jesus takes His disciples and leaves Judea for Galilee.

What is surprising here is that He passes through Samaria. It's surprising because a Jew normally would do that because there was so much ethnic conflict between them. From centuries back there was this feeling that the Samaritans had intermingled with the Jews and had polluted their religion and way of life. Jews had such a hatred for these 'half-breeds' that when travelling from Jerusalem to Galilee, they would take the long route around Samaria.

So why didn't Jesus travel the long route, but instead went through? Well, I think that Jesus wanted His disciples to see that the gospel was to go through the world, not just the Jews. And just as importantly, see how the text in verse 4 says, 'He had to go through Samaria'? Jesus had to go here because there was going to be an encounter with a woman at the well that would be remembered throughout time.

So, the disciples were first sent off to the local 7-Eleven to get some food. While they went off, Jesus stopped and rested at a place called Jacob's well in the middle of the day, when the sun was beating down on Him. As His weary eyes waited and watched the horizon, His unsuspecting appointment arrives, carrying a water pot on her head.

## THE CONVERSATION (vv.7-26)

Women would normally come and draw water at the cooler hours of the day – usually morning or afternoon. It is interesting that this woman comes at noon, the hottest hour of the day. It may hint at her unfavourable reputation – and she comes at a time when there would be hardly anyone at the well.

We need to remember that during the time of Christ, the cultural sentiment for women was extremely low. The Pharisees taught that men should not speak to women in public. Commentator Leon Morris quotes the rabbinic attitude toward women: He that talks much with womankind brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the Law.” One of the Jewish prayers included the phrase, “Blessed art thou, O Lord.... who has not made me a woman.” In fact, some of the Pharisees were so rigid that they were called ‘the bruised and bleeding ones’, the reason being that they would refuse to look at a woman they passed on the street. They literally closed their eyes and bumped into walls and buildings. Now, I’ve bumped into things before, and I had my eyes open even! That’s how rigid this system was.

But now here comes this Samaritan woman to the well Jesus is at. He was not afraid to pass those silly manmade barriers and He probed right in. The more you study the life of Jesus, the more you’ll see His absolutely genuine love for people. I guarantee you that if we were living in that time, the great majority of us would have written her off. But not Jesus. And that’s the beauty of this story.

### A. The discussion

In this conversation, there are six appeals made by Jesus with the woman responding to each.

**The first appeal is to her kindness (v7).** Jesus not only looked but also talked to her. If you know anything about human nature, one of the best ways to break down a cool feeling with a stranger is to ask a favour. “Would you mind handing me that?” or “Can I help you with this?” That’s the approach He used – He appealed to her kindness. “Can I have a drink, please?” You’ll immediately see here defensive response in verse 9. She says, “What’s the deal? We don’t talk to each other!” But Jesus did not retaliate.

**He simply appealed to her curiosity (v10).** He emphasised the living part of it. Her response was sarcasm (vv11-12). She even brings up some side issue about the well. With anyone else, they would have been side-tracked with the debate about who actually owns the well. The enemy will always try to get you off the main issue with trivial debates. Don’t get side-tracked.

**So Jesus appeals to her desire (v13-14).** Her desire was physical water but her greater, though less obvious, desire was for living, spiritual water. Now she didn’t hear what Jesus said. She saw things only from the horizontal human viewpoint and misses the point entirely. She didn’t hear “eternal” for “in him”. She’s thinking purely physical water. She says, “Man, that walk to this well is a drag. I’d love to have this water that would spring up whenever I need it.” She didn’t get the spiritual aspect of what Jesus said. Have you experienced that before? You’re sharing about spiritual things but your listener just isn’t getting it? And so you need to be very careful to understand the perspective of the listener. We often assume more than we should. The average Australian has heard all sorts of things regarding the church, but they’ve may never have been clear on the issues of faith plus nothing in Jesus Christ. This at least has been my experience.

To this woman, what Jesus was saying was as foreign as Egyptian hieroglyphics. **So He appeals to her personal lifestyle (v16).** Jesus knew the promiscuous lifestyle of this woman, and Jesus brought up this embarrassing issue because her sinful life had to be confronted. She was an unbeliever and so of course she led an immoral lifestyle. In a way, Jesus places a full-length mirror in front of her, forcing her to take a good, hard look at herself. Like the sobering reflection that greets you when you first wake up, this woman's glimpse of herself makes her flush with embarrassment. Now, all of us have secrets that we jealously guard. We have all done things in our past which we don't want anyone to find out. Thank God that they are now under the blood and there is, therefore, now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. But let's face it – sometimes we live with that shattered sense of insecurity, "What if someone found out?" I praise God that He isn't like that, that's only with people, because God already knows our deepest and darkest deeds. Let me illustrate that with this story:

*Illustration: A couple went down to the coast and stopped for some chicken at KFC. They were going to enjoy it that evening along the beach. Somehow, by mistake, that KFC store had placed some of the money proceeds of the day into a chicken bag, and that bag had been given to the man by accident. So they got to the beach and opened up the bag, and there was something better than KFC in there – there was money! \$1200. So the man thought that it wasn't right to keep the money and he returned to the KFC. Meanwhile, the staff were in panic and phoned the police. When they saw that he returned the money, they were so excited. They said to call the police, call the radio, call the newspapers because there are still honest people around in the world. But the man says, "Please don't do that.... Because the woman I'm with is not my wife."*

Isn't it interesting how on the surface there is honesty, but underneath, there can be gross corruption?

**So Jesus then appeals to her conscience (vv17-18).** What impresses me is the fact that although Jesus exposed her sinful lifestyle, he did not condemn her. Now, He did not agree with that sort of lifestyle, but He did not stone her. He in fact commended her for telling the truth. It's interesting how she then responds with a controversial issue (vv19-20). In effect, this is like someone saying, "What about all the unsaved Pygmies of the world?", or "How can a good God allow suffering and evil?", or "Which Bible version is the truth – King James or NIV?" Or there might be other silly questions like, "Does God have a wife?" These are nothing more than simply distracting questions about religious peripherals. This is quite common – when someone is under conviction, they will squirt to other non-issues in an attempt to get off the issue. But Jesus is getting to the core of her problem.

**After this, Jesus appealed to her will (vv21-24).** He points out three things here: First, location is unimportant in eternity – the where (v21). Second, the object of worship is mega-important – the who (v22). Thirst, God seeks true worshippers – the how (v23). Her response is a common one – to delay. "Weeeell, I'll just wait until the Messiah comes, then I'll listen." The same thing happened with Felix and Paul. Felix said that that was enough and when it's convenient he'll send for Paul. Then two verses later it says, 'two years had passed.' You see, the sharpest dart of the enemy is delay, and she used it right here... "I'll get around to it."

## **B. The Declaration**

The passage has now built to a climax, hasn't it? Maybe some of you have sensed it. From the appeal to her kindness to the appeal to her will. Jesus has brought her to a point where she now crouches on the brink of total acceptance – waiting to make that leap of faith. An extremely critical moment where souls are won or lost. She listens with piqued interest for the revealing of this mysterious visitor's true identity. Then in verse 26 Jesus declares to her, "I am He."

## **THE REACTION (vv27-42)**

Just at that dramatic, cliff-hanging moment, guess who shows up with the hamburgers, coke and fries? The disciples. You ever had that happen to you? You are witnessing to a listener and right at the crucial moment when you appeal to their will, someone or something interrupts. Its almost as if its planned by the devil. The disciples were like, "Come on, Jesus. Yours is getting cold." Not only that, the disciples were absolutely shocked that He was with this woman.

### **A. Of the Samaritan woman (vv28-29)**

The woman leaves, without her water pot, and went into the city and told everyone about who she met. Please understand that for her to do this, she must have had a bold security about this man. As she was going back to the city, she probably thought about the whole event and concluded that she would tell everyone about Him. "This man could see right into my life, and He never condemned me once. Could this be the Messiah? Is this the Son of God?" So her actions tell us that she believed she had met the Messiah.

### **B. Of the Samaritans (vv40, 39-42)**

So the Samaritans went out to meet Jesus and we read that many believed in Him because of the woman's testimony. Who says that testimonies don't do much? Like a stone plopped into water, Jesus' words of life in this woman's heart rippled through the city. And now watch how the passage has built to a climax. She first knew Jesus simply as "a Jew", then as "Sir", then as "a prophet", then as "Messiah", and finally as "the Saviour of the world." Isn't that wonderful? There's a climax in this passage. They come from ignorance and unbelief to great belief.

### **C. Of the Disciples (vv31-38)**

Now let's go back to the disciples. What about them? They were hungry! They said, "Rabbi, eat!" He said that He has food that they know nothing about. They thought, "Where did you get it from? Has someone already fed you?" While the disciples were preoccupied with passing the salt and BBQ sauce, Jesus teaches them a vital lesson about another kind of food.

When Jesus said, "open your eyes and look at the harvest" one writer says that it was then that all these Samaritans could be seen making their way toward Jesus. A solitary seed was planted, and with the time it takes to eat lunch, an entire field of humanity becomes ripe for harvest for the kingdom of God.

He says to the disciples, and He says to us in verse 38, "I send you to reap." So, the question is why aren't we reaping?

1. We're turned off by externals. (Prejudices)
2. We're over-involved with the necessities of life. (Priorities)
3. We simply put it off. (Procrastination)
4. We never get specific regarding Jesus Christ. (Press for decision)

He has sent you to reap.

Just before we conclude, I want you to note this important observation. The Samaritan woman needed water. But the disciples, whose thirst had already been quenched by the river of life, needed food. A sinner's greatest need is the free gift of salvation. The greatest need of one who is saved is to understand and do the will of God (John 4:34).

## **Conclusion**

The water jar she had come to fill stood over there empty, but the heart she had not come to fill was now overflowing with living water. That's often the way it works. She never came expecting to get what she received that day. Earlier, Jesus had turned ordinary water into the most expensive of wines – now He takes the emptiest of lives and fills it full. And that's exactly what He still does even today. No matter how stagnant the water.... No matter how empty the pot. One sip of faith and He is able to satisfy everything our heart is truly craving for.

And I'll just finish by speaking to every heart listening today: Can you ever remember a time when you said, "Lord Jesus, come into my heart. I believe you died and rose for me. I want to be a child of God. I want to have eternal life. I need that right now"? If you have never made that decision to follow Jesus Christ, then friend you are lost. You're lost. You are no closer because you gave something in an offering, or because you attended a church service. You are no closer because your whole family is religious, nor if you do a good job of raising a family. Nor if you're a good student, or a good parent, or a good, honest, upstanding businessperson. Jesus offered the woman living water that never runs dry.... And He is offering that to you today too. Giving your heart to Jesus is a deeply personal matter, something just between you and Him, and I press you now at this moment.... Make that decision. Make it now. Right now.

And to the Christian I ask that searching question: Are you reaping? Are you reaping?