

Who is Jesus?

Messages from the Gospel of John

Message 6

The Divine Husband John 4:1-42

Desperate Desires

Have you ever *really* wanted something? Wanted it so bad you would almost be willing to do anything to get it? How about water? Have you ever been so thirsty you would be willing to steal to get a drink? Have you ever craved sex or love so badly you would be willing to commit sexual sin to satisfy your desires? No? Well today's story is about people with overwhelming desires – people who are in situations that push some men and women to desperate measures to satisfy their cravings. Let's look at this story of the woman at the well to see how Jesus deals with such urges.

Jesus and the Woman

Our story begins with Jesus on the run – sort of. There is no evidence of panic in Jesus, but it's clear that He has stirred up so much commotion in Judea that He has to leave town. The obvious place to go is Galilee, where His hometown is and where He had found His twelve disciples. Between Judea and Galilee is a region called Samaria. Jews hated Samaria, so much so that they refused to travel through the land. Instead they made a long detour around Samaria. But verse four tells us that Jesus needed to go through Samaria. This immediately tips us off that something dramatic is going to happen there.

Travel in those days (except for the wealthy) consisted of walking mile after mile in the heat and dust of dirt roads. There were no rest stops, restaurants, or convenience stores to refresh the travelers, so the journey could become quite unpleasant. Jesus and his disciples tumbled into Sychar, and while the others went looking for food, Jesus collapsed by the well. I am sure Jesus was parched with thirst. There he was, sitting by a wonderful supply of water, but without a bucket to draw up the water. It must have been a maddening situation. Whenever I read this passage I think of my trip from Casablanca to Marachesh in Morocco. It was over 100°. We rode for three hours in a bus full of people with half of the windows closed. When we arrived in Marachesh, we were practically mad with thirst. In Jesus' case, however, help soon arrived.

But look at who arrived to help! Most people would have been more dismayed at Jesus' deliverer than the thirst. First, it was a Samaritan. As we said earlier, the Jews and Samaritans did not get along. Not to put too fine a point on it, they hated each other. This animosity went back centuries before, and was nursed by each succeeding generation. Samaria occupied the best part of what was once the northern kingdom of Israel. Over time Israel grew more and more sinful. They worshiped idols and oppressed the poor. God sent prophets to warn of judgment, but they were rejected. Finally God sent the Assyrians who utterly destroyed Israel. Assyrian foreign policy was to reshuffle the ethnic groups in their empire, thinking that if each conquered people were scattered all over, they would be unable to rebel. So most of the Israelites were moved elsewhere, while others peoples were settled in the land of Israel. Before long the people intermarried, which God had strictly forbidden the Israelites to do. The ethnic mixing was a vivid testimony to the open sinfulness of these people.

Furthermore, the mixed population also mixed religions. They worshiped the gods of the newly settled peoples, but also the God of Israel. They did this on the theory that since Israel's God had jurisdiction here, they must pacify Him by worshipping Him, too. To facilitate worship of God, they built a temple on Mount Gerizim. This also was strictly forbidden in God's law. Only one worship site was permitted, and

that was the temple in Jerusalem. So not only did they practice a corrupt form of religion, they also did this openly.

By all objective criteria the Samaritan people had miserably departed from following God – and for this they were legitimately faulted. But as the centuries progressed the Jews fostered a hatred of the Samaritans that just as wrong as the Samaritans' sin. Surely the ridiculous practice of making an enormous detour around Samaria so they would not even have to walk on their soil shows how much the Jews hated these people. Many people these days love to use this passage to criticize racism. Certainly the Jews were racist, and Jesus blows their cover in this story. But we must also note that the Jews' criticisms were valid. The problem was not in rejecting the Samaritan religion. It was in hating the people. Here Jesus deals a crushing blow both to racists and to those who preach tolerance. Jesus did not accept this woman's religion, but He did not hate her either. Jesus accepted the woman while condemning her religion.

Jesus made a bold move by asking a despised Samaritan for a drink, but it was compounded by the fact that this person was a woman. Women were not given much respect in the ancient world. Jewish women had far fewer social rights and privileges than men, but their situation was much better than their counterparts in Greece and Rome. A Roman man had power of life and death over his family, including his wife. A Jewish man could not put his wife to death, but he could divorce her for any reason. A woman, on the other hand, could divorce her husband only with great difficulty. Women were considered incapable of learning the Torah, the law of God – so men never wasted their time discussing issues with women. In fact, they did not interact much with women at all. And certainly no self-respecting Jewish man would talk to a Samaritan woman – not even if he were very thirsty.

Furthermore, this was not a nice woman. The first clue to this is that she was at the well in the middle of the day. This was the hottest part of the day, and no one would fetch water then. The women ordinarily got their water early in the morning and in the evening when it was cooler. Clearly this woman is some sort of social outcast. What sort becomes evident as we read on. She is a serial fornicator.

Everything about this situation is tailor-made to shock the sensibilities of decent people. No respectable man, and *certainly* no rabbi would *ever* talk to a Samaritan, nor to a woman in public, and *never* to a fornicator. Jesus has violated all norms of decency here. And sure enough, when Jesus' disciples return, they are so shocked they are left speechless. Why? Why would Jesus behave so terribly? And why was it *necessary* for Jesus to go through Samaria? Our answer is in verse 35. The fields are ready for harvest. Samaria is ripe to believe in the Messiah. They may have a corrupt religion, some may be living immoral lives, they may not be nice people, but they are looking for a Messiah. When I was growing up on the farm, our lives were governed by the weather and the crops. When the crops were ripe, you had to harvest them immediately. If you failed to get in the grain as soon as it was ripe, the next rain would mash it to the ground and ruin it. If you harvested it too soon, it would be damp and rot. Because of their hatred for the Samaritan, the Jews could not see that Samaria was ripe for the gospel. But Jesus saw it. And Jesus was willing to risk His reputation to go mingle with filthy Samaritans to save them.

It is not difficult to see the application to us. First, Jesus loves sinners. Whoever you are, Jesus loves you. You may be sexually immoral. You may have a drug habit. Perhaps you routinely cheat on your homework and exams. Perhaps you lie to your parents and have never been to church since you came to Lehigh. Even if you secretly hate black people and treat women like trash – no matter how bad you are, Jesus loves you. Jesus came for people like you. You are slowly killing yourself. Eventually your drugs or booze or sex will no longer satisfy and you will be like this woman – hopping from man to man, idol to idol desperately trying to find satisfaction, but its nowhere to be found. Jesus is the only source of true satisfac-

tion. Jesus fulfills those deep longings that propel you to destruction, ultimately to hell. Jesus is the only way to be rescued from yourself and become a real man or woman. And even though you have spent your past 20-some years rejecting His love, Jesus loves you still. Do not resist His love. Come to Jesus. Abandon your cheap thrills and let Jesus take over your life.

Another application here is that Jesus did not let social prejudices get in the way of proclaiming the gospel to needy people. Jesus came for all people, the bad and the dangerous as well as the nice and polite. If we are followers of Jesus, we also will take the gospel to the needy. Most of us are concerned about the spiritual welfare of our friends. This is commendable. But Jesus said elsewhere even thieves love each other. Loving your friends proves nothing. It makes you no better than a thief. If you would be a follower of Jesus, you will love the unlovely. You will leave the comfort of your own friends and cross the hall or classroom or lunch room to extend a welcome to the outcast, the drunken frat guy, the profane soccer player, the drug user, the sex addict, the unloved. These are the ones who need Jesus, and sometimes these are the ones who are ripe to believe. Most of you are not called to be evangelists, but you are called to witness to those around you. Stop selecting the nice people. Look around you for the bad and dangerous people. Pray for God's grace and go offer friendship to them.

Now some of you will point out that often the people who are not in our nice religious circle do not *want* to hear from us. I know. This woman did not want to hear from Jesus either. Not at first. At first she tried to rebuff him based on their mutual prejudices. She said, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (John 4:9). At this point Jesus could have concluded that He was imposing Himself on her, mumbled an apology, and moved on. But Jesus did not allow her to control the encounter. Jesus hung in there. Even when she insulted Him in verse 12 and evaded His question in verse 19, Jesus continued to pursue her. But also notice that Jesus was not rude. Some people are evangelistically zealous, but are insensitive and rude in the process. Their attitude seems to be, "I know what you need to hear, so shut up and listen to me." But Jesus was not like this at all. Jesus listened very carefully to her and carried on an interesting, normal-sounding conversation. And as they talked, the woman was drawn in. As she saw Jesus' love, she became fascinated and engaged in the conversation. In the end she ran off and rounded up the whole village to come hear Jesus. This might sound a little harsh, but it is the absolute truth: our timidity about engaging people in conversation about Jesus is usually just an expression of our lack of love for them. There are many factors at work, but in the end, many of us just do not care. Let us pray, and pray fervently, for God to soften our evil hearts and move us with compassion on the lost.

But how are we to gain a loving heart for the lost? This leads us to a third application. We will never have a deep love for others as long as we persist in thinking we are better than they. This is the problem with some of you. You are impressed with yourselves. I know what you think. You are pleased with your diligence and discipline, proud of your accomplishments, and impressed with your theological insight. And by the world's standards you are impressive. Sometimes I brag about you to my own friends and colleagues. But before Jesus – well, what did Paul say in Philippians? In the face of Jesus, your own positive qualities are as pleasant as manure, as fragrant as dung. In other words, compared to Jesus, you aren't worth squat. Compared to the sinless holiness God demands, you are not measurably better than the worst Hitler in history. Now the message here is that God loves you anyway. But if you cannot see the inherent repulsiveness of your sin, you will never know the fulness of God's love. And you will never be able to love others. Brothers and sisters, let's put this simply. You stink, but God thinks you are wonderful. Now quit dwelling on the sins of other people and invite those other stinkers into the party with Jesus.

The Water

But there is more to this story. The whole event takes place around a well, and the text calls

attention to the fact that it was Jacob's well. The conversation opened with Jesus' request for a drink and quickly moved on to a discussion of water. Jesus promised the woman water that would permanently relieve her thirst. In fact, the water Jesus offered would be a spring of water within her. This spring of water would not only quench her thirst, it would give her everlasting life.

Water is so essential to life, it is often used as a symbol for life itself. Isaiah uses water this way.

Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid;
'For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.'
Therefore with joy you will draw water From the wells of salvation. Isaiah 12:2-3

Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters;
And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat.
Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.
Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance.
Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live;
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you – The sure mercies of David. Isaiah 55:1-3

Psalms 42 opens using water as a symbol for God Himself.

As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul for You, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?

If we were to read this story and think that Jesus is merely offering a better life, we would be seriously mistaken. Jesus is offering that living water which is salvation from sin and death. The water Jesus gives is God Himself. That spring of water welling up inside is the presence of God who energizes with spiritual life. As we have seen before in John, life itself is found only in Jesus.

The Bridegroom

But we still have not dealt with the well. Why would John call our attention to Jacob and the well? Can it be because Jacob found his wife at a well? As did Isaac and Moses. And what appears to be the controlling desire in this woman? Is it not for a husband? She certainly has devoted her life to seeking one. She has had five husbands already and is now on her sixth. So now we see that the root need in this woman is a husband. She has spent her whole life seeking a husband, but all her attempts have been failures. What she really needs is a true husband – not some man who will use her for his own pleasure, but a man who will love her and enable her to become a fruitful daughter of Eve. And now enters Jesus, who against all expectation "needed to go through Samaria". Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaac – the beloved only son who was offered as a sacrificial lamb. Jesus is the real Jacob, the true Israel of God, a prince who fought against his enemies until victory. Jesus is the greater Moses, who is not a servant in the house of God, but the Son over his own house. Jesus is the bridegroom who came to the well seeking a bride. When He arrived, He found that His bride was a revolting mess, but He loved Her anyway.

Who is Jesus' wife? Not the woman at the well – although this story points us to the answer. John provided the answer in the Revelation of Jesus. In Chapter 19 we read,

After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God!"² "For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her."³ Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!"⁴ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!"⁵ Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!"⁶ And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"⁷ "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."⁸ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.⁹ Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." (Revelation 19:1-9)

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. (Revelation 21:1-3)

The church is Jesus' bride. Jesus came for His people. When He came, they were miserable sinners, but He loved them and embraced them. They were looking for love in idols and sex and booze and careers – even in many good things which they worshiped instead of their heavenly Father. All these false gods failed them, but Jesus never fails. This woman at the well spent her whole life looking for fulfillment. Finally she found rest in Christ.

You Will Find Rest in Christ

- He will quench your thirst
- He will be your husband
- He will satisfy your needs for intimacy

You – must believe

C. David Green
Lehigh University
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Deuteronomy 7:1-4 "When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you,² "and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them."³ "Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son."⁴ "For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.

Deuteronomy 12:10-14 But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, ¹¹ "then there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the LORD. ¹² "And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you. ¹³ "Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see; ¹⁴ "but in the place which the LORD chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.