

Living Water

There are seven billion people in the world today. About 32% of them profess to be Christians in one way or another, but only 7.9% of the world population is thought to be evangelical, that is, true believers in the unique salvation offered in Jesus Christ according to the word of God. This causes us great concern, and with a sense of urgency we look at the 16,000 plus ethnolinguistic groups in the world. Realizing that over 6,000 of them do not have a vibrant Christian witness in their own ethnolinguistic group, we see that we have, still, a great mission to perform. At the same time, we often find ourselves most challenged by the unbelievers who are all around us here in Memphis. We often hear folks say about their lapsed Roman Catholic neighbor or their liberal Protestant or Jewish neighbor, "Well, who am I to talk to them about religion?" or "They would be offended if I suggested they needed salvation!" or "They believe that they are already saved" or "They really don't want what Christianity has to offer."

Our text today addresses this issue beautifully.

John 4:1-15

1 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John **2** (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), **3** he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. **4** And he had to pass through Samaria. **5** So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. **6** Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." **8** (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) **9** The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) **10** Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." **11** The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" **12** Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." **13** Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, **14** but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." **15** The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

Jesus has completed his discourse with Nicodemus, a prestigious Pharisee in Jerusalem, and now proceeds to a strange country. From him, we learn many important lessons about Gospel life.

- I. We must cross very human barrier for the sake of the Gospel (vv. 1-9).
 Notice in verses 1-3 that God's providence is already at work. Jesus believes it necessary to leave Judea to make his way to Galilee. In verse 4, however, we have a very interesting statement that "he *had* to pass through Samaria" (italics added). This suggests that there was a divine necessity for Jesus to go through Samaria, rather than, as most Galileans in his day did, go around Samaria. Not only did he go through Samaria but he broke all social conventions by talking not only to a Samaritan, but also to a Samaritan *woman*. Even the woman herself recognizes the impropriety of what Jesus has just done: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" Jesus has traversed two ironclad categories in order to have a conversation with this person. As we know, the Jews from Judea hated the Samaritans, and vice versa, due to a long history of discord and conflict. Furthermore, it was inappropriate both in Samaria and in Judea for a man to address a woman who is not a member of his own family. Jesus simply says to her, "Give me a drink," because he is crossing every human barrier for the sake of the Gospel.

- II. When we cross human barriers, we must share the Gospel (vv. 10-12).
 So often we pride ourselves in making a diverse group of friends, and, yet, we often fail to evangelize any of them. Jesus does not make that mistake. In verse 10, he makes a stupendous statement that if she had known the gift of God and who is speaking to her, she would have asked him and he would have given her living water. The key is “living water.” In the Old Testament it is clear that this living water is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah 44:3, Isaiah says, “For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring and my blessing on your descendants.” In Ezekiel 47, God foretells the great day of the Lord when a river of living water will flow from the temple in Jerusalem in all directions: “And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.” (Ezekiel 47:12). In answer to Jesus’ statement, the Samaritan woman offers two objections: one practical and one religious. On the one hand, she says Jesus has no instrument with him to draw water, and on the other hand, she asks if Jesus thinks he is greater than “our father Jacob,” who dug this well. We often get these kinds of objections as well from those who have already made some religious commitments, but notice what Jesus does.
- III. When we share the Gospel, we must carefully explain and defend it (vv. 13-15).
 In answer to her objections, Jesus compares the blessings of the Gospel with the very limited benefits of her current religious life. He says in verse 13 that the water she drinks will simply make her thirsty again. This is true with every thing we seek to satisfy us — money, love, sex, power, prestige, traveling experiences, etc. The satisfaction derived from these things is only temporary and we find ourselves wanting more and more. But in verse 14, Jesus says that the Gospel provides an enduring satisfaction for the one who drinks of this living water “will never be thirsty forever.” Furthermore, Jesus claims that this living water will well up within the person so they have an inexhaustible resource for their deepest satisfaction.

The woman responds simply asking that Jesus would give her this water. Isn’t it amazing that the dialogue began with Jesus asking for a drink and it ends here with her asking him for a drink. This is the beginning of real discipleship. She is obviously confused (clearly seen in the second half of verse 15), but Jesus takes her at her superficial best and works with her, as we shall see in subsequent weeks.

Discussion Questions

1. What is it about the Gospel that demands that it traverse every human barrier in culture, tradition, religion, and manners?
2. What are the barriers we most commonly face in our daily experience? What keeps us from crossing those barriers?
3. What do you notice in verse 10 about Jesus’ Gospel presentation to the Samaritan woman?

4. Why did the Samaritan woman not understand Jesus? What were her objections to his Gospel presentation? What are the most common objections to your Gospel presentation that you hear?
5. How did Jesus compare her life to the Gospel life he was offering her? What are the most common points of comparison with the local religious options that we need to be prepared to address?

Going Deeper

1. What barriers do you need to cross in order to evangelize your friends?
2. What religious viewpoints do you need to study in order to present the Gospel intelligently to your friends?