

Water for the Way: Part Three

John 4:4-42

1. The old & new Way.

2. The old & new Water.

3. The old (or the) new Worship.

love.learn.live.

westvalleychurch.com



West Valley Church
03/12/23
Michael O'Neill

Water for the Way Week Three

This is our third Sunday in the season of Lent, and we are going through the daily devotional book called "Water for the Way," and I want to begin by reading the Bible passage that is in our reading for today. It's a bit of a long passage found in John's Gospel, chapter four, but you'll want to hear the story. Would you help me honor God's Word by standing with me as I read it?

Now he (Jesus) had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

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."

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

"I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "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."

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

"Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, 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 the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.” (John 4:4-42, niv)

This, my friends, is God’s Word for God’s people. Thanks be to God! Thank you for standing.

That is an amazing story of the encounter that Jesus had with a Samaritan woman that turned out to be life changing not only for her, but for most in her entire community. As in all of John’s Gospel, there is powerful truth below the surface of this story.

When Jesus and his disciples came to the town of Sychar where there was a well, it was midday. The Jewish day started at 6 AM and ended at 6 PM. John says that this was the sixth hour, which would make it noon, so the sun was at its driest and hottest. Jesus, being tired and thirsty from the journey, stopped at the well while his disciples went on ahead into a nearby city to find some food. That’s where Jesus meets up with the Samaritan woman, and it’s in this conversation that we first see the differences between...

1. The old & new *Way*

There was a particular way of doing faith that people had followed for centuries—especially when it came to the relationship between Jews and Samaritans.



Palestine was not more than 120 miles long from south to north. The southern area was Judea (where Jerusalem was), and at the far north was Galilee. In between was Samaria.

The shortest route from Judea to Galilee was to go right through Samaria. That trip would take about three days. But to the Jews the Samaritans were filthy illegals, so in order to steer clear of them, travelling Jews would turn east across the Jordan River, travel north until they were past Samaria, then turn west across the river into Galilee. That trip would take twice as long—six days—and yet that was the route the Jews would routinely take just to keep from having anything to do with Samaritans. The feelings were mutual; it would be unsafe for Jews too if they came across

Samaritans. But Jesus led his disciples to take the direct route right through Samaria. In verse 4 it says that Jesus *had* to go through Samaria. That wasn't because he wanted to make the trip shorter; it was because there was something he *had* to do. Going through Samaria was an important part of his mission. And it started with meeting this woman.

Now, the old way was that Jews didn't associate with or even speak to Samaritans. Let me try to briefly explain the reason for the 750 years of animosity between them. It started when the Assyrians invaded the ten tribes of Jews living in the northern kingdom of Samaria and defeated them. Up until that time, those living in Samaria were Jews. But the Assyrians sent almost all of the Jews to another country as slaves, and Assyrians were brought in to repopulate the area. There were still some Jews left there, and those who were left did what Jewish legalism said they were not supposed to do—they intermarried with non-Jews. That was an unforgiveable crime; it meant that they lost their racial purity. Even to this very day in strict Jewish households, if a son or a daughter marries a non-Jew, the family carries out a funeral service for them—that person is dead in the eyes of orthodox Judaism. So those who were left in Samaria intermarried with non-Jews, and those who were deported never returned—they are called the lost ten tribes of Israel. Because those who remained intermarried, they lost their right to be called Jews at all.

Here's what's interesting: Judea in the South had the other two tribes of Jews. They were invaded too, by Babylon, and they went through the same things as the northern ten tribes. But the two southern tribes stubbornly held to their Jewishness and refused to intermarry.

Now, fast-forward to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the Judean exiles (the two southern tribes) returning to Jerusalem.

They began to rebuild the Temple and the wall around Jerusalem. The Samaritans came down and offered to help, but the Jews told the Samaritans in no uncertain terms that their help wasn't wanted; that they had no right to share in the rebuilding of God's city. The

Samaritans were snubbed, and they wouldn't forget it. To make matters worse at that time, there was a disloyal Jew named Manasseh who married a daughter of a Samaritan named Sanballat (you can read about him in Nehemiah). Since the Jews wouldn't let them participate in the building of the temple, Manasseh built his own temple on Mount Gerizim in the middle of Samaritan territory. Later, the Jews raided and ransacked that Samaritan temple. It was an act of war! That happened over 450 years *before* this scene with Jesus and the Samaritan woman. So you've got seven and a half centuries of racial hatred.

So now we come to our story in 30 AD and they are still bitter enemies. The rabbis of Jesus' day said that if you ate *bread* in Samaria you might as well eat pig flesh (pigs were considered unclean animals). But Jesus marched right into the middle of this atmosphere and attitude of centuries-old hatred and animosity. Jesus knew exactly what he was doing, and that's why he *had* to go there. Even though it was unsafe for a Jew to be there, Jesus bravely broke down the barriers of racial hatred, showing the new way.

But Jesus demonstrated another difference between the old and new ways. This particular Samaritan was a woman. The strict rabbis forbid any rabbi from speaking to a woman in public. He couldn't even speak to his own wife or daughter or sister in public. It was the end of his career if he was seen talking to a lowly woman. That was the old way. Women were considered lower than dogs.

And this particular woman was even worse: not only was she a Samaritan woman (as if that wasn't bad enough) she was a woman with a terrible reputation and very bad character. So when she said, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan; how can you ask me for a drink of water?" there was a whole lot she meant; she knew the old way and she knew where she stood in it.

By the way, there's something interesting about the fact that she was at this well. The well was about a half mile south of her town of Sychar. There was a well in the center of that town. So why would she come a half mile outside of town to Jacob's well in the middle of the hot day? It's because she was such a moral outcast even in her own town that the women of her city wouldn't let her draw from their well. This was a sinful, Samaritan, woman, outcast from even her own people. And *this person* is who Jesus came to see, and spoke to, and asked to give him a drink of water! And, by the way, anything she touched was also considered unclean, but Jesus asked for a drink of water from *her* jar.

Here's something really amazing and powerful and scandalous—this sinful Samaritan adulteress was *the very first person* that Jesus revealed himself – to this mistress he said, "I am the Messiah." To this Samaritan woman he said, "I am the savior of the world." Jesus had come to show the new way between people, no more walls of judgement and prejudice.

From now on with Jesus it wasn't "those who were God's people" and "those who were not." It wasn't, "This ethnicity is good," and "this one is not." It wasn't "men are good, and women are lowly." The new way was that *everyone* could be God's child. The old way was the seedbed for racial prejudice and discrimination. The new way was the Savior of the *entire* world. Jesus was *intentionally inclusive*. Jesus came for everyone. That's why we are never to judge others or be prejudiced against others. By the way, that's also why West Valley Church *must* become one church with two languages, because Jesus came to break down those barriers. The old way was walls; the new way is welcome to everyone.

Secondly, behind the scenes in this story we see the difference between...

2. The old and new ***Water***

The area of Jacob's well had many Jewish memories attached to it. This was a piece of ground that had been bought by their forefather Jacob (remember God renamed him Israel, and from him came the twelve tribes). While on his deathbed, Jacob gave the well to his son Joseph. When Joseph died in Egypt, his body was taken back to Palestine and buried there. That made this a special place, with roots going way back.

Now, the well was more than a hundred feet deep. It wasn't a well that tapped into spring water; it was actually a well that the water would sort of gather in. It was more of an underground reservoir than a moving spring. In the Hebrew language of ordinary Jewish conversation, there was a difference between standing water and moving water. Water that was moving was called "living water," and to those living in the desert, that was always the best kind of water you could drink. So when Jesus talked to this woman about living water, she may have at first assumed that he meant flowing water from a spring instead of the still water from that well. So part of her response to him was saying, "Where would you get spring water? Besides, this water may not be flowing, but it was good enough for Jacob and it's been good enough all these generations. Jacob dug it out with his own hands; what makes you think yours is so much better? Are you saying you are stronger and wiser than our father Jacob? No one can claim that!" But Jesus *is* making that claim, and he will soon prove it to her. Here's the point of all this: Jesus is revealing deep truths here. *Jacob's well represented the old, stagnant way of life, living under the law. But with Jesus there was now available a new life in Him that was always fresh and flowing.*

The Jews had another, deeper use of the word "water" – having to do with their relationship to God, talking about their souls being "thirsty" for God. Any Jew would have understood the meaning of what Jesus was saying. It's all over the Scriptures. The Bible says that the Lamb will lead us to springs of living water. The promise from Isaiah has always been that God's people would draw water with joy from the wells of salvation. The psalmist said that his soul was thirsty for the living God, and God promised through the prophets to pour water on our thirsty land. Isaiah said that everyone who wanted could come and drink freely the water of life.

Ezekiel had his vision of the river of life, and Zechariah spoke of the new world where a cleansing fountain would be opened, and the waters would flow from Jerusalem. That's why Jesus says in Revelation:

"To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life." (Revelation 21:6, niv)

Get the idea? All through the Bible, God is our source of living water, and Jesus is the one who is finally making this new water available to everyone.

But the Samaritan woman still isn't getting the picture. So Jesus gets more blunt, making an even more amazing claim. He says that he can give her a free gift of water that, if she would take it, she'd never have to drink again. She *still* took it literally, thinking he was talking about H₂O, but Jesus is making the outright claim to be the Messiah. The Old Testament

promised that when the Messiah came, we wouldn't be hungry or thirsty because then God Himself would be the fountain of life.

The prophets said the promise was that when the Messiah comes the dry and thirsty spiritual ground will become a pool filled with springs of water. So when Jesus says that he brings water that will quench our thirst forever, he is telling this woman that *he is the Messiah—God himself*. But she *still* doesn't see it. So she begins to joke with him about it. Knowing she still doesn't understand, Jesus changes his approach; he begins to deal with her directly and personally about her own personal life.

Now that's something you can always count on with Jesus. He's happy to talk to you about the Father and about the promises that he will fulfill in your life. But sooner or later, he's going to talk with you about *you*, about your hurt. About your need for healing. About the sin in your life. He loves you too much not to. You might try to hide your sin or shame, but he *will* deal with it. Having sin in your life is like approaching the spring of the water of life with a plugged up straw; you won't be able to drink anything. Jesus wants you to drink freely!

Jesus gets to the point with her—the time for verbal play is over; he asks her to go get her husband. She tries to avoid the subject and simply says “I don't have one.” But Jesus knows the truth—so he says directly, “You're right about that; in fact you've had five husbands and you are living with another man now.” Suddenly she's confronted with her sin.

Whenever Jesus comes into our lives, we can expect two things: He will reveal the Father's love for us, and he will reveal our sin that keeps us from the Father. When we meet Jesus, we realize the God he is, but also the sinners we are; the sin that separates us from him and each other. There's no more hiding from it. That's because Jesus wants to forgive us and set us free.

Now she realizes there's no way this stranger would know that about her, so he must be more than just a man—she decides that he must be a prophet. So she begins a discussion about the appropriate way to worship God. That's partly because she doesn't want to talk about her sin so she's trying to change the subject. Don't we do that whenever God gets a little too close for comfort? We try to talk theology and debate doctrine, but God wants to get at the heart; with God it's always about the heart.

What is God saying to you right now about your heart? How will you respond? However we settle the heart issue will determine whether we choose...

3. The old or new ***Worship***

Jesus begins to teach about the difference between the old and the new worship and we really see the difference. New worship is meaningful, fulfilling, and thirst-quenching. Old worship leaves us dry and thirsty.

Jesus teaches this woman the difference between her old type of worship and the new worship that God offers through Christ. No more racial, ethnic, or gender divides. No more legalism.

I already told you that the Samaritans decided to build their own temple on Mount Gerizim.

They claimed that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice there, instead of on Mount Moriah as the Bible says. They said it was on Mount Gerizim that Moses offered a sacrifice to God when the people entered the promised land. But the Bible is clear that it was on Mount Ebal. Here's the point: they changed things to fit their perspective. The Samaritans accepted the first five books of the Old Testament and not the others. The Samaritans revised history and Scripture to fit their prejudice, out of their hatred for the Jews. But there can be no revisionist Christians. We worship God with our entire lives, or with nothing at all.

There was another problem. Jesus tells this woman, "You worship what you do not know." Their worship only went so deep; it was partial, it was ignorant, it was shallow. Again, if we are going to worship God effectively, it will require our whole being; we must be open to God, even it means changing the traditions and comforts that we've carried for so long.

Here's the heart of what Jesus is getting at, and it's what transforms this woman's life and through her, her entire community. Jesus points out that what we are really thirsty for is a relationship with the Father, and only Jesus can provide it. We won't find it by legalistic approaches or by sticking to a certain temple or style. Worship is a *relationship response*.

Jesus points out that relationship is from the heart; if we are going to worship God first of all we do so in *spirit*. What Jesus meant when he said we are to worship him in spirit is that we yield our wills to God's will; that we surrender our opinions, desires, attitudes, our dreams, we even surrender our plans for His. We worship him with our whole heart—that we worship him with all we are. Worship isn't about showing up here and singing for one hour and then going home. It's about how we live for God the other 166 and a half hours of the week. Then we come here to worship and celebrate and seek God together.

We will do whatever *he* desires for whomever *he* desires, ahead of ourselves. That's worship from spirit, from the heart—the center of who we are. That's what it means to worship him in spirit. How are you doing in your response to God?

Jesus doesn't stop there. Jesus said that we must worship in spirit, and then also in truth. Truth, according to the Bible, is Jesus. Jesus said:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except by me."
(John 14:6, niv)

We don't worship some god that we've made up or something that *we* want God to be—we worship God as he is revealed in Jesus Christ. And we see him in his Word—the Bible. Jesus is called God's Word, and Jesus said that God's Word is truth. That's why we are taking this time in the Word to go behind the scenes—to learn the truth of who Jesus really is, so you can respond to God—worship Him—effectively. No other god, no other truth, no other Scripture, no other Christ.

The focal point of worship is God the Father. He is the object of our worship, and he is the one who is seeking worshippers. Too often, we want worship to be about *us*— *we* want to get something out of it, we want to feel better, we want to be blessed. But it's not about *us*—it's about God. We worship *HIM*.

But notice something: at the same time, the Father is seeking *you*. The word Jesus uses means that the Father eagerly searches for *you*. It's the same image that Jesus gives us in the story of the prodigal son. He says that the father of the lost son was seeking him—

looking for him—and saw him while he was a long way off and ran to his son. God is not waiting for you to get your act together—he is seeking *you*; he is *seeking* worshippers! He wants to give *you* this living water that will never run dry! He wants to bring this water into the dry, tired places in your life.

You come to focus on him and worship him, and he comes to pour life-giving water into you!

That's what happened to this woman—which resulted in her seeing Jesus for who he was. Remember, the Bible says that Jesus *had* to go through Samaria?

That's because he was seeking that woman and the people of her village. She essentially said, "All I know is, I can't wait for the Messiah to come." To which Jesus said, literally, "*I am*, the one speaking to you, *I am*." And she realized that Jesus is the I AM—YHWH, the Messiah. And the change is amazing—she can't help but run and tell everyone in her town—the very ones that rejected her, she now runs to tell. And as a result, her entire community believes, and Jesus stays with them for two days teaching them. They finally said to the woman, "We no longer believe because you told us; we have seen him and believe it for ourselves."

I want to show you a clip from the video series called "The Chosen." Have you seen it? It is a historically and culturally accurate fictional account of factual events. It unpacks the stories we know from the Bible, but adds the stuff that was probably going on outside the Bible narrative. The producers' intent was not to strictly re-enact Scripture, but to put Scripture into a culturally probable context and narrative. I'd encourage you to check it out if you haven't already. There are currently three seasons, and I believe they intend to create seven seasons. This series has now been seen by billions around the world. Literally.

This is a ten-minute clip, but I want you to see it. As you watch it, you will see in the subtle exchanges everything we talked about. We've included subtitles in case you have trouble following the dialogue.

Is your religion old or new? Do you need to surrender your prejudice? Your life? Is your worship of God from the heart, founded in truth—Jesus— and is it for the Father? He's been seeking you, you know. And the life-fulfilling water he has for you will never run dry. Don't believe just because I've told you—find out for yourselves! And if you've found it to be true, run and tell everyone you know!

Prayer