The Woman at the Well

Bible Stories Anthology — John 4:1-42

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> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

Give Me to Drink

It was noon, the hottest hour of the day, and the well outside the Samaritan town was deserted. No one came for water at that hour. The women of the town came in the cool of the evening, together, talking as they walked.

But one woman came alone.

At the well sat a stranger, a Jew, tired and dusty from the road. Jews did not speak to Samaritans. Men did not speak to women they did not know. Respectable teachers certainly did not speak to a woman with a past like hers.

He spoke to her. *Give me to drink.*

In the conversation that followed, Jesus told this woman things he had not yet told the rulers in Jerusalem, or even plainly told his own disciples. He told her about living water. He told her the hour had come when God would be worshipped in spirit and in truth. And when she spoke of the coming Messiah, he said to her, as he had said to no one else so plainly: *I that speak unto thee am he.*

She left her water jar at the well and ran back into town. Within hours, the whole town was coming out across the fields to see him.

This is the story of the woman at the well — the outsider who became the first to carry the good news to a town.

The Setting

When. Soon after the first Passover of Jesus' ministry (story 42), about A.D. 28 by the reckoning this series uses. Jesus had spent some time in Judea, where his disciples were baptizing more people than John the Baptist (John 3:22; 4:1-2). Jesus himself said that it was **"four months, and then cometh harvest"** (4:35), which may mean it was early winter, about four months before the barley harvest in spring; or he may have been quoting a common saying.

Where. "A city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph" (4:5). Sychar is usually identified with the village of Askar, about half a mile north of Jacob's well, at the foot of Mount Ebal; some think it was a name for nearby Shechem. Above the well, to the south-west, rises **Mount Gerizim**, the Samaritans' holy mountain. **Jacob's well** is still there today, beneath a church near the modern city of Nablus. It is a deep shaft, cut down through rock to underground water, and when it was measured in modern times it was about a hundred feet deep or more. It is one of the very few places in the land where we can be sure we stand where Jesus stood.

The Samaritans. When the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., they carried many of the Israelites away and brought in people from other lands to settle in Samaria. These people learned something of the worship of the LORD but kept their own gods too: **"They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence"** (2 Kings 17:33). Over the centuries the Samaritans came to worship the LORD alone, but on their own terms. They accepted only the five books of Moses as Scripture. When the Jews returned from Babylon to rebuild the temple, they refused the Samaritans' offer of help (Ezra 4:1-3), and the hostility grew. The Samaritans built a temple of their own on Mount Gerizim; the Jewish ruler John Hyrcanus destroyed it more than a century before Christ. By Jesus' day, Jews and Samaritans despised one another. Jews called someone a Samaritan as an insult (John 8:48).

Who.

- **Jesus**, about thirty, travelling from Judea to Galilee.
- **A woman of Samaria**, unnamed.
- **His disciples**, who had gone into the town to buy food.
- **The people of Sychar.**

The administration. The **Christ administration**, under the Law of Moses. Jesus' ministry was to Israel first: later he would send the twelve out saying, **"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"** (Matthew 10:5-6). Yet here, himself, he spent two days in a Samaritan town.

The Story, Told Faithfully

He Must Needs Go Through Samaria

> **John 4:1** *When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John,*
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> **John 4:2** (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,)
>
> **John 4:3** *He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.*
>
> **John 4:4** *And he must needs go through Samaria.*

“The Pharisees had heard.” Jesus’ growing following drew the attention of the Pharisees, who had already been watching John. Rather than stir up conflict before the time, Jesus left Judea.

“Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples.” John stops to correct a report. Jesus’ disciples were doing the baptizing, a baptism of repentance like John’s, not Jesus himself.

“He must needs go through Samaria.” Samaria lay between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north. The quickest road went straight through it, about three days’ walk. Some strict Jews avoided Samaria by crossing the Jordan and going up the eastern side, but many Galileans travelling to the feasts did go through Samaria, as the historian Josephus records. So the road itself was not unusual. But John says Jesus *must* go — the same word *dei* that he uses for things God has ordained: **“even so must the Son of man be lifted up”** (3:14). This series understands it as more than geography: there was a woman at a well in Samaria whom God meant him to meet.

Jacob’s Well

> **John 4:5** *Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.*
> **John 4:6** *Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.*

“The parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.” When Jacob came back from Haran, he bought land near Shechem: **“And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for an hundred pieces of money”** (Genesis 33:19). On his deathbed he gave Joseph a special portion (Genesis 48:22). When Israel came out of Egypt, they carried Joseph’s bones with them, and **“the bones of Joseph … buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought”** (Joshua 24:32). This was holy ground to both Jews and Samaritans. The Samaritans counted themselves the descendants of Joseph, through Ephraim and Manasseh. The Old Testament does not mention the well, but the people of the land had always called it Jacob’s, and they still do.

“Being wearied with his journey.” Jesus was tired. He had walked many miles on dusty roads in the heat. He was a real man, with a real body that grew hungry, thirsty and weary. The writer to the Hebrews says he was made **“in all things … like unto his brethren”** (Hebrews 2:17).

“Sat thus on the well.” *Thus* — just as he was, worn out. He sat down on the low stone wall around the mouth of the well.

“About the sixth hour.” By the Jewish reckoning, which counted the hours from sunrise, the sixth hour was about noon, the heat of the day. (Some have suggested John uses Roman reckoning here, which would make it six in the evening; but most take it as noon.) Women ordinarily drew water in the cool of the evening: Abraham’s servant came to a well **“at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water”** (Genesis 24:11; story 09). A woman coming alone at noon may have been avoiding the other women of the town. The text does not say why she came then; but as the story goes on, the reason is not hard to guess.

“Give Me to Drink”

> **John 4:7** *There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.*

John 4:8 (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)

> **John 4:9** *Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.*

"Give me to drink." Jesus began not with a sermon, but with a request. He asked her for help. He had no bucket of his own; she did. By asking, he made himself, for a moment, dependent on her kindness — a Jewish man asking a favour of a Samaritan woman.

"(For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)" "Meat" in old English means *food* of any kind. John's parenthesis explains why Jesus was alone, and why he had nothing to draw with: the disciples, perhaps with the travelling bucket, had gone to buy food.

"How is it that thou, being a Jew ...?" She was astonished. She could tell he was a Jew from his clothing or his accent. Three walls stood between them: he was a Jew and she a Samaritan; he was a man and she a woman; he was a teacher and she, as we will learn, a woman with a shameful reputation.

"For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." John explains for his readers. The Greek word *synchraomai* means *to use together, to share*; it may mean that Jews would not share drinking vessels with Samaritans. Jewish teachers regarded Samaritan women as ritually unclean, and anything they handled as unclean. (This rule is recorded in Jewish writings from a little later than the New Testament; it shows the attitude of the time.) For a Jew to drink from a Samaritan woman's water jar was unthinkable. Jesus asked anyway.

Living Water

> **John 4:10** *Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.*

Jesus turned the conversation around. She thought he was asking her for something. In fact, he had something far greater to give her.

"If thou knewest the gift of God." *Gift* is the Greek *dōrea*, a free gift. In the book of Acts the same word is used for the gift of holy spirit: **"ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"** (Acts 2:38); **"on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost"** (Acts 10:45). Jesus himself later explains what the living water means (see 4:14 below).

"And who it is that saith to thee." She did not know who he was. If she had known, the roles would be reversed: *thou wouldest have asked of him.*

"Living water." In everyday speech, "living water" meant running water — water from a spring or a flowing stream, fresh and moving — as opposed to still water stored in a cistern. Jacob's well was fed by underground springs, but most water in the land was collected rainwater kept in cisterns. In the Scriptures, God Himself is called **"the fountain of living waters"**: **"For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water"** (Jeremiah 2:13). The prophets foresaw living waters flowing out from Jerusalem in the day of the Lord (Zechariah 14:8; Ezekiel 47:1-9).

“Art Thou Greater Than Our Father Jacob?”

> **John 4:11** *The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?*
>
> **John 4:12** *Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?*

“Sir.” The Greek *kyrie* can mean *Lord* or simply *Sir*. Here it is polite respect; she calls him *Sir* three times (4:11, 15, 19).

“Thou hast nothing to draw with.” The word is *antlēma*, a bucket for drawing water, usually a leather bag on a rope, which travellers carried with them. Jesus had none. **“And the well is deep”** — about a hundred feet down to the water. She took his words literally. *Where would you get running water from? You can’t even reach the water in this well.*

“Art thou greater than our father Jacob?” The Samaritans claimed Jacob as their ancestor. *Jacob dug this well — or so we have always been told. He drank from it, his sons drank from it, his flocks drank from it. It was good enough for him. Are you greater than Jacob?* The Greek form of her question expects the answer *No*. But the reader knows the answer is *Yes*. This is **irony**: words that mean more than the speaker knows. Jacob once dreamed of a ladder reaching to heaven; Jesus had just told Nathanael, **“Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man”** (John 1:51; story 11).

A Well of Water Springing Up

> **John 4:13** *Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:*
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> **John 4:14** *But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*
>
> **John 4:15** *The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.*

“Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again.” Every day she had to come back to this well. Every day she drank, and every day she was thirsty again. So it is with everything this world offers to satisfy the soul.

“Shall never thirst.” The water Jesus gives satisfies for ever.

“Shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” Not a jar of water carried home, but a spring *inside* the person, bubbling up, always fresh. “Springing up” (*hallomai*) is the word used of a lame man leaping up when he was healed (Acts 3:8). It is water with life in it.

What is this living water? John tells us plainly later, when Jesus stood up at the feast of tabernacles and cried:

> **John 7:37** *… If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.*
>
> **John 7:38** *He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*
>
> **John 7:39** (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

The living water is the gift of holy spirit — God's own life given to dwell within the believer. It is the same new birth Jesus spoke of to Nicodemus (story 42), here pictured not as a birth but as a spring of water within. And as with Nicodemus, it was not yet given; it would be poured out at Pentecost, after Jesus was glorified.

"Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." She still took it literally — or half literally. *Give me this water, so I will never have to come out here again.* Perhaps there was longing in it too: never to have to make that lonely walk at noon again.

"Go, Call Thy Husband"

> **John 4:16** *Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither.*
> **John 4:17** *The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband:*
> **John 4:18** *For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.*

She had asked for living water. Jesus answered by touching the place in her life where she was most thirsty — and most ashamed.

"Go, call thy husband." Jesus knew she had none. He was not trying to humiliate her. He was bringing the truth into the open, gently, so that she could receive what he had to give.

"I have no husband." A true answer, and a guarded one. It was the truth, but not the whole truth.

"Thou hast well said … For thou hast had five husbands." Jesus told her what no stranger could have known. Five times she had been married. We are not told why. In that world a man could divorce his wife for many reasons, and a woman had almost no way of divorcing her husband. Some of her husbands may have died; some may have sent her away. She may have been more sinned against than sinning. The text does not call her a harlot, and this series does not either.

"And he whom thou now hast is not thy husband." But this part was her own choice. She was living with a man who was not her husband. Jesus named it plainly. That, in a small town, would explain why she came to the well alone at noon.

"In that saidst thou truly." Twice Jesus commends her for speaking the truth (4:17, 18). He does not lecture her, condemn her, or tell her to go and change her life before he will speak with her. He tells her the truth about herself, and he keeps talking to her. Later John would write of him, **"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved"** (John 3:17).

This Mountain, or Jerusalem?

> **John 4:19** *The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.*
> **John 4:20** *Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.*

"I perceive that thou art a prophet." Only a prophet could know what he knew. She was right — and she was also, perhaps, uncomfortable, and quick to turn the conversation away from her personal life to a religious question.

“Our fathers worshipped in this mountain.” She pointed, perhaps, to Mount Gerizim, rising above them. It was the great dispute between Jews and Samaritans. When Israel entered the land, Moses commanded that the blessings be spoken from Mount Gerizim and the curses from Mount Ebal (Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:12-13). The Samaritans held that Gerizim was the place God had chosen. Their copy of the five books of Moses even read “Gerizim” in Deuteronomy 27:4, where the Hebrew Bible says the altar was to be built on Mount Ebal. **“And ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place.”** The Jews held, rightly, that God had chosen Jerusalem and its temple, built by Solomon (2 Chronicles 6:6; 7:12).

In Spirit and in Truth

> **John 4:21** *Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.*
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> **John 4:22** *Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.*
>
> **John 4:23** *But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.*
>
> **John 4:24** *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

Jesus did not brush the question aside. He answered it — briefly, honestly — and then lifted it to something far higher.

“Woman, believe me.” *Woman* — the same respectful address he used to his own mother at Cana (story 41).

“The hour cometh.” Here again is *the hour* (see story 41): the time God had appointed, which began with Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension and the outpouring that followed. In that hour, worship would no longer be tied to one mountain or one city.

“Ye worship ye know not what.” The Samaritans worshipped the LORD, but with only part of His revelation. They had rejected the prophets and the writings, all the Scripture after Moses.

“We know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.” Here Jesus speaks plainly as a Jew. God had chosen to work through Israel. The promise to Abraham was, **“in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”** (Genesis 12:3). The Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah and the house of David. Paul wrote that to Israel belonged **“the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises … and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came”** (Romans 9:4-5). Jesus did not pretend the differences did not matter. The truth was with the Jews.

“But the hour cometh, and now is.” It was coming, and in a sense it was already beginning, because the one who would bring it was sitting at the well.

“The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” *In spirit* — not by place or ceremony, but from within, by the spirit God gives. *In truth* — according to what is true, God’s revealed Word, not error or half-knowledge. Both are needed.

“For the Father seeketh such to worship him.” Here is a beautiful truth: God is *looking* for worshippers. Not the woman seeking God at a well, but God seeking her. **“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost”** (Luke 19:10).

“God is a Spirit.” In Greek, *pneuma ho theos*, *God is spirit*. God is not flesh and blood, not confined to a body or a place. **“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens**

cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (1 Kings 8:27; story 26). Therefore true worship cannot be tied to Gerizim or Jerusalem.

"They that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." *Must* — the same *dei* again. Because God is spirit, worship that reaches Him must be in spirit. This is exactly what the gift of holy spirit — the living water — would make possible.

"I That Speak unto Thee Am He"

> **John 4:25** *The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.*
> **John 4:26** *Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.*

"I know that Messias cometh." Even the Samaritans looked for a coming deliverer. Since they accepted only the five books of Moses, their hope rested on Moses' promise: **"The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken"** (Deuteronomy 18:15). Later Samaritan writings call this coming one the *Taheb*, "the one who returns" or "the restorer." John writes her words with the Jewish title *Messias*, the Greek form of the Hebrew *Mashiach*, "Anointed," and explains it for his readers: **"which is called Christ."**

"When he is come, he will tell us all things." She expected the Messiah to be a teacher who would make everything clear. She did not know he had already begun.

"I that speak unto thee am he." In Greek, *Egō eimi, ho lalōn soi* — "I am, the one speaking to you." The word "he" is supplied in English, and rightly: Jesus is answering her statement about the Messiah. *I am the Messiah — the one talking with you right now.* This is the plainest statement Jesus made of who he was in the early part of his ministry. He would not say it so plainly to the rulers in Jerusalem (John 10:24-25). He told it to a Samaritan woman with five husbands, at a well, at noon.

Some readers take "I am" here as a claim to be God, since God said to Moses, **"I AM THAT I AM"** (Exodus 3:14). But the setting answers the question. She has just spoken of the Messiah, and he says that he is the one she spoke of. When a man born blind was healed and his neighbours argued about whether it was really he, he said the same words: **"I am he"** (*egō eimi*, John 9:9). Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, God's anointed. That is exactly what the people of the town would soon conclude: **"this is indeed the Christ"** (4:42).

She Left Her Waterpot

> **John 4:27** *And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?*
> **John 4:28** *The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men,*
> **John 4:29** *Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?*
> **John 4:30** *Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.*

"And marvelled that he talked with the woman." The disciples were astonished — not so much that she was a Samaritan as that he, a rabbi, was talking with a woman alone in public. The Jewish teachers of that time warned against talking much with women; a later saying recorded among them was, *"Do not talk much with women."* **"Yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?"** They had learned enough already not to question him.

“The woman then left her waterpot.” She had come for water and forgot it. She left the jar behind — perhaps in her haste, perhaps so that Jesus could drink from it, perhaps because she meant to come straight back. John simply notes it. The water she came for no longer mattered; she had found the living water.

“And went her way into the city, and saith to the men.” The woman who came to the well alone, avoiding the town, now ran straight into the town and spoke to the men — publicly, openly, not ashamed.

“Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did.” She did not hide her past. The very thing she had been ashamed of became part of her witness. *He knew everything about me.* And yet he had not turned away from her.

“Is not this the Christ?” In Greek her question is cautious: *This couldn’t be the Christ, could it?* She did not try to argue them into believing. She invited them to come and see for themselves. Philip had said the same to Nathanael: **“Come and see”** (John 1:46).

“Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.” It worked. The men of Sychar left the town and started across the fields toward the well.

“I Have Meat to Eat That Ye Know Not Of”

> **John 4:31** *In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat.*
> **John 4:32** *But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of.*
> **John 4:33** *Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat?*
> **John 4:34** *Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*

“Master, eat.” The disciples had brought food from the town, and they urged him to eat. He had been weary and hungry an hour before.

“I have meat to eat that ye know not of.” Like the woman with the water, the disciples took his words literally: *Has someone brought him food?* The pattern repeats through John’s Gospel: Jesus speaks of spiritual things in earthly words, and his hearers think he means the earthly thing — Nicodemus and the new birth (3:4), the woman and the water (4:11), the disciples and the food.

“My meat is to do the will of him that sent me.” What fed Jesus most deeply was doing what God had sent him to do. He had told the devil in the wilderness, **“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”** (Matthew 4:4; story 40). **“And to finish his work.”** “Finish” (*teleioō*) means *to complete, to bring to its goal*. On the cross he would say, **“It is finished”** (John 19:30), from the same root.

Fields White to Harvest

> **John 4:35** *Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.*
> **John 4:36** *And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.*
> **John 4:37** *And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.*

> **John 4:38** *I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.*

“There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest.” The grain had been sown, and green shoots stood in the fields around them. Harvest was months away.

“Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.” Jesus pointed. Perhaps at that very moment the men of Sychar were coming across the green fields toward them in their white robes. Many readers have pictured it that way; John does not say it, but the timing fits. The grain in the fields was not ready, but the harvest of people was — right now.

“He that reapeth receiveth wages.” Those who gather people into God’s kingdom have their reward. **“That both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.”** Others had sown in Samaria before: Moses, whose promise of the coming prophet they treasured; perhaps John the Baptist, who baptized at Aenon near Salim, not far away (John 3:23); and now the woman herself had sown the seed in her own town. The disciples would reap.

“One soweth, and another reapeth.” A common saying. Paul wrote, **“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase”** (1 Corinthians 3:6).

The Saviour of the World

> **John 4:39** *And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did.*
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> **John 4:40** *So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days.*
>
> **John 4:41** *And many more believed because of his own word;*
>
> **John 4:42** *And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.*

“Many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman.” The outcast woman became the first person in John’s Gospel to bring a whole town to Jesus. Her testimony was simple: *He told me all that ever I did*.

“They besought him that he would tarry with them.” Samaritans asking a Jewish teacher to stay in their town! **“And he abode there two days.”** Jesus, a Jew, stayed in a Samaritan town, ate their food, slept in their houses, and taught them.

“And many more believed because of his own word.” First they believed because of what the woman said. Then they heard him for themselves.

“Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves.” Her witness brought them to him; his word brought them to faith. That is how it should be. A witness points away from herself to him.

“This is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.” The Samaritans reached a confession that went beyond Israel. Not only the Jews’ Messiah, but *the Saviour of the world*. This exact title appears only one other time in the Bible, in John’s own letter: **“And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world”** (1 John 4:14). The despised Samaritans were among the first to see it.

From there Jesus went on into Galilee, and came again to Cana, where a nobleman from Capernaum begged him to heal his dying son. Jesus said, **"Go thy way; thy son liveth"** — and the boy was healed at that very hour, twenty miles away. John adds, **"This is again the second miracle that Jesus did"** (John 4:46-54; story 41).

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

Meetings at wells. Abraham's servant found a bride for Isaac at a well (Genesis 24; story 09). Jacob met Rachel at a well (Genesis 29:1-12). Moses met the daughters of Jethro at a well and married Zipporah (Exodus 2:15-21). Each time a stranger came to a well, water was drawn, the woman ran home to tell her family, and a household was joined to God's purpose. Now, at Jacob's own well, the greatest son of Jacob met a woman — not to marry her, but to bring her, and her whole town, to God. Many readers have noticed this pattern; John does not point it out, and this series gives it as a picture, not as the meaning of the text.

Greater than Jacob. *Art thou greater than our father Jacob?* Yes. Jacob gave a well whose water left men thirsty again. Jesus gives water that springs up into everlasting life. **"A greater than Solomon is here"** (Matthew 12:42); and a greater than Jacob.

The Christ. To this woman Jesus said plainly what he was: the Messiah, the anointed one. He is the Prophet like Moses whom Moses promised (Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22), the one Samaritans and Jews alike were waiting for.

The Saviour of the world. "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (1 John 4:14). The Son came from Israel — **"salvation is of the Jews"** — but for the whole world. His death, resurrection and ascension opened salvation to every people: **"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem"** (Luke 24:47).

Doing God's will to the end. "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." He did finish it: **"It is finished"** (John 19:30). Then God raised him and exalted him.

To the Grace Administration

The living water has been given. When Jesus sat at the well, the living water was a promise. On the day of Pentecost God poured out the gift of holy spirit (Acts 2:1-4, 33), and since then every believer has the well within. **"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body … and have been all made to drink into one Spirit"** (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Samaria received it. After Pentecost the gospel went **"in all Judaea, and in Samaria"** (Acts 1:8). Philip preached Christ in a city of Samaria, and the Samaritans believed and received the gift of holy spirit (Acts 8:5-17; story 56). The seed the woman sowed was harvested.

No more walls. Jesus spoke with a Samaritan, a woman and an outcast. Under grace the walls are gone: **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"** (Galatians 3:28). Christ **"hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us"** (Ephesians 2:14).

Worship in spirit and in truth. No mountain, no temple, no city. The believer is himself the temple: **"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"** (1 Corinthians 3:16). **"For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh"** (Philippians 3:3). Paul wrote, **"I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also"** (1 Corinthians 14:15) — in spirit and in truth.

A witness tells what happened. The woman did not preach a sermon. She told what Jesus had done for her and invited others to come and see. **"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ"** (2 Corinthians 5:20). **"Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear"** (1 Peter 3:15).

How Jesus spoke to her. He crossed a barrier first. He started with an everyday need. He told her the truth about her life without condemning her. He answered her religious question briefly and returned to the heart of the matter. And when she spoke of the Messiah, he told her plainly who he was. It remains the pattern for anyone who wants to share the good news one person at a time.

To the Topic of Thirst

- **Everyone is thirsty** — for meaning, love, forgiveness, life.
- **The world's water leaves you thirsty again.**
- **God is the fountain of living waters** (Jeremiah 2:13).
- **Jesus offers living water freely** — a gift.
- **The living water is the spirit God gives,** a spring within.
- **He knows everything about you** — and still offers it.
- **"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters"** (Isaiah 55:1).
- **"And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"** (Revelation 22:17).

The Main Takeaway

On his way from Judea to Galilee, Jesus must needs go through Samaria; weary at noon, he sat on Jacob's well near Sychar, and when a Samaritan woman came alone to draw water, he crossed every wall between them and said, "Give me to drink"; when she marvelled that a Jew would ask a Samaritan, he told her that if she knew the gift of God and who was speaking, she would have asked him, and he would have given her living water — water that becomes "a well of water springing up into everlasting life," the gift of holy spirit that would be given after he was glorified; when she asked for it, he told her to call her husband, and laid her life open — five husbands, and the man she now had was not her husband — without condemning her; when she raised the dispute between Gerizim and Jerusalem, he answered that salvation is of the Jews, but that the hour was coming when the true worshippers would worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for God is spirit and the Father seeks such worshippers; when she spoke of the coming Messiah, he said, "I that speak unto thee am he." She left her waterpot, ran into the town and said, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"; the town came out across the fields, white to harvest; Jesus stayed two days, and many believed, saying, "this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

- **Jesus seeks the outsider** — and the Father seeks worshippers.

- **He knows everything about you,** and offers living water anyway.
- **The living water is God's gift,** a spring within that never runs dry.
- **True worship is in spirit and in truth,** not in a place.
- **Tell what he has done,** and invite others to come and see.
- **The fields are white** — the harvest is now.

For Our Learning — The People

- **Jesus.** The Messiah, the Saviour of the world; weary and thirsty at the well.
- **The woman of Samaria.** Unnamed; married five times, living with a man not her husband; came alone at noon, left her waterpot, and brought her town to Jesus.
- **The disciples.** Went to buy food; marvelled that he talked with a woman.
- **The people of Sychar.** Believed first because of her word, then because of his.
- **Jacob.** The patriarch who bought land near Shechem and gave a portion to Joseph; the well bore his name.
- **Joseph.** Jacob's son, whose bones were buried in that ground (Joshua 24:32).
- **The nobleman of Capernaum.** Whose son Jesus healed afterward, the second sign (4:46-54).

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **Jews and Samaritans** — centuries of hostility, rival temples, rival mountains.
- **The Samaritan Scriptures** — only the five books of Moses; "Gerizim" in their Deuteronomy 27:4.
- **Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal** — the mountains of blessing and curse above Shechem.
- **Drawing water** — women's work, usually in the cool of the evening, in company.
- **The leather bucket (antlēma)** — travellers carried their own.
- **Jacob's well** — about a hundred feet deep, still there today.
- **Living water** — running spring water, as opposed to cistern water.
- **Not sharing vessels** — Jews regarded Samaritan vessels as unclean.
- **Men and women in public** — a rabbi did not talk at length with a woman alone.
- **The sixth hour** — about noon by Jewish reckoning.
- **Hospitality** — the town asked Jesus to stay, and he stayed two days.
- **Sowing and reaping** — the harvest about four months after the green shoots.

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Parenthesis (a sentence set inside another)** — "(Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,)" (4:2); "(For his disciples were gone away …)" (4:8).

- **Metaphor** — “living water” (4:10) for the gift of holy spirit; “meat” (4:32-34) for doing God’s will; “fields … white … to harvest” (4:35) for people ready to believe.
- **Irony** — “Art thou greater than our father Jacob?” (4:12), spoken expecting “No,” when the answer is “Yes.”
- **Erotesis (questions for effect)** — “Art thou greater …?” (4:12); “is not this the Christ?” (4:29).
- **Antithesis (setting opposites against each other)** — “shall thirst again … shall never thirst” (4:13-14); “in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem … in spirit and in truth” (4:21-23).
- **Ellipsis (words left out)** — “I that speak unto thee am he” (4:26), with “he” (the Messiah) supplied from her words.
- **Proverb (paroimia)** — “One soweth, and another reapeth” (4:37).
- **Synecdoche (a part for the whole)** — “the world” (4:42) for all mankind.

What the Bible Actually Says

- **Jesus “must needs go through Samaria.”**
- **He was wearied and sat on Jacob’s well about the sixth hour.**
- **He asked a Samaritan woman for a drink,** though Jews had no dealings with Samaritans.
- **He offered her living water,** springing up into everlasting life.
- **The living water is the spirit** believers would receive after he was glorified (7:37-39).
- **She had had five husbands, and the man she now had was not her husband.**
- **The Bible does not call her a harlot,** or say why her marriages ended.
- **Jesus said salvation is of the Jews,** but worship would not be tied to Gerizim or Jerusalem.
- **God is spirit, and true worshippers worship Him in spirit and in truth.**
- **The Father seeks such worshippers.**
- **Jesus told her plainly he was the Messiah.**
- **She left her waterpot and told the town.**
- **Many Samaritans believed because of her, and more because of his word.**
- **They called him the Christ, the Saviour of the world.**
- **The Bible does not tell us her name.**

God’s Will and Intent

- **God seeks true worshippers** — even among those others despise.
- **God offers living water freely** — His own spirit, given within.
- **God’s salvation came through Israel, for the whole world.**
- **God wants to be worshipped in spirit and in truth,** not tied to a place.
- **God uses ordinary, imperfect people** to bring others to His Son.
- **God sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world,** and raised and exalted him.