

Living Water

Lesson 6

John 4:4-19, 25-30, 39

Opener

“Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink (Isaiah 55:1).” Sometimes we may feel a longing deep within us for significance, fulfillment or acceptance. It becomes a desperate search for the end of our “thirst.” But everything we try—money, relationships, drugs, alcohol, fame, work or whatever still leaves a nagging thirst. What can quench our thirst—permanently?

The thirstiest people are the lonely people—the outcasts. These people have been rejected by others because of their behavior, appearance, or social ineptness. Whatever the reason, these people are alone. They need someone or something to water their dry, arid souls.

We see just such a woman in our lesson today.

Scripture

Key verses: “People soon become thirsty again after drinking this water. But the water I give them takes away thirst altogether. It becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life.”

The woman said, “I know the Messiah will come—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

Then Jesus told her, “I am the Messiah!”

-vv. 13-14; 25-26

After talking with one of the most prestigious Jewish leaders (Nicodemus), Jesus finds himself talking with an outcast—the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus was passing through Samaria to avoid the controversy surrounding him in Judea (vv.1-3).

Discussion

The people of Samaria were considered social rejects by the Jews—in fact, the Jews would not even talk to them! Yet when Jesus is resting at Jacob’s well, a Samaritan woman comes to draw water and Jesus asks her for a drink. There are two reasons why this was shocking to the woman: 1) because she was a Samaritan and he was a Jew; 2) because men did not address women in those days.

And yet this meeting was no accident—it was Jesus’ plan all along. He knew this woman; he had created her! He knew her past and her hurts, and he knew what she needed to end her thirst for meaning.

Ask: What does Jesus mean when he offers the woman “living water?”

Although the woman does not understand this, Jesus is speaking of eternal life—being “born again” as he described it to Nicodemus. Yet here Jesus has chosen to describe a spiritual concept in terms the woman can understand—water.

But the woman’s attention was not on spiritual things, and so she misinterpreted Jesus’ offer of this “living water.”

Ask: Are we missing what Jesus has to say to us because we aren’t paying attention?

It’s not enough to be concerned with our physical needs and merely surviving. In the words of Stephen Curtis Chapman, “There’s more to this life than living and dying—more than just trying to make it through the day.”

Like Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman did not have her spiritual eyes open to realize Jesus was not speaking of real water, just as he had not been speaking of a physical rebirth.

She begins to wonder about him, though, when Jesus tells her “everything [she] ever did” (v. 29). At that point, she must have known something was different about this Jewish traveler talking about living water.

Finally, Jesus tells her who he is: “I am the Messiah!” (v.26). This is the only time recorded in the Gospels that Jesus refers to himself as the Messiah.

Ask: Why would Jesus choose to reveal his identity to a sinful Samaritan woman?

Many times in the Gospels, we see Jesus speak in parables or use phrases that have a deeper meaning. Yet here he plainly says who he is, with no hidden meaning. He recognized the spiritual thirst of this woman—her need for love and acceptance. Her soul was wounded with the pain of rejection. Who better to receive the living water?

And, unlike Nicodemus, the woman rushes back to her people and tells them about Jesus, and many become his followers because of her testimony.

Those who have lived lives of sin and shame seem to show a deep appreciation for the forgiveness Jesus brings them. They know where they have been and what they have been saved from.

In Luke Chapter 7, we see an “immoral woman” (v. 37) who washes Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume. Jesus is ostracized for allowing this gesture by such a woman, another outcast. In reply, Jesus teaches us an important lesson. He tells of a man who loaned money to two people: one was a great amount, the other a small amount. Then he cancelled their debts because they could not pay them. Jesus says, “Who do you suppose loved him more after that?” Of course, the one who owed him more.

Jesus compares these men to sinners. We are all sinners (Romans 3:23). Some have sinned a lot, others a little. Those who have a sinful past are so grateful to God for his forgiveness. Jesus says, “Her sins—and they are many— have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love.”

The Samaritan woman realized the depth of Jesus’ love for her, and she could not wait to share it with others. Her soul had been set free from spiritual thirst forever!

Application

We may be social outcasts like the Samaritan woman, or we may not. But we have all experienced the pain of rejection and the shame of sin. So we can all relate to the woman at the well.

Yet Jesus wants to have a relationship with us anyway! He doesn't require us to be perfect to have a relationship with him. All we must do is realize how much we need him. Once the woman realized this need, her thirst for fulfillment was satisfied by the refreshing "living water" of Jesus Christ.

We may have dry, crusty souls because we haven't received this living water—eternal life. And like water, it is a necessity of life—the most important need we have!

Like Jesus did with the woman, he will show us our sinful past, but only to help us repent of our sin and follow him.

Ask: Are you ready to "thirst no more?" Come to Jesus—the friend of sinners.