

John 4:1-26: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] John chapter 4 verses 1 to 26 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John, although Jesus himself did not baptize but only his disciples, he left Judea and departed again for Galilee.

And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 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. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, Give me a drink. For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

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. 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.

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? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.

[1 : 1 9] Jesus said to her, Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again. 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. 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 said to her, Go, call your husband and come here. The woman answered him, I have no husband. Jesus said to her, You are right in saying I have no husband, for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.

What you have said is true. The woman said to him, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.

Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

[2 : 2 7] But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. The woman said to him, I know that Messiah is coming, he who is called Christ.

When he comes, he will tell us all things. Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am he. When we read through John's Gospel, it's important to recognize that there are depths to the stories that John's Gospel tells, depths that may only be recognized by more observant and patient readers that take their time over the text.

The story of the Samaritan woman at the well is one such story. To recognize the depth of these sorts of stories, it's important to pay close attention to the ways in which they are told, to the shape of the stories, to key themes, to familiar features, or to peculiar details.

Each one of these might help to tip us off to something more that is taking place. So, for instance, the story of a man meeting a woman at a well is one that we find on several occasions elsewhere in Scripture, especially in the Pentateuch.

[3 : 43] It's what Robert Alter has called a type scene. When we see a woman and a man meeting at a well in the Bible, we should almost be able to hear the wedding bells in the distance. This is an event that we see in the story of Isaac and Rebecca, in the story of Jacob and Rachel, and in the story of Moses meeting his wife.

All of these women are first met at wells. And so Jesus' encounter with the woman here is charged with all of this biblical memory and all of these marital themes.

Another thing to note here is the continuation of themes of water. The themes of water will continue to play out in the Gospel of John for quite some time. But we've already seen it in the baptism of John.

We've seen it in the turning of the water into wine. We've seen it in the conversation with Nicodemus. We've seen it with the baptism of John again at the end of chapter 3. And now we see it again with the water from the well.

Water is an important part of the picture. And John wants us to see the different ways in which water represents something beyond itself. Another thing to observe is that, as in the case of Jesus' mother Mary, John does not name the woman of Samaria.

[4 : 57] She is simply a woman or the woman. Jesus has significant encounters or interactions with his mother at the wedding of Cana and at the cross, with the woman of Samaria and with Mary Magdalene, all at charged moments or locations, a wedding, a well, his death, and in a garden.

And he addresses each one of them as woman, suggesting that each one of them stands for something greater than a mere individual. There is a further woman that we meet in chapter 16, verse 21, a woman who gives birth to a man when her hour has come.

And Jesus gives this as an illustration for his own death and resurrection. In each one of the particular women in John's Gospel, we are also encountering the archetypal woman, the woman who is going to give birth to this son, who will be the one who rules over the nations.

We should also observe the remembrance of Jacob, the field that Jacob gave Joseph, Jacob's well, the woman's question of whether Jesus is greater than Jacob, who dug the well and drank from it with his sons and livestock.

Jesus is being presented here as the true Jacob, the one who is going to open up a greater well, the well of the Spirit. He's the true Israel. Note that it's about the sixth hour.

[6 : 15] The theme of the hour is one that goes throughout the Gospel of John. And the detail may seem, by itself, to be somewhat extraneous. Just a detail of the scene to give us more of a scenic image of what's taking place.

However, there is then a reference to an hour that is coming in verse 23. Six hours plus another hour is the seventh hour. In John's Gospel, the language of the coming hour is often used.

My hour has not yet come in chapter 2. This hour that is coming when the true worshippers will arrive. The hour had come when he serves his disciples.

And the hour of his death arriving. All of these references to the hour are charged with theological significance in John's Gospel that should help us to recognize that there's something more going on here.

The seventh hour brings completeness. And this hour is coming. Note also that the woman has had five husbands and is currently with a man who is not her husband.

[7 : 21] That makes six men. However, they go on to discuss the coming man, the Messiah, the seventh man. Jesus is the true husband. He's the true Israelite.

He's the true man who's going to take Israel and the people of Samaria as his own. He's going to form a new nation. Warren Gage has remarked further upon the parallels between this story and stories in Revelation.

This is an extended quote from him. With the Samaritan woman of the Gospel, we have come to another Johannine representative of the Bride of Christ. Just as we observe the dual character of the seven churches, so we observe the dual character of the woman of Samaria.

The portrait is the same. The Samaritan woman's past bore much in common with the Whore of Babylon. But her meeting with Jesus transforms her so that she becomes like the Bride of Christ at the end of Revelation.

We begin by noting the patterns of the correspondence between the Samaritan woman and the Whore of Babylon. The Gospel account begins with Jesus sitting upon the well.

[8 : 29] Chapter 4, verse 6. A posture that corresponds to the Whore of Revelation who sits upon many waters. 17, verse 1. The Samaritan woman is thirsty and comes to the well with her water pot to draw.

In John, chapter 4, verses 7 and 28. Similarly, the Babylonian Whore is depicted with a cup in her hand, satisfying her thirst with abominations of fornication.

In Revelation, chapter 17, verse 4. When challenged by Jesus, the Samaritan woman lies about her marital status, claiming that she has no husband. In fact, Jesus tells her that she has had five husbands, and that the one she is now living with is not her husband.

In John, chapter 4, verse 17 to 18. But when the Samaritan woman and the villagers receive Jesus, he remains among them two days. Chapter 4, verse 40.

Similarly, John tells us that the Babylonian Whore also lies about her marital status, claiming, I am not a widow. But in fact, Babylon has known five kings who have fallen, and one is, and the other has not yet come.

[9 : 40] Revelation, chapter 17, verse 10. When he comes, however, he will remain with her a little while. Revelation, 17, 10. Christ redeems the Samaritan woman in spite of her impure past and transforms her into the picture of the bride of Christ.

Her thirst having been satisfied, in John 4, verse 28, she leaves the one she loves at the well, going back into the village to share with everyone the love she has found without cost.

And so she calls for the people, any who thirst for living water. John, chapter 4, verse 10. To come out of the city to meet Jesus, who gives so freely by the well of waters.

John, chapter 4, verse 29 to 30. In this, she conforms to the picture of the bride in Revelation. Who invites all who thirst to come out of the city.

Revelation, 18, verse 4. And partake of the water of life without cost. Revelation, 22, verse 17. The grace of Jesus expressed so tenderly to an immoral woman of Samaria surprises even the woman herself.

[10 : 45] In fact, she is shocked that Jesus would have anything to do with her. John, chapter 4, verse 9. Likewise, the disciples marvel that Jesus speaks with her. John, chapter 4, verse 27.

Similarly, in Revelation, the disciple John marvels when he sees the whore of Babylon. Revelation, 17, verse 6. By such means, John recreates in the reader the astonished wonder of the disciples as we first become aware of the pattern whereby a harlot called out of the city of Babylon can become the bride of Christ.

As the reader begins to comprehend the full measure of the love of Jesus for the immoral woman of Samaria, he begins to share the very wonder of the disciples who returned to the well and saw Jesus speaking with a Samaritan woman.

This woman, with five marriages and an ongoing illicit relationship, seems an unlikely antitype to the virginal Rachel, whom the Samaritan woman replaces in John's retelling of the story of Jacob.

To understand the full measure of this redemption is to marvel with the disciples. As we move further in this passage, we see a reference to the true worshippers.

[11 : 55] As we go through John's Gospel, reference is made to the true something on a number of occasions and to the truth. So in chapter 1, verse 9, we see the true light that's coming into the world.

In chapter 4, 23, the true worshippers. In chapter 6, verse 32, the true bread that comes from heaven. In chapter 15, verse 1, the true vine. And in Christ, the point is, the genuine article has arrived, the epitome, the culmination of all the things anticipated in the Old Testament.

The true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in the truth. Christ speaks of a new form of worship that will come, whose location isn't that mountain or the mountain of Jerusalem, but in the true temple of the Spirit.

the body of Christ. Worship in Spirit and in truth is more than really meaningful and heartfelt worship. It's a reference to a new manner of worshipping God, no longer geographically bound to the temple at Jerusalem, but occurring in the environment of the Spirit.

This new form of worship arrives through Christ's death and resurrection, and exists because He is the true tabernacle and temple of God. One final question to reflect upon.

[13 : 13] What are some of the ways in which the gift of the Spirit is like the placing of a well or a spring within us?