

Subverting Expectations at the Well

John 4:5-26 (NIV)

⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ 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.) ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² 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?" ¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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." ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ 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." ¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ 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. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." ²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

All he asked for was a drink of water. Why didn't I just give him a drink of water? This was not the way it was supposed to go. This was supposed to be easy. I was supposed to come down at noon like I regularly do every day and get the water I need. This was not part of the routine. I come down to Jacob's well specifically at noon so that I wouldn't have to put up with all the sideways glances, the whispering behind my back, and the people who won't look at me or talk to me. I come here at noon so that I can get my water in peace. But no. This Jewish man just happened to be here taking a rest at Jacob's well. He asked was for a drink of water. That was his only request. Why didn't I just give him a drink of water? Then this conversation never would have taken place. Then I could have already been on my way home. I wouldn't have yet another person making me feel guilty for what I've done.

Nothing about this day has gone the way that it should have. He's a Jew; I'm a Samaritan. We don't talk to each other. We are brought up to hate each other mainly because of our religious differences. On top of that, he's a man. It's doubly taboo in our culture that he talk to me, a woman. Yet, when I asked him, "How can you ask me for a drink?" (verse 9) because I know that Jews and Samaritans don't interact, he responds by saying, "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." (verse 10)

What on earth is he talking about? He asked me for a drink, and now he's talking about giving me a drink? And he's offering "living" water. Who does this guy think he is? "Sir, 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?" (verses 11-12) That ought to put him in his place. He thinks he's better than Jacob. Yeah, right.

Then he told me, "Everyone who drinks this water [from this well] 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." (verses 13-14) Wait, so he's going to give me water that if I drink it, I will never be thirsty again? Well, yeah. Give that to me. C'mon now. I don't want to have to keep coming back to this well. I don't want to have to keep having to deal with the stares, the snubs, and the whispers. I'm an outcast. Plus, it's tiring to come here every day to draw this water. "Sir, give me this water." (verse 15)

"Go, call your husband and come back" (verse 16) he says. I'm not bringing him here; he's not even my husband. I got it. I'll just say, "I have no husband." That's accurate. I'm divorced five times over. I have no husband. I have no interest in getting married again. I don't have to tell him all those things. I don't have to drudge up all these guilty feelings about my failed marriages. So I said, "I have no husband." (verse 17)

“You’re right,” he says. Woah. Wait. What? He knows? How can he know? How can he know all the relationships that I’ve been in plus this one that I know is wrong, but I kind of gave up on marriage. Wait. Why am I on trial here? Why do I have to feel bad? This guy was asking me for water. He needs me to do a favor for him, and now he’s making me feel guilty for the mistakes of my past? I mean, obviously, he knows things. He’s probably a prophet, a man of God. Plus, I know he’s a Jew. Let’s bring in a little religious controversy to take the attention away from me. Those Jews can’t help but think they are right about everything about God and tell everyone they see about him, especially to prove a Samaritan woman like me wrong. So, I say to him, “Sir, 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.” (verses 19-20)

And then get this. He tells me that a time is coming when neither the Jews nor the Samaritans will worship on these mountains. Now all of the sudden it doesn’t matter where we worship. I mean, c’mon. The Jews and the Samaritans have made this one of the defining points of our religions and cultures, and now this guy says that it doesn’t matter? Just that we will worship in spirit and in truth? The nerve of this guy, I tell ya.

Wait. Wait a minute... He said “you will worship the Father...” (verse 21) He’s including me. Me?! A Samaritan woman. The Jews have excluded us, treated us like dirty bloods, half breed, outcasts for centuries. They would rather kick us than say hello. And now this Jew is saying that I will worship the Father?! He’s including me! This is so confusing. Can this be for real? Is this truth what he is telling me? Is this the truth in which I will worship the Father? I remember those promises from the Bible lessons in Genesis. About that prophet who will come who is greater than Moses. So I say, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” (verse 25)

“I, the one speaking to you—I am he.” (verse 26) What?! He’s the Messiah?! He’s the one who was promised to come, the one to crush the head of the serpent, the prophet greater than Moses? This is amazing!

I had to go. I had to tell everyone else about this. I just left my water jar to come tell you. This man is not just a prophet. He is the Messiah! He’s the one that we have been waiting for. I thought he was just another arrogant Jew, but he sought me out. He asked me for a drink not so that I could give him a drink, but so that he could give me a drink that would save my life.

You all know about my life. I had given up on marriage. I didn’t care what God said about it anymore, and that was wrong. The way I’m living is wrong. I know that I’m not the only one to have messed up. Some of you, you have had relationships like the ones I’ve had. You’ve had the rug pulled out from under you by cheating spouses. You know just as I do that marriages are not fairy tale relationships that end with “and they lived happily ever after.” There’s fighting. There’s name-calling. There’s abuse. Marriages get broken, just like mine. I wasn’t able to keep my marriages together. But this man at the well, he did not turn up his nose to me. He did not shun me. He did not insult me. He cared about me.

I know now why it was a good thing that I didn’t just give that man a drink of water like he asked. Since we talked, I now know that he cares about each and every one of us. He is offering something to us that we have not heard before. He is offering us to worship God together in spirit and in truth. He is offering a breaking down of the walls of hostilities that have separated us Samaritans and those Jews for hundreds of year. He’s not offering this because we have it so right or because the Jews have it so right, but because God wants every single one of us to worship him.

I know that not all of your lives have turned out the way that you wanted them to. I know that some of you never thought you would be as sick as you are. I know that some of you can’t stand the idea of listening to a Jew. I know that some of you think that God should love you and accept you only because you have lived a good, noble, decent, and moral life. But this man turned over, subverted, my expectations. I thought I could never have another meaningful relationship, and yet here he comes – my Lord and my God. He is the Savior we have been waiting for, the Savior who does not treat us as we deserve, but treats us so much better than that. He is merciful. He is forgiving. He reaches out for to outcasts like me. He shares himself, the living water, with people like me so that you and me can be saved.

Will you worship him, this Messiah, with me, in spirit and in truth, not on some mountain that we think is holier than other mountains? It doesn’t matter who you are or what you have done. It doesn’t matter if you are the perfect believer or not. This man showed me that God does not love us based on our race or our religious differences. He loves us in spite of ourselves. He does not treat us as we deserve. Who would have expected for God to treat us like that? Amen.