

## **John: Temptation at the Well**

**John 4:1-26**

By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)

*December 18, 2002*

Please turn with me to the gospel of John, chapter 4.

The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but His disciples. When the Lord learned of this, He left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now He 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 the sixth hour. 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 flocks and herds?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I 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 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 fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, 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 spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and His worshipers must worship in 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 who speak to you am He."

Let's pray together:

*Our gracious God and ever blessed Father, we thank you for your word and we ask just now, that by Your Spirit, You would illuminate this familiar story to our hearts and minds and souls, for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

John tells us in the gospel why he writes it. He has a very definite purpose in mind. He tells us at the end, at the close of the gospel, that his purpose in writing this gospel was in order that men and women might believe that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God. He has an evangelistic purpose as he writes the gospel. He makes no bones about it; he is perfectly open and frank about it, he tells the stories that he tells and why he tells them in the way that he does.

You'll remember, of course, that the gospel of John begins in a different way from the other gospels. Whereas the other gospels begin with the birth of Jesus and then recount the tale leading to His death and crucifixion, John begins, as it were, not so much from below, but from above. He begins with a statement, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God, the same was in the beginning with God." Then a little later in that same chapter, he tells us that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

John has been selecting certain stories. He's told us about the preaching of John the Baptist. He's told us about the wedding in Cana of Galilee. He's told us of an encounter that Jesus had with Nicodemus. And now in chapter four another story, not found in any of the other gospels, of a journey that Jesus makes northwards to Galilee from Jerusalem going through the territory known as Samaria.

### **I. Jesus is God in the flesh, who came to earth to give Himself to atone for our sins.**

The telling of this tale, too, has an evangelistic purpose. He wants us to realize in the first place, that the Jesus whom this Samaritan woman encountered at the well of Jacob is none other than the Word made flesh. The Jesus who became incarnate is the very person whom this woman of Samaria met at the well. The scene is set for us in the opening couple of verses. There's a confrontation with

the Pharisees a little like the opening of the seventh chapter of John's gospel, and Jesus, because His time has not yet come, goes northwards to Galilee.

John tells us a little lesson in geography. He “must needs go through Samaria.” If you were to look at a map, of course, Samaria would have been the obvious direction. Samaria would have gone northwards to Galilee; it was the shortest point between the two locations. But that was not the usual way to go to Galilee. Because of the relationships between Jews and Samaritans, the usual way to traverse northwards to Galilee was along the Jordan valley. This is not the way Jesus goes, and John wants us to appreciate that there's once again a reason why he is in Samaria. Because, as John puts it, He “*must* needs go through Samaria.”

And the necessity, of course, lies in the purpose of John's writing of this gospel. It is, of course, an evangelistic purpose. Jesus must encounter this woman. Had He gone in a different direction, He would never have met her. And there is then, a divine compulsion upon Him that He cannot go in any other direction but through Samaria and to this well of Jacob. And there He meets this woman. Jesus is tired and sits down at the well, and John goes into a fair amount of detail. The scenery is set for us. It's another Bible story about a well. And those of you who know your Bibles well will remember that there is something very familiar about the way John tells this story, because it reminds us of the opening chapters of Exodus, where there too, a man sat by a well and met a woman. And that story of Moses at the well led to the Exodus and the deliverance of God's people.

In a sense John wants us to pick up on that and he is saying, “A new Moses is here.” As you read this story, John is saying to you, “I want you to understand now, people of God, as you read this story I'm relating to you, a *new* deliverer has come.” One who is going to lead His people forth into liberty from bondage and sin. John tells us that Jesus sat down at the well because He was tired, and the way John says it is interesting because it's a construction that seems to imply that Jesus not only was tired but looked tired. Isn't this a wonderful demonstration that Jesus has been tempted in every point like as we are, yet without sin! He relates to your tiredness; He related to your sense of physical exhaustion, when you end the day after a long day's hard labor and toil, and you just want to rest in that favorite arm chair and maybe put on a favorite piece of music and just blot out everything, and Jesus is saying to us, “Yes, I've been there, too.” He was tired and He looked it.

And a woman of Samaria comes to Him and He says to her, “Give me a drink.” The fact that He's speaking to this woman at all is a great mystery because normally the etiquette would be that men did not *talk* to women in public-- certainly not at a well scene like this and already something of the alarm bells in your antennae are already going off as John is relating this, but there's more than that because this is no *ordinary* woman. This is a woman of ill repute. This is a

Samaritan hussy, and Jesus is talking to her. He asks of *her* that she might give Him a drink. And as you read this story in all of its details, John is giving you details, that in the very language that this woman used about wells and drawing from the fountains of wells, are *loaded* imagery.

And you get the impression, and more, than that John is intending that you pick up the signals. This woman in her conversation with Jesus is actually tempting Him. And everything in you is now saying, "Oh no, not my sweet Savior." Every instinct in your body is saying, "Not so!" And I understand that because I want to resist that notion too, but read the story again and you will see that when the Bible tells us about our sweet Savior, that He was tempted in every point like as we are, yet without sin. Even in this place also. Even in the most distressing of all temptations, even in the allurements of this woman, Jesus is being tempted. And Jesus in His tiredness and physical exhaustion, when your resources, as it were, are spent and your energy to resist temptation is almost altogether gone, Jesus is in danger here. He is in as much danger here in this story as anywhere in the gospel narratives of Him. The Word is made flesh.

John also tells us something else. It was about the sixth hour. Now, that seems of such little significance that he tells us that, and maybe there is no significance to it, but maybe also, when you remember later when John recounts the crucifixion of Christ and when this Savior was nailed to a cross and wicked men slew Him, John says, "It was about the sixth hour." It was as though he was saying, "You remember that story I told you on the journey through Samaria, there where Jesus was tempted in every point, but with victory and triumph, and now He is being cursed in your stead for the sins with which you are tempted and perhaps have failed and have not resisted, and have not come out with cleanliness and purity and righteousness and integrity as Jesus did here. And John is saying, "The Word was made flesh." The Jesus with whom this woman engaged in conversation was the Word made flesh and incarnate for sinners like you and me.

## **II. Jesus is the only true life and light.**

But in the second place, the Jesus that is set before us in this story is the only true life and light. He talks in verses 10-18 about living water, and it is the beginning of an exchange of discourse between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, and John is relating the story to us, almost begging us in the hearing of this story, to ask the question, "Does this woman *really know* who Jesus is?" And, "Is this woman actually going to discover the living water of which Jesus speaks?"

Water, of course, is deeply significant in John's gospel. In the very opening chapter, he tells us about John's baptizing with water. In chapter two, we are led immediately into a wedding ceremony in Cana of Galilee and, there also, water

pots of purification were changed from water into wine. In chapter three, Jesus tells us the story of Nicodemus and to him Jesus says, "Unless a man is born again of water and the Spirit," referring to the Old Testament rituals of cleansing; and now, in chapter four again, there is this reference is to water. And just a few chapters on, in chapter seven at the feast of tabernacles, Jesus again will say something very similar, and He will say, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, from his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." And these references to water symbolize, I think, from the references in John seven to the giving of the Holy Spirit in part on the day of Pentecost, that when we trust in Jesus Christ, from within us the Holy Spirit will come and cleanse us and renew us and make us fit for God. He is the only true source of life.

But not just life, but light too, because this woman is in darkness. She says to Him, "I perceive that you are a prophet." And some commentators will always want to suggest that in a sense, she is trying to deviate from the conversation. Jesus has asked her to go and fetch her husband and of course, this introduces a huge problem in her life. Maybe she is indeed trying to fence off the question of Jesus and introduces a red herring—introduces a completely irrelevant point of conversation. You have experienced it yourselves many times when you try to speak to others about the gospel, when the gospel is hitting home, you'll see them squirming, trying to change the conversation. And maybe that's what this woman is doing here--but perhaps not. Perhaps this is a genuine reflection of her confusion, the genuine paucity of her understanding of what *true* religion is all about. And people have all kinds of weird notions of what true and genuine Christianity is all about. And Jesus is being presented to her as the true source of life and the true source of light.

### **III. Jesus is the great example of evangelism.**

But in the third place, Jesus is being set before us here in this encounter with this woman as the great evangelist. In a sense, Christ is wooing this woman. Here you have a glimpse into the personal evangelistic strategy of Jesus.

And in this well scene, again you remember your Bible stories in the Old Testament. In Genesis 24, Isaac and Rebecca at the well; and in Genesis 29 it's Jacob and Rachel; in Exodus 2 it's Moses and Zipporah. Wells scenes in the Bible are scenes of betrothal and marriage--highly significant moments. And John is doing something startling isn't he? Whereas this woman is tempting Jesus; Jesus is wooing her also in an altogether different sense. It's not so much this woman that is advancing toward Jesus, but Jesus who is advancing towards her. He's come for His bride, you might say. There's a strategy at work here.

I'm always intrigued, when I read this story, at how complex Jesus' presentation of the gospel is here. It's not a simple presentation. And though there is a place,

of course, for the simple presentation of the gospel, but the gospel is always much more complex than that. And here in this narrative John is giving us a glimpse; He's giving us a lesson on evangelism and mission and ministry and how to relate to unbelievers.

There's a seven-fold stage through which this woman seems to pass. In the first place, she comes from a spirit of total alienation. As the story begins, she is standing above Christ, knows better than Christ, and she thinks that she's in control of the conversation. She knows things that He doesn't. And yet she's blind and she cannot see at all. Her intentions are altogether hostile. And then she is brought to a position of apparent curiosity. She is drawn to a state of fascination. How much did this woman make of what Jesus said? Did she understand His presentation of the gospel? He says things that seem almost certain to confuse. And yet, by the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, in the presentation of this message and the outflow of this conversation, this woman's curiosity is engaged.

And then, seemingly, a state of confusion, in verse 15 she says, "Sir, give me this water so I will not be thirsty, nor come all the way here to draw." When she hears Jesus speak about waters of life and waters that if she drinks from, she would never thirst again, and her heart and mind begin to race. And all this drudgery of coming out to the well to draw water and the necessity of it would go away and she asks in her confusion that she might experience this water.

And then comes conviction. "Are you greater than Jacob?" she asked Him. The woman has a vision of Jesus that sees Him merely as a man. That's all she sees. She's like Jacob. But Jacob's well only brought perennial thirst. And the well of Jacob could never satisfy the human heart, and Jesus brings this line of conversation to a radical end. And He knows now that the next touch will light upon the very pain—like a doctor, you know when they press on your stomach because you've got a pain. And they say, "Is it here?" And you say, "No." "And is it here?" "Yes! It's there." And Jesus knows now where to touch and it will hurt and He says to her, "Go, call your husband." And her response is a mixture of conviction and self protection. "I have no husband," she said. And she has five husbands. And the man she is now with is not her husband, and it suddenly dawns on this woman that Jesus knew things about her that she thought he didn't know.

And there comes a dawning realization that here was one standing before her who knew the deepest secrets of her heart and exposed the sinfulness and the waywardness of her lifestyle. And she begins to grope near the truth, and she says in verse 19, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet." And in all of her confusion, something of the realization that here was a teacher the like of which she had never seen or experienced before. And there's a dawning that finds a fulfillment in Jesus in the words in verse 26. "I who speak to you am He." That is, the Christ, the Messiah. The one that she had vaguely heard about, the one that

she knew the Jews were looking and longing for.

And now John spoke to her directly, face to face, and said to her, "I am He." I am the one that the Old Testament Scriptures speak of and prophecy. I am the fulfillment of all those hopes and dreams; I am the fulfillment of all those prophecies. I am the Christ. And then there's the breath of grace in her soul as she leaves her water pots and goes into the city and says to the men, "Come, see the man who told me all the things that I have done. Is this not the Christ?"

If the fourth chapter of John's gospel were a movie, I guess Steven Spielberg would end the movie with a camera coming closer and closer in its shot to the empty water pot at the well of Sychar--the water pot that had never been used that day. The water pot that she had brought with her, day after day after day, in the routine of coming to that well to draw water, but *that* day, she leaves the well and leaves the water pot behind. Symbolic as it is of a life that has been radically changed and transformed by the person and ministry of Jesus Christ that is presented here as the word of God made flesh and dwelling amongst the people, a single water pot--symbol of the change that Jesus can bring into the lives of the most hardened sinners in all the world--even a hussy like this one. And Jesus transformed her and changed her and took away that stony heart of unbelief and gave her a new heart. Here is a woman who has had six men and now lives with a seventh, and He stands before her drawing her to Himself, not offended by her depravity or offended by her lifestyle so that He would have nothing to do with her. That He would speak to her despite the shock that the disciples sensed when they come back from the village and they say, "Why is He talking with this woman?" And John is saying to us. He is talking with her because His heart overflowed with love and compassion for sinners--sinners in need of Christ, sinners in need of salvation, sinners lost and in bondage to a wayward lifestyle and to whom Jesus, in the power of His sovereign majesty, can take and transform and renew and change.

What has happened in this story is that this woman has come to believe and to trust in Jesus Christ. She has come to see Him as the only solution, the only answer to the problem of sin and the problem of her life; and she's cast her all on Him. And John says that when she went back into that city there was the awakening in that city--a beginning of a work of revival in that city. It was the dawning of the outpouring of the Spirit on that locality where others--tens, hundreds--came to know the Savior partly through *her* instrumentality.

We worship the same Jesus, today, who was dead and is alive forevermore; who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If you, in this congregation today, are still without Christ in this hour of worship, if you are conscious of something in your life that is terribly amiss and you do not know the source of light and life, may I point you to Him? Jesus the Son of God, who lived and died for sinners like you and me, and who calls sinners to Himself and says, "Come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." May God the Holy Spirit

write these truths on our hearts. May we stand and pronounce the benediction?

Now may the grace of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God our Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

**Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).