

THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel - Part sixteen

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LIFE'S DEEPEST THIRSTS CAN ONLY BE QUENCHED THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

John 4:1-14 - "Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John [2] (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), [3] he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. [4] And he had to pass through Samaria. [5] So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. [6] 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. [7] There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." [8] (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) [9] 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.) [10] 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." [11] 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? [12] Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." [13] Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

There is good reason for spending some time with the background of this text. John makes sure we are all made aware that this woman - thirsty in more ways than one - was a **Samaritan** woman. The central woman in this text is the one who reveals her awareness of the great divide between Jesus - a **Jew** - and herself - a **Samaritan** - **John 4:9** - "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.)"

And clearly, by "**no dealings**" (9) John wants us to include even the act of sharing a drink of water from the same well. Such was the ancient animosity between Jews and Samaritans.

This hatred didn't just happen. It **came** from a long, entangled history. Oversimplified, its roots went back to the captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians. The capital city of Israel was **Samaria**. And **most** of the Jews were forced to leave their homeland. But a small number stayed behind. As foreigners flowed into the land they married with these Jews and also brought their religions. The people left in Samaria - the **Samaritans** - were a mix of both race and religion.

When the people of Judah came back from Babylonian captivity their first mission was to rebuild the temple. And the syncretized Samaritans fought against Judah's efforts. They established their own worship, not in Jerusalem, but on Mount Gerizim. Samaritans were considered enemies of the covenant God of Israel. All of this means there is something particularly tender and powerful in Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. In Christ, who the Apostle John has already identified as the one who came "**...in order that the world might be saved through him**" (3:17b), we are just beginning to see the scope of that reach.

But there's something else that needs explanation. Roughly one year **after** this successful account of Jesus' ministry in Samaria we find Him giving these instructions to His disciples before sending them out in ministry - **Matthew 10:5-8** - "These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, '**Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans**, [6] but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. [7] And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' [8] Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.'"

What are we to make of this? "**Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans.**" Why such a difference between Jesus' **own** ministry and His prescribed ministry for His disciples? Why does **He** go to Samaria and bless this woman and yet tell His disciples to **avoid** the very same people and place?

1) **JESUS LABORED TO OVERCOME A DEEPLY ENTRENCHED SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS - EVEN IN HIS FIRST DISCIPLES**

I think there are two reasons. One is more minor and one is major. First the **minor** reason. Jesus recognized the attitude of long established hatred in His first Jewish disciples. **We** might not take much note of it, but I'm sure Jesus saw the dark prejudice of their own hearts on several occasions.

Consider **Luke 9:51-55** - "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. [52] And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. [53] But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. [54] And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "**Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?**" [55] But he turned

and rebuked them.”

Needless to say, that kind of attitude doesn't foster a love for evangelism. And it doesn't easily rinse out of our hearts. Consider how long racial prejudice lingers in the American south. Jesus doesn't want **future** ministry to the Samaritans to be put in jeopardy by the hatred of Samaritans (and other Gentiles) that His own disciples might have considered righteous and God-honoring. This is important. The Jews who first admired and followed Jesus used their **love for God's law** to promote **hatred for the Samaritans**. This kind of warped holiness isn't hard to find in today's church. It is always easy to justify hatred toward the sinner as well as the sin.

Jesus would eventually lead His disciples out of this spiritual blindness. Later, after much teaching, and the complete revelation of Messiah's atoning death and resurrection, we find much more complete and developed instruction regarding the missions of Jesus' disciples - **Luke 24:44-48** - **"Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." [45] Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, [46] and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, [47] and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things."**

I said there were **two** reasons for Jesus' instruction for His disciples **not** to take their mission **initially** to the Gentiles or the Samaritans. To see the second reason, look again at His instructions in **Matthew 10:5-8** - **"These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, [6] but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. [7] And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' [8] Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay."**

These instructions aren't instructions **against** the Gentiles or the Samaritans. These are carefully structured words designed to show the link between **Jesus** and God's Old Covenant people, **Israel**. Jesus' mission **started** with the Jews in order to make it perfectly clear that Israel's calling and purpose were manifested and completed in Him. **He** stood as the divine bridge between all that Old covenant Israel **pointed to** and all that Father God would **yet** do in providing redemption for all the nations and peoples of the earth.

This is quite specifically what Paul meant in words we so often quote but rarely take the time to analyze in **Romans 1:16** - **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."** This is not, as some people assume, because God loves the Jews more. Rather, it is to reveal the divine flow and plan of redemption from Old covenant to New. We're taught to see Jesus, not as some brand new, isolated, unplanned event, but as the completion of all that had gone on before. This is God's plan to make the rejection of Jesus Christ inexcusable. God had flooded history with pointers to His coming Son.

2) **SPIRITUAL HUNGER CAN'T BE MANUFACTURED OR SUSTAINED APART FROM GROWING KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S REVELATION**

John 4:9-12 - **"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.) [10] 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.' [11] 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? [12] Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."**

There were two things this woman needed desperately to know - **John 4:10** - **"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."**

Don't rush over those words. What is holding this woman back from divine grace? What keeps her messed up moral life from the refreshing power of living water? Is it that she's too sinful for Jesus? Is her life too messed up to be loved and restored? Has Jesus written her off?

The text won't even let us go down that road. She is held back by what she **doesn't know** - **"If you knew....."** Her heart, like yours and mine, is tethered to her mind. She can't embrace what she doesn't understand. There isn't enough in her **mind** for her to make a meaningful repentance in her **heart** and a meaningful commitment with her **will**.

Please don't write me off when I tell you there are scores of people in the church who simply don't **know** enough to be

serious disciples of Jesus Christ. They've been told for so long that it isn't **head knowledge** but **heart knowledge** that God is after that they've forgotten - or haven't been told often enough - that, **yes**, it **is** heart knowledge God is after - and **yes**, it takes more than a smart brain to please God - but **heart knowledge** is **impossible** without a constantly growing foundation of **understanding** in the mind.

We should have realized this just from reading our Bibles:

2 Peter 1:2 - "May grace and peace **be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.**"

2 Peter 1:8 - "For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful **in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**"

2 Peter 3:18 - "But **grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.** To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

This last text is perhaps the most specific. Exactly how does the growth of divine grace happen in my life? How is its effect deepened and appreciated and cherished? Peter's conclusion is too clear to miss. Grace grows as knowledge grows. People who ignore this are trapped in the common deception that they can work up a love for Jesus and His grace by striving for a romantic state while they sing praise choruses. And that, by itself, will never sustain your love for Jesus.

What do you **know** about God, Jesus Christ, redemption, eternity, the kingdom of God, that you **didn't** know last year at this time? Are you writing these things down? Do you chart your growth? Do you test yourself with questions? Is any of this even important to you?

Look at this thirsty woman two feet from Jesus. She's missing out on living water because, Jesus says, she's not functioning with any **awareness** of her present situation. She's coming to **Jacob's well**. And she doesn't know that Jacob existed to point to Jesus. But she has somehow missed all that. She is face to face with living water. But doesn't know enough to even ask for it when offered. She's missing her present moment because she's not **seeing** the importance of it. Is that you today?

3) **THIS WOMAN IS MISSING WHAT IS ETERNAL BECAUSE SHE'S PREOCCUPIED WITH WHAT IS TEMPORARY**

John 4:11-15 - "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? [12] Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.' [13] Jesus said to her, **Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**' [15] 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.'"

It's not that there anything wrong with coming to the well for water. It's no sin to be thirsty. After all, Jesus **opened** this conversation with His own request for a drink of water.

No. It's just that she can't get past her physical thirst. She's preoccupied with the water in Jacob's well to the point she can't hunger for anything deeper. That's what earthly appetites do. The more we feed them the more they diminish our capacity for giving attention to anything else.

This is the problem with the kind of evangelism that uses **only** perceived needs to make contact with the unsaved. In trying to tap into an already existing interest the church **may** be overestimating the ease with which people switch hungers from the material and immediate to the spiritual and eternal. I'm not saying this approach can **never** work. I'm only pointing out that there are inherent dangers in it that should be thought through.

Even when the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed Jesus said it was very hard for the seed of the Word to **overcome** needs and interests that appeared to have more immediate consequences - **Matthew 13:22** - "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful."

The problem here, of course is the Word doesn't compete well with earthly worries and material prosperity. Given the

same amount of time for germination, the weeds and thorns **grow more quickly and densely than the Word**. They choke out the Word. Never is it vice-versa, according to Jesus.

What this means is it takes, as with the words of Jesus to this woman, a supernatural work to bring about a recognition of the two great needs we all have. Jesus can get nowhere with this woman until He reveals two things. **First**, He shows her the sin in her life by revealing her immoral lifestyle (16-18). Her sin is a greater problem than her lack of physical water.

Second, He reveals to her that if she is to ever reach God in worship and relationship she must come to terms with who He - **Jesus the Messiah** - really is (20-25). Jesus tells her religious tradition and devotion apart from Himself as the living water, will always come up empty. And, as her present moral situation demonstrated, religious tradition without Christ will never break the bondage of sin.

4) THE PROOF OF A GENUINE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

John 4:13-14 - "Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"

We are drawn back into an issue the Apostle John can't leave alone. Because his whole gospel was written to build faith in Jesus Christ (he tells us that in **John 20:30-31**) he constantly forces the question on his readers, "**What exactly is faith in Jesus Christ, and how do I know if I have it?**"

And his point in **4:13-14** is this. Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord isn't something cold and static. It isn't merely like graduating into a new spot and getting a certificate. It is a constantly moving, living, active, forceful, and above all, satisfying devotion. It makes all other loves seem **boring** and **dry** in comparison. This is why Jesus saw the image of **water** and **thirst** as good analogies of the old life and the new.

Faith in Jesus changes the kind of people you can be happy merging lives with. Jesus changes the kind of entertainment you can watch with any measure of pleasure. Jesus changes the direction of your pursuits from the satisfying of your own desires to what brings glory and joy to Father God's heart.

In other words, when you say you "**believe in Jesus**" what you're saying, if you mean it in the New Testament sense, is you are permanently spoiled for finding the deepest thirsts of your life quenched anywhere else.