

“I AM”

John 4:1-26

- 1** Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John— **2** although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.
- 3** So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. **4** Now he had to go through Samaria.
- 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 AM, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

Introduction

In a recent podcast, pastor and writer Max Lucado said that he thought there are two words that describe our present-day culture: “fragile and fearful.” Yet I suppose it a rare time and place when people in most cultures have not been fragile and fearful. When has the Middle East not been fragile and fearful?

It certainly was in Jesus' day. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus had his amazing way of hope for the fragile and fearful as well as strong challenge to the prideful and powerful.

As we come to the account of Jesus meeting the "Woman at the Well," we see the grace and truth that the Savior came to offer.

I. No Superiority

"Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John the Baptist — although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

It says, "In fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea." Jesus always cautioned against feeling either superior or inferior to others. There was a division like that in the early church at Corinth. Paul writes saying, "One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'Well, I follow Peter'; still another, 'Well, I think I have it best: I follow Christ.' Now wait a minute: Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?" Jesus wouldn't want anyone boasting that they were baptized by Jesus.

Remember when Jesus heard that some were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, he told a parable. "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 18:9-14). To Corinth, Paul responded, "So then, no more boasting about human leaders!"

To minimize this rumor of the Pharisees, it says that Jesus left Judea and went back to Galilee (some 80 miles to the north).

II. Compelled

"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."

Three important things to note here: 1) Jesus had to go through Samaria. "He absolutely had to" is the first word in the sentence, Greek for strong emphasis. The living God the Father urges, impels Jesus the Son by the Holy Spirit to go through Samaria, something observant Jewish people would avoid. 2) the

town is Sychar, today near the Palestinian embattled city of Nablus on the West Bank. Jesus wants to meet and tell his good news to the Palestinians!

In Galatians 3 we hear a deep theological and anthropological truth. “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

And 3) Jesus was tired and thirsty. He was fully human (something Gnostics and other cults have often tried to deny). Remember in John 1: “The Word became flesh” – a real human being who gets tired and looks for a place to sit down, rest and get a drink.

So he had to go. The rest of the story will show why. For you and me, we happen to move or have to go from place to place. I have to go to work; I have to go grocery shopping; I have to go visit my in-laws! “Jesus had to go through Samaria. He came upon Jacob’s well. A Samaritan woman came to draw water; Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” Jesus doesn’t ask her, “Do you realize what a sinner you are?”

God will bring people, events and situations to us that are ripe for sharing Christ with others. When talking with an insurance agent, bumping into someone at that supermarket, visiting with family or friends, don’t be surprised at how the Lord can use you and your basic, simple faith to make an important difference for good in someone else’s life.

Jesus asks a question; he asks for her help. He was sensitive to the fact that the Samaritan woman was a social outcast, coming to the well at noon when she knew she would not have to deal with the comments and looks of the other women from town. They came for water in the cool of the morning or evening. She is there at noon.

III. The First “I AM”

The conversation ensues. A bit taken aback, she asks, “How come you, a Jewish man, are asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?” Jesus breaks through the ancient world’s androcentricity (male-centeredness) and answers, “If you only knew the free gift of God” (do you appreciate who is speaking to us through every conversation in the Gospels?). “If you only knew the free gift of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water.” She says, “You don’t even have a bucket to draw with. How are you going to get this ‘living water’?” Jesus says, “Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst.” The woman says, “Sir, give me this water so I won’t ever get thirsty, won’t ever have to come back to this well again!” Then the conversation about her difficult past and present (five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband).

Now comes the most important part of the story. She says, “I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we’ll get the whole story.” Jesus tells her “I am he, I, the man talking with you. You don’t have to wait any longer or look any further.”

This is the first of the “I AM” declarations of Jesus in the gospel of John. “I am the bread of life... Before Abraham was born, I am... I am the gate... I am the good shepherd... I am the resurrection... I am the way, the truth, the life... I am the vine.”

The first “I AM” was not given in impressive Jerusalem to religious leader Nicodemus in chapter 3 or even to the first disciples in chapters 1 and 2. The first is given in less impressive Sychar to what most readers of the gospel back then, a three-time loser: a woman, a Samaritan, with an troubled past.

God will always make it as clear as possible. Living Water, the gift of faith, the presence of the Holy Spirit, salvation itself – this is indeed a free gift, completely independent of gender, nationality or merit; completely independent of one’s past or present history; completely dependent on God’s grace and mercy.

Conclusion

This is the reason Jesus *had to* go through Samaria. This is the reason you and I *have to* go. God the Father sends Jesus and this woman to meet in this God-forsaken place. God’s providence at work.

Retired pastor Donn Moomaw called this the story of a woman who came for water but who went home with a well. Let us pray for the water that Jesus, the great “I AM” offers becoming in us “a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Jeremiah 1:2-10

The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah in the reign of Josiah king of Judah,
and through the reign of Jehoiakim, down to Zedekiah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile.

The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

“Alas, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.”

But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’”

You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.

Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me,

“I have put my words in your mouth.

See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms

to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”