

The Samaritan Woman

Part II

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We have listened to the conversation between Jesus and the woman of Samaria. Having met her at the Jacob's well and being very thirsty, the Saviour asked her for a drink. The woman refused on the grounds that He was a Jew and therefore could not expect favours from a Samaritan.

Jesus then started talking about living water which, He said, she would ask of Him if only she knew the Gift of God and who it was that was speaking to her. The trouble was that she did not know. Like all fallen descendants of Adam she was blind, her mind being darkened by sin.

She was not just a sinner in the ordinary sense. This woman was a notorious sinner, even by Samaritan standards. She had been married five times and was presently living with a sixth lover. Yet sinner though she was, there was hope for her, for she had met Jesus. He had to pass through Samaria that day to save this poor woman. He had asked her for a drink because He was thirsty. But His was not only a physical thirst. The Saviour was also thirsting for the soul of this sinful woman. He longed to save her. What she needed was living water, the healing waters of grace and salvation. And He offered her this water. But she did not understand what He meant.

She was intelligent enough, however, to realize that this Stranger was talking about a special kind of water. So she asked: "Give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw" (John 4:15).

At this, Jesus bluntly tells her, "Go call your husband." Why does He say this? To make her realize what her problem is. She has to know how great a sinner she is. This woman has asked for living water, but she does not know the value of it. She cannot. Until she first sees her need. Her problem is a spiritual one. She has sinned against God. That's why He says: "Go call your husband!" And what is her answer? "I have no husband." Is she single then? Or a widow? No. She deliberately gives an ambiguous answer. Why? Because she tries to hide her shame. She is on her guard. She doesn't want a full exposure. Not yet, anyway.

Do you see yourself here? When the Lord comes with His searchlight and begins to probe the darkness of our heart we tend to do the same thing as this woman here. We too are so good at using evasive tactics. We will admit that we are sinners, of course, but we prefer not to go into any details. “I have no husband,” is her curt reply. It is the truth, but not the whole truth. Yet that is what Christ is after. The whole truth, a complete, honest confession.

“Thou hast well said, I have no husband,” Jesus replies, “for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.”

In this way Christ puts the knife of conviction right into the wound. This seems cruel, but it is really merciful. Jesus is not a soft physician who makes stinking wounds. He is firm and ably wields the scalpel in order to lay open the real source of the problem.

The Lord also comes to us offering living water. But are you thirsty? In a sense, of course we are because we all seek fulfillment in life. We have our desires and longings. The problem is that like this woman we thirst for the wrong things. We lust after objects God has forbidden us. That all started in Paradise where we forsook God the Fountain of living waters and began to drink at the wells of sin.

“Go get your husband,” Jesus said to this woman. What would you say if Christ put this question to you? You understand what He means by husband now, don’t you? Your husband here means your sin, whatever you are thirsting for instead of God. He comes to you in the preaching of His Word and He asks you, Who are you? What is your life? What are your deepest longings and cravings? What do you live for?

The Lord knows our answer already. He knows us better than we know ourselves. Why then does He ask such personal questions? Because He wants us to realize what our problem is. He wants us to face the awful fact that we are sinners, so we will confess all our sins, also our bosom or darling sins, to Him and seek cleansing for them in His blood. He knows we are vile sinners, every one of us, but we must know it too. Otherwise we won’t see or feel any need for Christ. As long as we think we are in pretty good shape we will not go to a doctor. “They that are whole,” Jesus says, “need no physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Therefore, go call your husband. Tell me what your sin is, and confess it to Me. Don’t try to cover up.

What is your sin? What is your secret fountain from which you try to quench your thirst? Either by big draughts or tiny sips, that makes no difference. As long as you are addicted to whatever sin it may be, you are not drinking the living water Christ offers you. That “husband” does not necessarily have to be some immoral sin. It can be a perfectly respectable thing, such as your decent life, your respectability or even your religion. If you trust in your own goodness, then that too can become a fountain for you. Anything instead of Christ — in other words — is sin, if we put our trust in it and derive our satisfaction from it. This is the cutting edge of the Gospel.

The Lord kills before He makes alive. It may seem as if the Lord is against us when He comes with the searchlight of His Word, but His purpose is always medicinal. He reminds us of our sins, not to drive us from Him, but to draw us to Him. When Christ tells this woman to get her husband, He puts His finger on the sore spot in her life and that hurt her, of course. He did not say this to discourage her so that she would go away and never come back. No, He meant for her to come back with her husband. Bring him here. Bring him to Me! “Go” is His word addressed to our conscience. But “come” is addressed to our heart.

Maybe some of you feel too sinful to come to Christ. You realize you have gone far into the forbidden path. How can the Lord have anything to do with me, you wonder? I am so vile and He is so holy! But are you worse than this woman of Samaria? I doubt it. But even if you are, wouldn't Christ be able to help you? And doesn't this story show that He is very willing too?

Nothing can surprise the Lord. Nothing can shock Him either. You may surprise yourself and shock others by your sins, but you cannot surprise the Lord. Scripture says about Jesus Christ: “And He knows what is in man.” No, He is not shocked when we come to Him with our “husband.” There is only one thing that does shock Him. Only one thing surprises Him. The Bible says that Jesus was amazed once when in spite of all the wonderful things He had done for the people of Capernaum, they did not believe in Him. Then it says, “And He was amazed at their unbelief.” Because of their unbelief, He could not do much there.

The Lord is still amazed at our unbelief today. Many of you have heard the Gospel many times, but you still don't believe in Him as your Saviour. That amazes Christ.

Today He comes to you again, and He says, sinner, come to me with whatever sins you have on your conscience and let me set you free. You cannot do that yourself. You cannot break those chains that bind you to your lusts. You cannot forsake those fountains of poisonous water in your own strength. He alone has that power. How gently the Saviour treats this woman. He points out her sin, but He also points out who her Saviour is. “I am the Messiah,” He tells her. Isn't that strange, that He reveals His identity to this Samaritan woman? He did not tell the Pharisees who He was. He even forbade His disciples to give away the secret of His mission. But what He denied them, He granted her, a poor lost sinner. Jesus still does that. He hides His secrets from the wise and prudent, but He reveals them to babes.

That's why Jesus had to go through Samaria. That's why He sat down at the well — thirsty for water, yes, but even more thirsty for the salvation of a lost soul.

The Lord Jesus is still sitting by the well of salvation today. He is still waiting for sinners like the Samaritan woman, thirsty sinners who are drinking from the wells of sin but who are not satisfied, who feel so empty inside.

“Go, call your husband! I am your Messiah!” These are the two statements the Saviour speaks to all whom He saves. By the first He exposes our sin. It is the law that convicts and condemns. By the second He pours in comfort. It is the Gospel of His grace. Blessed we are if we have heard Christ speaking to us in this twofold way. Then we will often pray with David in Psalm 139: “Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” That way is Christ who is the Way, the Life, and the Truth, but also the Fountain full of life-giving and life-sustaining water.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink, and live.”
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.

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