

Awakening Spiritual Thirst

John 4:1-18

BI: Nothing has the power to awaken true spiritual thirst for Christ like deep conviction over our own sin.

Today we bring that all-familiar story of the Woman at the Well. This is one of the most impactful narratives we find in the book of John. The dialogue between Jesus and this very bright Samaritan woman bears the complexity of a multi-faceted diamond. And yet, the flow of thought is so easy to follow that it's hard to miss important insight and truth John intends for us to discover.

My intention is to take this absolute gem of a passage and turn it over slowly and carefully so that we can see it for all its glory. But this morning, in the interest of time (Lord's Supper Sunday) I want to make one observation about Jesus' strategy with this woman that will, I trust, help us know how to awaken spirit thirst for Christ in our own hearts when it seems we have momentarily lost it (or in some cases, never had it).

Now, on its face this passage is obviously intended to reveal that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who offers salvation to all who will believe (even a cereal sinner like this Samaritan woman). But what I want us to consider is the part of the dialogue we find all the way down beginning with verse 13.

Read 4:13-14

Now, let's think about this for a moment. If there ever was a man who could be called the Master Evangelist, Jesus was it. He knew how to share the gospel. And really, that's what the story of the woman at the well is all about. But when you get to this part of the "presentation" something seems to go awry. Look, the woman is ready! She's eating out of his hand! Notice what she says: (15) "The woman said to Him, 'Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw.'" I mean, it sounds to me like she is just about ready to pray the sinners prayer, right?

If Jesus were such a great evangelist surely he would start moving to close the deal. He would explain to her that all she needs to do is pray the prayer and if she really meant it deep down in her heart she could know for certain (and never, ever doubt) that she had become a child of God. But that is absolutely NOT what he does.

Read v. 16-18

Wait a minute! What was that? If we were critiquing Jesus' approach to evangelism we might say, "Jesus, what were you thinking? You were so close being able to draw the net on this woman! Why in the world did you bring up that thing about her husband? Talk about rubbing salt into an open wound! And then when she didn't tell you the whole truth, you went ahead and flat-out exposed her very personal, private, and no doubt very painful sin! What evangelism school did you go to, anyway?"

Beloved, I put all of this in such crass terms to highlight the difference between most modern evangelism techniques compared to the approach of our Lord. You see, Jesus wasn't working from some canned, memorized evangelism presentation. Rather, He addressed each person according to their need.

When He spoke with Nicodemus who was enslaved to a theology of self-righteousness the focus of his message was "You must be born again." Here, however, when He is speaking with a woman who is apparently enslaved by the endless quest for satisfaction in men companionship, the focus of His message is, "Only living water can truly and permanently satisfy your soul."

In both cases He was offering the gospel to sinners. But I am especially intrigued with how He does it here. Think about it. What was Jesus offering this woman? Living water. What was the appeal of this "water"? If you drink it you will never thirst again because it will become (by the power of the H.S.) a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

But here is the problem. The woman was thinking only in terms of liquid water because she didn't want to have to keep making the long journey to the well every day. Jesus' challenge was to do something that would cause her to thirst for the living water; the gospel. So, in order to provoke her to thirst for what God offers in Christ, He exposed her sin.

You know the end of the story. Not only was her life transformed by this encounter, but her entire village experienced a kind of revival that is seldom seen in church history. Read v. 39-42.

Now, here is the point that I want to drive home. Nothing has the power to awaken true spiritual thirst for Christ like deep conviction over our own sin. The reason the American church is so spiritually weak in our time is not because we have *NOT* been able to figure out how to make people feel better about themselves, but because we've trained people to feel SO good about themselves that they have little use for Christ. To the American church Jesus is less like the Lamb of God who came to bear our sin, and more like a therapeutic Life Coach come to help us experience all the blessing and comfort we deserve.

Beloved, viewing Jesus like this is no different than the woman who was hoping Jesus would provide an easier way to get water. But that is not why He had come. He came to give her (and us) something infinitely more valuable; namely, a reconciled and eternally satisfying relationship with Almighty God.

Why don't people have that? Because of sin. Why do we so often lose our fellowship with God in Christ? Because of sin. You see, beloved, the remedy for our lost condition before God and the remedy for our lack of fellowship with God is the same; namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from sin.

I would submit to you that the woman at the well would never have found herself thirsting for living water if Jesus had not exposed her sin. And I have found this true in my own walk with the Lord; that whenever I find within my soul a lack of thirst for fellowship with God I also find a corresponding insensitivity to sin. Conversely, I find that the times of sweetest fellowship with Christ are almost always connected to a deep sense of my own unworthiness in the light of His glorious grace. To taste that grace is like drinking deeply of living water and it is Oh, so satisfying to my soul!

The remarkable thing about humiliation and adoration in the heart of Charles Simeon is that they were inseparable. Simeon was utterly unlike most of us today who think that we should get rid once and for all of feelings of vileness and unworthiness as soon as we can. For him, adoration only grew in the freshly plowed soil of humiliation for sin. So he actually labored to know his true sinfulness and his remaining corruption as a Christian.

I have continually had such a sense of my sinfulness as would sink me into utter despair, if I had not an assured view of the sufficiency and willingness of Christ to save me to the uttermost. And at the same time I had such a sense of my acceptance through Christ as would upset my little bark, if I had not ballast at the bottom sufficient to sink a vessel of no ordinary size. (Moule 134f.)

He never lost sight of the need for the heavy ballast of his own humiliation. After he had been a Christian forty years he wrote:

With this sweet hope of ultimate acceptance with God, I have always enjoyed much cheerfulness before men; but I have at the same time labored incessantly to cultivate the deepest humiliation before God. I have never thought that the circumstance of God's having forgiven me was any reason why I should forgive myself; on the contrary, I have always judged it better to loathe myself the more, in proportion as I was assured that God was pacified towards me (Ezekiel 16:63). . . . There are but two objects that I have ever desired for these forty years to behold; the one is my own vileness; and the other is, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ: and I have always thought that they should be viewed together; just as Aaron confessed all the sins of all Israel whilst he put them on the head of the scapegoat. The disease did not keep him from applying to the remedy, nor did the remedy keep him from feeling the disease. By this I seek to be, not only *humbled and thankful*, but *humbled in thankfulness*, before my God and Saviour continually. (Carus, 518f.)

All of my heroes from church history understood this. The way upward is to descend downward. The way to see the highest glories of Christ is to see them from the lowliest seat of the undeserving sinner. The more I see His glory, the more I know my sin. And the more I know my sinfulness, the more clearly I see His glory and feel the awesome privilege that it is to be favored with His fellowship, love, and care.

Beloved, as we come to the Lord's table this morning, if you are sensing that your fellowship with Christ is lacking, your thirst for Him is weak or non-existence, let me encourage you to do something about it. Ask the Lord to do for you what He did for the woman at the well. Ask him to search your heart and reveal all your sin. Hold nothing back from Him and let Him pour into you the life-giving, soul-satisfying living water of the gospel that by it you will once again know the forgiveness of sins and reconciled fellowship with your God.

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