

1. INTRODUCTION:

- a. **Redemptive History Context** – To prepare us for this segment of The Gospel of John, it's important that we understand the context to see what is really taking shape in this portion of Scripture. John's Gospel is a unified message comprised of a series of short stories that together present a view of the greater story of redemptive history. In looking at the Bible as a whole, it begins with the creation story where in Genesis chapters 1-2 we find humanity created to be with God in the best place on earth... the Garden of Eden.
 - i. To bring focus to his message, John tells an alternate creation account in John 1:1... "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word is God." John wants his readers through the ages to know the pivotal importance and significance of Jesus' identity as God incarnate. Jesus is the living Word of God... the Logos.
 - ii. At the end of Scripture in the Book of Revelation also written by John, we find at the end of the redemptive history story, humanity living in intimacy with God in the best place anywhere... in a New Heaven/Earth. This new reality is the central hope of all of God's people, and is brought about by the ministry of Jesus to redeem humanity.
 - iii. Redemptive history is all about God's reclamation project for Fallen humanity, and the Gospel message explains how it was brought about.
- b. **Transformational Life Context** – further, the Gospel message in the context of Redemptive History makes it clear that God's plan is not simply making us better, but has to do with a radical makeover making us into something we were not before... this is about radical transformational change.
 - i. In John chapter 1, John's use of "In the Beginning" introduces Jesus as God who is here on earth to transform humanity in Jesus' Image that we may live in eternity with God.
 1. God becoming human is in itself a story of radical transformation, but God became human so we can see who God really is. Rather than some abstract concept, God is a Person who desires that we become more appropriately responsive to Him, and then be recreated through Him.
 2. Jesus ministry was one of reconciliation where humanity and God could not just resume their relationship as experienced in the Garden, but enter into a radical intimacy in an amazing new creation of Heaven & earth... this is transformational change.
 - ii. In John chapter 2, John teaches about Jesus changing water to wine. We are told that this was not merely good wine but it was the best wine. This is another story of radical transformation, of making something as common as water completely different and way better than it was before. If Jesus can make amazing wine out

of common water, imagine what He can do with you and me.

- iii. In John 3:5-8, Jesus talked with Nicodemus about the necessity of Spiritual birth. Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish religious leadership the Sanhedrin. He knew the Scripture but was clueless about his need for Spiritual transformation.
 - iv. All four Gospels of Grace tell the story that we were created as Spiritual beings who are living out a physical life on earth. The Gospel message is not merely about making us better or even about restoration, but rather it is a complete and radical make-over as we are individually transformed in the life-long process of sanctification in becoming God's Children... children who look like Jesus in the character of the inner-person.
- c. John's Gospel story of redemptive history and transformational change is continued with the story of the woman at the well.

2. THE MESSAGE OF WOMAN AT THE WELL – John 3:31-4:26:

- a. My story is not unlike other individual stories:
 - i. Like the Woman at the Well, I also had an appointment with Jesus that completely changed my life. God loves the challenge of personal transformation, and John's Gospel rings with Spiritual Life and transcendent hope as when Jesus changes ordinary water into the best wine ever. Or when He takes a proud and arrogant fisherman named Simon and sees in him the Apostle Peter... something Peter didn't see in himself. Again when He takes a leader of the Sanhedrin named Nicodemus... who was an expert in the Jewish Law and schools him on the need to be transformed by being born Spiritually as well as naturally. God is not satisfied in merely improving our life, or just making it better... He wants a radical transformation making us into the beings we were always intended to be before the Fall of Humanity. This is the goal of Christian Discipleship, and this is why Paul writes in Romans 8:19 that "all of creation waits in eager expectation for the Sons and Daughters of God to be revealed." God is determined to making us unique individuals, something both amazing and wondrous.
 - ii. In my story, I met Jesus as a young man who was not satisfied with the person I was... I despaired because I realized that my best efforts were just not good enough. I knew it was impossible for me to change myself and become the person I knew in my heart I wanted and needed to be. I was at the time a hippie truth seeker... longing to know what was "True" and what "Authentic Spirituality" was all about. Not unlike the woman at the well, I encountered the Savior in what I thought was a chance meeting that was actually something Jesus had planned before the beginning of time... and for me everything began to change. Obviously, I am not yet perfected, but my life has been moving toward faith and hope and

love ever since.

- iii. The aspects of our individual character development occurs as we are progressively transformed into the Image of Jesus... this is what Christian discipleship is all about, and it is what matters most to God. With this in mind let's take a closer look at the story of the Woman at the Well.
- b. Her Story – “The story within the story”:
- i. At the end of chapter 3, the Apostle John speaks about how John the Baptist declared what Jesus' True identity is... Jesus is identified as “The Lamb of God who has come to take away the sin of the world.” The Baptist goes on in affirming Jesus' power and authority as the Messiah... God's Holy and Anointed One who would redeem humanity.
 - ii. John's Gospel goes on to say that Jesus “had to go to Samaria.” We don't think too much of this, but this was a shocking tongue in cheek statement for the 1st century readers. The Jews at that time were known to have disdained everything that wasn't Jewish. Jews preferred to walk miles further than to take the short cut though Samaria and run the risk of becoming ceremonially impure in coming into contact with any of the Samaritans who were by ancestry a mixed Pagan/Jewish people.
 - iii. Jesus' “Cleansing of the Temple” in chapter 2, demonstrated Messiah's anger at the hard-hearted Jewish leadership of the time who allowed the area reserved for the “God fearing Gentiles” who wanted to come close to God. This area was known as the “Court of the Nations,” but the Jewish leaders allowed it to be used instead as a place of business to make money for the Temple. God intended that all humanity was invited to know Him, but the Jewish religious misinterpreted “being separate” as a counter-cultural element within society; instead they would have little to do with those outside their faith. This was not God's intention and helps explain Jesus' righteous indignation with these Jewish leaders, and sets up Jesus' journey into Samaria... and another object lesson in discipleship for Jesus' followers.
 - iv. The journey into Samaria states that Jesus sent the disciples ahead into town and that He waited by Jacob's well. Jesus waits patiently at the well for the appointed hour for this “un-named woman” to appear. Jesus knows her and loves her... though she has at yet no clue about it.
 - v. The woman was coming to draw water... something a servant would do and something she probably did several times a day. The text also says the well is deep... archaeologists have discovered that the well was over 130' deep. At that depth you would have needed a rather heavy vessel to break the surface and go deep enough to fill with water as a light vessel would float uselessly on the

surface. Once filled she had to pull the now heavier loaded jar back up the 130' before carrying it back into town which was some distance away. This was arduous work done several times a day and every day week after week and month after month without relief. This was a physical burden she carried... daily back breaking and mind-numbing work.

- vi. The woman is revealed to have been married 5 times, and now living with a man who wasn't her husband. When you think about this story, what impression do you imagine about the nature and character of this woman? In terms of modern standards of divorce we might think that she must have had some serious issues to be unable to remain married after so many tries. However, the more common reason for divorce in the Ancient Near East was the inability of a woman to bear children. In that era if a man didn't have children it was considered his wife's fault and he was then justified to divorce her. This woman as a young girl undoubtedly had the same expectations of all young girls... that of a husband who would love her and care for her, of children and grandchildren to love and raise, of a happy home, and of a satisfying life in her later years. Instead, after 5 marriage failures and years of disappointment all such hope was crushed out of her. Her place in the man's house in which she now lived was most likely that of a servant. She most likely cared for the cleaning and cooking in the home, the tending of the animals, the fetching water, etc., all in exchange for a place to live and a meal. This had become her life... certainly not what she had expected or hoped for. This was the relational and emotional burden she carried... all hope of a happy home filled with love was gone.
- vii. When she meets Jesus some interesting things happen as Jesus asks her for a drink... the woman remarked that a Jew would never ask a Samaritan for anything, and further they wouldn't take it from them knowing that they did not conform to all the Jewish purity laws. Ritual purity was a big deal for the Jews, and Jewish purity would be compromised by merely touching something "unclean or impure." Such ritual impurity would necessitate an extensive process of purification.
- viii. Next, pay attention as John reveals Jesus' personal identity to the woman as they talk... she notices Jesus' is: 1) a Jew and marvels that he would ask anything of her. The conversation that ensues leads to her conclusion that Jesus is: 2) a prophet because He knew things about her that no one could know. As Jesus starts to teach her it is unsaid but obvious that Jesus is 3) a Rabbi because He is revealing Truth from the Law and the Prophets only a Rabbi would know. In this short exchange, John masterfully tells his story where Jesus is revealed as a Jew, a Prophet, and a Rabbi.
- ix. As this conversation continues the woman becomes more engaged and her

demeanor reflects greater relational interaction. We can understand that this woman was well acquainted with disappointment and frustration, and here she is now talking to a Jewish-Prophet-Rabbi. This was probably the best day of her life! So she ventures out and reveals something often overlooked... that she has one hope remaining... that Messiah is coming someday. Then Jesus says the unimaginable to her... "I Am He."

- x. Just for a moment... put yourself in this woman's place. All her hopes and dreams have failed... her life has been hard and disappointing. She bears physical, emotional, and relational wounds and burdens that some of us know all too well. Her only remaining hope is "that Messiah is coming" someday... and now here He is! Even more amazing, He is not just standing there, but He is engaging her in conversation, He is even teaching her. She matters to Him! Can you imagine her excitement after so many years of pain and discouragement? Then Jesus' disciples appear and what does she do? She runs into town telling everyone... "Come see... I think the Messiah is here!"
- c. Transformational Observations of this Story:
 - i. The first observation is that the text reveals "The Woman" left her water jar at the well. While this may seem an insignificant fact, this is intentional information John provides which begs the question what does this mean? This water jar had become a symbol of her failures and lost hope. Essentially, all her burdens and wounds are drawn up into this one vessel. Up until now the jar was her primary focus for living... and now she meets Jesus and she deliberately leaves it behind... and the jar is not mentioned again. Think about it, this is a picture of deliverance. In applying this observation we should each realize that we all have our own burdens... we all have disappointments, and wounds that we carry around with us. Right now as you ponder your own life, some of these are coming to mind. What if you had the courage to not merely identify these disappointments and woundings, but set them before Jesus and leave them behind? This doesn't mean that it never happened, or that it didn't hurt or matter. Rather it means setting it down before the Cross of Jesus, and asking Him to free you from this burden. Would you believe me when I tell you that Jesus is inviting you right now to leave these burdens behind with Him... we know we all have them, what do you need to let go? Do it now!
 - ii. Another observation is that the woman's status has now changed – not only did she experience personal hope in meeting Jesus, but now everyone in her town shared her realization. The woman has been transformed from the "failed servant water woman" and has become the "lady who brought Messiah to her village." The text goes on to say that Jesus stayed with them in their village for 2 days!

Amazing! Wouldn't you love to know what was said during that time? Wouldn't it have been interesting to have been one of Jesus' disciples taking all this in? The disciples' world was being transformed no less than the Samaritan's world was. They were all seeing first-hand the transformational power of Messiah. I encourage you to pray for an amazing transformation in your life... that you would find the courage to answer the invitation you hear from the Spirit now... to become the person God always intended you to be, and move into this invitation with confidence.

- iii. Encounters with Jesus are necessarily life changing. Take a moment and think about your own encounters with Jesus right now. If we are honest, we know that we each had a "Woman at the Well" experience... didn't we? What a blessing to know the God of the universe came into history for a personal One-on-one appointment with each of us. Jesus comes not just to free us from hell, but to make us God's own family... His children who have the right to call God "ABBA"... which means "daddy" (Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). Not just a friend, but intimate family.

3. ADDITIONAL APPLICATION THOUGHTS:

- a. Living Water – John writes that Living Water "wells up inside us into eternal life." John also says that only Jesus can grant it. So what is it? In the Ancient Near East living water was spring or river water where life existed. This was in contrast to dead water like the Dead Sea where nothing could live or grow. This part of the story is similar with Nicodemus mistaking "born again" literally, instead of transformationally. The woman takes living water in the common way instead of the Holy Spirit that Messiah gives to all who come to Him as Savior and ask for His gift of salvation by Grace. We all need Jesus' Living Water... which transforms us from the inside out.
- b. Worshiping in Spirit and Truth – God desires that His children do this and the text says that He seeks those who do... obviously this is a good reason to know what it is and then to do it! Here is an explanation of what is going on:
 - iv. The gift of the Spirit ignites Spiritual life in God. This is what it means to be born again. This is Life we cannot generate by ourselves... it is eternal life that Jesus alone can grant. God is Spirit... to worship in Spirit involves the inward nature of our character, rather than merely outward practices. It is having our inner-life transformed into a reflection of Jesus.
 - v. The Truth is the power of the Gospel of Grace... it is the Scripture where God has revealed Himself to humanity and it is Jesus who is the Living Word. God wants to be known and desires to be found... but we must approach Him on His terms. This we learn in the Scripture and it forms the foundation of Christian life illuminated

by the Spirit within.

vi. **Worshipping** – is giving back to God that which He deserves. We speak of giving God “Glory and honor and praise”... these responses are the result of a heart that loves God and a transformed life that knows who Messiah is and what He has done for us personally. We as Jesus’ disciples live in obedience and gratitude knowing how lost we were without Jesus. Worshipping is a picture of a holistic life that includes three things... Mind, Heart, and a Missional Life:

1. **“A mind”** that knows the Truth of Scripture and is both conformed and transformed by it. Scripture necessarily masters each disciple... it is never the other way around. When we think we have mastered the Scripture we actually are in danger of becoming like the Pharisees... proud and hard-hearted. This is not what God is looking for.
2. **“A heart”** that is ignited by faith, hope, and love... that rejoices and praises God for His undeserved favor [Grace] given personally by God to me. The Spiritual gift of Living Water is for all disciples throughout the Church age, and it progressively transforms us from the inside out.
3. **“A missional life”** where we do naturally the things that please God in obedience and service to others... when you know the Truth that we have been set free from the burdens of sin and death as well as from the burdens of life we carry, we cannot help but rejoice first, then to tell and teach others. Christian discipleship flows out of “The Great Commandment” to love God and others; and “The Great Commission” the Go of evangelism, and the teaching and training of discipleship. It is why we are here right now in a community of faith, it is what Christian discipleship and our personal Faith Journey is all about.

4. **CONCLUSION:** This is the message of the Woman at the Well... but one final thought – what about that old water jar? What do you think happened to it? My guess is that it was likely permanently attached to the rope and left at the well as a reminder to all that the Messiah intentionally came to visit them. A friend commented recently on the Theory of Relativity... and one application of the concept is about how time passes more quickly when you’re happily engaged doing something you love and more slowly when you’re doing something you don’t enjoy. In considering the woman of the well, I’m not certain she continued hauling water in the old jar, but if she did I’ll bet that the jar was far lighter and no longer considered a burden. Instead it probably became an object of praise and hope and joy from then on for all who used it.

5. **DISIPLESHIP QUESTIONS:**

- a. Read John 4:9-14 and Hebrews 11:6 – why are faith and Living Water vitally connected?

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- b. Read John 4:23-26 – If this is important to God... it obviously should be important to us. What does “worshipping in Spirit and Truth” mean to you now? What do you plan on doing differently and who will you ask to stand with you to encourage you to follow through?
- c. When you think about the woman at the well leaving her burden behind, there are undoubtedly some things the Spirit is prompting you to let go. What are they and what do you intend to do about it? [Remember that the Encounter Room is a ministry established specifically for such deliverance.]
- d. Meditation: Read Luke 4:17-21 – how does John present Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy? This is the model of the mission of Christian discipleship.



This is a picture of the incomplete church at the location of Jacob’s Well where the story of The Woman at the Well takes place. It is a real place commemorating Jesus’ visit to Samaria. On one hand it is rather sad that this church was never finished... on the other hand it is a reminder that the work of the Spirit of Living Water in us is never completed in this lifetime... but rather in eternity.