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Close Encounters with Jesus:

Encounters with Jesus: Woman at the Well

John 4:4-30, 39-42

By Dr. Matt Hook

Where ever you've come from this morning, your greatest spiritual need and my greatest need are the same: R.C. Sproul declares "*The greatest spiritual need in the world today is that people need to discover the true identity of God.*" You don't need an advanced degree to see how popular spirituality is today, but Len Sweet, the dean of the Theological School at Drew University says, "our society is experiencing a greater spiritual hunger than our nation has ever seen." But he says the problem is that people are not turning to the Church as a place to find answers and a solution to that hunger, instead they are following after gurus, and self help books, and the new age movement, and all these places where you can custom design your own god ... to have the god that you need at this time in your life. Unfortunately, they are not going after the true God.

R.C. Sproul also says "The greatest spiritual need in the church today is that people discover the true identity of God." The Gerasene Demoniac learned of Jesus' identity when he moved from the tombs to his new life. The woman with the alabaster jar learned of the depth of God's forgiveness. Nicodemus learned of God's salvation. In every case, people encountering Jesus discover the true identity of God. And it changes them! Today, this woman at the well didn't seem to get it that she had a need. Until she encounters Jesus, who doesn't let her hide behind anything.

Here's the difference: We skim. Jesus doesn't skim. We get tired and move on. Jesus loves perfectly. And Jesus, God in the flesh, was not only available to this woman; he was also sensitive to her. Our Master saw a person who mattered to God. Today's passage is the longest conversation recorded in the Bible between Jesus and anyone. At it's between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. It's as controversial as you could get. A Jew and a Samaritan! Jesus and a woman! Jesus and *that* kind of woman! In the beginning it looked like Jesus was the needy one, being hot and thirsty. (Do you realize He never performed a miracle for himself?)

4 Now he had to go through Samaria.

- Right off the bat, 2 things: Samaria = Trouble!
- Jesus had to...all part of the plan.

5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

- Remember the Bible isn't a set of doctrines and principles! It's a set of accounts people had with God. When John says Sychar, he's reminding us God is specific. Whatever is going on in your life, remember God is specific. He doesn't just love you in general. God loves you specifically. You'll encounter the Lord in the details.

6 *Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.*

- The 6th hour...most likely noon. Most likely the hottest part of the day...most likely the time when no other women would be there to draw water.

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.)*

- One on one: the best way to approach anyone about spiritual stuff.

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.*

- Understand: The racial prejudice went back to the northern 10 tribes of Israel were led into captivity by the Assyrians, and foreign settlers were brought into the territory. Before long, these newcomers adopted a warped version of Judaism. The Jews of the Judah, the southern kingdom, rejected the colonists and their clumsy imitations. Later, after the Jews themselves had suffered through the Babylonian captivity and returned to repossess the land, they found the Samaritans still there. When the Jews wanted to rebuild their temple, the Samaritans offered to help, and were rejected.
- Jesus doesn't let human division distract him. He directs her question to God...

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."*

- "If you knew..." This was Jesus, through whom the Great Lakes and oceans were carved out. How amazing is this: Him asking her for water!
- Here's the other thing—did you catch it? In this one reply, Jesus tells her all she needed to obtain salvation: what it was (the water of life), who controlled it (he did), and how to get it (you ask him and receive it as a "gift of God.")

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 flocks and herds?" 13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I 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 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."*

- She's tried everything. I imagine for years and years she had been telling herself there was nothing wrong, that it was all right—when all the time deep down, she knew it was keeping her parched.
- Here's what we learn: If you want to go deep in your encounter with Jesus, you've got to realize you're thirsty: What in your life, or in your past, or in your character, is keeping you parched?
- And look: The Lord doesn't give the gift of eternal life without first dealing with the question of sin. As soon as she reveals her receptiveness to the gift of living water, Jesus names what was causing her quenchless thirst: sin.
- Jesus doesn't pry. He simply talks realistically. "Love covers a multitude of sins" 1 Pet. 4:8.

19 *"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet.*

- When you take the time, you begin to see Jesus in new ways. She went from calling Jesus "Jew" to "Sir" to "Prophet."

20 *Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."*

- Even Jesus got smoke screened!
- How many people in a conversation heading down a spiritual path veer off toward religion, rather than plain faith? It's so much safer! Less personal, more debatable.
- When it becomes plain and personal, all of a sudden the issues crop up: Jonah and the whale, the virgin birth, Where did Cain get his wife? And other irrelevant religious issues.

21 *Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, 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 spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."*

- Jesus seems to be distinguishing between types of worship! What is spiritual worship? It's internal. It's honest. It's relating on the heart-level. It's scary.
- I would rather do any external act of worship than I would really confess my sins, ask God for forgiveness, seek Christ, and put my whole trust in Him.

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 who speak to you am he." 27 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" 28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" 30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him.*

- Why'd they listen? She had seen the Christ. And now, the people of Sychar saw the Christ in her. A changed life gets people's attention every time.

39 *Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."*

- Not a bad life-goal. Throughout your life, remind people of Jesus

40 *So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. 41 And because of his words many more became believers. 42 They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."*

- The woman at the well left behind not only her old water pot, but her shame as well, never to embrace it again.
- "The Savior of the world" is an awesome title for Jesus. It was really a radical concept. And it was first expressed by Samaritans! Jesus had said to the woman "Salvation is from the Jews." And now these Samaritans said, "And so it is! We have found not just salvation, but the Savior, and not just the Savior of the Jews, but the Savior of the world."

Thirst is a gift from God. Her thirst put her in the path of the Messiah. Physically, thirst is a God-given safety measure that sends us to water. Spiritually, thirst is a sign we need time with our only source of living water.

- What are you thirsty for, spiritually? Have you been trying something other than the living water Christ offers?

- If it is your desire to enter into a closer encounter with Jesus, we need to ask: What water jar do you need to abandon for a taste of the real thing? Now, stop thinking about everyone else's jars. Just concentrate on your own. (Is your water jar the dregs of a relationship you need to let go of? Old habits? Personal goals that looked good once but are probably irrelevant now? Do you need to let go of the jar of Bitterness?) Leave it at the well that flows with living water, drink freely, and go remind people of Jesus!