

# The Unlikely Bride Becomes an Evangelist

*John 4:7-15, 16-30*

As we have read through and thought on John's gospel, it has struck me that John, the apostle that Jesus loved, came to see the depth of the Fall and the wonders of Salvation in terms of numbers. You could say that, for John, all of human history has come up sixes and sevens, that the main problem facing humanity is that, way back when in Genesis, God made us on the sixth day, but having been made in God's image, having been crowned male and female the kings and queens of God's good creation, we failed to successfully make the transition into the seventh day, that day when God is crowned as our emperor, the rightful ruler of heaven and earth.

Because in Genesis, it is on the seventh day, it is over this very issue that we and God parted company. So like in Genesis, the sixth day in John's gospel shows us a human couple in Cana, ready to be crowned and wed, but the wedding isn't right, the reception isn't provided for until Jesus appears and provides the royal couple with what they lacked in their fallenness, that good wine, that rich drink that only comes from God when we acknowledge the Savior God sent to make us whole and right.

And we saw that the very next scene in John's gospel also echoed the notion in Genesis of the seventh day derailed. After getting the wedding in Cana back on track, Jesus headed to Jerusalem to visit his Father's house, only to find that God's human priests had allowed Israel's sanctuary garden to become a sort of strip mall, and so Jesus twirled a rope over his head, and drove the failed gardeners out of his sanctuary much as the warrior angel had driven the original gardeners out of Eden in Genesis.

And the gospel going out has repeated the theme, time and again. Jesus in Jerusalem winning the allegiance of men and women whom he cannot trust because it simply isn't in men and women to be faithful and loyal to a Savior for long. Nicodemus shows up at Jesus' door late at night, about the best that Israel has to offer. But no, Jesus tells him, it isn't good enough. Being a little bit good, a little bit wise won't get the old man into God's kingdom. He has to be "*born from above...of the Spirit...born of water*".

There is no insight into the kingdom, no entrance into God's company, unless one faces his sins at the Jordan and opens his heart to God's Spirit. And even John the Baptist, that priest God sent to confront Israel with her sins, to offer forgiveness to anyone who will face what's wrong in his heart, even John the Baptist could not set right our failure to allow God his throne on the Seventh Day. "*I am not the Christ!*" the Baptist warned his disciples, "*the Bride belongs to the Bridegroom!*" John taught them.

All of Old Testament Israel, Moses and all the prophets down to the Baptist, had only begun to show people a way, only begun to point people toward a Savior, a Bridegroom who could love and lead us back to the Garden from which we came. And so all of John's gospel will show us Jesus finding fallen people, stuck in Day Six, unable to get to the wholeness and healing and rest that belongs to the Seventh day.

Last week, we met a Samaritan woman, a person with a suspect heritage, suspect doctrine, a bride who had married five times and finally gave up on the project and settled for something less than a husband. I think she shows up in John's gospel and John's gospel only because she fascinates the Apostle, she is so clearly stuck in the sixth day, given her heart to six men and not found a true Bridegroom.

And I said last week that the point of this story is that Jesus is the Seventh Bridegroom, the One sent by God to get the Bride unstuck, to make love whole and promises complete. That's what the number seven in the Scriptures is always about. So the notion here is not some individual human romance, not a boy-girl encounter between the Savior and the Samaritan. The notion is that women in John's gospel, like much of Scripture, stand in for all of us. All of us, male and female, are like the Woman at the Well, stuck in the sixth day, looking for that missing piece that only Christ can provide, a sort of love, a measure of safety and healing and stability and purpose that no human solution, no fallen bridegroom could ever supply. And the Samaritan woman seems perfectly aware that Jesus is speaking to her about spiritual things.

She notes right away that the man who just offered her living water is entirely unequipped to get anything from a well. *"Are you greater than our father Jacob?"* she asks him, *"He gave us the well..."*. In other words, Jesus has presumed to teach her something, but all the advantages on that hot day were her's. She had a water jar and she had an ancient well dug and used by Jacob and Jesus so far had brought nothing to the situation but thirst. Still Christ had an answer, *"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst. The water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

At this point, I think, the advantage began to pass over to Jesus. Truth be told, we will find out, the woman had lived a pretty dreary life, five times married only to have her hopes dashed, the sixth time hedging her bets and settling for less. How many times, a day, a week had she dragged water back home from Jacob's well, only to run dry and make another trip. Jesus had sparked a hope in her that she just couldn't ignore. *"Sir, give me this water, so that I will not thirst, nor have to come here to draw"*.

She's not stupid, she knows that Jesus is not talking about plumbing and dishwater, but deliverance from all that's wrong and missing in her life. And here again, much like it had with

Nicodemus, the spiritual possibilities get linked to moral necessities. With Nicodemus, Jesus had told the old rabbi to head for the Jordan and line up with the sinners waiting for a ritual bath by the Baptist in the river. Here, Jesus invites the saucy woman from the wrong side of the tracks to bring her personal life out to the well for Jesus' inspection: *"Go, call your husband and come here."*

*"I have no husband."* the Samaritan said. And she will find to her shock that Jesus, the thirsty Jew, somehow knows all about her and her husbands. So she knows he's a prophet and out of her heart comes pouring the ancient grievance that had prevented her and all Samaritans from ever accepting a word of truth from any Jewish prophet after Moses: *"Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you people say that Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship."*

For four hundred years, Israelites and Samaritans had fought over who owned the one true God and where and how he should be worshiped. And here at a Samaritan well, Jesus launched into a prophecy that would have shocked any Samaritan or Jew who heard it. He said to her, *"Woman, believe me the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father."*

The Jewish-Samaritan conflict was fast becoming pointless, was already pointless by the time John the Apostle wrote these words in his gospel some decades after Jesus met this woman. But even so, Jesus did not dodge the necessary confrontation. He tells the woman she was wrong: *"You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews."* So the point here was not that old Israel was always, ever wrong. Jesus wasn't teaching that truth didn't matter, or that anyone was free to worship God where or when or how they pleased.

That was not true then and it isn't true today! There is a particular time and place, and a particular company in which we must worship. Formal, common, weekly worship is the fundamental discipline around which a true believer's life is built. What Jesus was teaching the woman is that all the symbols and rituals that kosher Jews and errant Samaritans had fought over for 400 years were about to be swept away by something more alive and immediate and personal.

So Jesus told the woman, *"...an hour is coming and now is when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth."* So what Jesus tells woman at noon in Samaria with her untidy life and uneven doctrine is an echo of what Christ said to tidy, orthodox Nicodemus at night in Jerusalem: *"The wind blows where it will and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it's come from or where it's going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

And the point is not that, with the arrival of Christ and the dawn of grace, truth doesn't matter. The point is that Christ is the Word, the personification of all the moral and spiritual truths that were only pictured by Moses in the Old Testament Law. The moral distinctions and spiritual realities that ritual sacrifices and ritual washing and kosher diet tried to picture have now been brought to full life and color in the person of Christ and it is his Spirit who breathes those realities into our hearts and teaches them to our minds. The truth from the Law gets interwoven with the life and power of the Spirit and it's then that we gain the ability to "*worship the Father in Spirit and truth.*"

Before Christ, these realities existed as static pictures, a tent in the wilderness or a shrine atop a mountain where the Holy Spirit descends in a visible storm cloud to teach the lesson that when we worship, God is there. An animal sheds blood before a priest can promise forgiveness and a believer must wash, bathe before a priest can pronounce him right and whole. Before Christ, you had to go to Israel to see these pictures and learn these things. That's what the feud with the Samaritans was all about.

But now, here was Jesus in Samaria with the good news that God was no longer static, no longer waiting passively at this shrine or that for worshipers to approach him. Far from it, God was on the move "*seeking*" unlikely people in unlikely places and actively inviting them to worship him where they lived, beginning with the lives they had. And the message here was not that truth didn't matter or that sin wasn't real. The message was that here is a Bridegroom who will love you as you are, and a Spirit who will meet you where you live and get you where you need to go.

And the Samaritan woman was wide awake to what was happening to her. The pain of being told she was wrong was not so great that she didn't recognize a Bridegroom who could love her or a Prophet who could teach her the truth. So she said to Jesus, "*I know that Messiah is coming, whom they call Christ. When he comes, he will tell us all things.*" And Jesus speaks to her just as plainly as he had to Nicodemus in Jerusalem. He said to the woman, "*I, who speak to you, am he!*"

And what we'll learn next week is that from that moment, with no formal altar call, no visible tidying up, her life heads in an entirely different direction. Christ never gets his drink by the way. And life gets moving so fast that nobody notices or cares. That's what things are like when the wind gets to blowing! We'll continue next week.