



## THE SAMARITAN WOMAN | JOHN 4:1-30

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*Before reading this story, read the Scripture passage. Keep in mind that this is a loose retelling and liberties have been taken to capture our imaginations and help us understand the context of the story and the power of the gospel.*

I open the front door just a crack to see if anyone is in the street before stepping out with my water jar and heading to the well at the edge of the village. I keep my eyes down, avoiding a group of men coming through the front gate who are thankfully too engaged in their lunch plans to notice me.

It's not that I don't like people; I just can't tolerate the thought of their staring eyes, filled with judgment and contempt, silently pushing me away until I want to disappear into the walls behind me. I stopped going to get water with the other village women a long time ago. Hopefully, everyone else is inside by now, at the hottest time of the day. It might be a lot of extra effort, but it's worth it to avoid being the subject of town gossip every week.

As I turn the corner, there's only one man sitting on the side of the well. I breathe a sigh of relief. It's a Jewish man who must be in a hurry to come through Samaria at all. At least he'll ignore me, which is all I want anyway. I approach the well to begin drawing water when, much to my dismay, the man suddenly says, "Please, give me a drink."

Who does this guy think he is? Men don't speak to women in public, and especially not a Jewish man to a Samaritan woman. But then again, it's not like I have anyone else to talk to. "You're a Jew, and I'm a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"

He says, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

Is he overheated from sitting out in the midday sun? But then, Jews do love their religious superiority. Maybe he's taking this opportunity to ridicule the nearest half-breed Samaritan. Well, I can play that game too: "But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," I say, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?"

The man smiles and says, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."

He doesn't seem crazy—I can see the lucid sincerity in his eyes as he talks. I hate to admit it, but I'm curious; I have a feeling he's not really talking about water anymore. But of all people, I know that if a thing sounds too good to be true, it probably is, so I reply with a little more sarcasm in my voice than I intended: "Please, sir, give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water."

"Go and get your husband," he says.

"I don't have a husband," I spit out a little too quickly. Which is true. Technically.

"You're right!" He replies. "You don't have a husband—for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!"

The jar in my hands falls to the ground. How . . . how could he *know*? I've never seen this man before in my life. There is no reason he would ask anyone about me, and no one cares enough about me to tell him. I can feel my face growing hot. *Pull it together*, I think. Talk about something else, *anything* else. He has to be some kind of holy man. I regain my composure and shoot back as nonchalantly as possible:

"Sir, you must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?"

Unfazed, the man counters, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

There's that Jewish superiority again. But this man isn't like the other Jews I've seen. His words aren't harsh, but earnest. He speaks with authority and certainty. But that's impossible, there's only one person who could know for sure: "I know the Messiah is coming," I say, "the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

He looks me directly in the eye. "I am the Messiah," he says softly.

I searched his face. No, those aren't the eyes of a madman, but the eyes of one who is thinking clearly and indeed, thinking on a different plane than everyone else. The piercing eyes of one who sees straight into the depths of my soul—the worst things about me, the things that I desperately hide from everyone else.

And yet, he doesn't seem disappointed.

In fact, he smiles gently at me, and for the first time in a long time I feel relieved that someone truly knows me and for once, doesn't turn away. If the eyes of others make me want to disappear, the gaze of this man makes me feel somehow more solid and real.

As all of this passes through my mind, his friends return with lunch. They exchange glances of shock and confusion at finding their friend talking to me, but they seem to know better than to ask questions. Their friend does not move to acknowledge their presence. He's still looking intently at me with a calm, focused demeanor that says, "*So, what are you going to do now?*"

I smile back, because I know exactly what I have to do. I laugh and push my way through his friends, mumbling apologies as I sprint back to town.

I realize halfway there that I left my water jar where it fell on the ground. It doesn't matter, I have to find someone, anyone, to tell them. The man at the well, he knows all about me, things he couldn't have known, he told me things that don't make sense at all, but if he's the . . . the *One*? But what if he's not?

But what if he *is*?

I don't care who sees me now; I tell anyone who will listen: "You'll never believe what just happened to me! You have to go see him for yourself."