

AN ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS

4 When Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was making and baptizing more disciples than John ²(although Jesus himself was not baptizing, [it was,] rather, his disciples[who were doing so]), ³he left Judea, and went back to Galilee.

⁴Now it was necessary for him to pass through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the piece of land Jacob had given to his son Joseph, ⁶and Jacob's well was there. Jesus, being wearied by his journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour [of the day].

⁷When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, Give me a drink. ⁸(Now his disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, How is it that you, being a Jew, ask me for a drink—I who am a Samaritan woman? (for Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus responded to her by saying, If you knew [what] gift God [offers] and who it is who is saying to you, Give me a drink; you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water. ¹¹The woman said to him, Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep; from where, then, do you get this living water? ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this well and who drank from it himself, together with his sons and his cattle? ¹³Jesus answered her, Every one who drinks this water will be thirsty again; ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water that I will give him shall never be thirsty [again]. On the contrary, the water that I shall give him shall become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. ¹⁵The woman said to him, Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw [water]. ¹⁶Jesus said to her, Go, call your husband, and come back. ¹⁷The woman responded by saying to him, I have no husband. Jesus said to her, You have spoken well [by saying], I have no husband; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the man with whom you are now living is not your husband. What you have said is true. ¹⁹The woman said to him, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; but you say that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. ²¹Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you shall worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You [Samaritans] worship what you do not know, we worship what we do know; for salvation comes from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and has even arrived, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for, indeed, the Father requires such [people] to be his worshipers. ²⁴God is a Spirit; they who [would] worship him must worship in spirit and truth. ²⁵The woman said to him, I know that the Messiah is coming (the one who is called the Christ). When he comes, he will inform us of all things. ²⁶Jesus said to her, I who am speaking with you am he.

²⁷Just then his disciples returned. They were surprised that he was speaking with a woman; but no one said, What do you want? or, Why are you speaking with her? ²⁸Leaving behind her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹Come, meet a man who told me everything that I ever did! Can this be the Christ? ³⁰They came out of the town and were coming to him. ³¹In the meantime the disciples urged him, Rabbi, please eat. ³²But he said to them, I have food to eat of which you know nothing. ³³The disciples then said to one another, Has anyone brought him [anything] to eat? ³⁴Jesus said to them, My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. ³⁵Do you not say, There are still four months before the

harvest? Look, I tell you. Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, see that they are already white for harvest. ³⁶The one who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit for eternal life; so that the one who sows and the one who reaps may rejoice together. ³⁷Here is the truth in the old adage, One sows, and another reaps. ³⁸I sent you to reap that [harvest] for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you [now] share in their labor. ³⁹Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, He told me everything that I [ever] did. ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹Many more people believed because of his word, ⁴²and they said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of your testimony, [but] because we have heard for ourselves and know that this is indeed the Savior of the world. (Jn. 4:1-42)

Introduction

By the usual standards of her native India, Salma was a wealthy woman, living on one of the Fiji Islands. But listen to her testimony:

I had a university education. I was married to a prosperous businessman. I frequently attended parties, nightclubs, and socials. But I was never happy. Life was a big question mark to me. Why did the many things I possessed fail to satisfy? I had a home, but it was cold and lifeless. I had a family, but each went his individual way. I had a religion, but the rites and customs were hollow. I had a God—Allah—but I could not define him.

A Muslim from birth, I had for most of my 30 years tried to follow the prescribed rituals. The Koran told me that I was supposed to pray five times a day and fast regularly. ... When I realized that I was unable to follow the rules completely, I resigned myself to going to hell and decided I would do whatever I wanted to in this life. ...

But living a life that pleased myself did not bring satisfaction. I prayed to Allah with all my heart, yet my depression remained. Christian acquaintances tried to tell me that their faith in Jesus brought contentment. I could not understand how one of God's prophets could be any different from another. But one day in desperation I knelt down in my bedroom and tried to make contact with Jesus.

"O Jesus," I prayed haltingly, "if there is any truth in Your existence, if You are anything or something, then reveal Yourself to me. Guide me and take away this depression."

I decided I would give Him 24 hours to do something. If He did not, then I would know that He was not what I was searching for.

When nothing happened, I went into the living room, feeling as discouraged as ever. Then I heard a knock. I went to the door and opened it to a young man and woman, Westerners who said they had come to spread Good News.

“What good news?” I asked.

“The Good News about Jesus,” the man replied.

When he said the name of Jesus, my heart began to pound. Was it possible—

“May I come in?” the woman asked.

I had forgotten my manners! “Of course,” I said, inviting them in.

The couple, who said they were from New Zealand, used a small booklet to explain many things to me. They told me about a loving God and about His only Son, Jesus, sent to rescue man from the penalty of his sins. They answered my many questions. Before they left, they led me in a prayer for forgiveness as I welcomed Jesus into my life.

When my guests were gone, I went into my bedroom and closed the door. There I let the tears flow. But they were tears of joy. I had never felt such peace. (*POWER*, 2/15/87, pp. 2-ff.)

In the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John we meet another woman—a Samaritan woman—who also had an encounter with Jesus, and who likewise found Him to be much more than she at first thought Him to be.

Often times we fail to truly appreciate who Jesus is; we tend to minimize what He can do and what He has to offer—until we have a personal encounter with Him. Then we discover that He is much more than we at first may have thought Him to be.

I. When You Encounter Jesus, You will Find Him to be the Giver of Spiritual Life

In the closing verses of chapter three, we learn that Jesus was beginning to gain the pre-eminence that is His by rights:

After this, Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside; there he spent some time with them, and baptized. ²³Now John also was baptizing at Enon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; people were coming and were being baptized. ²⁴John had not yet been put into prison ... ²⁶So they came to John, and said to him, Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan, the one about whom you testified, he is baptizing and everyone is coming to him. (Jn. 3:22-24,26)

But when we enter the fourth chapter of John, we do not meet a proud and pompous religious leader; rather, we find a very humble man. Observe how the humanity and the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ are expressed in this passage. Jesus was wearied by His journey, that is why He sat down beside the well (vs. 6.)

When a woman from the nearby town comes out to draw water from the community well, Jesus asks her for a drink (vs. 7.) Note: The state of weakness, exhaustion, and humiliation in which we find the Lord Jesus at the well in Samaria is just a preview of the great weakness, exhaustion, and humiliation He would endure upon the cross of Calvary, there offering His life unto God as the payment for sin so that He might offer unto us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, even as He now is about to make that offer to this Samaritan woman.

According to verse 9, the Samaritan woman is taken aback by this humble request for a drink of water: here is a Jewish man asking a favor of a Samaritan woman!

Even though we find Jesus to be weary, thirsty, exhausted, asking this Samaritan woman for a drink of water, listen closely to what He says in response to her inquiry: *"If you knew [what] gift God [offers] and who it is who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink; you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water'"* (vs. 10.) Jesus' words emphasize the graciousness of God, as well as Christ's own ability and willingness to impart to us this gracious gift of spiritual life: entering into the life and fellowship of God forever.

The woman's initial reaction is one of scoffing unbelief: *"The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep; from where, then, do you get this living water?'"* (vs. 11.) In effect she is saying, "Jesus, you appear to be unable to help yourself, much less able to help anyone else!" This would be the same erroneous assessment that the religious leaders would make of Jesus as He hung upon the cross of Calvary:

... the chief priests, together with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, ⁴²He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him. (Matt. 27:41b-42)

Then the woman inquires, *"Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this well and who drank from it himself, together with his sons and his cattle?"* (vs. 12.) She is saying, "Our father, Jacob, gave us this well. It was the best he could do for us. He was not able to offer us any springs of living water! Are you greater than him?" In contemporary terms, one might raise a similar question: Jesus, are you greater than all the religious teachers of the world? They have given us their teaching, it is the best they could do for us. Do you have more to offer than they? The Bible declares the answer to be "Yes!" Note the testimony of 1 John 4:10, *"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a propitiation for our sins;"* a propitiation is a sacrifice that satisfies the divine justice and appeases the divine wrath against the sinner.

The Lord Jesus promises to satisfy the deepest need of our soul; He says to the woman, *"Every one who drinks this water [water drawn from Jacob's well] will be thirsty again"* (vs. 13.) The material things of this world can never satisfy the longing of our soul. As the great eighteenth-century American theologian,

Jonathan Edwards, expressed it, "True poverty and true misery consist in the lack of those things of which our spiritual part stands in need." We have been made by God and for God, and unless we become reconciled to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and by means of His atoning sacrifice at Calvary, we will never be spiritually satisfied, and we will perish in our sins. Jesus now proceeds to inform the Samaritan woman, *"but whoever drinks the water that I will give him shall never be thirsty [again]."* The Lord Jesus Christ alone is able to meet the deepest need of our soul: forgiveness of sin and a restored relationship with God. He continues, *"the water that I shall give him shall become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."* This living water is a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit, as we come to learn from John 7:38-39a,

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water. ³⁹Now [Jesus] was speaking about the [Holy] Spirit, whom they who believed in him were to receive. (Jn. 7:38-39a)

When you encounter Jesus, you will find Him to be the Giver of spiritual life.

II. When You Encounter Jesus, You will Find Him to be the Exposer of Your Sins

The woman's skepticism gives way to a strong desire for this mysterious water of which Jesus speaks: *"The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw [water]'"* (vs. 15.)

At this point her conversation with Jesus suddenly turns from the heights of expectation to the depths of this woman's personal life, exposing her sordid past. Jesus now becomes uncomfortably personal, He instructs her, *"Go, call your husband"* (vs. 16.) The woman immediately seeks to bring this topic to an abrupt halt with her response, *"I have no husband."*

But Jesus will not let the matter rest there. He gently, but firmly, confronts this woman with her sins: *"Jesus said to her, 'You have spoken well [by saying], I have no husband; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the man with whom you are now living is not your husband. What you have said is true'"* (vs. 17b-18.) Beware of Jesus, He is dangerous: there is no sin in our lives that is safe with Jesus around, and there is no secret that is secure. As the Book of Hebrews informs us, *"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account"* (Heb. 4:13.) But we can trust Jesus, because He is merciful and gracious. Consider the words He addresses to the church in Laodicea *"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline"* (Rev. 3:19a.) How should we respond to the Lord Jesus Christ? We should respond to Him by being honest:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 Jn. 1:8-9)

Whoever conceals his transgressions shall not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall receive mercy. (Prov. 28:13)

The woman's response at this point is that of respect for Jesus, but she still is not ready to honestly deal with her sins; thus, she says to Jesus, "*Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet*" (vs. 19.) The woman still does not truly know to whom she is speaking, and she now seeks to dismiss this whole matter, which has become very convicting, by asking a difficult question about religion: "*Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; but you say that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.*"

But there is no way to elude the Lord Jesus Christ, every response the woman makes in her efforts to redirect the conversation results in a deeper encounter with God. Jesus warns that the days of public worship as it was practiced in the land of Israel are drawing to an end: "*Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you shall worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem'*" (vs. 21.) The words of Jesus are a warning of impending judgment. In the Gospel of Luke He amplifies on this prophecy. Referring to the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Roman armies in the year 70 A.D., He declares,

*When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. ²¹Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city; ²²for this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. ²³How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. ²⁴They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. **Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.** (Lk. 21:20-24)*

But His words spoken to the woman at the well are also a revelation that the way of direct access to God by means of Christ's atoning sacrifice is about to be realized. At the very moment that His work of atonement was completed, Matthew informs us that Jesus cried out in a loud voice, then, "*At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom*" (Matt. 27:50-51.) The tearing of the curtain that separated the holy place from the holy of holies—and that tearing being an act of God as seen by the fact that it occurred from top to bottom—indicated that direct access to God is now available by virtue of the atoning sacrifice offered by Christ Jesus on the cross of Calvary.

Jesus goes on to instruct the woman as to what is the essence of true worship:

But the hour is coming, and has even arrived, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for, indeed, the Father requires such [people] to be his worshipers. ²⁴God is a Spirit; they who [would] worship him must worship in spirit and truth. (Jn. 4:23-24)

To truly worship God we must enter into His realm—being conveyed into His presence by the Holy Spirit—and the worship we bring must stem from a heart that truly loves Him and is devoted to Him.

At this point, being confronted with her sins and with the definition of true worship, the woman seeks to call a halt to this entire conversation: "*The woman said to him, 'I know that the Messiah is coming (the one who is called the Christ). When he comes, he will inform us of all things'*" (vs. 25.) In other words, "Rather than trying to deal with these 'complex religious questions' [which are extremely convicting,] let's wait for the Messiah to give us the answers!" Such is the gist of the woman's reply.

Jesus responds: "*I who am speaking with you am he*" (vs. 26.) With those words the woman finally and suddenly realizes that she is standing in the very presence of the long expected Messiah, the LORD Himself. The Messiah has come! He has come to her! He is calling her to repentance and life!

When you encounter Jesus, you will find Him to be the Exposer of your sins—with the intention of bringing you to repentance and life!

III. When You Encounter Jesus, You will Find Him to be the One Who Fills You with Awe

After this encounter with the Lord Jesus, the woman left her water jar behind and ran back into the city (vs. 28.) She is so awestruck by the person of Jesus that she forgot the reason she came to the well in the first place.

Upon entering the city she urges the whole community, "*Come, meet a man who told me everything I [ever] did!*" She is so awestruck by the person of Jesus that she forgets her shame and ostracism, (a woman with her immoral lifestyle would have been shunned by the community,) and compels everybody to meet this man for themselves.

When you encounter Jesus, you will find Him to be the One who fills you with awe. In the words of the hymn writer, Fanny J. Crosby,

A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord,
A wonderful Savior to me,
He hides my soul in the cleft of the rock,
Where rivers of pleasure I see.

With numberless blessings each moment He crowns,
And filled with a fullness divine,
I sing in my rapture, O glory to God,
For such a Redeemer as mine!

As we walk with Jesus, as we trust in Him and submit to Him, He will fill us with wonder and cause us to marvel along with the Psalmist,

Many, O Jehovah my God, are the wonderful works that you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you. Were I to speak and tell of them, they are more than can be numbered. (Psl. 40:5)

But all the marvels of Jesus that the Christian may experience in this present life with Jesus are but a faint glimpse of the marvel and wonder to be revealed at the time of His return in power and great glory: *“he shall come to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at [or, to be the object of wonder to] by all those who have believed”* (2 Thess. 1:10.)