

## An Unlikely Bride

Hello, & thanks for listening to *Voice of the Church*. I'm Pastor Ryan Swale, & recently have done a number of meditations on the Song of Songs... This week and next, I thought I'd do a couple of somewhat related meditations from the gospels, on this theme of Christ as the bridegroom – today looking at John 4 & the woman at the well...

It's a long passage, so I'll just read & summarize some parts of it. It says, "When Jesus learned that the Pharisees heard he was making & baptizing more disciples than John, he left Judea & departed again for Galilee. And had to pass through Samaria, so he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so, Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the 6<sup>th</sup> hour... [and] a woman from Samaria came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.'"

And she marveled that he, a Jew, asked her, a Samaritan woman, for a drink (for Jews have no dealings with Samaritans). But Jesus told her if you knew the gift of God & who it is that spoke to you, you would've asked me, & I would've given you living water." And they go on to speak of this living water, & she says, "Give me this water so I'll never be thirsty again." And Jesus tells her to go get her husband, to which she responds she doesn't have one; & he says, "I know, for you've had 5, & the man you're now living with is not your husband." And she perceived he was a prophet; but he then revealed he is more than a prophet: he is the Christ. And she goes back to her village & brings everyone out to see him, saying. "Come see a man who told me all I ever did; can this be the Christ?" And Jesus stayed for 2 days, and many more believed that he is the Savior of the world.

That's John Ch. 4, coming just after the end of John 3, where John the Baptist said *Jesus* is the bridegroom. And John 2 where Christ performed his very 1<sup>st</sup> sign at a wedding, where normally the bridegroom provides the wine, but in John 2, *Jesus* takes the place of the bridegroom & supplies it... Meaning he is *twice* announced as the bridegroom, leading into John 4 where Christ approaches a well, the place in the OT where husbands often meet their wives. You think of Moses & Zipporah, Abraham's servant meeting Rebekah, Jacob & Rachel...

In fact, this is *same place* where Jacob meets Rachel in Genesis 29, even at the same time of day (at noon, the 6<sup>th</sup> hour). So, now Christ, who has twice been announced as the bridegroom, approaches the place where husbands meet their wives, even at the same time of day, then sits down while we wait to see who comes...

And the clock strikes 12, & we see a silhouette approaching... But then v. 7 makes us do a double-take as the woman is an unclean Samaritan! Who we find out in v. 18 has had 5 husbands & the man she now lives with is not her husband... *This can't be right...* We were expecting the purity of Rebekah, the beauty of Rachel, the strength of Zipporah! But this unnamed Samaritan with a scarlet "A" on her dress is *none* of these things... In fact, she's the opposite.

But that's the point: as this woman is a symbol of the bride of Christ: a Samaritan (a racial-mix between Jew & Gentile), impure, unworthy, unlovely, filled with *shame* – that's why she's here in the heat of day all by herself! ... And it's because she is all of these things that she is the *perfect symbol* for the bride of Christ... John is giving us a little introduction to the kind of bride Christ is seeking.

That's why throughout the rest of the passage there's this bridal-language, as this conversation about living-water reminds us of Jer. 2, where God's people have forsaken him, the "Fount of *Living Water*" & turned to broken cisterns that hold *no* water! Just like Israel, she seeks satisfaction in 5 different men, but none of them satisfy! And Christ exposes her sin, and then offers her living water... Which, in Jer. 2, comes in the context of a marriage-metaphor, where God says, "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride!" And then offer living-water...

Or Proverbs 5 uses the same language: "Drink **water** from your own cistern, **flowing water** from your own well! Let your fountain be blessed, & rejoice in *the wife of your youth!*" Song of Songs 4, "Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold you are beautiful!" And then the beauty of the bride is poetically described with all of this garden-imagery, culminating in: "a garden **fountain**, a **well of living water!**"

Living water, in the OT, is a metaphor for the love that a husband & wife are to satisfy each other with... And *that* love is small foretaste of the satisfaction that may only be found in Christ, the TRUE bridegroom!

So, when Christ tells this woman who's gone from lover to lover, trying to find satisfaction, when he tells her, "Come and drink MY Living Water, & you'll *never* be thirsty," he's inviting her to be his bride! He's inviting **us** to be his bride!

And we know we're included because of the all-encompassing language he uses in v. 14, "WHOEVER drinks this water I will give..." He even uses *male* pronouns, "the water I will give *him*..." So, we know Christ isn't referring to a literal, exclusive union with this woman, but is inviting her (& ALL of us who find ourselves in *her*) to that *ultimate* marital union...! And as we come and drink of HIM, & find our satisfaction in HIM, being *intoxicated* with his love which is better than all those broken cisterns (even better than wine), it's *then* that his Living Water will become in us a "spring of water welling up to eternal life..."

We could say a lot more about this passage, but very simply: it is an invitation for you to come to Christ and recognize his all-surpassing beauty & worth, as heaven's bridegroom come to obtain a bride, even though she does not deserve him... Jesus leaves heaven & goes to the other side of the tracks (he goes *out of his way* to Samaria) to take this unclean woman, this unworthy, unlovable Samaritan, and offer her union with himself...

He exposes her sin, telling her everything she's ever done. And then he offers her life... And she is a symbol of the kind of people Christ pursues, not the perfect, not the healthy, not the righteous – but sinners! And he says, "Come and drink the living water of union with me!" & I will take your sin, & I will give you my righteousness, & I will send you off, like he does her in John 4, to witness to my glory...

We see 2 things in this passage: we see wedding & we see witness, a woman who Christ meets at a well to offer union with himself, and then she goes and invites everyone to come and see this bridegroom-Messiah, who has told her everything she ever did, and is the Christ!

And the rest of John 4 tells us the people of her village came to see Christ & he ministered to them for 2 days & many believed because of his Word. And they said to her, "It's no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world!" And, so, she invites them to the wedding, invites them to the marriage of the Lamb, showing us what the bride of Christ is to be busy in, telling others to come & see! Doing even what it says in the final verses of Revelation, where it says, "The Spirit & the Bride say *Come!* And let the one who hears say 'come!' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life (living water) without price!"

I believe Revelation 22 is alluding back to John 4, to show us what the bride of Christ is to be busy in, 'til he comes: gathering others for the wedding, head over heels for her bridegroom & telling others how great he is...

There's a lot more we could say about John Ch. 4. But I just want to leave you with two thoughts: if you're listening, and you are not a Christian, and you have sought to find satisfaction in other things, listen to the words of Jesus: "Whoever drinks of the water I will give him will never be thirsty again!" Come & find satisfaction in him – it doesn't matter if you're a sinner; it doesn't matter if, like this woman, you have had five husbands – Christ knows everything you've ever done, & says, "Come!"

And then one final thought for the Christian listening to this meditation: even as we see the witness of the bride to the wedding, & the joy that fills her as she tells others of the Christ, inviting them to come and find living-water at no price, this is to be the bride of Christ's vocation until he returns: the church is to being busy extoling the excellencies of this bridegroom & calling others to find their satisfaction in him.

I pray there's someone listening today who needs to hear of that Christ. Or someone listening who needs to be reminded of the beauty of what heaven's bridegroom has done for you. So that, in your joy, you might – like this woman – go and bring others to him, gathering many more for the Wedding Supper of the Lamb... Thank you for listening, and may God bless you.