

Jesus, The Woman at the Well, and the Forgiveness of Sins

1. Introduction

What Were the Jewish People Waiting For?

1. Not just an earthly, political Messiah
2. The *renewal of God's relationship with his people*:



3. In other words, they were waiting for a *new marriage covenant* with God

Words of John the Baptist

...*I am not the Messiah*, but I am the one who has been sent before him. *He who has the bride is the bridegroom*. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices with joy because of the voice of the bridegroom. Therefore this joy of mine is now fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:25-30)

Jesus the Bridegroom

1. First Miracle: Changes Water into Wine at a Jewish Wedding (John 2)
2. Refers to Himself as “the Bridegroom” (Mark 2)
3. Describes His Crucifixion as His Wedding Day (Mark 2)
4. But Where is Jesus’ Bride in the Gospels?

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

[Jesus] left Judea and departed again to Galilee. He had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. *Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well*. It was about the sixth hour.

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, “*If you knew the gift of God, and who is it that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.*” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? *Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?*” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.” Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here...” (John 4:3-16)

2. Women, Wells, and Weddings in the Old Testament

Moses Meets His Future Bride Zipporah at a Well

But Moses fled from Pharaoh, and stayed in the land of Midian; and *he sat down by a well*. Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came and drew water... The shepherds came and drove them away; but *Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock*. When they came to their father Reuel, he said, “How is it that you have come so soon today?” They said, “An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and even drew water for us and watered the flock.” He said to his daughters, “And where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread.” And Moses was content to dwell with the man, *and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah*. (Exodus 2:15-21)

Abraham’s Servant Meets Isaac’s Wife Rebekah at at Well

“Let the maiden to whom I shall say, ‘Pray let down your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac...” Before he had done speaking, behold, *Rebekah*, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, came out with her water jar upon her shoulder. *The maiden was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known*. She went down to the spring, and filled her jar, and came up. Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, “Pray give me a little water to drink from your jar.” She said, “Drink, my lord”.... When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw for your camels also, until they have done drinking.” (Genesis 24:14-19)

Jacob Meets His Future Wife Rachel at a Well

Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east. *As he looked, he saw a well in the field...* The stone on the well's mouth was large, and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well, and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place upon the mouth of the well. Jacob said to them, “My brothers, where do you come from? ...Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?” They said, “We know him.” He said to them, “Is it well with him?” They said, “*It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!*” He said, “*Behold, it is still high day*, it is not time for the animals to be gathered together; water the sheep, and go, pasture them.” But they said, “We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep.” *While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them*. (Genesis 29:1-9)

Jacob’s Well in Ancient Jewish Tradition Outside the Bible

And when Jacob saw Rachel... Jacob drew near and, *with one of his arms*, rolled the stone from the mouth of the well; *and the well began to flow, and the waters came up before him*, and he watered the flock of Laban... *and it continued to flow for twenty years*. (*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen 29:10-11)

3. What Kind of ‘Bride’ is the Samaritan Woman?

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman’s “Past”

Jesus said to her, “*Go, call your husband, and come here.*” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “*You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly.*” The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “*Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.*” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things.” Jesus said to her, “*I who speak to you am he.*” Just then his disciples came. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, “What do you wish?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” (John 4:16-27)

Who Are the Samaritans?

1. Mixed Heritage: Gentile (pagan) and Israelite descent
 - a. Originated during the Assyrian Exile (722 B.C.)
 - b. 10 Northern Tribes of Israel scattered outside the land
 - c. King of Assyria brings pagan peoples and settles them in Israel
 - d. These peoples come to be known as the *Samaritans*
2. Mixed Religion:
 - a. Mixed *paganism* with worship of *God of Israel*
 - b. Worshiped on Mount Gerizim instead of Mount Jerusalem
3. A *Sinful* People:
 - a. Worshiped 5 Male gods, known as *Baals* (meaning “Masters” or “Husbands”)
 - b. Practiced *human sacrifice*:

[the Samaritans] *burned their children in the fire* to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sephar-vaim. They also feared the LORD... So they feared the LORD but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away. (2 Kings 17:31-33)

The ‘Betrothal’ of Jesus the Bridegroom and the Samaritan People

So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” They went out of the city and were coming to him... Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “*It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.*” (John 4:26-26, 28-30, 39-42)

4. Jesus' Gift of "Living Water"

Jesus' Wedding Gift: the Living Water

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who is it that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." ...Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here..." (John 4:3-16)

"Living Water" in Ancient Jewish Tradition

1. Running Water: like from a spring (Targum *Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen 29)
2. Temple Water: used for washing away sin and impurity (Number 19:17-20)
3. Wedding Water: cleanses a bride before her wedding (*Joseph and Aseneth* 14:12-17)

The "Living Water" from the Side of Jesus

Jesus stood up and proclaimed: "If any one thirst, let him come to me and let him who believes in me drink. *As the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water."* (John 7:37-38).

But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and *at once there came out blood and water.* (John 19:25-35)

5. Conclusion

The Samaritan Woman as Ourselves

This [Samaritan] woman, *who bore the type of the church*, comes from strangers, for the church was to come from the Gentiles, an alien from the race of the Jews. *In that woman, then, let us hear ourselves, and in her acknowledge ourselves and in her give thanks to God for ourselves.* (St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 15:10)

Human Sin: No Obstacle to Christ's Love

He gave himself up for her that "He might cleanse and sanctify her..." (v. 26). So the Church was not pure. She had blemishes, she was ugly and cheap. Whatever kind of wife you marry, you will never take a bride like Christ did when he married the Church; you will never marry anyone estranged from you as the Church was from Christ. *Despite all this, he did not abhor or hate her for her extraordinary corruption...* Though she was like this, Christ accepted her and made her beautiful. He washed her, and did not hesitate even to sacrifice himself for her. (St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage*, pp. 47-48)

God Thirsts for Us

"If you knew the gift of God!" (John 4:10) The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. *It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink.* Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. *God thirsts that we may thirst for him.* (Catechism no. 2560)