

Thirst Quenchers, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. L3080224
Exodus 17:1-7 and John 4:5-26
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Despite the rain yesterday, we are still in an exceptional drought. Living in a drought makes me think about the thirsty and dry times in my life. Have you ever been so thirsty that you drank to the point your stomach was full, but you were still thirsty? Sometimes, we can't quench our thirst.

It was hot and dusty on the journey through the barren hills from Judea to Galilee. Jesus was thirsty. About halfway, he came to a well in Samaria. There was a woman there drawing water and Jesus asked her for a drink. What ensued was the longest recorded conversation Jesus had with anyone. What is amazing is that he ever talked with this woman at all. He was a he and she was a she and he's and she's did not talk in public!

He was a Jew and she was a Samaritan. In the scripture, there is an important parenthesis: "for Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans."¹ This was a parentheses of society. Such societal parentheses destructive. They are unwritten understandings: "we know what those people are like!" "We don't want them moving here." Most Jews thought they were better and more faithfully religious than Samaritans.

Such unwritten human parentheses did not stop Jesus. He associated with all, and he associated with this woman. Many interpreters have said there was something immoral about the woman because she was there at the well at midday rather than evening, the common time for drawing water. There have been all kinds stories about how loose she must have been. She had had five husbands and was living with a man now, to whom she was not married. You can imagine the gossips of the town pointing their fingers and wagging their tongues.

The woman probably was quite lonely, feeling like an outcast. Jesus' conversation quenched her thirst for companionship. Jesus never judged her; he simply asked her for a drink. Even after they established the facts of her past, he did not ask her to repent. They talked about water, but it was mis-communication. She talked about one kind of water and Jesus talked about another. The woman wanted ease in getting water: "give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."² Jesus was talking about spiritual water, spiritual thirst quenching. The water he gave would fill her with eternal purpose. She would have meaning for her daily trips to the well.

This Samaritan woman was one of the first evangelists! She went to town and told others what had happened. Because of what she said, they knew and believed that Jesus was the Messiah. They were people inside the parenthesis: people to whom the Messiah was not anticipated to come. Fred Craddock said that in this incident there were "No ultimatums, no threats of hell, no assumptions of certainty on theological matters." The woman simply said, "Come and see." That is all we have to do to be effective evangelists: issue an invitation: "Come and see!" She spoke "the Word."

This incident is one of the "signs" in John's Gospel. These were occurrences in Jesus' ministry, according to John, that took place to prove Jesus was Messiah. The spiritual thirst of many was quenched that hot and dusty day in Samaria.

¹John 4:9

²John 4:17

We heard another story of thirst quenching in the first Scripture. This took place fifteen hundred years earlier, during the exodus journey of the Israelites with Moses. It is a story of putting God to the test. That is why Moses called the place “Massah” and “Meribah”: “Test & Quarrel.” Meribah: the Israelites tested God saying, “Is God among us or not?” Even back then, people were looking for proof of the existence of God.

The Israelites had been grumbling like a bunch of Tenderfoot Boy Scouts, or Army recruits: “How much farther is it?”

“Why can't we stay here?”

“Why did we ever leave Egypt?”

The Israelites were finding fault: putting God to the test. Why? In Chapter Fifteen, they had just crossed the Reed Sea in safety in front of Pharaoh's army. They were free people: no longer slaves! At Marah with its bitter water, Moses was able with God's help to make the water drinkable! God had fed them with manna in the chapter before! They came to Elim, with its twelve springs of water and the people drank. The people knew by now that God would take care of them, yet they grumbled! They wanted another miracle so they could believe in God.

We often put God to the test as the Israelites did. How? When we don't think things are going our way, the way we expected, we blame God. We want miracles. But a miracle won't prove anything for us. It might last for few days, but then want another one. We pray to God for things we would like to have happen. It is like a Santa Claus wish list. “God, help us to win this game.” Does it make any difference that the other team is praying the same thing?

“God, why haven't you gotten rid of this arthritis?” Why? For what purpose? Do we want to control God? What if we did get everything we prayed for? It would turn God into our errand boy! We would have been successful in switching places between creator and created.

We say, “God, you must have something against me!” In all this universe, do we really believe that God has time to focus all of God's attention just on making me miserable?

We ask, as the Israelites did, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

“Is there a God?”

Or, if there is a God, “Why isn't God good?”

“Why would God allow this to happen?”

There are no more miracles necessary. We have all we need to believe in God's grace. Through Christ, we have received proof of God's love and care. Through Christ, we have learned how to respond as faithful followers.

It is important for us to believe that God can quench our thirst. Only God is the endless supply of the spiritual waters of grace. It does not come from deep down inside of us. That internal supply runs out. There are wonderful people who do wonderful things without faith in God. We marvel at the ability of Social workers, doctors, nurses, and other “good people” to do good things. But, if they do not have a supply of faith beyond themselves, their ability will at some point run out, and they will become cynical.

Those who know how to tap the supply of God's grace do not suffer burn out. Harold Kushner says in his book *Who Needs God?*, “The man or woman who turns to God is like a tree planted by a stream. What they share with the world is replenished from a source beyond themselves, so that they never run dry.” He gives an analogy. “When we are financially bankrupt, we cannot lend ourselves money to solve our problems. We need help from beyond ourselves.”

In the same way, we cannot replenish our own supply of spiritual grace. The living, thirst-quenching waters of grace come from God. Having drunk this kind of love enables us to

handle our spiritual needs and even the struggle for our physical needs. There will still be physical sufferings, but we will be able handle them. We will still have times of loneliness, but we will know that God is with us.

The incident with the woman at the well raised the issue of worship. The well was not just any well. It was called "Jacob's well." Jacob had dug it and drawn water from it. It had supplied water to people of village for two thousand years before Jesus came along. Jesus was telling the woman that worship is not limited to localities like this mountain nor the temple in Jerusalem. Worship is not limited by ancestry or religious law. Like Jesus, we are on a journey too. We are on a Lenten journey to discover the true God.

On the first Sunday of Lent, we learned that we are human, God is God, and to not hide our inner selves. This week, Jesus tells us that true worshipers will worship in spirit and in truth. God transcends geography, liturgy, gender, and race. Through Jesus, God offers us quenching for our spiritual thirst. In this parched and dusty world, come into presence of God and quench your thirst.

