

READING THE GOSPEL OF JOHN TOGETHER

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3. The Woman at the Well (i)

Steps

- John 4: reading / observations
- Wells: symbols of life
- Wells and marriages
- The OT pattern
- Marriage symbolism
- Samaritans
- John 4
- Initial conclusion

Wells: symbols of life

- Prov 5:15 Drink water from your own cistern,
 flowing water from your own well.
- 16 Should your springs be scattered abroad,
 streams of water in the streets?
- 17 Let them be for yourself alone,
 and not for sharing with strangers.
- 18 Let your fountain be blessed,
 and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe.
 May her breasts satisfy you at all times;
 may you be intoxicated always by her love.
- 20 Why should you be intoxicated, my son, by another woman
 and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?
- Song 4:13 Your channel is an orchard of pomegranates
 with all choicest fruits,
 henna with nard,
- 14 nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon,
 with all trees of frankincense,
 myrrh and aloes,
 with all chief spices—
- 15 a garden fountain, a well of living water,
 and flowing streams from Lebanon.
- Prov 23:27 For a prostitute is a deep pit;
 an adulteress is a narrow well.

Wells: marriages

Ex 2:15b But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well.
16 The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. 17 But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock. 18 When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?" 19 They said, "An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock." 20 He said to his daughters, "Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread." 21 Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. 22 She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, "I have been an alien residing in a foreign land."

Gen. 29:1 Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east. 2 As he looked, he saw a well in the field and three flocks of sheep lying there beside it; for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, 3 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 on the mouth of the well.

Gen. 29:4 Jacob said to them, “My brothers, where do you come from?” They said, “We are from Haran.” 5 He said to them, “Do you know Laban son of Nahor?” They said, “We do.” 6 He said to them, “Is it well with him?” “Yes,” they replied, “and here is his daughter Rachel, coming with the sheep.” 7 He said, “Look, it is still broad daylight; it is not time for the animals to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them.” 8 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.”

Gen. 29:9 While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep; for she kept them. 10 Now when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother’s brother Laban, and the sheep of his mother’s brother Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well’s mouth, and watered the flock of his mother’s brother Laban. 11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept aloud. 12 And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s kinsman, and that he was Rebekah’s son; and she ran and told her father.

Gen. 29:13 When Laban heard the news about his sister’s son Jacob, he ran to meet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, 14 and Laban said to him, “Surely you are my bone and my flesh!” And he stayed with him a month.

Gen. 29:15 Then Laban said to Jacob, “Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?” 16 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah’s eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. 18 Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” 19 Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.” 20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

The Old Testament Pattern

<i>Outline</i>	<i>Jacob</i>	<i>Jesus</i>
1. A man arrives at a well	Jacob arrives at a well	Jesus arrives at Jacob’s well
2. At the well, there are shepherdesses	Rachel is at the well	The Samaritan woman arrives
3. There is some problem or convention about the water	Agreement to water together / size of the stone on the well	Jesus has no bucket; Jews don’t share things in common with Samaritans
Moment of recognition	Jacob kisses Rachel	Gradual recognition, in several moments
The girls run back to tell the others	Rachel goes back to tell her father	The Samaritan woman tells the townspeople
The man is received in the place	Laban received Jacob	Jesus
There is a wedding	Two weddings!	?

Marriage symbolism

Is. 54:6 For the LORD has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man’s youth when she is cast off, says your God. 7 For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you.

Is. 62:4 You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. 5 For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your

builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

The Samaritans

2Kings 17:24 The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria in place of the people of Israel; they took possession of Samaria, and settled in its cities. 25 When they first settled there, they did not worship the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them.

2Kings 17:29 But every nation still made gods of its own and put them in the shrines of the high places that the people of Samaria had made, every nation in the cities in which they lived.

- There is one God, Yahweh (anglicised as Jehovah).
- His chief mediator is Moses.
- The vehicle of the mediation is the Torah.
- According to their version of the law (Deut. 27:4), Moses, at God's command, instructed Joshua to build an altar on Mt. Gerizim, which thus became the central site of worship for the community.
- Finally, the Samaritans anticipate a coming Day of Vengeance and Recompense initiated by the Messiah (who was called Taheb)

Originally, worship of the God of Israel took place near Shechem, on Gerizim, long before a cult was established in Jerusalem. For various reasons, as Israelite history progressed Jerusalem became more and more the exclusive sacred center of the Israelites.

Samaritanism represents a clear objection to this development. This tension developed following the return of the exiles from Babylon and is apparent in the postexilic documents of Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 Esdras. While friction between the two groups is demonstrable during the Persian period, the tension between Samaritan Judaism and Jerusalem-based Judaism was most pronounced in the Hellenistic period.

John 4

- Overall story is a type scene
- Changes of metaphor
- Why a *Samaritan* woman?
- Location of worship

John 4: Pattern

- Jesus arrives at a well: vv. 4-6
- A woman of Samaria is present: 7
- Difficulties over water: vv. 9-11
- Gradual recognition: vv. 12-26
- The woman goes back: vv. 27-29
- Jesus is received vv. 30, 39-42
- There *is* a wedding: v. 46 = 2.1-11!

John 4: Metaphors

Water: vv. 10-15	= worship
Marriage: vv. 16-19	= worship
Location: vv. 20-24	= worship

NB: although the metaphor changes, the subject matter remains the same.

John 4: Why Samaria?

- John 1-4:
- Ex followers of John the Baptist
- Pharisees
- Samaritans: *Jew, Jacob, prophet, Messiah, Saviour of the World*

- Gentiles

John 4: Location

- Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple
- Catastrophe for Jews
- Very problematic for Christians
- Temple at Mt Gerizim
- Destroyed *again* in the Jewish War
- Mt Gerizim
- Under Antiochus IV Epiphanes: *Zeus-the-friend-of-strangers* (2 Macc 5:23; 6:2)
- Destroyed by John Hyrcanus 128 bc
- Revenge in 6 AD; 37 ad (Pontius Pilate); 70 ad
- Josephus Jewish War 3.7.32
- Nor did the Samaritans escape their share of misfortunes at this time; for they assembled themselves together upon the mountain called Gerizzim, which is with them a holy mountain, and there they remained. [Cerealis] assured them, that if they would lay down their arms, he would secure them from any harm; but when he could not prevail with them, he fell upon them and slew them all, being in number eleven thousand and six hundred.

John 4: Water

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37–39)

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), “I am thirsty.” (John 19:28)

Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (John 19:34)

John 4: Marriage

- The wedding feast of Cana (x2!)
 - Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. (John 4:46)
- John the Baptist
 - The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled (John 3:29–30)
- The Samaritan Woman
- The burial of Jesus
 - Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds (John 19:39–40)

John 4: Location

Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:19–22)

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. (John 14:17)

Initial Conclusion

- John's Gospel has many quest stories
- The Gospel is in dialogue with OT symbolism and narrative
- The Gospel is in dialogue with the Jesus tradition — e.g. parables of wedding feasts
- The Gospel is in dialogue with the current situation of the addressees
- The Gospel is, so to speak, in dialogue with itself: the symbolism used here is picked up significantly across the Gospel.

The Woman at the Well (ii)

Steps

- John 4: scenes
- John 4: symbolic narrative
- The “layers” of John 4
- And for today?

John 4: Scenes

Introduction 1-6

Scene 1	7-15	(living water)
Scene 2	16-29 [30]	(place)
Scene 3	[30]31-42.	(food)

- A request or invitation is given by or to Jesus in the (aorist) imperative: give, go call, eat (vv.7, 16, 31)
- Jesus makes a statement which, in some way, overturns this request (vv. 10, 17-18, 32)
- The leading character makes an initial response to Jesus' statement (vv. 11 [9], 19-20, 33);
- Jesus offers Christological revelation (vv. 13-14, 21-26, 34-38);
- The leading character makes a faith response (vv. 15, 28-29, 39-42 – in each case intensifying to a climax).

Scene 1

- A request
 - Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (John 4:7)
- Overtaken
 - Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” (John 4:10)
- Initial response
 - The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? (John 4:11)
- Revelation
 - Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” (John 4:13–14)
- Response
 - The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” (John 4:15)

Scene 2

- A request
 - Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” (John 4:16–17)
- Overtaken

- a. 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 the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" (John 4:17–18)
- c) Initial response
 - a. The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." (John 4:19–20)
- d) Revelation
 - a. Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these 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" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." (John 4:21–26)
- e) Response
 - a. Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" (John 4:28–29)

Scene 3

- a) A request
 - a. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." (John 4:31)
- b) Overturned
 - a. But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." (John 4:32)
- c) Initial response
 - a. So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" (John 4:33)
- d) Revelation
 - a. Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour." (John 4:34–38)
- e) Response
 - a. Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." 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 what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world." (John 4:39–42)

John 4: Symbolic

Dorothy Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel*

Stage 1	Establishment of the fundamental symbol
Stage 2	Misunderstanding
Stage 3	Struggle for understanding
Stage 4	Attainment or Rejection of Symbolic Understanding

Stage 5 Confession of Faith or Statement of Rejection

E.g. Samaritan Woman, Man Born Blind

E.g. (fractured) Nicodemus

Scenes	Stages
Scene 1: Living Water (7-15)	Stages 1 to 2
Scene 2: Place (16-30)	Stages 3 to 4
Scene 3: Food / Harvest (31-42)	Stage 5

John 4: Layer

- From mundane tasks to spiritual thirst
- From misunderstanding to recognition
- From being a Samaritan to being an apostle (she leaves down her bucket)

- Jesus
- A Jew
- Greater than Jacob
- Sir / Lord
- Prophet
- Messiah
- Rabbi
- Saviour of the world

- Background: OT symbolism (wells, marriage, Temple, harvest)
- Type scene: meeting your future wife at a well
- Scenes: request / overturned/ response, revelation, response
- Symbolic narrative: misunderstanding to faith
- Function: who is Jesus?
- Function: “Outsiders” may become apostles!

And for today...

- How does the story work?
 - A story of pre-evangelization
 - A story of encounter
 - A story of mission
- Bearers of the good news today?
 - Identify with the Samaritan woman (cf. Augustine)
 - Own my own stories of encounter with Jesus
 - In proclaiming: (1) we empower; (2) we do not take the place of Jesus

- Understanding often comes in more than one stage – what has been my experience of understanding and being understood?
- Remembering the time(s) in my life when a thirst for something deeper was “activated”?
- Looking back over my life – what have been the major stages both on a personal level and on the level of faith?
- Who has been to me the “prophet” moving me on to deeper insight. Have I been a prophet to anyone?

- Where do I now “worship God” in spirit and in truth?
- What about my role as a bearer of the news – times when I have “left down” my ordinary affairs?
- The townspeople believe on the basis of their experience – what has been my experience of faith?
- Can I name, today, my “springs of living water”?