

Is He the Messiah? Am I the person at the well?

This is the question asked by the Samaritan woman after leaving her jar beside the well and running back to the village. Like me, she was an ordinary person. She was going about her day and accomplishing necessary tasks (like drawing water from the well). Unaware that she was in the presence of the only begotten Son, she spoke to Him as one living in the natural world, inquiring, “How will you draw this living water without rope or bucket?” Yet, He persisted in pursuing her supernaturally, offering “My water brings eternal life.”

In awe of Him, she ran back to the village and urged others to see a man who could tell her all she had done. Transfixed on His ability to know her past, she might easily have missed what He offered for her future. Bewildered and perhaps overwhelmed, she runs away to her village and beckons that others come and see this man. She even ponders, “Could he possibly be the Messiah?” And because of her many Samaritans from the village came out to see, listen, and, ultimately, believe in Jesus.

John’s account of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is beautiful and gripping. It is beautiful for many reasons. Jesus reveals Himself to be the Messiah. He proves to be radically inclusive, making way to salvation for all who believe. And as we read, many Samaritans came to know and believe Jesus because of the woman at the well. We know that she and her village were moved by Him. His presence in their village was alive and real. They discovered a food they previously knew nothing about.

It is also a beautifully gripping story because her question raises another question. Could I possibly be the woman at the well? As I reflect on this story of an imperfect human who was focused on meeting her day-to-day needs, I am convinced that, of course, I am her. Or, at least, I recognize that her sins are no greater than mine and that my existence is no greater than hers. We are both imperfect humans in need of living water.

I have the benefit of growing up with her story. I have imagined what if it had been me at the well and how I might hope to have responded had I met the Messiah that day. For those growing up with scripture, it can be a bit like watching a movie you’ve seen plenty of times before. At times, I almost plead with the characters, as if it might redirect the outcome. I beg the woman at the well to stay with Him a bit longer. I find myself encouraging her, “Yes, you are right! IT IS THE MESSIAH! Kiss HIS feet! Do not leave His presence! His living water gives eternal life and to live in His presence on this earth is the only hope of an abundant life. Forget your past, focus less on ordinary tasks and more on what is eternal, and follow HIM wherever HE leads.”

But just then, as I hear myself pleading with her, I discover that I am looking down into the well, seeing my own reflection, and delivering the message to myself: Jesus is the Messiah. He gives living water. Follow Him wherever He leads.