

Women in the Gospels

Seeing Jesus from their perspective.

October 1, 2024

Mary and The Woman at the Well

Jesus and His Mother, Mary

As you know, we are meeting the women in the New Testament, women who met Jesus and interacted with him in some way during his short ministry on earth. His mother, Mary, was the woman he interacted with most—all those 30 years before he left home to begin his earthly ministry.

Have you ever wondered what it was like to raise Jesus from birth until 30 years of age? I love this verse from the Christmas hymn, “Once in David’s Royal City”:

Jesus is our childhood’s pattern,
Day by day like us he grew.
He was little, weak and helpless,
Tears and smiles like us he knew.
Thus he feels for all our sadness,
And he shares in all our gladness.

Luke 2:41 – 52

Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴ Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

⁴⁹ “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁵¹ Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Obviously, Jesus grew up in a faithful Jewish household. He was immersed in Judaism since his youth. And we see is that he was totally comfortable sitting in the temple courts with the teachers of the day, asking them questions.

What questions come to your mind when you read this story?

When they finally found him, probably in the last place they looked, they were astonished to find him there. Then Mary moves from worried to greatly irritated and unhappy with Jesus. What do you think of his response to his Mother:

“Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”

Jesus informs her in a very confident, almost dismissive way that he’s doing what he’s supposed to do. He *has* to be in the temple, his Father’s house.

Mary “*treasured all these things in her heart.*” She was reminded again that Joseph is not Jesus’ father and she is again brought to the reality that Jesus is like no other child ever born.

This is the only incident from his childhood that is recorded and only Luke records it. I’m inclined to believe that Luke learned these details from Mary herself many years later.

At 12-years-old, Jesus understands he is on earth for a purpose different from anyone else who was ever born. Mary must have learned then, if not before, that this son of hers was like no other, and her job was to raise him until his time arrived, and then watch him as he is crucified on a cross for her and for us.

Water into Wine

John 2:1- 12

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there,² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.³ When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”

⁴“Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.”

⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

⁷Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.”

They did so,⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside¹⁰ and said, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.”

¹¹What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

¹²After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

This is the first time that Mary, Jesus’ mother, is mentioned in the Gospel of John, and it’s very interesting that John gives us all the details of this event.

Weddings were the most important celebration in Jewish life. The fact that Jesus was invited to this wedding tells us that he loved joyful occasions and was glad to take part in this celebration.

We forget to “invite Jesus” into every part of our lives.

The Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence is a great book that makes it even clearer how to practice the presence of God.

Jesus was invited to this wedding, and he was there. Have you—do you regularly invite Jesus into your life? Into the humdrum stuff as well as the stressful parts? Are you aware that he’s there all the time?

We are told that this “*was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*” So, what made Mary think that Jesus could solve the problem?

Why did Jesus call her woman and not mother?

Mary doesn’t argue with him. Neither does she tell him what to do. She just knows him, and she turns to him first when she has no answers and doesn’t know what to do.

Friends, we should be like Mary and just go to Jesus when we have a need. You just have to go to him and turn the situation over to him and trust him. It’s just that easy and simple—and it’s just that hard.

Why is it hard for us to turn over our problems to Jesus and trust him?

Philippians 4:6: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

1 Peter 5:7: *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

Proverbs 3:5 – 6: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*

Psalms 34:17: *The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.*

Then “His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” She trusts Jesus because she knows Jesus!

“If Christ can turn water into wine by his will, he can do anything and everything. If Jesus has once exercised a power beyond nature, we may readily believe that he can do it again: there is no limit to his power.” (Spurgeon)

This became a very important turning point for Jesus and his disciples. This “*was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*” (John 2:11)

The *gift* was for the bride and groom, so they would not be embarrassed. The *miracle* was for the disciples, so they would believe in him.

Jesus and the Woman at the Well

“We might expect a conversation with his mother to be Jesus’ longest dialogue with a woman. After all, she would be the most appropriate woman for an unmarried rabbi to talk to—especially in private. But instead, Jesus’s longest recorded private conversation with anyone in the Gospels is with a woman Jewish men would have avoided at all costs” (*Jesus Through the Eyes of Women*, p. 84).

John 4:1 – 10

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

Samaritans are Israelites who inter-married with foreigners. “Jews saw Samaritans as both racially and religiously contaminated. Like the Jews, they worshiped the Lord, but they only recognized the Bible’s first five books, and while Jews worshiped at the Jerusalem temple on Mount Zion, the Samaritans built an alternative temple on Mount Gerizim. The Jews destroyed this Samaritan temple in 128BC, cementing the enmity between the two groups” (*Jesus Through the Eyes of Women*, p. 84).

Jesus immediately crosses several cultural lines here. First, he speaks to a Samaritan. Second, he speaks to a woman. Third, he asks her to help him—to give him some water. Fourth, he does so when he is all alone with her. All of that was totally inappropriate in that day.

“As we look through this Samaritan woman’s eyes in this moment, we see Jesus as a Jewish man trampling on the ethnic and social barriers of this day. Perhaps she wonders what he’s really after. But Jesus isn’t there for what he can take. He’s there for what he can give” (*Jesus Through the Eyes of Women*, p. 85).

Jeremiah 2:13: *“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”*

John 4:11 – 12: *“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”*

John 4:13 – 14: *Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*

Later in John we read that Jesus cries out in the temple:

John 7:37b – 38: *“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”*

Jesus makes this declaration first to this woman—this woman that no Jew should talk to!

John 4:15

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Even though she has no real understanding of what living water is, she continues talking to Jesus because he’s got her attention. Then Jesus told her, *“Go, call your husband and come back.”* She simply replies: *“I have no husband.”* (John 4:16-17)

John 4:17 – 18

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

Why does Jesus say this? Do you think he is trying to shame her?

Why did she have five husbands?

John 4:19 - 26

“Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

²¹“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

²⁵The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

²⁶Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

Jesus now tells her a truth he has not yet explicitly said to anyone else—at least not recorded in the Gospels—and it is another of his “I am” statements.

“The Christ you are talking about, the one you are looking for, I am he.” This is the first time in the Gospel of John that Jesus minces no words and declares that he is Messiah.

Jesus talks to this woman knowing full well who she is. He also knows her heart, and he knows she longs for some truth to set her free. What does this tell you about Jesus?

The Disciples Rejoin Jesus

John 4:27 - 34

²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

³¹ Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

³² But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

³³ Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

³⁴ “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.”

John 4:39 - 42

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴² They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

When was the last time you told your story? Nobody can tell you that your story is not true. I encourage you to tell your story—as often as you can.

References are from the book, *Jesus Through the Eyes of Women* by Rebecca McLaughlin