

“THE FORGOTTEN WATER JAR”

(John 4:7-30)

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–I–

1. Read Text John 4:7-30 and Pray.

2. The newspaper USA TODAY once asked 4-10 Graders around the nation this question: “*What do you think will be most important when you are an adult?*”<sup>1</sup> Here’s how they responded:

To do something good for other people:	35%
To be good at your work:	34%
To make a lot of money:	30%
To have close friends:	30%
To have enough time to do the things you want to do:	27%
To be married:	21%
To have kids:	14%
To be famous:	9%

A–Now I share this poll simply to point out that even at a young age we tend to have a very keen sense of what we feel should be priorities in and for our lives.

B–Our priorities not only reveal what we feel to be important, but they also help to define us, energize us, and give us direction.

C–And whether we recognize their presence or not, we ALL have priorities in our lives that affect us for either good or evil.

3. Well, today’s story from John 4 (what has come to be called “The Woman at the Well”) is essentially a story about priorities: *WHAT they are; HOW we make them; and (most importantly) HOW our walk with God affects them.* I want us to look at these today.

–II–

4. Of course, the first thing we need to do is define **exactly what a priority IS.**

A–Perhaps the best definition that I’ve heard is that a priority is “*something which is of leading importance in our lives.*”

1–It’s what we spend our time thinking about, what we do, and even what we spend most of our money on.

2–It could be a person, possession, idea, belief system, or even a behavior/action.

B–In fact, humanity is unique in that we are the only part of God’s created order that can set and establish priorities for *ourselves.*

1–The mineral, plant, and animal kingdom do not possess this capacity in any meaningful way.

2--In fact, one could argue that this ability to establish and set priorities is perhaps the greatest freedom that God gives to us as human beings.

C--In Verses 16-17 of today's scripture, we hear Jesus telling the woman at the well to "*call her husband*" (or the man she's living with who's "*not [her] husband*").

1--In effect, he's calling her to recognize and acknowledge that which her actions reveal to be of leading importance for her (i.e., her "priority").

2--Namely: her relationship with other men outside of marriage.

D--What are *your* priorities today? What is of leading importance in *your* life? When we come face to face with Jesus, the first thing he calls us to do is to recognize/acknowledge *what* our priorities already *are*.

5. But then, next in this story we learn **HOW we make priorities** in life.

A--You see, even today's scripture teaches us that a priority is something consciously and voluntarily *chosen*.

1--In Verses 13-14, when Jesus speaks of the difference between the water drawn from the well at Sychar and the "*water that I [Jesus] can give*,"...

2--...it's clear that he means by this that we can consciously *choose* which well we draw water from: the *earthly* well (giving temporary, worldly satisfactions); or the *heavenly* well (giving spiritual and eternal satisfactions).<sup>2</sup>

B--The problem with many of us is that the priorities *we* make tend to get rather mixed up from time to time.

C--Consider, for example, the true story (printed in a June 1978 New Mexico newspaper) of a "want ad" run by a single farmer looking for a wife that went like this: "*Man 35, wants woman about 25, with tractor. Send picture of tractor.*"

D--Well, in today's scripture we learn that this woman had obviously set some bad priorities for herself along the way in her life.

1--Verse 6 tells us that she was drawing water from the well "*about noon*" – Yet, most of the women of town would have drawn water earlier in the day when it was cooler.

2--Based upon Jesus' conversation with her about her "live-in" husband, it could be inferred that there was something notorious about this woman (we don't know exactly what) that probably made her unwanted and unwelcome earlier in the day.

3--So then, before Jesus even approached her, this woman's priorities – often like our own – had been consciously misplaced at some point.

6. But Jesus' very conversation here also highlights **the role that God and our walk of faith play in affecting our priorities.**

A—You see, all while this woman's priorities centered around her relationship with other men, Jesus' conversation with her in Verses 21-26 kept pointing her towards the *worship of God* and her *acceptance of himself as the Messiah* as that which should be of "leading importance" (that is: a priority) in her life.

B—Of course, sometime I hear people read this as if to say that God *Himself* should be the "top priority" in life, to look something like: (1) God; (2) church; (3) family; (4) job; etc.

C—But I don't think that this is what these verses are saying.

1—For one thing, I want to know specifically *how* is it that we're to make a "priority" out of "God"?

2—By itself, it's just too vague and idealistic a concept to put into practice.

3—What's more is that if God is our "first/top priority," then doesn't relegate God into being merely *one* among *many* priorities – who is easily compartmentalized?

D—You see, in the end I think a better way to explain these verses is to say that while God may not be able to be our "top priority," per se, nevertheless He and His will should **ORDER ALL** our priorities.

1—In other words, God and His *divine* will can give meaning and purpose to our *earthly* priorities.

2—In this way, God's will becomes the *divine center* around which earthly priorities (such as family, friends, job, school, & church) orbit and revolve.

7. Again, today's story gives an excellent example of this. Notice, for example what this woman does in Verses 28-29 *AFTER* she accepts Jesus' offer of "living water":

[NRSV]: "*Then the woman left her water jar and went back into the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!'*"

[MSG]: "*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.'*"

A—Now, think about that a moment: *WHY* did this woman come to the well in the *first place*?

1—She came to draw water, and brought her water jar with her to put the water in.

2—And yet, by the time Jesus finished talking to her, she had forgotten the whole reason that she was there in the first place!

3—Do you catch this? She was so excited and overwhelmed by Jesus – this man who loved her in spite of who she was and whatever it was she had done – that what she *thought* was most important wasn't so important anymore.

B–You see, at that moment, Jesus didn't *become* her priority. But Jesus did drastically *rearrange / reorder* the priorities she already had.

1–Compared with the "*living water*" that she now had, the "*physical water*" didn't really matter very much.

2–All of the sudden, whatever shameful things she had done didn't matter anymore, because she knew that she was a new creature in Christ. <sup>3</sup>

C–*That* was the effect of faith on this woman's priorities. And it can have the same effect on us today, as well.

1–When we come to have a personal relationship with Jesus, things that we think are important are all the sudden not as important as we once thought they were.

2–Jesus takes the old priorities of our lives and rearranges them.

3–And when he does, there are all sorts of "forgotten water jars" that represent our reordered priorities in Christ.

–III–

8. So, let me ask: do you have a "forgotten water jar" in *your* life ...Something you left behind because Jesus came into your life? ...that represents a change in your priorities?

A–Is it alcohol? drugs? cigars/cigarettes? gambling? a prideful spirit? pornography? a stingy wallet/purse? a love of gossip?

B–God's Word tells us that when we truly experience God's salvation, we'll live new lives, with reordered priorities that reflect the kingdom and will of God, and those "old" things won't be so important to us anymore.

C–...Because like the Woman at the Well, we'll be so excited about our new selves that our first thought will be to "go and tell" all that Christ has done for us.

D–So today as we close, I want to ask if you have a "forgotten water jar" in your life?

1–If so, think about what it is and give God thanks for it.

2–If not, then it's not too late to open yourself to the "living water" of Christ; to help you recognize/acknowledge what your current priorities are, and to help you consciously choose HIM to reorient them in a more Godly way.

9. [PRAYER]

10. [CLOSING MUSIC (Jesus, Be the Center)]

**ENDNOTES:**

1. From USA Today newspaper, Tuesday, May 26, 1987.
2. So then, a priority is not chosen simply by belief *or* by actions *alone*, but by a *combination of these* – I’ve even heard it said that “*Values/Ideals + Beliefs + Commitment = A Priority.*”
3. 2 Corinthians 5:17–“*Behold, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation: everything old has passed away; everything new has come!*”