
Editorials

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Nearly two thousand years ago, when Jesus walked from Judea up through Samaria, he encountered a woman at "Jacob's well" near the city of Sychar. That ancient well is still there today as a monument to this life-changing event.

The teaching that Jesus presented to the woman is preserved in Scripture in John's Gospel (John 4). During His conversation, He revealed to the woman that He was the Messiah and the very source of "living water" and "eternal life."

There's also a more recent narrative of another woman at a well. However, this one is not a chronicle or record of historical facts as is John's account, but rather is a modern-day parable. It is an illustration I have often used to demonstrate the plight of those caught within the dangerous and unhealthy web of cultic and aberrational doctrine and how escape can be made from the degenerating effects of such teaching and teachers. The story unfolds in this way:

There once was a woman who lived in the country. One day, some friends and neighbors began telling her about a newly discovered well which they said was a source of water which contained great medicinal value. It, they claimed, had healing properties which far exceeded anything she could obtain from her own well. While affliction and unrest still seemed apparent in the

lives of her friends and neighbors, their exuberance as they drank from the well soon overwhelmed her. She too found herself committed to this alluring source of water.

However, in time she began to realize that what she experienced was not excitement as a result of drinking from the new-found well. It seemed to be more externally generated, not really from within because of the water itself. In fact, she sensed just the opposite — that she was weak, sick and apathetic. In time, her condition grew worse, and despite the disapproval of her friends, she went to her doctor and described her symptoms, hoping for a diagnosis.

After listening carefully to the woman, running several tests and gathering personal data, the physician wisely determined that the well water she was drinking was contaminated. He told her to drink water from another, more healthy, source. He also prescribed a strong medication to clear up the many toxins which had entered in her system as a result of the polluted water.

Several weeks passed and she returned to the doctor for a follow up visit. Her complaints of feeling weak, sick and spiritless persisted. Puzzled by lack of any small sign of improvement in her condition, "Just keep drinking water from a healthy source and stay on the medication to clear up the toxins," the doctor emphasized to the woman.

A few more weeks passed and yet another visit to the physician revealed the same symptoms continuing to
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plague the woman. With further investigation, the physician found that the woman had, in fact, not returned to a source of healthy water but was still drinking from the contaminated well. Moreover, he learned that she had not taken any of the medicine that he had prescribed.

The meaning of this parable?

The contaminated well water is the unhealthy doctrine and practice of false teachers, false prophets and the churches they spawn. The medicine is the antidote of a healthy church with scripturally solid doctrine and practice. The woman's afflictions are one's spiritual condition. To progress on the road of biblical sanctification (and get our spiritual feet on firm ground), we must not only stop drinking from the poisoned well, but we must get on proper medication (i.e., get into that good church home and digest sound doctrine).

For many members trying to exit cultic and aberrational groups, it is extremely difficult to accept such counsel and follow it through.

As my colleague G. Richard Fisher points out in his article on deception (found in this *Journal*), many have "invested blood, sweat, tears and money into religious deception" and for this cause "may be too embarrassed or too stubborn to admit he has been taken."

Further factors stifle the healing process as well. The sense of loss (including perhaps family, friends and finances) can be overwhelming. Likewise, the sense of fear. "What if my friends are right and the doctor is

wrong," they may reason. "Perhaps he's misdiagnosed my case. What if the group I am trying to leave is true after all — and it's just me? What if they are true prophets and I am blaspheming the Holy Spirit by my doubt and action?" can all plague the victim. The jaded mindset and the years of not really thinking can add even more fear and confusion. The spiritual terrorism techniques of these groups are overpowering and devastating and leave lasting scars.

At PFO's recent Conference on Biblical Discernment, Pastor Fisher addressed the struggles and grief of ex-cult members. In his workshop, *Getting Out – Getting On*, (designed to help the exiting member) he mapped the intricacies of the grieving process and offered practical help for one coming out of an abusive group:

"There can be the smothering feeling of loneliness. And do you know what? Sometimes the person toys with wanting to go back. Do you know why they want to go back? Because they want to feel better. Not because it makes any sense to you and me, but because they want to feel better. They are just tired of feeling bad. So they decide, 'Maybe if I go back — maybe I'll just go back for a while. Maybe I'll just reconnect a little bit because it will make me feel better.' But you see now they're beginning to take their feelings and put their feelings above God's Word. They're making feeling better, more important than obedience to God. ... We will do anything for self-comfort, especially when we're used to doing things for self-comfort; even, sometimes, things that don't make a lot of sense. Someone has said that there are some people who will stay in hell because they know the names of the streets. No matter if the terrain's dangerous, the terrain's sinful,

the terrain's unhealthy. You sort of know the terrain. ... there's a certain weird comfort and safety factor even in insane places if you know how it all works. ... Because to be on terrain they don't know is very, very fearful" (G. Richard Fisher, *Getting Out - Getting On*, cassette tape).

As difficult as it may appear and as hard as it is to try, one *must* go on — and above all, stop drinking from the contaminated well and be committed to the antidote. Life and habits will have to be reorganized. And you must remember: You can't change the past. Dr. Jay Adams zeros in on the debilitating effects of dwelling on the past:

"Some persons focus on the past. So long as they do, change will not be possible, since no one can change the past. It is not the past that needs to be dealt with; actually the past no longer exists. It is not his *past* that needs changing; it is the counselee *himself as he now is* who must change. Counselors must help the counselee to refocus from the past to its effects upon the present. They must explain that the past is present in the life patterns of the counselee himself and in the present effects of past activities. Just as those who focus on the future (which does not exist) in worry do not change, so too those who expend their energies and concern upon the past (which does not exist) find that they are unable to make the required adjustments" (Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, pp. 172-173, italics in original).

The Apostle Paul offered this example and advice to the believers at Philippi:

"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

Paul left his impressive-sounding Jewish pedigree behind. As Jesus said, "the Truth will make you free" (John 8:32); He has the power to set you completely free (8:36). The unhealthy doctrine and practice of false teachers and aberrant churches must be left behind. The healthy discipline of being in a well-balanced church family with worship, Bible study, service, and fellowship must be established and continued. It will be just what the doctor ordered! A caring body of true believers is also needed for support in the fearful times.

God is bigger than your fear, God is bigger than your afflictions, God is bigger than your hurt. He will see you through — His Word guarantees it:

"I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are things I will do; I will not forsake them" (Isaiah 42:16).

—MKG

reach of many ordinary people and living standards have been gradually falling for years," the report stated.

Before the Kenya services, Hinn took publicity of his crusades to a new level. On several television broadcasts, he suggested that Jesus Christ would personally and physically appear at the Kenya meetings. However, such purported appearances apparently are not unheard of among Kenyans. The *Kenya Times* reported in its June 22, 1988, edition that about 6,000 worshipers at a Muslim village in Nairobi believed they saw Jesus Christ in broad daylight.

The newspaper described that a tall, white-robed, barefoot and bearded figure appeared at the Church of Bethlehem during a miracle prayer meeting conducted by spiritual healer Mary Sinaida Akatsa. The man believed to be Jesus left the meeting by car, but the driver later claimed he was instructed to stop the car at a bus terminal where the man got out "walked a few paces beside the road and simply vanished into thin air." The *Times* article also identified the person claiming to be Jesus Christ as the Lord Maitreya. New Age guru Benjamin Creme stated that "Maitreya's appearance was in keeping with the crowd's expectations, as Jesus Christ, hence his bearded face and biblical robes."

Despite Hinn's hype of the crusade in early May, media coverage of the event was sparse. The limited coverage by the secular media appears to be a strategy orchestrated by Hinn's ministry to control and filter crusade details. A reporter for the *Daily Nation News* told PFO that "there was minimal coverage as the local press were prevented from entering the crusade compounds."

A freelance news writer in the United States told PFO that while Hinn's organization permitted her to attend the Philadelphia Miracle Crusade (which was held a few weeks after the Kenya meetings), no cameras were allowed. The reporter was further instructed that she was forbidden to speak directly to anyone presented onstage as healed. Any details of those claiming to be healed were to come solely from Hinn's crusade representatives.

—MKG

A HEAVYWEIGHT DIVORCE SETTLEMENT

Three-time heavyweight boxing champion Evander Holyfield and his second wife, Janice, reached an out-of-court divorce settlement in March. The agreement, which ended the couple's 3½-year marriage and full year of divorce proceedings, precluded what could have been a very messy split, including the incarceration of Holyfield's pastor, the Rev. Creflo Dollar, for refusing to give a deposition in the case.