

March 3-7, 2025 Edition

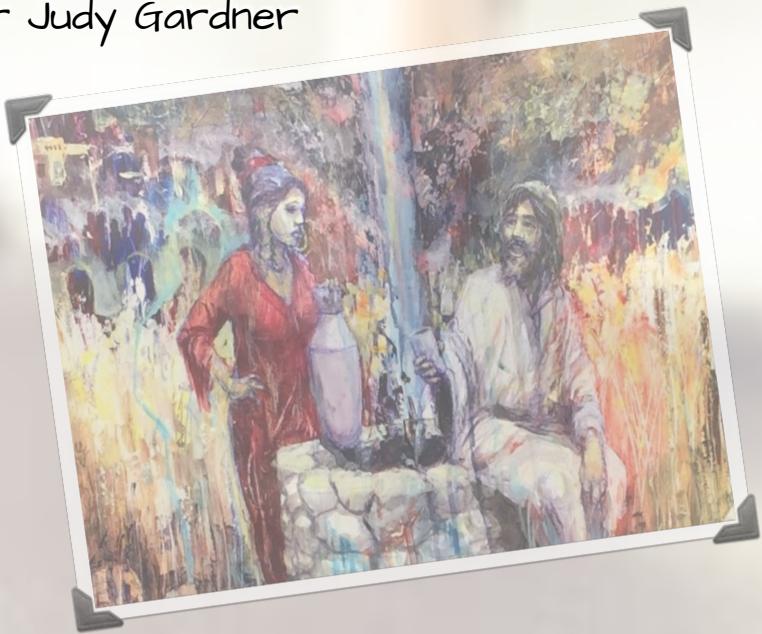
Following

The Year_(s) Of Jesus Part 165

Rivers Of Living Water

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

March 1/2, 2025



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday:

Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John (though Jesus himself didn't baptize them-his disciples did). So he left Judea and returned to Galilee. He had to go through Samaria on the way. John 4:1-4 (NLT)

Reflection: Do you ever read things in the Bible and just wonder, why? I do it all the time... of course I was one of those kids growing up that asked why so often that eventually my teachers would say, "stop asking why, Eddie. Just listen to the story!"

But here's one of those perfect places where John says something really interesting but doesn't elaborate or answer the why.

He had to go through Samaria on the way.

Why? Why did He HAVE to go through Samaria? I spend a lot of time pondering these vague questions... maybe I have too much free time?

The Jews hated the Samaritans. Their hatred was reciprocal... the Samaritans hated the Jews too. It all went back to the days just after Solomon died and the kingdom of Israel was divided. It took a bloody civil war to separate the northern Kingdom of Israel from the southern Kingdom of Judah. But the problem went far deeper than just the political arena. There was also the question of religion. I know what you're thinking... why? Why was there a religious undercurrent adding to the tension?

Because... Solomon had built God's Temple in Jerusalem, the capital city of the southern kingdom. And this wasn't just a temple... it was THE TEMPLE. And all of the Jews wanted to worship God at His Temple. So the northern kingdom had a problem. You couldn't have all your subjects traveling to the southern kingdom and struggling with their sense of allegiance (not to mention spending all their money on their pilgrimage and sacrifices in the south). So the north built their own temple on mount Gerazim.

It was a HUGE controversy. The southern Jews claimed blasphemy. There can be no other temple besides THE TEMPLE in Jerusalem. The northern Jews were heretics... and eventually the rumor would be spread that the northern Jews (the Samaritans) had intermarried and so they were no longer true Jews... they were half breeds (there is a lot of evidence now to suggest that this was a propaganda smear campaign on the part of the southern Jewish priests and that it's not really true... but that was what the Jews of the first century believed about the Samaritans).

At one point the Samaritans sent a special forces unit to Jerusalem with the intention of defiling the Temple in Jerusalem. They spies were caught and nothing happened in Jerusalem but in retaliation the southern Jews sent their own squad to mount Gerazim and they were successful in burning down the temple of the northern Jews.

All that to say... they hated each other. And since Samaria was smack dab in the middle of the northern Jewish settlements in Galilee (where Jesus was born and where most of His disciples were from) and Judea (where the Temple was and Jesus did a ton of ministry) then there was a problem. Because the most direct route to get from Galilee to Jerusalem was right through Samaria... but no self respecting Jewish person would take that direct route.

They would add extra miles and days to their journey by taking a circuitous route that went to the easy of Samaria so they wouldn't soil their shoes.

So then why? Why did Jesus HAVE to through Samaria? I guarantee you His disciples would have been confused and troubled. I would lay odds that none of them (with the possible exception of Matthew who had been a tax collector and probably wouldn't have worried about such things) had ever been through Samaria. So why does Jesus HAVE to go there?

I think He had an appointment. God had someone that He needed Jesus to meet. A woman. And not just a woman... a Samaritan woman. And not just a Samaritan woman... a Samaritan woman who had led such a messed up life she was an outcast even among the Samaritans. I wonder now if John didn't say that Jesus HAD to go through Samaria with his tongue planted firmly in his cheek. Because that's Who Jesus turns out to be. The guy who just HAS to do things that makes everyone else shake their heads in disbelief.

This week we're talking about that appointment, but for today I hope you'll think about the fact that one day God had a special appointment planned for Jesus to run into you. At that perfect moment when you would be able to see just how much you needed Him. And if that day hasn't come yet for you... well then rest assured God has an appointment penciled in for you sometime in the future when you'll be receptive.

Prayer: Lord, you are such a mystery. I don't know why You do the things You do. I don't know why You care about the people You care about. Teach me to see other people the way You see me. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Tuesday:

He had to go through Samaria on the way. Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food. The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?" Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water." John 4:4-10 (NLT)

Reflection: Ok... so what do we know about this woman? Well, she was Samaritan which would have meant she didn't want to have anything to do with Jesus (Him being a southerner and they hated the southerners just as much as the southerners hated them). Also she was a woman (wow Pastor Ed... tremendous grasp of the obvious! You're pretty sharp...) which meant that Jesus shouldn't have been talking to her. And finally we know she was an outcast. How do we know that?

Well, the first clue is that she's coming to get water at noon. Typically middle eastern women would go out at dawn and at dusk to get water to avoid the hottest part of the day. More than likely she didn't want to run into anyone else... maybe because she was an outcast?

And later on we'll find out from Jesus that she had been married 5 times and the guy she was currently with she wasn't even married to. And as any good southern Jewish person would tell you, even the Samaritans would know that that was messed up.

Ok... so she's a messed up Samaritan woman. Three strikes against her right up front when it comes to the typical Jewish religious leader. But thank God that Jesus wasn't like any Jewish religious leader that this woman had ever met or heard about.

But she doesn't know that... yet.

As she approaches the well she would have been able to tell from a distance that there was a Jewish rabbi sitting at the well. The way Jesus would have dressed would have been a dead give away. Just like today you can tell from a distance if someone's a hipster by their distinct fashion sensibilities ;o) If you see someone across a room wearing vintage and thrift store inspired fashions, tight-fitting jeans, old-school sneakers, thick rimmed glasses & knit hats or fedoras with androgynous hair styles that include combinations of messy shag cuts and asymmetric side-swept bangs... then you might be looking at a hipster (definition of hipster taken from Urban Dictionary and is not meant to make any value judgments pro or con toward hipsters... just using them to make a point ;o)

Same thing with Jesus. She would have been able to tell that He was a Jewish rabbi from a distance and I imagine she was thinking, "great... now there's a Jewish rabbi at the well. I was hoping to get my water and get home without running into anyone but now I've got to deal with this guy. Well... I'll just hurry up and I know he won't say anything to me because they hate us."

Or something along those lines.

But she's wrong. Because as soon as she gets to the well and starts doing her thing Jesus asks her for a drink. Whoa! That NEVER happened. The Jews would have considered the Samaritans to be "unclean". And if you know anything about the Jewish ceremonial purity laws then you realize that if a Jew drank from a cup that belonged to a Samaritan then that Jew would become "unclean". It would take time and a pretty involved process of washing and waiting to become clean again. No Jewish religious leader that she'd ever heard about would ever drink from a cup that she owned. Heck, even the Samaritan people probably wouldn't drink from a cup she owned.

But once again... Jesus is surprising everyone. He asks her for a drink and changes the world... and He changes her life. Forever.

In the 1st century everybody who heard about Jesus was a clean slate. They had never heard of Him and they didn't know anything about Him. He was always a surprise. In 21st century America everyone thinks they know Who Jesus is and what He's about. But I think if we'd really look at His life and set aside every preconceived notion we have about Him... then Jesus would be as much of a surprise today as He was 2,000 years ago.

So I hope you'll spend some time today thinking about how Jesus isn't like any religious leader that you've ever met either. What do you think that means?

Prayer: Father, thank You that you care about me even though I am so messed up. Teach me to see Jesus for Who He really is. Help me to set aside everything I think I know about Him today and see Him for afresh... surprise me Father. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give will never be thirsty. The water I give will become a spring of water gushing up inside that person, giving eternal life. John 4:13-14 (NLT)

Reflection: Jesus knew something about every human being He came across.

We are all thirsty.

Spiritually speaking. We all have this ingrained need to find meaning, satisfaction, love, peace & purpose. We NEED these things. We don't just want them, we are lost without them.

And so we pursue them somewhere. Sometimes people will look for meaning in their work. They'll think, "if I can just 'make it' in my career then everything will be right in the world and I'll be ok. Sometimes we look for meaning in money. We'll think, "if I can just hit a certain number then all will be right with the world and I'll be ok." Sometimes it's possessions. We might think that the right car or right house or right jewelry or right clothes will make us feel the way we know we're supposed to feel.

Even relationships can lead us astray. Sometimes we think that love is what will make us ok. That if we just find the right boy/girl friend, spouse, child, or friend that they will make us feel like everything is right in the world and we're going to be ok. The problem is, that even though there's nothing wrong with careers, money, possessions & relationship, they make lousy foundations for your life. Even relationships, if we put the pressure of our meaning and purpose and satisfaction will become toxic and dysfunctional and destructive and codependent.

So what's the answer. Well, Jesus tells this woman who had been through 5 husbands and was currently not even married to the guy she was with (now to be fair... this was a tough time to be a woman and this lady could have, through no fault of her own ended up with this sad life just because of circumstances and the way things were back in the first century but the lesson still holds...) that He could give her the "living water" that would quench the thirst He knew she had.

Feeling thirsty? Jesus is hoping you are. Because as human beings we all need to quench our spiritual thirst somewhere and if you're not making Jesus the source of your heart then whatever you've put there in His place is going to leave you feeling thirstier than if you hadn't had a drink at all.

What's the difference we'll ask. Isn't a drink a drink? Well let's think about it this way... let's say you're parched. You NEED something to quench your physical thirst. Will any liquid do the trick? How about if I pour you a tall glass of Log Cabin maple syrup? Sound like that might quench your thirst? No? How about a tall glass of Tobasco sauce (or any extremely hot sauce you might prefer)? I used to love to tell a joke about a guy dying of thirst in the

desert and coming across a well used spitoon... I won't gross you out with all the details but you probably see what I mean... not just any liquid will do, will it?

Jesus says the same thing about the places we humans go to try to quench out spiritual thirst. Career, money, possessions, even relationship will give us the illusion of quenching out thirst but in the end leave us thirstier than ever. I don't know if you ever saw the Seinfeld episode where Kramer gets a part in a Woody Allen movie. But his one line was, "these pretzels are making me thirsty." Everyone has their own take on how the line should be delivered and it becomes a running gag throughout the episode. Whenever one of the characters would need something to say they'd resort to, "these pretzels are making me thirsty."

All that to say this- when we dip the bucket of our souls into any other well than Jesus we just end up thirstier than ever. It may take time to recognize it but eventually all of us will say or have said, this career is making me thirsty! This money is making me thirsty! This relationship is making me thirsty! This devotional thought is making me thirsty ;o)

So what do we do when we recognize our thirst? We'll talk about that tomorrow. For today spend some time thinking about what it is that's making you thirsty.

Prayer: Father, show me where I've been going to quench the spiritual thirst in my life. In Jesus Name I pray, amen.

Thursday:

The Teacher says, "Useless! Useless! Completely useless! Everything is useless." What do people really gain from all the hard work they do here on earth? Ecclesiastes 1:2-3 (NCV)

Above everything else guard your heart, because from it flow the springs of life. Proverbs 4:23 (ISV)

Reflection: And when we get to that point we usually do one of 4 things. If we haven't yet achieved a certain level of success in our chosen area (career or money or possessions or relationship) then we will often blame ourselves for our thirst. I've made bad choices so I don't have the level of success that would quench my thirst but if I just keep working at it, then all will be right with the world and I'll be ok.

Or for those who have reached the pinnacle... and the world is filled with the biographies of wildly successful people (in the eyes of human culture) and have found the pinnacle to be empty. Solomon's book of Ecclesiastes is the story of the most successful man on the face of the planet who can't find meaning anywhere. He tries power, success, money, possessions, pleasure... even relationships (he had 700 wives and 300 mistresses) to fill the void within him and nothing satisfied him. He uses the word "useless" 38 times to describe chasing these things to fill the void of his life. At the end of the book he urges us to pursue God over these other things if we want meaning and satisfaction in our lives.

When people reach that pinnacle of success and still don't find satisfaction what they'll do is blame the things themselves. In other words, I have reached the top and still don't feel what I

thought I would, so it must be I've pursued the wrong career... the career is the problem. Or I thought if I got married everything would be ok but it's not so it must be my spouse's fault. Or I thought if I had kids everything would be ok but it's not so it must be the kids' fault. The result is that we switch careers, relationships, cities, houses and styles with increasing frequency. It's the stuff that keeps tabloids in business.

We also sometimes will blame God for our dissatisfaction. If I don't have what I need to be happy then it must be God or the universe's fault.

But there's one more possibility. Maybe the fault lies at the center of our being. Our heart. Back in the 70's when I was a kid the environment had just started to get some attention. I grew up in southern California and the smog we had was legendary. I can remember "smog alerts" being issued. They had stages for how bad the air quality was. When it got to a stage 3 smog alert we weren't allowed to go out and play during recess because if you were too active you drew more of that pollution into your lungs and it would literally hurt to breathe. I can remember my eyes stinging from the smog.

My 5th grade teacher was a certified card carrying tree hugger. She taught us songs about pollution and caring for the environment and the thing I remember her telling us the most was that if you were going to clean up a stream that had become polluted you couldn't start where you were... you had to go to the source of pollution. Otherwise you could work all day every day and never change a thing.

Same thing is true with us. We have lots of symptoms in our lives of the pollution that causes us to behave or think certain ways. We often work on behavior modification which can have a temporary impact but never lasts. Instead Jesus says, go to the source of the pollution and deal with that first. Then as the source gets cleaned up eventually as it flows to your thoughts and feelings and actions you'll start to be able to get control over things you never could before.

In English the heart is thought to be where our feelings come from. But the Bible says our heart is the source of our life force. Everything we think and say and do flows from there. That's why Proverbs 4:23 says:

Above everything else guard your heart, because from it flow the springs of life.

So if you want to change what you think and do and say... then you change your heart. Jesus says your heart can become a spring of water gushing up inside that person, giving eternal life... satisfying your soul's thirst for meaning, purpose, peace, love & satisfaction. And once you clean up your heart then as His life giving refreshment flows out from the center of who you are everything else will become more manageable and as you work on your thoughts, your speech and your behavior you will find you're not fighting a losing battle of temporary behavior modification but instead you are being transformed into something you never dreamed you could become. How to do that we'll deal with tomorrow but for today, why don't you take a page out of the Samaritan woman's book and, even though you don't know what He's talking about... ask Him for this water that will change your life?

"Please, sir," the woman said, "give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water."

Prayer: Father, I don't understand everything about this "life giving water" that You talk about, but ok... I'll bite. Please, give me this water so I'll never be thirsty again. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Friday:

If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water. John 4:10 (NLT)

Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give will never be thirsty. The water I give will become a spring of water gushing up inside that person, giving eternal life. John 4:13-14 (NLT)

Reflection: All right. What do I do now? What if I want this "thirst quencher" that Jesus is talking about? How do I get it? Well, Jesus Himself tells us in this story.

You just ask. He repeatedly says the gift is something that He gives. It doesn't cost anything, you can't get it anywhere else, and it's for everyone. And it's not really something that we have to learn to do because we are all already doing it with something.

In other words, you don't have to be taught how to worship because every single one of us, whether we know it or not, are sacrificing the best of our time, energy, resources or relationships on the altar of something we are worshiping. If we worship success in our career then we are already sacrificing the best of what we have on the altar of success to achieve what we think will make us feel ok about ourselves and life. The same goes for every other area that people will worship or make the center of their lives in order to quench the thirst that we all feel.

In other words, we are, all of us, already drinking deeply at some well. It may be success, it may be possessions, it may be relationship... we've already really covered this but you get my point.

So how do I transfer that allegiance, that sacrifice, that worship to Jesus?

There are churches out there that will tell you what that looks like. They'll tell you what to do, what to say, even what to think. As I sit here writing this there is a movie that has just come out that is causing quite a stir. There are churches who are up in arms telling their members what movies not to see and instead telling them what movies to see. I'm not saying that's wrong for them... but it's not how we think God is asking us to do church here at Riverside Community Church.

At Riverside we have very few rules. We rarely try to tell you what to do or how to do it. Instead, every ounce of energy we have goes into trying to get everyone who walks through our doors to start asking a simple question: what would Jesus want me to do?

I have spent the better part of my life trying to break this idea down into its most simplistic answer and so far what I've come up with is, you just start thinking about everything in your life with Jesus as the brand new lens you view them through. In other words, at work, how

would Jesus have me do my job? How would He have me treat the people I work with? Would He want me to cut corners? To do "creative" accounting?

How about at home? How would Jesus have me do my taxes? Pay my bills? Surf the internet? Watch Tv? How would Jesus want me to treat my kids? My parents? My spouse? My neighbors?

It really is that simple. As you make Jesus the center of your life everything down stream (my thoughts, my words, my actions) will change based on your new priorities. Simple... but not always easy. But as you work out your life with Jesus at the center I believe you will find a satisfaction that you never knew could exist in this life. Every area of your life will benefit, your job, your peace of mind, your joy, even your relationships will enjoy a refreshment as Jesus impacts how you treat the people in your life. So what do you say? Let's try making Jesus the center of our lives and see what happens.

Prayer: Father, I'm in. Today I choose to make Jesus the center of my life. I want all my thoughts, words and actions to be influenced by Him. From this day forward I'll ask for Jesus' input on every situation, every choice, every decision. Show me the way forward. In Jesus' Name, amen.