

THE POWER OF HIS LAST WORDS

by Susan Pargman



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The Power of His Last Words

by SUSAN PARGMAN

A Lenten monolog series on the
seven last words of Christ

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

NARRATOR

ZACCHAEUS

JOHN

LEAH

MARTHA

SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL

NICODEMUS

MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS

PRODUCTION NOTES

These monologs may be staged in many different ways. Your set may be as simple as an empty space above which hangs the shadow of a cross, to a full recreation of Golgotha, with a rugged cross surrounded by throngs of costumed actors. You may present them separately on each of the Sundays of Lent and Good Friday, or consecutively. Throughout all seven presentations, after the church leader introduces the idea of the last words of Jesus from the cross, the Narrator reads his lines from off-stage. Your actor is on the stage as the lines are read and is facing the cross, as if hearing Jesus' words as they are spoken. She or he then turns toward the audience in response to the words they have just heard and delivers his or her monolog. The actors should take time delivering the lines, fully visualizing each situation so that the "first-person" impression is well-developed and as realistic as possible.

You may add music between the monologs if they are performed consecutively. Either congregational singing or soloists would work well.

It is good to darken the room in which the monologs are performed, using a soft, amber-tinted light to spot the area around the actor in order to give the impression of looking into the past. But it is not necessary. Use everything at your disposal to create the ambiance of the time. Costume colors say a lot about the character, because different dyes were more or less expensive in those times and often reflected the person's social standing. The weather at that time of year was cool. The women would be wearing head coverings. Some people were barefoot, while others wore sandals. Everyone's feet were dusty. No one wore nail polish!

Put a lapel microphone on your main speakers, but be sure to hide the wiring well. Nothing can bring the audience back to the twentieth century faster than seeing an antenna dangling down behind Nicodemus!

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Introduction

NARRATOR: *(Begins with the following introduction On-stage, then takes a place Off-stage from which to read the words of Jesus, cuing each monolog.)* Lent is a solemn time when Christians reflect on the sacrifice Jesus made when he gave up his life for our sins. But it is also a celebration of sorts. Perhaps this seems incongruous. Isn't death an occasion for mourning? Of course it is. But Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is also an occasion for celebration because of its tremendous impact on the world and, as we will see, its impact on individuals. The Gospels recorded some of the last words that Jesus spoke from his place on the cross before dying. Many people in attendance heard him speak. Let's imagine who some of those people may have been and what they may have been thinking when their beloved Jesus spoke...

FORGIVEN

Luke 23:34

Story from Luke 19:1-10

NARRATOR: Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

ZACCHAEUS: *(Turning from cross to face audience)* When do we ever know what we are doing? I’ll tell you when! When it’s all over and it seems too late to do anything about it — a word that escapes your lips too quickly, a contract you sign before you’ve considered all the angles, revenge sought in the heat of anger. Oh, we think we know what we’re doing...at the time. It all seems right and perfectly rational...at the time. Only later, that’s when it hits, and you suddenly realize that the “beach-front property” you bought was really a swamp in Samaria, or that you just called your wife’s cooking a “burnt offering” for the last time! And it’s time to seek forgiveness.

(Reflects.) I wish I had known what I was doing when I bid for the position of chief tax collector of Jericho. I thought I knew...at the time. I thought, “I am providing income for myself. Every man has the right — no, the *duty* to do that!” I even told myself it was all right because it was perfectly legal. I was backed by the Roman government — even encouraged — to collect more taxes than absolutely necessary and split the difference. Everyone was doing it — mostly Gentiles, but I had the support of military force on my side. If anyone gave me trouble, one word from Zacchaeus *(Indicates self)* would send a centurion to their door to “encourage” cooperation. And centurions can be very “encouraging” people, believe me!

Of course, tax collecting, as a profession in general, doesn’t tend to make you terribly popular among your

1 fellow Jews. But I've never tended to be that popular
2 anyway. Before I became a, shall we say, "financial
3 giant," my fellow Jews tended to look down on me due
4 to my, as they say, "small stature." All the women looked
5 down on me, and even some of the children entertained
6 themselves by calling me "little boy" and asking
7 whether my mother knew I had gotten out of the
8 nursery. I was ashamed of being different, although I
9 had no reason to feel shame for that. I should rather
10 have been ashamed of the hatred I began fostering
11 against my own people, for hatred leads to thoughts of
12 revenge. You need power to exact revenge, and tax
13 collectors in the city of Jericho command great power.

14 How does it feel to gain so much power after having
15 less than none before? I'll tell you how it feels: It affects
16 you like strong drink. You become giddy with delight at
17 your newly found influence over others. Pretty soon
18 you're numb to the results of your behavior. It gets
19 easier and easier to demand more from the people you
20 see as your enemies. They're not people anymore.
21 They're food to fuel the fire of your vengeance.
22 "Vengeance is mine!" you tell yourself, and you feel like
23 a god. Power to extort taxes. The power to drain men of
24 their rightful wages. The power to crush families and
25 sell them into slavery. Not bad for a man of "small
26 stature."

27 But the strong drink of power never does quench the
28 real thirsting inside. Before long, I began to wonder
29 where all this was leading. I had become one of the
30 richest men in the district, yet my wealth brought me
31 no peace.

32 Then I heard about a man, Jesus of Galilee. People
33 hailed him as a "great prophet" and "teacher," and I
34 became curious. I heard he was passing through
35 Jericho on his way to Jerusalem, and something inside

1 compelled me to join the throngs in the streets, trying
 2 to see him, to touch him, to hear him speak just one
 3 word. They pressed around him like sheep around a
 4 feeding trough. I could see the crowd making their way
 5 up the main avenue of the city. But I couldn't see Jesus.
 6 I remembered an old sycamore tree I used to climb as a
 7 child. Could I run ahead and climb the tree in time to
 8 see him as he passed by? I found I was still as nimble as
 9 a monkey, swinging up into the tree and sliding out
 10 onto a limb that was overhanging the street. They were
 11 almost there. Most of the people were so caught up in
 12 looking at Jesus and talking with him that they never
 13 even realized I was dangling overhead. But he realized.
 14 As he reached the spot in the road directly under the
 15 tree where I clung to the branch tighter than a green
 16 fig, he stopped. Jesus stopped and looked up. What was
 17 that smile on his face? Was it amusement? I suppose I
 18 did look a bit odd. The city's chief tax collector
 19 suspended in midair over this flock of admirers like a
 20 cat that had been chased up a tree by a toothless dog.
 21 He called to me, using my name. "Zacchaeus, come
 22 down immediately. I must stay at your house today." I
 23 practically fell off the limb. But I climbed down quickly
 24 and escorted him directly to my home. I had never felt
 25 so tall in all my life. You should've heard the people
 26 muttering against Jesus then! "He has gone to be the
 27 guest of a 'sinner'." And I was. And he had.

28 Just being in his presence lit a fire within me. It
 29 wasn't like the fire of vengeance. It was much more like
 30 the fire of the bright lamp of truth. And by the light of
 31 that lamp I understood that no matter what anyone had
 32 done to me, I had no right to become rich by robbing
 33 God's people in the righteous name of "tax collecting."

34 "Look, Lord," I told him, "here and now I give half of
 35 my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated

1 anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the
2 amount."

3 This time his smile was not one of amusement, but of
4 favor. He said, "Today salvation has come to this house,
5 because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son
6 of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

7 And it was then I knew forgiveness. God forgave me
8 that day not because I bought forgiveness with the
9 money I returned, but because I had seen my sin for
10 what it was, and I was sorry. He is willing to forgive
11 anyone who recognizes his sin, calls it what it is, and
12 asks for mercy. It's funny: I thought I had gone out to
13 seek Jesus that day, and he says he had come seeking
14 me. He found me in a tree, of all places.

15 Now I find him on one.

16 (*Turns to face cross.*) "My Lord, please forgive us. We do
17 not know what we are doing."

With Him in Paradise

Luke 23:43

NARRATOR: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

JOHN: I once asked to be with him in paradise. My brother and I asked if we could sit right next to him in glory some day!¹ Right next to him! Did I really think I deserved such an honor? How could I have asked such a thing? It was my boldness overcoming my good sense — as usual. What a fool I was. It's just that I wanted so much to be with him in paradise.

I could try to blame my big brother, James. After all, James has been helping me get in trouble all my life! We used to get ourselves into so many predicaments that the Master nicknamed us "James and John, the Sons of Thunder."² What a name! When you're known as the "Sons of Thunder," people rarely think of you as men of God. But Jesus was different. When he called us "Sons of Thunder," it was as if he were proud of us. Oh, he had to rebuke us any number of times, like the time James and I wanted to call down fire from heaven to rain on the Samaritans because they wouldn't welcome us into their village!³ But Jesus didn't exactly go for that. He just moved on, and we followed.

Because we wanted to be with him in paradise...

I knew that Jesus was different from the first time I heard him teach in the synagogue at Capernaum. Everyone was amazed. When he taught, it wasn't at all like the teachers of the Law did it. He spoke the words of the Law as if...as if he had written them himself. My heart beat so quickly, I thought I would burst forth in

¹Mark 10:35-39

²Mark 3:17

³Luke 9:54-56

praise at any moment. But someone else burst forth before I could draw my next breath! It was one of the men of Capernaum. An evil man filled with an evil spirit. Oh, he was a member of the synagogue, all right. But being a member of a holy house of worship doesn't make you a holy man! Not by a long shot! This man burst forth, shouting in a cruel and spiteful way, saying, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are — the Holy One of God!"

Jesus answered him so boldly, it made the "Sons of Thunder" look like quivering mice. He ordered the evil spirit in that man to come out. He *ordered* it out, just like he had the authority to speak what he pleased. And the evil spirit obeyed! The man shook violently and then shrieked as the spirit left him. Everyone stood there, asking each other what had happened. But they didn't stand there for long! News spreads quickly in Galilee.⁴

That night we all went to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a fever. Fevers can quickly lead to death, especially at her age. We all kept our distance, except for Jesus. With the same boldness he had shown in the synagogue, he went to the sick woman. But this time his boldness was tempered with sympathy. He looked at her with such compassion as I had only seen before in my own mother's eyes. He touched her hand and helped her up. In that moment the woman became well, just as well as I am, standing here before you this very minute. And she began to wait on us. Serving us with beautiful, strong and capable hands.⁵

⁴Mark 1:21-28

⁵Mark 1:29-31

Like I said before, news spreads quickly in Galilee. After supper, practically the whole town was gathered at the door. The people had brought their sick and demon-possessed friends and relatives. And what did Jesus do? With the same boldness and sympathy with which he treated everyone who asked anything of him, he touched them.⁶ He healed them. And he filled them with new hope.

And they longed to be with him in paradise.

It was a long time after that, on the day that we set off for Jerusalem, that James and I became so brazen. We had watched him work so many miracles. We had seen him talk face to face with Elijah and Moses. There was no doubt in our minds that this Man was the Son of God, walking among us and with us. He told us he was going to Jerusalem to be betrayed, to be mocked, and to be killed...and to rise again. So we stepped forward with our request.

"Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

I believe he knew what we were going to ask before it even left our mouths. But still he questioned us: "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Let one of us sit at your right, and the other at your left in your glory."

"You don't know what you are saying," he warned. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" Again, he knew what we would say before we spoke, but he let us speak so that we might hear our own voices speaking words that only a fool (*Boldly*) or a "Son of Thunder" should be heard saying:

"We can."

He was proud of us, although we had answered with our hearts and not our minds.

⁶Mark 1:32-34

1 **"You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with**
2 **the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or**
3 **left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those**
4 **for whom they have been prepared."**

5 **"For whom they have been prepared." That's what he**
6 **said. Then he told us that in God's kingdom, things**
7 **work quite differently from the world we live in now. In**
8 **God's kingdom, whoever wants to be great, like those**
9 **who sit at the right or the left of the King, must become**
10 **the servant of all. Whoever wishes to be first must be**
11 **last, like a slave...⁷ (Refers to Christ) or like one who gives**
12 **himself up to be sacrificed for the good of those he**
13 **loves. That's what it takes to sit next to the King. That's**
14 **what it's like to be in paradise.**

15 **I have lived with him. I have walked by his side. I**
16 **have eaten at his table. Now I wait at his feet. He is no**
17 **less a King for dying. In dying, he serves all of us who**
18 **bring our sins before God and cry out for holiness. In**
19 **dying, he washes us clean with his own blood. In his**
20 **death, he rises higher than any man has ever risen,**
21 **going before us and opening to us the gates of paradise.**
22 **Lord, I long to be with you in paradise.**

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35 ⁷Mark 10:35-45

Behold Your Son

John 19:26-27

(*LEAH is a young woman, perhaps in her later teens or early twenties. She speaks in a quick, manner, betraying her inclination to speak more quickly than she thinks.*)

NARRATOR: When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.¹

LEAH: Did you hear what he said? Did you hear what that man said? He doesn't even know his own mother! He's crazy, you know — as mad as those people who follow him around everywhere. Doesn't even know his own mother! And this isn't the first time, either. It happened before. Oh, yes, it happened before. I've heard all about this man. He's an odd one, he is.

Why, he even tried to tell the Pharisees what to do! The Pharisees! They are the most proper gentlemen among all the Jews. They know the laws of Moses like they know their own names. They tithe ten percent of all they earn, and they never eat anything that's not kosher. They're good men. And a Pharisee would never be seen anywhere near a tax collector or, heaven forbid, (*Whispers*) a prostitute. Not like *this* man! *This* man kept company with all sorts of outcasts: tax collectors, drunks², and even lepers and Samaritans!³ (*Shivers with disgust at the thought.*) Those were his friends. It's no wonder he went mad! And *he* tried to tell the *Pharisees* what to do!

The Pharisees are such good men. So kind and wise

¹John 19:26-27

²Matthew 11:19

³Luke 17:11-16, Mark 1:40-42

1 and thoughtful. For instance, one day when this Jesus-
 2 fellow and some of his followers — those “disciples” of
 3 his — were sinfully breaking the fourth commandment,
 4 the one that prohibits us from doing any work on the
 5 Sabbath, some of the Pharisees were thoughtful enough
 6 to point it out to them. I’m sure the Pharisees were just
 7 trying to be helpful, but do you think this Jesus-fellow
 8 could see that? You bet your mother’s sandal straps he
 9 couldn’t! He answered them back, that’s what he did.
 10 You see, the disciples were picking some heads of grain
 11 and eating them!⁴ Everyone knows how sinful that is.
 12 Even my nephew who’s barely five years old knows you
 13 can’t pick grain on the Sabbath!⁵ I’ll tell you what
 14 happened: Jesus started telling the Pharisees a story.
 15 That’s what he does when he wants to confuse everyone
 16 — he tells stories. He told them that King David himself,
 17 when he was hungry, entered the temple and ate
 18 consecrated bread — the bread that is meant only for
 19 the priests to eat. Then he told them that the priests in
 20 the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent.⁶
 21 See how he tried to confuse every issue? The poor
 22 Pharisees. They just stared at him, not knowing what to
 23 say. How embarrassed they must have been! But it
 24 didn’t end there.

25 Later that same day, Jesus went into the synagogue
 26 and touched a crippled man and healed him.⁷ Again he
 27 worked on the Sabbath! You’d think he’d have learned
 28 his lesson the first time, but no... Did that ever make
 29 the Pharisees angry! Jesus was at least smart enough to
 30 leave the temple, but not smart enough to stop healing

32 ⁴Matthew 12:1-2

33 ⁵Exodus 20:8-11

34 ⁶Matthew 12:3-5

35 ⁷Matthew 12:13

1 all those sick people who kept coming to him. He asked
 2 them not to tell anybody that he healed them,⁸ but you
 3 know how that goes. People can be so gossipy
 4 sometimes, I tell you!

5 Of course, when the Pharisees asked him to do a
 6 miracle for them, do you think he would? Just one little
 7 miracle? No! Jesus said right to their faces that they
 8 were wicked! Of all the people to say such a thing! Then
 9 he told them another story: the one about Jonah being
 10 inside the big fish for three days. As if the Pharisees
 11 wouldn't know that! He's crazy, I tell you! And here's the
 12 craziest part: he said that he was going to be like Jonah,
 13 only he'll be inside the earth for three days and come
 14 out again.⁹ Obviously, he was just a bit wrong.

15 After today, we won't have to put up with any more of
 16 this nonsense. And I, for one, am glad of that. This man
 17 says the strangest things, like what I was going to tell
 18 you about before — about not knowing his own mother.

19 It was one of those times when he was doing his
 20 "teaching," as he called it — telling foolish stories as
 21 usual. There was this big crowd gathered all around
 22 him, and just outside, his mother and brothers had
 23 come to talk to him. Well, they sent a messenger in to
 24 get him. The messenger goes up to him and tells him,
 25 "Your mother and brothers are standing outside,
 26 wanting to speak to you."

27 So what would a sane man do, do you think? He'd go
 28 out and talk to his family, right? Not Jesus. He goes:
 29 "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" That's
 30 how confused he was. Then he points to all those people
 31 gathered around him. "Here are my mother and my
 32 brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in
 33

34 ⁸Matthew 12:15-16

35 ⁹Matthew 12:38-40

1 heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”¹⁰ That’s
2 what he said. No kidding. I’d like to see what it’s like at
3 his family reunion. I doubt if they could come up with
4 enough latkes and matzo balls for a crowd like that!
5 And where would you ever find enough wine? I suppose
6 Jesus would make some out of water or some such
7 thing! Hah!

8 At least we’re putting an end to all this madness
9 today. After today, you’ll see all these “disciples” of his
10 scattered far and wide. Don’t you worry. After today, I’m
11 sure you’ll never hear the name of Jesus again.

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35 ¹⁰Matthew 12:48-50

Forsaken

Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46

Story from John 8:1-11

NARRATOR: About the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi Eloi, lama sabachthani?” — which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

MARTHA: Forsaken. I’ve known what it means to be forsaken. But at least I deserved it — (*Referring to Jesus on the cross behind her*) not like him...

I first felt the sting of rejection from my father. He divorced my mother and me when I was only four years old. You wouldn’t think that a child so young could understand rejection, but I did. I understood that we did something that made him stop loving us. Something that turned his devotion into hatred. To this day, I don’t know what it was we did to anger him so. All I know is that he left us. And my mother decided to drown her sorrows in cheap wine from the day he left until the night she died. I’ve known what it means to be forsaken.

As I grew older, I found that some men would pay me for my attention. And the more attention I gave them, the higher my pay would be. Of course, it was always in secret — to protect their reputations. Their precious reputations. But did they care about *my* reputation? Of course not. I wasn’t a person to them. I was only an object for their pleasure. Loved for a moment, if you can call that love, then forsaken for a lifetime. And back into the streets I would go. You wouldn’t think a woman like me could be hurt by rejection, would you? But it was always there with me, reminding me that I was different. I was unworthy. I didn’t deserve to be loved. And then... (*Refers to Jesus on the cross*) him.

I had been caught. How it happened, I don’t know. But someone caught me with a married man. They

1 dragged me out into the streets. Into the bright
2 sunlight. Oh, the punishment for adultery is a cruel one:
3 all the good fathers and husbands and other men of the
4 town have the pleasure of throwing stones at the
5 accused woman until she succumbs to death. Death that
6 may come quickly, mercifully — or not, depending on
7 the crowd's size and strength and skill at stoning. Some
8 cities get more practice at it than others.

9 They spat on me and called me names — names that I
10 well deserved. Then they brought me before this man,
11 this Jesus, whom they laughingly called "Teacher,"
12 and they accused me of my crime. "Teacher," they said,
13 "this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. In
14 the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women.
15 Now what do *you* say?" Their fiery eyes and the cruel
16 edge of their voices revealed that they were not just
17 accusing me of adultery. Something told me that they
18 were accusing this man I stood in judgment before
19 as well. My eyes swam in tears. It was difficult to
20 breathe and my hands were sweating in evidence of my
21 rightful condemnation.

22 Now a judge is a man who usually sits in a high seat
23 before the accused, handing down decrees of
24 punishment for their various crimes. And so I expected
25 this man, Jesus, to do likewise. But rather than hand
26 down his decree from on high, Jesus bent down. He
27 began to write on the ground with his finger, there at
28 my trembling feet. What can he be doing? I wondered.
29 This man was not like the others. My heart stood still
30 within me.

31 The townsmen questioned him again and again about
32 whether I should be stoned. That's when Jesus stood
33 and handed down his decree. His eyes were not like the
34 blazing eyes of the angry men clutching my arms and
35 thrusting me before my judge. His eyes were firm in

1 their gaze and full of wisdom and truth. In that moment
2 I knew that whatever he decreed against me would be
3 right. When he spoke, his voice was bold and strong and
4 without anger. "If any one of you is without sin," he
5 said, "let *him* be the first to throw a stone at her." I
6 closed my eyes and braced myself for the onslaught. I
7 didn't dare to look. I had seen women stoned before and
8 prayed that my death would come quickly. After a time,
9 a cool breeze ruffled my hair and refreshed my lungs,
10 giving me courage to open my eyes at last. They were
11 gone! The whole crowd was gone! I found myself
12 standing alone before Jesus. He smiled at me — not the
13 way other men smile at me, but his expression was...
14 how can I explain it? It was as if I was looking into the
15 eyes of Love for the first time in my life. Then he spoke
16 to me. His voice was like...music. The sweetest melody I
17 had ever heard: "Woman, where are they? Has no one
18 condemned you?"

19 I could only manage a whisper: "No one, Sir."

20 "Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave
21 your life of sin."

22 I was free. It was almost beyond belief. Only a
23 moment ago I was facing certain death for my crime.
24 And now I found myself completely forgiven. No one
25 was able to throw the first stone. Not one of my
26 accusers was himself free of sin. Only one Man was
27 worthy to judge me, and he had set me free.

28 Now, through his death, that one Man sets me free from
29 condemnation forever before my God. Because he *loves*
30 me, he is taking the punishment for my sin upon himself.
31 Because he *loves me*, I shall never again be forsaken.

I Thirst

John 19:28

Story from John 4:7-42

NARRATOR: Jesus said, "I thirst."

WOMAN: (*Repeating his words*) "I thirst." There was a time long ago when this same man asked me to give him a drink. He was a stranger to me then. We met at Jacob's well, and he asked me for a drink of my water. Imagine! A Jewish man asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink of water! The Jews will hardly look upon a Samaritan, much less speak to one! But the odd thing was, it was not he who was thirsty, really. I was the thirsty one. I was parched and dry...just as he is now. My life had drained out of me long before the day I met him — and he asked *me* for a drink! That was the day that transformed my life. No, that was the day when my life began!

You see, I'd always thought I was living a full and thrilling life because I had everything that made life worth living: a home, possessions, a proud Samaritan heritage, and a man. And before that, *five* husbands! What could be livelier than that? Five husbands ...imagine! You'd think I was a fountain of happiness the way the men flocked about me! But inside — deep inside, where only God can see — I was drier than the sands of Sodom and Gomorrah, and just as empty of life. He saw it, too. And yet he asked *me* for a drink.

I laughed at him. After all, Jews just don't ask Samaritans for anything. It would be like a hen asking a weasel for directions to the local bird bath! He answered me with a very odd statement. He said that I should be asking *him* for water — "living water."

Again I laughed at him, for he had nothing to draw water with! I asked him, "Where can you get this living

1 water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave
 2 us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons
 3 and his flocks and herds?" I told you I have a proud
 4 Samaritan heritage, and I wanted him to know it, too!

5 But the way things turned out, I didn't need to tell
 6 him who I was. He already knew. It was as if he'd known
 7 me since the day I was born. Or maybe even before that.
 8 He told me everything I ever did. Imagine! Everything I
 9 ever did! It was then that I thought he must be a
 10 prophet, so I asked him the Great Question. The one
 11 that separates the Samaritans from the Jews. The
 12 question of worship: Shall we worship God on the
 13 mountain, as the Samaritans claim, or shall we worship
 14 him as the Jews do, in Jerusalem? I thought I would
 15 have the answer at last. A definite answer from a
 16 prophet of God. Jerusalem or the mountain? I was
 17 willing to accept his answer as if from the mouth of God
 18 himself. The mountain or Jerusalem. *(Dramatic pause as*
 19 *she waits on his answer.)*

20 "Neither."

21 His words were alarming! They pierced my soul like
 22 an arrow. How could the argument that had kept
 23 Samaritans and Jews apart for all these generations
 24 suddenly be disposed of in a single word?

25 "Neither," he said. "God is spirit, and his worshipers
 26 must worship in spirit and in truth."

27 I was so confused I didn't know what to say. I told him
 28 that Messiah, called Christ, is coming, and that when
 29 Messiah comes, he will explain all this. Messiah will put
 30 an end to the argument and confusion. Messiah will
 31 bring us the peace we long for.

32 And that's when he declared the words I shall never
 33 forget. He said, "I who speak to you am he."

34 Just then his disciples arrived, so I ran into town and
 35 brought back everyone I could find. "Come and see a

1 man who told me everything I ever did!" I told them.
2 And they came. Hundreds of them came, and they
3 listened to his words, just as I had. We urged him to stay
4 and teach us more. He stayed for two more days and
5 filled our thirsting souls with "living water."

6 That was where I met him. At Jacob's well. My
7 Messiah. My Savior.

8 He thirsts now. He is parched and dry. He has taken
9 on the need of the whole world, so that we may never be
10 thirsty again.
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Into Your Hands

Luke 23:44-46

NARRATOR: It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

NICODEMUS: *(Turning toward audience after hearing these words spoken from the cross)* And now he commits his spirit. It is this matter of a man's spirit that caused me to seek him out by night in the first place. We had all heard him speak: Caiaphas, and Annas...nearly all the priests and Pharisees. Wherever Jesus went, some of our people were there. We watched him in wonder as he performed miracles of healing before our eyes. We knew from these miracles that he was a teacher from God.¹ Who else could perform such signs? All my life I had studied the Holy Scriptures, longing to learn the ways of God; burning to serve as even the lowliest of servants in his kingdom. The Scriptures told me so little. The other Pharisees would say of me, "Nicodemus is never satisfied." And it was true. I had to know more! I had to speak directly to Jesus and ask him the questions that haunted me. But the Jewish leaders disapproved. *(Confused)* They knew he was a teacher from God, but they disapproved of him! *(Disturbed)* They thought that with more and more people following Jesus, their leadership would suffer, and before long the Romans would take away their political power as well as their nation.² Caiaphas warned us all to stay away from

¹John 3:2

²John 11:48

1 Jesus, and yet...I *had* to speak with him.

2 So I went by night.

3 It was during the Passover Feast. Jesus and his
4 disciples were in Jerusalem for the celebration. He
5 made no secret of his presence, entering the temple
6 courts and driving the merchants and moneychangers
7 out with a whip! Yes, there was no mistaking it! Jesus
8 was in Jerusalem. What he did — chasing people and
9 animals alike out of the temple — seemed like
10 blasphemy to the priests. They had allowed the selling
11 of sacrifices in the temple courts for so many years that
12 everyone naturally thought of the temple courts as a
13 sort of...well, marketplace. Everyone had accepted the
14 practice as common. But not Jesus. As he flailed that
15 whip and overturned tables, he cried out to those
16 selling doves: "Get these out of here! How dare you turn
17 my Father's house into a market!"³ (*Laughing*) The doves
18 escaped their cages like a wild white whirlwind! I
19 wonder if they knew how fortunate they were that day!

20 Many Jews were angry, but I felt nothing short of
21 admiration for him. I had often felt the same way about
22 using the temple courts wrongly. But I felt powerless to
23 stop it. In a single day, this man cleared away four
24 decades of abomination! And he brought the vengeance
25 of the Sanhedrin down on his head. I had to see him
26 soon, but in secret.

27 The night I came to him, my mind was swirling with
28 questions: questions about points of the Law and
29 theological puzzles. And what of the Resurrection? And
30 the coming Messiah? I barely spoke a sentence before
31 Jesus began to address something entirely different. He
32 never even heard the questions on my lips...but instead
33 began to answer the questions in my heart.

34
35 ³John 2:13-16

1 **"I tell you the truth," he began, "no one can see the**
 2 **kingdom of God unless he is born again."**

3 His words took me by surprise. He was speaking of
 4 the kingdom of God — the very thing I had always
 5 longed for. It was the reason I had become a Pharisee.
 6 But I didn't fully understand his words, so I asked:
 7 "How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he
 8 cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to
 9 be born!"

10 He was kind enough not to mock my ignorance. But
 11 instead he explained:

12 **"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of**
 13 **God unless he is born of water and the spirit."**

14 I believe he could see that (*Points to his head*) the light
 15 had not yet come on, so he patiently explained: "Flesh
 16 gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit."⁴

17 Ah! The Spirit gives *birth* to spirit! A man must be
 18 *born* again! I began to understand. It wasn't the Law
 19 that made us spiritual! The Law was only a work of the
 20 flesh. It wasn't our theological arguments that made us
 21 wise! Only God's spirit could lead us to wisdom. What a
 22 mystery this was! The kingdom of God was not a matter
 23 of earthly striving after all. It was a matter as simple —
 24 and as perplexing — as being born....again.

25 He taught me many things that night. Sitting at his feet
 26 and listening to him teach was better than feasting at a
 27 hundred Passover suppers. He fed my hunger to learn of
 28 spiritual mysteries. At last, Nicodemus was satisfied.

29 I'll never forget the words he spoke to me shortly
 30 before I left. He said, "For God so loved the world that
 31 he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in
 32 him shall not perish, but have eternal life."⁵

34 ⁴John 3:6-8

35 ⁵John 3:16



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