

# The Living Water

## John 4:1-26

**Call:** Ps 42:1-5 (NIV)

**Scripture:** 1 Cor 13:1-8a (NIV)

### I. Introduction

Today we continue our studies in John with the woman at the well. I plan on spending three weeks on this text because it is so rich. However, because of some scheduling changes due to the pandemic, we will look at this text this morning, but not come back to it again until September. Next week we will resume our Philippians study with Joel preaching.

Our text today is ideal for the situation we find ourselves in right now, a world that is on fire. In the midst of the charged response to the ugly, reprehensible killing of George Floyd, yet another reminder of our broken world where people around us live in the constant fear of hatred and racism, it is in the midst of this, that light and love are so needed right now. Martin Luther King said that years ago, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that" (King). In our text today, we see Jesus be the kind of light and love that are so desperately needed in our hearts and in our actions today.

But also, in this brilliantly told story, John gives us a picture of what the Living God is doing all over the world even to this day. What is he doing? The living God is on the move seeking out people. One by one from every nation, tribe and people, he is seeking people to live life in a deep relationship with Him. And, he is seeking people through whom he can show the world who he is, and the life he desires to give to the world. In the Gospels, we discover that God the Father is doing the seeking through his one and only Son, Jesus. In our text today, we discover Jesus as the sent one, sent by His Father on a very particular mission.

So, I invite you into our text this morning, beginning in chapter 4, verse 1.

### II. Jesus Arrives in Samaria (1-6)

*1 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John 2 (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), 3 he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. 4 And he had to pass through Samaria. 5 So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. (ESV).*

#### A. Jesus "had to"

Sometimes we may think geography may not be that important. When I was a kid I certainly didn't think so. However, in this text, we find that understanding the geography is helpful. We were told at the end of chapter 3 that Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside to baptize with John at Aenon near Salim (John 3:22-23). Now, here in

chapter 4, we can assume Jesus has left from Aenon to go to Galilee.

The typical route to Galilee would have been to travel north along the Jordan River. But, John says, in verse 4, that Jesus *“had to pass through Samaria.”* But, as you can see from the map, he didn't *have* to go through Samaria. In fact, very strict Jews of Jesus' day avoided Samaria at all costs, even if it was a shorter route. Why? Because Jews hated Samaritans and Samaritans hated Jews. The hostility went back over 500 years when the Assyrians captured the Northern Kingdom of Israel. They imported Assyrians into the land who intermarried with the Jews. From then on, the Samaritans were considered half-breeds by the Jews. Then after the Exile, the Samaritans would not help re-build the Temple in Jerusalem. So, there is definite hatred for each other. No good Jew in the first century would travel through Samaria.

Yet *“Jesus had to pass through Samaria.”* Why? Because Jesus is on a mission. The Father is sending his Son to Samaria, to seek out a Samaritan woman at a well, in order that she may become part of His people.

The Greek word for “had to” speaks of “divine necessity.” We already saw it twice in chapter three, translated as “must.”

- *“You must be born again from above” (3:7).*
- *“The Son of Man must be lifted up” (3:14).*

We'll see it again today in verse 24:

- *God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”*

Jesus *“had to pass through Samaria.”* Going through Samaria is a divine necessity. Jesus is being sent on a mission to seek and call a woman to be part of the people of his Father. And it is what God is doing all over the world right now, in the midst of a pandemic and social chaos.

## **B. Jesus is tired**

Jesus and His disciples must have walked a considerable distance since sunrise. And, Jesus was very tired, verse 6. The verb John uses can describe the sheer exhaustion of working all day out in the fields. Isn't it amazing that here is the *“Word who was with God and who was God... Through him all things were made and without him nothing was made that has been made” (1:1-3)*, and one day, around noon, he sits by a well exhausted. As one writer says, “Here is the one who ‘in the beginning,’ decided that two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom would combine to make water, and now he is sitting by a well, weary and thirsty” (Johnson). Many people consider the Gospel of John to have a very high view of Jesus' divinity, but as we see here, this book has a very high view of Jesus' humanity as well.

We now enter into the conversation between the Samaritan woman and Jesus. And, for this central dialogue, verses 7-18, we are going to walk through the conversation one verse at a time, making observations along the way.

### III. Jesus Breaks Down All Walls (7-18)

#### A. The woman arrives (7)

It's about noon, and a very thirsty Samaritan woman arrives at the well (7a). Her empty water jar that she continually needs to refill symbolizes a deeper thirst which she cannot seem to quench. Jesus' thirst can be quenched with water. Hers cannot.

Nor can yours. Nor can mine.

Jesus knows why he is thirsty. The woman doesn't know why she is so very thirsty. And she doesn't know where to go to satisfy this deeper thirst. Apparently, she's been disappointed so many times attempting to quench her deeper thirst, that she, like so many people, basically ignores it, burying it in the endless routines of life.

Have you ever done that? Buried your deeper thirsts in the endless routines of life? I think that is why we keep so busy in the West, to escape the deeper questions of life. And, so, we remain in our emptiness.

The woman arrives alone at a hot time of the day, twelve noon. That's unusual for two reasons. For one, in a climate like Israel, no one does any work outside during the hot times of the day. I've been to Liberia. I've seen this first hand. Secondly, no one would go to a well alone. Why? Because it would be difficult to lift a filled water jar onto your head or shoulders without help. But, this Samaritan woman comes to the well alone at noon. It is likely she is coming alone at a hot time of the day, because either she is ashamed of being with other women, or they are ashamed of being with her.

#### B. The Walls Jesus Breaks Down (7b-9)

We now enter into the conversation, and as we do, notice the dividing walls Jesus breaks down to love this woman.

##### 1. Status: Outcast vs. Teacher/God (7b-8)

He begins by asking her for a drink (7b). His words are better read as a question. He has just broken down the status wall. She's an outcast, and he is a total stranger to her. But we know he is of a much higher status than her, not only a teacher, but also the living God.

*"Will you give me a drink?"*, he asks, immediately placing himself below her in status. It's a brilliant move on his part. Yes, he is very thirsty and doesn't have anything with which to draw water, but he is also on a mission. He wants to bring the woman to another well where her deeper thirst can be quenched.

For the woman, it would have been a total surprise. She most likely would have expected any stranger to ignore her. After all, most of the village ignored her. Or she might have expected a lustful stare. Instead, a stranger, who was a teacher, who was God, *saw her*. His love and compassion broke down the status wall.

## **2. Gender: Woman vs. Man (7-8)**

Secondly, he has also broken down the gender wall. She's a woman; he's a man. Sorry women. But, in that time period, men were not allowed to even be seen with women in public. The law explicitly stated that "A man shall not talk with a woman in the street, not even his own wife, and especially not with another woman, on account of what men may say." Pious men in the first century would even pray: "O Lord, I thank thee that thou hast not made me a Gentile, or sinner, or tax collector ... or a woman!"

But, as we see, Jesus does not treat women as second-class citizens. The way he relates to women was and is truly revolutionary. He treats women as fully human, equal to men in every respect. In the rest of the Gospels, we see him even inviting women to become part of his band of disciples, "an unprecedented happening in the history of that time ... Jesus knowingly overthrew [all] customs when He allowed women to follow Him" (*Jeremias*, 376). Jesus also received financial support from women, something no rabbi of His day would ever dream of doing (Lk 8:1-3).

Jesus' love and compassion broke down the gender wall.

## **3. People groups: Samaritan vs. Jew (9)**

Thirdly, he breaks down the people group wall. She is a Samaritan; he is a Jew. She is so caught off guard by his request, she forgets social etiquette and speaks to Jesus without any title. She blurts out, "*How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?*" (9). The woman is stunned that a Jew would ask for a drink from a Samaritan. As we already said, they hated each other. But, Jesus' question is even more stunning, because in order for Jesus to drink, he must touch his hands to the cup she uses; even more, he must touch his lips to her cup! This is extraordinary given what rabbis would say: "Let no man eat of the bread of the Samaritans, for he who eats of their bread is as he who eats swine's flesh." Jesus' love and compassion just broke down the people group wall.

It's a bit like a Republican sharing a meal with a Democrat. Or even more, like a white person sharing a meal with an African-American person, or any minority for that matter. Isn't this the kind of love and compassion needed in our country right now, love and compassion that will break down racial and ethnic walls? For, this is the kind of love which drives out racism and inequality. It's the kind of love which actively resists the injustices all around us.

We love because he first broke down every dividing wall to love us. I've been thinking hard about how to drive this point home this week, and I don't know how to best do it. But, one thing I do know is that I know my own heart has darkness in it. And, I know I live a privileged life, essentially living in Disney Land everyday. And, I can't begin to put myself in any minority's shoes. But, I know I'm trying now more than ever to learn what "the other"

goes through and listen to what they're saying. And, I'm learning particularly that racism, exclusion and injustice is an everyday occurrence for minorities in this country. Many live in fear everyday of people who look like me. Another thing I'm learning is the simple act of reaching out and asking "the other" how they're doing is a great place to start. So, I'm trying to learn and listen and love by standing up for "the other" in practical, peaceful ways.

Yesterday, my wife organized a socially distanced bike ride to raise money for IJM. It was a very small step. But, it also gave us a chance to talk with our kids about what it means to break down the walls of prejudice and discrimination to actively care for those that look different from us.

And, how about this woman at the well? How do you think this woman is feeling right now? For the first time, maybe ever, she feels like a real human being. Someone *saw* her and was *present* with her. (May we see like Jesus.) Sitting on the edge of Jacob's well is the creator of the universe, who is a stranger, a Jewish teacher, and a man. And he is talking to her, an outcast, a Samaritan and a woman. Alone! In public! And asking her for a drink of water from her water jar. Jesus breaks down all walls of division to reach this woman!

It's the same for us: God breaks down every dividing wall to make us His own. No wall will stop his love and compassion, because every single person is made in his image!

### **C. The Living Water (10-18)**

At this point, Jesus begins to address the woman's deeper thirst directly, verse 10. *"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water"* (10). As one writer says, Jesus has gone from a "Death Valley thirst to a Mount Everest fountain" in just one sentence (Bruner, 249).

The woman, understandably, is curious. *"Sir, where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob?"* (11)? She is probably thinking in physical terms. In her mind, "living water" would refer to flowing water versus stagnant water. But her comment about Jacob seems to imply she is sensing more than just the physical.

Jesus clarifies, verses 13 and 14. *"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."* (13-14).

So, what is Jesus referring to with living water? Living water is defined in chapter 7 as the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, whose source is Jesus, God with us, is the continuously flowing well which provides the deep, lasting life we all thirst for. The prophecy Isaiah said years before was coming true, *"For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants"* (Isa 44:3).

The woman wants what Jesus is offering. So, she blurts out, verse 15, *“Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water”* (15). Even though she might not understand all of it, the woman wants the water!

And, so do you! And, so do I!

But, then Jesus gets personal. *“Go, call your husband and come here”* (16).

She replies, *“I have no husband”* (17). With this statement, she probably wishes to end this probing investigation. But Jesus doesn't stop.

Jesus replies, *“You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”* (17-18).

Uh oh. She's exposed. The mask is not working with this man. He knows who she is.

Most people wonder why Jesus would even go there? Why did he bring up *that* which undoubtedly was her greatest source of pain and shame? The primary reason is probably because, up to this moment, the woman was beginning to feel loved. Look at all the walls Jesus broke down to reach her! And, if she had gone home before Jesus brought up her pain, she may have begun to doubt his love. I can imagine her walking back to the village wondering, *“Would he still love me if he really knew me? If he knew about my life? If he really knew why the village shunned me, would he really have pursued me?”*

Ever felt that way? Ever doubt God's love for you? I know I have at times.

And Jesus, in order to head off that doubt, exposes that which she seeks to hide, not to embarrass her, but to heal her, bringing her darkness into the light. This is her deeper thirst, an emptiness manifested in broken relationships. And, this deeper thirst is what the living water is intended to quench. *“Go, get your husband”* (16) is Jesus' way of saying, “Dear woman, it's the real you I love. I know who you are, and I am *still offering* living water to you.”

He's now broken down more walls, hasn't he? Not only has he broken down the external walls we already mentioned, he's also broken down her internal walls of fear, doubt, guilt and shame, allowing light to shine into darkness. He's saying, “I know who you are. And I still love you. I have not made a mistake in breaking down these walls to love you.”

He says the same to you and me as well.

Now, the conversation takes a bit of a shift into worship, verse 19. And, I'm going to now read through the final verses 19-26, then make some comments about them.

#### **IV. Jesus Defines Authentic Worship (19-26)**

*19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." 26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." (ESV)*

### **A. The Question of Worship**

Well, the woman now changes the conversation significantly to worship. She's the first person in this Gospel to raise the issue of worship, one of the most fundamental issues of human existence. And, this is where our next sermon will pick up in September. We will only touch on it now.

Many interpreters think that this woman is purposely diverting the conversation because she is so uncomfortable with where it has gone. Nothing like a good theological diversion to avoid real life issues, they say. I disagree though. I don't think she's changing the topic of conversation. I believe we are seeing Jesus being a true prophet here and doing what true prophets do (Newbigin, 52). True prophets expose sin. True prophets are supposed to expose the reality of our lives with respect to the living God. Jesus has just done that for the woman. And, the woman perceives rightly that he is at least a prophet, and now she must go and deal with her exposed sin. Jesus has brought all her darkness into the light, her heart has been softened and now she must go somewhere to deal with her sin. She must go cleanse herself in worship.

### **B. The "I Am"**

But where should she go? The Samaritans worship on Mt. Gerizim and the Jews worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. Where should she go? Jesus answers and declares that neither Mt. Gerizim or Jerusalem matter anymore. Why? Because to the woman at the well, Jesus is revealing God to her. He is not just the Messiah, but "*I AM,*" the first use of many "I AMs" in this Gospel. In other words, I am the one you now feel the need to worship! I am the one in whom you must believe. I am the one who *will deal* with your sin and guilt and shame, all of your darkness. That is the new normal for this woman.

What is our normal? For us, Jesus has gone to the cross, been resurrected, ascended, and poured out his Spirit on us. The new normal for us is that the God who we must deal with for our sin has taken our sin upon himself, and went through the grave and came out the other side and is alive today. We have forgiveness of sins, for the light shone into the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it (1:5). This is our normal, a fact we will celebrate in a moment in communion.

## **V. Conclusion**

Before we get there though, our text today is brilliantly portrayed in a scene from the Narnia series. And, I want to conclude with this scene this morning. This scene is from *The Silver Chair*, the 6<sup>th</sup> book of the series. The Pevensie Children, Peter, Susan, Edmund & Lucy are not in this book. Instead, it's their cousin, Eustace Scrubb, who is the main character. And he takes a friend, Jill, into Narnia. We pick up the story with Jill in a Narnian forest all alone. She had seen Aslan, the lion and Christ figure, already, but only had a glimpse of him. So, this is her first encounter with him.

*When Jill had stopped crying, she found she was dreadfully thirsty. She listened carefully, and felt almost sure she heard the sound of running water.*

*Jill got up and looked round her very carefully. There was no sign of the lion; but there were so many trees about that it might easily be quite close without her seeing it...*

*Her thirst was very bad now, and she plucked up her courage to go and look for that running water. She went on tiptoes, stealing cautiously from tree to tree...*

*The wood was so still that it was not difficult to decide where the sound was coming from. It grew clearer every moment and, sooner than she expected, she came to an open glade and saw the stream, bright as glass, running across the turf a stone's throw away from her. But although the sight of the water made her feel ten times thirstier than before, she didn't rush forward and drink. She stood as still as if she had been turned into stone, with her mouth wide open. And she had a very good reason; just on this side of the stream lay the lion...*

*'If I run away, it'll be after me in a moment', thought Jill. 'And if I go on, I shall run straight into its mouth.' Anyway, she couldn't have moved if she had tried, and she couldn't take her eyes off it. How long this lasted, she could not be sure; it seemed like hours. And the thirst became so bad that she almost felt she would not mind being eaten by the lion if she could be sure of getting a mouthful of water first.*

*'If you're thirsty, you may drink.'*

*... For a second she stared here and there, wondering who had spoken. Then the voice said again, 'if you're thirsty, come and drink,' and of course she remembered what Scrubb had said about animals talking in this other world, and realized it was the lion speaking...*

*'Are you not thirsty?' said the Lion.*

*'I'm dying of thirst,' said Jill.*

*'Then drink,' said the Lion.*

*'May I - could I - would you mind going away while I do?' said Jill.*



*The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl... The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.*

*'Will you promise not to - do anything to me if I do come?' Said Jill.*

*'I make no promises,' said the Lion...*

*'You mean I should trust you? Do you eat girls?' she asked. 'I daren't come and drink.'*

*'Then you will die of thirst,' said the Lion.*

*'Oh, dear!' said Jill, coming a step nearer. 'I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.'*

*'There is no other stream,' said the Lion.*

*She suddenly made her mind up. She went forward to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping up water in her hand. It was the coldest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted. She didn't need to drink much of it, for it quenched her thirst at once (Lewis, 18-21).*

There is no other stream. For a world on fire, there is no other stream. For all the darkness, hate, inequality, racism and division, there is no other stream. Our burning world needs Jesus, and he has sought out his people, you and me, to show the world who he is, and the light and life he desires to give to this world. Jesus is our only hope.

And, for all our emptiness, there is no other stream. What was the end of the story for the Samaritan woman? It's verse 28. John narrates saying: *"The woman left her water jar and went away" (28)*. The symbol of her emptiness left at the well, as she actually becomes the first evangelist. She had found the living water, and things would never be the same again.

So, what's the end of the story for you? Will you leave your emptiness behind and drink from His stream? There is no other stream which provides true satisfaction, abundant life and eternal life. Amen.

## **VI. Benediction**

Now receive this benediction:

Come, all you who are thirsty, to the only stream that brings life, and watch him, him who is able to do far more abundantly than all you ask or imagine, according to the power of that living water at work within you, to him be glory in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

## **Resources**

Jeremias, Joachim, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*  
Johnson, Darrell, *BIBL 553: Believing Into Life* (Regent College Course)  
King, Martin Luther, *Strength to Love*  
Klink, Edward, *John* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)  
Lewis, C.S., *The Silver Chair*  
Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Light Has Come*