

"Jesus, the Living Water"
(John 4:1-42)
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(John 4:1-42)

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.

³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

(John 4:1-42 – cont'd)

²¹ “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

²⁵ The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

³¹ Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

³² But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

³³ Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

³⁴ “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. ³⁵ Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶ Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. ³⁷ Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. ³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴² They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

To understand the richness of this story we have to know something about the history between Jewish people and Samaritan people. Who were the Samaritans and what was the relationship between them and the Jews?

The Samaritans were considered to be half-breed Jews. They had mixed blood because their ancestors had intermarried w/ foreign nations. And from their intermarriage, they had also corrupted their Jewish religion by assimilating parts of foreign religion into the Jewish religion. Four centuries earlier they had also erected a rival temple on Mount Gerizim. The true temple of course was in Jerusalem. A couple hundred years later that temple was destroyed. But this act continued to drive these two peoples apart and grow their animosity toward each other. The Samaritans continued to worship on Mount Gerizim. One other thing to note is that the Samaritans only considered the five books of Moses as holy scripture whereas the Jews considered the entire Old Testament as their scriptures. This is why the Jews and Samaritans didn't like each other.

Let's now enter the story. Jesus and his disciples enter this area of Samaria around noontime. The sun would have been high in the sky. It would've been hot and they would have been thirsty from the journey. They come to Jacob's well to get some water. Jesus sends his disciples into town to pick up some food. Then this unforgettable encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman occurs. From what we know, the woman came to the well alone. In that culture the collection of water was the job of women. But it was also customary for women to come in groups. Why did she come alone? Why did she come midday when it would have been customary to come in the morning? We'll find out soon enough.

The woman is surprised that Jesus, a Jew, would ask a Samaritan for a drink of water. John adds the commentary saying, "For Jews do not associate with Samaritans" (v9). In that culture at that time, Jews feared becoming defiled or unclean from any contact with a Samaritan. Jews saw Samaritans more as Gentiles, with which they were not permitted to eat. The Jews were aware of that and so were the Samaritans. That's why this woman is surprised at the request, but in addition to the racial or religious barriers that Jesus was willing to cross, there were also other societal barriers. He was male and she was female. It would have been quite outside the norm for this encounter to occur, but she was not only ethnically unclean, she was also morally unclean. Yet, Jesus has no problem associating with her.

One of the amazing things about Jesus' encounter with unclean people is that he never becomes unclean, rather those who touch him or those whom he touches become clean. Isn't that amazing? A leper, a woman with non-stop bleeding, a dead person, a gentile, a sinner. He touches them all, yet he never becomes unclean. The exact opposite occurs. They become clean.

Then, when we come to verse 10, Jesus offers something far more precious to the woman. He says, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

Let's dissect his offer. Jesus essentially says two things:

First, if you knew what I had to offer you and second, if you knew the identity of the person presenting you with the offer, you'd have already asked him. These are the two questions of the entire bible. These are the two most important questions in life. Do you know who Jesus is and do you know what he offers? No two questions are more important than these two.

Jesus tells the woman that what he offers is “living water.” The phrase ‘living water’ could have been understood in one of two ways. First from a purely physical or literal level, which meant water from fresh springs. In a dry part of the world like ancient Palestine, you can see why this would have been such an important thing, but “living water” also carried deep spiritual truths as well. In the Old Testament living waters is equated with God himself. In the time of Jeremiah the people are accused of forsaking God, the spring of living water. Living water was also an expression of spiritual renewal. And finally, water in the Old Testament was a symbol of spiritual cleansing from sin. It’s with this rich background that Jesus offers this woman living water, which is what he offers to us today.

The woman is thinking purely on the physical level and does not understand the true meaning behind Jesus’ offer. She says, “Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?” Then she says, “Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?” What a question! “Are you greater than our father Jacob.” Jacob, you’ll remember, was the grandson of the patriarch of the Jewish faith, Abraham. Later in John’s gospel, Jesus says, unabashedly to his opponents, “Before Abraham was, I am!” It’s to this person that the woman asks, “Are you greater than our father Jacob?”

Jesus then says, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (13-14)

In this answer Jesus tells us something incredibly profound about human nature. He tells us that we are much more than just physical beings, we are spiritual beings. As physical beings we have physical needs and we should have those needs met: food, water, clothing, shelter, even procreation. All of these are physical needs. No one denies that, but there are many people who say that is all we are, that we are physical and material, and nothing else. To which Jesus would say, no. We are indeed spiritual beings; we are eternal beings, which mean that we all have spiritual needs and dare I say, we have eternal needs.

It would be foolish to think that a spiritual need could be satisfied by a material thing, but that’s what we do. That’s the blindness that all of humanity has. If you are hungry, you go to a restaurant, or to the kitchen. If you are longing for companionship, you call your friend or you get married, but a spiritual need is different. It asks the question of meaning, purpose and destiny. Here are some spiritual questions. See if you’ve asked one or more of these:

- What do I do with my guilt?
- What will happen when I die?
- Is there a god?
- Am I just a physical being, the same as all the animals or is there something uniquely different about humanity?
- Why is it that I long for meaning and purpose?
- Why is it that I feel so lonely, empty, dissatisfied?
- Why is it that I have such a difficult time with being good?
- Are there a heaven and a hell?
- Why does truth matter so much?
- Will God judge me when I die? How will I fare?
- Is the material world all that there is, or is there a spiritual world?
- Why is that only humans are moral?
- Why do I care so much about justice?
- Why is it that only humans are concerned about evil and good?

Why is it that only humans are able to appreciate beauty?

I don't believe science can answer those questions. In fact, science doesn't even ask those questions. These questions are on a different plane. They are spiritual. We ask those questions and we seek the answer to those questions because we are spiritual beings.

In the answer that Jesus gives he tells us that people need is not just a cup of water, it's not merely a physical need that needs to be satisfied. Rather, far more important, what people really need is the quenching of a deeper spiritual thirst. You and I are the same. You and I have spiritual thirsts, deeper and stronger than you might be aware. That's what Jesus is getting at here. He's offering us the solution to the deepest spiritual longings of our lives. He offers eternal life.

Let me talk about eternal life for a moment. Most of us have heard this phrase many, many times. However, most people think of eternal life in two ways. First they think of eternal life as a destination. They think of eternal life as going to heaven and living forever. And they wouldn't be incorrect in saying that. The other way that people think of eternal life is in contrast to eternal death. Everyone agrees that it's far better to receive eternal life than eternal death. In other words, it's far better to go to heaven than to go to hell. And they wouldn't be incorrect in believing that either. But they don't go far enough with their understanding. In John 17, Jesus offers a prayer. It's the longest prayer of Jesus recorded for us. It's nicknamed Jesus' high priestly prayer. Jesus stands as our great high priest, our great mediator and offers to God this incredible prayer for us. And here's what he says. "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

How did Jesus define eternal life? He said, "This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Does he define it as a destination? Not really. He defines it as a **relationship**. Living forever without God, without Jesus, is not a life worth living. That's not the point. The point is that we live together with God. The Apostle Paul understood this too. In his letter to the Philippians, a letter he wrote from prison, he says, "Guys, I'm not sure how this is all going to turn out. I'm not sure if I'm going to be released or if I'm going to die in this cell. I've been thinking and praying a lot about this. I've imagined in my head a scale, a balance and on one side of the balance I've placed being released and going on living. And on the other side of the scale I've placed dying and being with Jesus. If I live, then I get to serve Jesus more. But if I get executed and die, then at that very moment I get to be with Jesus. If it were up to me, what would I choose, what would I choose?" He then says, "It's a no-brainer. Being with Jesus is far better!" Even Paul knew that eternal life is a relationship.

That's why earlier Jesus said to the woman, "If you knew *who* it was that was offering you this living water. If you only know that it was your creator, that it was your savior, that it was your hope and joy, your love, and your eternal satisfaction. If you only knew *who* it was that was offering this to you." What he was offering to the woman was nothing less than himself—that's what eternal life is.

Let's continue in the story.

V15. The woman says to Jesus, "please give me this water so I won't be thirsty anymore and I won't have to return to this well over and over." To which Jesus says, quite abruptly, "Go, call your husband and come back."

She says, "I have no husband."

Jesus replies, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is quite true."

So, technically, she wasn't lying, she didn't have a husband; but she wasn't being completely honest either, for she was living with a man, unmarried to him.

On a side note, it's worth saying that unrepentant sinners never come clean. They always tell half-truths, half-lies. Later however we know that the lady comes clean because she confesses it all.

Now, why do you think Jesus does this? Why does he 'expose' the woman's history? To humiliate her? No, I don't think so. He does this because he wants to heal her. He's like a master spiritual surgeon who keeps digging until he gets to the root of the problem. We can be assured that this is how he'll treat each one of us, too. He will not leave us being satisfied with getting only our physical needs met. He cannot leave us just to be satisfied knowing that we're going to heaven. And this is where the story begins to take a turn.

The woman starts to realize that Jesus is no ordinary man. She says in v19, "I can see that you are a prophet." She then engages Jesus in a theological question. It appears abrupt, perhaps because the subject of her personal life had become way too uncomfortable, or maybe this question always bugged her and this seemed like the perfect opportunity to get an answer. Whichever the reason, Jesus allows her to change in subject to worship, whether on this mountain or Jerusalem, to which Jesus replies, "Neither!" The woman was asking a 'where' question. Where is the proper location for worship? Jesus says that the where question is not the most important question regarding worship. The 'whom' and the 'how' and the 'when' of worship are most important questions.

Whom do we worship? The Father.

How do we worship? In the Spirit and in the truth

When do we worship? Now (meaning with the coming of Jesus, a new age, a new dawn of true worship has now come)

I wish we had more time to unpack this, but we'll have to leave it at that for today. Let's continue.

The woman replies, "I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." And then the big reveal. Jesus says to her, "I, the one speaking to you---I am he."

It's at this moment that the disciples returned, surprised to find Jesus talking with a woman. Let's now pick up the story in verse 28:

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,²⁹
"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"³⁰ They
came out of the town and made their way toward him. **(John 4:28-30)**

If you're a car guy, and you saw a rare, "Holy Grail" vehicle on the road, in pristine condition, you'd chase down that car, snap a picture and send it to all your friends. If you were browsing around in a second hand store and came across an authentic thousand dollar designer purse and you picked it up for \$20, you'd tell all your girlfriends. When this woman found out that the person she was talking to was the Messiah, in her excitement, she went back to town and invited everyone to come and see him.

Let me draw out for you some important implications from this story:

1. Jesus shows us that there is no barrier too high or thick that he cannot break in order to reach us.
 - a. Racial barrier
 - b. Gender barrier
 - c. Social barrier
 - d. Cultural barrier
 - e. Moral barrier
 - f. Religious barrier
 - g. Sin barrier
2. Jesus will always go beyond our surface needs, the physical needs, to minister to our deepest needs, our spiritual needs -- the need for living water.
3. Jesus points out that one of our deepest needs is to deal with the problem of sin.
4. Jesus tells us that our ultimate need is to live in an eternal relationship with God and with himself.
5. Jesus tells us that we were created for worship. That eternal relationship for which we were created is a relationship of worship.

Friends, this is why Jesus came. This is the meaning of Easter. This is why Jesus died and rose again. He crossed over and broke down the greatest barriers, especially the barrier of sin, so that you and I might live in an eternal relationship with God and with Jesus.

Let's pray.