

Living Water for a Thirsty Soul

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John 4.1 - 42

It is a month since we gave attention to the Gospel of John. You will recall that John 3 describes the encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus. Nicodemus not only was a Pharisee but stood out among them – he was described by Jesus as the *teacher of Israel*. Nicodemus had impeccable credentials – he was an OT scholar, an expert on the Law, and knew all the details about how to follow the Law in daily life. If there was anyone who looked like he was on the fast track to heaven, it was Nicodemus. That is what Nicodemus thought as well, so you can imagine his surprise when Jesus told him, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” (John 3:3, ESV). Despite all of Nicodemus’ knowledge and adherence to God’s Law, he still fell short. Like everyone else, he needed help to get to heaven – he needed to be born again; he needed to be born from above.

Nicodemus pictures multitudes of people who are very religious, appear to lead fairly commendable lives, and believe they will go to heaven when they die. But they, like Nicodemus, make two errors. First, they fail to understand how impeccably holy and righteous God is. Second, they fail to realize what constitutes sin and how sinful they really are. Considering that, no one is good enough to merit heaven. There is only one way to heaven and that is to have a personal relationship with God through God’s Son Jesus Christ.

In the fourth chapter of John we meet the antithesis of Nicodemus, an unnamed woman who lived in Sychar, Samaria. After spending some time in Judea, the region in which Jerusalem was located, Jesus headed north to Galilee.

John 4:3–6 (ESV) ³He left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob’s well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

While Galilee is located directly north of Jerusalem, most Jews would not take that direct route. Rather, they would bypass Samaria, which was between Judea and Galilee by crossing the River Jordan near Jericho and travelling northward along the east side of the river until they were just below the Sea of Galilee and would then cross back to the west side. The reason most Jews did so was because they hated the Samaritans, who reciprocated those feelings. Centuries earlier the Assyrians deported most of the Jews living in Samaria and repopulated Samaria with people from other regions they had conquered. The Jews who had been left behind in Samaria intermarried with the people the Assyrians brought. As a result, the Samaritans were only partially Jewish. The tension between the Jews in Judea and the Samaritans escalated further when the Samaritans built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim. As a result, Jews, and especially Pharisees, would not set

foot in Samaria lest they were contaminated. However, as was often the case, Jesus ignored the normal protocol and went through Samaria and arrived at Jacob's well at about the 6th hour, or noon. Understandably He was tired from the journey and sat down at Jacob's well to rest. As an aside, those details highlight Jesus' humanity.

Jesus Christ is the Living Water That Quenches the Deepest Thirst

Jesus's disciples headed into Sychar to buy food and soon after they left, a Samaritan woman arrived – she came to draw water from the well. Jesus initiated a conversation with her by asking her to give Him a drink (7-8). She was surprised since Jews did not talk to Samaritans, and certainly not to women. Not only did Jesus do the unthinkable by talking to her, but He asked her to give Him a drink from her container – *“Why, anything she touched would be unclean? The very thought was preposterous!”* No wonder she was surprised! In her response she raised those points with Him (9). Jesus ignored her surprise and immediately focused on her deepest need – the thirsting of her soul.

John 4:10 (ESV) Jesus answered her, “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.”

She of course misunderstood what the *living water* was that Jesus was talking about and shared details about the well and its history. Jesus wasn't deterred, He expanded on the *living water* He offered,

John 4:13–14 (ESV) ¹³Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but 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.”

The thought of never being thirsty again and not needing to come for water everyday appealed to her. She tried to avoid and hide from others; she heard their whispers about her and her immorality. It is little wonder she said to Jesus, *“Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water”* (John 4:15, ESV). But Jesus was not talking about physical water; He was talking about *living water* which only He could supply and which would quench the thirsting of her soul.

There is a longing in every person to know God; God put it there when He created humankind. While marred by the Fall of Adam and Eve, it has not been eradicated. It is a thirst only God can satisfy. However, most turn to the world's counterfeits, as this woman had. Over the course of years or even decades of denial of the longing of their heart, or repetitive rejection of the Holy Spirit tugging on their heart to believe the Gospel, that thirst can be all but silenced. Oh, it is still there, but it is buried deeply in a hardened heart.

The innate desire to have a relationship with God and the singular solution has not changed since that day at the well near Sychar. The most critical need all people have, whether they realize it or not, is to quench the thirsting of their souls – to fill the emptiness within, address the constant

gnawing of unforgiven sins and the guilt that accompanies those sins. The only solution in the entire universe is Jesus – the *Living Water* who quenches the thirsting of people’s soul when they turn to Him for forgiveness of their sins and the gift of eternal life.

If anyone reading this hasn’t yet said “Yes” to the Savior by believing the Gospel and asking for His forgiveness and placing your faith and trust in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross for your salvation, this is the time. Don’t let this opportunity slip through your fingers as the Holy Spirit tugs on your heart. “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 6:2, ESV).

The most important point to glean from this account of the woman of Samaria meeting Jesus is that He is the *Living Water* that washes away the sin from those who embrace Him as their Savior, but there are related points.

A Most Unlikely Person to be Saved

Typically, women from the neighboring village came to the well earlier in the day, before it got hot, and they came as a group to share in the labor of drawing the water and to socialize with one another. The woman who met Jesus that day avoided the other women by coming at noon; she felt no affinity with them; she didn’t socialize with them. She was likely viewed as an outcast, perhaps a *black sheep* in the community.

She had lots of *history* and rather than politely ignoring that *history*, Jesus did just the opposite when He told her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” (John 4:16, ESV). He knew what her situation was before she said, “I have no husband.” (John 4:17, ESV). Jesus added she had had five husbands and was now living with another man (John 4.17-18). She was all too aware of her five failed marriages; her guilt over her part in their collapse. No wonder she had given up on marriage and had resorted to just living with the latest man. She tried to divert attention from her painful past and immoral present by trying to turn the focus to a controversial topic between Jews and Samaritans – where to worship (4.19-20). Jesus, on the other hand was not about to ignore her critical need – her eternal destiny. And in so doing, the conversation concluded with Jesus disclosing to this immoral woman He was the long-awaited Messiah. “I who speak to you am He.” (John 4:26, ESV). Wow! Jewish scholars had spent centuries searching the Scriptures and identifying the prophecies of the Messiah’s coming. Why not first tell them He was the Messiah they were searching for? Making this announcement to the Samaritan woman is in the same category as announcing the birth of Jesus some 30 years earlier to the shepherds; they too represented the downcast and marginalized of society. But this was no error in making a media release, the announcement He was the Messiah to this obscure, unnamed Samaritan woman was a message in a message.

Don’t miss the significance of this encounter! Nicodemus represented those who think they are good enough to merit salvation. They believe they are doing fine; they often soothe their darkened souls through self-righteous comparison with obviously needy sinners like the woman at the well. In sharp contrast to Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman represents those who believe they are too bad to merit God’s love and forgiveness. They think they are beyond His grasp – they know they will never measure up. The truth is – no one will ever merit heaven through their own efforts. However, those who think that because their sins are so visible and are so horrible, immoral, repulsive, and so on, that they are beyond the reach of the love of God, are mistaken.

Remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16, ESV). The love of Jesus encompasses not just those who seem to deserve God’s love, but to those who don’t – those who are all too aware of their sin. Remember, *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”* (Luke 19:10, ESV). If someone who appeared so distant from the Kingdom of God could be saved, so can the worst of sinners. **The only way for a person to be excluded from Jesus’ offer of salvation is to reject His invitation to believe the Gospel and trust in Him.**

It becomes clear in the balance of the record in John 4 that the woman’s heart was opened that day and the thirst deep within her soul was quenched.

What Constitutes Marriage

Let me draw your attention to one other piece of information which we can deduct from this account and which is ever so pertinent. Many times people allege the Bible isn’t relevant and doesn’t address the circumstances of the 21st century; that certainly is not the case with this. Never have so many couples who are not married to each other been living together and see nothing wrong with doing so. I have had people tell me that in the eyes of God, even though they have not formalized their relationship through marriage, God sees them as married because they are committed to each other. And because God is a God of love, He’s OK with it.

The exchange between the Samaritan woman and Jesus gives us clear insight into what God thinks. Rather than avoid a potentially embarrassing and hurtful situation by not talking about the woman’s marital woes, Jesus did just the opposite and raised the subject by telling her to go call her husband and have him come (16), to which she replied, *“I have no husband”* (17). Jesus’ reply to her is extremely informative on what He thought constituted marriage. Not only did He affirm that the man she was living with was not her husband but added that previously she had had 5 husbands (17-18). In God’s eyes, a couple living together is not synonymous with marriage. If a couple genuinely love and are committed to each other, they will get married. They would declare their love and faithfulness to each other before God and representatives of their society, and in response to those public promises, a person authorized by society would declare they are husband and wife.

Scripture is clear on God’s definition of marriage, and irrespective of what our society or today’s social norms may deem acceptable, does not change what God thinks.

A Divinely Arranged Appointment

When the woman from that obscure village in Samaria got up that eventful day, she had no idea how it would change the trajectory of her life for eternity. She didn’t anticipate when she approached that Stranger at the well that she would leave with the thirst in her soul satisfied. She arrived trying to avoid people, she left seeking after people. She arrived alienated from God, she left with an intimate relationship with God. She arrived without hope, but left filled with hope.

Some view this as just a chance meeting, but it was anything but. As I noted previously, the route around Samaria is the route one would have expected Jesus to take, but He didn’t. In fact, notice carefully what Scripture tells us, *“And he had to pass through Samaria.”* (John 4:4, ESV). The verse conveys a sense of imperativeness, as though He had no other choice. The meeting between Jesus and the woman from Sychar was not happenstance, but just the opposite. It was a divinely arranged appointment! God had prompted His Son to head to Galilee on that day and to travel

through Samaria, so that Jesus would arrive at Jacob's well at that precise time. He did so because a Samaritan woman whose life was in tatters and who was haunted by emptiness within needed far more than water from Jacob's well. She needed to meet the Messiah and receive *living water* welling up to eternal life (14).

While our lives do not generally have the kind of intentionality and clarity of purpose apparent in this divinely arranged encounter, we must always be on the lookout for, and be receptive to, the appointments God has scheduled for us. It may be the Holy Spirit urging us to contact or visit someone, or offer to do something for someone. That prompting may very well be in response to the prayers of individuals. Sometimes divinely arranged appointments are for our benefit, on other occasions it is for someone else's benefit, sometimes for the benefit of both. It may be a situation very similar to the one in John 4 where God has scheduled an appointment with someone who gives no indication they are interested in the things of God, but we are to be the contact link.

In some cases it will be immediately apparent after you have followed the Lord's prompting that it was of the Lord, but on other occasions only eternity will reveal how some little and unnoticed act changed the trajectory of another person's life. I think back to a Saturday morning in September 1975, when someone unknown to me dropped a flyer in our mailbox inviting us to an evangelistic service the next day in the *Pentecostal Church* in Sherwood Park, AB. That person does not know that as result Beverley and I, who had for months been thinking we needed to find a Church where our 2 small children could learn about the things of God, responded to that invitation and weeks later we would be saved when we received the *Living Water* which satisfied the longing of our souls.

I draw attention to this to highlight the importance of being attentive to appointments God has arranged for us. Pray each day God will guide and direct you to His appointments for you and that you will not miss His prompting.

Transformed Lives are Visible

Another point to glean from this account is the immediate change that happened to this woman. So dramatic was the change when she embraced Jesus as her Savior that she forgot why she had come.

John 4:28–30 (ESV) ²⁸So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"
³⁰They went out of the town and were coming to him.

She couldn't contain what had happened to her – she had to tell others *Who* she had met. And as a result, "*Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me all that I ever did.'*" (John 4:39, ESV). And that resulted in more people believing the Gospel and trusting in Jesus as they interacted with Him over two days, "*And many more believed because of his word.*" (John 4:41, ESV). It is impossible to conceal the transformational change in a person when they are saved.

May the Lord minister to you through the song, **Fill My Cup, Lord** sung by Jessy Dixon

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPyz7fR-e6A&ab_channel=JesusChristismyLord