

Find Life in the Son: Thirsty John 4:1-26

Introduction

One of the major contributions Christianity made to the world was its elevation of the status of women. This was true even in the Jewish community despite the fact that the OT foundation of why women are to be treated with honor and value is that God made both male and female in His image.

Unforgettable words of Proverbs 31:28-31

28 Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:

29 "Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all."

30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but
a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

31 Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let
her works praise her in the gates.

The NT apostles saw women as colaborers in the gospel, calling on husbands to treat their wives with understanding and honor, as heirs together of the grace of life, and to sacrifice themselves in love for their wives even as Christ gave up His life for the church. The apostles' views of how to treat women did not come from their culture, Roman or Jewish, but from Jesus. Women supported His ministry and traveled with Him and His

apostles in their itinerant ministry. He treated them with profound respect and insight. Our text this morning is one of the best known and most loved passages that reveals Jesus' heart for women and their needs, particularly those damaged by false teaching and sin's scourge: the woman at the well.

The opening nine verses pull back the curtain on the world in which Jesus lived and ministered. They reveal the kinds of barriers and burdens that made life hard for those in broken situations like this Samaritan woman.

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.

⁷ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

Let's stop here for a moment to take in what this passage reveals about the first century world and its brokenness. Doing so will help us understand better the rescue operation Jesus came to accomplish.

Jesus and His disciples have been ministering in Judea, but He decides to head to Galilee, and for good reason. The Pharisees have begun to take note of the growing popularity of Jesus, greater even than that of John the Baptist. John had called on everyone to repent, Jews and Gentiles. He had the audacity to call even Pharisees and Sadducees to repent or face the wrath to come, calling them a brood of poisonous snakes. The Pharisees were the respected Bible teachers of the day, and the Sadducees ran the temple worship. Together they were among the most powerful and respected leaders of the Jewish nation. In those days Gentile proselytes were baptized into the Jewish religion, but it was outrageous that Jews, especially the religious and political elite, would be called to a baptism of repentance as well. So John was a problem for them, but Jesus was proving to be an even greater threat to their imagined superiority over others. Later He would confront them about their rejection of John the Baptist and declared the prostitutes and tax collectors would make it into heaven

before they did, because these notorious sinners repented at John's preaching and the Pharisees did not.

The Pharisees considered anyone that threatened their culture of superiority and control a threat to be neutralized, so Jesus' popularity was a clear and present danger. In chapter 5, they begin persecuting Jesus for His violation of their manmade Sabbath rules and start seeking to kill Him (5:16, 18).

According to God's plan and timetable, the cross will come, but it is not the time. So Jesus withdraws from Judea to travel back to Galilee. The text reads that it was necessary for him to go through the region of Samaria on His way to Galilee. It was the shortest route to Galilee, but Jews would normally go around Samaria to keep from associating with Samaritans. We are not told why it was necessary for Him to go this route, but the implication is that it was necessary to fulfill His saving mission to Samaritans, not just Jews.

It's high noon, and Jesus is tired. So he stops at Jacob's well. Centuries before Jacob dug a well there, about 100 feet straight down to a spring.

Townpeople typically would not come to draw water in the heat of the day, but here

comes a woman. She is alone. Jesus is also alone because His disciples have gone into town to buy food. Unphased by the possible awkwardness of the situation, Jesus asks her for a drink. Simple enough, but with that basic request He pushes through multiple barriers. She voices the chief one:

John 4:9

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

For 700 years Jews and Samaritans have been at odds, and for good reason. They were the result of Assyrians intermarrying with Israelites from the northern tribes who were left in the land at the time of the Assyrian captivity. Further, the Samaritans had developed their own religion modified from the Pentateuch and rejecting the later books. They had opposed the rebuilding of the Jewish temple when the Jews returned from their 70-year exile in Babylon, and had ended up building their own temple at the base of Mount Gerizim. So to the faithful Jew, the Samaritans had violated the covenant with God both by their intermarriage with pagans and by their corrupted religion. Jews hated Samaritans, and Samaritans hated Jews. When Jesus' enemies wanted to insult Him, they called Him a Samaritan.

His ethnic identity and hers should have barred all interaction between them. But her need is deeper than her Samaritan ethnicity; and His power to meet that need far greater than His identity as a Jew.

Consider what these nine verses reveal about the world in which this encounter takes place. It is a world where what passed as biblical religion had degenerated into self-righteous sectarianism that used religion to achieve power and wealth, the practitioners of which thought themselves holy because they maintained a system of external codes and ceremonies developed over the years. They saw themselves superior to those uneducated in their system and basked in the accolades of those who revered them. But their inner life was corrupt to the core, full of merciless greed, prideful contempt, and murderous hatred. Externalism, sectarianism, tribalism, polarization, prejudice, mistreatment—all these were commonplace. Jesus was not welcomed. And someone like this woman would never find God in such a religion. Nor could anyone who actually had any thirst for inner cleansing, healing from brokenness, loving interaction with one's neighbors, and an authentic connection to God Himself who sees us as we really are. The fact that Jesus was a Jew was only one of many barriers to her ever finding the door to life.

Not much has changed. *We still live in a world full of externalism, sectarianism, tribalism, polarization, prejudice, and mistreatment. Not just in the pagan world, in the very places people would hope to find true religion. No wonder they have such difficulty finding their way to God.*

1. Thirsty for Eternal Life (10-15)

¹⁰ 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."

¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"

¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

If you knew the gift of God—living water that quenches your thirst forever because it will plant divine life in you that will well up to eternal life

Jesus uses similar language in John 7:37-39
37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" **39** Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

The eternal life springing up in a person comes from being born again—regeneration produced by the Holy Spirit. This life of God in the soul of man accounts for the transformation that occurs in the life of every true believer in Jesus.

There is a thirst for the life we lost in the Garden of Eden, a life connected to God, a life empowered by God, a deep satisfaction not only with the life we have but with the persons we are. The deep, usually unspoken sorrow we bear is that try as we might, this life eludes us. That is exactly why it must be given to us by nothing and no one less than God Himself.

Revelation 21:6

And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

Revelation 22:17

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

If you knew who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink"—Who can give this gift of God? Only Jesus, the God-man, the Mediator between God and man. But it will take a while for her to realize Who Jesus is. Greater than our father Jacob? O yes. Much greater.

You would ask Him—that's how you receive the gift. He's the only One who can give it. You have to trust Him to give it to you. So what kind of life do you really desire, and who you believe Jesus to be?

Applications

- What are you most thirsty for?
- What if anything in this world do you thirst for more than life from God through Jesus?

The reason only Jesus can give this gift goes back to why we lack eternal life in the first place. Our sin has broken the fellowship. Our sin has broken us. Someone has to take care of our sin or there's no way back to God. That leads us to the second kind of thirst we see in this woman. As soon as it is clear that the

woman actually does want the gift of God, Jesus zeroes in on the sinful pattern that has so marred this woman's life.

2. Thirsty for Deep Cleansing (16-18)

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."

Manmade religion paints a veneer of righteousness over lives that are corrupt. What Jesus offers cleanses and roots out the sin that has infected our lives. When Jesus tells the woman to call her husband, He is pulling back the cover on her failure and her pain. She gives a truthful answer, but an evasive one. "I have no husband." He then lets her know He is fully aware of what's been going on in her life. She's had five husbands, and the man she's living with now is not her husband. What is supposed to satisfy the human need for lifelong companionship has turned out to be a repeated disaster for her. Think how others must have viewed her. Imagine what she thought of herself. Clearly starving for companionship, but never able to find what works. A slave to her desires. An outcast in her community—likely the reason

she's coming in the heat of the day to draw water when nobody else would be there.

The directness of Jesus regarding her sinful lifestyle pattern would have turned others away. We almost expect her to wheel round and leave full of embarrassment and anger, but that is not her response. Later she will see Jesus' full knowledge of her, sin and all, as proof that He is the promised Messiah, the Savior-King. Here is someone who knows her better than anyone else, and nonetheless has entered into conversation with her and proceeds to teach her truth from God. *He sees her as a real person with real needs, and offers to meet those real needs with a real solution.*

It is easy to let the sins of others keep us from engaging with them at all. That's the Pharisaic approach. It rescues nobody. And it presumes oneself to be free from sin. How many religious people would think this woman was beyond hope—too long a history of sin and failure.

It is also easy to avoid the topic of sin altogether so that we do not offend—that's another common approach today. But that's not as loving as it is selfish and cowardly. Too inconvenient, too much trouble, too much risk to try to rescue those on a self-destructive course. Such an approach pretends that sin

with all its rebellion against God and harm toward human beings, including the sinner himself or herself, doesn't really matter at all. That's sticking your head in the sand. That pretends that God will not judge sin at all. And that guts the gospel of its meaning. If sin doesn't matter, why did Christ have to die for it to rescue us from it?

Applications

- What sins are you willing to tolerate in your own life rather than coming to Jesus to be cleansed?
- Whom do you avoid because of the sins in their lives?
- Whose sins do you ignore because you're afraid of disrupting your relationship?
- If you were to follow Jesus' example, how would you approach persons you know are caught in sin?

3. Thirsty for True Worship (19-24)

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."

Her understanding of who Jesus is grows. "Sir, I perceive you are a prophet." A prophet hears from God and speaks to people. Jesus' deep knowledge of her tells her

He knows the way God knows her. But her roots are Samaritan, and the big divide between Jews and Samaritans had to do with how one approaches God. Since this man she's just met has demonstrated himself to be a prophet, perhaps He can settle the worship wars of her own times. Her Samaritan fathers worship God at Mt. Gerizim, but the Jews worship in Jerusalem. Who's right? Will Jesus side with His own people, the Jews, or with the Samaritans?

Who's right? There are so many religions, so many denominations, so many church splits, so much wrangling over the practice of religion. Would Jesus be an independent Baptist or Southern Baptist, a Presbyterian, a Lutheran or Methodist, or what about a Roman Catholic? Or maybe, since the Koran teaches that Jesus is a sinless prophet from God, maybe He's okay with the Muslim religion too.

Jesus doesn't pull any punches. The Samaritans have based their religion on ignorance—they accepted only the Pentateuch, not the rest of the OT. The salvation God has promised was revealed through the Jews—holy men of old who spoke and wrote born along by the Holy Spirit.

But even for the Jews, the place of worship is not the most important thing. In a few

decades, there will be no temple. What then? Will contact with God be lost? Is true worship dependent on a place? Not possible. In the days of the wilderness wanderings the tabernacle was moved from place to place. And before there was a tabernacle, the Israelites still worshipped God.

John 4:21-24

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."

God is not bound to place. He's spirit. And the worship of Him is not mere ritual. Those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. Aligned with the truth of Scripture, and at the level of spirit realities. Not external pretense. Authentic, heart-felt, honest worship.

The Father—what comforting words for this relationship-starved woman!—the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. He is seeking individuals like her. Those who are

thirsty for true worship. *The real you has to come to know the real God. Nothing between. No charade. No faking it.* This is the kind of worship most Pharisees knew nothing of. They studied the Scriptures, but they were all about LOOKING good, not BEING good. And the Sadducees were worse off yet. They did not study the Scriptures because they did not believe them. They were rich and powerful, but ignorant of the Scriptures and the power of God. All their temple worship with all the sacrifices God Himself had prescribed centuries before was like a production or a play without truth. But it was good money, and it gave them power and influence.

Applications

- When are you most likely to slip into going through the motions of worship that is not “in spirit and in truth”?
- How does know that God the Father is seeking true worshipers shape your attitude toward worship?
- What if anything is standing in the way of your engaging in authentic worship?

4. Thirsty for the Promised Messiah (25-26)

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.”

Who would have ever thought this woman would have cared a thing about the Messiah? Yet she shows more understanding of why the promised Messiah was coming than the Jewish religious leaders show. She's not looking for political deliverance. She's looking for reconciliation with God. She knows a prophet when she meets one. And she wants to know what He can teach her. She's not looking for someone who will merely reinforce what she already believes and practices. She longs for true worship. And she's already convinced the Messiah will answer her questions about these important matters. "When He comes"—she believes God's promises about the coming Messiah—"He will tell us all things." Her heart is open to whatever He will teach.

So for the first time, Jesus openly reveals that He is the promised Messiah. "I—the one speaking to you—am. I am. *Ego eimi*. The I Am that I Am. You are looking at Him. You have been talking with Him.

If you knew Who asked you a drink, you would ask Him for living water. The Who is the Messiah. The Who is Jesus. Greater than Jacob. More than a prophet. Son of God and Son of Man.

The real you must meet the real Messiah.
Ask, and He will give you eternal life. That is,
if that is what you're thirsty for.

Applications

- In what ways are your expectations aligned with God's Messianic promises?
- In what ways do you show by your daily life that you thirst for Jesus the Messiah to teach you and lead you in all things?

Conclusion

1. Thirsty for Eternal Life (10-15)
2. Thirsty for Deep Cleansing (16-18)
3. Thirsty for True Worship (19-24)
4. Thirsty for the Promised Messiah (25-26)

How does Jesus the Messiah quench this thirst? Our text gives us a clue.

Did you notice that the first one to ask for a drink was Jesus? He was thirsty. And weary. How could the Messiah, the Son of God be thirsty and weary? Same reason He would be hated, arrested, condemned, tortured, crucified. He was to be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.

So come to Jesus to quench your thirst.

Hebrews 4:15-16

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Closing Song: O Come, All You Unfaithful

Applications Summary

- What are you most thirsty for?
- What if anything in this world do you thirst for more than life from God through Jesus?
- What sins are you willing to tolerate in your own life rather than coming to Jesus to be cleansed?
- Whom do you avoid because of the sins in their lives?
- Whose sins do you ignore because you're afraid of disrupting your relationship?
- If you were to follow Jesus' example, how would you approach persons you know are caught in sin?
- When are you most likely to slip into going through the motions of worship that is not "in spirit and in truth"?
- How does know that God the Father is seeking true worshipers shape your attitude toward worship?

- What if anything is standing in the way of your engaging in authentic worship?
- In what ways are your expectations aligned with God's Messianic promises?
- In what ways do you show by your daily life that you thirst for Jesus the Messiah to teach you and lead you in all things?

Additional Discussion Question

- Jesus cut through multiple obstacles to engage this woman in a conversation that would lead to her trusting in Him. What are some ways we can overcome the obstacles we face today in order to engage people with the gospel effectively?