
Living Water

John 4:1-42

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All societies and cultures have their outcasts. There are those people everywhere who don't fit in. And there are those who intentionally excluded. The social expressions of this are often racially, ethnically or even religiously driven. So we can grow up in society that views and treats black people as being sub-human. Or you can go to the Orient and find that there is a brisk trade in child porn and prostitution. Yet the victims of this horrible practice are left in the street, penniless and broken and diseased. Or you can go to South America and find the streets filled with filthy children scabbling out a living on the crumbs of their begging or from rooting in the garbage or by the selling of what pitiful remains they have because they have simply been dumped by their families.

The horrors of sin and fallenness are all around us. We can walk downtown in Dayton and feel just slightly sick at the human waste of the ever-present drunks, druggies and whores. We can sort-of pull up our nice clean righteous skirts and cross to the other side of the street.

Now it is easy to say, this was not Jesus' way. He met every need. If you think that you are sorely misreading the Bible. Jesus passed the poor and the sick and the leprous and blind who clogged the streets of Palestine. But He never turned away from genuine need and cries for real help. Sometimes, His ministry is so full of meeting needs, and travel and pressing concerns that his human weariness brings Him to quiet lakes, and homes away from the crowds and to a stone well on Samaritan hillside.

The Conditions of the Ministry

(v.1-6)

We must learn to see behind the ordinariness of life the mysterious and moving hand of God's providence.

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.

Why He Goes

(v.1-3)

Jesus changes the location of his ministry based on his rising popularity. That popularity is now gaining the attention of the Pharisees. A lot of what Jesus did and how He went about ministry simply is baffling to the modern mindset. "Here, we are doing well here. There are lot's of people coming into the Kingdom. We are being well received. We are even getting opposition from the right area. So, let's go somewhere else to do ministry." The Apostle John is showing us how the statement of John the Baptist, "He must increase; I must decrease" (v.30) is God's providence.

Where He Goes**(v.4-6)**

“Jesus had to go through Samaria.” This was a geographical necessity. The best and shortest route home was a good road that passed through Samaria. Jesus comes to a well-known place, Jacob’s well near Sychar.

Why is this significant? In these paragraphs, as well as in all of Jesus’ ministry, His outreach overcomes the barriers of racial bigotry (v.9), social mores (v.10) and religious expectation (v.39). His ministry is consistently marked by leaving comfort zones and breaking through barriers in order to meet people in their need.

And so, we are brought by a Divine appointment to a significant moment.

The Conversation with the Woman**(v.7-26)**

Listen carefully to the dialog. Try to hear this as though for the first time. Imagine having this conversation yourself with Jesus.

Issue of the Water**(v.7-14)**

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.) 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.”

Look at how this conversation flows:

Please give me a drink. (Are you thirsty for life?)

Why would you ask me, a vile Samaritan and a woman? (Boy, if you only knew what I was really like!)

If you could really see God’s gift and who I am, you would ask and receive living water. (I thought He was the one who was thirsty.)

How are you going to give me water? (Who does he think he is anyway?)

The water I give is not like a well you come to, but a spring of water on the inside. (If you drink at one, you will not crave the other.)

What are the key points John is making?

Since we do not see with our understanding God’s gift and God’s Son then we are going to other wells instead of living springs (v.10).

All wells leave us thirsty. But the spring of living water always satisfies (v.13-14).

Issue of her Wickedness

(v.15-18)

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." 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."

"If that's the case, give me this water so I will not be thirsty and will not have to come back to this old well."

"Mam, we are talking about more than water and wells. We are talking about spiritual thirst and how we satisfy our thirst. Go get your husband."

You can almost hear her cringe. "I don't have a husband." She covers her sin with a half-truth.

Jesus moves in to expose her sin. She is immoral. And she is not truly thirsty and cannot drink from the springs of living water because she has been drinking from the muddy well of immorality.

Listen to me loved ones. The issue in belief is *always* sin. It is not about personality. It is not about self-fulfillment. It is not about culture. It is not felt needs. It is always about sin. Unbelief is itself sin. Sin is anything that does not please God nor show how great and holy He is. Believing God is how we fight sin. The reason you do not believe God and obey Jesus is that you are satisfied and content with your sin. It may be a sweet, carefully packaged, appealing Coke—but it is never living water. Eventually we find that at the bottom is mud and sediment and nasty crawling things—but we still want it.

Issue of His Worship

(v.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."

Knowing that He is a prophet because He has exposed her sins, she understands that the primary problem of her sin is worship. I do not believe that this discussion is a diversion. This woman *perceives* that Jesus is a prophet and therefore speaks for God. Her sin is primarily an issue of worship. We have been created for worship, that is, to glorify and enjoy God. Sin keeps us from it. So an awakened sinner's first question ought to be, "How can I come to God?" How do sinners turn from muddy wells to living springs?

She is most concerned about *where* we worship. She wants to know where the proper place of worship is because there is where she will deal with her sins. The Temple is the place where the sacrifices were offered.

God is most concerned about *how* we worship. God is not so concerned about mountains or buildings. He is not even so concerned about Jerusalem. He desires worship in spirit and in truth.

Jesus presents Himself as the *who* we worship. He is the Messiah. He is the One we are to worship because of what all the Scriptures say.

So here are the primary criteria for Biblical worship – we must worship in spirit and truth. And it is our own sins that keep us from worshipping God in the ways that please and delight God. Worshipping is like coming to a bright sparkling fountain. We may praise it. But the best way to commend it is to simply kneel down and drink deeply and say, “Aaah”.

The New Testament does not say a lot about worship, but what it says is important. Biblical worship rests in the context of all the Psalms with their God-ward and God-centered adoration in all varieties of music, instruments and texts (Psalms 149 & 150). We must be worship God, and God alone (Matthew 4:10). The angels are examples of heavenly worship (Hebrews 1:6). Our worship must be full of awe and reverence (Hebrews 12:28). Presenting ourselves as living sacrifices is worship (Romans 12:1). Our present worship must express itself in heaven’s future themes (Revelation 4:8-5:14) and therefore must be in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). And our worship is vain when we teach our traditions and rules as though they were the Word of God (Mark 7:7).

There is an inseparable connection between the issue of wells and water and the issue of worship. While God offers us satisfying springs of living water, we too often are not thirsting for Him in our worship because we have been drinking all week long at the muddy wells of sinful pleasure.

I am standing this morning as a faithful witness. Muddy wells will slake your thirst, like a coke. You may find your life fulfilling, your sin fun and not see the need at all. But these things will eventually leave you empty and lonely and painfully and eternally apart from God. But there is a spring of living water that will eternally satisfy. I know. I have drunk deep. There is nothing like it. It is deep and cold and clear and all we need.

The Correction of the Disciples

(v.27-38)

The scene shifts to the disciples huffing and puffing up to the well. There are some skeptical and questioning looks on some of their faces. Some of the frowns are turned to the woman as though to say, “What do you want?” Others are turned on Jesus as though to say, “Why are you talking with *her*?” But as usual, they don’t dare say anything.

By the Examples They Saw

(v.27-30)

²⁷ Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” ²⁸ So 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?” ³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him.

The disciples need to learn a lesson about wells and springs as well. Biblical witnessing is modeled right in front of them.

Jesus’ Witnessing – In Jesus they see and hear modeled the heartbeat of Christian witness. Jesus meets the woman where she is, builds bridges with common ordinary talk, comes to the issue while sharing the saving truth. Wonder if any of the twelve of them, going all the way into town and going through the market and coming all the way back witnessed to anyone!

Woman’s Witnessing – The Samaritan woman has drunk deeply from the spring of living water and she runs, leaving her water pot, to tell her story. Here is the simplicity of gospel witness. Tell your story. Point to Jesus. Go and tell so that men and women, boys and girls will come and see.

By the Exhortation They Heard

(v.31-38)

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." ³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. ³⁶ Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

"Well, now that she is gone, let's get down to the important thing, food." Now I know that what we may be seeing here is simply a genuine care and concern for Jesus' physical well being. But Jesus takes their concern and teaches them about His concerns.

Its Motivating Perspective – The disciples are focused on food. They want Him to eat. Here is the meal. While the Samaritan woman is thirsty and needs living water, the disciples are hungry and need sustaining words. Jesus gets their attention. "I have food that sustains." "Who brought Him lunch?"

Its Transforming Principle – Jesus is sustained by serving. He is sustained by doing God's will and work. Not that it replaces the need for food. But too often we do not hunger for God in His will and in His works because we are filled with earthly food.

So He gets them to turn and look down the road towards Sychar. The road has become a field, harvest white with the turbans and headdress of men and women coming to see Jesus. They are going to have a harvest where the woman sowed.

The Confession by the Samaritans

(v.39-42)

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

Here is the harvest: many believed. That is what we are after. We want to drink deeply at the springs of living water and not be satiated with the muddy wells. Then we can witness and extol what we have truly experienced.

Believe the Witness

(v.39)

Saving faith involves first believing trustworthy witnesses. They listened to her story and God's Spirit gave them life so that they believed. There must be witnesses. Romans 10:13-15 is clear on this.

But many of you are not witnesses, not because you never say anything, but because your joylessness and your apathy and your self-centeredness do little to commend the mighty spring of living water. Frankly, from some of your faces and your body language this morning, an unbeliever would conclude that the mud puddle may bring better and lasting pleasure than whatever it is you have.

Believe the Word**(v.40-42)**

Saving faith also must believe the Words of Jesus. It is clear from this Book that salvation from sin and acceptance with God and drinking deep from the springs of living water is only possible to those who believe what the Bible says.

Saving faith is believing in Jesus. We are not to have faith in faith. It is believing that Jesus is the one and only One through whom salvation comes.

But you must believe the Word. And you must be coming to Christ. And drinking deep in a way that keeps you from muddy ponds and empty wells is worship. Believe in Jesus today.

Reflect and Respond

See what keeps us from hungering and thirsting after God:

Sinful pleasures keep us from thirsting after God – lost
Natural pursuits keep us from hungering after God – saved

Notice some observations on Jesus' method:

Building bridges - the cup of water
Exposing sin - go get your husband
Telling truth - worship in spirit and truth
Describing God - I am He

John is showing us that saving faith is:

Satisfied in the worship of God
Sustained in the will of God
Believing in the Word of God