

"Give Me a Drink of Water"

John 4:1-26

Last week we were in John 3 when Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, hoping to find out more about Jesus because of all the amazing things He had done. Nicodemus came to Jesus thinking they were peers (or maybe Nicodemus felt he was Jesus' superior), clearly two Jewish rabbis who were righteous men obviously near the top of the list of who will be in the future kingdom of God one day.

Jesus challenged Nicodemus' self-righteousness by telling him he needed a new start – he needed to be born again or born spiritually if he hoped to be part of God's future reign one day. Nicodemus was taken aback by this and wondered how in the world he could do that since he's older. Jesus points out that Nicodemus should have known from reading and teaching the Old Testament that everyone falls short of God's glory, no one is declared righteous without faith and therefore he needs a new heart, through the work of the Holy Spirit's cleansing. We looked ahead in John's gospel and saw that Nicodemus did indeed place his trust in Jesus. He probably lost his seat on the Sanhedrin but gained an eternal position in God's kingdom.

Since Jesus knows what is in the hearts of men (as we saw at the end of Ch. 2), John the writer picks up this theme again at the beginning of Ch.4. The Pharisees are noticing Jesus' popularity is rising, so Jesus senses the need to take His new disciples back home to Galilee. Jesus will intentionally encounter the Samaritan woman on his trip back. From a human perspective, you couldn't paint a more opposite picture. The respected, self-righteous, serious, well-off Pharisee comes to Jesus for spiritual answers at night. Now we have the culturally unclean, indifferent, flippant, most probably poor Samaritan woman whom Jesus sought out in the middle of the day. John purposely contrasts these two to show us that in the eyes of God both are the same. Yet we often don't see them that way. Whether we admit it or not, we pre-judge people based on externals on whether we think they might accept Christ or not. Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman are paired together to remind us

Anyone Can Be Saved **(Ch. 3 & 4)**

The 'righteous' Jew is self-righteous and the woman who has a different religion is really hurting and lonely. Both need Jesus. Both will come to Jesus. Jesus will use different words and methods to speak to their need for salvation. With the self-righteous Pharisee Jesus challenges his biblical intellect by asking Nicodemus why he doesn't know about the need for a spiritual birth when the very Scriptures he taught teach these things (Eze. 36-37; Ps. 87). With the Samaritan woman, Jesus catches her attention by offering her access to living water so that she'll never have to be thirsty again.

We are reminded that everyone needs salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and anyone can be saved by the grace of God through the work of the Spirit. Those who do good [like Nicodemus] think that will get into God's kingdom. But God doesn't accept anyone based on their good works. Nor does He disqualify people like the Samaritan woman who have had tough lives (whether by choice or circumstances). All need to believe Jesus is God's only Son sent to die for our sins and rose from the dead. The apostle Paul makes this clear in Rom. 10:9-10,

⁹ That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹ As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

We may be less inclined to witness to nicer people because their niceness lulls us into forgetting they still need Jesus. We may also hesitate to witness to the disrespected and culturally unclean of society thinking they would have no interest in Jesus. So John puts these two back-to-back to remind us of everyone’s need for salvation no matter what their background is or how they are perceived by society. We saw how John has set us up for this in 2:25

²⁵ He did not need any testimony about mankind, for He knew what was in man [each person].

He knows the heart of Nicodemus and how he needed to understand his Jewish self-righteousness won’t include him in the Kingdom of God. And he knew the heart of the Samaritan woman who thinks she was better than Jews because she only follows Moses.

Nicodemus fades from the scene and we don’t hear a response from him until later. Now Jesus and His disciples leave for the Judean wilderness and we encounter John the Baptist once more in 3:22-36. People approach John and tell him more are going to Jesus and His followers for baptism instead of John. John wisely points out that he is the friend of the groom and not the groom. Jesus is the One who should be followed. Whoever believes in Him will have eternal life.

Ch. 4 begins then with Jesus leaving Judea to go north to Galilee because people are aware of His growing following while John is still ministering. Maybe to avoid any potential tension between the two groups but more so because the Pharisees are becoming more interested in Jesus, He leaves for Galilee but He must go through Samaria. While Samaritans and Jews did not get along, many Jews still travelled through Samaria because it was quicker. When we read that they didn’t have any dealings with one another it was mostly because the Rabbi’s ruled that it would be sin to be found indebted to a Samaritan. Once in awhile there might be a slight skirmish if the Jews passed through but mostly they just avoided each other. The disciples do buy food there, so it wasn’t unheard of for Jews and Samaritans to interact. But only when necessary I’m sure.

Jesus “had” to go through Samaria. There was a divine purpose along the journey. So often we’re so focused on the goal of whatever it is we’re doing (go to the store, school, work, get home; go to church, get out quickly; go to the gym, get out; go to the kid’s game, get out, etc.) that we miss divinely arranged appointments for gospel opportunities – to the unsaved as well as encouragement for the saved. So often God’s goal is in the journey:

Our Goals are Not Our Purpose **(4:4-15)**

The disciples will not get this when they come back. They don’t know why Jesus is talking to this woman since according to the Rabbis to talk with any woman in public makes you unclean, let alone a Samaritan. And to accept water from her would also be considered unclean. Jesus communicates to her that none of these things concern Him because they are not biblical. Sometimes we’re so concerned about what people think of us, in case we are wrongly associated with someone we may not normally associate with, that we miss the opportunity for them to hear about Jesus. Everyone needs Jesus. Only Jesus knows their hearts. Remember, the one who most people would

think was least likely to accept Christ in these two chapters accepts Christ that day (and someone else the reader wouldn't expect accepts Christ before this chapter ends). Yet Nicodemus (the good guy) will take awhile.

So let's be a little more sensitive to God's purpose in our life in our mini journeys that we make to the store, the game, work, or wherever it is we're going to that is so important [!]; to be open to connect with people who need encouragement or need saving. And that's what Jesus does:

Look for a common connecting point (vv.5-9)

Water becomes the common connecting point here. She needs some for herself and so does Jesus. The well itself is also a connecting point. Jacob's Well is still around today. A Greek Orthodox monastery was built around it to preserve this holy spot. The well is 75-100 feet deep and still draws water. There is a ledge upon which one can sit. Jesus sits at Jacob's well, which would recall Gen. 24 where Eleazer finds Rebekah, Jacob's future wife. Jacob would later buy this piece of property near Shechem in Gen. 33:19. The same spot of land that Joshua would lay to rest the bones of Joseph in Josh. 24:32. None of these things are lost to the Jewish reader nor to Jesus nor to the Samaritan woman.

She comes alone at the 6th hour (noon) to get water, obviously to avoid other women. The cultural thing for Jesus to do was to withdraw Himself from her in silence while she finished getting her water. Instead, He talks to her (!) and asks her for water (making Him indebted to a Samaritan!), risking becoming unclean because He has no vessel for water. The typical water vessel while travelling was a leather pouch you would roll up when empty and carry easily, then fill as needed. She acknowledges these cultural faux pas by asking Him why are you talking to me. As with Nicodemus, who Jesus bypassed pleasantries, telling him he needs to be born again if he wants to see God's kingdom, here Jesus bypasses cultural commentary and says to 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."

What was Jesus doing here?

Building a spiritual bridge (vv.10-15)

He stops at Jacob's well – a highly revered spiritual site to the Samaritans. He has a need – water. He engages her in conversation – showing He is willing to bypass prejudices and cultural expectations. Now He uses her need for water and His need for water as the spiritual bridge. And 'the gift of God' also.

Both Jew and Samaritan understood the 'gift of God' to mean the life-giving Word of God that God gave to Moses at Mt. Sinai. The Samaritans, however, only accepted the 5 books of Moses as the Word of God while the Jews accepted the Old Testament as the Word of God. As well, we see the how God used living water and His Word in Jer. 2:13:

Jer. 2:13 "My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

'Living water' meant a spring as opposed to water in a cistern. And His reference to His own identity is a reference to God giving His Son (Is. 9:6) who gives life to people (Is. 42:5-6) that the Jewish reader might have picked up on even though she may not have.

Is. 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

42:5 This is what God the Lord says— he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: ⁶ “I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, ⁷ to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

All these little things are going on in that brief statement. Jesus puts some spiritual bait on a hook. Will she bite? She does! She knows He has just intimated He is a special Jew so she flippantly says ‘You think you’re better than Jacob who gave us this well [not true 😊] as did all his descendants, and it [miraculously] survives to this day?’

Jesus offers her ‘living water’ which she mistakes for a spring, which in her mind she’s thinking ‘I won’t have to go to the well at noon, avoiding women who look down on me anymore.’ And Jesus knows this because He knows what’s in the hearts of mankind. So then He asks her what seems to us an unrelated question ‘Go call your husband and come back.’ Meaning, let me speak to the man of the house and we will make a covenant (much like Jacob and Abraham did when sharing water with their neighbours). Now the ‘elephant in the room’ is out in the open. ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus knows this and [I believe with compassion] says,

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.”

What did Jesus just do? What we need to try (and maybe not in the first encounter with a person):

Prayerfully Seek to Speak to People’s Needs **(4:16-18)**

Is water her real need? No. She’s lonely, has suffered a lot, and is ostracized even by her own community. She needs to be valued and loved.

Most readers judge her as an immoral woman who avoids everyone else and Jesus points out her sin. Maybe, but maybe not. Let’s think about this. If she was an adulteress, why would other men marry her? Why wasn’t she stoned to death (which is in the 5 books of Moses)? And if she is so immoral why did the townspeople later on listen to her because normally a man would not listen to a woman” advice or report (the disciples didn’t even listen to the women’s report that Jesus had risen from the dead [Luke 24:11]).

The fact that she was married 5 times may mean some of those husbands died. If she was divorced numerous times, was that her fault? A woman could not initiate a divorce. In either situation the community would avoid her because there was “obviously” something wrong with her to have lost a number of husbands to death or been divorced a few times. So who would want to marry her at this stage in her life? She is probably an older man’s servant who needed someone to keep his house and feed him. They probably had an arrangement. Perhaps she was less immoral than we think and more a victim of bad circumstances. She has suffered much grief (from husbands’ deaths) and

rejection (from divorces). Perhaps she was barren which may have been the cause of a divorce or two. Another social stigma. She is a woman who has suffered most of her life, who Jesus will now redeem her suffering for the salvation of her community.

She senses He must be a prophet to know her history so she changes the subject and enters into an old historical and theological debate: who are the true people of God, the Samaritans or the Jews? My way of religion is fine; I don't need yours. But Jesus makes no apologies for the truth of God and tells her real need:

Help People Understand Their Need for Forgiveness **(4:19-26)**

'We worship here, you worship there,' she says. Not a new argument. But Jesus says quite clearly, "Salvation is from the Jews" (v.22). If you're going to claim you're connected with God through Abraham and Moses then we need to be clear that God's Word and promises extended to all Abraham's descendants, ultimately to David, ultimately to Jesus. And the place of worship is Jerusalem at the tabernacle/temple. Why? Because that's what God's Word says. And that's where God accepts the sacrifice so your sins can be atoned for.

She wants to debate religions. Fine. Here's the bottom-line argument for religions and why hers was wrong. You walked away from the only place where forgiveness is available. How can you be accepted by God without receiving atonement for your sins? If Jesus is God's Son then He is the way, the truth and the life and no one can be forgiven except through Jesus, whose sacrifice atoned for your sins. Jesus shows her what we know too:

There's only one way to forgiveness (vv.19-23)

At some point in our presentation of the gospel we have to graciously yet unapologetically state that Jesus is the only way. The Scriptures are historically accurate and clearly explain how and why the world exists. Who we are and what our purpose is. Why Jesus Christ came, died and rose and why He'll return. And, how the world will end one day and what happens after we die. We have to explain what the Word of God says about our need to get right with God because we've all sinned and fall short of God's perfect presence. The proof? Aging and death. Jesus is the only way.

And yet, while the source for our salvation is narrow,

Anyone can find it (vv.23-26)

When Jesus said a day is coming when neither of them will worship on either mountain but in Spirit and truth, He was pointing towards worship of Himself not limited by geography, ethnicity or gender. Jesus' sacrifice does away with any human attempt to get to God. Anyone can now worship in Spirit and truth. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit at salvation unites us because we believe in the truth.

Then Jesus declares to this Samaritan woman in a clear statement that He is the Messiah, the One Moses prophesied would come in Deut. 18:18. She clearly believes Him, drops her water jar and goes back to her village where we will resume the lesson that all Jesus disciples need to learn next week.

Jesus challenges all His disciples to reach out to people, making connections, building spiritual bridges so we talk about the most important things in life – the need for forgiveness of sins. Millions of

people have little concept of the need to have their sins forgiven before they die. About their need to find hope in Jesus Christ now, so that when they die we will see them in eternity.

That really nice neighbour is as lost as a criminal. Both need to repent of their sins and come to faith in Christ. Those people we look down on and don't think are interested in Christ may be hurting badly and looking for someone to give them a reason to hope. That there's more to life than the suffering they are experiencing. Be more proactive in reaching out to anyone God puts in our path and let Him and His Spirit save who He wants to save. Let's be more conscious this week of connecting with people with the hope and prayer to help them understand they need Jesus.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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