

Never Thirst Again

We are continuing in our series entitled “Road to Resurrection” with our focus on the person, characteristics, teaching, and model of Jesus in these weeks leading up to Resurrection Sunday (Easter).



You may have noticed that I gave you my mobile number there in the bulletin this morning. Do you see it there, just after the postlude in the liturgy? I’m proposing an experiment.

I’ve always been a fairly avid, early adopter of technology. When I was my sons’ age, the first personal computers were hitting the market. I started to program on TRS-80s, Apple IIs, and Commodore 64s. I’ve been *hooked* ever since.

I get a little edgy when I’m not connected. My iPhone is always on and with me. I monitor my email constantly as well as Facebook, voice mail, and text messages. I pride myself in being pretty easy to get a hold of... by just about any means. You may have noticed... but I’m generally not still before very long before I take a glance at the screen on my iPhone.

Earlier this week, Laurie got on my case a bit for fussing with my iPhone while listening to a speaker; she thought I wasn’t paying attention. Truth is, I was *really* paying attention. While listening to the guy deliver his talk, I was:

- Looking up scripture references
- Skimming an article that the guy had on a website
- Looking at his recently released book on Amazon

You may have seen the news coverage on King5 last week about how Mars Hill Church encourages twittering during church... providing another way for people to reflect on their worship experience, live, to an audience that includes their friends, church leadership, and even extends far beyond the walls of the Church. In some churches you would be asked to turn *off* your phones; at Mars Hill they are encouraging folk to turn them *on* and use them.

You may have noticed that folk are connected here too. Looking up things on their mobile devices, even occasionally bringing a laptop... nobody is *freaked out* by appropriate use of technology here. As long as your gear isn’t distracting, it is welcomed here.

So... with all of that said, here’s the experiment. I thought it might be cool if there was a way you could communicate with me during the sermon. What if you were able to say “good point” or “you’re losing me” while I’m talking up here.

Some of you, of course, are happy to just shout out stuff like that... but for those who might want to try a more sophisticated approach, feel free to send me a text.

I thought about using something like Twitter or an instant-messaging system... but I think text messaging might be worth a try. I'm confident I can multitask without it being a distraction... but we'll have to see. Try not to be too silly with this; but otherwise... text away. If you don't really know what I'm talking about... don't worry about it; it probably isn't your "thing."

OK... enough about the technology experiment... let's get to John 4.

If you have a Bible open (or if you are looking at it on a screen) you can see that Pharisees were trying to disrupt the work of Jesus by creating trouble between Jesus and John the Baptist (and their followers).

In the first few verses of John 4, we read that Jesus decided that the best way to counter the Pharisees' disruption was to leave Judea and head back to Galilee.

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—²although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.¹

Verse 4 says

⁴Now he had to go through Samaria.

If I decided that we ought to have lunch today in Bellevue, I would *have to* go through Kirkland. Well... I could come up with a few other ways to get to Bellevue, but the most efficient route would be straight through Kirkland to Bellevue.

This was similar to what Jesus faced. He could have skirted around Samaria; there were other ***well-worn*** routes. But Jesus decided that the direct route was best... maybe because it was efficient, or maybe because he had other work to accomplish along the way.

I said that there were other *well-worn* routes, because a good Jew would do whatever it might take to not set foot in Samaria.

¹ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Jn 4:1-3.

Orthodox Jews avoided Samaria because there was a long-standing, deep-seated hatred between them and the Samaritans.

The Samaritans were a mixed race, part Jew and part Gentile, that grew out of the Assyrian captivity of the ten northern tribes in 727 B.C. Rejected by the Jews because they could not prove their genealogy, the Samaritans established their own temple and religious services on Mt. Gerizim. This only fanned the fires of prejudice. So intense was their dislike of the Samaritans that some of the Pharisees prayed that no Samaritan would be raised in the resurrection! [As an example of the hatred] When His enemies wanted to call Jesus an insulting name, they called Him a Samaritan (John 8:48).²

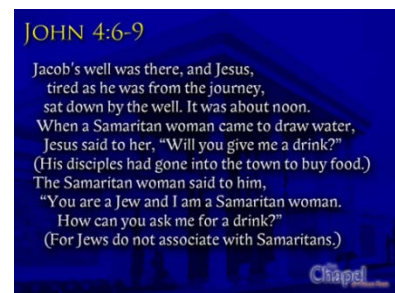
Giving no credence to the long-standing feud between his people (the Jews) and the Samaritans, Jesus made his way through Samaria, stopping at a town along the way.

This same Jesus, the Son of God capable of the glorious transfiguration that we talked about last Sunday, embraced His humanity... suffering in the same way we suffer. In this scene we find Jesus tired, hungry and thirsty.

With his friends off to find food for an evening meal, Jesus has this unusual encounter.

⁷When 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.)

⁹The 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.)³



This had to surprise the woman on several levels:

- It was not at all proper for a man to speak to a strange woman, especially out in the open public
- It was even more unusual, of course, for this **Jewish** man to be speaking to a **Samaritan** woman
- It was truly bizarre that this Jewish man would seek **hospitality**, and
- It was ceremonially **illegal** for this Jew to use a Samaritan's utensil for drinking or eating

Jesus was setting aside all sorts of common conventions and rules to reach out to this woman.

Like other accounts, ceremonial and religious hurdles would not keep Jesus from healing the sick, feeding the hungry, or leading the lost.

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989). Jn 4:1.

³*The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Jn 4:7-9.

Quickly, Jesus demonstrates that this conversation is not merely about *wetting his whistle*.

¹⁰Jesus 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.”⁴

Jesus always tailored a precise message to each situation, and each listener.

We often get *hung up* on one way that resonates with us to express spiritual truth. For example, in my Bible if I flip back just one page I can read the account of Jesus meeting with Nicodemus when Jesus explained that Nicodemus needed to be “born again.”

³Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again.”⁵

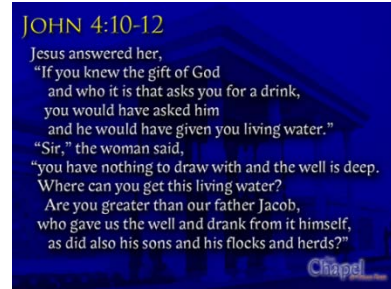
There are lots of us Christians, indeed entire movements who are *hung up* on that “born again” language. Now I don’t have any intent to disparage the notion of being “born again.” I am “born again.” I want you all to be “born again.” I want everyone to be “born again.” But Jesus only told Nicodemus, ***just this one guy*** in this one episode as far as the Bible tells us, that he ought to be “born again.”

In chapter 3, Jesus revealed the truth through the metaphor of being “born again.” Here in chapter 4, Jesus reveals Spiritual truth through this metaphor of “living water.”

Of course the woman didn’t *get it* right away... and neither would you or I. When we read this from the delicate pages of our Bibles, we have expectations that this woman simply would not have had. To her... this guy had to seem a bit odd, if not completely *nutto*.

¹¹“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?” ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?”⁶

Not only was he talking to a woman, a Samaritan woman, and asking to drink from her Samaritan pail from drawn from her Samaritan well... now he’s talking about *magic* water and may even be disparaging their common ancestor Jacob.



⁴ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Jn 4:10.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Jn 3:3.

⁶ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Jn 4:11-12.

Jesus went on with His Spiritual truth using the metaphor of the water that was at hand.

“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but those who drink 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.”⁷

JOHN 4:13,14

Jesus answered,
“Everyone who drinks this water
will be thirsty again,
but those who drink 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.”

Jesus came to bring life, abundant life. The Gospel of John, probably without parallel among the various books of the Bible, makes this mission of Jesus plain and clear.

We have noted before that *life* is one of John’s key concepts. *He uses the word at least thirty-six times.* Campbell Morgan has pointed out that mankind needs air, water, and food in order to have life. (We might also add that he needs light.) All of these are provided in Jesus Christ. He provides the “breath” (Spirit) of God (John 3:8; 20:22). He is the Bread of Life (John 6:48) and the Light of Life (John 1:4–5), and He gives us the water of life.⁸

Unlike physical water that only satisfies for a few short hours, the Spiritual water that Jesus brings to quench our thirsty souls fully satisfies. The gift of the Spirit that Jesus brings not only satisfies, it *reproduces*... not merely a one-time drink, but this Spiritual transformation of which Jesus speaks becomes a *spring* of water... an ongoing, continual source of life giving water.

The story unfolds and the Samaritan woman finally begins to “get it.” She so thoroughly understands that she quickly moves from *convert* to *evangelist*. Jesus reveals himself to this woman as the Christ, the Messiah that her people, and the Jews, longed for. Convinced by the claims Jesus made, and the supernatural knowledge he revealed, she went on to tell her people about Jesus. Let’s pick up the story at verse 39:

³⁹Many 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.

⁴²They 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.”⁹

Jesus is the Savior of the World. The Savior of His Disciples, these Samaritans, and the Savior of us too.

⁷ *The Holy Bible: Today’s New International Version.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Jn 4:13-14.

⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989). Jn 4:1.

⁹ *The Holy Bible: Today’s New International Version.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Jn 4:39-42.

Let's pause now and ask ourselves "so what?"

Let's *bring this home*.

- What can we learn from this episode?
- What can it mean for us today?
- How might this shape each of us?
- How might this shape all of us... what kind of a church can this help us be together?



I think we ought to ask ourselves again, "where did this take place, and what exactly were they talking about?"

Where did this take place? **The well**... tell me about the last time you were at the well. Was it this morning to make your breakfast? Maybe you stopped at the well before you stepped into church this morning?



I've never been anywhere without clean running water nearby. I'm a city boy; I don't think I've even camped anywhere that didn't have running water on the site.

While this is *a given*, normal to me and all of us, this isn't really **normal** for the human experience. Abundant, clean running water is a luxury enjoyed by less than half of the world's population today... and this, of course, is the most advanced we've ever been throughout history.

So let's ask ourselves again, "where did this episode take place?" 2,000 years ago in the West Bank in ancient Palestine, what was this scene? Where were they?

This was a critical point of survival. This was all about sustenance. Without this well, there would be no town, no crops, and no livestock. This wasn't merely a hole with water in it; it was a hole with money in it, food in it, family in it... it was a hole with **life** in it.

The idea that Jesus introduced in this episode of "thirsting again" was no small thing. What if the well goes dry?

Is there any way that we can relate? What are our "wells?"

- Economy
- Jobs
- Savings
- Health
- Family
- Reputation

What are the wells that we rely on everyday that are in danger of drying up?

In these turbulent economic times, the well has dried up for many.

- Friends are jobless, for the first time in their lives
- People are unable to retire the way they had planned
- Many are now unable to afford the lifestyle to which they have grown accustomed to

These are difficult days. The well is failing, and we're thirsty again... and Jesus meets us at the well. Jesus confronts us, and causes us to ask questions like:

- What can be trusted?
- What will sustain me?
- What do I really need to live?

The economy may be making us ask these questions. But these are really *Spiritual* questions.

Do our answers to these questions cause us to live differently? Might they even cause us to live **better**? Could difficulties like these, periods of suffering like this, cause of to live **deeper**?

The **culture** answers these questions differently. When asked "what do we need?" we are confronted with more, newer, and extravagant.

The **government** answers these questions differently too. When asked "what do we need?" we are confronted with needing to be cared for by lawmakers.

But how does Jesus cause us to answer these questions? When dealing with our wells, and confronting the reality that our wells could run dry, how does Jesus cause us to respond?

Thinking about the characters in this episode, this woman didn't get any magic water... at least not in any physical sense. She would need to drink again; she would thirst again, just like Jesus and His Disciples would thirst again. The physical needs for water, food, air, light, shelter would persist.

But Jesus calls us to consider these "needs." He calls us to look beyond the physical and temporal to the Spiritual and eternal.

God, speaking through the Prophet Jeremiah, puts it this way:

- 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.”¹⁰

JEREMIAH 2:11-13

Has a nation ever changed its gods?
(Yet they are not gods at all.)
But my people have exchanged their glorious God
for worthless idols.
Be appalled at this, you heavens,
and shudder with great horror,”
declares the LORD.
“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.”

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Je 2:13.

The choice offered here is between a spring and a cistern.

- Spring: an ongoing source of fresh, clean, running water
- Cistern: a bucket that collects rain water

Jeremiah calls it “sin” that God’s people chose their cisterns over God’s spring. They chose what they could gather and hoard for themselves. They picked what they could do for themselves, even if it was dirty, stagnant, and habitat for bugs and disease. Furthermore, the cisterns are broken... hopelessly leaky, unable to even hold water.

Isn’t it easy for us to make the same choice? Isn’t it easy for us to rely on what we can provide for ourselves... even when God provides a far superior choice?

This morning, let’s ask ourselves about our own broken cisterns. Or, better yet, let’s ask God to reveal to us the areas in our lives that are our cherished broken cisterns... the sources of life that we cling to that could be best met with, even overwhelmed by, God’s eternal spring of life.

Is it

- Money?
- Family?
- Health?

What *well* are we most concerned with today? Does it fully satisfy? Could it run dry?



Father, our prayer is that you would give us faith and courage to choose the spring of life over the lives we make for ourselves. Take our suffering and struggles and use them to turn us to You.