

The gift of eternal life

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[0 : 00] And let me lead us in a prayer. Almighty God and Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight.

! With John 4 open in front of us, what I want to do is talk this morning about a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ.

I wonder if I asked you this morning, I wonder how you naturally tend to think of yourself. Do you tend to think of yourself quite often as a somebody?

I've got quite a bit to offer in life. I do things well, people are glad to have me around, I'm on the up, I'm going places. Or do you tend to think of yourself some of the time more as a nobody?

I've got little to offer. People don't notice me and why should they? I'm on the edges of things. In fact, truth be told, I'm a bit of a failure sometimes, I don't really belong.

[1 : 06] In John chapter 3, the previous chapter, Jesus met a man called Nicodemus, who in the culture of the day had everything going for him. He was a man, he was a Jew, one of the chosen people, and he was a leading religious ruler, honoured and respected, serious and obedient, part of the inner circle and the top lot.

And in John 3, he came to Jesus and engaged with him. Nicodemus chapter 3, the total opposite of the woman at the well here in John 4.

Because she, in the culture of the day, has very little going for her. First, she is a woman. And for many Jewish men, you wouldn't really talk to a woman in public.

Second, she's a Samaritan. It's not her fault. She was born like that. A Samaritan means descended from the tribes of Israel from way back, but now a half-Jew, a racial half-breed, a Samaritan.

And Jews don't associate with people like that. The Samaritan's blood has been contaminated. They are unclean. She's a woman. She's a Samaritan.

[2 : 23] And she's an outsider to the people of God who doesn't belong. Imagine being back in the school playground, being made to feel on the outside. You're not joining in with us.

You're foreign. You're a girl. You smell. It's possible as an adult to still carry that sense of being on the outside because of who you are or where you've come from.

She's a woman. She's a Samaritan. She is also, in the text, as you see in the conversation with Jesus, a sinner and a sexual sinner. She got married a long time ago, but something went wrong. We don't know whose fault it is. Relationships are complicated. Maybe she'd been hurt. Maybe she wasn't satisfied, but she'd moved on. She'd taken or accepted another man and then another and then another.

And now, meeting Jesus today, she is bedding man number six. In Jesus' day, that's not a string of mistakes. It's wrong, immoral, sinful.

[3 : 28] It's dirty. She'd have known that, as would everyone else. Why is she coming to draw water in the heat of the day? Maybe no one does that unless they're avoiding people with their head down.

Just asking at the beginning, how do you naturally tend to think of yourself? Are you a Nicodemus kind of somebody doing well and worthy?

Or are you more of a Samaritan nobody? On the outside, dirty and unworthy. You know, even if on the outside some of us are fairly top dog confident Nicodemuses, it wouldn't be surprising if hidden away we carry things in our lives that make us feel unacceptable.

Something about who we are or where we're from or what we've done. That might make us think to ourselves, could the living God really have any interest in me?

And that is one way into this awkward and wonderful encounter in John chapter 4. See what happens in the story.

[4 : 40] Jesus had decided to leave Judah in the south and return to Galilee in the north. And to do that, verse 4, he had to go through Samaria. Look at this. And so he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

Jacob's well was there and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. So if you can picture it then, it's midday, the sun is beating down, Jesus sweating and exhausted, seated.

And at that moment, a woman appears to draw water. You picture it? Maybe she starts as she sees him. Wasn't expecting company at that time of the day.

Maybe she looks down at the ground, keeps her head turned away. He'll ignore me, surely. In the middle of verse 7, Jesus said to her, Will you give me a drink?

Such a simple question. But a first step as Jesus steps towards her. Which is what the Son of God does.

[5 : 44] Verse 9, the Samaritan woman said to him, You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink? Because Jews do not associate with Samaritans, John tells us.

So maybe she's suspicious. Certainly surprised. You are violating boundaries here, Jewish man, coming close to me. She doesn't even know yet that she's talking to the Son of God.

In verse 10, Jesus presses further and draws closer. He 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.

He invites her to ask for something. He's offering something good. Living water. Just ask. Sir, the woman said, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep.

Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock? Jesus answered, Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.

[6 : 59] Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water, welling up to eternal life. And so to this thirsty Samaritan woman, an author.

I'll give you water. You'll never thirst again. The water I give you is like a never-ending spring and there's eternal life there for you, if only you would ask me.

I've just come up out of the story for a moment. Notice two things about the salvation Jesus offers, emphasised in the text here.

And because this is what he's doing, he's offering her salvation. Firstly, the salvation Jesus offers is all gift. It's all gift. Verse 10, If you knew the gift of God, look at this, end of verse 10, he would have given you living water.

Verse 14, Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. The water I give. When a person encounters the Son of God, Jesus Christ, he doesn't demand that you give him things.

[8 : 11] He doesn't demand that she sorts her life out and only then will she be worthy of him. It might work like that in all sorts of other relationships, but it doesn't work like that with the living God.

She has nothing to give and nor do any of us. The salvation Jesus offers is pure, free gift. Just ask. When as a creature you thirst for God, or as Charles has said, I tried, I was still thirsty.

When you thirst for God and yet you sense your own guilt and unworthiness, and how could I? It's almost unbelievable to know that he gives it to you freely.

Secondly here, the salvation Jesus offers will satisfy your thirst. The language here of this conversation, by the way, is so clear and inviting.

Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. I mean, a couple of chapters time, Jesus will say, I am the bread of life.

[9 : 17] Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Such an emphasis in John's gospel. Jesus is bread and water for the soul.

And the gospel message is that, yes, Jesus comes to take away your sins so you won't be condemned, you can be forgiven. But also, along with that, as you come to know Jesus Christ, as you become an adopted child of God, you discover satisfaction.

Like a long, cool drink on a hot day. It's what's promised. The urges and desires of your heart, what you long for, you will find in rich relationship with him.

I'm just stepping aside for a moment. It's hard to quite know what this Samaritan woman understands at this point. But what Jesus offers does speak right into her life. Do you not think? Because six men in, I mean, what's driving that? So much of sexual sin, driving it, is a thirst for intimacy and a yearning for relationship and a desire to be held and accepted and known at the deepest level.

[10:41] But you'd imagine she doesn't find it. Or it's been a short-term high and gone again and again. And so she tries again with someone else. It's addictive and disappointing and shameful.

Because I wonder whether she's looking in the wrong place to have her thirst quenched. She is. I like that for her.

I like that. It's like that with pornography. You want intimacy and satisfaction. You imagine it. But it so obviously leaves you guilty and thirsty again.

It doesn't deliver. It won't. And 100 years ago, Oswald Chambers, a Scottish pastor, wrote, there is only one being who can satisfy the last aching abyss of the human heart.

And that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Because only in Jesus Christ and in knowing God the Father through him with the Holy Spirit in me will I find the acceptance and satisfaction I so desperately want.

[11:47] Jesus says here to this woman, hard to know what she understands at this point, when you know God deeply and that is what the Gospel offers, you will never thirst again.

And back to the story and the conversation and verse 15. See what's happened so far. Jesus has stepped towards her. Could you imagine like the true bridegroom she needs?

And he's offered her living water to quench her thirst. And in verse 15, she has at least understood something. The woman said to him, sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.

At which point now Jesus gets closer even more still and more personal with her. He told her, go, call your husband and come back.

So you imagine her stiffening and nervous and looking into his eyes. He doesn't know about me, does he? A quick reply, short to the point, I have no husband, she replied.

[12:57] Let's move the conversation on. I've spoken the truth. Jesus said to her, you're right when you say you have no husband. Fact is, you've had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband.

What you have said just now is quite true. Something very frightening, maybe, about being exposed like that.

I mean, that old story about Conan Doyle who wrote Sherlock Holmes. He once sent an identical message to 12 of his friends all at the top of their different professions, the army, the politics and industry and finance.

And the message he sent to them simply said, flee for your life, all is discovered. And within 24 hours, 11 of 12 had left the country. something really awful about imagining people finding out what we're really like.

It's why we keep things hidden from each other. It's why sexual sins get covered up. It's why even in churches we struggle to be honest and open with each other because at some level we're petrified that if people knew what we're really like, you'd run a mile from me.

[14:10] And Jesus on purpose is eyeballing this woman and saying to her, do you realise I know you? No other reason for him to say this. I know you. Back in chapter 1 Jesus saw Nathaniel and knew him.

In chapter 2 Jesus knew what was in each person. That is, you can't put on a front with Jesus or hide from him.

He sees us, he sees into us, he sees everything we've ever done and I guess he would say to you and me this morning, the now risen, reigning Lord Jesus, do you realise that I know you?

I know you. Which might be scary in part. And yet, and this is one of the wonders of the Gospel, the Lord Jesus wants this woman and he wants us to know that he sees right into the depths and folds of our heart and that everything about us is laid bare before him.

He wants us to know that he knows us and that still knowing all that he still offers us living water. It's pure grace on offer here.

[15:29] And part of God's grace through Jesus is to expose us completely and still say to us come to me, come to me. Maybe the conversation has got too close to the bone now.

And so, verse 19, Sir, the woman said, I can see that you are a prophet. You know things, you know things about me. Here's a question.

Our Samaritan ancestors worshipped on this mountain but you Jews claim that the place we must worship is Jerusalem. What do you say to that Jesus? One angle you might think is she's pulling back from him here.

I think though actually this is still a very personal and significant question. It really is. I'm a Samaritan woman and you Jewish men are offering me water and eternal life but we can't worship where you do.

We can't join in, remember. We're outsiders. I don't belong. Can't. Answer.

[16:40] Woman, Jesus replied. Believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know.

We worship what we do know for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth.

For they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is Spirit and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth. Worshipping the Father is what this woman and every human being is designed for and made for.

to be loved by God and accepted into his presence to see him as he really is and know him deeply and fall down before him in glad service worshipping the Father.

That's what will quench our thirst. And Jesus says to the Samaritan now you can come in. Now you can belong.

[17:46] The prophecy of Ezekiel 37 years beforehand had looked forward to the day when Jews and Samaritans would be united once more under the Messiah.

They'd be saved from their sins and cleansed and they would be God's people. When the Messiah comes he will do that. And Jesus says here the time has now come.

The time has now come where where you're from and what you've done is no longer a barrier. You Samaritans you worship God in the spirit and in truth now.

God the Holy Spirit gives you new birth a spring of sin cleansing life giving water in you. Jesus the Messiah speaks truth you listen and believe in him and you become an acceptable worshipper and an accepted worshipper.

Samaritan woman the father is seeking worshippers and now the offer is there for you even you.

That's the story the narrative next week we'll go on further in this encounter.

[19:07] With John 4 in front of us what we've looked at so far we're talking this morning about a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. So wonderful in John's Gospel that he encounters individuals Nicodemus the woman the man the paralytic.

Let me just ask whether this morning you call yourself a committed Christian a lapsed Christian a non-believer whatever has this conversation here has it prodded you or has it connected with you in some way?

It might be that for a very long time you have felt you could never belong in God's family because of who you are or because of where you're from the kind of people you belong to or your ethnic background or your family history.

It may be that like the Samaritan woman there is stuff in your life which you are ashamed of or you should be ashamed of.

It may even be like the woman here unhealthy addictive sexual sin and it does cross your mind whether you are too unclean for God.

[20:26] This morning with John 4 in front of us would you allow the healing balm of the gospel of Jesus Christ to get to work on you? Jesus is the Messiah he is the Christ he was sent into the world to save the world and Jesus the Son of God knows you he sees right into you and Jesus the Son of God offers you living water a gift of grace offers you cleansing and salvation and thirst quenching life with God.

God the Father seeks your worship and he only can satisfy the desires of your heart. You are meant to read John's gospel and see that it is true and believe in Jesus you are meant to come to Jesus Christ and ask him for a drink and this Son of God who went to the cross and cried out I am thirsty and then died in shame for people like us this Son of God washes away our sins and covers over our shame and ushers us into the presence of the Father completely accepted and he promises us that with faith in him we will never thirst again.

As an adopted dearly loved child of the living God soaked in his grace towards us we will never thirst again that is the promise. Final thing to say it could be that some of this conversation in John 4 some of what's been said doesn't make complete sense to us and it needs explaining more and if you think that that's okay you'd not be alone in thinking that because look John 4 verse 25 at the end of the conversation by the well in the midday heat the woman said I know that Messiah called Christ is coming and when he comes he will explain everything to us so you think was it too new for her too complicated was it too much to take in in one go was it too good to be true don't know but Jesus has one final word for her looking into her eyes

Jesus declared I the one speaking to you I am he that is don't look for answers anywhere else and don't look for acceptance anywhere else and don't look to meet your thirst anywhere else listen to Jesus listen to Jesus and then come to him I'm going to lead us in a prayer and then we're going to sing together let's pray Jesus says whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life our Lord and our God we thank you for Jesus Christ the Messiah the long promised one thank you that through him there is salvation that not only brings us forgiveness but satisfies our thirst to be accepted and acceptable worshippers of you is what we're made for what we're saved for would you help us help us to be men and women who know our thirsts and desires and who come to you in repentance and faith and accept the gift that you offer thank you that your son thirsted for us died for us that we might be cleansed of our sins and have them covered thank you that there is salvation in this Lord Jesus Christ who is the saviour of the world in Jesus name amen so