

The Bad Samaritan

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[0 : 0 0] Our Heavenly Lord, we bow before you now and we ask that you would stir up in us a spiritual thirst and a spiritual hunger for the living water and the bread of heaven and help us not to be satisfied with anything else.

And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Please sit down. If you would open the Bible back to John chapter 4, 888, 889.

Very long passage, lots of things to say. As you do that, at the 9 o'clock this morning, while Jeremy was talking to the children, out of nowhere, one of the little girls lifted up a hand and Jeremy held the mic down to her and she said, Jesus loves me.

It's just this beautiful moment. So Jeremy affirmed it and kept going and then a little boy put his hand up and he put the mic down and he said, I love Jesus.

I thought, oh, I got nothing to say after you. That's the whole thing right there. And then I thought, no, no, that is exactly what John 4 is about.

[1 : 1 0] It's about Jesus loves me. I love Jesus. Fantastic. This is the second week in our series of meeting Jesus. And last week we met Nicodemus in the dark in Jerusalem.

And now we come up to Samaria and you could not have a bigger contrast. This is a woman who is looked down on. She's despised. She is uneducated. She's on the edge.

She has no status whatsoever. And the first half of the passage, which I'm going to go 4 to 26, is really about how this woman comes to meet Jesus.

It's brilliant. Just watching Jesus at work is such a privilege. The second half, which is 27 down to 42, is now watching her testify to Jesus.

It's amazing. So we're going to do these two things together. And the main picture in the first half is water, spiritual water. And the main picture in the second half is spiritual food.

[2 : 1 8] It's a very clever passage. So firstly, verses 4 to 26, this first half, I've called it spiritual thirst, soul-satisfying water. And you've got to love this woman.

She is sceptical and wary and openly hostile to Jesus. Way down until verse 16. She's rude to him. And what helps us get into this are a couple of very strange details at the beginning.

The first one is in verse 4, where we're told that he had to pass through Samaria to go back up to Galilee. He didn't have to pass through Samaria. This is a comment that Jesus had a sense that this was God's will for him. The second strange detail is that he gets to this town called Sychar at noon in the boiling heat, and he's exhausted.

We're told, is that verse 6? He's wearied from the journey. He just collapses down on the ground, and the 12 hungry disciples go off to get some food. This is important.

He's not pretending to be tired. This is part of Jesus taking on human flesh and our weakness, entering in, putting himself in the place of need and vulnerability.

[3 : 3 0] Even more surprising, next verse, a woman comes from the village to collect water by herself in the middle of the day, in the heat of the day.

In these villages, you never collect water in the heat of the day. It's at the beginning and the end of the day, because you don't go out there in the heat. And secondly, you never go alone. That's dangerous to do. And even most surprising, now let me just pause there for a second.

We're meant to see immediately she's avoiding contact with people. The fact that she chooses to come to do this at the wrong time and without anyone means she's isolating herself. She's wanting to avoid people.

And we find out why in just a moment. But the most surprising thing is that Jesus speaks to her and asks her for a drink. And he just casually crosses a whole raft of boundaries which you never cross.

Religious, cultural, social, Jews and Samaritans. They didn't even touch each other's food things. And you can hear how scandalous this is from the hostility of her response in verse 9.

[4 : 35] She says, how is it, she's angry, how is it that you, a Jew, can ask me, a woman of Samaria, for a drink?

And then I think the next phrase is probably her speaking. Jews don't even touch what Samaritans touch. It's a bit of a contemptuous response. It's like she is saying, you cannot be serious.

I can list the historical atrocities that your people have committed against my people over the last 400 years and you want me to get a drink for you? Ha! Last bit I added in.

This is a deep and historic hatred. It's Hutu and Tutsi. It's Ukrainian versus Russia. It's Turk and Armenian. It's Croat and Serb. This is deep hostility.

And it's not a good start. As a way of bringing someone into faith. Not a good way to begin, is it? I would bail from this conversation now, but Jesus does something absolutely wonderful.

[5 : 39] He offers her salvation by appealing to her imagination. She's come for water. In verse 10 he says, If you knew the gift of God, who it is that was saying to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

He says, I may be thirsty, but you're really thirsty. You've got the bucket, but I've got the gift of God, living water. She's so filled with prejudice though, this is confusing for her.

She's already said something angry, two things angry, and she's not used to someone to whom she's hostile offering her grace and gifts. But in verse 11 she's not buying it.

She mocks Jesus. You see that in verse 11? She says, listen buddy, I'm used to dealing with men who make big claims for themselves and can't deliver. You think you're any better than our old father Jacob who dug this well?

You don't even have a bucket, let alone a spade. What are you going to do? And Jesus patiently explains living water. In kindness he says, it's not like H₂O, physical water.

[6 : 46] You drink physical water, you'll thirst again. Verse 14, whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

When I was in high school, we were forced compulsorily into military cadets. And each year we were sent on camp. I've got to describe this to you.

Ten days, two weeks, we were sent close to the outback in the middle of summer. A couple of hundred boys to a military installation. And I don't think they really knew what to do with us.

So someone came up with a brilliant idea of sending us on marches from 8am to 8pm. And really, we would march out into the countryside, 40 degree heat, with no water.

They never supplied us with water. Actually, this is, you're getting more details than the 9 o'clock. They used to send us through live firing ranges.

[7 : 47] And you'd hear explosions round about, and you would think, we're very tough for doing this. However, they promised at the end of the day, at the end of the march, there was this big water tank with fresh water.

And there was. There was a number of them. And it was just fantastic. And you drank, and you drank, and you drank. And you threw it all over yourself. And it all, you felt strangely like it was worth it going 10 hours without water.

Or is that just an Australian response? I don't know. But Jesus has chosen this idea of living water. Because it can refer either to water that bubbles up like a spring.

But he means more than that. He means eternal life. And he's doing this because, you see, this is an Old Testament idea.

God calls himself the spring of living water. It's a picture of life, eternal life, and goodness, and transformation, and purity, and satisfaction. Verse 15, she's completely unimpressed.

[8 : 52] Sir, she says, give me this water that I won't be thirsty, or have to come out here to draw water in the middle. You hear what she's saying? She's saying, I don't want your fancy words. I want some indoor plumbing.

You can do something. If you can give me this water, she says, you're going to save me from the humiliation of coming out here by myself in the middle of the day and avoiding everyone. It would be great. She is what some people would call a tough nut.

And then in verse 16, we reach the turning point. Till now, Jesus speaks of soul water. But what he does is, now he puts his hand on what is her greatest need, weakness, failure, to show her that she

is actually very, very spiritually thirsty.

She's hiding it well. And he simply tells her to call her husband. Call your husband. This is the elephant in the room. This is the elephant at the well.

And it's very interesting. He doesn't bring the weight of God's judgment and the law to her. But he's testing her to see if she's going to be truthful. And this is an essential part of meeting Jesus.

[10:06] We have to come to terms with who we really are, what's really going on and what we've done. What we've done to ruin our lives and ruin the lives of others. We can't come to the living water without that.

This is what the Bible calls repentance. We can't drink the living water if we're gorging ourselves on dirty puddles. And now in verse 17, for the first time, she just answers simply and truthfully.

It's not the complete truth. She says, I have no husband. Because there's all this guilt and pain around it. She doesn't really want to get into it too much. And Jesus' response is beautiful.

Twice, he commends her truthfulness. He says, you're right. He fills it out a bit. He says, you've had five husbands. The guy you're living with right now is not your husband. Very personal, very authentic, and very exposing.

And I think many of us have misread her response in verse 19 to 20 as evasive, trying to sidestep.

She says, sir, I see you're a prophet. And then she starts to talk about worship.

[11:10] No, no, no. A prophet is the highest category she can think in right now. And it's a recognition that God is speaking to her through the prophet's job, basically, was to expose sin.

She says, you've seen me to my very depths, and yet you're still offering me eternal life. God is behind what you're saying. And she gets to worship because they're standing in the shadow of the hill, Mount Gerizim.

The Samaritan said, no, you can only worship God at Gerizim. The Jews, you can only worship God in Jerusalem. And she says, I'm in trouble. Where do I go for help? If you're a prophet, help me know how I can go to God for forgiveness and grace and direction.

How do I deal with this? And I think that's why Jesus' answer in verses 21 to 24 is so full of good, goodness, and life.

But we don't have time to look at it. Just notice, please, that he says to her that God is seeking her. And she leans into it.

[12:15] And finally, in verse 25, she confesses her hope in the coming Messiah. The Samaritans had some sort of hope of a Messiah. And in verse 26, Jesus' response is the clearest statement in all the Gospels that he knows exactly that he is the Messiah.

I who speak to you am he. Because Jesus is keener and more eager that we receive the living water than we are to drink.

And he's led this woman. And because of her sincerity, and because she said to him, give me this water, he does. And if you want that living water, if you say with sincerity to Jesus, I want that living water, he will give it to you.

And right at this moment, this tender moment, this electrical moment in the passage, the disciples blunder in with the food.

Verse 27. And she takes off. Verse 28. Leaving a water jar on the ground. Because now that she's begun to drink this living water, it becomes an overflowing spring in her and she wants others to drink it as well.

[13:28] So I want to move from the spiritual thirst and the soul-satisfying water to the second part of the passage. And in the second half of the passage, the main picture is spiritual hunger and soul-satisfying food.

Verses 27 and forward. The disciples are surprised, shocked that Jesus is talking to this woman. And throughout this section, they are so focused on physical food, they miss out on what's going on around them.

As they are talking with Jesus, these Samaritans are coming out of the village and talking to Jesus and coming to faith in him because the woman has raced back in and given testimony. And what a change in her, verses 27 to 29.

As soon as she begins drinking the living water, this water of soul-satisfaction, she dumps the jar by the well. Completely impractical thing to do.

Race us back into the village to find as many people as she possibly can, the very people who she had been working so hard to avoid. Because now she's got something to share with them.

[14 : 34] And what she says in verse 29 is just lovely and spontaneous and authentic. It has the ring of honesty to it. She says, Come see a man who told me all I ever did. Can this be the Christ?

Please notice, she's not preaching. She's not even evangelizing. She's not been to one training course at St. John's. She knows very little.

She's grasped one thing. She says, Come see a man. Come see a man. This is, I think this is brilliant for us in terms of testimony. The heart of Christian testimony is not explaining and arguing and proving and getting everything straight.

It's basically us saying, Come see a man. She's become to experience this living water. She wants others to as well. Because living water, eternal life, just cannot lie buried and inactive in our hearts. It can't be hidden. And the great irony is that what she says is, She picks out the very thing that caused her shame and isolation and hiding.

[15 : 39] She says, She told me all I ever did. And they said, Really? There's no polish. There's no clever words here. She's no longer trying to hide.

Because this thing that she was so desperately trying to hide from others, like we are all the time, has become the source of healing and eternal life and testimony.

Don't you think that one of the key ways Satan has of silencing our testimony is to make us to begin to think that our performance is not good enough for us to testify. That somehow the spiritual power of living water depends on my goodness and my having it all together.

If you wait until you have it all together, you're going to die before you testify. Here's a suggestion. Take the very worst thing that you've done in your life and tell your friends how God has met you and cleansed you and forgiven you in it.

Actually, that would be a conversation to have. And you could no longer remain the focus of the conversation for too long. Now, I'm saying this because there are all kinds of ways to testify.

[16 : 53] For Nicodemus, you remember last week, the way he testified, he tried to say something. It was terrible. Really, we wait until the end of the gospel. And the way he did was by using his money and by putting his reputation on the line by taking Jesus off the cross and making sure he got a decent burial.

See, what this woman says rings absolutely true for her neighbours and the very thing that had kept her from people and kept her from Christ now becomes her liability, becomes the greatest asset. Her open testimony to the reality of Christ's forgiveness is so truthful that the Samaritans come out to meet him. They ask him to stay and they then hear his words and they come to faith and they drink the living waters.

So, step back a bit. The first half of the chapter is about the woman at the well focused on physical water. Then Jesus explains spiritual water, living water.

Now, Jesus now explains this testimony of the woman and these Samaritans coming to faith in terms of spiritual food.

[18 : 07] He wants the disciples to see as he sees by speaking about soul satisfying food. So, let's go back to 31.

The Samaritans are gathering around and hearing Jesus' words. And verse 31, the disciples give a commandment to Jesus. Rabbi, eat. I can't think elsewhere where anyone gives Jesus a command, any of the disciples, except maybe Peter, don't go to the cross.

What does Jesus say? Verse 32. He says, I have food you don't know about. Verse 24. My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

He hasn't eaten any lunch. He hasn't drunk any water so far as we know. What nourishes Jesus is doing the will of God. And he appeals to the disciples' imagination.

He says, look, you know those matzos in your hand? There's something more satisfying. It's going to satisfy your soul. The most gratifying and fulfilling thing for Jesus is to do the will of the Father in heaven.

[19 : 18] And in this context particularly, it's bringing eternal life to other people. Jesus is delighted to bring eternal life.

It gives him pleasure. It's like spiritual sustenance for him. It is his soul food. So you see, Jesus testifies to the woman and he sows the seed of eternal life.

And then she comes to faith in Jesus and he reaps that seed. She then goes and sows the seed of eternal life by saying this minuscule thing about Jesus.

Come and see Jesus. The Samaritans come and they are reaped as well. And they become the harvest for eternal life. So verse 35.

Look, I tell you, says Jesus, lift up your eyes. See the fields of white for harvest. 38. Just as I was sent, I send you to reap that for which you don't labor.

[20 : 20] Others have labored and you enter into their labor. He's talking about the woman, I think. So, stay with me. If you're drifting off, come back.

Or I'll make the wind blow through the window, through the cross there. Sound effects. No, I won't. I can't do that. Jesus wants us all to enjoy more than living water.

He wants us to enjoy the sole satisfaction of coming others, of seeing others come to taste the living water. Part of the blessing of living water is the work of allowing God to sow and reap through you.

And that is soul food. When I was in Australia last century, I was a youth leader in a church. And we used to practice a thing called the 40-hour famine.

It happened here in Canada as well. It was an event where we got all our kids in the youth group to starve for 40 hours, to raise money for awareness, for world hunger.

[21 : 26] And at the end of the weekend, we would have an event where we had a meal from Africa, which was small but very nutritious and tasty. And all these kids would come in, you know, these kids who were so used to sugar and they would drag themselves and drag each other in, exhausted and hungry.

And they would taste the food and boom, it was absolutely wonderful again. Well, spiritual water is great to drink.

But it's so good you can drop your water jar and run back in because it wells up to eternal life. But there's another thing for us and that is tasting the joy of the Father's will in working eternal life into the lives of others.

See, it's a miracle for someone to come to a place of seeing they need eternal life. It's also a miracle for God to bring his people to the place of knowing that they need to share eternal life with others.

Don't get me wrong. Jesus never commissions us all to be preachers. But for everyone who tastes the living water, it's part of the tasting that we will testify to what God has done.

[22 : 38] And when we have an opportunity to testify, we then taste the spiritual food of doing the Father's will. I think this is a word for us today at St. John's.

I think some of us feel we're just too busy to testify to Christ. I am doing so many good things. I couldn't possibly make a detour to Samaria and stop and testify to what Christ has done for me. I think others feel we don't really know enough to testify. I might make a mistake. I might muddle it low up. No, Jesus says, just say, come see a man. I think others tell ourselves that I'm not an extrovert.

I'm not a preacher. And it makes me feel awkward. It makes them feel awkward to testify. I'll just pray for them. And what all these things share in common is basically we don't want to be disliked. None of us do. And we're embarrassed about Jesus and ashamed of the gospel. And we nod our agreement at the harvest, but we're actually too ashamed to testify.

[23 : 43] When Jesus is the only thing we should never be ashamed of. A lovely thing. Jesus doesn't pretend this is easy. He uses a farming picture and he uses the word labor three times in verse 38.

There's only one command in this passage. And that is lift up your eyes and see. That's what Jesus really wants. He wants us to lift up our eyes and to see people as he does.

As those dying of spiritual thirst. Who, if they do not come to faith in Jesus Christ, will not have the living water. Eternal life will pass them by and they will perish eternally.

And I think many of us sense this has become far more difficult to testify to Christ today than it was any time in our lives. And yet these words of Jesus remain true.

The harvest is ready. Readier, I think, than we think. There is more interest in Jesus than we can imagine. So, this is a season for us as a church. 2018.

[24 : 45] To seek God. Ask him to stir up our spiritual hunger for the will of God. To see others as he does. And to allow the living water to well up and overflow our lives into the lives of others.

Would you join me in praying for this very thing right now? Let's bow our heads. Our loving Lord, we praise you and thank you for your skill and grace and kindness in this story.

And we feel humbled by it. Thank you for this, the liveliness of this woman. And then the eternal liveliness of her grasping and then witnessing.

We pray that you would stir up in us a spiritual hunger for the will of the Father. That you would help us to see as you see.

And that that living water might well up from us and overflow to others. We pray this in the name of your glory. Amen.