

Greater Water

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[0 : 00] Oh, good evening, everybody. Great to see you. If you're new, special welcome to you. My name's Aaron. I'd love to meet you afterwards.

Come and say hi. So we are in a series in John, and you've just heard the passage read that we're going to be looking at tonight, and goodness me, what a passage it is. There's a lot going on. You could read this quickly, and you could say, right, okay, so Jesus is on his way somewhere to Galilee. He stops in Samaria. He meets a woman, and he's really kind to her and tells her about God's love for her using the metaphor of water, and that would be broadly accurate.

But behind every aspect of this story, there is a huge back story. So let's get into it and have a look. Well, for a start, we are not surprised that Jesus is talking to this woman.

But we should be, because respectable Jewish men in those days didn't just idly chat to females. It was just not, you just didn't do it.

[1 : 12] It was sort of taboo. It was like trying to talk to somebody on a bus in Vancouver. I don't know if you've ever, I was on a bus the other day, and there was a guy near the front who was not from here, obviously, and just started chatting to this person opposite them quite loudly.

What's your name? So what's your name? What's your name? And honestly, I was sitting at the back of the boat. You could feel the tension rising in the bus, because no one says anything. You could feel like everyone just going, oh my goodness, this guy's a killer, or he was a pervert, or he was a weirdo.

What's he doing? Just taboo. You just don't do it. So, we're looking at, so, there is this gender barrier straight away that Jesus breaks through, just chatting to this woman.

That's not the only barrier that he breaks through, because she's not just any woman. She's a Samaritan woman. So first, five times in the first nine verses, it uses the word Samaritan or Samaria.

It wants us to be in no doubt where he is. Now you might think, what's the big deal of Samaria? Well, when you hear the word Samaritan, you probably think good things.

[2 : 24] You think, the good Samaritan. That's a positive thing. You might think Samaritan's purse, which is a well-known aid agency. I don't think any of you think, anyone here would think, religiously confused, unclean half-breed.

Would you? I mean, that just sounds awful what I said, right? That just sounds terrible. Who would say that? Well, this is just what Jews in the first century probably thought.

That's probably a fair description of that woman in their mind. So here's the back story to that. So 700 years before this, this area of Samaria was overtaken by the Assyrians, and they had a really, really fantastically evil strategy for overtaking areas.

Very effective. So they would basically go in and they would ship out all the important people. So all the upper class people, all the leaders, all the politicians, all the artisans, anyone that's sort of interesting or important or talented.

They got rid of them. They took them somewhere else. And then they'd import all of these foreigners into the country. And with all these foreigners came the foreigners' faith, their pagan faith.

[3 : 38] And what happened in Samaria is that these groups of people, so just the peasants were left, and then you import all these foreigners. And they all intermarried, it all gets intermingled, and their faith all gets sort of mashed up together.

And it becomes kind of some weird kind of Jewish, idolatrous, pagan, kind of syncretistic sort of thing. So the upshot, the Jews surrounding Samaria hated the Samaritans.

They viewed them as cultural traitors, as idolaters. They were like the mudbloods, to use Harry Potter. Parlance. Parlance?

Parlance. Now, I mean, you could just touch like a Samaritan and sort of, you'd be ritualistically sort of unclean. It was so bad that a proper Jew wouldn't actually, so this is where Jesus was, for example, right here, right?

And this is Galilee, and there's Samaria here. There's this big body of water here. So a proper Jew would actually, before they got to Samaria, would actually cross the body of water, go up this coast, and then back over to avoid it.

[4 : 43] So Jesus chatted to this woman, this Samaritan woman. So a major ethnic and religious barrier he pushed through. But she wasn't just any old woman, and she wasn't just any old Samaritan woman.

She was a compromised woman. You see in verse 6 there, Jesus met a woman at a well, and it was the sixth hour.

So the sixth hour, they start counting hours, so zero is sort of like daybreak, so they say like 6 a.m., for example. And so the sixth hour is probably midday, the hottest time of the day.

This is the worst time of the day you want to be doing manual labor. But no one goes out during this time of the day, it's just too hot, it's awful. And it was hard work. Jacob's well is still there, you can visit it.

And it's about 100 feet deep before you actually hit water. So it was difficult work. So why would this woman collect this water at the hottest time of the day when sensible people wouldn't?

[5 : 51] Well, she goes at that time to avoid people. In particular, probably other women. If you read on, you'll find out, and we're going to talk about this next week, she was married five times, and the guy she's currently living with is not her husband.

So that track record, that's not a good look in our culture, let alone 2,000 years ago in a small religious village. So she goes at midday because she doesn't want to deal with the stares and the accusations and the rejection.

She's an outcast. So the barriers Jesus crossed to reach her. Religious, moral, ethnic, gender. And yet he did cross them to strike up a conversation that would change her world. Now your average Orthodox Jewish male in those days, I mean every instinct in their body would have said, stay away, stay away.

Don't talk to her. Don't touch her. Try to not look at her. And yet Jesus doesn't avoid her. In fact, he's desperate to meet her. And I think she's the reason that he went through to Samaria.

[7 : 00] If you look in verse 4 there, it says, Jesus had to pass through Samaria. That little detail, he had to pass through Samaria. He had to. It could mean he had to pass through to get to Galilee. Or it could mean there was a compulsion.

There was an urgency. There was an urge. There was a desire. There was an intent. He had to go through there. Because there was someone to meet. Now let's press pause on this for a moment. Think about how this encounter follows on from Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus. So we've got this woman.

And then just before this, you've got Jesus has this conversation with Nicodemus. And they're quite long conversations, right? There's a bit of interaction. There's a bit of detail. While they put them beside each other like that, Jesus talks to Nicodemus.

Jesus talks to a Samaritan woman. Nicodemus. Male. Religiously trained. Respected. Powerful. This woman. Female. No name.

[8 : 01] She's not even given a name. She's culturally impure. She is religiously dodgy. She's morally compromised. She's isolated. She's a reject.

Why would these accounts put these two events together? It's because Nicodemus is a wonderful example of the truth that no one can rise so high in life that they are above the need for salvation. And the Samaritan woman is an amazing example of the truth that no one can sink so low that they are below the offer of salvation. The Bible puts these two things together because they represent the scope of the gospel.

The scope of it. Now listen to me here. Do you see how... Do you see how Jesus doesn't relate to people like we do? He had no problem taking the initiative with people who appeared to be no good, who had made terrible decisions in their life, who had pasts, pasts that they didn't want other people to know about.

Perhaps you're here tonight and you're thinking about all the barriers you have to overcome to have a conversation with Jesus. Like, I can't talk to Jesus. I can't be with Jesus because of this, this, and this reason.

[9 : 29] Goodness. You have to clean up your act to talk to Jesus. You have to become a respectable Nicodemus-type person. That's just not what we see here, is it? What we see here is actually becoming a religiously respectable person can perhaps take you further away from Jesus.

Jesus initiates with the most unlikely people and pursues them, people like you. Alright, where are we in this sermon right now?

If you split the passage into two parts, what I've said up to this first part here, this is probably about the first half of the text, and I could summarize it by saying, this is the scope of the gospel.

It's for everyone. You're not above it, and you're not below it. I'd say the second half of our passage is about the substance of the gospel. So what is the gospel? What's the heart of it?

What's the guts of it? Have a look at verse 9 there. We see the woman is really surprised by Jesus interacting with her, and Jesus responds with this line. He says, 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.

[10 : 46] She responds in verse 11. She doesn't really kind of get it right. She doesn't really know what's going on there. And then Jesus says, Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I give him will never be thirsty again, and the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

So Jesus is saying to her, I can give you something that will satisfy your soul. And he describes it as living water. Why describe it as living water? This is an arid place that they live in.

And water was life. Without water you die. So Jesus is saying, As basic as water is to you physically, what I'm going to give to you is as necessary as water.

Without it there's death. I can give you something that will satisfy that thirst in your heart. Now when we think about what satisfies us, we probably often think about something outside of us.

Probably. What's something outside of us that will satisfy us? You know, money, power, and the perfect spouse, great boyfriend, girlfriend, house, job, degree. Jesus is saying, There's nothing outside of you that is going to satisfy the deep, deep thirst that's inside of you.

[12 : 04] In fact, pouring your hope into something outside of you is going to hurt you in the end. I want to give you something inside. A spring of water welling up to eternal life inside of you.

On the cover of Newsweek earlier this year, January 15 maybe, the cover was dedicated to a guy called David Foster Wallace. So on the front of it it said The Turbulent Genius of David Foster Wallace.

He was a writer, maybe you've heard of him, writer and educator. He committed suicide in 2007. Not a religious man, but a fabulous writer, very insightful. He wrote *The Pale King* and something else I can't quite remember.

So he was famous for those books and they're still very, very popular. He was also famous for a commencement speech he made at a university called Kenyon, Kenyon University in Ohio.

And I want to read a chunk of it out. It's very good because I think he summarizes really well what happens when we trust in things, even good things, for our happiness.

[13 : 14] What happens when you pour yourself into something outside of yourself or you pour yourself into something that doesn't deserve your trust really. So let me read quite an extended quote from that commencement speech.

Here we go. In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. So remember, this guy's not a religious person. There is no such thing as not worshipping.

Everybody worships and the only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of God or spiritual type of thing to worship is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive if you worship money and things.

If they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you'll never have enough. Never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you'll always feel ugly and when time and age start showing and you die a million deaths before they finally grieve you.

On one level, we all know this stuff, he says. It's been codified as myths, proverbs, clichés, epigrams, parables and the skeleton of every great story. The whole trick is keeping the truth up front in daily consciousness.

[14:27] Worship power and you'll end up feeling weak and afraid and you'll never, ever and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear.

Worship your intellect. Being seen as smart and you'll end up feeling stupid, fraud, always on the verge of being found out. But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is that they're unconscious.

They are the default settings. Very, very insightful. End of quote. So this woman turns up at the well every day with an empty bucket to get water and it's a picture of her life.

A cycle of thirst and temporary satisfaction and thirst and temporary satisfaction and thirst and temporary satisfaction. And we find out later she's trying to find joy in relationships and all these marriages and it's a cycle she cannot escape because that's what she's committed her heart to. This is the one thing if I get sorted I will be happy, I'll be satisfied, I'll feel complete, I'll feel like a woman or I'll feel like a man or whatever it is she wants to feel that she thinks she needs to feel.

[15:34] And Jesus offers her a wellspring of life that can't be taken away from her. And we find out later as we get through John that this wellspring of life he's talking about is the Holy Spirit, it's the presence of God in her.

It's acceptance and forgiveness and unconditional love of God. And the amazing thing is we see here that this, this thing here is a gift, it's described that as a gift.

I just want to give it. I searched you out. I went through Samaria to find you, to give you this gift. That was my purpose just to give you something.

Which means it's not a prize. This means it's not something she's discovered. It's not a reward. You just receive it. It's a gift.

Verse 10. And how does it compete with all of those things that we crave? All of those other things. All those other frail things.

[16:33] Well, let me quote somebody else here. Malcolm Muggeridge. This is somebody you might not have heard of but he's quite famous. Oh, you would have heard of him. I'm just pointing to an English gentleman over here.

So he was a British satirist. Sort of a media personality. Second half of the 20th century. Became a Christian later on in life. Fascinating guy. World War II spy.

Really interesting guy. Anyway, became a Christian later on in life. He said this. And he's talking about what it means to be successful and what he's experienced in Christ.

So he says this. I may, I suppose, regard myself or pass for being as a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me on the streets. That's fame. I can fairly easily earn enough to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the internal revenue.

That's success. Furnished with money and a little fame, even the elderly, if they care to, may partake in trendy diversions. That's pleasure. It may happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heated for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time.

[17:41] That's fulfillment. Yet I say to you, and I beg you to believe me, multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing, less than nothing, a positive impediment, treasured, measured against one draft of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty, irrespective of who or what they are.

Having that living water, the life of God in you, means that you can actually achieve amazing things in your life, beauty and power and fame and money, but not be enslaved by them.

And it means you can live a life of great struggle, but not without hope or inner joy. And this is what Jesus offered this outcast by this world.

So we've looked at the scope of the gospel. We've looked at the substance of the gospel. And lastly, just very, very quickly, I want to look at how she responded to all of this.

That's very interesting. So the question, the question is this. Did she know what Jesus was talking about? No. I don't think so. Not really. He offered her living water.

[19:03] And I think she thought he was talking about some magic faucet. Faucet. Tap, right? I think that she thought that he was going to do some magical tap like near her house so that she could avoid coming to the well each day.

She thought that Jesus was going to do something for her that would make her life, feel like her daily life, just sort of like easier. It should be nice, you know. Look at verse 15 there. 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.

And she got it fairly wrong. And my point in telling you this is not, she's so dumb. Isn't she? What a stupid woman.

That's not why I'm telling you this. And I'm not saying, I'm not telling you this because I think she's a model of like, oh, simple face. You know, like, good on her, you know. No, not at all. My point is this. She didn't get it. She asked imperfectly.

But Jesus responded wonderfully, didn't he? And so graciously and so perfectly and her life was changed forever, eternally. Now we'll pick this up next week as we look at the second half of the story.

[20 : 19] So let me just sort of tidy this up a little bit here. I'll finish with this idea here. So this man, Jesus, God in flesh who broke every barrier to talk to this woman, this outcast, who went out of his way to do what?

Just to give her something. That was his purpose, to give her something. And he gave her infinitely more than she actually asked for.

She really didn't know what she was asking for and he gave her infinitely more. Folks, as you think about that, don't you think you can trust that man? Don't you think you want to trust that man?

Don't you think you can trust that man with your life? Don't you think you can trust that man with your dreams and your ambitions? And don't you think you can trust that man to give you what you really need to satisfy your soul so that you don't have to try and find it in unhealthy things and frail things and things that can be taken from you?

This man we're talking about here, Jesus, isn't it also a relief to know that he is God? Isn't it a relief to know that this is what God is like?

[21 : 40] We'll talk more about this next week, but God, this God, isn't it a relief to know that he is very comfortable around the sexually broken? That he is very comfortable around the relationally broken?

Isn't it a relief to know that he seeks these people out? And isn't it a relief to know that when we don't know what to ask, we don't really know what we're doing, we don't fully grasp the gospel, that Jesus meets us perfectly and wonderfully.

Amen.