

Greater Water

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[0 : 00] Well, it's quite a beautiful week, isn't it? It's been wonderful to be outside with the sun. I've just been loving it. It's quite a special break, right in the middle of February especially, because right now, normally, we Vancouverites know a whole lot about water.

Water is falling from the sky, cars are hitting puddles, and it's getting us on the sidewalk, it's leaking into our houses, and a lot of you are trying to get away from it. So you're going to vacation somewhere where it's really, really sunny.

California, Hawaii, some of those places. Water everywhere for about eight months of the year. So it's hard for us to understand actually how precious water is oftentimes.

And especially in an ancient context where water could only be found if you lived next to a major river or you happened to have a well. I have a friend who works in California as an engineer, and his job is actually to go to villages in Africa in the Saharan Desert where they don't have close water access and help build wells.

He was telling me a story the other day of one particular village that he's working with where the women get up every morning as a clan, and they take their jugs, and they do a two-hour hike to the nearest water source, which is a local river.

[1 : 19] And they fill up their water jugs, about 40 pounds apiece. They put them on their head, and they do that two-hour hike back just to have water for the village for the day.

So every single day, a four-hour round trip just to have water. If that were the world you lived in, you would find water very, very precious, and especially a well.

Imagine a well near your village. A well would become a symbol of blessing and life and abundance and flourishing because as human beings, we would need that well to thrive and flourish as people.

Now in our passage, our passage revolves around wells. I want to submit to you that our passage revolves not around one well, but actually three wells. There are three wells in our passage.

If you turn to John chapter 4, that will be helpful at this point. The first well in the passage is the most obvious of the three. It's Jacob's well. In verses 1 to 9, John describes Jesus traveling to Jacob's well and then an encounter with a Samaritan woman at this well.

[2 : 28] And it's interesting because the way that John tells the story is he tells a story of Jesus breaking all sorts of social-cultural boundaries by coming to this well and interacting with this woman.

It's just stunning. Verse 3, Jesus breaks the geopolitical boundary. He left Judea and departed again for Galilee.

Verse 4, And he had to pass through Samaria. Now if you're reading this text with ancient Jewish eyes, all of a sudden red flags are waving in your mind and alarm bells are starting to resound in your heart because you realize that if you're a Jew, you should not be doing this.

You have just walked into Samaria, the land of the unorthodox, scripture-twisting, idolatry-worshipping, pagan-marrying people. They're the ones that set up an alternative temple so they could worship God the way they wanted to about 500 years ago.

And they're the ones that about 150 years ago, the Jews went and actually tore down their temple because it was so abhorrent to them. And so you can imagine the geopolitical tension as Jesus steps into Samaria and he doesn't leave.

[3 : 43] And then Jesus breaks, or verse 5, it says, He came to a town of Samaria called Saqqar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. We are told that Jacob's well was there.

It's a bit of a random side note. Jacob's well is still there today, supplying water over 3,000 years. It's massive. And it's one of three wells in the ancient Middle East that still has its original capstone.

So this stone, actually, if you look up pictures online or something, is about 18 to 20 inches thick. It's all a piece of stone. Massive. about five feet in diameter with a little hole right in the middle of it that you could put your pail in to draw water from.

But most of the well was covered so you didn't have children falling into the well or dust going into the well. And so you could have a surface for people, travelers, to rest on when they're tired and weary and kind of fill up their buckets and whatnot.

And that's actually what we see happening in verse 6 is Jesus is tired and weary. Verse 6. So Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting, literally, on the well.

[4 : 58] Don't overlook the seriousness in the detail here. Wearied by his journey. I think what John is describing here is that Jesus has not only broken geopolitical boundaries, but Jesus has actually broken divine human boundaries.

John says at the very beginning of his gospel, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh.

Here's God in human flesh experiencing all the weakness and all the weariness and all the fatigue and all the neediness that you and I experience in our day-to-day human lives.

Jesus has broken down the divine human barrier and he's experiencing it all. But there's more than that. Jesus breaks down the gender barrier, which would have been massive in that time.

Look at verse 7. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Now, if you're a Jewish male at this point, like Jesus was, you would have instantly had to withdraw culturally and socially and kept at least 20 to 30 feet of distance from this woman.

[6 : 11] Why? Because it was absolutely unacceptable and it would have damaged your reputation and hers for you to be seen talking to a woman or engaging alone with any woman in public who was not your wife.

And to make matters even worse, this woman comes in the middle of the day. At that time, you get water early in the morning when it's not hot and late in the day when it's not hot, but not in the middle of the day.

And at that time, you travel in groups if you're women and you travel in groups to get water. And here we see this woman coming alone and coming in the middle of the day which tells us either she's looking for trouble or she's socially outcast and deeply broken, ostracized from society.

And the Samaritan woman, when she comes to Jesus, Jesus does not flinch one bit. He stays there. He's glad to be in her presence.

There's more still. Jesus breaks down the ethnic-religious boundary. Look at verse 6. Amazing words. Jesus says to her, give me a drink, please.

[7 : 25] Give me a drink. This weak and weary Jesus asking this woman for a drink at the well. It's quite amazing, isn't it?

The conversation doesn't begin with Jesus saying, you're a sinner. Let me tell you what you need. Conversation begins so humble as Jesus is, the word made flesh, with I need.

Give me a drink. As Christians, I think we can see a glimpse of the cross here at the very beginning of John's gospel. Because it's on the cross when Jesus is pouring out his life for the life of the world that he thirsts so deeply that he cries out in John chapter 9, I thirst.

It actually says. And so we cannot but help of Jesus on the cross thirsting as now he says to this Samaritan woman, give me a drink.

Samaritan woman is utterly shocked. It starts exploding all of her categories one at a time. Verse 9, how is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?

[8 : 39] And then John explains, for Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. See, brothers and sisters, in these first nine verses, Jesus is crossing every single cultural and social boundary that you could possibly imagine because the ministry of Jesus is radically countercultural.

But the question is, why? Why would Jesus do such a scandalous thing? And the answer is quite simple. Because he's determined to give this woman life.

Jesus wants to cross every boundary that keeps him from us in our lives because he is determined to give every sort and type of person life. Do you remember John chapter 3?

Jesus talking to that great teacher Nicodemus? The greatest teacher, the greatest religious leader, the greatest intellectual of that day, and Jesus is talking to him because he wants to give him life.

The highest of the high in that society. And now here in John chapter 4, Jesus is engaging with an uneducated, unorthodox, spiritually confused and religiously defiled and ethnically mixed and morally compromised woman.

[9 : 54] He's talking to the lowest of the low in that society. Why does Jesus do it? Because Jesus wants the highest of the high and the lowest of the low and everybody in between to know the life that he has to offer them.

He wants people to know abundant life. Once again, I think we see glimpses of the cross because it's this desire to overcome those boundaries that separate us from God that ultimately leads Jesus to the cross where he hangs on the cross and after he says, I thirst, he says, it is finished.

Meaning I've broken down every last barrier including sin and death itself so that nothing should separate you from the love of God in Christ. It all begins with a needy request from Jesus.

Give me a drink, he says. And in those few words, an absolutely life-changing encounter starts to unfold. Jesus has asked her for a drink but now what he needs to do is he needs to tell her that she's actually looking at him and she's looking at a far deeper well than Jacob's well.

That Jesus actually is the true well of life in this passage. And so that's what we see. Jesus is the second well. Verse 10. 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.

[11 : 30] if you knew the gift of God and that God is actually speaking to you, you would have asked him. If you and I knew the gift of God and who it is that speaks to us right now, we would ask him.

If our friends and family only knew the gift of God and who it is that speaks to them, they would ask him. If Vancouver and the whole entire world knew the gift of God and who it is that speaks to them, oh, that people would ask him.

He is the one that we really thirst for. Jesus said, you would have asked and he would have given you living water. Jesus wants us to see that he is the true well of life in this passage.

He's it. Now, this woman's utterly confused. She's more confused than before. Verses 11 and 12 show us that.

And so, in verses 13 and 14, Jesus has to begin explaining his offer to her again. Verse 13, everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again.

[12 : 42] But, whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty, and the Greek literally says, into eternity. Will never be thirsty into eternity.

Now, notice how Jesus mentions the woman's thirst. He mentions her thirst before he ever mentions her brokenness or sin.

Isn't that interesting? Sure, in verses 16 to 17, which whoever's preaching next week will get to go through, Jesus names her sexual promiscuity. He names her relational brokenness.

He names her sins. But before he ever does that, he talks about the deep soul thirst that lies in the very depths of her humanity. I was in a coffee shop yesterday morning, as is my habit, on Saturday mornings with family.

Bean Brothers in Carersdale, if you're interested, great muffins. And I saw a new water bottle that I'd never seen before. It was a crazy kind of metallic looking one, and it had in big letters thirsty.

[13 : 49] Since I was preaching this morning, I was like, oh, thirsty. So I pick it up, and it's that coconut water stuff, which is the big rave these days. And it has a little picture of Buddha, and it's called Thirsty Buddha.

And then the tagline, this is great, is Buddha-licious. So that was fun. I turn it around, and I start reading the label, and it says, and this is what they say it's all about.

It says, hydrate from within. replenish and quench your thirst naturally. Hydrate from within.

Now they see something. They see that we're really thirsty as human beings. And they're making a reference here, not just to drinking water, but like that there's actually a deep within thirst that we have, like a deep human thirst.

But the interesting thing is it says, hydrate within. Do this naturally on your own resources. I've been reading a book lately by a guy named Charles Taylor, who's a Canadian philosopher guy, and he wrote a book called Sources of the Modern Self.

[14 : 58] And he said, one of the most significant ways in which we view ourselves as human beings in the modern world is exactly this. Hydrate from within. It's this radical inwardness.

That yes, we have deep longings and desires, but that those longings and desires can be satisfied by our own resources, by our own feelings, by our own experiences, by our own wisdom, by our own intellect, by our own power, by our own will.

But the thing is, is that that's actually a radically different view than what the Bible has of what it means to be human. To be human is actually to be one that's oriented outside of yourself towards God in relationship and oriented towards each other in relationship.

And so the thing is, is by saying hydrate from within, we actually starve ourselves from the very thing that we thirst for most, which is God himself.

According to the Bibles, human beings are made by God and for God, and the deepest thirst of our lives is him. David says this in Psalm 63, 1. He says, Oh God, you are my God.

[16 : 09] Earnestly I seek you, and my soul thirsts for you. That's his deepest longing. In Isaiah 55, chapter 1, verse 1 into 3, God says, come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, why that your soul may live.

The human being longs for God, for living waters, as Jesus says. So the major question is, what are living waters? If this is what's supposed to quench our thirst, and if this is what Jesus is offering, then what are these living waters?

Seems a bit elusive. Well, I think the place we have to go is John chapter 7. Flip the page over to John chapter 7, verses 37 to 39. This is the only other time in the book of John where living waters are mentioned.

It's important. Chapter 7, verse 37. On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

And whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow, here it is, rivers of living water. Now this, he said, John explains, about the spirit whom those who believed in him were to receive.

[17 : 35] And if you follow the story of John, once Jesus rises from the dead, in John chapter 20, what's one of the first things he does? He breathes out the Holy Spirit and says, receive the Holy Spirit to his disciples.

Brothers and sisters, the living waters that Jesus is offering in John chapter 4 is nothing less than the Holy Spirit of the living God. Jesus offers us God, the greatest gift that God can give, God, the Holy Spirit.

it's astonishing. We're told in chapter 3, verse 34, that the Father has given Jesus the Spirit without measure and now Jesus wants to give the Spirit to us without measure.

There's so much life here. I cannot help when I read this but thinking of standing with a paper cup at the bottom of Niagara Falls, trying to receive that life because that's how much it is.

So the next question is, what does the Holy Spirit do? If Jesus gives us this Holy Spirit, then what happens to us when Jesus pours the Spirit out?

[18 : 47] Well, there's the third well of our passage. The people who receive the Spirit become wells themselves. See, our whole passage is about a journey to Jacob's well where the woman discovers Jesus is the true well of life and Jesus makes her into a well of eternal life.

Look at verse 14. It's astounding. The water that I will give him, the person who drinks of Jesus, will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

By drinking of Jesus' water, we get to become wells. Deep, deep wells. wells. This word, welling up, shows up only three times in the New Testament.

The whole New Testament. Once here and twice in the book of Acts. The two times this word, which is *alimai*, shows up in the book of Acts, it shows up when the apostles heal somebody who is lame and has never walked in their life and that person leaps up.

Alimai. They leap up because they've experienced the healing work of God in their lives and God's new creative power and they go off into the distance set free. Walking.

[20 : 02] And that's the exact same word that Jesus uses here. So he's literally saying you will have living water leaping up to eternal life. When the Holy Spirit is poured out into you, you will experience God's healing power in your lives in ways that you cannot fathom.

You will experience the new creation power of God. welling up into eternal life.

Notice that last phrase, into eternal life. We saw this phrase last week, chapter 3, verse 36. Whoever believes in the Son, present tense, has eternal life right now.

What's eternal life? We're going to hear about it in the Gospel of John. What is it? It's really important. Now I suspect that for many of us when we hear the word eternal life, we think duration, right? You think, I'm going to live for a really, really, really long time.

And for some of us that may not seem very exciting because we don't really know what we're going to be doing for all eternity. I think it is going to be exciting. But often, we think of eternal life as duration, living forever.

[21 : 18] But I actually think in the Gospel of John, while that is true, eternal life is a lot less about duration and a lot more about quality of life.

So what kind of life will we experience when Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit? What is the quality of life that Jesus is saying is going to well up and leap up within us?

In the Gospel of John, eternal life is nothing less than the quality of God's very own life. He's the eternal one. I know this explodes categories, but eternal life is God's life as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Do you know that for all eternity and for all past and all eternity future, God is the Father who loves the Son and gives life to the Son? And God is the Son who reflects that love back to the Father and delights in the glory and beauty of the Father.

And God is the Holy Spirit who brings Father and Son together in a mutual relationship of intimacy and joy and life and blessing and beauty and harmony as they live together in profound, deep relationship for all eternity.

[22 : 37] That's what eternal life is. so to be offered eternal life is quite literally to be swept up from earth into the heavenly life of God Almighty.

The water that I will give him, says Jesus, will become a spring of water welling up into eternal life. Brothers and sisters, God wants so much more for us than simply getting our daily lives fixed.

He wants so much more for us than just making us feel better about ourselves. He wants so much more for us than just forgiving us and saying, now go on your way.

Jesus wants to pour out the Holy Spirit on us so that right now we will know the eternal life of God. To know the Father. The Father wants you to know him as the one who is infinitely loving and who loves you to the very core of your being no matter how ugly or wretched you feel you are.

God is the Son who wants to forgive and bless you infinitely, lavishing you in blessing no matter how undeserving and guilty and shameful you feel.

[23 : 54] God is the Holy Spirit who wants to beautify and change and heal and perfect you, forming the image of his Son in you no matter how marred or disfigured you feel.

The Holy Spirit draws you into the very life of God. It's an amazing offer. Now some of you may be thinking at this point, that's great.

My heart is too icy and too apathetic. It's too hard. God can't transform me. I will never experience this life that's being talked about.

Brothers and sisters, I often feel this way. I'm preaching to you this morning but I guarantee you tomorrow morning I'm begging that God would awaken me from apathy. I found a quote from one of my favorite theologians very helpful when I feel like I'm in that place.

He says, the Holy Spirit is like a fire that God sends upon our icy hearts so that he would melt them so that they flow with rivers of living water once again.

[25 : 06] That's what God wants to do. Icy hearts are not too hard for the fire of the Spirit. Others of you may be thinking, I'm too young in my faith to experience this.

My faith isn't deep enough. I'm not gifted enough. I'm not equipped enough. I don't know enough. I'm not going to know this life. There's a guy who's been going to the evening service for about two months now.

He's been a Christian for about two months and he told me, he's about 24 years old and I said, how did you become a Christian? He said, I was riding the bus one day and there was a girl from high school who happened to be a Christian and she came over and sat next to me and we hadn't seen each other for five years and we started chatting.

We got off the bus, went to the coffee shop, started chatting. She started telling me about Christianity and he became a Christian two weeks later. Lo and behold, bus ride, Christian. It's amazing. I met with this guy because he's just beaming with life and I asked him like, what's the deal, man?

Why are you so excited? And he said, because I get to know God. I mean, quite literally, he was just so thrilled to know God that it was just beaming out of his face.

[26 : 21] The interesting thing is that he invited a friend three weeks later to come to the evening service and that friend has now been a Christian for five weeks. Here's this guy who's been a Christian for three weeks.

He knows nothing about the Bible. He's not equipped by anybody but he has the spirit of the living God welling up within him because he has discovered everlasting, eternal life and what happens?

That starts to spill over to his friends. It's quite amazing. Maybe others of you are feeling like you're on the other opposite end of the spectrum. Maybe you're a bit older than young.

Getting worn down by life. The daily grind and hard knocks have taken its toll on you and the older you get, the more you wonder is this well going to run dry because I'm feeling it.

Men's ministry that I'm part of on Tuesday evenings, we were discussing this question the other day. One of the guys said, does the well run dry? Will it last?

[27 : 31] The test of time. One of the great things about multi-generational men's ministry is we had an older guy there who could testify to us and he said, no, it doesn't.

He said, the amazing thing is that as you get older and older the thing that you discover is that the well does not run dry but the well is deeper and deeper than you could have ever imagined.

There's another woman in our congregation, an elderly woman who is in the hospital right now. She's in poor health and she no doubt feels that the well is running dry life is dark as her body decays towards death.

Feels like there's no life there. One of the amazing things is that as the pastors of our church have been meeting with her in the hospital, they've been noticing that there's been a tremendous change in the nurse who's been taking care of her.

The nurse. The nurse is profoundly thankful to be taking care of her. She feels like there's no water in the well but just in the way that she looks at her life as she heads towards death.

[28 : 41] In the way that she cares and engages her nurse, this nurse is starting to be changed by the life-giving waters of Jesus. The well is so deep and when we discover that Jesus is the well of living waters, he pours it out into us and makes us a well to other people.

Because no matter whether you're cold and apathetic, younger and uncertain, or older and tired, Jesus wants to make you into a well of living water. He wants to give you eternal life.

The only question that remains is how. How does this happen? All you have to do is ask. Look at verse 10.

You would have asked him and he would have given you living water. Verse 15. Sir, give me this water. It's amazing, brothers and sisters.

We don't have to twist God's arm. We don't have to send him our portfolio of good works. We don't have to even clean up our lives. God's going to do that. All we have to do is just ask.

[29 : 51] Just say to Jesus, Jesus, I want those living waters. And he is very, very glad to give them. Say these things to you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.