

John 4:1-15

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Preacher: Rev. Jordan Senner

[0 : 00] Let's jump into John chapter 4, though. If you can open up your Bible to page 888. This is our fifth week of a sermon series, Encounters with Jesus.

and today in chapter 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well. And we can hardly overestimate the significance of a well in the ancient world.

A well was not a luxury. A well was a necessity of life. So, I have a friend who helps build wells in remote places of Africa, and he told me of one particular village, where the women every morning would leave the village, it would take them two hours to get to the nearby well.

They would draw water, and then they would walk back two hours. Four-hour round trip every single day. Why? Because they could not live without a well. In a dry, arid climate where there's no indoor faucets, there's no outdoor spigots, and there's no Pacific Northwest rains.

A well is not just a luxury, it is a necessity of life. And if you had a well, not just two hours away, but maybe next door to your town, or even, say, in your town, or even in your backyard, it was a symbol of blessing and life and abundance and flourishing.

[1 : 18] And I want to suggest to you that John chapter 4 revolves around not one, but three wells. And the third well is perhaps the most surprising.

The second well is the most significant. But we're going to start with the first well. So, Jacob's well. This is the most obvious one, isn't it? Verse 6.

Jacob's well was there. Jesus has journeyed from Jerusalem to Judea and now Samaria. And he comes to Jacob's well, and it says that Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well.

Literally, he was sitting on the well. And it was about the sixth hour, and a woman from Samaria came to draw water. Now, this well is still there today.

It's actually still an active well over 3,000 years. And it's one of three wells in the ancient Near East that still has its original capstone to it, about 18, 20 inches thick, five feet wide.

[2 : 20] The well is about 100 feet deep, so it keeps people from falling in. But it also provides a place for weary travelers to sit. So that's why in the Greek, it's actually he was sitting on the well, because he was sitting on this capstone that's still there.

And one of the stunning things that we see at this well is that Jesus is breaking all sorts of boundaries in order to bring this woman alive. At first glance, it just seems like there's a random encounter.

But actually, Jesus is breaking a whole bunch of boundaries to be there. I mean, just the very fact that he's stopping at a well in Samaritan territory would have been a bit like an Israeli today going into Palestinian territory and stopping to hang out and rest.

It's not exactly something you do. There's also this divine human boundary, not just a geographical, cultural one that Jesus is breaking, but Jesus is breaking this divine human boundary.

In the Gospel of John, nowhere is Jesus seen as more glorious and divine and sublime and sovereign, and nowhere is he seen as more human at the same time. Here we have somebody who is wearied by the travels that he experiences in life.

[3 : 32] He is tired and he is exhausted, and he comes to this well and engages this woman in the humility of his humanity. He wants to bring her the abundance of God's grace.

And so there's not just a geographical boundary and a divine human boundary, but there's also a gender boundary that Jesus is crossing here. And this is no feminist lens on this passage in particular, because if you look at verse 27, it says, when the disciples came back from grabbing food, they marveled, they were amazed, they were astonished that he was talking with a woman.

And yet no one had the courage to ask him what was going on and why he was doing it. And so the fact that Jesus is engaging this woman, which would have been astonishing in that day, because in the ancient Middle East, you were not supposed to be seen in public with any woman alone who is not your spouse, your wife.

Add that to the fact that in verse 6, John is very clear to tell us that the woman came about the sixth hour, which is in the middle of the day. Now in that culture and world, women would have come to wells at dawn and dusk, because it's cooler then, and they would have done it in groups, never alone.

So the fact that this woman is coming in the middle of the day and she's coming alone either means she's a shady figure and she's looking for trouble, or she is an outcast, a social outcast who is plagued by the shame of her past.

[5 : 04] And so the fact that Jesus, standing there, does not flinch when this Samaritan woman comes alone in the middle of the day is simply astonishing. It raises the question, why?

Why is Jesus there breaking all these boundaries? The answer is, he simply wants her to have life in his name. And he wants every one of us to have life in his name.

And when you zoom out a little bit in John, and you put John chapter 3, the whole Nicodemus episode, pretty marvelous, isn't it? In John chapter 4, the Samaritan woman episode, side by side, you realize that Nicodemus is a male, he's Jewish, he's educated, he's a leader in Israel, he's a teacher, he's a professor of the law, he's the highest of the high in that age and world.

And then in John chapter 4, we have a woman, a Samaritan, morally compromised, uneducated, the lowest of the low in that world. And the point that John is making by putting these two side by side is that both need Jesus.

And Jesus came for both. There is no one who is so high so as to be above the need for Jesus' grace. And there is no one that is so low so as to be beyond the reach of his grace.

[6 : 23] Like, you could be the best and brightest person who works on the top floor of the tallest high rise in downtown Vancouver and still be in desperate need of the life Jesus offers.

And you could be the most broken and lonely person hiding on the streets of the outskirts of Vancouver City and still be able to receive the life that Jesus offers.

And so Jesus meets this woman at Jacob's well and the thing unravels. It begins with a needy request from a tired traveler. Would you give me a drink?

And then we see in verse 10 Jesus shifting this woman's attention away from his request to a far deeper well.

Look at verse 10. Jesus answered her, if you knew the gift of God and who it is who is saying to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

[7 : 30] Do you see what Jesus is doing here? Astonishing. He asks her for a drink at first and then she's astonished that he's asking her for a drink and he's saying, if you knew who it was who's asking you for a drink.

And that's the whole point of this is that he's going to reveal it to her. He's going to say, I am he in verse 26. He said, if you knew who it was that's offering, that's asking you for a drink, you would be asking him for a drink.

In other words, Jesus is saying, we have encountered each other at Jacob's well, but I am the true well in this situation. A well of living water, says Jesus, and living water in the ancient world just would have been fresh running water that comes from a spring.

It moves. It has life. It's not stagnant. It comes from a source that constantly gives and does not run dry. And the woman is so confused by this, she's like, I've never, where are you going to get this living water?

There's nothing like that around here. Jacob's well is the best that we have to offer. And Jacob's well, by the way, has not just been good enough for me, it's been good enough for centuries of Jacob's children's children's children's children and all the livestock and it's provided everything we need.

[8 : 48] So what are you talking about, Jesus? So he has to clarify in verse 13 what he's talking about. He says, everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again.

But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him, so this is a different type of water, will never be thirsty again. Literally, will never be thirsty into eternity.

This is a well that will never run dry in this life or the next. And so we discover here that Jesus is drawing her attention to who he is as the true living well in this situation.

And just two things really quickly before we move on. It's astonishing to me that Jesus offers her the gift of water before he ever names her thirst.

And he names her thirst before he ever names her sin. Yes, Jesus is going to go on to say, don't you have five husbands? And kind of put his finger on something that's very broken in her life.

[9 : 52] But before he ever does that, he's saying, you are thirsty. You have a deep thirst in your soul. And I am what you are thirsting for.

And the other thing that is quite amazing about this passage is that Jesus does not remove her thirst. He satiates it. In each one of our lives, being thirsty is not a bad thing.

It's where do we go to have our thirst satiated. That is the real question of our lives. In order to understand this living water, we have to fast forward to John chapter 7 when Jesus says, if anyone thirsts, come to me and drink.

And whoever believes in me, out of his heart or her heart will flow rivers of living water. And then John tells us, Jesus said this about the Holy Spirit. In other words, the living water that Jesus has come to give is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the very life of God, into us.

So, they encounter each other at Jacob's well. Jesus says, there's a far greater well in front of you. And finally, if you drink of this well, you yourself will become a well.

[11 : 09] And that is the surprising third well, the Samaritan's well. The woman actually becomes a well. So look at verse 14 with me. Whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.

And then what's Jesus' next line? The water that I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

So, by drinking from Jesus well, people become wells. And this verb, welling up, that Jesus uses here is only used two other places in the whole New Testament.

And both occur in the book of Acts. And they describe when a lame person is healed by Jesus and leaps up. That's literally the word. Leaps up, jumps to their feet, and walks for the very first time.

So this word is talking about the life we experience as we result, as we, as a result of God's healing grace in our lives. Jesus. And the image here is not of us digging deep wells for ourself.

[12 : 17] The image here is of Jesus digging a deep well in us and then placing a spring in it, which is the Holy Spirit. Filling us full with the life of God until it overflows to other people.

I like bluegrass music, and there's this wonderful little band in the States called the Hillbilly Tomas. It's a really weird name. But they have a song about this, and they describe this part of John 4 in the form of a prayer, and they say, Lord, would you put in me a well that I can draw from all my life?

And that's the prayer. And I think that's essentially what the woman is praying in verse 15. Sir, give me this water. She's asking for more than what she knows.

Put in me a well that I can draw from all my life. So these are the three wells that we encounter in John chapter 4.

Jacob's well leads to Jesus' well, leads to the Samaritans' well. And I think there's just one simple application for us that comes out of the passage.

[13 : 26] Just one application. It has lots of implications, but just one application is ask. That's all we need to do is ask. Jesus only asks her to ask him.

And all Jesus asks us to do here is ask him. Give me a drink. Give me this water. If you ask, Jesus will give.

If you ask, Jesus will pour out his Holy Spirit. If you ask, Jesus will fill you with all the fullness of eternal life. And now everything else we see in the rest of the passage, which we don't have time to cover, is the implications of that asking.

The second that somebody asks Jesus, then he's going to take them deep, he's going to take them high, and he's going to take them wide. He's going to put his finger on that area of sin and brokenness that is their greatest place of need for his life.

You have five husbands, I know. He's going to lift their hearts and make them true worshipers of God. The Father's come to seek those who will worship him in spirit and in truth.

[14 : 32] And he's also going to send people wide back to their cities to share their testimony and say, come and see somebody who told me everything I ever did. Come and see the man that could be the Christ and people coming and receiving life in him.

So there's going to be massive implications of this asking in this woman's life. But the only thing that Jesus asks her to do is ask. And so that's what we get to do this morning.

we get to kneel and we get to ask, God, would you give us living waters again today? Would you put in me a well that I can draw from all my life?

And this we do in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen.