

John 4:1-42 “Living Water”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Thank you, yes. Beautiful. That beautiful song is about the beautiful story that we come to in John 4 today.

Mark so helpfully last week showed us the importance, the centrality of Jesus. And we've encountered Jesus here in the Gospel of John as he engages with religious leaders like Nicodemus.

And today an encounter Jesus has with someone quite different. With a Samaritan woman at the well. Before we read the passage together, let me read you just a little bit of Ruby's story.

Name and details made up by me. Ruby slipped out the back of class a couple minutes before the bell. She was hoping to make it to the next class before everyone else and avoid the hateful stares the hallway seemed full of again today.

[1 : 16] Just yesterday, the once well-liked senior became hated by what seemed like every girl in the school. Every phone on campus pinged with evidence of her poor decisions with multiple boys.

Everyone knew. No one was happy. The hallway was silent. Oh, perfect. Until a door opened on the far end and Reggie hobbled out on crutches.

Also getting a head start on the class change. He had to be the nicest guy at the school. Even since he broke his leg in the last football game of the season.

I'll just slip quickly by him, Ruby thought, head down. Hey, could you help me open this locker? Oh, sure, she said.

Hey, thanks, said Reggie. Hey, I know you've had a hard couple of days. Can I help you with anything? I don't think I need to get involved with another boy right now.

[2 : 26] Everybody already hates me, Ruby said. Oh, yeah, I get that. But listen, you know there's someone who will love you no matter what, right?

You know about Jesus? Yeah, I've heard, Ruby rolled her eyes. I'm pretty sure he won't love me right now. Pretty sure he's seen the pictures too.

He might surprise you, Reggie said. Let me tell you the story of when Jesus met the woman at the well.

Now, when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John, although Jesus himself did not baptize but only his disciples, he left Judea and departed again for Galilee.

And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well.

[3 : 39] It was about the sixth hour. It's noon. Jesus, don't you love his full humanity on display here?

He's weary in the heat of a long, dusty walk. Seems likely that he's hoping for a drink from this well or a nap beside it.

And someone interrupts his rest. We'll read the rest of the first half of our text where we see his encounter with this woman. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water.

Jesus said to her, Give me a drink. For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?

For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, 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.

[4 : 54] The woman said to him, Sir, you have nothing to draw water with and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob?

He gave us the well and drank from it himself as did his sons and his livestock. Jesus said to her, Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again.

But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

And 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. Jesus said to her, Go call your husband and come here.

The woman answered him, I have no husband. Jesus said to her, You are right in saying I have no husband for you have had five husbands and the one you now have is not your husband.

[6 : 03] What you have said is true. The woman said to him, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.

Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know.

We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. The woman said to him, I know that Messiah is coming, he who is called Christ.

When he comes, he will tell us all things. Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am he. Jesus, may we encounter you today just like this woman did.

[7 : 19] Might we really know you? Holy Spirit, would you show us our Savior so clearly, so gloriously, so needfully for us.

We ask it in his name. Amen. We'll read the rest of the story in a few minutes. But first, I want you to notice this remarkable interaction between Jesus and this woman as Jesus gives thirst quenching water.

The first remarkable thing about it is that this conversation even happens. It's really amazing. To engage this woman, Jesus crosses all sorts of boundaries.

He asks for her help, and she knows that he's breaking lots of rules. Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. They were considered religious rejects, not pure blood Jews.

They're social outcasts. Some said at the time that even their shadow, touching your shadow, would make a Jew unclean. On top of that, she is a woman, minimized in this society, looked down on by many men, certainly not to be spoken to by Jewish men in public.

[8 : 48] We'll read later, even his disciples are astonished that Jesus is talking with her. Religious, racial, gender boundaries.

Plus, and maybe she thinks he doesn't realize this, but I'm morally outcast.

So even her fellow Samaritans won't associate with her, which likely explains why she comes for an exhausting task in the heat of the noonday sun rather than early or late in the day with all the other women.

Her relationship with men, including one presently married to someone else, it seems, leave her isolated from friends.

She's alone. Nonetheless, across all those boundaries, this holy teacher, who by the way, does know all about her, wants to engage her in conversation.

[9 : 57] Asks for her help, even for her to touch water that he will then drink. It's safe to say that the woman did not come to the well looking for Jesus, did she?

In fact, for quite a while here, she'll avoid his personal inquiries. Maybe that's you today. I don't know. Maybe you're stuck here with family.

Better plans fell through, if you're honest. You're just clocking in, not looking for Jesus. She is there for one very clear reason, to get water.

Not looking for Jesus, right? But Jesus humbly engages her. He takes her natural need, this need for water, and turns it to a spiritual conversation.

Isn't that amazing how he does that? Does he do that in your life? Where he meets you where you are, experiencing something in your life, and all of a sudden he starts to start to kind of work in

here, in your heart, to show you something maybe you weren't even aware of.

[11:16] That's the goodness and grace of Jesus, y'all, so on display in this interaction. Listen, at every turn, no matter what the situation, he's more overflowing with blessing than we are with need, isn't he?

He's more eager to hear than we are to pray. He's more quick to forgive than we are to repent. Amazing how wonderful Jesus is.

We get a taste of it here. She's there for water, and Jesus offers her water, living water. Later in John chapter seven, Jesus identifies this living water as his Holy Spirit.

But it's the same word when he says living water, that they also used for running water. So this woman keeps right on with her natural focus on natural water to drink.

Even when Jesus takes it up a notch and talks about living water that becomes a spring of water welling up inside you to eternal life so that you never thirst again. Wow!

[12:28] Right? Just hear the words of that song in your mind. You'll never thirst again. There's water that Jesus gives. Amazing promise. And even as she asks for this water, she thinks of it as very natural, doesn't she?

It's going to be so I won't have to walk to this well again in the heat of the day. That's as deep as she will admit her thirst at this point. But Jesus is so good.

He won't stop there. And maybe where she's stopping for now, but he won't stop at addressing our physical needs. He knows that every one of us is deeply thirsty.

Dying of thirst, if you will. Deep inside, we're thirsty. And with insight that this story seems to ascribe to a prophetic gift given to him through the Holy Spirit inside him, Jesus exposes where she's looking to quench her deeper thirst.

Do you see that? He's not attacking her. He's not yelling at her. He's not even changing the subject on her, but he's not stopping short of her deepest need either, is he?

[13:48] Go get your husband and come back. I don't have one. True. The man you're with is someone else's.

And this is not your first challenging, eventually empty relationship that has left you thirsty. She's not the first or the last person to look to romance or relationships to quench her thirst, is she?

You know, one of the reasons that's so common and so many of us experience that is that relationships resonate deeply with each of us because we were made for them. We were made to be in relationship, especially we were made to be in relationship with God himself.

That closest and most important relationship. And Jesus is telling her, the water of men will not quench your thirst for long.

She needs his living water. She needs something more than what she is tasting currently. Currently. I ask you to consider this morning, where is your thirst most evident?

[15:09] You don't walk to wells very often to get water. Let's think a little deeper than that. Are you desperately chasing relationship and romance?

In a marriage? Outside of your marriage? If that boy would just show me attention? If that girl would just like me?

Or it may be that your ultimate thirst is exposed in your endless workaholicism. Maybe in your desperate chase for fulfilling experiences, for that perfect fall break vacation, not to meddle.

Your obsession with your kids' success. I don't know. Where is it that you're looking to quench your thirst that you already realize has left you thirsty?

You've tasted it and you're thirsty again. You've gone back. Or maybe you know, if you're honest, that in the blink of an eye, beyond your control, it could leave you there thirsty.

[16:19] That thing that's quenching your thirst today might not tomorrow. Well, the woman, perhaps intrigued by this spiritual conversation, perhaps, as we're wont to do, just asking the most common theological question of the day when she sees this must be a Jewish prophet, she asks about where people should worship.

See, among other religiously sketchy decisions that the Samaritans had made, they had built their own temple in which to worship Yahweh. So much angered the Jews that about a hundred years before this conversation, the Jews had come and destroyed this Samaritan temple.

Only the temple in Jerusalem for the true God, they said. What do you say? She asks prophet Jesus.

The hour is coming when you won't worship here in Samaria or in Jerusalem, specifically, Jesus says.

Yeah, the Samaritans were misguided on the temple, but the hour is coming even already kind of here when true worshipers will worship in spirit and truth.

[17 : 44] This woman is striking out at this point. Religious failure. Moral failure. Social failure.

Nothing to her credit. Not worthy of knowing Yahweh, the one true God. And yet, here he is telling her how to do exactly that.

How to do what she was made to do to worship God truly in spirit and truth. And there is so much written on what that means.

At the heart of it is that the true focus of worship is not a building. It's not a particular place, an outward style or formality.

No, true worship, real relationship with the living God happens in all of life and in gathered services like this one through the Holy Spirit and the Son who gives him.

[18 : 50] Remember just a few weeks ago when Jesus cleansed the temple and then he offered to rebuild it in three days. He was saying, I am the temple.

I am the true way to know and to worship God. True worship comes to the Father through Jesus the Son by his indwelling spirit.

That's what's essential in worship. All else is secondary to that. Does your worship on Sundays help you encounter and engage with the real Jesus full of grace and truth as the word of God reveals him?

Does your worship Monday through Saturday, because it's not just a Sunday thing if it's the true God you're worshiping in relationship, does your worship Monday through Saturday help you walk with his spirit moment by moment aware of his presence with you?

Aware that he has a plan for your life that you're to follow? Aware that he has a mission that he has sent you on for his glory? That's what you were made for, friends, living with him, learning his heart, seeking his glory, and it all happens in Jesus.

[20 : 17] Especially it happens through his death on the cross. Remember that's what his hour means in John's gospel. The hour is coming, verse 23.

He's ushering in new worship that is focused on Jesus Christ and him crucified. The one way to God. God. And as he talks about it and teaches us that, here he is, here he is with the most unworthy people in the world to be participating in this worship.

To be a part of this unbelievable relationship. Here he is inviting them into worship, giving his life for them, offering to give them the living water of the spirit.

That's a lot. The woman says, you know, the Messiah will come and sort all this out. Although perhaps she's wondering now.

And Jesus says, pleased to meet you. That's me and make no mistake about it. No more metaphor.

[21 : 31] No more analogy on the person of Jesus as the promised king, the hope of every thirsty soul as simple and clear as he can possibly be.

Don't get confused on how you worship right or on what the water is or what all this means. Come to Jesus and have him sort it all out for you.

Whether you've trusted Jesus before or not, will you come to Jesus today? Will you believe today that the one who quenches the thirst you really feel more deeply than you know, maybe that you haven't stopped to feel lately?

The one who quenches that thirst is not your husband or your wife. It's not your friend or your financial planner. It's not any of those. It is Jesus himself.

He offers you living water that will fill you up even when everyone else lets you down. Even when everything else leaves you empty. He offers fullness of life with him that never ends.

[22 : 37] And in fact, it changes everything now too. That's the second piece of the story. If he's meeting you and quenching your thirst, if maybe even for the first time you're thinking, man, there is something more that won't leave me thirsty and empty.

then know that this thirst quenching water Jesus gives is also overflowing water. The woman is living this in this passage while the disciples are learning this from Jesus.

Let's pick up at verse 27. Just then, while this amazing interaction is going on between Jesus and this woman, just then his disciples came back.

They marveled that he was talking with a woman but no one said, what do you seek or why are you talking with her? So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, come see a man who told me all that I ever did.

Can this be the Christ? They went out of the town and were coming to him. See, they noticed the boundaries that Jesus has crossed, and the woman adds another of her own to those that the disciples can already see.

[24 : 03] She's going to the people that she was avoiding earlier in the same day that she didn't want to be around. Water jar left behind. Isn't that interesting? The cares of this world cannot distract her from the glory of Jesus.

She needs to go tell people about him even though she's still thirsty. There is now life welling up in her and overflowing. See, Jesus gives water so graciously that when he quenches our thirst, there's always more still pouring in.

It changes our lives. It impacts the way we live that day. Look how this happens with the disciples' perspective. They're about to be confused about natural food just as the woman was confused about natural water.

Verse 31. Meanwhile, the disciples were urging him saying, Rabbi, eat! But he said to them, I have food to eat that you do not know about.

So the disciples, they're a little slow, be patient with them, they said to one another, has anyone brought him something to eat? Oh, come on now. Jesus said to them, listen, my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

[25 : 23] Nobody slipped me a sandwich. No. Once again, Jesus is taking a natural need into a spiritual conversation, isn't he?

He wants the disciples to know something so important. Listen, Jesus says, there is nothing as fulfilling as living with God, as going where he sends you, as pointing others to him.

Jesus came for the express purpose of giving living water to thirsty people and not even the need for a lunch break can stop him from doing that.

That fills him up. See, when you receive this living water, your whole view of life is transformed and alongside knowing the one who gives it yourself, your highest and most fulfilling purpose in whatever you're doing changes.

changes. It's not money anymore or fame or pleasure. It's actually other people knowing the one who gives the living water, having their ultimate thirst quenched.

[26 : 27] That's your new deepest and highest longing and calling. Listen to what Jesus says. Do you not say there are yet four months, then comes the harvest?

Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.

For here the saying holds true, one sows and another reaps. I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored and you have entered into their labor. Look, Jesus says, now, today, because I am here, people are coming into the kingdom from places you'd least expect it, disciples, across all the boundaries you might be thinking of.

And this is your calling, your purpose, your delight as my followers to reap the harvest that I have sown. The fields, friends, are ripe for harvest.

harvest. Is your mouth eager to share the good news? Is it quick to be praying with your neighbors? Are you always talking about Jesus or is your mouth, and this is the image that came to mind for me, is your mouth full of bread like the disciples?

[28 : 01] That's what they're thinking about, isn't it? You can't talk well when it, you're just stuffing your own face. Are you so caught up in the things of this world that you can't be bothered to see the glory of Jesus yourself, much less to share of it with others?

Or maybe, maybe have you left your water jar, your previous priorities, the things that you so quickly would have been trying to gather to yourself and spend your time and your energy on?

Have you left your water jar to use whatever relationship, whatever occupation, whatever interaction Jesus gives you to let living water overflow from you?

Jesus has come. Jesus has died. Jesus is risen. It is harvest time, friends. harvest time for people to come into his kingdom.

He has done the work. You get to reap and see people come in to know him and to taste living water. What a privilege. Look what happens.

[29 : 16] Maybe you think, he couldn't use me to do that. Look what happens when an untrained, immoral, theological novice encounters Jesus and is filled with his spirit.

Not just one Samaritan converted, but a revival of the rejects. Verse 39. Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony.

He told me all that I ever did. So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them and he stayed there two days. They just wanted to be with Jesus, didn't they?

And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, it's no longer because of what you said that we believe for we have heard ourselves and we know that this is indeed the savior of the world.

She points people where? To Jesus. And she's delighted apparently for him to be the hero, the focus, the center of attention.

[30 : 27] After all, he is the savior of the world, a mark of the Messiah, the Christ that she's looking for, that God's salvation would go not just to the Jews but really in a fresh, never before experienced way to the ends of the earth.

Samaritans en masse embracing a Jewish Messiah. Messiah. What is happening? Not just a savior for those who look the part or measure up or have figured out where they're supposed to worship or how they're supposed to relate to God but who come to him and find him to be the savior of the whole world.

all because a thirsty woman encountered Jesus. Wow.

Years after encountering the real Jesus for the first time in a high school hallway, Ruby lives for Jesus in all sorts of places including those hallways.

she loves getting to talk with high school girls, especially those who feel they've blown it, could never know true love. She delights to tell them of Jesus' love, a love that never fails and is more quick to forgive than we are to repent.

[31 : 56] But many of the conversations she's having these days are with people in her office, some whose spouses have let them down, others who just feel a longing for something more in life and they'll talk to her, there's living water that really satisfies, she tells them, found only in one place.

Ruby even gets to volunteer weekly at a crisis pregnancy center where her favorite story to share with disappointed, despondent, even despairing women is of a woman like them.

the woman at the well who met a savior who understood her thirst, knew her story, and gave her life.

Often, Ruby gets to explain that's her story and that the fountain she's been drinking from has never run dry on her, keeps overflowing from her, and will never run dry for them either.

No matter what you've done, she loves to tell them, Jesus really is the savior of the world, and that's all that matters. There's life the way you were made for in relationship with him.

[33 : 15] for Jesus to be the savior of the world. He knew that it would take another day where he would be thirsty, and where no one would offer him anything to drink to quench his thirst.

A day when his hour truly would have come, and he would hang on a cross thirsty, so that we would stand in the presence of the holy and living God, joyful and satisfied forever.

And he was absolutely committed to the point of being fed and filled up by it. he was absolutely committed to accomplishing the work that his father had given him, to finishing that task.

And so on a night when he was betrayed by a close friend, Jesus took bread, and he broke it, and he gave it to his disciples.

As I'm ministering in his name, give this bread to you. He said, take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

[34 : 40] And in the same way, after supper, he took the cup and said, this cup is a new covenant in my blood, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Drink from it, all of you. There's power in the blood of Jesus, and if you know that, if you are thirsty and have found in Jesus living water, come and drink and eat.

You may know him, but you may be tired and thirsty and needing to be refilled. Come, he is here to give you of his spirit again today.

This is not the table of Southwood or the Presbyterian church. It's the Lord's table. It's the place where if you trust him, if you've made that public and become a part of a church that preaches that life is found in Jesus, then you come and he promises to pour his spirit into you so that it wells up to you to eternal life and overflows from you.

You come and drink of that water this morning. If you don't look at this table and see Jesus, see him as the one you long for and find life in, he warns you not yet to come to this table and take these elements.

[36 : 02] But he invites you to drink of the living water. You've heard it in his very words. Water that if you drink, you will never thirst again.

He will cross any boundaries to give it to you. You're not too far away from him. You are not too far gone. He invites you to come no matter how thirsty you are and drink and never thirst again.

let's pray and we'll come to this table together. Jesus, what an amazing gift that you would come not merely to a woman in Samaria, but to people like us who don't deserve any more to know you, to walk with you, to taste of your love, and you would make us worthy.

You would give us life. You would give us water when we're thirsty. Might we know that even as these common elements of bread, wine, juice, as we consume them, would you fill us?

Would you quench our thirst and would you remind us where to turn for water that lasts forever? forever? We ask it in your name. Amen.

[37 : 28] For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. thanks for you.

Wha... It's and cheers. Thank you.■