

John's Gospel - the Woman at the Well

by John Vissers

Jesus offers living water, symbolizing salvation and eternal life, to all people, regardless of background or status.

Duration: 35:52

Scripture: Jeremiah 2:13, John 4:1-18, John 7:37

Topics: "Gospel Of John"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well, found in the fourth chapter of John. The main message is that Jesus loves us as we are and wants to bring the living water of His grace into our lives. The preacher emphasizes that in order to receive this water, we must face the truth of our own sin and allow Christ to work in our lives. The sermon also highlights the profound impact of Jesus unmasking the woman and breaking down her walls, leading to a transformation in her life.

Transcript

Welcome tonight to the marvelous passage in chapter 4 of John, the woman at the well. And I'm going to read tonight, not all 26 verses, I'm going to read just down to the end of verse 18. As I was preparing for tonight, I came to realize that there's a lot of material here, and so I'm going to take just to the end of the 18th verse tonight, and then in two weeks when we come back, we're going to look at the last section, which deals with the discussion that Jesus has with this woman about worship.

But tonight we're going to focus on the first 18 verses of this text in John chapter 4. So let us hear the Word of God. As we read it, I invite you to follow along in your own Bibles. The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.

When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria, so he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well.

It was about the sixth hour, that is about 12 o'clock noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, will you give me a drink? His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The

Samaritan woman said to him, you are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman.

How can you ask me for a drink? For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, if you knew the gift of God, and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water. Sir, the woman said, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep.

Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds? Jesus answered, everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. The woman said to him, sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.

He told her, go call your husband and come back. I have no husband, she replied. Jesus said to her, you are right when you say you have no husband.

The fact is you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true. So far, the reading of God's Word tonight, and may he follow it with his blessing and by his Spirit indeed teach us what he has for us this evening.

Let's bow in prayer, shall we? Gracious and loving God, our Father, we come in this evening hour of worship. We come to sing your praise and to join together in fellowship, and we bow now and pray that you would speak to us through your Word. We thank you for your holy, inspired Word, for your infallible Word to us recorded in Scripture.

And we pray this night that you would teach us and give us new and fresh insight into this story, which may be so familiar to many of us. But Lord, speak to us, we pray this night, for we ask it in the name of Christ, our Savior and our Lord. Amen.

A few years ago, I was traveling by air from Seattle to Cincinnati. At the time, I was attending, or rather pastoring, a church in North Vancouver, and I'd been invited to attend a conference in Cincinnati, and the fastest way was to drive down to Seattle, catch a flight there, and catch the flight into Cincinnati. Seated next to me on this flight as we traveled was a retired professor from Washington State University.

And it didn't take very long at his initiative, actually, before we were into a fairly intensive conversation, having a conversation about all sorts of things. And when he found out that I was a pastor, that I was a Christian minister, things even seemed to get more serious. It's funny what people will tell you when they know that you're a pastor, when they know that you're a minister.

And so we got into a fairly serious conversation about all sorts of things. It turned out that he was going to Cincinnati to meet his adult daughter, whom he'd not seen for an awfully long time. Following the breakup of his own marriage, there'd been a great deal of tension in the family.

They had become alienated from one another, and there had been long years of silence where, in fact, they had not even communicated with each other. But now, after many years, he was going to see her with the purpose of being reconciled to her. It seemed that she had become a Christian, and that she had initiated this process and had contacted him and wanted, again, to be reconciled with him, to see him, and to meet him.

And so in the context of that conversation, a conversation that I had not planned, a conversation, quite frankly, that I was not all that eager to be engaged in initially, I had a wonderful opportunity to speak about the Gospel, to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was not a Christian by his own admission. He wanted to know what the Christian faith was all about.

He wanted to know what it was about the Christian faith that would make or encourage or instigate this, within his daughter, this desire for reconciliation. And so we talked about sin, we talked about forgiveness, we talked about reconciliation and relationships, we talked about faith and life, we talked about all sorts of things related to Jesus Christ. Well, as often happens, of course, I got off the plane in Cincinnati, he got off the plane, and I've never seen him again to this day.

And I've often wondered in my own mind what happened, what happened when he saw his daughter, whether in fact he himself has ever come to the point of making a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. It was for me a one-time conversation. It seemed to be a kind of chance encounter, something that just happened, but did it.

Was in fact there something behind it? As I look at the New Testament, I'm always amazed at the number of conversations that Jesus gets into, that Jesus had, and many of them at first glance seem like very casual encounters, very casual conversations, but in fact they're not. They were providentially planned conversations where things of eternal value are discussed. And that's certainly true in our passage this evening.

Because as we think into this text, what we realize is that Jesus and his disciples are en route, and they're en route, they're - excuse me, I've just lost my place here, that hasn't happened for a while - they're en route up back to Galilee. And Jesus has decided that it's time to go back to Galilee because he's had a rather difficult encounter with the Pharisees. The Pharisees are out to get him once again.

And Jesus knows that it's not his time, his hour has not yet come, and so Jesus wants to get out from underneath a potential conflict with the Pharisees by going back to Galilee. Now the fastest route back to Galilee went straight through Samaria. And indeed it was not the route that was usually used by the Jewish people because there was a lot of tension between Jews and between Samaritans.

Most of them would rather go across the Jordan River twice than to travel through Samaria. But Jesus and his disciples decided to go through Samaria. They were in a hurry.

And as it turns out, Jesus has a divine appointment with a woman at a well. And it's this appointment, this encounter, this conversation, as it were, which we want to look at tonight, which is so significant and which we want to unfold as we look at this passage together. And so let's look at this encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

Now the first thing I want us to notice is that Jesus breaks down the barriers in speaking to this Samaritan woman in verses 1 to 9. Jesus and his disciples stopped at Jacob's well just outside the town of Sychar. And Jesus was tired from his journey and he sat down by the well. And the text says it was about 12 noon and his disciples had gone into town to buy some food.

And as Jesus rested and as Jesus waited for his disciples to return, a Samaritan woman came to draw some water. Jesus was thirsty and he asked for a drink. He asked this woman for a drink of water and she's astonished that this Jewish man would even speak to her.

You see, the reality is that there had been a great deal of tension that had existed for a long time between Jews and between Samaritans. The Jews considered the Samaritans half-breeds. They had Jewish origins in the old northern kingdom which fell in 722 BC and many of those who had survived had intermarried with the foreign colonists who had come from Babylon.

And so there was this feeling that somehow on the part of Jews as they looked down at Samaritans that somehow they were less than really Jewish. They were half-breeds. They were sort of part-Jewish but they were also half-breeds in the sense that they had intermarried.

There were also theological differences in the ways that they looked at the Old Testament, in the ways that they interpreted the prophets and the law, the ways in which that they interpreted the law of God. And so when Jesus speaks to this woman, she's surprised. She's surprised because he is a Jew and she is a Samaritan.

But it's even more than that because he is a Jewish teacher, a Jewish rabbi, and she is a Samaritan woman. And rabbis did not ordinarily speak with women openly in public. And so what's going on here as this encounter begins to unfold, as this encounter, this conversation begins to take place is that there's an overcoming of barriers.

Jesus has broken a barrier as a Jew speaking to a Samaritan. He's overcome a barrier as a rabbi, as a teacher, as a Jewish teacher speaking to a woman in public. And so the first lesson that we need to draw from this passage, it seems to me, is that Jesus breaks down important barriers in order to enter this conversation with this woman.

And it reminds us, of course, that the ministry of Jesus extends to everyone because everyone needs salvation. If we think back into chapter 3 of John's Gospel, into Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, we begin to realize just how significant this is because what we have is a contrast between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. I suppose it's really difficult to imagine, if you would, a more significant or a greater contrast than the contrast between Nicodemus and the woman at the well.

Nicodemus was a Jew. This woman was a Samaritan. He was a Pharisee.

She was a woman of the street. He came at night to protect his reputation. Jesus meets this woman at high noon in broad daylight.

He was educated, sophisticated, and powerful. She was simple and poor and marginalized. But the reality is, in both of these encounters, what we see are two people who desperately need to meet Jesus Christ, who desperately need to have and to receive what He offers.

And it reminds us that no one can rise so high as to be above the need for salvation, and no one can be so low as to not need salvation. Everyone needs Jesus Christ. I have a good friend in this city who works among the corporate elite on Bay Street.

I've spoken about him before, and he's taken it as his ministry to work and to move among the business elite and the corporate elite of this city in order to build networks and to build relationships and to build friendships so that the gospel of Jesus Christ might be shared with that community, so that men and women who work in that world can hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. And he started small Bible studies in small groups all over the place, up and down Bay Street and in the corporate world in this city. There is a world that is important to reach for Jesus Christ.

There are people who are in the fast lane, who are making all kinds of money, who are well-educated, who are sophisticated, who are power brokers in this city, but they need the gospel of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, I have a good friend who works among street people of this city. And as you know, of course, we've begun an out-of-the-cold program here at Knox.

And there, too, we have people who need the ministry of the gospel, people who need to receive Jesus Christ, who need to hear the message of salvation. And it reminds us that no matter what our station in life, no matter what our need, no matter where we may find ourselves, the reality is the same. From the greatest to the least, in the eyes of the world, from every possible group, people need Jesus Christ.

And my prayer is, of course, that this congregation, that this church would be a place where all such are welcomed in the name of Christ, welcomed in the name of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to have the gospel shared with them. Jesus broke down barriers, racial barriers, gender, sexist barriers, all kinds of barriers in order to encounter this woman. And it provides for us a marvelous example, a marvelous witness of what it means to make a witness for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But then secondly, as we look a little more deeply at this passage, what we begin to understand is that Jesus offers the Samaritan woman living water. Living water. The woman at the well was astonished that this Jewish man would speak to her.

But Jesus tells her that it's even more astonishing than she realizes. For if she really knew with whom she was speaking, if she really knew that God was at work in her midst, she would ask Him for a drink of water. It would be the reverse.

He wouldn't be asking her for a drink, but she would be asking Him for a drink of living water. And what we begin to see here is that Jesus now has her really interested. And she interprets Jesus literally at first.

She notices that he doesn't have anything to draw water from the well. She thought that he was talking about some other source of water. The phrase living water can mean or can refer to a water that's moving, a running stream, a running river, running water.

And perhaps she thought maybe Jesus knew where there was a stream or where there was a river of water from which they could draw. And if so, if Jesus knows where there's this kind of water, that would be very significant. Because in fact, this well, Jacob's well, had historic significance.

It had been dug by Jacob and it had been used as a source of water for generations, first by Old Testament Israel and then by the Samaritans. And so the reality is, she's wondering to herself, is Jesus claiming that he can provide a new source of water that is better, that will provide better water, more plentiful water than this water provided by Jacob's well, which has this great history in our nation, the history of the Old Testament. But Jesus, of course, tries to redirect her thoughts, because of course he's not talking about H₂O.

He's talking about spiritual water. He's talking about a spiritual reality. He's talking about salvation.

He's talking about the Word of God and he's talking about the Spirit of God. Jesus, you'll remember, told Nicodemus that he had to be born of water and the Spirit. And now he says to this woman that she can have living water.

And she still doesn't understand. She thinks that Jesus is offering some sort of a new source of water so that she won't have to make the 45-minute trek down to the well every day to draw this water out. So we need to understand that what Jesus is offering to this woman is nothing less than the reality of salvation, which comes by His Word through His Spirit.

The Bible is filled with the language of water as a symbol for eternal life, as a symbol of that which Christ came to offer, as a symbol of salvation, the reality of the new life which is offered through Christ. Think of what the prophet Isaiah wrote. Therefore with joy you shall draw water out of the wells of salvation.

Isaiah 12:3. Or the psalmist in Psalm 42, verse 1, as the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after God. And in Jeremiah 2, verse 13, as Jeremiah pronounced his judgment upon Israel, my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Or in Isaiah 44, we read, I will pour water on him that is thirsty. But perhaps the most interesting and most significant verse comes a little later, in John chapter 7, where we read these words on the part of Jesus Himself. John chapter 7 and verse 37.

On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, if a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive.

Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified. And so what is Jesus saying? What is Jesus offering to this woman? He's offering to her new life. He's offering to her new life that comes by His Word.

He's offering to her the promise, the reality of His Holy Spirit welling up within her, the Spirit that regenerates, the Spirit that brings new life, as we saw in John chapter 3. He's offering to her a plentiful source of new life and unending riches of grace which only He can give. And the reality, of course, is that we all need to drink from this water which Jesus offered to the woman at the well. Because the reality is that we all try to quench our spiritual thirst in some way or another, whether it's through material possessions or through relationships or through New Age philosophies or through some ideology that we grab onto in order to find that which will satisfy.

But what Jesus here is promising, what Jesus here is offering to this woman is something that only He can give, the refreshment, the salvation that only He gives in order to replenish our lives, the salvation from sin and everlasting life. A little while ago I came across a wonderful quote from Malcolm Muggeridge, the late Malcolm Muggeridge, which I think beautifully not only illustrates his own testimony, but indeed points to the reality of this living water. This is what he said.

I may, I suppose, he said, regard myself or pass for being a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets. That's fame.

I can fairly easily earn enough to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the inland revenue. That's success. Furnished with money and a little fame, even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of 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. That's fulfillment.

Yet, he says, 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. In fact, a positive impediment measured against one drink of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty, irrespective of who or what they are. The testimony of someone who lived his life to the full in so many areas and yet coming to the reality that he needed and that only the water that Christ provided would ultimately and could ultimately satisfy him.

Are you thirsting tonight after something that can quench your thirst, your spiritual thirst? Christ offers living water as he did to this woman at the well. And then finally notice that Jesus confronts the woman at the well with her sin in verses 16 to 18. The conversation now turns somewhat delicate.

It even turns a little confrontational because now the reality of this woman's life, the reality of this woman's past, the reality of this woman's sin has to be dealt with. She has to face the truth. So Jesus tells her, go and call your husband and come back.

And she replies, I have no husband. And we have here in the same kind of a way that Jesus spoke to Nathanael when in fact he told Nathanael something about his own life in John chapter 1. Now Jesus proceeds to tell this woman about her life. She's had five husbands and in fact the person, the man that she's presently living with is not even her husband.

And you begin to see, you can almost feel the tension building up what had turned around her and turned around what had originally been a kind of casual conversation in which she had become intrigued by what Jesus was saying and intrigued by what Jesus was offering. Now that conversation had taken a turn in a way that she had not counted on. She hadn't divulged anything really to Jesus, but Jesus now speaks to her.

Jesus now gazes into her soul. Jesus now uncovers her life as it were. And suddenly, she's trapped.

Because suddenly now, her life is exposed. Her life is exposed before her and it is exposed in the presence of this Jewish rabbi, this Jewish teacher. And as we'll see in a couple of weeks when we come back to this passage, what she does is she tries to take attention away from herself and poses a question to Jesus about worship.

But at this point, Jesus has put his finger on a raw nerve in her life. He forces her out into the open, not to embarrass her, not to hurt her, not somehow to make her feel good, not to grind her further into the dust and into the ground, but so that she might experience the touch of his grace in her own life. To perform spiritual surgery on her exposed heart.

And with great skill, as only our Lord can, he begins to work in her life in a way that she'll never be the same again. The fact of the matter is that she, in order to receive this water which Jesus was offering, had to face the truth of her own life. People don't like to hear about sin today, about the evil that infects our lives, but the reality is that the promise of the Gospel is not just a promise held out before us in terms of something good, but the reality is that it forces us to face the sin of our own life in order that we might receive what Christ has to offer to us.

So that we might experience the living water rushing through our lives. And what's going on here, it seems to me, is something that is very profound and something that is very real in terms of our own day and our own age, because Jesus unmask this woman, as it were. He pierces through her carefully built-up wall around her.

He forces her out into the open. And Jesus often breaks through the masks which hide our painful and sensitive feelings about who we are. He breaks through to reality so that he, by his grace, might touch and might minister in our lives.

In T.S. Eliot's poem, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, we meet a wistful man who has succeeded in hiding himself throughout his whole life. And he's always put on a face, as it says, a face to meet the faces that you meet. And at the heart of Eliot's poem, there is the fear that we all have of being found out, and at the same time, the aching desire that we all have to be found.

A few years ago, I visited some friends in Basel, in Switzerland, and it was during the carnival which is known as *Fastnacht*. I don't know whether any of you have ever been in Switzerland or in Basel when this carnival has taken place. It's much like the celebration of the *Mardi Gras* that takes place in Roman Catholic countries, but it is celebrated during the first week of Lent instead of before it.

And the carnival is a time of riotous behavior in which the normally restrained, normally reserved Basellers kind of let loose and let themselves go morally. And everyone knows what goes on, and there are even jokes about it. No one precisely knows who does what because all of the revelers wear masks.

Everyone wears masks so you can get away with all kinds of things that you might otherwise not get away with. Each year during *Fastnacht*, however, the Salvation Army makes an attempt to challenge the people to a higher standard of conduct by placing large signs around the city bearing this German inscription, *Gott sieht hinter dein Mask*, which means, God sees behind your mask. And behind your mask.

God sees behind your mask. The Lord Jesus knows the heart. As we saw this morning in our study of Revelation 2, He searches the mind and He searches the heart and none of us can hide.

And the reality is that all of us in our heart of hearts want to be found. We long to be found. Perhaps the Lord is speaking to you tonight.

He knows your life. He gazes into your soul. He knows everything about you.

He knows who you really are. He sees you as you really are. No games, no masks.

But the good news of the Gospel just as it's found here in this fourth chapter of John, in this encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well, Jesus loves you anyway. He loves you the way that you are. And He wants to bring into your life the living water.

He wants you to lay down the burden, to take off the mask, to allow the water of His grace to pour over your life, cleansing, renewing you, clothing you in the righteousness of Christ. That is the Gospel. Everyone has sinned and all of us put on masks to try to hide it, but there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Do you know the reality of that grace in your life tonight? Do you know what Christ offers the living water and will you receive it afresh in your life tonight? Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you tonight for your word. We thank you for the living water which Christ gives and the salvation and life which comes through Him and through Him alone.

Lord, as we bow in your presence tonight, some of us have been hiding from you and some of us need to face the truth and come clean about our lives in your presence. By your grace, touch our hearts and touch

our lives. And by your grace, minister to us, we pray in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

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