

## **Never Thirst Again (John 4:1-14)**

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2020 has been quite a year, and we still have a little over 10 weeks to go. From the coronavirus outbreak in March, to the spotlight on racial injustice in June, to the bitter political fight this fall, it's been a year marked by disruption and unrest on multiple fronts. And those are just the common factors in our broader culture. I'm sure you could add your own list of personal troubles.

Responses vary to a year such as this. Some give reign to bitter cynicism, ranting over the dumpster fire that is the last 10 months. Some look for the silver lining, focusing on positive stories of families and communities pulling together. Others close their eyes, keep their head down, and try to keep putting one foot in front of the other, hoping 2021 brings a little more peace and stability. Ps 4:6 captures the shared refrain: "There are many who say, 'Who will show us some good?'"

Christianity commends an altogether different sort of wisdom. Don't respond to 2020 with pessimism, optimism, or indifference. Do this instead. **First, acknowledge the spiritual lesson suffering affords.** The people, possessions, and pleasures of this life will never truly satisfy your soul – not in 2020 or any year to come. They are created things, not the Creator. And until our Creator returns to make all things new, they remain corrupted by the curse of sin. They will inevitably disappoint you.

**Second, embrace the spiritual opportunity suffering provides.** Look to Jesus, not your material circumstances, to satisfy your soul. Hab 3:17–18, "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation."

Friend, if 2020 causes you to do that it will be the best thing that ever happened to you. Why? Because of what King David goes on to say in Ps 4:6-7. "Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD! You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and new wine abound."

Experiencing that kind of joy, that kind of satisfaction of soul, doesn't happen automatically. It's the result of a spiritual process, the fruit of a relational encounter with Jesus. It's what the Samaritan woman and her countrymen experienced in Jn 4. It's what Jesus' disciples experienced in Jn 4. It's what Jesus is still in the business of doing today. **No matter who you are or what you've done, Jesus is eager to satisfy your soul**

**with the joy of worshipping the Father in the power of the Spirit.** That's the message of Jn 4:1-42.

I want us to look closely at the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus, his disciples' encounter with Jesus, and the spiritual fruit it produced in this chapter. There's so much to learn here, friends, that we're going to take 3 weeks to work through this passage. At every step along the way, we need to understand what Jesus did, why he did it, and the corresponding question his actions compel us to answer.

### **SCENE 1: JESUS TAKES INITIATIVE**

*Will you embrace the Savior who shatters social boundaries?*

V.1 finds Jesus in the Judean countryside, in the southern part of Israel, where his disciples were baptizing people. He soon learns, however, that his ministry had begun to garner undesirable scrutiny from the Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders of the day. So he leaves Judea for Galilee, which is in the northern part of Israel. The shortest route from Judea to Galilee passes through a middle region of the country called Samaria.

Jesus was a Jew and the Jewish people, by and large, hated the Samaritans. They viewed them as religious half-breeds responsible for leading the charge into pagan idolatry in the northern kingdom after the reign of Solomon. Many Samaritans had intermarried with foreigners, they rejected all but the first five books of the Jewish Old Testament as the Word of God, and they even built their own temple on Mt. Gezirim until the Jews came up and burned it down.

Needless to say, they weren't friends. Prejudice ran both ways. Some Jews would even take a longer, more circuitous route from Judea to Galilee simply to avoid passing through the unclean region of Samaria. But not Jesus. John's observation in v. 4, "And [Jesus] had to pass through Samaria," alludes to more than geographic necessity. It points to the Savior's heart to seek after the lost. He didn't avoid Samaria. He passed through Samaria because he had work to do in Samaria.

Jesus and his disciples soon arrive outside the Samaritan town of Sychar. A well dug by the Jewish patriarch Jacob was there (it's still visible today), and Jesus (v. 6) "wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well." Isn't that amazing? The One through whom and for whom all things were created, who in that very moment was sustaining the universe by the word of his power, was worn out from a long journey on a dirt road.

Why? Because the moment he was conceived in Mary's womb, the eternal Son of God took to himself all the frailties and liabilities of human flesh (our sinful nature excepted). The bodily challenges you experienced this week, he experienced. The tiredness you felt this week, he felt. Take heart in the promise of Heb 4:15, friend. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses..." Jesus' humanity, the bodily nature he retains as the ascended Christ, was a real thing. It's one more reason we can come to him with confidence not only with troubles in our souls but also troubles in our bodies. He gets it. He's been wearied too.

After his disciples head into town to buy food, a Samaritan woman comes to the well to draw water. Women in her day typically came to draw water as a group early in the morning or late in the afternoon when the sun wasn't so hot. The fact this woman comes alone in the middle of the day strongly suggests she's a social outcast, which is soon confirmed when Jesus reveals the details of her marital history and sexual immorality.

When she approaches the well, Jesus does something that may seem innocuous enough to us in our day and age. He asks for a drink of water. To her, it was a shocking request. V. 9, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" Why was she so surprised? Because in a single moment, Jesus crossed not one, but three of the greatest cultural divides in his day. As a Jew speaking to a Samaritan, he shattered the boundary of race. As a man speaking to a woman, he shattered the boundary of gender. As a respectable teacher interacting with an adulteress, he shattered the boundary of social propriety.

To politely ignore her was expected. To initiate conversation with her was shocking. To ask her to serve him with a drink of water from her jar was scandalous. It's why the disciples are later struck speechless when they return and see him talking with her. It's the exact opposite of what respectable people of Jesus' status were supposed to do.

Friends, Jesus isn't good news for upper-middle class white people who vote Republican, homeschool their kids, and appear to have their life together. He is good news for all people. It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done, Jesus is eager to meet you. Jesus is eager to engage with you. Jesus is eager to draw near to you. He's the Savior who shatters social boundaries. Embrace him.

Don't count yourself out of the kingdom of God, friend, simply because you feel unworthy. We're all unworthy. Some of us know it more than others. Some of us look like it in the eyes of the world more than others. But if the beginning of Jn 4 teaches us anything, it shouts that God's heart isn't for a single race, gender, or social class. An

immoral Samaritan woman was among the lowest of the low in Jesus' day. Yet she wasn't invisible to Jesus. The Savior of the world, exhausted as he was, made time to relate with her.

Do you, Christian? Do you make a point of engaging relationally with people who don't look like you, live like you, or believe what you believe? Or is your ministry focus strangely limited to what you see in the mirror? Jesus didn't wait for the Samaritan woman to strike up a conversation with him. He took initiative as the one who held all the privilege cards to engage with a woman whose very namelessness highlights her social invisibility.

Friend, you don't have to move to Africa to express the kind of cross-cultural, boundary-shattering love Jesus did. If you're a young, white man, you can engage in conversation with an older, black woman and find out how you can pray for her. If you're an older, white woman, you can introduce yourself to a young, Latino man and find out how you can pray for him. Loving people across the cultural barriers of our day, caring for the weakest and most despised members of our society, isn't a liberal thing or a Democratic thing. It's a biblical thing. It's what the mission of the gospel compelled Jesus to do. May it compel us to do the same.

Fueled by compassion, the Savior who knows our weaknesses took initiative by inviting a Samaritan woman to serve him at his point of need. There's nothing patronizing. No sense of superiority. He humbly leads with his own vulnerability. Creating an opportunity for someone to serve you, pray for you, eat with you, befriend you, especially when they would never expect it, is a powerful expression of love. Embrace the Savior who shatters social boundaries.

## **SCENE 2: JESUS EXTENDS AN OFFER**

*Will you ask Jesus for the life he alone can provide?*

The Samaritan woman was astounded by Jesus' request for a drink. His response to her question in v. 9 only compounded her amazement. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" V. 10, "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.'"

It's at this point in the conversation we start to sense Jesus isn't engaging her primarily because he needs something from her. He's engaging her primarily because she needs something from him. She came to the well to satisfy her physical need for water. Jesus recognizes her deeper spiritual need. She needs living water. She needs the water of

forgiveness, peace, and joy that are only found in relationship with the Triune God. We all do, friends.

Except this woman, like many, doesn't realize it. All she can see is her physical needs, her material needs. Many of us are no different. We go through life fixated on our education, our job, our house, our spouse, our health, our kids, our retirement, you name it. Are any of those bad things? Not at all. Are all of those real needs? Absolutely. But all of those needs can blind us to our deeper spiritual needs.

And when that happens, we completely miss what Jesus ultimately came to give us. We see him (at best) as a vending machine for the material life we want, or (at worse) a threat to the material life we already have. The Samaritan woman makes both mistakes in vv. 11-12.

**First, she questions Jesus' power.** V. 11, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" Translation? I know my need, Jesus. I need water. And I don't see how you can possibly give it to me. What's she doing? She's only thinking of Jesus as a vending machine for her physical needs. And when she doesn't see how he can meet her felt needs, she sees little use for Jesus. We do the same thing whenever we come to Jesus, require him to play in the tidy box of our material desires, and then assess his power to provide accordingly.

**Second, she questions Jesus' wisdom.** V. 12, "Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Translation? I know my need, Jesus. I need water. And it's already been met in full. I already have everything I need. Thanks for the offer, but I'm doing just fine on my own. It's easy to fall into both traps, isn't it? Praise God for his patience.

Look at how Jesus answers both of the woman's objections in vv. 13-14. "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 again...'" Woman, I'm not offering you physical water from the well in front of us or any other, a water that quenches physical thirst temporarily. I'm talking about the water of spiritual provision that can quench your spiritual thirst eternally. I'm talking about the satisfaction of knowing and loving God.

Jesus is borrowing from the language of Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah who used water as a symbol of the spiritual life that only God can provide. Jer 2:13, "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no



water." Everything we ask to satisfy our souls other than the Lord himself will ultimately disappoint us.

So the Lord graciously exhorts us in Isa 55:1-3, "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live..."

Friend, God made you to know him. You are hardwired for relationship with your Creator. Nothing else can satisfy your soul. And that's the gift, the living water, that Jesus came to give you and Jesus alone can give you. He did it by living the obedient life we were supposed to live, dying the death for sin that we deserved to die, and rising from the grave as our Conquering King, proving that he had accomplished all that was necessary to secure the blessing of eternal life with God. You can't earn it. You can't buy it. It's a free gift received through faith in Jesus.

And when you receive it, guess what happens? You receive a get-out-of-jail-free card to whip out at the pearly gates. No! Jesus fills you with the life of God himself right here. Right now. The "spring of water" Jesus promises in v. 14 is the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Jn 7:37-39, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive..."

Jesus is the one who grants us the gift of relationship with God, but it is through the indwelling Spirit that we experience the joy of that relationship. The Spirit does it by empowering us to see Jesus for who he is and delight in Jesus for who he is because it is in Jesus that the Father has most fully revealed the glory of his goodness.

Take heart in this, Christian. Through the power of the Spirit, you will never reach an end to the joy of life with God. It doesn't peak and fade like the joy of good food or sex. It's a never-ending spring, "welling up," as Jesus says, "to eternal life." Our experience of life in God will ebb and flow until the day the Lord returns, but the spring of water will never run dry.

Whenever we feel our need for more of him, whenever our soul seems dry, the Lord's invitation to us is the same. Lk 11:9, "I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Whenever we sincerely ask Jesus to satisfy our soul the answer is always "yes." The question is not whether Jesus is willing to

give us the life he alone provides. The question, as Jesus reminded the Samaritan woman in v. 10, is whether we are willing to ask.

J.C. Ryle, "The infinite willingness of Christ to receive sinners is a golden truth, which ought to be treasured up in our hearts, and diligently impressed on others. The Lord Jesus is far more ready to hear than we are to pray, and far more ready to give favors than we are to ask them. All day long He stretches out His hands to the disobedient and gainsaying. He has thoughts of pity and compassion towards the vilest of sinners, even when they have no thoughts of Him. He stands waiting to bestow mercy and grace on the worst and the most unworthy, if they will only cry to Him."

## **CONCLUSION**

No matter who you are or what you've done, Jesus is eager to satisfy your soul with the joy of worshiping the Father in the power of the Spirit. Don't keep running to a broken cistern, friend. Don't keep asking someone or something else to satisfy your soul. It will only leave you thirsty again.

Look to Jesus. Cry out to Jesus. Ask him to give you life. Ask him to give you joy. Not a joy that turns on the tide of pandemics, human justice, or elections, but a joy that remains and abounds in all circumstances because it's rooted in the unchanging character of the Father and the indwelling presence of the Spirit.

And as the Lord grants you the gift of living water, friend, remember that you are no more deserving than the Samaritan woman of his mercy. The chasm between a holy God and sinful men is infinitely greater than the divide between Jews and Samaritans. Yet that is precisely the gap Jesus crossed to save you.

Follow his example by deliberately engaging someone across a cultural divide in your own life this week. Look for an opportunity to be vulnerable with someone who would never expect you to talk with them and watch what the Lord will do. It's one of the most important ways we show the world that the love of Jesus knows no bounds.

Embrace the Savior who shatters social boundaries. Ask Jesus to give you the life he alone can provide. May the Spirit help us to take both of those steps this week.