

Amazing Grace

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[0 : 0 0] John chapter 4 verse 1. Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized but his disciples. So 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 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 livestock? Jesus answered, Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them 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. Sir, the woman said, I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place we must worship is in Jerusalem. Woman, Jesus replied, Believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know.

We worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in the spirit and in truth.

[2 : 4 3] The woman said, I know that Messiah called Christ is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us. Then Jesus declared, I, the one speaking to you, I am he. This is the word of the Lord.

Amen. Great. Thanks, Aileen, for reading. And if you could keep your Bibles open at John chapter 4, that would be great, page 1066. And we are going to look at that together. We will take questions at the end. So if you, as you are looking at it and as we are thinking about it together in the next 25 minutes or so, if you have any questions, just keep them in mind and we will take questions from the floor. It's my custom to pray because we don't just want to be thinking academically about who God is, but actually if he is there, having a real encounter with him. So let's bow our heads and pray together.

We thank you, Heavenly Father, for Jesus and for John's account of his life. And we pray that you will make yourself known to each one of us this evening and that you will help us to respond rightly to you. In Jesus' name. Amen. So we, having this guest service, it was sort of part of a series at St. Silas thinking about the Reformation. And the Reformation is what we call the rediscovery 500 years ago of truths about God from the Bible as people across Europe went back to the Bible and saw truths that had been there all along but had been lost by the kind of traditions of the church. And at the heart of that was this idea that in the medieval church and across medieval Europe, people thought that there was a God who would accept the good and reject the bad. So your good deeds had to outweigh your bad deeds if you were going to please this God and be accepted by him. And when you turn to Jesus, you find that we can't earn God's favor in that way, but that on offer to any of us, as we just heard

Rebecca discovered from a youth group on offer to any of us is a free gift or favor from God. I don't know whether you're a fan of Sam Smith, but he's got this song that's just come out. He had this really successful first album and now his second album has just come out and to promote it, he has released one of the songs off the album. So it's been on the radio and everything. And it's called Pray. And we're just going to hear a clip from it to hear how Sam Smith thinks about God.

You won't find me in church. No!

[5 : 33] Reading the Bible. No! I am still here and I'm still your disciple. I'm down on my knees. I'm begging you please. I'm broken, alone and afraid. I'm not a saint. I'm more of a sinner. I don't want to lose.

But I fear for the winners when I try to explain the words right away. That's why I'm stood here today. And I'm gonna pray. I'm gonna pray. Maybe I'll pray. Pray for a glimmer of hope. Maybe I'll pray.

So there he is with his typical voice that people love. But did you notice what he's saying about God? It's just like people used to think about God. And clearly people are thinking about God.

All across the UK today, he's decided to talk to God. Clearly in the song's words, the story of the song is it's a long time since he's prayed to God. It's clearly autobiographical in some way.

And he says, I'm not a saint. I'm more of a sinner. As though he's kind of having to confess to God. I don't know whether you're gonna hear me. Because this God, he wants saints, not sinners. And, you know, I'm not that good a person. I don't read my Bible. You won't find me in church.

[6 : 59] Will God really listen to me? So we're just gonna look here at this eyewitness account by John of Jesus' life. And we're looking at this encounter that Jesus had with a woman.

And it's this terrific scene because in one scene it shows us so much about who Jesus is, who he came for, what he offers to us. And so as we look at it, we're gonna look at four things about what Jesus offers.

Who is it for? What is it? Why does it matter? And how is the offer made? So first of all, who is the offer for? If you just look again at chapter four, what happens is Jesus is on his way back up north to Galilee from Jerusalem.

And he goes through this town, Samaria. In verse four we read that. He had to go through Samaria. I think lots of Jewish people would have gone around Samaria. It was a region that you avoided.

Because at that time, Samaria was full of the outcasts from the people of God. And they've made up their own religion, their own way of worshipping God. They worshipped him on a hill in their own way.

[8 : 05] So that if you were a Bible-believing God follower at that time, you didn't have anything to do with the Samaritans. So let's pick things up at the end of verse six. If you just have a look with me.

Jesus sits down at this well. Verse six. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, Will you give me a drink? Now, in that culture, that is a very shocking thing.

Because a man in the first century Middle East would very rarely speak to a woman in public. And certainly a Jewish man wouldn't be speaking to a Samaritan woman.

And you can see the shock in her response. In verse nine, she says, 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.

[9 : 07] So Jesus makes this incredibly enticing offer to this woman. And as he does, he's showing us the breadth of God's grace. Later on, we hear about this woman.

She's had five husbands. She's living with a guy who's not her husband. She has come to the well to get water at noon.

Why has she come at noon? Well, she's come because that's when nobody else goes to the well. All the women would have gone out from the village to the well in the morning together as a community activity.

She is an outcast from that. We can infer that it's because of the way she's lived. An outcast of the outcasts. And yet Jesus meets with her and he makes this amazing offer to show us that what he's offering isn't just for the religious.

It's not for the upstanding, the respectable who think they've earned it. No, it's a free gift. And that's the great news of God's grace. That Jesus offers it to an outcast woman.

[10 : 11] And he offers it to those people 500 years ago who were afraid that God wouldn't accept them. And he offers it to Sam Smith. And he offers it to us.

So that if you're here this evening and you're someone who thinks, well, church isn't really my thing. And it's a long time since I've thought about God and I don't really feel comfortable being in church.

Then the great news is that Jesus came exactly for people like you. So that's our first question about what Jesus offers. Who is it for? Secondly, what is it?

What is it that Jesus offers? Well, look at how Jesus puts it in verse 10. He says, Now the woman thinks he's still talking about the well.

So he says in verse 13 a bit more. He says, What's he saying?

[11 : 24] Well, I guess we all know the feeling, don't we, of being really, really thirsty. Maybe if you're kind of out for a run on a hot day or you're working, doing some job outside in the hot sun.

And you feel really thirsty. When you first get some cold, pure, refreshing water on a day when you're really parched, it's amazing as it goes in your mouth.

It's the most refreshing thing. And you just can't stop drinking it. And that's the picture Jesus uses here of what he offers to you and me. He's saying, I've got something that your soul needs as much as your body needs water for life.

I've got something that your soul will find as satisfying as your parched mouth finds a cold drink of water on a hot day.

And what that shows us, and one of the things we passionately believe at St. Silas, is that being a Christian is not just about ticking a box by what you say so that you would get to heaven when you die.

[12 : 36] And life carries on as it always would have done, but then you're going to go to heaven. No, what Jesus is saying here explores that idea. Because he says that he is offering us the only thing that can satisfy a thirst deep inside of every one of us.

Our spiritual searchings. So that it's like living water for your soul. And if you pursue it, you'll never thirst again. And that brings us to our third question.

Why does it matter? Why does it matter that Jesus offers that? And this is where the encounter with Jesus takes a fascinating turn for this woman. You see, in verse 15, she still seems to think he's talking about real water, physical water.

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. But Jesus responds in verse 16, Go, call your husband and come back.

It looks like an abrupt change of subject from him. And then we hear that she doesn't have a husband. And Jesus says that he already knew that. Verse 17, You are right when you say you have no husband.

[13 : 48] 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 what's going on? Is Jesus distracted?

Is he being cruel in pointing this out? Well, no, of course not. In fact, he's not even changing the subject. What he is doing is he's showing this woman that the living water that he can offer her, she's already looking for it.

But she's been looking for it in the wrong places. He's saying you're thirsty in your soul. And you're looking to satisfy that thirst through men, through relationships with men.

Now that looking to satisfy our thirst elsewhere is used before Jesus came by one of the prophets, Jeremiah, God speaking through this prophet, to describe what the Bible calls sin.

In Jeremiah chapter 2, we read this. God saying this to his people. He says, So this woman, she's looking to satisfy her thirst through relationships, through men.

[15 : 07] And without Jesus, that's what we're all doing. He's offering us living water. And sin is about the way that we take the good things God gives us. And instead of filling our lives with him and orbiting around him, we look to satisfy our thirst inside with other things.

And we're all doing that. So Sam Smith, in that song, Pray, as I first heard it on the radio, I was thinking, why has Sam Smith started to pray? Okay. And he tells us in his song, he says about his life so far, I'm young and I'm foolish.

I've made bad decisions. I block out the news, turn my back on religion. Don't have no degree. I'm somewhat naive. I've made it this far on my own. But lately, that stuff ain't been getting me higher.

I lift up my head and the world is on fire. There's dread in my heart and fear in my bones. And I just don't know what to say. Maybe I'll pray. In other words, he's tried life on his own.

And the stuff he goes to for the highs in life, the stuff he was striving to get, is wearing off. And he sent this message to his fans. He said, I hope you love Pray.

[16 : 16] I hope it becomes your friend in those deep, dark nights of confusion and loneliness. It's interesting, isn't it? Because when you hear Sam Smith talk, he has got everything he ever dreamed of in his success and his money and his popularity.

But he's saying he's still thirsty, confused, lonely. And so for us, aren't we all trying to satisfy thirst in life?

If you just pick up a weekend newspaper and see what people want to engage with on the weekend when they've got time. I picked up the Times magazine a couple of weeks ago.

And on the front page is this guy, Antonio Horta Osario. Why is he on the front page? Well, he was chief executive of Santander and then Lloyd's Bank. So he was like a massive cheese in the city.

And then he crashed out dramatically. He ended up in the Priory. He was exhausted. He was stressed. And he's in the magazine because he's now speaking out more about the mental health crash that he had.

[17 : 18] Because he says that in the financial sector, so in the city, there are loads of people who are so driven in their jobs and trying to get so much out of their career that they're all kind of revving too high and they're not willing to admit when they're in trouble and when they're too stressed, they're exhausted.

So it's a comment really on the way that people put work first and make too much of it. Then just a couple of pages on from that article is an article about these two women who've got a podcast, I won't tell you what its name, in America, they're in New York, about their sex lives.

And they podcast week by week and they interview guys that they've had sex with about the sex that they've had. So this explicit podcast. And millions of people subscribe to this podcast.

Then there's another article in there about what millennials do for kicks. And it's about people who pursue kind of extreme sport or extreme stamina achievement to try and get satisfaction.

So people for whom doing the Ironman is no longer enough. In the article, it talks about how lots of people now are using Strava, as I do and some of you do here, which is kind of a cycling and running.

[18 : 41] But these are guys who have just sort of gone on to a different level with all of that and are kind of doing marathons in the desert every day and this sort of thing. And it was saying, why are people doing that? And they were asking people and they were saying, well, it's because I get self-respect and other people respect me for these kind of madly difficult things I do.

And also there's a little community of people who share through social media and Strava and things that they're doing these kind of madly difficult sporting exertion activities.

So I read this magazine. I just think, isn't everyone really thirsty for something? And we see that in Glasgow, don't we? We've got people working in the city centre so hard in their jobs that that comes before everything else and they think that will satisfy them.

Other people, not paying perhaps as much attention to work and thinking that sex is what will give them satisfaction in life or that relationships are, the right relationship is what they need.

If only they had that, they'd be satisfied. And then we've got guys who are gym rats and being in the gym and being in shape and getting your resting pulse rate down has become this kind of the ultimate thing that they're living for instead of just something to enjoy.

[20 : 00] We're thirsty, just like this woman. And just as with this woman, Jesus wants us to see that we're looking for something in other things.

And he's making this magnificent claim that he can satisfy that first. So that brings us to our fourth question. How does Jesus offer it?

And one thing I noticed this week for the first time is just to think how the woman responds at the end to meeting Jesus. She goes off to tell people in the town in verse 29 what's happened.

It's interesting, she doesn't say, I've heard about this living water. Let me tell you about this living water, this thing that satisfies you. In verse 29 she says, come see a man.

Come see a man. Because he is the living water that we need. It's Jesus that can fill your heart with overflowing.

[21 : 01] How does he do that? Well, he does it because God who made us, made us to know him. And the Bible uses lots of words to describe that relationship with God. It talks about eternal life, about life in all its fullness.

But it also talks about that relationship as worship. Because we were made to obey God and serve him. And through that to enjoy him as we know him.

And to trust him. But we've all turned to other things instead in life. Now, the woman starts asking Jesus about worship. And he responds in verse 22.

He says, you Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know. For salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the spirit and in truth.

For they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in the spirit and in truth. In other words, Jesus has come so that in his coming from now on anyone, anywhere can come back to God and worship him.

[22 : 16] Be drawn back into that relationship that we were made for where we serve God and enjoy him. How will Jesus achieve that? Well, in verse 23 he said, a time is coming.

But literally what he says is, an hour is coming. And that's a key word because in John's gospel the word hour on Jesus' lips only ever refers to one thing.

It's about his death. His death, resurrection, ascension. In that by dying on the cross he is going to open a way that any of us can find living water by having a relationship with God again.

And he had to die for that because our searching for something else to satisfy ourselves is offensive to God. It's wrong of us to turn from God for that.

And somebody had to put that right for us to be forgiven by God and restored to him. So Jesus came to do that for us. He died in our place.

[23 : 21] In the flow of this chapter what you could say is that it's because of this. It's because on the cross Jesus says I thirst. He offers living water to anyone who will come to him but he can only offer that because he himself went thirsty on the cross.

He was physically thirsty when he said I thirst. He's been tortured. He's been crucified. But more is going on than that at the cross. He's spiritually thirsty because God has forsaken him at the cross.

He was abandoned so that we can come home. And let me say that for my money this is the key to the longings of our hearts. That if you know for yourself that you were made for God and you turned from him and that that God was so generous he was willing to sacrifice himself in your place that you could come back to him.

Knowing that God and his love is what satisfies the longings of our soul. So what will you do with Jesus as he presents himself here?

This man. The woman says to the people in the town come see a man and I guess at St. Silas we long for you to do that to keep coming back and hear more.

[24 : 44] You might be somebody another good number here who have already accepted that offer from Jesus of living water and I wonder if you could reflect on the ways that you could invest more in Jesus this week and less in the things that the world says you should put first for satisfaction.

You might be someone who wants to think more about Jesus and we'd love you to come over Christmas but also we've got these copies of the Word One-to-One that you get in a pair just to go through John's account of Jesus' life and as you go through it to have these notes to help explain them why not go through that with a friend and just talk more about who Jesus really is and what he offers but perhaps there's just one or two people here who could say that you've not really accepted what Jesus says here before but you'd like to do that for the first time this evening and if that's you you'd need to talk to God about it rather than me or anyone else and you'd say to God sorry thank you and please you'd say sorry that I have not lived as I should in the past I've gone to other things instead of you for satisfaction and I know that's wrong you'd say thank you that Jesus died for me in my place so that I could turn back to you and be forgiven and you'd say please send your Holy Spirit into my life that I could live your ways from now on so I'm going to finish by leading us in a prayer like that and if you're somebody who's never talked to God like that before you could just use that to echo along in your own heart what's being said so that God hears you and you turn to him let's bow our heads and I'll say that prayer heavenly father you made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you

I'm sorry for the times that I've looked to satisfy my thirsty soul by living for other things instead of trusting you serving you obeying you and enjoying you please forgive me thank you that Jesus died on the cross in my place that he was cut off from your love that I might be forgiven and accepted that he was thirsty so that he could offer me living water I now accept that gift please fill me with your Holy Spirit to help me from now on to live a life that pleases you in Jesus name Amen and if you have prayed that prayer for the first time this evening that's a brilliant thing do let me know or let somebody know who you've come along with so that we can help you go on responding to Jesus in the way that you have by praying that this evening you are going