

# John 4:1-18 // Big Day Out Talk 1

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to spend these next three weeks in John chapter 4, one of the great chapters of the Bible. I hope you'll be able to be here and join us through all three of them.

I'll follow along online if you're not in town over the next couple of weeks. But this wonderful encounter between Jesus and the woman of Samaria, I'm going to pray and then read to us the first 18 verses.

John writes, so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

And that by believing we may have life in his name. And so our Father, we want to thank you for recording the wonderful words and works of the Lord Jesus in the scriptures so that we can encounter him and believe in him.

And find true and fulfilling life in him. Pray that you would do that work in the heart of each one of us this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[ 1 : 06 ] Let me read them from John chapter 4, starting at verse 1. Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John, although Jesus himself didn't 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 or 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. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came 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.

[ 2 : 24 ] 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 again. The water that I will 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 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 him, You're right in saying, I have no husband. You've had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.

[ 3 : 24 ] What you have said is true. Please hold that open in front of you. There's also an outline, as ever, on the back of the notice sheet.

Well, our subject this morning is one that preoccupies most of us consciously or subconsciously most of the time. It's something that we seek in success at work, many of us, in happiness at home, in the excitement of travel, in the thrill of new experiences, experiences, and yet somehow it remains elusive with thinking about satisfaction.

It's not hard for a preacher to find endless quotations from those who have sought and are yet to find it. This is King Charles. There remains deep in the soul, if I dare use that word, a persistent and unconscious anxiety that something is missing, some ingredient that makes life worth living.

There are many more. I won't labor them all. It was as long ago as 1965 that Mick Jagger first sang. Some of you were there, right? No doubt. I can't get no satisfaction.

60 years on, and it seems we're still looking. So we're thinking about satisfaction, about fulfillment. Jesus, you may be surprised to know, says that the problem is neither that we want satisfaction, nor that it's impossible to find, but that we're looking in the wrong place.

[ 5 : 02 ] The oldest lie in the book is that true freedom and happiness are found apart from God and his will for our lives. It's the one that Adam and Eve fell for and the guard and the serpent asked, did God really say you may not eat from the fruit of the tree?

Or in other words, isn't he a spoilsport? Isn't he just restricting your freedom, your right to choose? Why would you listen to God? You should express yourself.

You should make your own rules. That's what's going to make you truly happy. And still today, even Christians, you'll know this in your own heart, can continue to look for meaning and satisfaction in success, in popularity, in relationships, in family, in possessions, in hobbies, and in therapy.

And Jesus says, you might find some temporary relief in some of those things, but it will fade and you will thirst again.

because the only place that we can find the sort of never-ending satisfaction that we crave is in him. Three points as we think about it together, the first of which is the longest.

[ 6 : 24 ] First then, the unending gift, true satisfaction. As I said, this is a pretty iconic conversation. It centers in, we'll just zoom in this morning on verse 10, if we may, for a second.

Jesus says, if you knew the gift of God and who it is that's saying to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. She gets confused in the next couple of verses.

She thinks he's talking about the physical water that comes out of the well. So in verse 13, he restates the offer. Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I give them will never be thirsty again.

The water that I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Notice a few things. One, verse 10, we're talking about a gift from God. So this isn't something we earn, but something that he freely gives.

Second, we're talking about living water that provides permanent relief from thirst. Third, even bigger, verse 14, this gift of living water results ultimately in eternal life.

[ 7 : 32 ] Put all that together. And what God is offering to the world through his son Jesus is a living, personal encounter and relationship with himself.

Something that begins now and lasts into eternity and that provides the profound and true and constantly replenishing satisfaction and fulfillment that we crave.

the setting for this astonishing pronouncement from the lips of Jesus is this place that I don't know how to pronounce called Sychar or Sychar in Samaria.

Jesus is withdrawn from the Pharisees so that he can teach his disciples in private when we join him. He's hot from the midday sun. He's tired from the journey. So he sits down next to this well while his disciples head into town to buy some lunch.

It's a very typical domestic scene. And that's when this local Samaritan woman appears and Jesus initiates a conversation with her by asking her for a drink. And immediately we're thinking something a bit weird is going on.

[ 8 : 42 ] As she herself points out for a Jewish man like Jesus to engage in a conversation with a Samaritan woman would have been absolutely unheard of in the culture of the day.

That's why she asks in verse 9 how is it that you ask for a drink from me a woman of Samaria?

Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Then Jesus' own disciples react in the same way when they get back from the shops in verse 27 we're told that they marveled that he was talking with a woman.

There's a couple of things going on. One is that right across the board Jews considered Samaritans to be racially, spiritually, and morally impure.

animosity between the peoples went back centuries so for Jesus to engage in any conversation with any Samaritan would have been a big deal but to chat to a Samaritan woman in particular was even more shocking.

As a rule do you know this Jewish men of the day didn't even talk to their own wife in public. There's nothing in the Bible telling them that's the way that they ought to live.

[ 9 : 49 ] That custom though awful as it is had arisen may be nice for the wife I don't know but Jesus is breaking some pretty big cultural taboos when he offers this woman of Samaria a taste of

his living water.

What is he talking about? We get a bit more background to the language of water in the conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus in chapter 3.

Can you just glance back with me to verse 3 just before the page on 887 the page flip Jesus tells Nicodemus that if he wants to enter the kingdom of God over the page again he will need to be born again and in verse 5 he says the same thing in slightly different words truly I say to you unless one is born of water in the spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God I'll mention this again next week but as I've I thought I'd indicated on the sheet but haven't the reference there's a reference there to the Old Testament book of Ezekiel Ezekiel chapter 36 and verses 25 to 27 where God promises his people a brand new start and in that context it's quite clear that the purpose of the water is to wash them clean of all of their sins and idols and spiritual impurities and Jesus was saying to Nicodemus that's what you need if you want to enter my glorious kingdom of life if you want to be there when I wipe away every tear from my people's eyes and swallow up the shroud of death forever you need to be washed clean that's what you need that's because all of us by nature are dirty spiritually before God it's wonderful then that Jesus is the forever king who can wash us spiritually clean and restore us to living and satisfying relationship with God that's what Jesus was saying to Nicodemus and all of that water stuff is still in the background here in chapter 4 as Jesus offers to this woman the living water of a clean start spiritual cleansing that brings you into an eternal relationship with God and the way he highlights her need of him is in verse 16 when he does that line go and tell your husband and come go call your husband and come here and she says I haven't got a husband and you're right in saying you haven't got a husband you've had five husbands and the bloke that you're with now isn't your husband what you've said is true we don't know the story of each of her marriages it may be that her first five husbands all died just kind of one after the other in which case number six is a braver man than I am

I think but given that they're not married the suggestion seems to be that she hadn't always waited until death do them part before she moved on but try as she might this woman had found that no relationship can fill the God shaped hole in her hearts maybe we picture her on wedding day after wedding day after wedding day and the raised hopes and excitement of a new love eager anticipation for the future it's going to be different this time the initial joy the gradual realization disillusionment failure disappointment despair and then that numbing cycle being repeated again and again and again and it may be that she was a particularly acute case on number six but you think she might have felt very much at home in the 21st century and in so far as any of us ever seeks fulfillment in God's world anywhere other than

[ 14 : 03 ] God we're actually just the same as her see what you make of C.S. Lewis most people if they'd really learn to look into their own hearts that's an interesting line most people if they'd really learn to look into their own hearts would know that they do want acutely something that cannot be had in this world there are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you but they never quite keep their promise the longings which arise in us when we first fall in love or first think of some foreign country we'd like to visit or first take up some subject which excites us our longings which no marriage no travel nor learning can really satisfy I'm not speaking of what would ordinarily be called unsuccessful marriages or holidays or learnings or careers I'm speaking of the very best possible ones but there was something we grasped at in that first moment of longing which just fades away in reality and I think everybody knows what I mean sorry Lewis goes on that the wife may be a good wife the hotels and the scenery may have been excellent the career may have been a very interesting career but something has evaded us

I read that to Emily once and she said don't worry I worked out years ago that I'd be wasting my time if I tried to find satisfaction in you I thought that was maybe a bit harsh but fair Augustine famously said you have made us for yourself oh lord and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you we're not just we're just not designed to find our ultimate meaning and satisfaction within this world in human relationships or achievements to think that any human being could ever be the source of another's ultimate and lasting fulfillment will always end in disappointment it's not a burden we were designed to bear but Jesus is offering us a fresh start to be washed spiritually clean invited into an eternal relationship with our maker the only one who can complete us and satisfy us you know he's not saying that your life is going to be easy or perfect if you follow him it doesn't mean that your christian life will be easy or perfect either of course they won't not in this life but they will be one day and so we have a hope that can be found nowhere else it's our first point

the unending gift of god is true satisfaction second the unique source is jesus himself and this is just a short point really and to be honest it's just the application of what we've seen but i want to underline again that this incredible gift of god comes to us in and through jesus it's a point that's made really clearly in verse 14 he says whoever drinks of the water that i give them will never be thirsty again the water that i give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life the point's unpacked at length all the way through john's gospel it's jesus it's it's only jesus who can wash us spiritually clean it's jesus it's only jesus who can give us this lasting and fulfilling relationship with our creator in the present it's jesus and only jesus who can give us a place in god's perfect new creation in the future he was lifted up on the cross for us he died in our place and so he is the unique source of the satisfaction that we crave and so here's my question to ponder in the the new year asked of myself as of you as always it is directed particularly at those of us who already follow jesus but by all means reflect on it too if you want to if we know and believe already that jesus is the only true source of this soul quenching living water if we know that about jesus then why do we persist in looking for that satisfaction elsewhere even as we go through life why do we still chase after satisfaction in our academic success and our career and our relationships relationships it is a wonderful kindness of god if he's given us a degree or a job that we find rewarding and fulfilling but we don't find our ultimate meaning in life in what we do so why do we keep thinking that if we just get a higher mark or a better job or more recognition that that's what will tip the balance and make us happy and fulfilled and so we give ourselves to that goal even though it's disappointed us so many times in the past and why do we still chase after satisfaction in relationships and for some of us family life and falling in love is an amazing thing having a family can be an amazing thing a great gift but how unfair to expect my children let's say to be the source of my self-worth and satisfaction in life and why do we still chase after satisfaction in a life of adventure and travel and new experiences in his grace god has put us in a wonderful world and like no generation before us actually he's given us opportunities to travel to live genuinely global lives many of you are testimony to that all of those good gifts from god are to be received with thanksgiving but you won't find living water in a buddhist temple in the himalayas or on safari in tanzania or in a doctorate from st andrews or on a beach in the caribbean we were never meant to so there is a challenge for us that just runs alongside this wonderful promise that we're thinking about this morning will i live in 2025 as though jesus really is the unique source of true and lasting satisfaction and let all of those other great things have their appropriate place in my life but not the primary place and not bearing a burden that they can never do so finally this morning the universal offer whoever there's an element to this story that i haven't mentioned yet it's that some of you will know this this isn't the first time in the bible that a man has met a woman at a well in a foreign land and they've got chatting man meets woman at a well and they start chatting so the intriguing thing though is that what typically happens in those circumstances is that they end up getting married so isaac and rebecca! that was their story jacob and rachel that was their story mooses and zipper are slightly different but that was their story every groom meets his wife through an apparently chance encounter at a well and those are such well-known bible stories in the first century that any time a guy meets a girl at a well we start to wonder our heads begin the wheels begin to turn now here's jesus in a foreign land at a well it can't just be coincidence because the the idea of jesus as a bridegroom comes up a little bit actually in these early chapters of john's gospel and back in the old testament god described himself as the bridegroom to his unfaithful people israel and promised that one day he would come to earth as a bridegroom to woo his people back into relationship with himself and so we come to john's gospel and first at the wedding of cana when the groom fails in his job of providing wedding for everybody jesus steps in and fulfills the role of the bridegroom by providing wine for the feast and then in chapter 3 verse 29 jesus is explicitly presented as the bridegroom john the baptist calls himself the best man whose joy is complete because the bridegroom jesus has now come put it together and what john is telling us is that jesus is god himself the divine bridegroom and that he's come to earth just as he's always promised to win a people for himself and to love them forever he has no romantic intentions towards this woman but he is fulfilling that role as the bridegroom of god's people and all of that makes it even more surprising that jesus should end up at a well talking to this woman in particular because this version of the story breaks from the previous tradition back in genesis rebecca is described as very beautiful and as a virgin rachel is described as beautiful and she's living at home under the protection of her father picture of innocence i guess zipporah was a damsel in distress when mooses rescued her at the well the samaritan woman is anything but a shy and retiring maiden the

