

The Water of Life

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[0 : 0 0] This morning's reading is from John chapter 4, verses 1 to 30. You can find that on page 1066 of the Bibles in front of you. 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.

[1 : 2 0] 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 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 where we must worship is in Jerusalem.

[2 : 2 5] 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 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. 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. Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman.

But no one asked, What do you want or why are you talking with her? Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, Come, see a man who told me everything I've ever done.

[3 : 26] Could this be the Messiah? They came out of the town and made their way towards him. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Brilliant.

Thanks, Nicola. It would be great help to me if you'd keep your Bible open at John chapter 4. We're continuing in our series on John's Gospel, a Gospel saturated in water, and we're looking at it through the lens of water.

So the first half of the Gospel in particular, water features really prominently. Chapter 1, we had Jesus' baptism. Chapter 2, the changing of water into wine.

Chapter 3, that chat with Nicodemus last week, that he needed to be born again of water and the Spirit. And we come to chapter 4 this week, the encounter of Jesus at the well.

So let's pray and ask God's help as we come to look at this amazing chapter. Let's bow our heads and pray. Father, we come to you thirsty.

[4 : 33] Bring us to the streams of living water that our thirst would be sated through the imbibing of your words and the transformative power of your Spirit.

Would your Spirit reveal to us the Lord Jesus? Would you amaze us again by your grace?

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. There isn't a single guy in the world I can trust.

There isn't a single guy in the world that I can trust. These were the heartbreaking words that a dear friend of mine, not a Christian, but a dear friend of mine said to me a few years ago.

There isn't a guy in the world that I can trust. She was devastated. She'd just split up from her long-term partner of several years, who she found out had been cheating on her, just like her previous long-term boyfriend had done.

[5 : 44] It also cheated on her all throughout her relationship. There isn't a single guy in the world I can trust. Actually, there is one who is faithful and true.

And the Jesus we encounter in chapter 4 of John's Gospel has this absolutely incredible encounter with the most unlikely of people.

A woman from Samaria who comes with her own relational baggage. We don't know all the details. But undoubtedly, one way or another, heartache there for her too.

And in many ways, it's an astonishing passage. The longest conversation between Jesus and a woman that we have recorded for us anywhere in the New Testament.

And there's layers and layers of meaning that we'll uncover just a little bit of, I hope, this morning. But actually, the main idea is really simple. And John chapter 3, 16 helps us understand.

[6 : 45] A verse we looked at last week. So just glance across the page to John 3, verse 16. Jesus says, For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever, whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life.

Whoever believes in Jesus will be saved. And the flip side of the Gospel is that everyone is perishing.

We looked at that last week, didn't we? Michael Reeder Harris showed us that even a theologian like Nicodemus, of such social standing, of such moral rectitude as Nicodemus, even a church-going, religious person like him, is perishing unless you're trusting in the Lord Jesus alone for salvation.

No matter who you are, no matter where you come from, you're never going to make it on your own. Everyone is perishing. But the good news is that whoever, whoever believes in Jesus, whoever believes in him for their personal salvation, won't perish, but have eternal life.

And the woman from Samaria who we're meant to see in contrast to Nicodemus is the whoever. The good news about Jesus extends to whoever, and it really is whoever, even her, the most unlikely of people, even a sinner like me.

[8 : 25] It's whoever, even you. No matter your past, no matter your baggage, no matter your background, no matter where you come from, whoever. That's the main idea of this passage.

This layers to it, as I say. But the main idea is simple. Whoever believes in Jesus will not perish, but have eternal life. There's different aspects of what Jesus is offering here, and how we are to respond to it.

We've got three headings this morning. They're in the handout. The first heading, God offers true satisfaction. God offers true satisfaction. Secondly, God invites true relationship.

And thirdly, God seeks true worship. So firstly then, God offers true satisfaction. Jesus is on his way through Samaria.

He's tired from the journey. We see his full humanity on display here in the heat of the midday sun, and he sits down by the well. Just about the same time he gets there, in God's providence, along comes a Samaritan woman, verse 7, comes to draw water from the well.

[9 : 43] And Jesus is thirsty. He says to her, will you give me a drink? And notice, it's the only question that Jesus asks in this whole conversation.

All the other questions come from her. Of course, he's directing the conversation in other ways. But Jesus initiates a conversation by this simple question, are you thirsty?

And it's a conversation that's surprising in all sorts of ways, with all sorts of twists and turns, a conversation that never should have taken place in the first place, at least not according to the social conventions of Jesus' day.

Breaking all sorts of social boundaries. And the woman knows it, verse 9. She says to him, verse 9, you're a Jew and I'm a Samaritan woman.

What are you doing asking me for a drink? And then John explains, for Jews do not associate with Samaritans. You could say that's kind of an understatement here.

[10 : 49] Any self-respecting Jew of Jesus' day would steer clear and give a wide berth to any Samaritan and certainly wouldn't be sharing a glass of water with them.

The Samaritans had compromised in their faith, allowing the surrounding pagan culture to infiltrate, to shape and influence what they believed and how they worshipped.

But we get the idea in Glasgow, a city divided by blue and green. I think we get the idea. There's some watering holes in Glasgow that you're best to avoid.

Best to avoid full stop perhaps, but particularly if you're from the wrong end of town. One such watering hole is the Loudoun Tavern on Duke Street in Hag Hill next to Deniston.

Not too far away from where we're planning to plant a church. There is on the screen. Delightful. Not too far away from where St Silas is thinking about planting a church and they certainly need the gospel in the east end of Glasgow as much as we do here.

[12 : 01] But the Loudoun Tavern is a ranger's pub in the Celtic end of town. Provocatively painted in royal blue adorned with Union flags and razor wire.

A windowless bunker. Self-proclaimed the greatest pub in the entire world. I love that. Not simply the greatest pub in Scotland or Glasgow.

The greatest pub in the whole world. Forget Harry's Bar in Venice. You've got the Loudoun Tavern in Deniston. On TripAdvisor, I love that people have written into TripAdvisor about the Loudoun Tavern.

Adventure tourists perhaps. But they've left reviews at Elf of the Lown, the greatest pub in the world. And Ian from Coat Bridge is circumspect, a little bit more measured than some of the other reviews.

He writes, Friendly pub on Duke Street. Well worth a visit. Friendly pub. I like that. Maybe get Mayor to organise the next church picnic there in the summer.

[13 : 09] Friendly pub on Duke Street. But then, with masterful understatement, Ian from Coat Bridge adds the following disclaimer. Friendly pub on Duke Street, but it is a good idea if you go there to be a Rangers supporter.

Well you don't say a good idea if you go there and want to get out of there in one piece, I suppose. You can just imagine the friendly reception that you'd get if you turned up in green and white.

There's watering holes that you just don't go to if you're from the wrong end of town and the wrong side of the divide. Well Jesus is that man.

He crosses the social boundaries and breaks all sorts of social conventions and it's shocking. We're meant to be shocked. The woman is shocked, certainly, and towards the end of the conversation when the disciples get back in verse 27, they're shocked too.

They were surprised, it says, to find him talking with a woman, this particular Samaritan woman, I suppose, all the more so. So Jesus asks her for a drink, she makes excuses, and Jesus answers her, verse 10, if you knew the gift of God, who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

[14 : 33] If you're the woman, you've got to be wondering to yourself, what on earth is going on here? I'm just minding my own business, going to fetch some water, and along comes this strange guy and starts asking me for a drink of water, and then the next minute he's saying that I should be asking him for a drink of water.

What's going on? And at this stage, she doesn't really get it, does she? She's a bit like Nicodemus. Last week, remember last week, Jesus said to Nicodemus, you have to be born again, and Nicodemus doesn't get it.

He's thinking in literal categories, how it's physically going to be possible to be born again as a grown man. He doesn't get that Jesus means spiritually, and it's the same with the woman here.

She's thinking literally. Sir, she says, verse 11, mate, you've not even got a bucket. How are you going to give me living water?

I think she's quite brassy. She gives him some sass in verse 12. So you think you're greater than our father Jacob. But Jesus isn't talking about drinking water.

[15 : 39] He's speaking of living water. He's offering her spiritual water that quenches our spiritual thirst, that gives true satisfaction, which can be found nowhere else except in him.

In verse 13, Jesus says, everyone who drinks this water from the well will be thirsty again. But whoever, whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.

The water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. The woman says to him, sir, give me this water so I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water from the well.

Seems she still doesn't quite get it at this point. But Jesus, if she only knew, is offering her something extraordinary. He's offering her life itself and he's offering her something that satisfies our deepest, profoundest thirst so that if you drink of it, if you drink of it, you will never be thirsty.

And Jesus is the source. You need to come to him. Jesus is making a promise about eternal spiritual life. Later on in chapter 7, he expands on this same image of the spring of water.

[17 : 11] So let's flick on a few pages, keep your thumb in chapter 4, flick on to chapter 7, verse 37, page 1072. Chapter 7, verse 37.

Jesus says, Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water will flow will flow within them.

He's speaking about the Holy Spirit being poured out, the life of God himself inside you. Jesus is making this offer to a Samaritan woman.

That's the shock. The promises in the Old Testament, for example, in Isaiah 55, come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters, or the promise or the promise in Ezekiel, if you're here for our last sermon series of a spiritual heart transplant.

I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh, says the Lord, and I will pour my spirit in you. And then the promise of streams of living water at the end of Ezekiel.

[18 : 32] God's people thought these were promises for them, the Jews. And yet, here is Jesus offering the fulfillment of them to a Samaritan woman.

And that's the shock here. It's being offered to someone on the outside, even her, whoever. Through Jesus, God offers true satisfaction to whoever, if you'd only put your trust in him.

Secondly, God invites true relationship. So the conversation takes a strange turn. It gets a bit awkward, doesn't it? Jesus throws in a curveball in verse 16 and gets her to call her husband.

She says, I don't have a husband. Of course, Jesus knows this. He says, you're right when you say you have no husband. The truth is, you've had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband.

The chat turns to husbands. It seems a bit abrupt, don't you think? A bit of a non-sequitur. We don't know why he's turning the conversation to this.

[19 : 43] We've been thinking about that a little bit in our roots groups this past week and it turns out that in the Old Testament, if you're looking for a potential marriage partner, the well is the place to be.

The well is the place to go to check out prospective marriage partners. No matchmaking websites back then and the well is the place to go. So, it's at a well, it's at a well where Moses meets his future wife, Zipporah.

And when Abraham's servant is sent to find a wife for Isaac, it's at a well. There he meets Rebecca. A few chapters after that in Genesis, Jacob meets his future wife, Rachel, you guessed it, at a well.

Jacob's well, in fact. Now, this should grab our attention because when Jesus comes through Samaria, he makes a beeline for Jacob's well.

That's what we're told and repeatedly John flags this up for us. So, in verse 5, Jesus came to a town near the plot of ground Jacob had given his son Joseph.

[21 : 01] Jacob's well was there. And as it turns out, it's even the same time of day, the high noon, when the sun's at its highest, that Jacob met Rachel and Jesus met the Samaritan women.

Another clue that John's giving us here. It's highlighted again in verse 12, are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself.

Wells, wells, wells. And I think what we're meant to understand is this encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan women at the well is following a pattern that's been very carefully established in the Old Testament.

A pattern that goes something like this. In each of those Old Testament encounters at a well, the pattern that is followed is this. First, the future bridegroom travels to a foreign land.

Secondly, there he meets a woman at a well. Thirdly, one of them, either the man or the woman draws water. Fourthly, the woman runs home to bring news of the stranger.

[22 : 17] And then finally, a marriage is arranged. So how does that track out in John chapter 4? First thing, the future bridegroom travels to a foreign land.

We're told in verses 3 to 6 that Jesus passes through Samaria. John's very careful to point that out to us. Secondly, he meets a woman at a well.

In verses 6 to 7, we've already been there. The Samaritan woman turns up just at the right time. One of them draws water. Actually, there's no mention of that in our passage.

We're not told whether either of them did end up drawing water, but instead Jesus offers living water to her. Fourthly, the woman runs home to bring news of the stranger.

If you glance down into verse 28, the Samaritan woman goes back and tells the whole village about Jesus. Finally, our marriage is arranged and we're left hanging here in this story, aren't we?

[23 : 26] The key to it is Jesus isn't offering a romantic relationship to the Samaritan woman. He's offering something more profound. He's offering a relationship to God through him.

And this isn't news to us if you've been following through the series in John's Gospel. The idea of weddings, the idea of Jesus as the bridegroom and of a spiritual relationship between people and God has been running all the way through these chapters.

So in chapter 2, Jesus turns up at a wedding. It's going badly because they've run out of wine at the reception. and Jesus steps into the bridegroom's shoes and miraculously turns the water into wine.

And then at the end of chapter 3, immediately before our passage, John the Baptist calls himself the best man and calls Jesus the bridegroom.

So in verse 29 of chapter 3, John the Baptist says, the bride belongs to the bridegroom.

[24 : 40] The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine.

Jesus is the bridegroom. So Jesus meets a woman at a well, in fact at Jacob's well, offering her living water and inviting this woman into a relationship with him.

This woman has been married five plus one times into relationship with Jesus and offering to be her perfect, faithful and true husband number seven.

And again, the shock, the shock is who it is that Jesus the bridegroom is offering a relationship to. He offers a relationship to this Samaritan woman with a questionable past.

When I say it's questionable, we simply don't know the details, we're not given the back story. Safe to say it's complicated. There's relational baggage, there's social stigma, there's guilt and shame.

[25 : 53] Presumably why she turns up alone at the well in the heat of the midday sun when all the other women would be coming in the cool of the morning or the evening to fetch the water.

Is she promiscuous? Maybe. A lot of the commentators seem to tar her with that brush. Is she some kind of glamorous Joan Collins figure, a first century AD celebrity from Sikha with five husbands?

Possible. Less likely, I'd say. It's just possible that she's been bereaved five times over and over, beset by tragedy. I guess by the time you're on to husband number four or five, it's maybe beginning to look just a little bit suspicious.

I suppose if you're that husband number four or five, you're maybe just starting to watch your back or starting to look over your shoulder just a little bit. I think it's just as likely that her husbands had been unfaithful to her, just used her and abandoned her, cheating on her over and over again.

We don't know her backstory. We just don't know. What we do know is the relationship she's currently in is displeasing to God.

[27 : 11] Sleeping with husband number six is not even her husband. And the point is, none of that disqualifies her.

None of it. Nothing in her past, nothing in her background, nothing to do with where she comes from, nothing to do with her sin and her shame disqualifies her. Now that disqualifies you, whoever you are, from taking up the offer of the true bridegroom's invitation to enter into a spiritual relationship with God.

God offers true satisfaction. God invites true relationship. How are we therefore to respond? Lastly, God seeks from us true worship.

We get the order wrong. Too often we get things the wrong way around. We think, first I need to go and sort myself out, then I'll come to Jesus.

First I need to iron out all the problems that are in my life, then I come to Jesus. I've had people say that to me before, people I've invited to church, say, I know I need Jesus, but my life's a mess.

[28 : 30] First I need to sort out my life. That's the wrong way around, isn't it? Your life's a mess. Before you do anything else, you need to run to Jesus.

We see that here, don't we? After Jesus shines a light on her relationships, there's no further comment. That's striking, isn't it?

Not from Jesus, not from her. It's not a case of go away and come back when you've sorted out your life. And she's realizing now that she's speaking to someone pretty special, someone pretty significant, someone who somehow knows all about her, knows all her past, all the workings of her mind, her memory, someone who's got answers.

And she, on her part, wants to talk about the deep things, the things that really matter. And so she asks him, verse 19, to address the dispute of where to worship.

She says, I can see that you're a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.

[30 : 05] And so she goes for the juggler, she gets right to the heart of the divisions that exist between the Jews and the Samaritans. and who was in and who was out and where we should worship.

The Jews and the Samaritans shared the same ancestry but were divided when the nation of Israel was split into ten tribes. In the north they were called Israel, two tribes in the south were called Judah.

The Jews of Jesus' day were from the tribes of Judah. They worshipped at the temple. The Samaritans came from the scattered northern tribes and they worshipped at Mount Jeruzim.

Where should it be? Jesus corrects in verse 22. You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know for salvation is from the Jews.

In other words, the Jews are right about this much. You Samaritans have been compromising. But actually a change is coming isn't it?

[31 : 15] And you Samaritan women are just in time. Your unorthodox practice in where and how you worship are about to be irrelevant because verse 23 the time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the spirit and in truth.

For these are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in the spirit and in truth.

Spirit and truth always together in the Bible. Notice that this isn't a conversation about the style of worship.

This isn't about one kind of music over another kind. It's a conversation which starts off about the where of worship and it ends up being about the nature of the worshipper.

These are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. Worshipping in spirit and in truth. It's not so much where. It's not so much about style.

[32 : 29] It's about what's happening to you, what's happening inside you. As you come to Jesus and he dwells in you by the Holy Spirit drawing you into a relationship with God through his revealed word and filling you to overflowing with living water that issues in true worship.

That's what it's about. The key to worship is the inward transformation of the Holy Spirit through the truth of the gospel.

And God is seeking true worshippers. True worship and true worshippers. And that could be you, Jesus is saying. That could be you, even you, Samaritan women with five plus one husbands.

You can be a worshipper in spirit and truth. Well, the Samaritan woman makes one final attempt to divert things and put off the inevitable. Verse 25, she says, when the Messiah comes, he can tell us all about this.

He's the last word in the matter. I can get on with my life and not worry about it for now. Well, she's in for a shock, isn't she? What are the chances? And Jesus says, yes, that's me.

[33 : 42] You're speaking to him right now. I, the one speaking to you, I am he. And the shock here is not so much that it's a man speaking to a woman or a Jew speaking to a Samaritan, but that God, the Son incarnate, the Messiah himself, is speaking face to face with this spiritually thirsty sinner, offering living water that provides true satisfaction, inviting her into true relationship with God and showing her how to respond in true worship.

friendship. there isn't a single guy in the world that I can trust. Well, actually, my friend is wrong. There is one, faithful and loving and true.

Jesus, the true bridegroom, the long-awaited Messiah called Christ. Aren't you thirsty? Ask him. And he will give you living water that will become in you a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

Accept him as your savior and he will draw you into spiritual relationship. Come to him and worship him in spirit and truth. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Amen. Let's pray and then we will turn again to worship in spirit and truth. Father, we give thanks to you for the good news that your grace extends to whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[35 : 35] Even the women of Samaria, even sinners like us. Help us to see with compassionate eyes those around us who are perishing and never to think that anyone's a lost cause or unsalvageable beyond the reach of you.

God, you may want to equip us. Thuse us and embolden us to be like the Samaritan woman and tell all those around us about the Lord Jesus and our hope in him, who loves us despite knowing all about our sinful lives.

And would your spirit fill us afresh that we would worship the risen Lord Jesus all our days in spirit and in truth.

Amen.