

One of the reasons that life is sustainable on planet earth is that we have water. Without water life would not be possible. Just like physical water is needed for physical life, the water that Jesus gives is necessary for eternal life. And so the theme of our sermon today is

Ask Jesus for Living Water

- I. so that you may have true life.
- II. so that you may offer true worship.

First, ask Jesus for living water so that you may have true life. In the Gospel for today Jesus was travelling from Judea in the south up to Galilee in the north. In between was Samaria. And as he was travelling through Samaria he came to a town called Sychar. Jesus was exhausted from the trip and so he stopped at a well. His disciples had gone into the city to buy food. A woman came out to the well to draw water and Jesus asked her for a drink.

It was very unusual for a Jew to ask a Samaritan for a drink because there was deep animosity between Jews and Samaritans. The woman said, **“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) (4:9)**. But Jesus came for all people. The previous chapter of the Gospel of John says that **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)**

As we look at this conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, I’d like to point out two things that Jesus does: 1) he directs her attention to a higher reality and 2) he reveals to her who he is. First, he directs her attention to a higher reality. Jesus starts out by asking her for a drink of natural water. But then he uses that as a spring board to talk about a greater water, but as the conversation goes on the woman continues to think that Jesus is talking to her about natural water.

Jesus directs her attention to higher things when he says, **“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” (4:11)**. The Greek phrase “living water” was sometimes used to refer to what we would call “running water.” It’s living in the sense that it moves. The well they were next to was fed by a spring and so the water in the well was living in that sense, and so she says, **“Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?” (4:12)**

Jesus again tries to direct her attention to a higher reality. **“Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I will give them will never thirst. Indeed the water I give them will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life’ (4:13-14)**. The woman still thinks that Jesus is talking about natural water and so she says, **“Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water” (4:15)**.

We might wonder, “Why doesn’t the woman understand that Jesus is talking about a higher reality?” Well, are we ever like the woman? Do we ever keep our minds focused on this world? If your prayer life is like mine sometimes, what do we usually ask God for? Does it ever happen that our prayers are almost entirely taken up by asking God for earthly things?

Ask Jesus for living water so that you may have true life. We Americans have water readily available to us. We can just go to faucet and get water any time we want. But even though we have water readily available to us. Sometimes we forget to drink enough water and we become dehydrated. What is your soul thirsty for? Isn’t your soul thirsty for forgiveness? Well, in the gospel you hear that Jesus died on the cross for all of your sins. And this forgiveness of sins is a gift of God through faith in Jesus. Isn’t that message like water to your thirsty soul? Jesus says, **“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” (4:11).** Drink this water. Believe the Gospel message and you will live forever.

Jesus directs the woman’s attention to a higher reality and Jesus also reveals to the woman who he is. Think of this whole event from the woman’s perspective. The woman walks up to the well and a man is sitting there looking exhausted. And at first she thinks that he is an ordinary man. Early in the conversation she says to Jesus, **“Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well?” (John 4:12)**

But then Jesus shows his divine knowledge. Jesus says to her in verse 16, **“Go, call your husband and come back” (4:16).** She says to Jesus simply, **“I don’t have a husband” (4:17).** And then Jesus shows his divine knowledge, **“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 just said is quite true” (John 4:17-18).** She had a lot of hurt in her past. And she was currently caught in a sin.

Why do you think Jesus brings up what must have been a sensitive subject for her? He brings up a sensitive subject because the living water is what can give her healing. If you were having a conversation with Jesus, what subjects would you not want him to bring up? Those are the subjects that Jesus wants to heal. We try to hide our wounds, but the living water can heal those wounds. So let’s repent of our sins and receive forgiveness from his cross.

When Jesus shows his divine knowledge, the woman realizes that he is more than just an ordinary man. She says, **“Sir, I can see that you are prophet” (4:19).** But even prophet isn’t enough to describe who Jesus is. Jesus reveals to her that he is the Messiah. **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, am he” (John 4:25).** Jesus is the Messiah. That’s the Savior that God promised in the Old Testament. Jesus is true God and true man in one person. The fact that he was exhausted shows that he is true man. The fact that he knew the woman’s past shows that he is true God.

Now why would God become man? God became man to save us from our sins. In the verses after our passage for today the woman goes back into the town and says to the villagers, “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did.” And the villagers come out to see Jesus and Jesus stays with them for two days and at the end of the story they say, **“We know that this man really is the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).** Several commentators<sup>1</sup> point out that throughout the story the woman realizes a little at a time who Jesus is. At first she thinks he’s an ordinary man, then Jesus reveals to her that he is a prophet, then the Messiah, then the Savior of the world. Jesus is God and man in one person. Ask him for living water so that you may have true life. And ask him for living water so that you may offer true worship.

When the woman realized that Jesus was a prophet, she asked him a theological question. And this theological question was something that was an issue of fierce debate between Samaritans and Jews. The issue was this. The Samaritans said that God should be worshiped on Mount Gerizim. And the Jews said that God should be worshiped at the temple in Jerusalem. The woman asked Jesus about this question. **“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem” (John 4:20).**

In the Old Testament, God did say that his people should come to Jerusalem to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. God directed people to worship him in a specific place, in Jerusalem among the Jewish people, because God had promised to bring a Savior from the Jewish people. Jesus says, **“Salvation is from the Jews” (4:22).** But Jesus also told the woman that worship tied to Jerusalem was about to be transcended.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Schnackenburg, *John*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 420; John Chrysostom.

**“Woman,”** Jesus replied, **“believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain [Mt. Gerizim] nor in Jerusalem.” (4:21).** Worship tied to Jerusalem was about to be transcended because all the sacrifices that took place there pointed forward to Jesus, the sacrifice for the sins of the world. John the Baptist said, **“Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29).** Jesus fulfilled all that the temple in Jerusalem was pointing forward to. And so after Jesus came worship was no longer tied to Jerusalem, worship could be in any place. Jesus says, **“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth” (4:23).** These verses tell us several things about true worship. First, true worship comes from faith worked by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit teaches us to trust in God as our Father through faith in Jesus Christ. Notice that Jesus says **“The true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth” (4:23).** We worship trusting God as our Father.

Another thing these verses teach us about worship is that worship should not be simply going through the motions. As we worship our minds and our hearts should be engaged. Worship should be genuine and heartfelt. **True worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth” (4:23).**

Another thing these verses teach us about worship is that worship should be focused on the truth that God reveals in his Word.<sup>2</sup> In worship we hear God’s word, and there God reveals to us the truth that Jesus died for us. After all, Jesus said, **“I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)**

Today Jesus says to the woman at the well, **“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” (John 4:10).** We know the gift of God. We know who Jesus is. So ask Jesus to give you living water so that you may have true life and so that you may offer true worship by faith in Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> I owe this insight to D. A. Carson, *John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 225-226.