

# Living Water in Exhausting Times

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] All right, we have been in a sermon series called The Gospel of John and the Drama of New Creation. The Gospel of John is the fourth gospel. There's not going to be anything on the screen, no slides, no text. So if you want to join me in John chapter 4, I invite you to do that. We're going to be going through this sort of verse-by-verse paragraph through paragraph. I have just a few things to say. I know we've been here a while already. We're not usually a church that like titles our sermons. It's not like we have one of those like church signs that we can put up or anything. But if this sermon had a title would be Living Water in Exhausting Times, can I have an amen for exhausting times? This is what John chapter 4 says. This is verse 4. Now, when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John. Parentheses, although it was not Jesus himself, but his disciples who baptized. We don't have time to get into that, but it's true. Verse 3, Jesus left Judea and started back to Galilee. So basically,

Jesus is sort of making a strategic withdrawal or retreat since he just made such a ruckus in Judea. So he's heading north, and he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city named Sychar, near a plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. And Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. Now, the Gospel of John is famous for, in sort of biblical scholarly terms, it's high Christology. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all present Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah and the Christ. And then you really have to like get into the weeds with the literature of like, but is it presenting Jesus as divine? It's hard to tell sometimes. Whereas John, there's no question, when you get in to read the book of John, there's no question that the author sees Jesus as divine. Jesus says these statements, I and my Father are one.

What I see the Father doing, I'm doing, all of that. But even with this high Christology, Jesus being divine, the author is still willing to admit that Jesus is tired out. Let me hear you say tired out.

Jesus was tired out by his journey, so he sits down by a well, and it's about noon. Now, if you're, if you're, you know, an ancient Jew, Hebrew, reading a story about a man sitting down by a well, your mind heads to the Barnes and Noble romance section, okay? Because well stories in the biblical literature are typically betrothal stories. They're typically betrothal stories of two people meeting by a well, and some romance, and maybe not like 21st century romance, but at least like the bringing together of two families in a marriage. That's where these things happen. It happened to Isaac, and it happened to Jacob, and it happened to Moses. So Jesus, he's tired. He sits down by a well, and it's about noon. Now, compared to John chapter 3, Nicodemus, who Matt preached on, Antonio preached on last week, meets Jesus by night. There's a little bit of like an undercover situation with Nicodemus and Jesus. Nicodemus is maybe scared to be associated with Jesus. He's afraid to be associated with Jesus, but the story that's about to play out happens at noon, broad daylight. And if you know anything about the story that's about to happen, there's a woman who's going to start coming to talk to Jesus, and Jesus talks to her. And it's often said like, well, she goes out to get water at noon in the hot daylight because she was socially ostracized, and she had to go when no one else was being there.

There was nothing in the ancient literature to suggest that's true, okay? It's just noon. If anything, it's the contrast between Nicodemus at night and the conversation that's about to occur in broad daylight. So verse 7, a Samaritan woman comes to draw water, and Jesus says to her, give me a drink. Now, I just want you to put a bookmark on that phrase, give me a drink, because God is making a demand of this woman. And we're going to talk about that, but not to the end.

[ 4 : 06 ] Verse 8, his disciples had gone to the city to buy food. So this is sort of on the outskirts of the city. There's a well. Jesus sits down. He's tired. He says to the woman who comes there, give me a drink. In verse 9, the woman says to him, how is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?

And then the writer puts in some commentary for us. Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans. So there is this multi-hundred-year feud between the Judeans and the Samaritans. And there's lots of reasons for this. It has to do with the exile and the intermarriage between purebloods and mixedbloods and like some weird sort of racial nationalistic stuff. But in the end, what this division has to do about has to do with style of worship, things that we would never fight about today, correct?

style of worship where the Judeans, they worship in Jerusalem. The sacrificial system, the priestly order is centered in Jerusalem, whereas the Samaritans have more in common with the northern kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament. And so they worshiped at Bethel or at high places. They were not part of the centralized worship system in Jerusalem. And the Jews and the Samaritans, unlike people today, had very strong fights about worship, okay? Sarcasm. It's wonderful. Okay, verse 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. And the woman says to him, sir, you have not even a bucket. The well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well with his sons and his flocks that drink from it? Now, living water, again, is going to ring bells to the ancient Jewish mind. Living water is a title for God. It shows up in Isaiah, shows up in Jeremiah, where God is referred to as a rock and as a source of living water, which harkens back to these Old Testament themes, the Exodus theme of Moses striking a rock and water coming out of it.

Water is also a symbol of new creation, the main theme of our sermon series. When you get to Genesis 2, and you're introduced to the Garden of Eden, it's surrounded by these waters that are said to be living. When you get to Revelation and the New Jerusalem, it's said that there is living water coming out of the city, which is harkening back to Ezekiel, which describes a New Jerusalem and a new temple that has water flowing out of it. Water is this fundamental theme to the Jewish way of thought about the goodness of creation, and we know that God is going to be doing something new to make creation new and good again, and the way that we know that is through living water. So when Jesus says, if you know who you're asking to, you would ask and he would give you living water, he's talking about God's creative goodness. Jesus says, everyone who drinks water from this well will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. And again, this is a theme in

[ 7 : 15 ] John, where it seems that what Jesus is promising, what God is doing in Jesus, is putting the source of God's creative impulse, of God's goodness, of God's presence into God's people. So it's not only that you're giving living water, it's that you've now become the source of that living water, a spring of water gushing up to eternal life for the life of the age to come. And the woman says to him, sir, give me this water so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.

Now, the woman's perspective is much like ours, limited access to resources. You're carrying a jar, a bucket to a well to get the water that you need for the day and just the day. It's the daily grind of survival. It parallels our own exhaustion under systems that manufacture scarcity. And I say manufacture scarcity because scarcity does not have to be a fact of life. It is manufactured.

And it's the panic and the exhaustion of those in power who built a city away from the well and forcing people to go to the well to draw the water. And Jesus offers something else instead.

Living water that never runs dry, a sense of abundance over scarcity, rest from endless toil. And in some ways, and we don't have time to unpack all of this today, but there are these connections to Genesis, this undoing of the curse in Genesis 3, where Adam and Eve are kicked out of the Garden of Eden. They're not allowed to have access to the tree of life. And whatever they put their hands to in the soil, it's going to be lots of toilsome labor to bear fruit. Whereas now, and also in Genesis 3, this idea of enmity, of aggression between male and female, that the men are going to try to rule over the women. And this is not, some people think that Genesis 3 is a statement of how things are meant to be. It's not a statement of how things are meant to be. It's a statement of how things are not meant to be. And Jesus seems to be bringing this to a close as you have a rabbi, male, and a female talking together about deep things. And reversing the curse of toilsome labor, but instead having water that never runs dry. So she's tired. She's like, yeah, I want this water. Where is it? Jesus says, go call your husband and come back. And the woman answers him. She says, I have no husband.

And Jesus, and I imagine him smiling, says, you're right. You're right in saying you have no husband, for you've had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true.

[10:03] Now, there's different ways that you can read this passage. You can imagine Jesus as judgmental. Hey, go call your husband. And the woman's saying, is it with shame? Is it with pride? I have no husband.

And most commentaries throughout history have assumed that this is because this woman is a vixen. A, I don't know if we have children in the room, but an S word. Somebody who likes to sleep around.

Okay? There's nothing in the text to suggest that. There is nothing in the text to suggest that. If you are one to be accurate, what is most likely happening is that she's been a victim of the patriarchy, of systematic dispossession, of not being, not sleeping around, but rather being passed around.

And we'll see later in the chapter that this woman is seen as a leader in her city. She's respected. People listen to her. She brings a crowd. She's not ostracized. Nothing in the text suggests that.

Patriarchal lenses reading scripture want to read that into the passage. It is not there. So Jesus does not offer or speak condemnation or judgment. Jesus does not demand her repentance, does not tell her to go and sin no more. There is absolutely nothing that suggests that Jesus thinks that what has happened to her or what she has done is wrong. Jesus does not speak condemnation, but recognition. I see you. Jesus sees her humanity, not her utility.

[11:37] And the woman says to him, verse 19, I see, sir, you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem. Again, this is the the feud between Jews and Samaritans. And Jesus says to her, woman or ma'am, believe me. Ma'am, believe me. The hour is coming when you will worship the Father, not on this mountain or that mountain.

You worship what we do not yet know. We worship what we know for salvation is from the Jews. And Jesus can say that. He's a Jew. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. For this Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. It's not about the style. It's not about the physical location. It's not about the mountain. It's about your spirit. It's about are you worshiping in truth. It's not about just saying the word Jesus and then like saying that sanctifies, in the case of the culture that we're in today, your bigotry or your hatred. All right? It's about actually following the way of Jesus, the way of love, the way of mercy, the way of grace. So the hour is coming where we worship in spirit and in truth. And the woman says to him, look, I know the Messiah is coming. You can kind of see her like, what is this guy doing?

She's backing off. I know Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us. And Jesus says to her, I am he, the one who is speaking to you. Again, the contrast between the John 3 and the John 4 conversation with Nicodemus, you must be born again. Nicodemus, I don't know what you're talking about. Jesus is like, you're a teacher of the Jews. You don't know what I'm saying. Whereas Jesus with this woman in broad daylight at noon at a well saying, this is who I am. There is no secret.

Just then the disciples came, verse 27. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, what do you want? Which sort of implies this like, uh, tired Jesus rabbi sitting at a well talking to a woman. Is he like wanting some favors or something? But the disciples were smart enough not to open their mouths and say that. Or why are you speaking with her? Verse 28.

And so then the woman, pay attention, left her jar and went back to the city. Notice the symbolism here. The author knows what the author is doing. Notice the symbolism. The woman leaves her jar.

[14:06] She leaves behind the tools of her labor and exhaustion and goes back to her people and her community. And I do think there's this narrative arc in the story of many relationships with God, at least of my own relationship with God, which begins with what sounds like God demanding something of me. Jesus says to the woman, give me something to drink. And so my relationship with God, I don't know about you, but my relationship with God started with religion as sacrifice. Religion is sort of bloodletting to get God to like me, feed the gods, give the gods water and drink. And then it changes as the woman's perspective changes, as her eyes are open to who she is talking to. It's no longer woman, give me something to drink, but rather I am going to give you living water. It transforms to know God is not the one who needs the feeding. God does not work off of scarcity. God is the one who gives us the living water. And by the end, the tools of my slavery to religion are left behind because now I see God as they truly are. Giver, not taker. Provider, not infinitely hungry.

And so the woman says to her people, verse 29, come and see a man who has told me everything I've ever done. He can't be the Messiah, can he? And then they all left the city and were on their way to him.

You have to skip verses 31 through 38 to verse 39. Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, the woman's story, the woman's mouth speaks truth, and people believe. He told me everything I have ever done. And so when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them. And Jesus stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. And they said to the woman, it is no longer because of what you said, but now we've heard for ourselves.

And we know that this is truly the savior of the world. In the Christian tradition, so Catholic, Orthodox, the Eastern Church, this woman is given the name of Photina, meaning light. She is called equal to the apostles, the first evangelist, the first one to take the message of Jesus and go spread it to those who need living water. And so in the story, we see the breaking of social barriers, Judean and a Samaritan, male and female, rabbi and woman. We see in this context that instead of blaming people on moral failure, Jesus instead notices systems of control and notices people caught up in them. We pay attention to our current moment where we have to ask, what are the barriers that are still dividing us, that are imposed by others to divide us? And what wells do feel unsafe because we think we're just going to be exhausted? I believe that God wants to give us living water in exhausting times where the temptation is that if we see the enemy fueled by anger and hatred, we feel like we have no choice but to be fueled by anger and hatred as well.

But what if we were fueled instead by not a scarcity mindset, but rather a mindset of abundance, of living water, a belief that God is not demanding just more exhaustion from us, but rather out of rest and out of abundance, calling us to tell our city and our community, I think I may have found the living God.

[ 17 : 54 ] How are we called to recognize divine encounters in unexpected places? This woman was just doing her errands for the day and she met Jesus. And then she was willing to set the errand down, to set down the tool of her toil and rather turn it into an opportunity to offer life to our community and becoming an agent of good news, becoming Fotina, equal to the apostles, a first evangelist, a light to the people.

So this woman's transformation is from someone seeking water to someone offering living water to others. Her story invites us to find renewal in Christ's abundant life and to share it with the thirsty world.

And the way she does that, she leaves her individuality, leaves the pot alone at the well, and rather finds joy and abundance in her city and in her community and in her people.

And through that finds life. Would you pray with me? God, there are so many stories in scripture like this where we have been told to look at someone's story, someone's character and assume, well, they're just, you know, another person that God condemned.

But that's not the story here. God in Jesus meets this woman in her exhaustion and her toil and transforms the mundane into the holy, relieves the exhaustion into mission and purpose.

[ 19 : 42 ] God, I pray that your spirit would offer the same thing to us. God, I pray that your spirit would offer the same thing to us. We need living water in exhausting times. The work is heavy and long, and I will tell you, God, I am tired of leading church through crisis.

Yet I believe, even when hope is dry, that faith will move us forward. God, I pray that you will not leave us forsaken.

And that if we find the Imago Dei, the divine presence, and those next to us, that we can carry forward and carry on. So, equip us and anoint us to be carriers and broadcasters and preachers and proclaimers and table setters and cooks and gardeners of abundant life of living water who share abundance with all we can.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.