

The Woman at the Well **John 4:1-15**

The gospel of John, chapter 4. We'll look this evening at verses 1 to 15, verses 1 to 15, but we'll read through to the end of verse 26, where Jesus reveals His identity to this lady at the well. So John chapter 4, verses 1 to 15 is the text, but we'll read through to verse 26. Before the reading we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we do ask that you would speak to us now from your Word. We ask that we would indeed receive a word from God by the power of your Holy Spirit. Father in heaven, we do not seek the wisdom of men, for we acknowledge that the wisdom of men is but foolishness and passing away. We ask for a word from God. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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 ² (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³ he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴ And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ 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.

⁷ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ 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.) 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.' ¹¹ 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?' ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.' ¹³ Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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.' ¹⁵ 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.'

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.' ¹⁷ The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.' ¹⁹ The woman said to him, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.' ²¹ Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' ²⁵ The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.' ²⁶ Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am he.'" Amen.

Well, let me start off by making one of those famous—no, they're not really famous, I'm not famous—but one of those bluntly obvious statements: John chapter 4 comes after John chapter 3. What a revelation. What happened in John chapter 3? Jesus met a man called Nicodemus, and Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. Now what do we remember about Nicodemus? He was a Pharisee. He was *the* teacher, as Jesus called him, of Israel. Nicodemus was a member of the ruling Counsel. He was a man, in Jewish terms, much to be admired. He was a leader. He was a respected man. He had a following even.

Well now, in broad daylight, someone completely different to Nicodemus comes within Jesus's reach—a woman. A woman. Not only a woman, but a Samaritan. A Samaritan woman. Not only a Samaritan woman, but as the story develops—and we're not really dealing with it tonight—but as the story develops, we find out that she's a bit of a dodgy character, this Samaritan woman—she's had five husbands. I think the technical term these days is “serial monogamy”—from one husband to the next.

It would appear, I think, that we could probably assume that the woman was barren, or infertile. She had no children, and she was being passed along, more or less, as a plaything—no one was entering into a lifetime, covenantal, binding relationship with her because you did that to have a family. This woman has had five husbands.

And to this woman, Jesus, the teacher, the holiest one of all the holy ones, to this unclean woman, Jesus sends out the gospel call. And by the power of God, this unclean woman, in darkness, bound up in sin, she hears the gospel call. She responds. She comes to God. She comes to God through Jesus Christ. She's called into the kingdom.

There's something that we need to understand. Jesus said it in another place—He didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to salvation. Now I don't think Jesus meant that there was someone in the world who was actually righteous, apart from Himself. He didn't come to call the righteous in their own eyes. He didn't come to call those who think that they're righteous, those who think that they've got no problem. He didn't come to call the proud and the ignorant. He came to call the humble sinner, the unclean one, the cast-off.

The very fact that this lady appears in the middle of the day—it says in the text, the sixth hour, which by Jewish time would be the middle of the day—that she appears alone in the middle of the day at a well outside the village, tends to indicate that the other ladies in the village didn't want much to do with her. She was actually the one that they were keeping their eye on. “If she starts talking to my husband, I'm going to get involved. I'm going to make sure that that conversation is very short and not very sweet.” She didn't have a cluster of friends to come wandering down to the well with her. She came down alone.

Some people wondered if she was coming in the middle of the day because that would also avoid company. It's believed that it was the custom that in these small rural villages, the ladies or the women of the village gathered the water in the early morning and in the evening. And many wonder if the reason that she was doing this in the middle of the day was simply to avoid contact with other people, because that contact would not be pleasant. She wasn't respected. She wasn't liked. And yet Jesus speaks to her. And so you get this enormous contrast between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, the woman of the nation of Samaria.

But there's something else going on here in the gospel of John, something else that we need to think about. You've just got to think about the idea in Scripture of the meeting of a woman at a well. Think, for example, of the story in Genesis chapter 24, where the patriarch Abraham sends his most trusted servant in search of a wife for his son, his promised son, Isaac. Do you remember that story? Where did he find Isaac's bride? At a well, watering the flocks. And he prayed, and there was the bride for Isaac.

Think of Jacob, in Genesis chapter 29. He's sent by his parents away from his brother Esau, for Esau was planning to kill him. And he was given instructions, "Go find your mother's relatives, and marry a woman from that household. Don't marry one of the local Canaanite women, go and find a relative of your mother's and marry one of those girls." And he goes. And what happens? The very first girl he sees knocks his socks off. She's the most beautiful thing he's ever seen. She's the woman he had to have. What was she doing? She was watering the flocks at the well. He met the woman at the well, the woman he was to marry.

Think of Moses, in Exodus chapter 2, fleeing from the people in the land of Egypt. He's committed murder, remember. He hid a body. He's rushed off into the deserts of Midian. And there he comes to a well, and there he meets a troop of girls and helps them to water their flock. One of those girls was named Zipporah. He meets a woman called Zipporah, and she becomes his wife.

And now Jesus comes to a well in Samaria, and there he meets a woman. And you might wonder if I'm making too much of this, but what I want to suggest to you as we get into the conversation between Jesus and this woman, is that it's actually almost flirtatious. I think if we knew her, we would say that this is a woman who's not backwards in coming forwards. It's actually a very bold conversation on her part. She's ridden around the block a few times, and she knows how to talk the talk.

Let's get into the text. "¹ Now when Jesus learned," chapter 4, verse 1, "that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ² (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³ he left Judea and departed again for Galilee." What's that all about?

It would seem to be that Jesus heard about the discussion that's reported to us earlier in John chapter 3, where a certain Jew came to John the Baptist's disciples and pointed out to these disciples that all of those who were following John the Baptist are now following Jesus. You remember, he tried to set up an argument about purification, and I think that argument was about, "Well, who's baptism's better? Who's baptism does the job? Should I get baptized by John the Baptist, or should I get baptized by Jesus?"

John makes a certain point in verse 2, doesn't he? "Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples." Why would that be? Probably a couple of reasons. Reason one, imagine the supposed privileges someone could claim if Jesus Himself baptized them. People don't need much to hang a hat on in order to try and claim some kind of prominence for themselves. But imagine if you had someone who could honestly say, "I was baptized by Jesus." Something to boast about; something to try and lever yourself into prominence.

So possibly Jesus wasn't baptizing for the purpose of making sure that there was no trouble further down the road by people who claimed that the baptism by Jesus Himself was more of a baptism than anyone else's.

Also, I think that it's pointed out to us in the gospel that Jesus came to baptize with the Holy Spirit. We're told a few times, "He came to baptize with the Holy Spirit." The baptism in water is the symbol of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the church, the coming of the Holy Spirit on individual believers. And so it's right that the disciples be administering baptism.

Therefore, it's a continuation of a previous practice. Who should baptize? Believers. Who are the believers? The disciples. When the church is born on the day of Pentecost, who's going to be able to baptize? The disciples. Now, or then, they're called the apostles.

"He left Judea and departed again for Galilee," verse 3. What was He doing? It appears He was kind of trying to just get off the radar for a short period of time. Basically, if He goes into Samaria, He's kind of out of sight and out of reach to the Pharisees. He's putting off the great dispute that He knows is coming.

Everything Jesus did was on a timetable. One of the things that we'll find a little later on in the gospel of John, and Jesus says it more than once, is, "My time has not yet come." But then we get on into John chapter 12, and suddenly Jesus says, "Now is the time. Now the time *has* come." He's working according to the fine timetable. How did He know it? I would say He knew it by faith through the power of the Holy Spirit. That's how He knew the things that He had to do.

It says here, "He had to pass through Samaria." Well, no one *had* pass through Samaria. If I said to you, "The only way to Sydney is to pass through Canberra," if you've got a map or a little experience, you'd say to me, "No, the best way from here to Sydney is through Canberra, but you don't have to go through Canberra. You could turn off and go through Queanbeyan and come out on the other side of Canberra, closer to Goulburn. Or if you'd like the scenic drive, you could go down Browns Mountain and up the coast and come into Sydney from the south side." You don't *have* to go through Canberra.

Well it's a similar story here. Jesus didn't *have* to go through Samaria because it's the only road available to Him. He didn't have to go there for that kind of reason. Why did He have to be there? Well, for the same reason that in the gospel of Luke He had to be in the temple of His Father. We get that story in the gospel of Luke—young Jesus, left behind after the festival. His parents have walked a couple of days towards home before they realize He's not with them and go back to find Him, and they find Him in the temple. What did Jesus say? "You should have known where to look for me. I had to be in the temple of my Father. This is where I must be."

Well we're told that Jesus had to pass through Samaria. God had a purpose. God had a reason. God had a plan. There was a divine appointment that had to be kept. That's why He had to be there. That's why He had to go that way. So He came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph, and 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.

Jacob's well and the patriarchs—I'll need to give us a little bit of information about the Samaritans just so at least we understand the animosity that there is between the Jew and the Samaritan, or the Jew and the people of Samaria. Go back into your Bible history of ancient Israel to the time of King Solomon, and there you find the kingdom is divided. Solomon sins by sacrificing to idols, and God divides the Kingdom of Israel into two smaller kingdoms.

The Southern Kingdom is called Judah, centered around Jerusalem, where the sons of David, or the offspring of David continue to reign for a period of time. They had the temple, they had the Scriptures. That is the Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom, called Israel, or Ephraim, was centered around Samaria, and in the Northern Kingdom they practice an idolatrous worship based upon golden calves.

Go forward a few hundred years after that division, and basically the Northern Kingdom, in the judgment of God, gets wiped off the face of the earth. The Assyrians invade and destroy the Northern Kingdom, they drag the people off into slavery, they destroyed the city of Samaria, and they put in their place imports, foreigners.

The way the Assyrians conquered was they would take a place, empty it of its local inhabitants, leaving behind only the poor and the infirm, only those whom they didn't want to take, and then they would move people in from another part of their kingdom to populate the place. The idea was they're trying to get a uniform society that they can control from the top down.

So you have the Northern Kingdom of the Jews, the city called Samaria, the Israelites, taken away into captivity, but some Jews are left behind, and some foreigners are moved in. Those foreigners marry into those Northern Kingdom Jewish families, and you end up with what the Jews considered to be a half-breed race, called the Samaritans.

The Samaritans had a strange religion. They had the first five books of the Bible. They believed in what we call the Pentateuch—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. They had nothing else. They did not have the histories, they did not have the Psalms, the Proverbs, the wisdom books, the prophets, just the first five books, and the first five books only. This was combined with a lot of strange localized idol worship.

Believe it or not, there are still Samaritans in the nation we call Israel today. I believe there are one to two thousand people who consider themselves to be Samaritans, and they're recognized as citizens of modern Israel, and they still practice their religion. And the Samaritans came up with a story. If you're going to have an offshoot religion, you need a story to justify your existence, and their story was that on the mountain where they worshiped, that was actually the mountain where all the stuff in the Old Testament happened. That was actually the mountain where Abraham offered Isaac. The mountain where they worship is the correct mountain, and the mountain that the Jews worship on is the wrong mountain.

So you notice when we read, the lady in question brings up an argument. "We worship on this mountain. The Jews say Jerusalem is where you ought to worship." That's the old argument. That's the Samaritan story, as they try to justify their existence as an offshoot of the Jewish religion. And so there's this animosity.

The Jews hated the Samaritans. They considered them to be an unclean half-breed race. They considered them to be the worst of the worst. They hated them probably more than they hated Gentiles, because as far as the Jews were concerned, they were corrupters of the true religion. They didn't like them at all. They had very many rules and regulations about how to deal with Samaritans.

The Pharisees who considered themselves the most holy, or the Pharisees who were the most militant, wouldn't walk through Samaria. They would find ways around Samaria so as not to be made unclean by the soil of Samaria. You wouldn't share a meal with a Samaritan, you wouldn't drink from a cup that was owned by a Samaritan. You could buy food from a Samaritan. If a Samaritan was in the marketplace selling potatoes and onions, you could buy the food, but you wouldn't actually share the meal with them. You wouldn't fellowship with them.

So that's the situation we have here. The disciples go to buy the food, and the woman is shocked. Why? Because she's come out with a bucket. She's got a means of getting water out of the well, and Jesus, a Jewish man, says, "Use your bucket. Give me a drink." Something that no Jew would do. No Jew would share something with a Samaritan. That's the shock.

"Jacob's well was there;" verse 6, "so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour." Now that actually tells us something. It confirms a Christian doctrine. Jesus was truly human. The Apostle John has told us that Jesus is truly divine. Remember it starts off, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us," it says in John chapter 1, verse 14.

Well now we find not only did He become flesh, but He actually took upon Himself a true human nature. He was weary from His journey. He didn't have superpowers. He couldn't just borrow from the superpower of God to make sure that He didn't get tired. He was truly a man. He was truly human. He suffered like we suffer. Jesus may well have gotten a bad case of the 'flu when he was a little boy. We don't know, we're not told that. But don't imagine in your mind that Jesus did not live through a true human life, as a child, as a young man, as a man. He lived the same kind of life that we live, except He lived it apart from sin. He lived without sin.

And so Jesus was wearied. Sitting beside the well, it was about the sixth hour, most likely the middle of the day. It would seem here that the Apostle John is using the Jewish time-keeping, and that would be six hours after sunrise, middle of the day. Verse 7: "A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.'" There you go. How do I start evangelizing? How do I make contact with someone who's not part of the kingdom of God? How do I make contact with someone who's a stranger, someone whom I know is not of the people of God? Well, use the circumstances that you're in. And here we go—in this circumstance, the opportunity is, share a drink—glass of water.

"Give me a drink," said Jesus. Verse 8, "(For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.)" Now where it says "city," don't imagine a great city. In that day and age, any village that had a wall around it for its own protection was called a city, regardless of how many people lived in it. It's a village. "For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food."

Verse 9: “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.)” Now I don’t know how your Bibles have it punctuated. My Bible’s got, “(For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans)” in brackets, suggesting that this is an explanation from the Apostle John. Many feel that these actually might have been the words of the woman herself. Who knows?

But “how is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” She’s shocked. “Not only are you asking for a drink, my friend, but that means that you’re going to drink from my bucket. You know, it’s one thing for you to ask to buy from me, for example, a bag of potatoes. But you’re actually going to share something with me, and I know that your religion says you share nothing with me. But you’ve said to me, ‘Give me a drink,’ a woman of Samaria.”

She knows the facts. She knows that the Jews hate Samaritans, and she knows that as a woman, she’s not considered to have any status nor standing at all in their eyes. It’s true that one of the things the Pharisees used to thank God for every day was they thanked God that they were not born a woman. A woman of Samaria. The Jews have no dealing with Samaritans.

“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.’” 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.

Now it’s a picture of many things in the Bible, isn’t it? We’re baptized in water. Let’s not argue about the amount, but baptism involves water. If there’s no water, it ain’t a baptism. That we know for sure. We know that the Egyptian army was destroyed by water. We know that the Israelites complained to Moses about a lack of water. We know that water is an important picture in Scripture.

Paul, in the book of Ephesians, compares water to the word of God, and talks about how water washes people clean, as does the word of God. And there he’s illustrating marriage and how a husband should be concerned that his wife is being presented pure and spotless before God. Water is an important picture in Scripture.

Jesus uses the particular phrase, “living waters”—“And he would have given you living water.” So we’ve got to ask the question, haven’t we, what is living water? Well, the Bible gives the answer to the questions. You’ve just got to know where to look, but it gives the answer to the questions. It doesn’t necessarily mean flowing water, although many think that it does. And it doesn’t necessarily mean pure water, though that may be implied.

Turn to the book of Jeremiah, chapter 2. We’ll start reading at verse 12. Now Jeremiah’s prophesying concerning the sins of the people of God, the sins of the nation of Judah. Jeremiah chapter 2, verse 12, speaking as God:

“¹² Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, ¹³ for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

“They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters.” Now take that into account. What has Jesus therefore said to this lady at the well? “If you knew me, if you knew the gift of God, if you knew who was speaking to you, you would be begging me,” you would have asked Him, “and I would have given you,” although He spoke of Himself in the third person, “and he would have given you living water.” What is this? It’s the relationship that a believer has with God. “They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters,” says Jeremiah.

So here’s Jesus, speaking to a Samaritan. Now this is stunning. It’s not so stunning that Jeremiah says to the people of Judah that their God is a fountain of living waters. That’s not so stunning. Their God was their life, or He should have been their life. To the believer, God is life. And it’s not so stunning that God’s covenant people, set apart by His covenant promises to Abraham—it’s not so stunning that to those people God should be their fountain of living waters, their source of life, their object of worship, the most important relationship in their lives.

But it’s stunning when Jesus makes that offer to a woman of Samaria, because she’s not of the covenant people. She’s of the accursed people. She’s of the people whom the Jews hate. She’s the one who’s a member of what they would consider to be the mongrel half-bred race. And yet Jesus says to her, “You ask—you ask me, and I’ll give you fountains of living water,” or, “I’ll give you living water. I’ll give you life from God. I’ll give you a relationship with God. You ask from me, and I’ll give you a covenant relationship with God. I’ll give you something better than you ever imagined.”

Jesus isn’t talking about H₂O here really, is He? He’s not speaking about the wet stuff that washes your hands. Jesus is speaking about life—life from, with, and in God. We read earlier from Isaiah 55, “Come to me all who thirst, seeking water.” Or think of the picture in Revelation chapter 22, verse 1: The river of pure water that flows out from the temple of God, flows out to the nations. Water, life, life from God, life in God. And Jesus says to the woman, “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.”

Now what would the gift of God be? It’s eternal life, isn’t it—the gift of God. “If you knew the gift of God, if you knew me for who I am, if you understood,” says Jesus. What’s going on here? “You wouldn’t be surprised that I want a glass of water; you would be amazed that you can come and sip, or drink, from streams of living water, the water of God Himself!”

“The woman said,” verse 11—and now she’s sticking here with the surface meaning of what He is saying, but I’m not sure if she didn’t understand what He’s saying, because then she goes on to speak about Jacob, and we’ll talk about that in just a moment. “¹¹ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep.’” You don’t have a bucket, you don’t have a rope, and they say the levels of that well varies—it can be from 70 to 100 feet deep. You need a rope, you need a bucket, you need a way to get the water from the bottom to the top. So she sticks with the physical. I think she’s aware that Jesus is inviting her to think of something more than just physical water, but she’s not quite sure where to go.

“Where do you get that living water?” Verse 12: “Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” And there we need to stop and look carefully at the question: “Are you greater than our father Jacob?” What we need to understand there is that that question is posed in the negative, and it’s asked in a way that can only get a negative response. It’s almost a rhetorical question.

So to give you some idea of what she’s saying, I think she’s saying to Him, “Now we know that you’re not greater than Jacob, are you,” expecting the only possible answer to be, “No.” “We know that you’re not greater than Jacob, are you?” You see what I’m saying? She’s forward. She’ll speak her mind. She’ll give and she’ll take. There’s to and fro going on here.

Jesus says, “Give me drink.” She says, “You’re a Jew, and want a drink from me?” You know, she’s not stunned into silence, she’s got something to say. Jesus says, “I’ll give you living water.” She says, “Do you think you’re better than Jacob? Jacob gave us this water, and this water’s good. And Jacob was one of the patriarchs. Do you think you’re better than Jacob?” “Are you greater than our father Jacob,” as I said, expecting a negative answer. “He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.”

Notice she said that Jacob was their father. “Are you greater than *our* father Jacob?” She’s aware of the interplay, or debates, that are going on between the Jews and Samaritans. She’s aware of the history. The Samaritans claimed to be descended from Abraham, just as the Jews were. That was their argument.

It’s a bit like Jehovah’s Witness or Mormons—they’ve all got their stories. They all come to you with their stories, don’t they? The Jehovah’s Witness will try and tell you, “Look, there’s been Jehovah’s Witness throughout history, it’s just that they were called by other names then. We weren’t invented in 1860 or 1870—oh no, no, no. We’ve been around from the very beginning.” And they invent their stories.

Well, the Samaritans had a story, and their story is that they can also trace their ancestry back to Abraham; therefore, they are the offspring of Abraham. She uses the name Jacob. But Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—it’s all the same claim. You claim to be the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you’re claiming to be one of God’s covenant people. “Jacob gave us this well. You think you can do more than Jacob did?”

Verse 13: “Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ 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.’”

See, Jesus is trying to draw her away from these arguments about things that don’t matter—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. This was Jacob’s land, this was Jacob’s well. Did the Samaritans really have Jewish ancestry? Is it really right that they worship on the mountain in Samaria, or should they also give in and go on trying to become Jews, even though the Jews won’t have them? Jesus is not interested. He’s trying to draw her away from all that rubbish, all that nonsense.

And He speaks to her again: “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again.” That’s Jacob’s water. You want to drink the waters of Jacob well, you’ll be thirsty again. You want to be a Jew? You’ll be thirsty again. And you want to claim you’re the offspring of Abraham by physical lineage, by descent? You’ll 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.”

And there’s that explanation of living waters—a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Living waters bring a person into a relationship with the living God—an eternal relationship, a relationship that never ends. Why? Because God never ends. Our hope for eternal life is built upon our knowledge of God. We know that God is eternal and unchanging.

So if a person who is eternal and unchanging, or a being who is eternal and unchanging, makes a promise to you and tells you that you are the object of His love, that He loves you, and that His love never changes, and that His love has been set upon you from before the beginnings of time—we’re told that our names were written in the book of life before the foundation of the earth—and He tells you that that love will continue into all of eternity, what do you know? You know you’ve got eternal life. You know you’re going to be living in the presence of God, enjoying the blessings of His love for all eternity, why? He is eternal, He is almighty, all-powerful. If God sets His love upon somebody and says, “I’m going to be in fellowship with that person forever,” that’s what He means. “I’m going to be in fellowship with them forever.” And He has the power to grant the eternal life to fulfill His promises.

Jacob can’t do that for us, can he? For all the good that Jacob is to us—and you who know me know that Jacob is probably my favorite Old Testament character. I love the story of Jacob, that flawed man, that deceiver, Jacob the deceiver, the supplanter, Jacob, the one upon whom God sets His saving love, and over time, transforms him and turns him into a faithful believer.

Yet Jesus is greater than Jacob. Jacob gives you water that makes you thirsty; Jesus gives you water that leads to eternal life, and you never thirst again. “The water that I will give you will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

“¹⁵ 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.’” She’s sticking with the physical here, isn’t she? She’s sticking with the things that she knows. But the hook—you see, the hook’s in the mouth. Jesus has hooked her. He’s dragged her into a conversation. She’s right in here. He’s got hold of her.

How do we talk to people—how do we talk to people who, as I’ve said, we know are not Christians? My friend, start where you are. Start where you are. Is it a freezing cold foggy day? Talk about it. It’s a good place to start. But somewhere along the way, an opportunity may just well come into your conversation to actually speak a word.

Now don’t imagine that every time you’re talking to someone, you’ve got to give them the whole gospel. Jesus didn’t speak to her about the cross, and He didn’t speak to her about the resurrection, and He didn’t speak to her about justification by faith. He spoke to her about who He was, and how she could have eternal life.

I know a fellow who was converted—I think I’ve shared this with this congregation before—he was converted through the efforts of about ten different people. He was a long-distance bike rider, and at one point in his life had been a professional bike rider. He rode miles and miles and miles. Every day, I think he churned out sixty kilometers. That was his habit. Sixty kilometers a day. He was a hardened heart. His wife was a Christian. She’d been converted. He was a hardened heart, and he refused to let her speak to him of Jesus. He’d gotten to the point where he was sick of hearing it, and told her to shut her mouth about that religious rubbish.

Anyway, they retired, bought a caravan, decided they were going around Australia. They pull up at the first caravan park along their way, and there’s a caravan next to them, and in that caravan is an old friend of his, back from his young days when he was a professional bike rider. And guess what—in the meantime, that old friend of his has been converted. And over dinner, that old friend of his preaches the gospel. Next morning, my friend said to his wife, “Pack up, we’re moving. I’m not staying here next to this Bible-basher.” Off they go.

They find another caravan park somewhere further around the way, and there, there’s no one next to him, and it’s all good. And he goes out on his regular daily bike ride, and he meets another fellow who’s a serious bike rider, and off they go, and they’re riding their bikes. And eventually, they stop somewhere to have a drink and a little breather, and they start talking—you know, the regular conversation between two men, what do you do? Well, it turns out that the what-do-you-do was a pastor—minister of the gospel. Shared the gospel with him. He went back, told his wife, “We’re packing up and moving on. I’m not riding around here with all these Bible bashers.” Off they go.

And so it goes. Eventually, they get to a place where there’s no one around to bother him. They’re in this caravan park, and he’s on his riding every day. Off he goes, he rides. He rides every morning. Riding down the highway somewhere or a country road, I’m not sure which, he gets a puncture. Now as I said, he’s a very experienced bike rider and carries the puncture kit with him. He’s always ready.

He gets a puncture, gets off his bike, sits on a rock by the side of the road to repair the puncture. He notices under his foot is a piece of paper. He lifts his foot, lifts the piece of paper up. It’s an old tract, an old faded gospel tract. And all he could read on it—he says everything was faded but one line, and it said—“No one comes to the Father but through me.” And his hands started to shake. His hands started to shake. And he fixed his puncture, rode back to his wife, and he said, “You’d better find a church. We’re going in the morning.” It was a Saturday. “You better find a church, we’re going in the morning.” She said, “Why?” He said, “That Jesus of yours is after me.” That Jesus of yours is after me. And he was converted, became an elder. After years, they settled down, he became an elder in a church. He’s a Christian man.

The point is, along the way, people contributed to that conversion. His wife, then his old friend, and then the pastor whom he met riding the bike along the road. And then somewhere along the way—you know, that gospel tract that was just rubbish blowing on the wind, someone paid to have it printed, and they probably put it under a car windscreen wiper in a car park, and that car went driving down the highway, and it blew off and landed where it landed. People contributed along the way. Everybody did a little bit. But of course, we know that their work was useless apart from what? The work and power of God the Holy Spirit.

When you're dealing with somebody, when you're talking to somebody, you don't have to try and give them the whole New Testament in one great chunk. We don't have to try and lead them to Jesus on the spot. If an opportunity arises in conversation, take the opportunity, but you don't have to push it any further than that.

Let's look at the last week, in the news events of the last week, and someone says, "I can't believe what happened in London. You know, all religions are the same. They should all be banned." You've got an opportunity. "No, all religions aren't the same. My friend, Jesus said, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' My friend, Jesus said, 'Judge not, lest you be judged.' Jesus said, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' No, I'm afraid all religions aren't the same. I'm not saying, my friend, that all Christians are perfect, but I am saying that when a Christian sins in anything like that way, you can confidently say that that "Christian" is a hypocrite and no follower of Jesus. I invite you to look at the religion that they claim to follow, and you will see that it's impossible to be a hypocrite in that religion; that you can do things like kill people in that religion. So all religions are not the same."

Leave it there. Leave it there. You don't have to say more than that. You've answered for the faith that you have. You've answered for the God whom you worship. You don't have to try and give him, that person, the whole Bible. "And so, you better repent and believe that Jesus died, and on the third day, He was risen from the dead."

You've sowed a seed, you've said something. They might hear it, they might refuse to hear it. That's not your problem. You're a servant of the living God. Your problem is, Did you obey God in the opportunity that He by His providence opened up to you? That's all you've got to worry about. Did you do the right thing in that moment when God gave you the opportunity to speak a word for Him? If the answer to that is Yes—Amen. Pray for the guy and let it go.

You probably won't get much more opportunity than one sentence like that, or a couple of sentences strung together. So give it what you've got and let it go. Trust God. Who knows but in a week's time, he might meet another Christian. You don't know that, I don't know that. We don't convert people, God does. By the power of His Holy Spirit, God does. We're just tools in His hand. We're people that He uses to accomplish His will.

Jesus spoke to the most unlikely person, used the circumstances that they were sharing—hot day, tired, need a drink, you've got a bucket, "Give me a drink." That simple. And from there, He led the conversation into the things of God. Now Jesus is the Son of God, and we know that He's perfect. You know, the "what-would-Jesus-do," you've all heard it somewhere along the way. What would Jesus do? Well, you know Jesus can do a lot of things that I can't do. Let's be honest. You know, Jesus had the prophetic insight to know immediately that this woman had had five husbands, and the one she had wasn't really her husband. We're not Jesus. You see, sometimes, Christians, you can't do what Jesus does.

What would Jesus do about an abortion clinic? You know what He'd probably do? He'd go and meet the abortionist, have dinner with him, and lead them to the Lord. Why? Because He's got the power of God behind Him. He's God the Son of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit. We're

not. We do what we can do. We do what we're given to do. We take the opportunities God gives us. We do the best we can. That's all we can do.

At work, I was always in the habit—now my job has changed, but I was always in the habit of sitting in the lunchroom with my Bible open, every day of the week. It led to a lot of opportunities, an awful lot of opportunities. People would come and ask *me* the questions from the news about things that are happening, about things that are happening in their family, etc., etc., etc. I didn't have to create the opportunities, God gave me the opportunities.

I don't know whether any of those people have become Christians. I'm not in touch with them all, but who knows? Who knows what God is doing? Who knows who else they're going to meet? Who knows what else is going to happen in their lives, what circumstances and what providence God is working?

You don't have to give them the whole Bible in a meeting, you just have to give them the truth, relevant to their situation, relevant to what they were doing just then at that moment. Jesus gave this lady truth, relevant to what she was doing. You could already see what's happening here. He's speaking about hunger and thirst.

Well, what must she have been thirsting for? Why was she bouncing from man to man? What does everyone thirst for? What does everyone search for? True love. You know, in this hardened cynical world, in the end, the truth is that everyone searches and seeks for true love. We want someone who loves us, and we want to love them, and we want to know that we're giving and receiving love. We want to know that we can trust them. We want to know that they will forgive us our faults and our sins. She's bouncing from man to man. She's thirsting for something, and she's never going to find it with boyfriend number 6, or if there was 7, 8, 9, or 10. The thirst was never going to be fulfilled.

Isn't that the world around us, once again? Why is it so extreme? Why are the kids so wild these days—and they're wild. They're wilder than I ever was. It's a fact. They go to extremes that I never would have gone to. Why? Answer: If you have no eternal hope, if you have no hope of life in the presence of God for all of eternity, if you accept the teaching that you are just the result of random occurrences, you're just a highly evolved animal, if you suppress the knowledge of God that you're receiving day by day from all creation, and harden your conscience—well all you've got is pleasure. All you've got is pleasure.

And how does that work? Well, if you don't know, I can tell you, because I wasn't always a Christian. If all you've got is pleasure, the things that pleased you last week are old hat this week, and you need something just to boost it up a bit. And then the things that please you this week will be old hat next week, and you need something just to boost it up a bit. You're always searching for a bigger thrill, a bigger "yippee," whatever you want to call it.

Whether you're searching for that through chemicals, through drugs, through alcohol, through fornication, through sexual uncleanness, whatever it is, you're always going for something more, because nothing ever ultimately satisfies. And you can't get enough. You're always pushing for more.

And that's our lady at the well—always thirsting for more, always wanting a deeper relationship, always wanting something true. Notice, she's a religious woman. She's a religious woman. Later on, she talks about worship on this mountain, worship on that mountain. She's already spoken to Jesus about her father Jacob. She's a religious woman, but she's got no real religion, no true religion, no revealed religion from God.

Jesus has started to reveal the truth to her, using an everyday occurrence. "Give me a drink. Give me a drink. I need some water. It's hot, I'm thirsty. Use your bucket, get me a drink." That's how we work in this world. That's what we're supposed to be doing—dealing with the people around us, day by day by day, taking the opportunities that God puts before us. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, I do indeed pray that you would give us opportunity to speak on your behalf, to speak the words of Jesus, to speak the wonderful words of life to the people around us. And I pray, Father, you would give us the courage to take every opportunity. In Jesus' name. Amen.