JESUS, THE GIFT OF GOD

John 4:1-26
Key Verse 4:10

“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.’”

Last week, we studied John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus, “He
must become greater; I must become less.” John was a man who lived
under God’s sovereignty. His source of joy was to give glory to God by
doing the work of God. May God give us all real joy when we become
less so that Jesus might be greater in us and on this campus. Today's
passage is the story of the meeting between Jesus and a Samaritan
woman. This meeting was an accident of history. But it was the most
beautiful meeting between the holy Son of God and a sinful woman.
Sinful human beings are usually terrified to meet God face to face,
because of their guilty consciences. But this meeting was so beautiful,
because it reveals God’s desire to meet sinners where they are, and to
satisfy their souls through restoring a love relationship with him. Jesus
tells the Samaritan woman the secret of true satisfaction in life. Let’s
learn from Jesus what is that secret.

I. Living water

First, The well of Jacob (1-9). Jesus and his disciples stayed for some
time in Judea, baptizing disciples along the Jordan River. Jesus
continued to raise disciples in the face of the godlessness of the
times. Soon, he came to the attention of the religious leaders in
Jerusalem. So Jesus and his disciples set out for Galilee, where he
could spend time with them and train them as disciples in relative
isolation. Look at verse 4. “Now he had to go through Samaria.” Jesus
took his disciples through the country of Samaria. In the past, it had
been Northern Israel, where the 10 tribes of Israel ruled, led by the
tribe of Joseph. Ever since the Assyrian invasion in 722 BC, however,
Samaria had become a place of mixed nationalities and cultures. They
preserved a sense of history regarding their ancestor, Jacob, but they
were not willing to submit to the God of Jacob or worship him at the
temple in Jerusalem. Instead, they built their own temple on Mt.
Gerizim, and even wrote their own version of the Bible, the Samaritan
Pentateuch. As a result, the Jews despised the Samaritans. To the
Jews, the Samaritans were false claimants of the spiritual heritage
they felt was their own. Nevertheless, Samaria was a land rich in
the history of God’s chosen people. Look at verses 5 and 6. “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
the sixth hour.” As Jesus sat by the well, he could see not only the
landscape, but also the history of God’s calling of his people. It was a
beautiful history because of God’s faithfulness. It was a very sad
history, because of his people’s unbelief and rebellion.

Jesus came to the well and sat down, while his disciples went into
town to buy food. It was the sixth hour, which is midday. The place
was quiet and empty because of the searing desert heat. Jesus was
very tired, as well as hungry and thirsty, from the journey. John the
Baptist had said of Jesus, “He testifies to what he has seen and heard,
but no one accepts his testimony” (Jn 3:32). Jesus was the one who
came from heaven and to whom God had given the Spirit without limit.
Jesus spoke the words of God, and everyone who believed could have
eternal life. But Jesus was alone by Jacob’s well in Samaria. It looked
as though Jesus’ mission to this world had been a failure. It looked as
though Jesus had been defeated by the unbelieving and rebellious
world. Jesus looked too humble and too weak to rescue mankind from
the power of sin and death. But wait! Something began to stir at the
horizon. Someone was coming. It was a Samaritan woman, coming by
herself in the heat of the day to draw water from Jacob’s well. She too
must have been hot and tired. She was not a remarkable woman. Her
life and history were not at all admirable. But her life was about to
change, through this chance meeting with Jesus at the well.

Look at verse 7. “When a Samaritan woman came to draw water,
Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’” The Samaritan woman
most likely looked away from Jesus as she came to the well. He was
obviously a Jew. Not only so, he looked poor. He was not the sort of
man who would talk with a woman like her in public. Perhaps she hoped to just quietly get her water and then go. She lowered her jar into the well to draw the water, and as she drew it out, Jesus spoke up, “Will you give me a drink?” Jesus’ request was unexpected and startling. He did not abide by the tacit agreement to mind each other's business. Jesus spoke up and intruded into her world. It was not to make small talk. Jesus asked a favor of her. Jesus humbled himself and asked her to help him, tired and thirsty as he was from his journey. But it was for the sake of beginning a conversation with her at the well of Jacob.

The woman was caught off guard by Jesus’ request. So she spoke to Jesus rather abruptly. Look at verse 9. “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.)” The Samaritan woman pointed to the obvious differences between them. He was a Jew. She was a Samaritan woman. He was a religious man. She was a notorious woman. It was not appropriate for him to be speaking with her. And he had no right to expect that she should serve him, if he was only going to despise her for making him “unclean”. The woman was very defensive. She “scratched” Jesus for speaking with her. She seemed to be a very unapproachable woman. What an unattractive and burdensome person she was! How painful it must have been for Jesus to have his request for kindness treated in this way, after he himself had decided to give his life for the sins of the world!

Second, The gift of God (10-15). Jesus had humbled himself and took the initiative in starting a conversation with the Samaritan woman. But the Samaritan woman was very hard to speak with. Jesus could have withdrawn and let her go her way, as she wished. But Jesus did not withdraw. Jesus made the conversation even more personal. Look at verse 10. “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.’” Jesus had asked the favor to get to know the woman. She did not welcome his interest. But Jesus implies that the woman really needs to know him, and find out what he can do for her. In this way, Jesus reveals his true motive in speaking with the
woman and asking a favor of her. It was because of his desire to give this woman the gift of God. What is the gift of God? What is the living water? The woman couldn’t understand Jesus. But she wasn’t so defensive anymore. She opened up to him some more and asked, “Sir, 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 flocks and herds?” (11-12). Jesus was so humble. He looked like a nobody. What could he possibly give to her? But the woman was intrigued. Jesus was not a self-righteous Jew. But she still did not know who he was.

Look at verses 13 and 14. “Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’” In these verses, Jesus explains succinctly what is the living water. The Samaritan woman worked hard every day to get water for herself and her companion. It was the woman's work in that society to get the water for the family. But most women came in the morning or in the evening to get the water, out from under the heat of the day. This woman, however, was not able to come at those times. Perhaps, it was because of her immoral lifestyle. Whatever the reason, her coming to the well in the heat of the day to draw water meant a lot of suffering and hard labor on her part. It was unavoidable labor. It was so meaningless, because it had to be done day after day. She came to the well to satisfy her thirst. But she got thirsty again and had to come back, without any hope that she would ever be truly satisfied. It is a metaphor for a life lived for the sake of obtaining satisfaction in the things of the world. The Samaritan woman had come to the well to satisfy her thirst time and again. But she could never be satisfied, no matter how much she drank. So it is with everyone who lives to please themselves and their physical bodies. If we eat to be happy, if we shop to be happy, if we pursue pleasure, knowledge or money to be happy, we are all drinking at Jacob's well. Our desire for these things is sometimes overwhelming. But getting them does not satisfy.
Jesus says, “But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” In contrast to the water in the well, Jesus offers us living water. Living water truly satisfies. Living water does not just go in and then come out. Living water has the power to change our inner man. Living water does not come from the ground. It comes only from Jesus. Whoever drinks the living water will be truly satisfied. Whoever drinks the living water has a living hope in the kingdom of God. Whoever drinks the living water can be a source of blessing for those around them, like a spring of water for people in a dry and thirsty land. Jesus offers us living water. Jesus invites us to drink the living water, and be satisfied. Jesus wants to make us a spring of living water, welling up to eternal life. The Samaritan woman still did not know what is the living water. But she knew that she was tired of her life of coming to the well every day to drink, only to get thirsty again. She decided to accept Jesus' invitation, and come to know who he is and what he came to give her. Her decision seems small, considering her misunderstanding about the living water. But it was not a small decision at all. Look at verse 15. “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.’” The woman had been sure that she wanted nothing to do with Jesus. Now, she is ready to receive from Jesus the gift of God. It was the fruit of Jesus' gentle shepherding of her soul. Jesus did not waver from his desire to help this woman. When he loved God and this woman more than himself or his own glory, he could serve her faithfully until she opened up her heart and asked Jesus for the living water. Praise Jesus who served one Samaritan woman, humbling himself to the extreme, so that she might receive the gift of God. May God help us to love even one of God's sheep to the extreme, until they can drink the living water from Jesus!

II. True worshipers

First, Call your husband (16-20). The woman may have thought that she was a young girl once more at the ball, being courted by the most handsome and eligible man in the town. Jesus was so gentle and hopeful with her, that she confessed her deepest frustration and disappointment in life to him. But Jesus was not courting the woman.
He knew that she had been disappointed in life. He knew that she needed something that only he could give her. But Jesus did not enjoy her admiration. Look at verse 16. “He told her, ‘Go, call your husband and come back!’” Jesus wanted the woman to share the living water with others. Look at verse 17a. “I have no husband,’ she replied.” The woman was startled by Jesus’ abrupt change of mood, and let down her guard. Look at verse 17b and 18. “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 just said is quite true.” Jesus understood this woman’s life problem. Superficially, it was a marriage problem. She couldn’t find the right guy to marry. When she married, she wasn’t satisfied, and her growing dissatisfaction made it impossible for them to stay together. She didn’t give up, and tried again and again and again – five times. Her life had become a nightmare. Now, she had no hope that anyone would ever marry her or treasure her as his wife. She lived with a man, but without prospect of love or even hope of satisfaction. It was a relationship of convenience. She had been drinking at the well of human love, but she wasn’t satisfied. She was worn out and tired, and washed up. She said, “I have no husband.” Jesus understood her perfectly. She had been married again and again. She was living with a man. But not one man could satisfy her soul.

The Samaritan woman was shocked by Jesus' spiritual insight and love. Look at verses 19-20. “‘Sir,’ the woman said, ‘I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”’ The Samaritan woman was convinced by Jesus’ spiritual insight that he was a prophet, a man of God’s Spirit, who spoke the truth of God. Then this woman revealed an amazing truth about herself. She had lived an immoral life. She had caused so many men to commit sin through her bad influence. She had ruined so many women’s lives through her seduction and deceit. But there remained a place in her heart that she had reserved for God. It was almost unbelievable. Still, the fact remained that she had a holy desire to worship God. She wanted to be right with God, and to know God’s tender care and mercy. She wanted to shine like one of the stars in the heaven, along with Daniel and Jacob and all of God’s most precious and holy servants! What a
wonderful and holy vision! What an amazing truth about this one sinful woman, that gives us hope for all sinners even in our generation!

Second, Salvation is from the Jews (21-24). Jesus was ready to answer the woman’s deepest question regarding worshiping God. Look at verses 21-24. “Jesus declared, ‘Believe me, woman, 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 the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.’” Worshiping God is not a matter of place or ancestry. God is the God of the Jews. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But he is not a building, an image or a man. God is spirit. To worship God who is spirit, we must worship him in spirit and in truth. We must come to him and honor him and obey him with our lives, with our hearts and with our minds. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” Worship means to love. To worship God is to love God. We must love him as Savior, and as Lord. We must give him our very best. God seeks those who are ready to do so, and shows them the way, even as Jesus came to help this Samaritan woman.

Third, “I who speak to you am He.” The Samaritan woman was very happy to know that God was seeking her to worship him. But there were still so many obstacles for her to overcome. How could she face all the people she had hurt or ruined? How could she come to God as she was, and know that she could be forgiven? Look at verse 25. “The woman said, ‘I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.’” The Samaritan woman needed a Savior. She needed someone to help her come back to God and restore the worship she needed for her very soul. Look at verse 26. “Then Jesus declared, ‘I who speak to you am He.’” Jesus is the gift of God. He came as the Messiah and Christ, the Savior of the world. He forgives all our sins, and enables us to come to God and worship him according to the deepest desire of our hearts. He is the Son of God and the Shepherd of our souls. He is the one that all people
on earth must turn to and receive from him the living water welling up to eternal life.

Living water is the spiritual life that comes into hearts when we worship God as forgiven sinners through faith in Jesus Christ. It is not for this world alone. It will grow in us and bear fruit for eternal life. We need many things to live in this world. But there is only one thing that will make us truly happy. We must worship God in spirit and in truth. We can do so when we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.