

## Abundance

John 4:1-42

Key Verse: 4:13-14

“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.’”

Even though the world is about two-thirds water, it's a very dry place. Everywhere you look you see misery and parched lips. People are yearning for life, but can only find death. In the past ten years, uncertainty has become normal. People are uncertain about their safety. They are uncertain about their privacy. They are uncertain about the economy. A college degree used to guarantee a job, but now it guarantees a lifetime of debt with no certainty of a job. Politicians bicker over tiny little things without caring about those who are truly suffering. Many children and young adults are from broken and blended families and have no idea of how to grow up to be a man or woman. We carry our wounds everyday as our failures far outstrip our successes. We're told that stuff or sex or fame or companionship will heal the wounds, but they only create more wounds. Stuff creates more debt and then it breaks. Sex leaves us feeling hollow. Fame is fleeting and vindictive, and companionship will leave us hurt and betrayed. That's not a happy thing to say, right? If none of this works, then, what can quench parched lips...what can fill the void and heal the wounds? In this passage, there is a woman who is just as broken and parched as each one of us. Jesus came to her and healed her. She wasn't parched any more. In fact, her spirit was given an abundance of life that poured over into her whole town. That's so much hope.

The passage begins, “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.” (1-3) In the last passage, Jesus was baptizing and John the Baptist was also baptizing somewhere nearby. More people were going to Jesus than John and word made it back to the Pharisees, one of the Jewish religious political parties. The Pharisees were at one time interested in who John was and sent a delegation to find out, but now Jesus was becoming more popular. Naturally, they would want to investigate the young upstart, but in God's plan it was not yet time for Jesus to meet the Pharisees. There was still work to do before that part of his ministry would occur. So, he returned to Galilee to continue his ministry there and prepare the people's hearts.

Verse 4 says that Jesus had to go through Samaria. Samaria was a region between Judea and Galilee and it makes sense that in order to go from Judea to Galilee, you would have to go through Samaria. However, the Jews did not like the Samaritans and the Samaritans did not like the Jews. In their history, they were once one people. After David's son Solomon died, the united kingdom of Israel was split into two: a northern kingdom called Israel and a southern kingdom called Judah. Eventually both these kingdoms were conquered, the north by Assyria and the south by Babylon. It was common practice that the conquering nation would send most of the population into exile. Some people stayed behind and foreigners from elsewhere in the empire would be brought in to settle the land. During this time, the people who were left behind in the northern kingdom began to intermarry with the foreigners and began to adopt some of their religious practices. They kept the first five books of the Bible, but got rid of all the prophets and psalms and everything else. They adopted dubious practices from various demon-gods like burning children as a sacrifice. When the exiles were allowed to return to their land, they rebuilt the temple and Jerusalem. At this time, the ones who remained behind and intermingled came to help rebuild the temple. When the Jews saw them, they were outraged. These people had compromised their faith and defiled their lives. They were beaten and sent away. They went to

the area around Mt Gerizim, and built their own temple on the mountain. These people became

the Samaritans. The Jews hated the Samaritans because they defiled their faith and their blood, and thought them to be the worst sort of sinners. They were considered more defiled than a Gentile. The Samaritans hated the Jews because of how the Jews treated them. So when the passage says that Jesus had to go through Samaria, it is an odd thing to say. A Jew in Samaria could get killed, and because of that, Jews tended to go around Samaria. It was a two-day journey to go from Judea to Galilee through Samaria, but it was a six-day journey to go around. Yet, Jesus had to go through Samaria. Jesus had to go through Samaria for this woman and her town. It would be as dangerous as a white-supremacist going through a black neighborhood in the south during the 1950's and 1960's or like an American in Iran today. It's a volatile place with a lot of distrust, but Jesus didn't care about such barriers. He came for this woman.

At about noon, the warmest part of the day, Jesus came to Jacob's well near Sychar. His disciples went to go get food, but Jesus sat down next to the well. At noon, a woman came to the well alone with her water jar. Here in the land of outcasts was an anomaly. Women usually came to the well in the cool of the morning to draw water. Noontime was unbearable and even today, in this region, all business shuts down and people go home during the hottest part of the day. Yet, here was this woman braving the sweltering temperature alone to get water from the well. The passage reveals more and more about the woman as it goes along, but let's see who she is first and then see what Jesus did.

I mention at the beginning that this woman was very broken and parched. Her relationships with everybody were broken. The morning water getting was a time for women to get together and have some time to hang out. It's like meeting friends at a coffee shop. It was a very social occasion to get something essential for the household, but this woman intentionally avoided those situations. It turns out that this woman was married five times and was in a relationship with a man that was not her husband. Even today, that's a lot of men. Even celebrities with their short-term marriages aren't this bad off. Divorce was rare, even in Samaria. If this woman was either divorced five times or each of the husbands died off, then either way there is a horrible stigma attached to her. If they all died, then she's the Black Widow, if it were divorce then the common denominator in all the relationships was her. In either way, this woman would be viewed as the source of the problems and everybody would avoid her and she would avoid them. To top it all off, to add more insult to injury, her current man wasn't married to her. They were probably sleeping with each other and she was probably taking that water to serve him, but he felt no obligation to her. He was selfishly using her and her condition to serve his own pleasure. She didn't have the security of being married. She had no rights in the family. There was no one to take care of her.

This woman had desire and everyone took advantage of it. In her naivety, she searched for a way to satisfy that desire and she told herself that each of the men would fulfill her life. She would be whole when she found Mister Right. But man after man came and she felt more and more empty. She compromised her integrity and opened herself up. She lost her heart so fast that each man would stab it. She neglected others to satisfy her own desires and her relationships became broken until she had no more friends. She thought that if she offered herself sexually to a man, he would love her and make her complete, but men don't work that way. The men were just happy to have sex and really didn't care about the woman. To the men, they saw her as a sex object and nothing more and she became even less, an outcast's outcast.

Take a good, long look at the unnamed woman. I hope that it is like a mirror for you. If it is not like a mirror and you're thinking that you're not as bad as her, then repent of your pride because you ignore your broken sinful self and pass judgment on others. Take a look around. We have a generation who seeks answers, because they are lost and broken and have no purpose. Things that people used to take for granted like a stable family, stable job, and a strong American economy are not so certain any more. Divorce is rampant and parents care more about their own feelings than their kids' condition. Companies are corrupt and will downsize at the drop of a hat, and the stock market can drop like a rock on any given day. With all this negativity, it's easy to see that people want to have distractions. You can escape for a couple of hours with a quick trip to the Redbox and a dollar in hand. Facebook gives you an endless stream of information about your friends. Your smartphone can control your life. In the end, these distractions solve nothing. When they pass, you are still empty and you still search for a way to fill the void, just like this woman. You might switch from distractions to success or work or your kids, but none of those will satisfy either. Each one will disappoint you and leave you bruised and broken. A wise man once wrote, **"I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind."** (Ecclesiastes 1:14) If everything is meaningless, where, then, is the hope? Is there a way out? Can our parched souls sing again?

That's why Jesus had to go through Samaria. This passage is not about this woman. This passage is about Jesus and what he did. When this broken and weary woman came alone to the well at the hottest part of the day, Jesus had a request for her, **"Will you give me a drink?"** (7) Jesus started to talk to her and began to break down the barriers in her heart. Here was a Jewish Rabbi asking the worst of the worst in society for a drink of water. She was confused by this request and reminded Jesus of the social boundaries that were put up, but Jesus responded by saying that if she knew who he was, she would have asked him for living water. After this, she's even more confused saying that he doesn't have a bucket to get water from the well. How is he going to get this living water? Who does he think he is?

Jesus then ups the ante. **"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.'"** (13-14) Jesus' water is a little special. You don't have to keep coming back to drink it to satisfy your thirst. You drink it and you won't thirst again and it becomes like a spring inside of you that overflows. That's definitely different. All those other things that we talked about will never satisfy our souls. You might have the best burger on the planet, but you will get hungry again. You may have the best time and greatest friends, but the experiences fade and you'll want more. On the other hand, what Jesus offers satisfies the soul and overflows; it just bubbles out of our lives.

I hope that you think that what Jesus offers is something that you want. The woman wanted it and asked Jesus to give her some, but she didn't understand what Jesus was offering. From that point on, Jesus no longer mentions living water. Instead, he draws her attention to her desire and her pain. Jesus brings up the men that were in her life. The woman had bludgeoned herself by going after man after man, and Jesus touched those wounds. Jesus sees how we are wounded and he touches our wounds too. I have many wounds and burdens that I carry. When I was a student here, I racked up a lot of debt. My student loan debt is astronomical and I bought a lot of junk that I didn't need. I'm now married with a baby girl and they are now under that debt too. They inherited the result of my sin and I have to deal with that everyday and it hurts to the core. Everyday there is a hand on that wound, Jesus' hand, and he looks at me and says, "Listen and see".

Jesus wants me to listen and see what he did for this woman. He healed her wounds and satisfied her soul. He did it without a gimmick and he did it permanently. The woman saw how special Jesus was and called him a prophet and began to talk about the place of worship. However, Jesus responded that it is not where we worship, but it is whom we worship.

“‘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 the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.’” (21-24) This shift from the woman’s wounds and her desires to talk of worship seems like she is changing the subject, but they are one and the same. Worship is simply the act of giving yourself to what you desire. You put your hope in that thing, even if that hope is only to make you feel better. Hoping that the distractions you seek will make you forget about your problems is worshipping those distractions. We have a natural inclination to worship what we deeply desire. If you want fame, you will do anything to get it, including humiliating yourself. If you want money, you will beat yourself and work yourself to the bone to get a few more dollars. If you want companionship, like this woman, you will compromise your body in order to get it. Each of these desires is an attempt to fill a void in our souls. We think that we know what we need to fill it, but whatever we try, the void is still there. It’s like trying to satisfy our hunger with crackers. What we really need to do is satisfy our desires with what really fills the empty spot in our lives. What we really need is to give our hearts to the only thing that can satisfy...to worship the only thing that is worthy.

So, what is this living water that Jesus gives that can satisfy our souls? What is worthy of our worship and devotion? What can we really give our hearts to and never, ever be let down? “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.’” (25-26) The woman brought up the Messiah. The whole in her soul could only be filled with a savior and there is only one savior that can satisfy, Jesus. The living water that Jesus gives is himself. He is what our hearts desire the most. He is the only thing that is worthy of worship and devotion. He will never let us down. He does not demand anything from us and he does not condemn. The woman was used to judgmental looks from everyone. She was used to men wanting to use her, but Jesus did not judge and he offered to give her satisfaction and eternal life. Jesus demanded nothing from her, but he gave everything, including his life, for her. The savior of the world had come to save the worst wretch of the worst region.

Right when Jesus revealed that he was the Christ, she left her water jar and went back to the town. She went and talked to the people about Jesus. She was a woman who avoided all social interaction, but she was now confronting people about Jesus. Her wounds were healed and she was changed. No longer did she seem burdened and broken, but she was joyful and a blessing. When she found the Christ, she just couldn’t help herself. She wanted to share Jesus with the whole town and she got them to come out to him to see for themselves. The people in the town must have been amazed at her transformation. It must have been intriguing to them and they wondered about what could change a person so completely and so quickly. “They came out of the town and made their way toward him.” (30)

Just before the woman returned to the town, the disciples came back and found Jesus talking with a Samaritan woman. When she left, they tried to get Jesus to eat, but he used the opportunity to teach them about satisfaction. Jesus had found satisfaction in doing God’s will and that work was about to produce fruit. Jesus could see the entire town coming out to meet him, and he said that the fields are ripe for harvest. Countless parched souls were walking

toward Jesus curious of how a tawdry, broken woman could be changed. Jesus stayed in the area for two days and many more people became believers. **"They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.'"** (42) At the end of the passage, you can see that not only was the woman healed of her wounds, but also her parched soul was filled with an abundance of life that overflowed to the whole town. The town was saved because of the overflow in her heart that Jesus had put there.

There are times when people wonder, "Why does God seem to use the broken and weary? Why does God use the ordinary? Wouldn't it be better for God to use the powerful and perfect to bring people to him?" In general, the powerful and seemingly perfect prefer to give themselves honor and they have a hard time acknowledging God. Think about it, when times are good, do you tend to forget about God? On the other hand, the broken, the weary, and the lost know that they are hopeless. They've tried everything to help their situation, but they just dig themselves deeper. When God comes in and restores that person, when he changes them from the inside out, it is so powerful. The transformation is so dramatic that other people can't help but be curious to know what happened. That's what happened with the woman and her town.

Christ is the cure to the emptiness that we feel. Even when we don't know it, our souls long for Jesus. He is God and having a relationship with him is exactly what we need. We were created to converse with God, but every time we try to fill ourselves with distractions or honor or love or power or money or fame and none of those things will every satisfy. The richest people in the world have so much money that they don't know what to do with it, but their money brings them more sorrow. The famous fear that they will not be famous anymore. They fear being forgotten more than being humiliated. But when our souls are filled with Christ, we are whole and there is no need to go searching for more. Now, I am not saying that when you have Jesus you will be living in the remote wilderness thinking happy thoughts about Jesus all the time, but with Jesus in our hearts as the object of our worship, we can enjoy things like movies and Facebook because we don't expect them to satisfy our souls. Jesus satisfies us and we are free to enjoy God's creation. We are liberated from the constant searching because we have found what we really need.

There is a story, **"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."** (Matthew 13:44) When the man found the treasure in the field, nothing else mattered. He sold everything he had before finding the treasure and bought the field. When he found that treasure, he was so joyful because he didn't need to worry about his desires any more. The same can be said of anyone who finds Jesus. Everything that you were seeking before just doesn't seem to matter anymore. I love movies and sci-fi TV. When I was younger, they were a welcome escape from the loneliness that I was feeling. I so looked forward to movie premieres: Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and the Matrix, but they really didn't satisfy. If you notice most of those movies weren't all that good as they went along. I still like movies, but don't put any stock in them. Now I have Jesus. When hardships, pain, and suffering come, I don't try to escape, I find refuge in Christ. He's my source of strength. He is my what satisfies me. I do have to say this: I'm not trying to paint a rosy picture. There are many times that I don't want to go to Jesus. I want the rest; I want the time with my family; I want the time to enjoy things. I want to seek those things before seeking Jesus, but what happens is that I get disappointed and I am no better off. Then I finally accept that I need Jesus, but this way of doing things is so convoluted. It's not a good way. I really have to go to Jesus first. When I feel dry, he is what my soul needs, not rest or distraction.

The same holds for everyone here. Each one of us gets parched. Each one of us is so dry, but Jesus is the only thing that can truly satisfy. You might have seen these bumper stickers that say, "Jesus is the answer." Personally, I hate those bumper stickers, they reek of self-righteousness, but they do have a point. When you ask the real question, Jesus is the only possible answer. "What can satisfy my soul?" Jesus. Do you know what the most wonderful thing about the only thing that can satisfy? He comes to you. Jesus had to go through Samaria. He had to go to find this woman and save her and her town. She was bruised and broken because of all the bad choices she made, but Jesus came to heal her and make her a source of overflowing blessing for the whole town. There is hope for you.

Jesus is God