

John 4:4-26, 39-42 (Unlimited Resources: Living Water) 10/04/11

⁴ And he [Jesus] 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."

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." (ESV)

I love church history, and so in some significant ways, this service shadows the one back in May of 1974 when the church was in Trenton, and the mortgage bonds were retired. As you look at the bulletin inside of today's bulletin, you can see that many that were involved in the church then, remain involved and part of our body today. And while we all sang many of the same hymns today, and I am preaching on the same text that Dr. Buswell did then, I've enjoyed particularly this week, the transition from our study of shepherding these last many weeks, to *this* passage that teaches us *what to do* with our well-shepherded hearts. Because I think Jesus has church history on his mind here, and the question of who is flock is, and what kind of hearts we are to have as we reach out to others. This morning we will look at:

- Living with a Large Heart
- Living with a Broken Heart
- Living with a New Heart

Many of you know this story. It is not only famous, but includes the single, longest recorded conversation with an individual that the Lord Jesus ever had.

Jesus is sitting by a well. He and his disciples had been walking north from Judea to Galilee. And it's very interesting that John starts off by saying that Jesus *had* to go through Samaria. Because the fact is, he really didn't. It *is* the direct route. But pious Jews – and rabbis like Jesus are certainly pious Jews – they avoided that straight-line route like the plague.

Samaritans and Jews were total enemies at this time. The Jews looked at Samaritans as racial inferiors and dangerous heretics who had melded paganism and Judaism together to come up with something far worse than either one could ever be on its own. The Samaritans had built their own, competing temple on Mount Gerazim (since they only believed in and used the first 5 books of the bible, that makes sense – they revered the mountain where Abraham offered up Isaac, and didn't care so much about David giving Solomon the money to build the temple in Jerusalem). Ultimately, the Jews would destroy the Samaritan temple so they would never have to look at it. A Jew would never take anything from the hand of a Samaritan.

So instead of walking straight through that territory to go north, Jews preferred to go miles out of their way, crossing the Jordan River in the south near Jericho, traveling north up the east bank through what was still largely Gentile territory, and then *crossing back* to the west bank near the Sea of Galilee, creating a large semi-circle detour around Samaria to avoid the risk of social interaction with these despised half-breeds. This half-Jewish, half-pagan people. Talk about not wanting to cross the road to avoid a Samaritan!

Now if Jesus had been in a particular hurry, this breach of normal practice might have been understandable. But there is no evidence to suggest that this was an urgent journey. The only reason, then, for John to say in verse 4 that Jesus *had* to go through Samaria must be that an important encounter awaited him at *just this place*. This conversation with the Samaritan woman was no chance meeting. It was taking place by divine appointment. Something about the heart of Jesus determined that there was a '**must**' about it.

What Jesus is teaching us is that we must have a largeness of heart. That of all the resources God gives the church through his Spirit, nothing will be more significant than the kinds of hearts that the Christian takes into the world.

Just look at the shopping trip that his disciples are on: Jesus was always telling his disciples to take nothing with them – forcing them to live off of the welcome of those they would meet. And so to get food, the disciples were doing the unthinkable. They were actually going into a *Samaritan* town to shop for food at a *Samaritan* market. John tell us in v. 9 that "Jews have *no dealings* with Samaritans." And yet Jesus' ministry has made it so that he and his disciples **must** depend on those who don't yet believe in Him. For that you need a larger heart.

Those of us who claim the name of Christ must choose again and again between two ways of living. One way is to cultivate a small heart. That's really the safest way to go because it minimizes pain and sadness. If our ambition – and I know we never state this out loud but it's still an unspoken goal for many of us – if the goal is to avoid the troubles of life, the formula is simple: minimize entangling relationships, and carefully avoid noble ideas that require any kind of sacrifice, and you can successfully escape a whole host of afflictions. If you can cultivate a sort of deafness to social pains and the lives of your neighbors, then you can be saved from a lot of conflict in this life. Cultivate blindness, and you'll avoid seeing much of what is ugly.

It is universally true for all of us that if we want to get through life with a minimum of trouble, we may occasionally have to go the circuitous route, but do whatever is necessary to limit the compass of our hearts. This is how many people, even those who name the name of Christ, get through life with minimal pain and suffering. They have cultivated a smallness of heart.

But there *is* another path that's also open to us—namely, to open ourselves to others and become susceptible to the kinds of sorrow and pain that a shriveled heart knows nothing about. Enlarge and ennoble your purpose and you will increase your vulnerability proportionately!

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the *risk* of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love is Hell.

— C.S. Lewis

Enlarge your heart, cultivate a *ministering, shepherding* heart, and you will enlarge the potential for pain. Some of us are hurting specifically because we have enlarged our hearts. Some have pursued big ideals, reaching the lost, justice for the oppressed, preaching to the enemy, and giving themselves to others, and that decision has left them prey to pain and suffering that otherwise would have been avoided.

That's part of what Jesus is showing us here. Will you serve Christ and others, or yourself? Your decision will affect the kind of heart you have. Little hearts, though safe and protected, don't contribute much of anything. No one benefits from restricted sympathies and limited vision. On the other hand, ministering hearts, though vulnerable, are also the hearts that know the most joy and leave the biggest impact on the world. Cultivate blindness, and you will never see the ugly, but neither will you see the beauty of God's creation. Cultivate a small heart, and you may have smooth sailing, but you will never know the powerful winds of the Holy Spirit in your sails.

With that in mind, I want you to think of Jesus just sitting there at the well.

We can only imagine what he's thinking – but *we can* imagine what he's thinking. Perhaps he is thinking about the story of Jacob. This is the well that became famous because it was the well that Jacob gave to his son, Joseph. And maybe Jesus thought back even further, to the passage that Don read, about how Abraham's servant, Eleazar, had found a wife for Isaac. And when Eleazar did meet Rebekah, he spoke words very similar to the ones Jesus was about to use – "I am thirsty, would you give me something to drink?" And that if Eleazar had not been offered a drink by Rebekah, there would be no marriage to Isaac, and there would be no Jacob... Maybe all of those providences were in his mind. Maybe he even thought of the question that Rebekah was ultimately asked – "Will you go with this man?"

And then we can imagine that this is when the Samaritan woman appears, walking toward Jesus, very likely with a water jug balanced on her head at high noon, under the baking sun. Now, make no mistake about it – this woman lives in a culture that is no less confused than our own. We can imagine what she is thinking, too. She hates, and she is hated in return. She is there at noon because she was the kind of woman who was probably quite beautiful in her day, but the kind of skin-deep beauty that threatens other women, and the kind of woman men don't take home to momma. I picture her with lipstick just a little too red; hair dyed just a bit too bright. She's obviously very bright, with a very quick wit. You know, she's the kind of woman that they write country songs about. Like most of us, she was looking for happiness.

She probably hoped that love and marriage would make her life worthwhile, giving it meaning, and direction. But somehow every relationship had gone bad on her. And each time she hoped she would not make the same mistake again. But she did. And the more emotional tragedy she experienced, the more her heart got smaller and smaller. All the youthful idealism had hardened into a frustrated cynicism. Now, as she comes to the well at noon so she can avoid the respectable people, she is worn down and despised. All she has left are her quick tongue, her wits, and above all, a deep thirst for something better.

Jesus is not supposed to ask a woman like her for a drink. In that culture she is of the wrong race, she is of the wrong region, she is of the wrong religion, and in that day and age she is even of the wrong gender. She had been married five times and was shackled-up with number six. No respectable rabbi would have given her the time of day. But this is what large hearts do. I want to push us as a congregation.

- Jesus ministered when he was tired.
- Jesus overcame barriers, and
- Jesus expected providence to happen to him.

Those are three fundamental markers of a spiritually enlarged heart. I don't really know anyone who isn't tired, but will you share a meal or open your home to someone? Will you call someone to look in on them? Even when you're tired? And will you do those things – share that meal or open your home – to someone who isn't like you? Jesus not only spoke to this woman but asked to use the woman's drinking utensil and by doing this became defiled. The ministry of Jesus leapt across the conventional barriers of the day. Will that be true of you? And will YOU expect providence in your life? Those people who ARE in your family... I know you don't like some of

them...but they are the ones God has given you to speak to. They are the ones that join you at the table the way this woman met Jesus at the well.

- Living with a Broken Heart

A broken heart must have been just what this woman had. Why is she here at the well alone? It's no big deal for you to go to the store alone, so we miss this, but this is NOT something that was done. First, this is very difficult, arduous labor. Drawing water was not easy, and women always came with friends or helpers so that they could help one another. You had to come with a great big pot or jar, and the water you needed would be for EVERYTHING you needed – the cooking, the cleaning, the bathing, everything. And so you'd never come in the heat of the day when no one else is there.

But this woman is a moral and social outcast. She was there most likely because some of the men she married, or didn't, were men that may have been with the other women in the town at some point – those women would come to the well in the early morning or late day, the *cool* of the day – and she didn't want to run into them, and they didn't want to see or draw water with her.

And it made her bitter. She must have been reminded of her sin every noontime that she walked out to Jacob's well. She's angry. Listen for the prideful sarcasm in v. 9: "How is it that *you*, a Jew, ask for a drink from *me*, a woman of Samaria?"

Then you get to verses 11 and 12. She starts off with a note of respect – she starts off with the word *Kyrie* which means "Sir" or "Lord" (many of you know that word), but there is still a kind of a mocking attitude "Sir, you don't even have what you need to draw water out of the well. Are *you* greater than our father Jacob?"

We may not hear it this way because we know how the story comes out in the end, but by the time you get to 15, there is real sarcasm. She urges him, "*Please!* Give me some of this wonderful water, Sir. I can't wait! Carting this water every day – if you can give me a jar so I never have to come again...that'd be a great trick if you could make me some eternal water!"

Now as Christians, we are supposed to both recognize people who are unholy, and things that we shouldn't do, and know we shouldn't behave like those folks. But that does NOT mean that we stay away from them. And we've also heard people who avoid the gospel with the same kind of self-mocking cynicism – "Yeah right. Me a Christian!" And yet we are also called to look through and past these things in others. Some of these barriers are imposed by a society that is sinful because it is a fallen and sinful world. We are surrounded by all kinds of people with all kinds of lifestyles – people who are different from us in their race, their social standing, their economic status and their religion. And we are called to see past those things because in spite of them, there is a person there who needs to be penetrated by the good news about Jesus Christ.

But it isn't just society that imposes sinfulness upon the heart but it is the heart itself. You see this in v.16. In our day and age, I'm not sure we can see this for what it is because today there is little shame in what she is doing. But forget the shame and the husbands for a moment. Look at what her life has really been about because it is radically contemporary: Her life has been a compulsive passion for someone who will make her happy.

An obsessive, habitual search for someone who will satisfy her and fill her life with the happiness she has always longed for. She has tried this over and over again.

And now, she is trying to find happiness once again, with a man who is willing to make her scum in that society by living with her without marriage. It's no shame today, but both Samaritan AND Jewish moral codes said that living with a man was socially immoral and unacceptable, but she will do anything she can to try and find happiness in a man who cares nothing for what it does to her.

You know, it's not the sin of fornication that the bible is trying to highlight here – though the bible says that it is sin – but it's what *leads* to it: The search, this drive, this thirst for happiness. Research says that for those of us who are married, only 5% of us are in marriages that are deeply satisfying. And that statistic is surely related to another that says that 50% of us will seek sexual satisfaction *outside* our marriages. Only 25% of working people say that they are in vocations that they want to be in for the rest of their working careers. Fully 1/3 of us will go through repeated bouts of serious depression – all of those folks expressing a dissatisfaction with their lives. Look at the lines of folks buying lottery tickets at the convenient stores. Governor Christie proclaimed March as "Problem Gambling Awareness Month in NJ." Why? People looking to pay for satisfaction – gamble on it!

We just don't have enough. And Jesus says that if you think you're going to find happiness through the wells of body sculpting videos, marriage manuals, vacation homes, pilates, or whatever – things that may not necessarily be bad – what you will be, still, is thirsty. You will be yet again. What this world has to offer will never fully satisfy. That's what Jesus is REALLY saying here. This is the main point of this passage – that without the work of Jesus Christ on your behalf, people *just stay thirsty*.

Can you see this? Do you recognize this? Can you relate to this woman's thirst for happiness?

Here is the thing about the woman at the well. Remember last week we spoke of the man born blind in John 9. And we said, yeah, he's a guy who was born blind, and Jesus made him see. But he is also a living symbol of who *we* are. Such that we can all now sing, "I once was blind, but now I see." It's the same with the woman at the well. If you want to know what she is like, Jesus says, "Look in the mirror."

She is not in scripture, you know, so that you can judge her. And she is not recorded here in the word of God so that you can feel pity for her. Or so that you can feel glad that you're not like her.

She is here at this well just like you would be. Look in the mirror friends! She needs a drink of water, she has physical needs. She has relational needs – she'd like to have someone in her life that makes her more secure and happy. She has spiritual needs – should I worship at Gerazim or Sinai? And those needs show her to be *just like us*.

And what does Jesus say to this? To all of these needs that we all have in common? You need me. You need a savior. You need someone to release you from all of the consequences of your sin. What is preventing us from fulfilling *our* physical, relational and spiritual needs – to seeing our own broken hearts, our own broken cisterns, our own brokenness – is the sin underneath those things. And to this, Jesus says, I am he. I am the one who can fill that need that is deeper than all others.

Do you see her when you look in the mirror? Jesus tells you that you should in v. 14 when he says, "*Whoever* drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again." She is just like us. "There is none righteous, no not one." She needs a savior, too.

- Living with a New Heart

Finally, living with a new heart. Jesus does something here that is really remarkable.

You know, John is the gospel that is in stark black and white. Or you could say it is the gospel where everything is in bold. The other gospels have parables that say things like "The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed," nobody gets it. Or you have ethical teaching. In John you don't have the Sermon on the Mount or any ethical teaching, and no parables either. Nothing is hidden in John. In the other gospels, Jesus is always telling people "Don't tell them who I am." Not in John. No John is all about revealing Jesus as boldly as possible. A light has come into the world. And in John, Jesus is never subtle, but he's always saying. "I am." Claim after claim, he says I am. The people of Israel have been looking for eternal manna, and Jesus says, that's me! I am the bread. The people of Israel have been looking for eternal life, and Jesus says, that's me! I am the life. The people of Israel have been looking for the good shepherd of Psalm 23, and Jesus says, that's me! I am the good shepherd. Lazarus dies, and Martha is torn apart. Jesus says, "Don't worry. I am the resurrection."

But what of this Samaritan woman? Did you notice how she responds to Jesus? She doesn't say, "How is it that *you*, a Jew, ask for a drink from *me*, a Samaritan?" No, she says, "How is it that *you*, a Jew, ask for a drink from *me*, a **woman** of Samaria?" Jesus had nothing to dip with, and if she did it, anything he touched from her would be unclean. But more than that, the Jews had a saying about Samaritan women. That they were menstrous from the cradle. Now in the OT, the idea was that Jewish women were unclean only at that time of the month, and they had all sorts of ritual cleansings to deal with it – all pointing to the need we all have for holiness. But the Samaritan women, well, the writings of the Mishnah said that they were permanently unclean. And that is if you touched a Samaritan woman it was tantamount to uniting yourself to her.

Now. Step back. What does this woman want? She has looked for love in all the wrong places, but she has wanted a husband. So when he asks for a drink she says in effect, "Jesus, are you so thirsty that you are willing to become defiled and unclean by me?"

And Jesus says, No, *YOU* are so thirsty that I am willing to become unclean. You want a husband. "*I am.*"

People say, "I want satisfaction." And Jesus says, "I am." What do you want? Jesus says, "Take me." And when you trust him, Jesus enters into you. He does! And friends, that is the gospel. It's a marriage! He is her sixth husband in a way. We don't know the names of any of her husbands, but I'll tell you this: this Samaritan woman, 2,000 years later, is linked with only one man, Jesus Christ. It's a sort of marriage because everything that is true of her, he takes on that shame. And everything that is true of him, that becomes hers. And that is the gospel. What are you filling your life with? Are you filling your life with things other than Jesus? Jesus is living water. He is your life spring.

Ever try covering over a spring? You can cover it with mountains of dirt, and all you'll get is muddy water. The spring just keeps coming.

Ever wonder why your life is so muddy? You are adding – you insist on adding – stuff to Jesus. Are you trying to fill your life with stuff when you already have Jesus?!

When you add to Jesus, you never get Jesus as your "I am." You miss his grace. And the anger will never burn off like hers does. As great as was her sin, greater still was his HIS love. And when you know the greatness of YOUR sin, then you will know that greater still is his love for YOU.

Let's end with this. At the end of John, at the crucifixion, Jesus asks for water. Do you remember? He says at the cross, "I thirst."

Friends, He thirsts, so that you may drink deep of salvation.

Let's pray.