

Answering Jesus: How Will You Satisfy Your Thirst?

Faith Evangelical Free Church

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This morning we continue a sermon series entitled “Answering Jesus”. It is our hope that over the next few weeks as we take a look at some amazing conversations that Jesus had with people just like you and me, we can learn more about how Jesus challenges each and every one of us ask the kind of questions and seek the sort of answers that will help us in our pursuit of faith in Jesus Christ and our desire to experience God in all of life.

Last week Pastor Steve began this series by looking at a passage from John 3 and challenged us to ask the basic, foundational question of the Christian faith: “Have you been born from above?” Have you confessed your need to be saved from your sins and be (spiritually) reborn as a daughter or son of God? To say “yes” to this question is to say, “I believe that Jesus died for my sins and has given me eternal life.” This rebirth graciously addresses our need to be granted salvation by a power far greater and beyond any we possess ourselves. Salvation must come from God and God alone.

This morning we are going to consider another need that I am sure we have all experienced at some point and perhaps are even experiencing today: our need to satisfy a longing that seems far greater and beyond our abilities to fulfill.

This is far more than trying to figure out how to get what we want out of life. We all have those little things we long for that provide a temporary kind of satisfaction: the perfect cup of coffee; the smell of books; the perfect Saturday with our friends or family (or for me fellow introverts out there, a Saturday with nobody at all), a job well done, a long sought after goal achieved. These are all good things and it is right to be thankful for them and consider them as gifts from our Heavenly Father who loves us.

But what we’re talking about today are not the things we want, and are even a little bit beyond the things we need. Today we’re going to look into the deep longings of our hearts. Our desire to be loved unconditionally. Clarity of our purpose in life. A sense of belonging to something or someone greater than the world around us. Life that does not end death.

We’re talking about the sort of things that occasionally keep us wide awake in the middle of the night. The things that we know, no matter how hard we work or how hard we try, we’ll never be able to figure out on our own.

The reason we can’t take on these deeper longings and desires by ourselves is because we’re not the ones meant to satisfy them. Only Jesus can do that. So, the question we want to consider today is:

Are you allowing Jesus to quench the deepest thirst of your soul? (x2)

The action in John 4 gets started when a Samaritan woman stumbles upon a very tired and thirsty Jesus, waiting by a well in the middle of the day.

1 Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John— **2** although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. **3** So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

4 Now he had to go through Samaria. **5** So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. **6** Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" **8** (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) **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.)

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."

John 4

To a first century reader this opening scene would have been all kinds of strange. First of all, Jesus' decision to pass through Samaria on his way to Galilee is curious. It was the fastest route between Judea and Galilee, but centuries of bad blood and hatred between the Jews and Samaritans led most Jews to take the long way around Samaria to the east along the coast of the Medetirainan Sea or west up the Jordan River...and most Samaritans were happy to see their despised regional and cultural enemies steer clear of their homeland. But Jesus ignores all this and casually strolls into the heart of enemy territory.

Then there is the time of day during which this whole scene plays out. In v. 6 John tells us it was around noon. It's unlikely that the well Jesus was waiting at was anything more than a small circular stone wall, maybe a few feet high and a few feet in diameter, surrounding a hole that went down about 100 feet to pool of still water. It's not like this spot was a cantina or roadside inn. At noon the sun would have been beating down from high in the sky, eliminating all shelters of shadow and shade as it radiated its midday heat. An odd time and an odd place to meet.

Then there is the lone Samaritan woman. It would have been highly unusual for a woman to come to the well by herself in the middle of the day to get her water. Normally the women of the village gathered early in the morning and traveled to the well together, enjoying the safety and fellowship of the group as they carried out their first of many daily chores.

So the fact that this woman comes by herself during the hottest part of the day, nearly guaranteeing that she'd be alone throughout her trip, raises some red flags. We're never told precisely why this was her practice, but it is reasonable to assume that she either did not want to be among the other women, or the other women did not want to be seen or share any time with her...or possibly a little bit of both. Something in her life had created some broken relationships with the people of her village, and as a result she walked to the well alone.

And it's in this hot, uncomfortable, lonely moment of her day that she unexpectedly meets Jesus. Isn't it interesting how often Jesus finds us when the last thing we are doing is looking for him? One of his favorite ways to break through our hard hearts and shine a light in the darker places of our souls is to show up unannounced in the middle of our day and say, "Hey...I've got something I need to tell you. I've got something I need to offer you, and trust me; it's going to help you in ways you can't even imagine."

Jewish men were almost never alone with non-familial women, rarely spoke to women in public, especially women who were not accompanied by their husbands, and if at all possible NEVER interacted in any way with Samaritan women, who many Jews believed to be unclean from their birth.

So Jesus' entire conversation with the Samaritan woman was both socially bizarre and borderline inappropriate. What he is doing here is just simply not done at this time in history and in this culture.

But Jesus knew this was something he had to do, that this woman was someone God wanted to hear the Gospel. In v. 4 John told us that Jesus didn't just come to Samaria because it was convenient. It says he **had** to come this way, **had** to enter this foreign land and **had** to find this woman and offer her Good News that would change her life forever.

Do you believe that Jesus pursues you with that same determination? You need to, because that's one of the loudest messages flowing from nearly every page in this book. Nothing stands in the way of Jesus reaching you with the message of God's love for you. What he offered to the Samaritan woman more than 2000 years ago he offers to you as well, even right now in this very moment.

In v. 10, Jesus says he could make the "gift of God" and "living water" available to the Samaritan woman. In vv. 13-14, after she understandably misses his meaning and assumes he knows of some local water source other than the well by which she sits, Jesus tries to make his offer more clearly:

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, **14** 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."

John 4

Throughout the Bible the imagery of "living water" is used to describe the many miraculous and merciful ways God saves us from the condemnation of sin and the consequence of death.

In Isaiah 55, the prophet beckons all who are thirsty to come to the waters of God and drink deeply to satisfy their longing for the Lord and to wash away their sins so that they may "go out [into the world] in joy and be led forth in peace" for the rest of their eternal lives.

Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus will make it clear that this invitation to drink deeply of living water is really an invitation to draw closer to Him:

37 "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. **38** Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."

John 7

This is the same living, life-giving, eternally sustaining water that John will later see flowing from the throne of God and throughout the New Kingdom of God, recorded in the book of Revelation:

1 And the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and from the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city...**17** The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

Rev 22

This is the power of God to wash us clean of our sin. It is a life nourished and satisfied by the inner spring of spiritual flourishing and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is the once-and-for-all completed and eternally ongoing work of Jesus Christ deep within our souls. This living water is Jesus, and he is life, and life abundantly.

Jesus makes this incredibly gracious offer -- lays out everything this woman could ever truly need or want -- with no strings attached, no preamble, no qualifiers. He simply shows up in her life and says, "I can give you everything your heart and soul need for all eternity. Just ask me, and it's yours."

Friends, that's the same offer he makes to you and me. Everyday of our lives Jesus is waiting for us at the well -- at the breakfast table, at the coffee pot, at the bus stop, in our busy moments and in our peaceful moments, in this very room right now -- and he says to us, "I can give you everything your heart and soul need for today and for all eternity. Just ask me, and it's yours."

Here's the bottom line: If you have ever longed for an eternal life that is free from the burdens of sin and shame then rejoice...because that's exactly what Jesus wants to give us.

If you want to quench that deep thirst within your soul for everlasting life in the presence of the Loving God...the Good News of the Gospel is that you can. All you have to do is accept his offer and drink deeply from the wellspring of His life.

But that's the catch, isn't it? Accepting what Jesus has to offer is hard for us, because we often think we want or need to be the ones in control of our own lives.. We think we know what we need, and we think we know how to get it, and we default to depending on ourselves rather than believing that Jesus is better than what we can manage on our own.

We get lost in the clutter what else this life has to offer. We satisfy our longings with things that fall short, and then we pretend like that's not what we're doing because the alternative is to admit we, and the things we too often reach for to satisfy the deep longings of our hearts, aren't enough.

We get lonely, so we try to fill our lives with relationships and put on them the unfair expectation that they will always provide us with happiness and that the people we love will never let us down. (And then, when they do let us down or don't make us happy, we discover the longing for a relationship that will never fail is dug deep into who we are and it hurts to have it unfulfilled.)

We get scared and long for a way to make the world safer and more sensible, so we invest ourselves deeply in the things we feel like we can control: health, wealth, politics, career paths, college degrees, social standing, and even the practice of religion itself can be used to generate a false sense of security and self control. (And then, when these things don't go the way we planned or don't yield the return we had hoped for and fall short of our dreams, we discover a longing for the blessed assurance we thought these things would provide.)

And we get into the pattern of going back to these wells, back to the practices and the same people and telling ourselves "maybe this time it will work, maybe this time it will be different, maybe this time I will find the satisfaction I seek."

That's the pattern of sin and suffering we see the Samaritan woman caught up in in our passage today.

After multiple failed attempts to get the Samaritan woman to hear, understand, and accept what he has to offer, Jesus changes his approach and instead turns his attention to gently exposing and carefully treating what must have been the parts of her soul most damaged by pain and sin and self-reliance.

It starts out with that awkward and tense exchange in vv. 16-25:

16 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

17 "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. **18** 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."

19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. **20** Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

21 "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. **22** You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23** 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. **24** God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

25 The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

John 4

The Samaritan woman, it turns out, has a complicated past. She's been through five different marriages and now lives with a man who is not her husband. It's important to note that we're not given any details about what led to this woman's multiple marriages or her culturally dubious decision to be with (but not married to) this sixth man.

It is certainly possible, and in the past was a popular assumption, that the woman struggled with sexual immorality and that contributed to the termination of her past relationships. But it is just as possible and perhaps even more likely that some of her previous husbands simply died, or that they divorced her. As is so often the case in all of our lives, the deepest wounds found in this woman's soul are probably the result of a messy combination of her sins, her misplaced longings, the sins of others, and the high cost of living in a fallen, broken world.

We also see in this passage that the Samaritan woman suffers from, not to put it too bluntly, bad theology (something I'm sure no one in this room has ever struggled with). Once she figures out that Jesus is some sort of prophet, she jumps on the opportunity to have her and her people's particular theological beliefs justified.

The problem is, the Samaritans thought the Jews were heretics and rejected any Old Testament writings other than the Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. They dismissed the writings of the prophets and had no special regard for the Davidic Kingdom or the divine lineage it claimed. In fact, their understanding of the "Messiah" was of someone who would be a second Moses, rescuing them from their oppression and restoring right worship of God (and...some other gods picked up from Roman religions) at a place called Mt. Gerizim.

This is the worldview and life this woman has created for herself (and that the world around her has led her to create): a lot of broken relationships, failed expectations, and a religion that its best gives her a Messiah who is a reformer but not a savior.

This is not a life that is better than what Jesus has to offer. And yet we all do things like this all the time. We all get caught up in the delusion that we can manage life on our own, find solutions to our problems for ourselves, and when we do that we reveal that our understanding of Jesus is less than it should be. We prove that we don't believe Jesus is better or that Jesus is best.

Do you want to allow *Jesus to quench the deepest thirst of your soul*? Then you have to start believing, starting accepting as truth, that He is better than anything you could ever try to use to take His place in your heart.

We fill our hearts with so much junk instead of Jesus. And all it ever does is poison the well and cut us off from the living water we so desperately need to be whole.

We are all going to have different ways we struggle to really and truly believe Jesus is better than the cheap imitations of satisfaction that we try to find on our own. And the fact is we can't just will ourselves into liking Jesus more than a world full of people, places, and things competing for our ultimate affection and devotion.

All of this clicks together, and we allow Jesus to quench the deepest thirst of our souls, only when we see him for who he truly is: that he is exactly who he declares he is in John 4:26 -- ***"I, the one speaking to you—I am he."***

Jesus says "I am he" -- the Messiah, the Christ, the Redeemer, the Lord of Life, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, the Son of God, the one who pays for our sins and the one who brings us into an everlasting presence of our Heavenly Father.

For the Samaritan woman, that moment of clear revelation changed everything. She abandons her water jar (finally realizing it's not the water she wants or needs) and rushes back to her town, telling everyone she can find, *"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"*

If you continue to read John 4 through v. 42 you'd find that the testimony of this woman -- once lonely now no longer alone; once struggling to find love now forever loved by one whose love will never fail; once caught up in religious obscurity now freed into the fullness of faith -- her testimony leads her entire town to the feet of Christ, and Christ leads them all to an amazing confession v. 42:

*"We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that **this man [Jesus] really is the Savior of the world.**"*

John 4

Are you ready to live the kind of life that is clearly satisfied in the person and by the work of Jesus? Will you see him and know him as the Savior of the world, and share with others this amazing truth?

Are you going to allow Jesus to quench the deepest thirst of your soul?

Over the last year I've started a new practice in my life directly related to this need to have my soul's deepest thirst satisfied by Jesus.

I get away and go walk on one of Manhattan's many terrific trails. My favorite are the ones in Washington-Marlatt park just west of Seth Child Road.

I don't take music, I don't take an audio book, and I don't take an agenda. (I do, however, take my dog).

And I just walk...talk to God a little bit...and try to listen. I try to let go of all the stuff I keep cluttered up in my mind and heart and just be with Jesus. Sometimes I pray about really big things in my life. Sometimes I list off things I'm thankful for. But the goal of these walks is just to wander in the presence of God and be satisfied with time spent with Him.

And I can't make it make sense to you, but I my testimony about this practice is: it works. When I get away and go to God I find him. I could be happy or sad, confused or excited, focused or completely scatterbrained. All I can tell you is that my longing to be with him is always rewarded by a deep, intense satisfaction of finding him to be everything I need and so much more.

During these walks, and at many other times, I have found Psalm 107 to be quite true:

"Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things."

Psalm 107:8-9

I don't know what your way is, maybe it's walking, maybe it's quiet times in the morning, maybe it's reaching your breaking point and running to God in great need of his grace. Whatever is, I encourage you this week:

Allow Jesus quench the deepest thirst of your soul. Take the water of life he offers. Surrender all your lesser substitutes. And join those who, after seeing Jesus for who he really is, joyfully confess him as the Savior of the world, the Savior of your heart, and the Savior of your life.