

## “Living Water”

In football my favorite running backs are the ones who run from north to south, not east to west.

A north south runner is one who runs straight ahead because he knows there is no other way for the ball to be advanced down the field for a touchdown. He runs in such a way so as to embrace the contact, as opposed to avoiding it, and he runs over defenders in order to score a touch down.

An east west running back is one who runs from side to side in order to find an open lane and avoid getting hit. Sometimes these type of running backs will zigzag all over the place, reverse their direction, and end up running one hundred yards just to advance the football a couple of yards down the field. They expend a tremendous amount of energy taking the path of least resistance.

We do this a lot in our lives. We are built that way.

Sometimes highways are built to avoid certain neighborhoods, thus taking the easiest path but not necessarily the shortest path, in order to get from point a to point b.

Another good example of this is the fact that we all have certain people we do not particularly like and so we will go out of our way in order to avoid them, even if it means taking a longer way.

How many of you have ever been to the mall and you saw somebody that you didn't want to bump into and so in order to avoid them you took a long detour back to your car? We are good at going out of our way to avoid messy, uncomfortable situations. It is a part of our sinful nature.

### **Taking the Harder Way- Going through Samaria**

In our text today John tells us that Jesus had to go through Samaria in order to go from Judea to Galilee.

In a physical sense that is not true. There was another route that led from Judea to Galilee and most good Jews would take it- the east-west path, the path of least resistance, as opposed to the shorter but more difficult north-south path. .

That path would track eastward from Judea and cross over the Jordan River, and then it would go northward in a semi-circular fashion in order avoid going through Samaria.

It was a longer path to Galilee but it was a much easier because it enabled Jews to avoid people they were not very particularly fond of, the Samaritans.

To be fair, this animosity went both ways, the Samaritans did not like the Jews either.

This hostility went back to a time of about seven hundred years before the time of Jesus.

In 722 BC the Assyrian army defeated the northern kingdom of Israel (Remember, God's chosen people the Israelites had divided into two different kingdoms much like our own nation did during the Civil War.) and in order to weaken Israel the Assyrian army deported many Israelites (exile) and in their place they planted Persian peoples in the northern Kingdom of Israel.

Eventually these Persians would introduce foreign gods and would intermarry with the Jews who had remained there in the defeated kingdom of Israel. Consequently, a new people would emerge from this mixing of peoples and they became known as the Samaritans.

The southern Kingdom of Judah frowned upon the Samaritans because of their racial and religious intermingling. They were viewed as inferior peoples.

Because of this shunning by Judah the Samaritans began to take on their own religious identity and they would eventually reject any part of the Jewish religion that showed a preference for the southern kingdom.

Consequently, they rejected the writings of the prophets and the wisdom books of the OT, which constantly talked about the Messiah coming from Judah, and they would only acknowledge the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) as their holy scriptures. They also built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, thus rejecting the temple that Solomon had built in Jerusalem. So the Samaritans did not like the Jews either.

It was this ugly context that led Jews who were traveling from Judea to Galilee to avoid Samaria like the plague. Yet our text tells us that Jesus had to go through Samaria.

Now why does it say this?

It says this because Jesus had been sent on a mission by his Heavenly Father to redeem fallen sinners from their sin. Jesus had come into this world in order to save Samaritans, including this woman.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

That's why Jesus had to go through Samaria, even though it was a taboo thing to do.

### **Risking Your Reputation for Sinners**

This is not the only thing that Jesus did that was controversial. He broke two other taboos in this encounter with the woman at the well.

First, he as a single man, spoke to a woman alone in public. This typically did not happen much in the day of Jesus. It was considered too risky a thing to do. One could put himself in a compromising position, or a rumor could start.

The fact that Jesus was considered to be a rabbi, a teacher of the Jewish Law, made it even all the more controversial to speak to her. Rabbis were to be especially careful.

The Jewish Mishnah offered this word of warning to teachers of the law: “He that talks much with women brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the law, and at the last will inherit Gehenna (hell).”

Second, not only did he speak to a woman in public, he spoke to a sinful woman in public.

By sinful I do not just mean that this woman was simply a sinner. Everybody is a sinner and even those people who think more highly of themselves than they ought to will admit that they “sin” every now and then. You know, respectable sins.

But this woman was a **sinner**. She had a bad reputation. Her life was broken. She made one big mess out of her sexuality and her relationships with men. She had five husbands and the man she was currently with was not even her husband. She was cohabitating.

Because of this she felt guilty and ashamed about her life.

She had an empty hole that was a mile long from bad, cheap relationships. This woman was weighed down with self-loathing. People whispered about her in public. They would point fingers when she was not looking. Some people, I imagine, were even bold enough to call her derogatory names.

That’s why she showed up at the well to get her water (not early in the morning when all the other respectable women came) but in the dead heat of the day, because she knew nobody else would be there to whisper about her. But surprise, there is Jesus sitting at the well when she arrives.

For him to speak with this woman was risky business. Yet he speaks to her anyway.

Jesus has come to give her the living water of God and that is what I want to spend the next few moments speaking to you about. I want to talk to you about the living water of Jesus Christ.

## **The Living Water of Christ**

There are three things I want to lift up to you about living water this morning.

### 1. Living Water- We Must Experience It

In this story, like so many of the stories in the gospel of John, this woman, at first, misses what Jesus is getting at.

Like Nicodemus who thought being “born again” meant going back in the womb of his mother, this woman did not understand that Jesus was talking about water that would permanently change her life with God.

He has asked the Samaritan woman for a drink of water. She is shocked by his request because he is a Jew and she is a Samaritan.

Jesus says to her if you knew who it was who was asking you for a drink it would be the other way around. You would be asking me for a drink!

Still not getting it she says to him, you don't even have a bucket and that well is deep. How are you going to give me water?

It is here that Jesus lets the cat out of the bag and he tells her that the water he is been talking about all along is not the literal water in the well; that only quenches physical thirst.

The kind of water that Jesus is talking about is the living water that flows from God, gives life with God, and forever quenches man's thirst for God if he will but drink of it.

Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water I give him will never thirst. (v.13-14)

What Jesus is saying here is that we must experience the spiritual rebirth. We must put our faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and life with God. We must drink of the water that wells up to eternal life.

If we just look at the water of Christ that God has put before us and we never drink of it then we will remain dead in our sins.

There must be faith on our part. There must be conversion. There must be spiritual rebirth. We will not see the kingdom of God unless we have been born again. We must experience the living water of Christ. That's what Jesus was telling this woman and that is what he is telling us today.

## 2. Living Water- It Must Change Us

When things finally began to click for this woman and she began to understand that Jesus was talking about something so much more than just stagnant water from a well, but rather a living, flowing, rushing water that can only come from God and can give eternal life, she cries out to Jesus, "Give me this water so that I won't get thirsty again." (v.13)

At this point Jesus begins to meddle in her life. He asks her to go and get her husband and then come back.

The story then reveals to us that Jesus knows all about her past life. He knows that she has had five husbands and that the man she is currently with she is not married to.

What is Jesus doing here?

He is calling this woman to repentance, to an amended and changed life.

If this woman is going to follow Christ then it will require repentance and change. Jesus never saves anyone just to leave them as they are, but he saves us in order to restore within us all that is broken.

By asking this woman to do this he is dealing with the cancer that has ruined her life and he is calling her away from that kind of past to a new and restored life with God.

Jesus always does this when he calls his people to follow him. He tells us that a man who is not willing to forsake everything is not fit for the kingdom of God.

Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell all of his possessions because he knew that those possessions were more a whole lot more important to him than Jesus.

Jesus told the woman who was caught in adultery in John 8 to go and sin no more.

Conversion can never be separated from repentance. Repentance does not save us, only Christ, through faith, but repentance is a necessary fruit of genuine conversion.

This is something we are badly missing in the church today.

We have totally misunderstood the inclusivity of Jesus.

Many people look at passages like this one and see how Jesus was willing to break so many cultural taboos to reach those who were outcasts and marginalized in society and they rightly conclude that we are to do the same, but then they fail to call those people to repentance.

A good example of this is the mainline church's struggle with the issue of homosexuality. The church is quickly drifting to a place where it upholds Jesus' inclusivity but fails to follow him in calling people to repentance, restoration, and redemption.

Jesus always called people to repentance. Repentance is never easy because it calls us to give up that which the flesh loves. That's why when Jesus started to meddle in the private affairs of this woman she tried to change the subject to be about which place was the right place for a person to worship God- the temple on Mount Gerizim in Samaria, or the temple in Jerusalem.

Though repentance will be costly it is always right because it moves us into redemption.

### 3. Living Water-We Must Share It

This was the point of Jesus going through Samaria. He wanted to share his salvation with this woman. He was desirous of confronting her with the gospel of his cross so that her sins could be forgiven and so she could have abundant life with God.

Did you notice in the text how Jesus, in asking her for a drink of water, was skillfully setting her up for a conversation about things that really mattered? He turned that whole conversation into a discussion about the living water of Jesus.

Jesus always took people to the heart of the matter, didn't he?

That's what he did with Nicodemus. Nicodemus said, "I know you are a teacher who has come from God." Jesus said, "You must be born again."

What God is encouraging us to do in the text to do is to share our faith. God calls us to share the living water of Christ with an increasingly parched culture and thirsty people who are drinking water from empty wells that never quench their thirst.

Unless we share the gospel people will not hear the gospel. And if they do not hear it then how can they believe? How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news! (Rom. 10:14-15)

## **Conclusion**

I want to leave you with three questions to think about and to respond to in your life. These three questions follow my three teaching points about living water.

1. Living water- have you experienced it? Have you experienced a real relationship with Jesus Christ in your life? Have you been born again? Or have you simply experienced religion? Do you worship the Lord in spirit and truth, or are you hung up about which mountain you should worship God on? This woman, at first, tried to divert Jesus with religion. Jesus was calling her to faith and to be born again.
2. Living water- is it changing you? Is there something in your life that is broken, that is eating away at you? Or is there something in your life that is not eating away at you, yet you know it should be? What are your five husbands in your life this morning? What is it that you need to repent from this morning? Jesus is calling you to give it up, to forsake it, and to follow him. "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" Repent from your sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ so that you may have life with God.
3. Living water- are you sharing it? Where is your Samaria? Are you going it or are you avoiding it? Who has God put in your life that you need to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with? God is speaking to you this morning and he is telling you to share that good news. You are God's instrument. You are his mouthpiece. So open your mouths and declare his praises!

Amen.