

The Life *The Gospel of John*

Can Jesus Satisfy Our Thirst? *John 4:1 – 30*

Introduction: My Thirst

In October of my freshman year, I found myself at a concert of a singer I had never heard before. I was there with one of my roommates, a guy from Kentucky who went by the nickname Oz. I was bright eyed and thirsty to connect with some people. Oz was a blond haired Grateful Dead fan, and a few months later would become known in another dorm as a recreational drug user. I tagged along because in the rush of the first few weeks of school, I had become friends with all of his friends, also Grateful Dead fans who would also become known as recreational drug users. So there I was at this concert, listening to music I had never heard before, as they lit up their marijuana. I was wondering, how did I get here? Well, I could remember feeling kind of thirsty, not in a physical sense, but in a deeper way. I felt empty. That was when my sense of understanding started growing; I realized I felt this vague thirst. And I knew I had felt it before, on at least three occasions.

FIRST. My freshman year when I was sitting in homeroom, and the announcer came on. She said, 'Yesterday, our swim team beat so-and-so school, and Mako Nagasawa swept his events, setting new school records.' Suddenly I felt very self-conscious, like everyone was looking at me. Now you have to know that I was a very quiet kid as a high school freshman. But at that moment, as I imagined the respect oozing from the people around me, I felt my heart pounding, my blood racing, and I felt filled. Then it was over. And I felt thirsty again.

SECOND. In high school, during my sophomore year, my parents started arguing about divorce. A day later, I spent my lunch hour with my biology teacher Miss Schultz, telling her about what was going on. When the bell rang, I walked away feeling like she had been really compassionate and sensitive. And then I realized that I shared that 411 about myself because I knew she'd be compassionate and sensitive to me. I wanted her to be compassionate and sensitive to me, because I was thirsting for it.

THIRD. About a year later, I started dating my one and only high school girlfriend. And you know how the big question about high school romances, much like college romances, is, 'What are you going to do when you graduate? Are you going to stay together, or just be friends?' Well, she answered that with, 'Well, we'll break up but still be friends.' I, on the other hand, wasn't so sure. I was still thirsty for relationship and some stability after my parents' situation, so I answered the question, 'I want to try to stay together.' And we entered into the worst part of our relationship, a breakup that lasted for a month and a half, with us trying to be off again on again. Finally I gave up because it was just too painful to go on. Call it a desire for relationship or stability or whatever; I was thirsty for something.

That's what I recognized my freshman year of college, when I was sitting on the lawn of this amphitheatre, sitting with these people that I was hoping to connect with, as they lit up their marijuana. I listened to this music I had never heard before, hoping to find something to fill me up. And I asked myself, I'm thirsty for something, but what is it? What kind of thirst was this? And where did this thirst come from?

I wonder if you've felt that longing, that thirst? Have you ever felt that thirst psychologist Carl Jung defined as the cause of a third of his cases, 'the senselessness and emptiness of their lives?' Emily Dickinson drank at the well of her literary accomplishments yet said, 'Success is only sweet to those who ne'er succeeded.' And the two woman band The Indigo Girls spoke about a thirst when they sang, 'I went to the doctor, I went to the mountain, I looked to the children, *I drank from the fountain.*' There is a thirst that we feel. What is it? Where does it come from? And how is it satisfied? Does Jesus have anything to do with it?

The Setting: v.1 – 6

We're going to read a story about a woman who thirsted, and then encountered Jesus. It is found in the Gospel of John, chapter 4. The story goes, 'Jesus left Judea, and departed again into Galilee. And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. And Jacob's well was there. [This well was 138 feet deep when archaeologists discovered it centuries later.] Jesus therefore, being wearied from his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about the sixth hour, or high noon.'

The setting of this story is in Samaria, the region off the beaten path of the road from Jerusalem to the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is on a journey. He will encounter a woman who is also on a journey. But this is no chance encounter. Jesus could have taken the normal route from Judea to Galilee, along the Jordan River, here (point to map). Instead, he goes into the drier and dustier region of Samaria, near this mountain called Mt. Gerizim.

Enter the Woman: v.7 – 9

The story continues, 'There came a woman of Samaria to draw water.' So picture a tan, olive-skinned woman, probably attractive, with a water jug balanced on her head. She's carrying the rope that's tied to the handle of this jug. Imagine the shimmering heat that beats down on her as she walks to the well at high noon. High noon? Do women go out to draw water at high noon? No. They go at dawn or at sunset when it's cooler. And do they go by themselves? No, they go together; they do not go by themselves. And do they go to this well? No. We know from archaeologists that in Sychar, there is a well in the village. This woman goes to a second well, called Jacob's well, that is farther away than the one in her village. She goes to a well that caravan routes stop at, rest at, hang out at. If you knew someone go to a really popular bar, night after night, what would you think? Well, that's kind of like what this woman is doing, in her cultural context. Why does this woman go farther away, in the heat of the day, by herself, to the most popular bar around? What is she thirsty for?

And what is Jesus doing meeting her there? Jesus says to her, 'Would you give me a drink?' He puts himself into a place of need. And this woman begins to interpret him through the needs she understands. This man has a thirst. After all, this man is only human. Human beings have thirsts, right? Thirsts of all kinds...

But just 'being a fellow human being' isn't a good enough reason in that day and age. The Samaritan woman therefore said to him, 'How is it that you, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?' She is curious, but surprised and cautious, and a little distrustful, and rightly so. From her perspective, there are all kinds of social barriers between herself and this man. There's the racial barrier. The Jews of that day didn't associate with Samaritans. Samaritans were seen as half-breeds who had intermarried with Israel's enemies. Jews wouldn't normally go through the Samaritan ghetto. Even if going through was the shorter way to a point, they'd travel around Samaria, as if they were going around a bad neighborhood. John the Gospel writer adds an editorial comment, 'For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.' That underscored the racial tension there. There was also the religious barrier. Jews of that day also thought Samaritans didn't hold to the right beliefs. They worshiped at the wrong places, didn't believe in any of the books after Deuteronomy, and didn't acknowledge the king from the line of David. They were like a cult and a foreign nation. There's also the gender barrier. Righteous men who were held in high esteem didn't talk to unknown women like this. So this woman is curious, cautious, and distrustful.

Speaking Her Language, Exposing the Thirst: v.10 – 15

Boldly, and not to be held back by these barriers, Jesus continues this conversation. Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would say, 'Do you want to give me a drink?!' Or, if this were a bar scene, she would say, 'Do you want to buy me a drink?!' Now that is weird language. Maybe this woman heard it this way: 'If you knew a gift from God when you saw him...' Is that what he said? Did he just say he is God's gift to me?'

Look at how Jesus turns the conversation around to her. 'You think I'm thirsty. You're thirsty, too, aren't you? For living water.' So this woman thinks, 'Oh, I see where this conversation is going. Very nice. Sure, I am thirsty. So is he. He said he's God's gift to me, and that maybe he's got what I need. I've got

what he needs; he's got what I need. In other words, maybe all this talk about being thirsty is just play language. I know what he's *really* thirsty for.'

Is this really happening? Is this in the Bible? When this woman heard Jesus talk about living water, what must she have thought? A bubbling fountain? Running water as opposed to still water? Does this guy live next to a river? River-front property in the ancient world was precious, since all ancient civilizations were river civilizations. Or is there something even sexual about this 'living water?' Why the heck does Jesus speak this way? It's filled with double entendre!!

But she knows how to play the double entendre game. So she says to him, perhaps with a shy smile, 'Sir (notice the term of respect), you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do you get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are you, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?' I think what she means is: 'You got bank?!?' Oh yeah! She asks, 'Are you, uh, rich? Do you have more means than our father Jacob, who had sons and cattle, and all the things that count as wealth in this world? Can you pay for me? Because I'm expensive. But I'm worth it.'

So what is Jesus going to say? Well, Jesus stays in the conversation. He answered and said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him [or her] shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.'

Now the woman must have thought, 'Okay, I agree. Everyone who drinks of this water *will* thirst again. True enough.' She knew that from personal experience, coming day after day to get water. So Jesus is offering her a different type of life, a life where she's not a leaky bucket but a gushing geyser. 'Drink my water,' he says, 'And more water will spring up from within you.' The word 'springing' loses something in translation. It's a very forceful word, like 'gushing.' So this is water that is gushing out of a person, not trickling slowly or cascading gently, but gushing and pouring out.

But again, how is she thinking about this? At this point, she seems to say, 'Whatever you've got, I want it!' So the woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw.'

Exposing the Deeper Thirst: v.16 – 18

Then Jesus ups the ante. He said to her, 'Go, call your husband and come here.' Back then, people were generally assumed to be married. So it's as if Jesus said, 'Since I assume you're married, go get your husband.' In our day and age, it would be like saying, 'Since I assume you have a boyfriend, go get him.' She hears that, though, as, 'Do you have a husband?' So the woman answered and said, 'I have no husband.' In other words, in a sultry tone, she says, 'I have no husband. I'm available.' Is it getting hot in here?!?

But this gets hotter. Jesus said to her, 'You have correctly said, 'I have no husband' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly.' Wow! He is essentially saying, 'There is another thirst in your life that I'd like you to talk to me about.' You have had five husbands, and are now living with a sixth man who is not lawfully your husband.' It's hard to know how Jesus said this or how she heard this. Jesus could just be pointing out that she's just been hasty, and this sixth man is not yet your husband. Or, is Jesus saying, 'The man you now have is not *your* husband,' meaning, he's *someone else's* husband? Isn't that why you're here trying to meet someone else? Trying to find a better man?

Is Jesus really going there? Yeah, he goes there, because she has been trying to play him! But all of a sudden, this conversation is not what she thought it was. No wonder Jesus seems to have thought it was important for them to be alone. You see, even though Jesus goes deep into the heart of your life where all your pains and embarrassments are, he doesn't jump the gun and guess about you.

Step into this woman's sandals for a moment. This wasn't the conversation she thought she was having. Now it becomes clear to her what Jesus is saying. 'Every day I come out here alone to draw water. I get

thirsty and I need to satisfy my thirst day after day. I come to this well, and I feel filled temporarily. But then I get thirsty again. This happens day after day. It's a cycle I'm locked into. I NEED REFILLS. And, I've come day after day to men in my life. I feel thirsty, and feel like I need him to satisfy that thirst. So I'm with this man, and I feel filled temporarily. But then I get thirsty again, and something goes wrong with the relationship, and I'm even more thirsty. This happens time after time, and this is the sixth time. It's a cycle I'm locked into. My day to day life is a projection, the visible projection of my inner life.'

This might have been a tough realization for her to face up to. Previously, she might have tried to spin it positively, like saying, 'Hey, I'm a survivor.' Or, 'Well it was their fault.' Or even, 'It's because of my childhood.' This might have been the first time she was facing up to her own thirst, and her own actions to try to quench that thirst.

One person who has felt cycles of thirst is Jim Carrey. The great physical humor comedian was featured recently in a TIME magazine article entitled JUST PRAYING FOR AN OSCAR 'This one is very close to me,' says Jim Carrey of The Majestic, the film he's making about a blacklisted writer who gets in a car accident, loses his memory, and becomes a small-town hero. 'I'm growing up, and there's a lot of me I haven't shown yet to people. In a way, this is the first time I'll ever reveal the wounds... Acting is always about finding out what your character wants, and this character, not unlike myself, is dying for self-respect. I grew up wanting to be this special miracle, and I've tried to prove that my whole life because of this black hole that is my need.' (Jim Carrey, TIME magazine June 25, 2001, p.79)

For me, as I said before, one cycle of mine was fame. I cycled through patterns of brutally hard work, to accomplish something fleeting, to get respect, only to have it mean – what? I wonder if for you there are cycles of thirst that you've been living in? Maybe you cycle through relationships like this woman did, because of a thirst you have? You thirst for connection, you want to possess it, you want to secure it, but you wind up doing something unhealthy. You probably give more of yourself than you should, but that leaves you more vulnerable to doing it again. Or if you've gone through cycles of intense work and stress, thirsting for respect, only to finish the semester feeling burned out again, feeling like your relationships need repairing again, but then going through the same thing later? You see the great danger of being high achievers is that you can stimulate yourself by working hard, and you can get lost in cycles of achievements leading to emptiness. Nothing ever becomes that geyser of water welling up from within us, giving life to others. Instead, we become life takers, taking life from others.

The Thirst-Quencher: v.19 – 24

Well the Samaritan woman is so startled by the fact that Jesus knows this, that she takes her focus off herself and focuses on Jesus. She says to him, 'Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.' In other words, 'Wow, you know a lot.' Then she seems to change the subject: 'Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where we ought to worship.'

Now if we were right there in this story, we might think that she is dodging the issue or trying to redirect the conversation because she's uncomfortable with the way it's going. I don't think that's what is going on. I think she is actually trying to get an answer to the burning question she now has. She recognizes her thirst, and she knows that only one person can fill her up: the one person who is the everflowing source of all life, God. So she asks, 'Where can I find God? Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where we ought to worship.'

Remember there was a disagreement about where God lived. The Samaritans believed that God lived on Mt. Gerizim, in their land, and therefore you should worship God there. The Jews believed that God lived on Mt. Zion, in their land, and therefore you should worship God there. The Samaritan woman was asking where she should go to worship. Why is this so significant? Because both of her two options are not attractive to her. If she goes to Mt. Gerizim, she will have to face the other women and men in her community. She'll have to endure the looks of scorn and contempt. Someone will probably spit on her, because they know who she is and what she's done. On the other hand, if she goes to Mt. Zion in Israel, she will have to face racial hatred. She might have a few stones thrown at her. No one will know her, but no one will care to know her either. They'll just despise her. Neither of the woman's two options are attractive, but she's willing to go to either. Why? Because she knows she needs God. Where is God?

Where can I find him? I don't care what I have to endure, but I'm tired of the cycles of thirst in my life, nothing gives me relief, nothing gives me life, and I'm desperate. Where do I go to find God?

In that context, listen to Jesus' reply: Jesus said to her, 'Dear Woman, believe me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.' In other words, neither place. You don't have to go to either place. Now when Jesus says this, he is looking at this poor woman and saying this with a liberator coming in to grant freedom. 'You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.' That is, for a time, God really lived in Mt. Zion and not Mt. Gerizim, so it's not appropriate to say that the Samaritans really knew God as well as the Israelites. 'But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.'

Jesus says you can worship God anywhere geographically; God is no longer going to inhabit buildings like the Temple in Jerusalem. It's not about right geography, but of being the right humanity. Jesus was the one human being who was fully filled with God, and throughout the course of his life, he was perfecting the union of God and humanity. He then could offer to us a humanity that is united with God spiritually. When we join ourselves to Jesus by his Spirit, we become a new dwelling place of God's Spirit.

This is one of the most powerful statements of Jesus anywhere. The Spirit of Jesus in us satisfies our fundamental thirst: our thirst for God. Deep in us we have a thirst for God. This woman had looked for six different men to complete her and none of them had. We look for dozens of people to complete us through their words of affirmation, through sex, through telling us good things about ourselves. But when we place our faith in Jesus, Jesus comes to live inside of us by his Spirit, and because he satisfies that most fundamental thirst, our lives then become a geyser gushing out life to others.

What a Satisfied Woman Looks Like: v.25 – 29

So what does a satisfied person look like? Here's what happens to this woman in her encounter with Jesus. The woman said to Him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am He.' At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, 'What do You seek?' or, 'Why do You speak with her?' So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men, 'Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?'

This woman does two things. First, she clarifies Jesus' identity. Are you the One we've been waiting for? Kind of like the movie *The Matrix*: 'Are you the One?' I had always hoped that there would be someone who would come and deal with my deepest questions and deepest thirsts, my thirst to be known, my thirst to be loved, my thirst for significance. Jesus says, 'I who speak to you am He. I am the One.'

Second, she leaves her waterpot. That waterpot she's carried around everyday for the past how many years, she leaves it there. That is a symbolic gesture. It's a little detail that John the Gospel writer includes because her waterpot had been the outward symbol of her inward thirst. Why does she leave it behind? Because in her enthusiasm, she's forgotten about it. Because her real inward and spiritual thirst has been quenched by Jesus, and not just quenched, but within her, the life and love of Jesus has become a fountain cascading outward. The whole flow of her life has been reversed. She's not fundamentally about consuming life, but giving life. Why? Because she is now connected to Jesus, the one whole human being, the one human being who is filled with God himself. And in Jesus, she is filled.

Illus: a deep shame about my identity. When I was younger, I felt ashamed of my mistakes. There were some pretty big ones. So for a while, I lived a double life. In order to deal with some of the anger I had inside, I stole things, destroyed things, and vandalized people's houses and cars. And it was hard for me to own up to the fact that I had done that. It was shameful. I felt defined by those things. I felt defined by how badly I had treated certain women in my life. And when I got older, I felt badly about being Japanese. When I read the book *The Rape of Nanking*, for example, it haunted me. I learned how badly Japan had exploited parts of Asia. I had a thirst to be cleansed of this, to be filled from my emptiness. But I learned slowly that Jesus could make me whole. I can look at those other things and say, 'My goodness, that

should not have happened.' Or, 'I did that? That was a mistake.' Jesus makes me whole, because he is whole, and he is filled with God.

I want to leave you tonight with two images: the waterpot or the geyser. Which one will you be?