

Main Idea: In John 4:1-26 we learn that Jesus is the One who gives living water. As we watch how Jesus interacted with the woman at the well, we find out how Jesus satisfies a thirsty soul. He made five things perfectly clear to the woman, and to us.

- I. Jesus makes it clear that He can satisfy our thirst (10-14).
 - A. He offers living water.
 - B. He offers eternal life.
 - II. Jesus makes it clear why we’re thirsty (15-18).
 - A. The woman said she wanted what Jesus offered (15).
 - B. Jesus helped her face her sin problem (16-18).
 1. He revealed her past.
 2. He revealed her present.
 3. He was helping her see why she needed a Savior.
 - III. Jesus makes it clear what doesn’t satisfy our thirst (19-22).
 - A. The woman changed the subject (19-20).
 1. She did what lost people often do when confronted with their sin.
 2. She started talking about religion.
 - B. Jesus revealed that she had a worship problem (21-22).
 1. He lovingly confronted her faulty worship.
 2. He explained that legitimate worship is the result of salvation.
 - IV. Jesus makes it clear what happens after He satisfies our thirst (23-24).
 - A. The Father is seeking true worshipers.
 - B. People who truly know the Father will worship Him.
 - V. Jesus makes it clear why He alone can satisfy our thirst (25-26).
- The Appropriate Response: If you are thirsty, start drinking.

Scripture Reading: John 4:1-26

He began to break his mother’s heart when he was a young teenager. She had taught him to love and live for His Maker, but in his pride he was convinced he knew a better way. His dad could care less about God, and getting a good job, making money, and achieving fame were the passions he passed on to his son.

His parents gave him a good education, the best money could buy. But his learning only broadened the scope of his self-promoting options.

When he was sixteen, he, along with some of his buddies, stole some pears from a neighbor’s orchard, not because he was hungry but just because he could. In fact, he didn’t even eat the pears but threw them to the pigs.

That someone trite incident set the tone for greater acts of rebellion that followed. It wasn’t long before his folly turned to licentiousness. He started having sex for the fun of it at first. Then he couldn’t stop.

He left home in his late teen years. He loved the theater and began to feed his imaginations with the pleasures of entertainment.

In his twenties he started hanging out with a cult-like Christian sect that promoted an intellectually sophisticated view of the world, and it fed his ego for he possessed a brilliant mind. He also started consulting astrologers in his thirst for knowledge and meaning.

Then he took a partner, not a wife, just a cohabitant for lustful purposes (since he and one of his guy friends concluded that marriage would distract them from their career

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this passage, see the Gospel of John series at WBC in 2010.

pursuits). He lived with the woman for better than ten years, and eventually fathered a child by her.

He became a professor and moved to the capital city, accompanied by his partner and son. And ironically by his mother too who never stopped praying for and doing all she could to turn her son to Christ. Which, as you can imagine, irritated him greatly.

In many ways, he had it all. Education, status, an influential job, the comforts of life, fleshly gratification. But he wasn't satisfied. He was indeed *dying of thirst*.

In fact, as the years past he became a miserable slave to his self-consuming passions and pursuits. While he sensed that he needed to change, he couldn't change.

And then, at the age of thirty-two, God did for that man what he couldn't do for himself. He gave him a drink from the fountain of living water, which is Jesus Christ. And for the first time in his life Augustine of Hippo, in the summer of 386 AD, began to really live!

I want you to hear what he said about life before he met Christ. When he was in his mid-forties, Augustine wrote a book and told his own story about those barren years of wasted living. It's called, *The Confessions*, and he concludes his first paragraph of the book with this statement...

*"You made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."*²

He's talking to God. *You made us*, he affirms. Why? *For Yourself*. That's why job doesn't satisfy, nor education, nor sex, nor any other created thing. We were made *for Him*. But without Him *our hearts are restless*—always looking for something else, the next thrill, the next drink, the next trip to the theater. Restless. *Until they rest in You*.

Perhaps you can relate to Augustine. Indeed, the world is full of restless people. Or to change the metaphor, *thirsty* people.

Which is why what I'm about to say next is such good news. The Lord Jesus said He can satisfy the restless, thirsty soul.

As we begin the summer, I want to launch a new series, "*Getting to Know the I AM*". We're going to look at several of the amazing "I AM" claims made by Jesus, such as "I am the bread of life," "I am the light of the world," and "I am the good shepherd."

I want us to know Jesus better by considering what He said about Himself. Each of these images says much to us, not just about who He is, but about who we are and what we must do. If He is the bread of life, then we must be hungry souls who feed upon Him. If He is the good shepherd, we must live as sheep who follow Him and find our security in Him.

So in the following weeks, we're going to walk through John's gospel looking at Jesus' I AM claims. And we'll begin with the first, which is in John 4.

Jesus told a soul thirsty woman He could give her living water. And He concluded His conversation with her by saying in verse 26, "I who speak to you am he," or more literally, "I that speak to you am."

I AM. Who is He? In John 4 the I AM says He is the One who gives living water.

We call her, "The Woman at the Well," because we don't even know her name. We do know that she, just like Augustine, had a thirsty soul, yet her soul became satisfied that day, for the first time in her life, by Jesus.

In John 4:1-26 we learn that Jesus is the One who gives living water.

² *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, from Book One, p. 1.

There was a commercial on television a few years ago that drove me crazy. It shows a guy in the office yawning, and asks, “Having trouble making it past the 2:00 slump at work?” The solution? *The five hour energy drink*. Just two ounces, zero sugar, four calories, and zap, you’re living again!

I’m afraid that’s how many people treat Jesus, like a five hour energy drink. They get their fix and then throw the bottle away. That’s not the way it works with living water.

Quite frankly, Jesus did some things that you might consider *offensive* in order to quench the thirsty soul of the woman at the well. And He does the same with anyone who truly wants their soul satisfied, and He does so because He loves us dearly.

In John 4:1-26, Jesus made five things perfectly clear to a thirsty woman, and to us too, if our souls are thirsty.

I. Jesus makes it clear that He can satisfy our thirst (1-14).

We need to set the context. Jesus did a series of shocking things in verses 1-14.

The first shocker, He *left the crowds in Judea*, we’re told in verses 1-3. That’s shocking because good teachers don’t walk away from crowds, do they? But Jesus didn’t measure success like we often do because He was on a mission to save sinners, not recruit them.

Shocker number two, He *went through Samaria* (4). Devout Jews avoided Samaria like a plague. They hated the half-breeds that lived there. But Jesus “had to go through Samaria,” says the text, and that’s because He had a divine appointment to keep.

The third shocker, revealed in verses 5-6, is that Jesus became *tired and thirsty*. The Son of God can turn water into wine! Tired and thirsty? How? He’s God in the flesh.

Number four, *Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for water* (7-9). That’s unthinkable. Jewish men never talked with a woman in public, and especially not a woman of ill repute like this woman. What Jesus did that day violated social expectations to the core.

And then fifthly, Jesus made an *astounding offer* to the woman. First in verse 10, “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.”

Incredible. Jesus says...

A. He offers living water. For the Jews, “living water” referred to flowing water from a river or stream as opposed to stagnant water from a pond or cistern. And they liked to use “living water” for their purification rites. So it’s what you used to clean up your life and get right with God.

I’ll do that for you, says Jesus. If you’ll just ask.

Of course, His offer went right over her head. She thought He was talking about literal water from the well. So Jesus gave this follow-up in verses 13-14, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

That, too, is incredible. Jesus told the woman that...

B. He offers eternal life. This is no five-hour power boost. We’re talking *eternal, everlasting, non ending life!* That’s His offer. Jesus makes it clear that He can satisfy our thirsty souls, and He does so *forever and ever*.

But why do we need this living water in the first place? That brings us to point two.

II. Jesus makes it clear why we're thirsty (15-18).

Not surprisingly...

A. The woman said she wanted what Jesus offered (15). “The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.’”

The woman thinks Jesus is talking about physical water, and who wouldn’t want that, a drink of water that made it so you never had to drink again? Sure she wants what Jesus offered. But she misunderstood Him, didn’t she?

Just like many people today. They want a Jesus that gives them better health, or a better job, or a better marriage, or more money in the bank. Sort of a Genie/Jesus in a bottle. And so they too come to Jesus and say, “Sir, give me this water.”

It’s at this point that Jesus’ actions move from being *shocking* to *offensive*. He starts meddling into the woman’s personal life in verse 16, “He told her, ‘Go, call your husband and come back.’”

Whoa! Where’d that come from? Why did Jesus give her that instruction? He’s helping her see something, namely *why* she needs the living water He’s offering. And why does she need it? For the same reason we need it.

B. Jesus helped her face her sin problem (16-18).

It’s sort of like this. Suppose you go to your doctor because you’ve been having pain in your chest and down your left arm for five days, and you tell him, “Give me some pain medicine and a tranquilizer so I can sleep at night.”

If he refused your request and instead told you that you needed a heart cath, would his actions be out of line? Would you say, “That doctor is so judgmental and doesn’t care about my pain!”?

No way. It’s because he does care about you, and because he knows more about your problem than you do that he’s insisting you do something to find out the truth about your heart.

This woman has a heart problem, just like every human being does from birth. And Jesus is helping her see it.

But she doesn’t want to see it. Verse 17—“‘I have no husband,’ she replied.”

That’s the shortest sentence the woman has spoken to Jesus. Only three words in the Greek. As one commentator observes, “In the fewest possible words she tries to stop a dangerous subject at once.”³ And while she’s not technically lying, she’s certainly not presenting the whole truth.

Of course, Jesus knew that, and Jesus took steps to reveal to her that He knew that in verses 17-18, “Jesus said to her, ‘You are right when you say you have no husband. 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.’”

Every time I read this account I think about what happened several years ago when a man and woman came to the church office on a weekday and asked for help from our food pantry. Whenever we share our physical food with people at WBC, we always try to offer them some spiritual food as well, which I did that day. As we stood in the hallway, I told this couple the story of Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well. I wanted them to know that Jesus offers them living water. When I came to the point where Jesus said, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you

³ Plummer, in Leon Morris, p. 264.

have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband,” I heard the lady mutter something which I could not make out.

After I finished the story, I asked the woman, “You said something a moment ago, but I couldn’t hear you clearly. What did you say?”

She replied, “I said, ‘He must have been a psychic.’”

“Why’d you say that?” I responded.

To which she returned, “Because I have had five husbands, and the man I now have is not my husband.”

Wiersbe said it well, “There can be no conversion without conviction.”⁴ That’s what Jesus is doing here. He’s helping this woman face her sin problem. First...

1. *He revealed her past.* “You have had five husbands.” Five husbands? What happened? Did they die? I don’t think so, not based on her evasiveness. Did she divorce them, or they her? Or a combination? And why did she keep remarrying? She’d been searching for something, hadn’t she? But she never found it in those men.

So she tried something else, which Jesus also revealed...

2. *He revealed her present.* “The man you now have is not your husband.” In the woman’s sentence, “husband” is the last word in the Greek text (“I have no husband”). In Jesus’ sentence, it’s the first word (“*a husband* you do not have”).

Jesus is helping the woman to face the reality that living together outside of marriage is not a matter of personal preference. It, like any other activity that takes a person outside the boundaries of God’s good law, is an offense to a holy God, which results in His displeasure and our harm.

Which is why Jesus exposes it here.

By the way, some people try to justify their cohabitation by saying, “We don’t need to get married. We’re already husband and wife in God’s sight.”

That’s not true. Please notice that Jesus says there’s a difference between living together and being married. This woman had five husbands, but the man she was presently with was *not* her husband. The Bible presents marriage as a formal, legal, public covenant between a man and a woman (Matt. 19:5-6).⁵

Some say, “Christians are so judgmental.”

Sadly, that’s often true, and if we look down our proud noses at people who are enslaved to sin, we need to repent and change. But there’s a difference between being judgmental and helping people see what The Judge says.

Let me ask you this. Do you think Jesus is being judgmental here? I find it interesting that Jesus isn’t the only person in the Bible that confronted sexual sin one on one. John the Baptist did with King Herod and his unlawful wife Herodias (Matt. 14:3-5). Paul did with Governor Felix and his third wife, Drusilla (Acts 24:24-25). Nathan confronted King David over his adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12). Paul told the Corinthian church to confront one of their members who was living in sexual sin, and that if they didn’t, he would (1 Cor. 5).

The world says, “You can do whatever you want with your body. It’s yours.” But that’s not what the Creator and Owner of the universe says, and He also says that the wages of breaking His law is *death*. So if someone you care about is breaking His law, are you really loving them if you keep silent about their dangerous condition?

⁴ Wiersbe, p. 300.

⁵ As MacArthur rightly explains, p. 147.

The Lord isn't being mean with this woman, but loves her deeply. Remember He's offering her living water and eternal life. But He knows she will never receive His offer until she faces the reality of why she needs it. To put it simply...

3. *He was helping her see why she needed a Savior.* Good people don't need a Savior. Only sinners do. And only people who admit their sin will then admit their need for the Savior God sent.

We're answering the question, "How does the Lord satisfy a thirsty soul?" We're seeing Jesus answer. First, He makes it clear that He can satisfy our thirst. Second, He makes it clear why we're thirsty in the first place. In the third scene of our story...

III. Jesus makes it clear what doesn't satisfy our thirst (19-22).

Not surprisingly, the next thing that happens in our story is that...

A. The woman changed the subject (19-20). "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

By calling Jesus a prophet, she's admitting the accuracy of His revelation.⁶ She's also admitting her guilt.

Yes, it's true. I have had five husbands, and I'm now with a man who is not my husband. All true. Guilty as stated. I can't deny it.

But she can try to avoid it. The fact is...

1. *She did what lost people often do when confronted with their sin.* She changed the subject. And what subject did she pick? Again, as so often happens in our day, as soon as the conviction of sin began...

2. *She started talking about religion.* "Where's the right place to worship?" she asks. People living in sin often talk religion, or better yet, *debate* it. It's a good diversion tactic. "Which religion is the right one?" "Why are there so many denominations?" "Why are there so many Bible versions, and which one is the right one?"

Those are all legitimate questions, but so often they're just a smokescreen that sinners who need a Savior hide behind. But the Lord didn't let this woman do that. He loves her too much to let that happen.

The truth is, the Samaritans did put a lot of stock in *their* mountain. They actually rewrote history to support the validity of their holy place, Mount Gerizim. Their tradition said that's the mountain where Abraham offered Isaac, and their tradition said that's the mountain where Abraham met Melchizedek.⁷

"What do you say, Sir?" she asks. "Is our mountain legit, or only yours?"

Then again, it's possible she isn't skirting the subject of her sin, but honestly wanting to know the remedy for it. As a Samaritan, she knows the cure for sin is sacrifice. The question is *where?* "Where do I go to take care of my sin problem? To the altar on our mountain, or to the altar on your mountain in Jerusalem?"

Notice Jesus' reply in verses 21-22, "Jesus declared, 'Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You

⁶ The Samaritan Bible is only the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, the Pentateuch. They acknowledged no prophet after Moses, other than the one spoken of in Deuteronomy 18:18, which predicts the Messiah. So her statement, "I can see you are a prophet," indicates she's thinking of Jesus in potentially messianic terms. See Leon Morris, p. 266.

⁷ Leon Morris, p. 268.

Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.”

If pointing out the woman had a sin problem was offensive, so is this.

B. Jesus revealed that she had a worship problem (21-22). He makes it very clear to her that all religions are *not* the same and they’re certainly *not* equally valid. Indeed...

1. *He lovingly confronted her faulty worship.* He told her, “You Samaritans worship what you do not know.” That’s a pretty judgmental thing to say, isn’t it? And so is this, “Salvation is from the Jews.” There’s actually an article in the original text, “*the* salvation is from the Jews.” She wants to talk about “our fathers.” Jesus refers to “the Father.”

Do you see what Jesus is doing? He’s helping this woman see what *doesn’t* satisfy a sinner’s thirst. If you cling to false religion, you will die of thirst eternally.

That’s her situation. This woman has a sin problem and a worship problem (and they go hand in hand). She’s a sinner and she’s trusting in a deficient religious system that can’t fix her sin problem.

She wants to know about the place of worship. Here or there? Jesus tells her it’s not about the place, and says the time is coming when worship will stop both on Mount Gerizim and in Jerusalem (which it did in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and slaughtered thousands of Samaritans on Mount Gerizim).

And don’t miss this...

2. *He explained that legitimate worship is the result of salvation.* Notice the end of verse 22 again, “We worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.” If you want to worship God acceptably, you must first experience the salvation He provides. That means you must admit your sin, repent of it, and then turn to God and ask Him to rescue you from its eternal consequences, to *save* you.

Jesus isn’t saying that only Jews are saved, but rather that God offers His salvation to the sinners of the world *through* the Jews. God gave the Bible to the world through the Jewish people. And He sent His Son into the world as a Jew. And He formed the church on a Jewish foundation.

So God’s salvation is *from* the Jews, but it’s *for* all people, including a Samaritan.

My friend, please don’t miss this. Here’s a woman who had a *thirst problem*, and she’s thirsty because she’s got a *sin problem*. But she’s trusting in a faulty religious system to fix her sin problem so she’s got a *worship problem*. The three problems go hand in hand, and Jesus loved her enough that He risked offending her to help her see them.

But there’s something else He helped her see, and us.

IV. Jesus makes it clear what happens after He satisfies our thirst (23-24).

In verses 23-24 He told her, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

This is critical. What happens *after* a person drinks from the living water that Jesus offers? They don’t just stop worshipping wrongly. They start worshipping rightly. Do you see that? Jesus said that *the time is coming and has now come*. It has come because He has come. And because He has come *true worshipers will worship the Father*. Worshipping the Father is the opposite of what they were doing. They were going their

own way in sin, but now, because He has come and they have drunk the living water He offers, they're living to bring honor to the Father.

In our day where easy-believism is rampant, this is vital to see. A true Christian doesn't just *say* he believes in Jesus. He shows that he believes in Jesus by the way he lives. He's not a Sunday Christian. He is a person who *worships the Father*. Not merely a generic "God," but *God the Father*.

And where does he worship the Father? On a mountain in Samaria or Jerusalem? No. He worships the Father *in spirit and in truth*. What's that mean? He worships *in spirit*—not by going to some place and going through some ritual, but rather from a heart that's been transformed by Jesus. He lives an inside-out life for the glory of the Father. And he also worships *in truth*—meaning he lives his life on the basis of what God says in His Word, not his emotions, not public opinion, but *truth*.

Please keep in mind Jesus' audience. He's talking to a woman who's blown it so badly in life that she's coming to this well at the hottest time of the day to avoid the scorn of the good people who've got their act together. She's blown five marriages and she's living in adultery. But Jesus tells her that the time has now come when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

Why is He telling *her* that? Can a person like that become a worshiper of God? Yes! My friend, it doesn't matter what you have done. If you come to Jesus and drink the living water He offers, water that will cleanse your soul, you will become a true worshiper of the One who sent Jesus to cleanse your soul.

Let Jesus' words sink in...

A. The Father is seeking true worshipers. That's why Jesus *had* to go through Samaria. The Father was seeking this woman. And as the following passage indicates, He was seeking her whole village.

And He's seeking true worshipers today too. You are not here by accident. You have either become a true worshiper, by the grace of God, or He desires for you to become one. And please know this...

B. People who truly know the Father will worship Him. His worshipers *must* worship Him, says Jesus in verse 24. Literally, "it is necessary" (Greek *dei*). It's the undeniable evidence that a person has begun to drink the living water Jesus offers. That person will indeed worship the Father.

There's one more thing Jesus made perfectly clear that day in Samaria...

V. Jesus makes it clear why He alone can satisfy our thirst (25-26).

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

That's interesting. What stood out to her about the Messiah wasn't the fact that He would reign in power, but that He would *explain*. And that's what she told her townspeople in verse 29, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

Do you ever struggle to make sense of why things happen? This woman did. But she says when the Messiah comes He will make everything clear to us.

Now notice Jesus' response in verse 26, "Then Jesus declared, 'I who speak to you am he.'" As I mentioned at the outset, there's no "he" in the original. Jesus said simply, "I am, who is speaking to you."

Amazing. The first person to whom Jesus openly revealed His identity was an unnamed outcast from Samaria. I AM, He tells her, taking her back to the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses. I am the I AM. And yes, I am the Messiah.

I hope that encourages you. Maybe you have a child like Augustine who's wasting his or her life in rebellious living. Don't stop praying. The Father seeks and the Savior offers living water to outcasts, no matter what they've done.

My friend, is your soul thirsty this morning? The remedy of the I AM is clear. He says you and I need to do three things.

1. *Admit the truth about yourself.* Jesus loves you, my friend. But He didn't come into the world and ultimately die on a cross because you are a good person worthy of His love. He did so because you and I are sinners who need to be rescued from our rebellious, God-offending, hell-deserving, self-absorbed ways. So admit the truth about yourself.

2. *Admit the truth about what the Father desires.* He desires and deserves your worship. He's worthy of our devotion, and honor, and praise. And that's precisely why He sent His Son into the world, to transform sinners into worshipers.

Are you giving the Father what He desires, the worship of your heart and life?

3. *Admit the truth about Jesus.* He, and He *alone*, can satisfy the longings of your soul. He alone possesses and offers to us living water. That's His claim. He says He is the I AM who gives living water.

The Appropriate Response: If you are thirsty, start drinking.
Do what the song says that Richard Blanchard wrote back in 1959.

*Like the woman at the well, I was seeking
For things that could not satisfy
And then I heard my Savior speaking
"Draw from the well that never shall run dry"*

*Fill my cup, Lord
I lift it up, Lord
Come and quench this thirsting of my soul
Bread of Heaven feed me till I want no more
Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole*