

**JOHN 4:4–26.** (EHV)

He had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the piece of land Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Then Jesus, being tired from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone into town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) 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." "Sir," she said, "you don't even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us this well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his animals." Jesus answered her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty ever again. Rather, the water I will give him will become in him a spring of water, bubbling up to eternal life." "Sir, give me this water," the woman said to him, "so I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus told her, "Go, call your husband, and come back here." "I have no husband," the woman answered. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say, 'I have no husband.' In fact, you have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true." "Sir," the woman replied, "I see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews insist that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will not worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. But a time is coming and now is here when the real worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for those are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (the one called Christ). "When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Jesus said to her, "I, the one speaking to you, am he."

"Don't go through the bañados." When I first got to Asunción, that's what everyone told me. The bañados are neighborhoods along the Paraguay River. Whenever it rains too much, se bañan—they flood. Not great real estate, unless you can't afford to live anywhere else. So only the poorest live there, and the poverty breeds crime—so much that even police won't enter. "Don't go through the bañados," people told me. "Even if your route takes an extra hour, go around."

That's kind of how Jews in Jesus day treated Samaria, not necessarily because it was dangerous (although for a Jew, it could be), but because there was racial and spiritual bad blood between them. You heard it in the lesson: "For Jews do not associate with Samaritans." If you were a Jew, and your route took you through Samaria, you did not go through Samaria. Even if it added an extra day or two to your journey, you took one of the roads around it.

Which is why the first verse of our text strikes us, doesn't it? "Now he," Jesus, "had to go through Samaria." He had to. If most Jews had to go around Samaria, why did Jesus have to go through it? It doesn't have to do with geography. It has to do with souls. And there were thirsty, needy souls in Samaria.

That's how the conversation Jesus had with a Samaritan woman by a well started—thirst. Jesus was thirsty from the journey and asked for a drink. But as the conversation progresses, it becomes obvious that *she* was the one with the spiritual thirst—in need of living water only Jesus could provide. And we are, too. And not too unlike her, we tend to ignore that, or even try to satisfy our thirst in ways that never truly can.

So thank God, Jesus shows another thirst in this lesson. Not just for water from a well. He had to go through Samaria because he has a thirst to save sinners like her—and like you and me. **Jesus is thirsty to save.** He shows us our thirst. He quenches our thirst. He gives us his thirst.

### 1. He Shows Us Our Thirst

As he passed through Samaria, Jesus grew tired from the journey. Around the sixth hour (probably noon), his disciples went for food, and he sat down by a well. That was when a woman came to draw water...

Already you can tell something's wrong. Normally, women in those days went to get water together in the morning when it was cool. This one comes out alone, in the heat of the day. Maybe because she wanted to avoid the pain of seeing how they looked at her and talked about her in whispers?

She gets to the well. And Jesus says, "Give me a drink."

She's taken aback. She tries to shut down the conversation by reminding him of the social order: "Um, you're a Jewish man, and I'm a Samaritan woman. We don't talk to each other...and you're asking me for a drink?"

But Jesus is thirsty to save. He tips his hand; he didn't come looking for a drink. He came to give her a drink. "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." Gift of God. Living water. See how he's trying to lift her eyes from the well to something greater?

But she's not picking it up. Her response is polite, but there's a bite to her words: "Sir, you don't even have a bucket. Where are you gonna get this living water from? Do you think you're greater than Jacob, who dug this well?"

Jesus isn't deterred. "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty again. Rather, the water I will give him will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Never thirst. Eternal life. Again, he's pointing her to something spiritual, something eternal.

But she is stuck on physical water and physical thirst: "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." Maybe she genuinely didn't understand what Jesus was getting at. Or maybe she was intentionally trying to avoid a spiritual conversation. Kind of like she came out alone to avoid the glances of the women that reminded her of her real thirst—her sin.

Kind of like us sometimes? We all have plenty of buckets to carry, too—work, family, school. Plenty of things that keep us busy. Sometimes too busy to spend much time thinking

about our spiritual thirst. Or at least, that's our excuse. The truth is, we don't like to think about that thirst—our sinfulness. It hurts. We're happy to stay preoccupied with other things to not have to deal with it.

Jesus loves us too much to let that happen. He is thirsty to save. "Go, call your husband," he says to the woman.

"I have no husband," she replies—a half-truth to try to avoid talking about the truth.

But that's something you can't hide from Jesus. "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 said is true."

And there it is: Jesus exposed her thirst. Her past sins. Her present sin. You have to wonder: What was she looking for in all those relationships? Did she think she needed a man to feel loved? To have worth? To be secure? It seems like she was trying to satisfy her soul's needs in her relationships with men. Whatever the case, each time she didn't find that satisfaction, it ended in sinful failure.

What about you? It's quite possible that you haven't had five divorces, but the fact that her thirst looks different from yours doesn't mean you don't have any. If you had sat beside Jesus at the well that day, what would he have said to expose your thirst? Maybe, "Go, get your computer, and show me your browsing history." "Go, get your daily planner. Show me how much time you spend with me there." "Go, get —." You fill in the blank. Or maybe he would just point out the ways we sin by looking to satisfy our soul's needs in places that are not him—contentment in stuff we own, security in our retirement account, worth in what we can accomplish, and so on. But those can never truly satisfy.

## **2. He Satisfies Our Thirst**

Are you thirsty? I know I am. And that's good. Because Jesus is thirsty to save. And he does that by satisfying your thirst. Listen to his words again: "Whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty ever again. Rather, the water I will give him will become in him a spring of water, bubbling up to eternal life."

No more thirst! Jesus is promising here to all who drink from him—to all who believe in him—a fountain of forgiveness and life that flows into your past, your present, and all the way into eternity. He calls this "the gift of God." Jesus gives it to you freely—no conditions attached, no price to pay—because he already paid the price for you. It's interesting that the next time John writes about Jesus's thirst is when he's hanging from the cross. "I am thirsty," Jesus said there (19:28). But the physical thirst he endured there wasn't the half of it. It was the spiritual thirst, the eternal dehydration and death of our sins, separated from God and all his blessings—all so that he could give you this living water of forgiveness and eternal life.

He thirsted for you, so that you would never have to. When Jesus gives living water, he satisfies completely. Forgiveness that fills every nook and cranny of your parched souls. Life that lasts forever. All the things our souls long for and can't truly find anywhere else—unfailing love, perfect security, worth—we find these perfectly in him.

He did the same for this woman. Her thirst was laid bare. Jesus won't let her go until he has quenched it, even when she tries to derail the conversation with a theological debate: "Jews say worship in Jerusalem; we say Mt. Gerizim. What do you say?"

“Pretty soon, that will be a moot point,” Jesus responds.

And you can almost picture her picking up her bucket to walk away as she says: “Well, Messiah is coming, and he will explain everything.”

But he won’t let her leave thirsty; he is too thirsty to save! “I, the one speaking to you, am he.” The bucket falls to the ground. And the Spirit leads her to believe what she just heard. Living water rushes into her parched soul. Guilt gone. For the first time, satisfied.

Friends, what I love about this story is how relentless Jesus is in his thirst to save. He had to go to Samaria for her. He won’t let anything stop the conversation—not the fact that he is a Jew and she is a Samaritan, not even her attempts to avoid and escape the conversation. He loves this one woman so much that nothing will stop him from giving her what her soul so desperately needs.

That’s his thirst that saved you. He sought you out and flooded you with his living water in baptism. He has pursued you relentlessly ever since in his word, doing that painful work of reminding you of your thirst, and then satisfying you again and again with his love and forgiveness.

### **3. He Gives Us His Thirst**

But as he satisfies our thirst, he also gives us his thirst. Right after our lesson, John tells us that the woman left her bucket at the well. She had found the one that satisfies our souls forever! But right away she ran to tell her fellow townsfolk, the same ones that had probably ostracized her. That didn’t stop her. They had to know! *She* was thirsty to save.

I get to see this a lot in our work. Hector is our church planter in Huanta, Perú. Although he was a member of a church before he came to us, he was an unbeliever. His church taught that going to heaven depended on his keeping the rules. He doubted he would ever make it there. His soul was parched. The Spirit used the truth we shared with him to fill it with living water, free forgiveness and salvation and Christ. So he started telling others at his church. But when he did, they kicked him out. So he started telling his family and friends and now shares the living water with a group in his home every week.

Friends, Jesus has filled you with living water. He satisfies your souls. Be thirsty to save! I thank you for all the ways you’ve supported world mission work through your prayers and offerings—keep on doing that. But think closer to home, too. Whom do you know who is still thirsty? Whom do you know who is living apart from God and trying to satisfy their soul in all the wrong places? No matter the race, Jew or Samaritan, no matter how sinful their past or present, you have the living water, and they need it. So share it! Amen.