

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## Springs of Living Water

John 4:5-14

**Intro:** In Western culture, water is often portrayed as a symbol of beauty. Think of the azure blue waters of the Florida Keys or the tropical paradise around a Hawaiian waterfall or the reflection of the sky in a clear mountain lake. Now, if the water comes in large enough quantities, it can also symbolize great destruction. When I'm out of state and someone asks me how far Houma is from the Gulf, I tell them we're usually 40 miles away but sometimes the Gulf comes to town. We know too well the destructive power of water when there is way too much of it around. But, in the dry, arid lands of the Middle East, water is seen in an entirely different light. In the culture of Jesus' day, water was a critical commodity without which one would surely die. In this culture, water was seen first and foremost as a symbol for life. We must understand this as we turn to the Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman. This truth provides part of the background scenery in John's 4<sup>th</sup> act because what is revealed in the midst of this conversation is the undeniable truth that Jesus Christ is as necessary for spiritual life as water is for physical life.

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**5-8** -Jesus had been traveling with His disciples from the area of the lower Jordan to Galilee and had to go through Samaria, as we saw last week in vs4. This wasn't entirely true from a purely geographical sense. There were other routes that could be taken from the area of lower Jordan to get to Galilee. Normally, orthodox Jews would take the eastern route to avoid Samaria but John tells us that Jesus "**needed**" to go through Samaria. This could only mean that Jesus had to go this way in order to meet the Samaritan woman. So Jesus travelled through Samaria and about noon on the second day of the trip, He came to the vicinity of the Samaritan town of Sychar. Being exhausted from His journey, He sat at the foot of the hill leading up to Sychar, on the edge of Jacob's well. The disciples had gone off to the city to buy something to eat while Jesus rested.

**Jacob**- The mention of Samaria and Sychar provides a geographical context to the account but the mention of Jacob provides us with a different kind of map. Referring to the plot of land that Jacob gave Joseph and the well that Jacob dug actually connects this geographical location with the

history of God and His dealings with His people. The setting for this encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well is not just on 1<sup>st</sup> century Samaritan soil, it occurs upon ground that God has been toiling over for centuries. In this light, all of biblical history is the backdrop for this scene.

**wearied**- What a picture of Jesus! The reason for stopping at the well was because Jesus had become tired from the journey. This gives us great insight into the humanity of Jesus – the Word that became flesh. His fatigue not only fits into the timing and location of His rest but it also expresses the very essence of His mission. The Lord's mission was not just seen in where He goes and what He says or does; His mission is also reflected in what He endures on earth. John's reference to the sixth hour means it was high noon and in light of the backdrop just mentioned, the setting of this scene provides a powerful image: at midday, on ground which God had already worked, Jesus sat by Jacob's well. The noon day sun was beating down on the Son of God, who Himself is light in a world overtaken by darkness.

But Jesus was not just wearied by the heat. He could have stayed in the cooler area of the Jordan. Here, Jesus was also wearied in His search for sinners. He had become thirsty seeking those to whom He could offer the water of life. It was on this very same errand that He would one day experience an even greater thirst on the cross. On that day, at noon, the sun would hide its face, the sky would turn dark and Jesus would cry out from a Roman cross, "**I thirst!**" Jesus is the great Rock in a weary land, the smitten Rock from which flows the living water. Jesus is thirsty but He is thirstier than the woman or we could know because He is speaking for the very heart of God. How God longs to see sinners come to repentance, to offer forgiveness, salvation, restoration and eternal life. This is what burdens the Godhead; this is what Father, Son and Spirit desire to see. Jesus here is moving in the travail of His soul and is seeking satisfaction in restoring this sin scarred woman back into a right relationship with the Father.

Jesus became man and experienced all that we experience, but the point of the incarnation is that He did this to redeem men. So, if He was weary, thirsty, hot, and on the road to even greater suffering; He was weary and hot for your sake and mine. Jesus suffered for Nicodemus, this woman and everyone else in this world. Most of us here are already believers; but - have we ever **wearied** ourselves in the pursuit of other men and women for Christ? Have we ever put ourselves in the position of being hot or

uncomfortable in order to communicate the gospel to others?

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**9 -a woman-** We have one picture of a wearied, thirsty Jesus but there is a second picture of the woman. She is also thirsty, why else come to the well. But just as Jesus' thirst was much more than physical, so too, her greatest thirst was for much more than water, she just hadn't realized it yet. But the Light will soon dawn in her mind and heart.

Her initial response to the Lord's request for water is one of surprise. She's incredulous: **Why are you talking to me?"**

Her skepticism was well founded. In the 1<sup>st</sup> place, by tradition, a rabbi would not speak with a woman in public, not even his own wife. Secondly, as we've just been told, the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. This refers mainly to the particulars of ritual purity that was so important to the orthodox Jews. Obviously, the Jews had some dealings with them because the disciples are right now on their way to a Samaritan town to buy Samaritan food. But, in that day, it was very unusual for a Jewish person to ask a favor or accept a drink from a Samaritan's cup. Jesus' request genuinely surprised the woman. Clearly, her surprise was a result of the assumptions she had about the thirsty man standing before her. This will not be the last surprise she has on this day.

It's interesting that she felt compelled to remind Jesus that He was a Jew. Of course, that is the crux of the whole matter for her. Jesus is a Jewish male, she is a Samaritan woman. How is it possible that this man does not see this glaring discrepancy? But again, in the midst of this centuries old cultural confrontation, the mission of Jesus is seen even clearer because it's only through Jesus that the "**middle wall of separation**" can be broken down (**Eph 2:14-16**).

The work of Jesus on the cross is the common ground of salvation for all separated groups. The wall is broken down because the common Lordship of Christ is greater than any previous division. Jesus didn't come to make peace between God and man or Jew and Gentile – He is our peace! The problem is not that Jesus doesn't know who He is, the problem is the woman doesn't know who Jesus is and thus, she is the one acting inappropriately. She thinks this is some cheeky Jew who needs a drink when, in fact, He's the unique Son of God, the very expression of God's love!

**10-12** – Jesus addresses her lack of knowledge and then offers her “**living water**.” What does that mean? What does it mean when H offers it to us? Of course, the woman took the offer in a crudely literal way, just like Nicodemus took the words about being “**born again**” literally. In Jewish parlance, **living water** meant *water that was flowing*, like in a river or stream, as opposed to water that was stagnant, like in a cistern or well. Living water was preferred. Thus, when Jesus offered her **living water** she naturally thought of a stream. She wanted to know where Jesus had found it. This was the level of the woman’s thinking: completely literal; exclusively physical.

To anyone accustomed to thinking *biblically*, this phrase should have meant much more. The OT is full of images of God as the only One who can provide living water to satisfy the thirst for God that exists in man’s soul. Isaiah wrote, “**With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation**” (**Isa 12:3**). David said, “**As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for you, O God**” (**Ps 42:1**). God declared through Jeremiah, “**My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water**” (**Jer 2:13**). In **Isa 55:1** God declares, “**Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters**” Several times Ezekiel and Zechariah mention a river of life that flows out from God’s presence in Jerusalem (**Ezek 47:1-12; Zech 13:1; 14:8**). The **living water** Jesus offered her is nothing less than the ultimate rest and satisfaction – eternal life – and it’s rooted in the God-head. Eternal life is the gift of the Father made available by the sacrifice of the Son, birthed in the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. This gift is mediated to mankind by the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Much of Scripture is filled with pictorial language revealing the thirst of the soul, a thirst that can be satisfied only by God. But, the woman misunderstood Christ’s words by taking them literally. In fact, from the tone of her remarks (**12**) it seems she took His claim as a bit blasphemous; He’s claiming to have done something greater than her ancestor Jacob had been able to do. Had Jacob been able to find a stream he certainly wouldn’t have taken the trouble to dig a 100 foot well. Are you claiming to be greater than Jacob? In her mind, the question assumes a negative answer. It’s inconceivable for a person to consider themselves greater than the patriarchs. If Jacob drank from this well, as well as his sons and livestock,

how can you say that the water from this well is inadequate?

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**13** – The Lord’s response is simple and the proof is readily apparent: everyone who drank from this well – including Jacob – was never truly satisfied; shortly after drinking, they needed to drink of its waters again. Jesus points out the limitations of this water. It may quench your thirst for a time but it can never satisfy your greatest need or desire.

**14 - fountain** – Having proved the inferiority of both the water and the well, Jesus goes on to describe the greater water He has to offer. Here, the offer changes from living water to **a fountain of water springing up!** Now, no one has ever seen a well of water springing up. Only the water in a spring springs up. The water in a well just sits there. So Jesus is not talking about a well. The woman had come to a well. Jesus is inviting her to a spring. He adds that if she allows Him to place this spring within her, the spring will never cease but will continue to bubble away forever.

It’s an important distinction. If you bought a lot to build on and found a well right where the house was going, what to do? The water in a well will give you no problem. You just bulldoze enough dirt to fill the hole and the well will be gone forever. But, if it were a spring, then you got a problem. Sure, you can bulldoze a ton of dirt over it and call it done. But, when you come back the next day you’ll find that the stream has come back too. You see, a well can be covered but a spring will always find it way through anything and everything that you try to put over it.

Jesus is promising to place a spring within the life of anyone who will come to Him in faith. This spring will be eternal, free, joyous, and self-dependent. But He’s also warning us that we will never be able to bulldoze anything over it! We try, of course. Many times believers come to a place in their lives when His way seems inconvenient so they try to stifle His presence in their life by piling “stuff” over the spring. They are glad they’re saved but they want to go their own way for a while. They don’t want to reject their faith; they just want to cover it up. So they try. But instead of succeeding they soon discover that the presence of God just keeps bubbling through.

What happens when a spring bubbles through dirt? It produces muddy water. Is it the spring’s fault? No! The problem is in the dirt that’s been pushed on top of it. Does this describe your life? Are you a Christian who

has run from God, trying to cover over His presence only to find your life filled with muddy water? If this is you, why don't you allow the Lord to remove the dirt and purify the spring of His life within you?

The truth is, as a believer, you can't go your own way indefinitely. You'll never get away with that. God must be true to His character, and God says that in His holiness He is determined to perfect the image of His Son, Jesus Christ, in your life. If God allowed you to go any way you want and be successful at it, then He would be a liar when He says that Jesus Christ is the only **way**, the only **truth**, and the only **life**. God is no liar. So He will make a mess of your life or a ruin of your life, if He has to, until you come to the point where you will let Him perfect that work in you He began when you first trusted in the Lord Jesus. That is His desire, His plan, His purpose for your life. Will you yield to Him?

If you do, He will see to it that every spiritual longing you have ever had will be met and satisfied. Think about it: He put it there in your heart in the first place. And He'll do with you that which pleases Him and which blesses others.

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There's no denying that in this text, Jesus is clearly claiming to be the One who alone can satisfy human longing. Do you believe His claim? Have you tested His claim? You may try to fill your life with the things of this world—money, fame, power, activity—but while these things may satisfy you for a time, they will not do so permanently.

Is God who He says He is? Is He everything He claims to be in His Word? How do you know if you don't put Him to the test? When it comes right down to it - only Jesus Christ is able to satisfy you fully.

