

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: July 18, 2010  
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“WALKING THROUGH SAMARIA”**

**John 4:4-42**

- In John 4:13-14, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman, **“Everyone who drinks this water”** (from Jacob’s well) **“will be thirsty again, but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst.”** She answers, **“Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water”** (verse 15).

It is a chore to trudge half a mile down from the village, lower the bucket more than 100’ into the well and heave it back up, lower and heave, lower and heave until she has all the water she can carry, then lug the jars half a mile back up the hill under the scorching Palestinian sun.

What she wouldn’t give to never thirst again! She longs for her bodily need to be satisfied once and for all.

☑ I cannot quite put myself in this woman’s place. All I have to do is turn on the tap and out flows cool, clean water. Besides, I have so many beverage options that my appetite for water is often dulled. My first impulse is usually to reach for a cup of coffee or milk.

Water has greater benefits. In the right quantities it can help regulate the appetite, speed up metabolism, boost energy, reduce fluid retention, alleviate headaches, lower blood pressure, lower high cholesterol, ease joint pain, inhibit kidney stones, decrease the incidence of some cancers, and promote healthy skin, without adding a single calorie.

I know all this – and *still* drinking water often requires a conscious effort on my part. Why is it easier to go for beverages that, in some cases (like pop), harm my body, and don’t effectively quench my thirst?

When Jesus speaks about water, the woman misunderstands and takes His statement literally. But He is using bodily thirst and physical H<sub>2</sub>O as metaphors for *soul-thirst* and *spiritual water*.

- So in verse 10 Messiah declares, **“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.”**

📖 Material “living water” is fresh, pure, flowing water, such as you find in a spring or a stream or a lake that is large enough to have currents. Spiritual “living water” is salvation, wholeness, peace, abundant eternal life, and God’s presence.

- **“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink,”** says Jesus, **“you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”** Then He adds {4:14}: **“those who drink the water I give will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give...will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”** As they drink in His presence it will bubble up within until they could not contain it if they wanted to! It will flood out and bless the people around them.

Don’t we crave vitality, wholeness, and fullness of heart? *Don’t we thirst for invigorating and refreshing union with God?* Don’t we yearn to drink in more of Him as we enter farther into his kingdom?

So why is it sometimes difficult to choose the water of life? *Why do we seek satisfaction in things which not only cannot quench our thirst but actively poison our souls?*

■ Jeremiah 2:12-13 puts it this way: **“Be appalled at this, you heavens, and shudder with great horror,’ declares the LORD. ‘My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.’”**

☠ 1<sup>st</sup>, Israel has forsaken God. You can see it in their sexual immorality and materialism, their outwardly orthodox religion that is inwardly dead, and their blatant idolatry.

☠ 2<sup>nd</sup>, Israel has **“dug their own cisterns.”**

📖 A physical cistern is a reservoir hewn from rock to collect rainfall and seepage. The water tends to become stale. It is easily contaminated by dust, bugs, and animals. In the desert a cistern can be a lifesaver; but only a fool would drink its stagnant water living water is available.

📖 A spiritual cistern is anything people rely on for ultimate fulfillment apart from God’s goodness: food, drink, recreation, sex, wealth, knowledge, status, power, religion, and so forth. Most of these are gifts from the Creator. Prioritized correctly and exercised rightly they bring wholesome pleasure and intensify our thirst for God. Yet when we over-value or misuse them they dull our taste for relationship with Him. And while these **“broken cisterns”** might *seem* satisfying they can’t **“hold water.”** All who rely on them to the end die of spiritual thirst.

The woman in John 4 has dug many cisterns.

⊗ In verse 12 she says, **“Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well?”** God himself {Ps 68:6} **“sets [us] in families.”** It follows that ethnic and cultural heritage are worth celebrating. Yet she has inflated its value all out of proportion. That is the cistern of smug ethnic pride.

⊗ Jesus speaks of spiritual matters but in verse 15 the woman asks: **“Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”** God expects us to take good care of these bodies; still, her mind is dominated by physical, material concerns. That is the cistern of worldly thinking.

⊗ In verses 16-18 Jesus notes that the woman has been married five times and is now living with a man who is not her husband. Marriage is one of God’s most beautiful creations; but her approach to it is terribly flawed, and her current partnership violates the standards God set up for our benefit. These are the cisterns of idolatrous relationships and sexual immorality.

⊗ In verse 20 the woman changes the subject: **“Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that... we must worship... in Jerusalem.”** Religious tradition *can* honor God and help us; however, she has made an idol of hers, and that is driving a wedge between her and the God she assumes she worships. This is the cistern of religious traditionalism.

The LORD has much better for her! Jesus has come that she (and we) {Jn 20:10} **“may have life”** not

in dribbles and drabbles and drops, but **“to the full”!** When the Son looks at his to-do list, “Give living water” is not jotted in the section labeled: “Would Be Nice”; it is written in bold, directly under the “Urgent!” heading.

We know this, because Jesus breaks five ironclad social rules to share it with her.

👉 # 1) Jews and Samaritans do not enter each other’s territory if at all possible.

In the south is solidly Jewish Judaea. In the north is Galilee, which is home to many Jews and Gentiles. Sandwiched in between is Samaria.

The journey between Jerusalem and Galilee takes 3 days, if one cuts through Samaria. Self-respecting Jews double the trip to 6 days by going around on the east side of the Jordan. Not Jesus; not this time. He intentionally passes *through* Samaria.

👉 # 2) in the event that Jews and Samaritans are forced to cross those lines they do not speak to each other. Yet Jesus asks a Samaritan for a drink {4:7}.

👉 # 3) Men and women do not converse in public. The Rabbis command: {DSB} **“Let no one talk with a woman in the street, not even with his own wife.”** They warn that a man who {DSB} **“prolongs conversation with a woman he causes evil to himself, desists from the law, and inherits”** hell. But Jesus initiates and prolongs {4:7, 10-26} this dialogue.

👉 # 4) Good men do not interact with immoral women. A woman is allowed to divorce 2 or 3 times, but once is enough to tarnish her reputation. Unwedded cohabitation is unthinkable. This woman has been married five times

and is living with a man who is not her husband {4:18}. Jesus seeks her out anyway.

👉 # 5) Jews do not touch impure objects. First-century Jews believe that as sin pollutes the spirit, so some natural things pollute the body. Come into contact with them and you must be purified before you can worship, or even socialize. Female Samaritans are (supposedly) perpetually contaminated, so no Jew is allowed to handle the things they touch. Yet Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for water {4:7}, and doubtless He drinks from her jar.

*Why does Jesus break these rules?*

⚙️ First reason: Some of them distort O.T. Law., and the others are man-made. They do not carry the weight of Scripture. Jesus has come, not to validate human tradition, but {Mt 5:17} **“to fulfill”** his Father’s **“Law.”**

⚙️ Second reason: Jesus hates sin and false belief. (Those are dry and **“broken cisterns”!**) However, He loves sinful, misguided people who have **“forsaken... the spring of living water.”** Short of violating his Father’s will, He will stop at nothing to bring sinners into the Kingdom and satisfy their thirsty souls.

● That’s what He does for the woman at the well. In John 4:28-29 she leaves her water jar, runs to town, and says to her neighbors, **“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”** {Jn 4:39-42} Many of her parched neighbors who previously forsook God and **“dug their own cisterns”** are saved, in part because of her witness.

In verse 42, they joyfully testify, **“We know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”**

*Walking with Jesus means drinking so deeply of his living water that it becomes in us a spring of water welling up to eternal life!*

{Rev 22:17} **“Come!’ Let those who are thirsty come; and let all who wish take the free gift of the water of life.”**