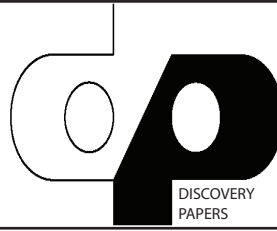


# SOUL THIRST

EASTER SUNDAY



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John 4

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*John 4*

He is risen!

What does that mean: He is risen? One of the things it means is that Jesus is present with us today, through the Holy Spirit, relating to us in the same kinds of ways that he related to people when he walked on the earth. The gospels thus invite us to see ourselves in the individuals with whom Jesus interacted.

When he walked on the earth, Jesus came to the town of Sychar, in the region of Samaria, where he sat down by a well and met a woman. The woman came to draw water, but Jesus drew out of her a deeper thirst.

Mark Twain wrote, "You don't know what it is you want, but it just fairly makes your heart ache, you want it so."<sup>1</sup> Does your heart ache for something? If so, even if you don't know what it aches for, perhaps you will see yourself in the woman from Samaria.

Intriguingly, the apostle John, the author of the gospel of John, reports that Jesus "had to pass through Samaria." When Jesus met the Samaritan woman, he twice told her that an "hour" was coming. With his resurrection, that hour has come. That hour is now.

**John 4:1-42:**

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John 2 (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), 3 he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. 4 And he had to pass through Samaria. 5 So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said

to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 10 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." 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." 26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

27 Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” 28 So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 29 “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” 30 They went out of the town and were coming to him.

31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” 32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” 33 So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?” 34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. 35 Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. 36 Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37 For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

39 Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

## Thirst for relationship and impact

The Samaritan woman thirsts for more than just water. Is that true of you?

Most people thirst for relationship, often a romantic relationship and sometimes just a sexual relationship. The vast majority of popular songs reflect romantic desires, sexual desires, or both. In a romantic relationship or in a hookup, people feel—or they hope to feel—validation and exhilaration.

C.S. Lewis, the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, felt all that anyone could hope to feel in a romantic relationship. He writes that he and his wife Joy “feasted

on love; every mode of it—solemn and merry, romantic and realistic, sometimes as dramatic as a thunderstorm, sometimes as comfortable and unemphatic as putting on your soft slippers. No cranny of heart or body remained unsatisfied.” Nevertheless, he observes, “We both knew we wanted something besides one another—quite a different kind of something, a quite different kind of want.”<sup>2</sup> Even if you manage to feel all that you could hope to feel in a human relationship, you still want something more.

Most people not only thirst for relationship, they also thirst for impact. People, especially in the Silicon Valley, want to “change the world.” Steve Jobs famously wanted to put a “dent in the universe.” If people manage to have some sort of impact on the world, they feel—or they hope to feel—validation and exhilaration.

Most people, however, don’t feel as if they’re having much of an impact. One successful software developer laments, “Nothing you do has any sense of permanence.”<sup>3</sup>

## Three strikes

Even if Jesus is drawing out of the Samaritan woman a deeper thirst, she has no reason to expect that he would meet that thirst—at least at first. Perhaps you have no reason to believe that Jesus would meet your thirst either—at least at first.

Jesus is a Jew. The woman is a Samaritan. Jews traditionally shunned Samaritans, whom they considered usurpers, harking all the way back to the north-south split in the kingdom of Israel after the reign of Solomon, some thousand years prior. As John observes, “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.” Yet John also says that Jesus “had to pass through Samaria.” Something compelled him, evidently as he responded to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, who came upon him and stayed upon him when John the Baptist baptized him (John 1:32-33).

Jesus is a Jewish man. The Samaritan woman is . . . well, a woman. Jewish men, especially Jewish rabbis, took pains to avoid being alone with women who were not their wives in order to guard against immorality and gossip but also because women, like Samaritans, were considered second-class. As John observes, the disciples of Jesus “marveled that he was talking with a woman.” From the perspective of Jewish men, the Samaritan woman has two strikes against her: she’s a Samaritan and she’s a woman. The woman herself asks Jesus, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?”

Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world. God created the heavens and the earth and created humans in his image, to know him and serve him in his creation. But the first humans rebelled against God and rejected his purpose for them. Their sin opened the door for evil to invade creation: Satan, sin, and death. But God didn't give up on humanity. He called the people of Israel to bless the world, but Israel, like the first humans, both rebelled against God and rejected his purpose for it. Nevertheless, God didn't give up on Israel. As Jesus says, "salvation is from the Jews." God's call for Israel to bless the world was heard and embraced by one particular Israelite: Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, the Jewish Messiah is the Savior of the world.

Jesus wasn't the first man in biblical history to meet a woman at a well. Abraham, the father of the people of Israel, dispatched his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac, and the servant met a woman at a well. Jacob, Isaac's son, met a woman at a well. Moses, the deliverer of Israel, met a woman at a well. After each of those encounters, a man married a woman (Genesis 24, 29:1-14; Exodus 2:15-22).

If you've read the biblical story from Genesis 1 to John 3, and you read about a man who meets a woman at a well in John 4, you know what to expect: a wedding. Does Jesus marry the woman? No, he's not that kind of man. Indeed, in answer to the woman's question, he's greater than Jacob.

Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world. The Samaritan woman doesn't need a husband. She's had five husbands! Moreover, the man she is currently living with isn't her husband. Why haven't things worked out for her? John doesn't say. Suffice it to say that her marital history and her current illicit affair are nothing to brag about back in town. The woman doesn't need a husband; she needs a Savior!

She's a Samaritan: strike one. She's a woman: strike two. She's been married five times and is currently involved in an illicit affair: strike three and you're out!

Yet Jesus doesn't call her out, even though he knows all about the woman. Some would distance themselves from the woman, but Jesus stays. Not only does he stay, he also asks the disgraced Samaritan woman to serve him. Not only does he ask her to serve him, he even offers to serve her. Shocking!

## Living water

Wouldn't it make you just a little uncomfortable to meet someone who knew everything you've ever done?

Group therapist Irving Yalom plays a game called Top Secret with people in his groups. He asks them to write out the single thing about themselves that they are least inclined to share and to then return the paper unsigned. The most frequent top secret is the admission that "I feel utterly worthless. No one would want me if they knew me."<sup>4</sup>

Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world. He knows you. He not only knows everything you've ever done, he also sees into the darkest corners of your heart. What does he do? Does he back up a few steps? Does he look askance? No, he stays where he is, looking into your eyes, even into your heart. Why does he stay? He stays to serve you. Shocking!

Serve you what? Living water of course.

If you drink the water that Jesus is offering, it will become in you "a spring of water welling up to eternal life." What is "eternal life"? Later in the gospel of John, Jesus, in a prayer to God on behalf of his disciples, defines it: "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Eternal life begins with knowing Jesus and culminates in the new and eternal world that God will create when Jesus returns. Like Jesus, those who believe in him will be raised from the dead, and creation itself will be renewed.

## Jesus quenches thirst for relationship

What is it about Jesus that the woman finds so compelling? Jesus told her many things, but when she tells the townspeople about her encounter with him, she says, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did." When John reports the reaction of the townspeople, he once again reports the woman's testimony: "He told me all that I ever did." What matters to the woman, and what matters to the man who is telling her story, is that Jesus knows her. The woman, it seems didn't expect the Messiah, when he came, to speak so knowingly, so personally. She says to the townspeople, "Can this be the Christ?"

The woman has taken her first drink of living water, even if she doesn't know it yet. She came to draw water, but upon meeting Jesus, she "left her water jar and went away into town." She leaves without even filling her jar. Why? She's found better water!

Paul Tournier, the famed Swiss psychiatrist, says, "It is impossible to overemphasize the immense need humans have to be really listened to, to be taken seriously, to be understood." The "immense need," however, goes largely unmet, according to Tournier: "Listen to all the conversations of our world, between nations as well as those between couples. They are for the most part dialogues of the deaf."<sup>5</sup>

Do you want to be known? If you want to be known, don't you also want to be accepted, even valued? Jesus wants to do for you what he did for the woman: he wants to serve you living water; he wants to give you . . . himself. And remember who this is: the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Talk about being valued!

Do you want what C.S. Lewis calls "quite a different kind of something, a quite different kind of want"? Do you thirst for an eternal relationship in which you are known, accepted, and valued? Come to Jesus.

## Jesus quenches thirst for impact

Later, John reports that Jesus said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37-38). If you taste the living water, it not only wells up in you, it also flows out of you to impact others. Look what happens to the woman.

After dropping her water jar, she goes to town to tell people about her encounter with Jesus. Just as the woman left the well after her encounter with Jesus, the people leave the town after hearing of her encounter with Jesus. John reports that many Samaritans from Sychar believe in Jesus "because of the woman's testimony." Those who went out to meet Jesus ask him to come back to town and stay with them. He stays in Sychar two days, and "many more believed because of his word."

The woman has quite an impact. She has an *eternal* impact. She changes not just the destiny of these people; she also changes their eternal destiny!

How did she do it? She consults no focus group. She crafts no vision statement. She employs no marketing strategy. Just as something compelled Jesus to come to Samaria, something compels the woman to return to

town. She can't help herself. She's one thirsty person telling other thirsty people where she found living water for her soul. The living water wells up in her and flows out of her to bless others.

If you come to Jesus, you will have an impact. In this life, you won't begin to know how your life impacts the world, but it will have an impact—an eternal impact. God himself, who enhances our words, our actions, and our prayers, guarantees it. If Jesus can turn five loaves and two fish into a feast for thousands, he can enhance our words, our actions, and our prayers. The apostle Paul puts it this way, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58). If you believe in Jesus, your life is not in vain: it has an eternal impact.

N.T Wright observes:

*What has begun with the resurrection of Jesus will be continued until it is thoroughly finished; every act of faith and love, of justice and mercy, of beauty and truth in this present world will be part of God's eventual new world. In the Lord, our labor is not in vain: what you do here in faith will stand, will last. Failure, cynicism, deconstruction, and despair do not have the last word. They are the soldiers standing guard at the tomb, and when morning comes they are sound asleep.*<sup>6</sup>

It turns out that your thirst for relationship, once quenched, also quenches your thirst for impact. If you believe that the Messiah, the Savior of the world, knows, accepts, and values you, something inside you will change. One taste of the living water will reconstitute your inner life so that living water wells up in you and flows out of you to bless the world for all eternity.

Do you want to put a dent in the universe? How about putting a dent in eternity? Do you thirst for impact, to influence the world in an eternally meaningful way? Come to Jesus.

## Thirst for forgiveness

Instead of coming to Jesus with the thirst in your soul, have you been coming to a relationship or hoped-for relationship or to a vocation or hoped-for vocation? Have you been coming to something other than Jesus? If so, then instead of drinking from the fountain of living waters, you've been building cisterns, holding tanks. Listen to God, speaking through the prophet Jeremiah:

## Jeremiah 2:12-13:

**Be appalled, O heavens, at this;  
be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares  
the LORD,  
for my people have committed two evils:  
they have forsaken me,  
the fountain of living waters,  
and hewed out cisterns for themselves,  
broken cisterns that can hold no water.**

Are your cisterns broken? Are they leaking water? Are they failing to quench the thirst in your soul? Join the heavens. Be appalled! Be shocked! Be desolate! This is not the way it's supposed to be.

Perhaps you thirst for relationship. Perhaps you thirst for impact. Do you also thirst for forgiveness? Is there something within you that makes you think things just aren't right? Do you have the sense, somehow, that you're not what you're supposed to be? Do you wish you could make things right but know, somehow, that you can't, not really? Don't you think the Samaritan woman, with her sordid past and her illicit present, was thirsting for forgiveness?

One contemporary woman's story of coming to Christ includes her exposure to this poem by Marguerite Wilkinson, which disabused her of the notion that she had no need for forgiveness:

*I never cut my neighbor's throat;  
My neighbor's gold I never stole;  
I never spoiled his house and land;  
But God have mercy on my soul!  
For I am haunted night and day  
By all the deeds I have not done;  
O unattempted loveliness!  
O costly valor never one.<sup>7</sup>*

Jean Vanauken's husband described her reaction: "She was shaken to the depths, shaken as I had never known her to be."<sup>8</sup> She was appalled, shocked, and desolate—not only because of what she had done but also, more especially, because of what she had failed to do.

If Jesus is the Savior of the world, how does he save the world? By dying for it! Just before meeting the Samaritan woman in Sychar, Jesus met a man named Nicodemus in Jerusalem and told him, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus is God's Son. God "gave" his Son; Jesus is the "gift of God" that he invited the woman to ask for. When Jesus died on the cross, he took our place: he died

for our rebellion against God and for our rejection of his purpose for our lives. He died for us, not only for what we've done but also for what we've failed to do. When we come to Jesus and believe in him, God forgives us. And oh, how good it feels to be forgiven! It feels like a cool drink of fresh water on a blistering day. It goes all the way down.

Is there something within you that grieves not only for what you have done but also for what you have failed to do? Do you thirst for forgiveness? Abandon the broken cisterns. Come to Jesus.

Relationship. Impact. Forgiveness. What do you want? Is there anything else you want? How about . . . And this is only a sampling. We could placard all the walls with such words.

## Hungry enough to die

Thirst in John 4 is a metaphor for desire. Jesus draws out the Samaritan woman's thirst, her desire. But the woman isn't the only one in this chapter who desires. And another metaphor for desire is also featured.

When Jesus' disciples come back to the well after having gone to town to buy food, they urged Jesus to eat. Jesus, though, tells them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." What food is that? He is speaking to the disciples metaphorically of hunger, just as he spoke to the woman metaphorically of thirst. He says, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." God's will and work, in this case, are to give the woman a drink of living water.

We're thirsty. Jesus is hungry. He's hungry to quench your thirst with living water.

How hungry? Hungry enough to die. Hungry enough to die on a cross. Hungry enough to die on a cross for you! Jesus would rather die on a cross than spend eternity without you. *Come to Jesus with thirst in your soul and taste the living water.* If you do, you will satisfy the hunger of Jesus. Think about it: you can satisfy the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the risen Lord of all creation, by letting him serve you.

A long time ago, something compelled Jesus to visit Samaria: "he had to pass through Samaria." We know, having read the story, that he had to come to Samaria to meet a Samaritan woman at a well in the city of Sychar and serve her living water. Jesus, alive from the dead, is here today. Something compels him still. What is it? You know the answer. It's us. It's you.

Come to Jesus. Believe in him. Taste the living water.

The hour has come. The hour is now.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Twain, Mark, *Tom Sawyer, Detective*.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, C.S. , *A Grief Observed*, 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> "Time Trials," Chris O'Brien, *San Jose Mercury News* (28 November 1999), 1A.

<sup>4</sup> Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1999), 63.

<sup>5</sup> Cynthia Crossen, "The Crucial Question for these Noisy Times may just be: 'Huh?'" *Wall Street Journal* (10 July 1997), 1A.

<sup>6</sup> N.T Wright, *The Way of the Lord* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 111.

<sup>7</sup> Margurite Wilkinson, *Guilty*.

<sup>8</sup> Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy* (New York: HarperOne, 1977), 67-68.