

An Empty Life Filled

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[0 : 00] Our reading from which the sermon will be based this morning is John chapter 4, verses 1 to 29. And let me ask Douglas to come and read for us.

Now, when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John, although Jesus Himself did not baptize but only His disciples, He left Judea and departed again for Galilee.

And He had to pass through Samaria, so He came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to His son Joseph. 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. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, Give me a drink, for His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

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.

[1 : 09] 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.

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? Are you greater than our father Jacob?

He gave us the well and drank from it Himself, as did His sons and His livestock. Jesus said to her, Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 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. 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.

Jesus said to her, Go, call your husband, and come here. The woman answered Him, I have no husband. Jesus said to her, You are right in saying I have no husband, for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.

[2 : 22] What you have said is true. The woman said to Him, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.

Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know.

We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him.

God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. 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. Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am He. Just then, His disciples came back.

[3 : 24] They marveled that He was talking with a woman, but no one said, What do you seek? Or, Why are you talking with her? So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did.

Can this be the Christ? This is God's Word. Good morning. My name's David. I'm the associate minister here.

If you've got a Bible, please turn to John chapter 4 and to that passage that Douglas read for us. I think it's the Canadian writer, Douglas Copeland.

In his best-selling novel, *Life After God*, he makes this observation. When you're young, you always feel that life hasn't yet begun, but then suddenly you're old and the scheduled life didn't arrive.

And in that same book, he reflects on his own life with these words, I felt sad because I realized that once people are broken in certain ways, they can't ever be fixed.

[4 : 35] This is something nobody ever tells you when you're young. It never fails to surprise you as you grow older, as you see the people in your life break one by one. He's an interesting writer, and much of Copeland's writing underscores the undeniable reality that we live in a broken and fractured world, a world of broken lives, broken relationships, often broken dreams.

As Copeland puts it, we are all broken in certain ways. And I wonder this morning if the Samaritan woman of John chapter 4 might not have recognized herself in Copeland's words, because for her, that brokenness was self-evident, a broken life, a life that perhaps she planned, but simply didn't arrive, an empty and unfulfilled life.

The empty jar she brought to the well day in and day out, a symbol of what had become really the story of her life, the story of a vessel that could never be filled, a thirst that never could never be quenched.

It was a woman who'd hoped that love would have been the answer to her aching spirit. Like many, even today, she believed that love, marriage, a partner, a significant other would have given her life meaning and direction and fulfillment.

But a string of broken relationships had shattered her romantic illusions. Each Mr. Right had turned out to be Mr. Wrong.

[6 : 19] She was a lonely woman. Despite these past relationships, nothing had seemed to fill the void that was at the center of her life.

She'd been looking for the answer, but relationship after relationship after relationship had only left her feeling empty inside. You may have noticed in the text that she came alone to the well to draw water.

That was very unusual. Normal for the women of the village to come to draw water together. But this woman didn't. And you may have noticed the hour at which she came to the well by herself.

Verse 6, it was about the sixth hour. That was noon, sun at the highest, its highest, the hottest time of the day. Why on earth would anyone come to draw water at that time?

Was it no coward once said, only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun? Well, this woman was neither. This was a woman who was trying to avoid other people, an outcast, someone with few, if any, real friends.

[7 : 31] And her actions here hint, I think, at sadness, loneliness, and emptiness about her life. A woman familiar with feelings of shame, a reputation standing in the community, perhaps viewed as being way beyond redemption.

A woman whose youth had passed her by, tired of the pain she felt inside, she felt worthless. Like the water jar she carried to the well, her life was empty.

And in that, of course, she's not alone. Her life mirrors that of countless others. Because we live in a world, don't we, of lonely people, tired people, broken people, hurting people, people looking for something to fill the emptiness, people looking for something to dull the pain, another relationship, another drink, another fix.

Seeking, searching, but often never finding. For the lonely trip to the well, read a lonely trip to the supermarket, or the retail park, or the bookies, or the pub.

And yet, this woman's story here in John 4 is not without hope. Because in this account, we see this woman meeting the one man in the world who could turn her life around.

[8 : 52] The one man who could ease her pain. The one man who could heal her brokenness. The one man who could infuse her life with meaning and purpose.

And here in John 4, we are, as it were, witnesses of this Samaritan woman's encounter encounter with Jesus of Nazareth. And we see this lonely woman drawn into a relationship with the one man who changes everything.

The one man who makes sense of life. The one man who brings healing and forgiveness to the broken and the burdened and the desperate and the guilty. And it's this one man, of course, who is the primary focus and burden of John's gospel.

And Jesus Christ is still the one man with whom a relationship, with whom a relationship can change everything for people. And we see here really unfolding in John 4 a kind of dramatic work of God taking place in this woman's life.

And what I want to do just briefly this morning is to highlight a number of key elements in that work as we witness this woman's life being quite literally turned around.

[10 : 11] And the first thing I want you to notice is that this work is a work of divine instigation in the first nine verses. A work of divine instigation. There's nothing accidental or happenstance about this encounter.

Notice how John tells us that in verse 4. Jesus, he says, had to pass through Samaria. Now, I think that's more a theological observation than a geographical one.

Humanly speaking, there was no necessity. The route through Samaria was generally avoided by the Jews who, on no account, wanted to mix or meet with Samaritans. There's no suggestion in the text that Jesus is taking some kind of shortcut.

And I think it's simply John's way of telling us that this wasn't a chance encounter for Jesus. This meeting with the woman took place in the plan and purpose of God.

Jesus had to pass through Samaria because he had to meet and encounter this woman. There's a sense of spiritual compulsion about these events, just as there was about the whole of Jesus' ministry.

[11 : 25] Here's an appointment fixed, as it were, in the divine calendar. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

Verse 5, Jacob's well was there. Jesus, wearied as he was from the journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. So Jesus and his disciples about halfway through their journey across Samaria, they stop at noon near this town.

Jesus is tired, he's weary. The disciples go into town to try and get some food. Jesus is left on his own beside Jacob's well, but he's not on his own for long.

Verse 7, a woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, give me a drink. The Samaritan woman said, how is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?

So the woman is shocked, surprised by Jesus. First, by his presence at the well at midday, and second, by his conversation.

[12 : 28] She's taken aback. He, a Jew, deigns to speak to her, a Samaritan woman, and ask for a drink of water. You'll notice Jesus initiates the conversation, and immediately she is left wondering what's going on.

Jesus' behavior is not what she was expecting. For a Jew even to speak with a Samaritan was a surprising turn of events. It was not the done thing.

And it's interesting that we see here that Jesus is not constrained by the social, racial prejudices of his day. not only that, but in speaking to an unknown woman in public, that was a very, that was very risky behavior.

Some rabbis held that it was even improper for a husband to talk to his wife in public, far less a strange woman. So Jesus is pushing, indeed crossing the boundaries of social convention here.

He's reaching across the barriers that are so often erected to divide people. He's crossing boundaries, Jerusalem to Samaria, male to female, Jew to Gentile, rabbi to outcast.

[13 : 46] He's not afraid to take a risk to minister to this woman and to meet her spiritual needs. Because he has come in love and grace to fill empty lives.

He's come not just as Savior of the Jews, but as the Savior of the world. He's come to connect with the broken and the hurting of whatever gender, nationality, or culture.

He's come to break down barriers to touch and transform people's lives. There's an old hymn of Charlotte Elliott, Just as I am, thy love unknown hath broken every barrier down.

And we find in this gospel the climax of this barrier-breaking, boundary-crossing, ministry of Jesus, ministry of love, at the end of John's gospel.

As you remember, Jesus hangs on the cross of Calvary, on that rough wooden cross. Again, interestingly, about the sixth hour, Jesus again cries out in thirst in order to save, rescue, sinful, fallen, broken men and women.

[15 : 00] And so, whoever you are this morning, whatever advantages or disadvantages you've had in life, Jesus Christ is not put off by them.

He's not put off by a checkered past or the mess you've made of your life. You can't keep this Jesus at a distance. You can't hide away forever behind your barriers, your morality, your status, your race, sexuality, religion, culture, pride, whatever.

Because Jesus has come to break through and to touch the person beneath. Here is a work in which Jesus Himself takes the initiative. It's a work of divine instigation.

And that brings me to the second thing here. It's a work of divine revelation. Verses 10 through 15. I think there is a progression that takes place through this chapter.

As this woman's eyes are gradually open to see just who Jesus truly is. The woman begins as all of us do from a place of blindness and ignorance.

[16 : 11] And Jesus tells us as much in verse 10. Jesus answered him, 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.

If only this woman had known who it was that was speaking to her, she would have been the one who was doing the asking. Not only that, but she would have received living water.

That's a phrase used in the Old Testament by Jeremiah. Jeremiah 2, 13, God declares to His people, My people have committed two sins.

They have forsaken me, the spring of living water. They've dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns, that cannot hold water. And so the living water really is a picture of God Himself, the life and the vitality that He brings to people.

And this is the water that only Jesus can bring to empty, parched human souls. And the woman like Nicodemus in the previous chapter doesn't have a clue about what Jesus is speaking about.

[17 : 17] I think it's interesting as a way of an aside. I think there's a very definite contrast drawn here between John 3 and 4. In John 3, Nicodemus, a man, a Jew, a moral, religious leader, a Bible scholar, comes to Jesus at night.

Here in John 4, it's an unnamed woman, a Samaritan, someone with a mixed-up understanding of the Scriptures, a questionable past, and who meets Jesus in the middle of the day.

These two individuals, you see, are polar opposites. The woman said to him, Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, verse 11.

The well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself as did his sons and livestock. Of course, the irony is that the living water that Jesus offers is not to be found in any well.

It's to be found in a relationship with him. He is indeed one greater than the patriarch Jacob. He is the very water of life.

[18 : 26] He is the Word made flesh. He is the Son of the living God. Jesus said, everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 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. See, the water that Jesus speaks of giving is very different to the water that the woman is thinking about.

The water she has in mind could at best slake a temporary thirst. The water that Jesus speaks of penetrates and satisfies that raging spiritual thirst that is at the heart of every human being.

The water that Jesus gives is not to be drawn up from some stagnant well. It is given as a gift that becomes a bubbling spring of eternal life in the human soul.

This life-giving water is only given by Jesus. It can't be purchased. It can't be earned. It can't be won. It can't be merited. It can only be received by faith.

[19 : 33] And it's only as our eyes are opened to see Jesus that we are drawn to rest our faith and trust and confidence in him. And it's only as we trust him that this living water is poured into our lives and we become new men and women.

You'll see that by verse 19 the woman's estimation of Jesus has become that of a prophet. The woman said to him, Sir, I perceive you're a prophet. By verse 29 she's telling the people from the town, Come see a man who told me all that I ever did.

Can this be the Christ? You see what's happened through this passage? Her eyes have been opened. The truth has dawned. This woman is being led out of the darkness into the light and life of Jesus Christ.

She's being led from the well and her empty jar to that spring of eternal life that is to be found only in Jesus. Sir, give me this water so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water, she says.

But before Jesus will do that, before he will complete this work of divine revelation, there is something you'll notice to be sorted out in this woman's life.

[20 : 47] And that leads us to the third thing here that we notice. Not just a work of divine initiation and divine revelation. It's also a work of divine conviction in verses 16 through 24.

Look what Jesus says. Go, call your husband and come here. The woman answered, I have no husband. Jesus said, you're right in saying I have no husband for you have had five husbands.

The one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true. Before Jesus reveals the truth about himself to this woman, he first of all reveals the truth about herself.

And it's an uncomfortable conversation as Jesus, in a sense, gets up close and personal. He sees right through her disguise. He exposes her sin and moral failure.

And Samus says, O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit down and when I arise. You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down.

[21 : 58] You're familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely. Here is the God, you see, from whom no secrets can be hid. Here is the Lord himself.

There's nothing hidden that Jesus cannot see. Before his gaze, your life is as transparent, as a pane of glass. He sees our thoughts, our motives, our hidden secrets.

He sees behind the mask just as he saw this woman somewhat murky and miserable past. And he insists that we face up to our sins and our failures.

For unless we do, we will never receive the life-giving water that he alone can bestow. And Jesus puts his finger on this woman's kind of sordid past relationships and he brings it all out into the open.

And we might say, well, is Jesus being cruel here? Is he trying to humiliate and shame this woman? I don't think so. He's trying to get this woman to be honest about her life.

[23 : 09] to face up to the way in which she's been trying to fill the emptiness of her soul. For her, it was relationship after relationship after relationship, but no lasting fulfillment.

Her life littered with a string of broken relationships. And Jesus wants her to face the truth. And that's often an uncomfortable thing, even a painful, convicting experience.

One writer puts it, she felt that her spiritual disease was discovered and for the first time in her life, she saw herself. That's a really important, vital, necessary aspect of a work of God.

Our sin needs to be exposed. We have to see where our problem truly lies. And that problem is a moral one.

Our emptiness is a kind of moral emptiness. Our brokenness is a moral brokenness. As Paul puts it, we've exchanged the glory of God, the immortal God, for other things.

[24 : 14] And that rejection of God is to be seen in human beings looking for fulfillment, satisfaction, meaning, in all the wrong places, in our jobs, in our ministries, in our relationships, our families, our hobbies, and it's all just idolatry.

Jesus wanted this woman to see the emptiness and hollowness of her life. He wanted her to face up to the truth, a truth that she was hiding from. J.C. Ryle writes, until men and women are brought to feel their sinfulness and need, no real good is ever done to their souls.

Until a sinner sees himself as God sees him, he will continue careless, trifling, and unmoved. Jesus wants us to face the uncomfortable truth about ourselves.

He wants to take us to that place where we can say with a hymn writer, I tried the broken cisterns, Lord, but ah, the waters failed.

Interesting, the Samaritan woman, when she's confronted with this, immediately tries to change the subject. She wants to move the discussion onto less personal ground. And, sir, I perceive you're a prophet.

[25 : 30] Our fathers worshipped on this mountain. You say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship. It's the kind of thing that people like to do when they're feeling a little threatened by the claims of Jesus.

They want to steer the conversation away from the personal and the moral to something vaguer, more abstract. The question she raises is about worship.

Where should it be offered? On the temple at Mount Gerizim in Samaria or in the temple at Jerusalem in Israel? Who is right? The Samaritans are the Jews. And Jesus says, Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know. Salvation is from the Jews. The hour is coming and is now here when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

For the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit. Those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth. And Jesus points out to her that the time is now at hand.

[26 : 38] There will be no longer any need of a physical temple to have access to God because Jesus Himself is the true temple of the living God.

It's in Him and through Him that men and women will connect with God. worship is not so much about a place as it is about a person. Salvation is from the Jews but it's not only for them.

It's for the whole world. Jews and Samaritans, Gentiles, all who come to faith in Jesus. And this woman is a great example of someone who has spent their life worshipping at the wrong altar.

we're all worshipers. We're all bowing down before something. Everyone worships. Everyone trusts in something. Everyone bases their life on something that requires faith.

The writer, I quoted this a few weeks ago in the evening, a post-mortem novelist, David Foster Wallace once wrote this, if you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough.

[27 : 50] Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure, you will always feel ugly. Worship power and you'll end up feeling weak. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you'll end up feeling stupid.

A fraud, always on the verge of being found out. Whatever you worship, if it is not Jesus Christ, it's going to disappoint you.

This woman's need for a man in her life was really destroying her. I wonder, what are you looking to to complete your life? If it is not Jesus Christ, it will eventually betray you and leave you disillusioned.

It will leave you empty. How important it is to understand this. If God is going to do a work in our lives, our idols need to be exposed.

It's not a painless experience. But it's only then that we can become worshipers of the Father in spirit and truth. What are you worshipping?

[28 : 56] If it is not Jesus Christ and the life-giving water He brings, then it is simply a broken system. a work of divine instigation, divine revelation, divine conviction, finally here and quickly, a work of divine transformation.

Verses 25 to 29, the woman said to Him, I know that Messiah is coming, called the Christ. When He comes, He will tell us all things. Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am He.

Literally, Jesus says, I who speak to you, I am. It may not be a theologically loaded response here, but it's hard not to be aware that this is how Jesus speaks of Himself all the way through this gospel.

Same Greek phrase, I am. Maybe a reference not just to being the Christ, but to being God. I am, Jesus says, the bread of life.

I am the way and the truth and the life. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the true vine. I am the good shepherd. You see, in a sense, Jesus is the man that she has been searching for all her life.

[30 : 11] This whole passage has powerful echoes of these Old Testament well encounters where a bride is wooed by or for her husband. And this woman here, she had had six men.

Now Jesus is the seventh and the last. He is the one who will lay down his life for her. Here is Jesus making this Samaritan woman part of His bride and part of His church.

And it says, Jesus reveals Himself that this woman's life has changed. That is always the case. It's as we come to see who Jesus really is in all His divine glory and majesty and in all His wonderful grace and love that we are drawn to fall at His feet and worship Him.

And this woman's need like ours was not for some good advice, some new religious ritual, some spiritual techniques, but for a relationship with the living God, a relationship with Jesus, a relationship with the Savior of the world, a relationship with Jesus full of grace and truth.

life. And we don't have time to look at the whole rest of the chapter, but there's a profound change that takes place in her life.

[31 : 30] She becomes a true worshiper. She runs into the town to tell others and to bear testimony to Jesus. And her witness, as we discover later in the chapter, has a profound effect on the people.

Her transformed life bears witness to the power of Jesus. Jesus. Bruce Millen, in his Bible Speaks Today, commentary, comments, there are no more attractive evangelists than those who have newly discovered Jesus.

The disciples come back. They marveled that He was talking with a woman. No one said, what do you seek? Why are you talking with her? The woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, come see a man who told me all that I ever did.

can this be the Christ? It's an interesting little observation. John says that the woman left her water jar.

She left the symbol of her empty life at the feet of Jesus. For she had received the living water. She had found the one person in the world who could complete her.

[32 : 43] and her life would never be the same again. Her empty life, like the empty water jar, was left at Jesus' feet.

This poor Samaritan woman with her empty, broken life utterly changed and transformed. And such is that transformation, we can almost imagine her taking to her lips those famous words of Horatius Bonner with which we opened our service this morning.

I came to Jesus and I drank of that life-giving stream. My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in Him.

What about your life this morning? Who or what are you really living for? Whatever it is, lay it down at Jesus' feet and discover for yourself that life-giving water that only He can give.

Bring your broken life to Jesus. For Douglas Copeland was wrong. It can be fixed. It can be restored. It can be mended.

[33 : 54] It can be filled. Are you thirsty? Are you empty? Come and drink these living waters. Tired and broken, peace unspoken, rest beside these living waters.

Christ is calling, find refreshing at the cross of living waters. Lay your life down, all the old gone. Rise up in these living waters.

Come to Jesus Christ. Drink of the life-giving waters. Come and discover for yourself like the woman of Samaria a new life in Him.

Let's pray. Almighty God, we thank You and praise You for Your goodness and grace towards us in Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank You that He is the living waters. Lord, may we come to Him this morning and indeed every day and drink from Him.

[34 : 58] May we know what it is to have our souls filled and satisfied not with the empty things of this world and this life but with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

And we pray these things in His name. Amen.