



INTRO:

Dane Ortlund wrote a book entitled *Gentle and Lowly*/would definitely recommend it. In it, he says this/**listen**: *“The Fall in Genesis 3 not only sent us into condemnation and exile; (it) also entrenched in our minds dark thoughts about God...Perhaps, he says, Satan’s greatest victory in your life today or just the reason for some hurt you’re experiencing, is not the sin in which you regularly indulge/or even which has been done TO you, but (rather) the dark thoughts of God that keep you cool TOWARD God in the wake OF your sin or being sinned against. The Christian life, he says, is a lifelong shedding of tepid thoughts about God.”*

Part of the reason we’re going verse-by-verse through the **Gospel of John**, is to give space to, both, unearth and God-willing correct some of those “tepid thoughts.” In a sense, reimagine what God is really like, FROM God’s own words ABOUT what He’s really like in Christ. The **Gospel of John**, as you know, having been written for precisely that reason...And you’re here on a good week, ESPECIALLY if - like all of us - you either harbor some “tepid thoughts” about God or even more, are in some capacity...hurting today. And I don’t say that lightly, because it is widely believed that the two reasons people most often lose their faith are, **One**, when a preferred lifestyle begins to conflict with their beliefs and **Two**, when they experience some suffering or pain they can’t explain...So...you really are here on a good week, because IN **John** there’s no better passage than ours today for seeing what God is REALLY like, ESPECIALLY to those who are distraught, disillusioned, or just disappointed.

TEXT:¹

So if you would, start with me in **v.1** and let's unpack together this incredible conversation between Jesus and a woman at a well: *“Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that (He) was making and baptizing more disciples than John - uh oh - (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”* or noon...Pause. What John’s doing here is setting the scene, SO THAT you can know everything you need to know in order to really engage the conversation Jesus is about to have with a woman at this well. And what ya find in this scene is that Jesus has shifted His ministry headquarters from Judea to Galilee. Up to this point, Jesus has largely been ministering in and around Jerusalem in a region called Judea. But HERE you see, He shifts to the more outer region of Galilee - left Back Bay/moved to Southie - BECAUSE, you see, things’d begun to heat up, as the Pharisees noticed His rising popularity. So Jesus shifts/not cuz He’s scared of the Pharisees, but because He can’t let the Pharisees amputate His mission of ultimately dying for the sins of the world. So He shifts from Judea to Galilee UNDERSTANDING that the most direct route between the two had you traveling through a place called Samaria. Now a little context for you: Samaria was considered,

¹ Works Consulted:

- “Thirst No More” - Clint Patronella - 1/6/2020 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/sermons-from-seven-mile-waltham/id1253500100?i=1000461700391>
 - “The Living Water” - Knowing Christ, Part 1: 1/10/99 - John 4:4-30 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (NYC: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).
 - “Never Thirst” - Gospel of John, Part 1: 1/20/91 - John 4:5-15 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).
 - “A Scandalous Interaction - 7/27/22 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000571323261>

by Jews at the time, enemy territory. The Samaritans were looked at by the Jews as both racial inferiors and dangerous heretics BECAUSE, in their minds, they'd corrupted the purity of Judaism by melding it with Paganism, to the point that - in competition with the temple at Jerusalem, which we discussed a couple weeks ago - the Samaritans built their own temple on what was called Mount Gerizim and proceeded to say that IT was the true temple of God. So you've got intense religious tribalism COMBINED with the fact that the Samaritans were a people who really only came into being because of Jewish intermarriage with the Assyrians when Assyria conquered Israel some 700 years prior. So to the Jews, the Samaritans were religiously, politically, and culturally dangerous/even disgusting. It's an understatement to say that Jews and Samaritans did not associate. TO THE POINT THAT though going through Samaria provided the shortest route between Judea and Galilee, Jews would OFTEN take the longer, more expensive Uber ride AROUND Samaria just to avoid it.

But not Jesus/Jesus it says, "*HAD to pass through Samaria.*" The language there being not so much that Jesus had no other route/He obviously did, but that He was so desirous/even so constrained by the Spirit as to HAVE to travel through Samaria. Cuz of course, Jesus is on a mission to "*seek and save the lost.*" And in some ways that mission can't be fulfilled UNLESS He goes through Samaria. And TO, it says, a town called "*Sychar*" where He stopped at "*Jacob's Well*" BECAUSE "*he was wearied from traveling.*" Jesus was tired! One of the patterns you see throughout the Scriptures, which shapes our understanding of Jesus as being more than just a good man, or historical teacher is this kind of divinity/humanity see-saw, in which in some episodes you see Jesus' total divinity on display - Him teaching with authority and doing all kinds of miracles/we've seen that! While in OTHER episodes/like here, ya see His full humanity - Him being "*wearied*" for example. And that's BECAUSE Jesus is neither divine NOR human, but rather divine AND human. Fully both/lacking in neither. As John has shown us in previous chapters, He's the God-Man, and as such was as susceptible to getting tired and needing a drink in the middle of the day. A drink at well we're told, "*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.*)"

To this woman's surprise Jesus is not only talking to her, but has taken the initiative TO talk to her. **Why? Why would she be surprised?** Well **One**, she's a Samaritan/Jesus is a Jew, and as we already said and as John says there in **v.9**, Jews didn't associate with Samaritans. But **Two**, she's a woman. And in an incredibly patriarchal society it was considered absolutely beneath a man to talk to a woman in public. You see that alluded to there in **v.27**...And then **Three**, not only was she a Samaritan, and a woman, but she's alone. She's at this well, collecting water, during the hottest part of the day. **Why? Why not wait til morning or evening when all the other women would go? Why be alone?**...And the answer is: because she's a social and moral outcast. As Jesus reveals down in **v.18** this is a woman who's had "*5 husbands*" and even now is living with a man who's "*NOT her husband.*" She's a serial wife - a 5x divorcee - and more than that, is NOW violating every Jewish and Samaritan moral code in living with a man to whom she's not

married! So the reason she's alone is partly that nobody WANTS to draw water with her, and partly that SHE doesn't want to draw water with anybody! ***You see?***

Now, let's be clear here: We don't know WHY this woman is a 5x divorcee and currently shacking up with her boyfriend. Could be any number of things caused BY her or having happened TO her. Could be that she was barren and in a culture that prioritized childbearing, every time a husband found out she couldn't have kids, she got let go... Could be that she'd been abused or was promiscuous or just that she just knows that, no matter what, she needed to BE with a man, given that in this day and time, it was very hard for women to literally survive APART from men. Could be any number of things and we really don't know. But what we DO know is that she's lived a life of immense suffering. Cuz of course nobody goes into marriage intending to get divorced/certainly not 5x over, WITHOUT there being ALOT of pain...to the point that it's almost understandable why she's with but NOT married to a 6th man. Cuz after 5 failed tries, who would wanna enter into a marriage commitment again ***right?*** And that's not to excuse the sin of pre-marital or extramarital sex/doesn't make it right. But it does help us understand her. This is a woman who's lived an exceedingly hard life and to which Jesus is quite scandalously engaging her in conversation! And she knows it's scandalous! *"How is it that you, a Jew, she says, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?"* ***Does that sound familiar?*** Maybe not in terms of Jew/Samaritan or even male/female, but: *"How is it that you, a Republican, interact with me a Democrat? Or you a Democrat, with me a Republican? How is it that you, the rich, the educated, the accomplished, the 1%, approach me the poor, the unlearned, the failure, the 99? ...How is it that you, church, would ever welcome me being gay, queer, having had an abortion, been divorced, unfaithful, addicted."*...Jesus is on a mission to seek and save the lost and He'll cross ANY barrier to fulfill that mission!

"Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that's saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you'd have asked him, and he would've 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 give him will never be thirsty again. The water I 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.'" Amazingly, Jesus takes an everyday REQUEST for drinking water and lovingly turns it into an OFFER of LIVING water. An offer to bring real satisfaction into this woman's life.

Now there's a couple things you gotta see IN Jesus' offer here. ***First***, you gotta see that when Jesus calls Himself *"the gift of God"* He's putting to rest any notion of Him merely being a good teacher, moral man, or even a powerful revolutionary. When you talk about Jesus, you're talking about someone WAY more than just a little religion, a little history or a little morality. You're talking about someone so big as to be called *"God,"* but also so important as to be called a *"gift"* that you can't possibly earn...***Second***, you gotta see that even though this woman clearly isn't initially picking up what Jesus is throwing down - she starts talking about literal wells and how deep they are - Jesus is nonetheless patient with her. He doesn't condemn her. Rather, He

clarifies that He's talking about something AS necessary for life as water, BUT altogether more satisfying. He's patient with her. **2 Peter 3:9** says, *"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."* Jesus as this HUGE yet humble savior...And then **Third**, you gotta see that as a huge, but humble Savior...He's out for your heart. Cuz when Jesus talks about this all-satisfying *"living water,"* ya notice, He does so by essentially making an argument that this woman/ALL of us are irremediably thirsty. In other words, he's saying, the reason this woman/YOU and I need to come to Jesus, is cuz we're thirsty. There's a craving in you for something that nothing in time or space can satisfy, such that anything you're trying to drink IN time or space in order to satisfy that thirst will only ever make you more thirsty. It's like after having gone for a long run and someone puts forth a drink that SEEMS to have all the qualifications for being able to quench your thirst. I mean it's liquid. It's cold. Maybe the person tells you it's sweet. Perfect **right?** But of course, we all know, there's plenty of cold, sweet, liquids out there that, not only, DON'T quench your thirst, but actually leave you THIRSTIER after. This is why you don't see people running marathons and then drinking pancake syrup...Jesus is saying, *"If you put down the bucket of your soul down into any other well/any other cause, pursuit, relationship, comfort, any anything, other than Him, you're gonna find yourself thirstier."*

And look, people in Boston, maybe especially in Southie, we know this better than anyone **right?** Cuz there's just something about the city and a neighborhood IN the city that's filled with social scenes, great sports, development, the beauty of beaches surrounded by skyscrapers and quaint triple-deckers, that almost brings out this longing inside of us. It's why people move here, because there's this sorta the implicit promise of satisfaction and quenching from any number of sources. BUT it's also why, in the midst ALL that promise, you can get - in the very same space - addiction, homelessness, poverty, loneliness, anxiety, and the like. People here to quench their thirst and people here realizing that nothing HERE CAN quench their thirst...Jesus is saying, you gotta recognize this tendency in yourself, and instead of going to yet another man...or woman, party, drink, job, fantasy, even church, ya gotta come to Him...in worship!

And so Jesus says, *"Go, call your husband, and COME here." The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You're right...for you've had five, and the one you now have is not your husband.' What's he doing?* He's getting her to admit that she's spiritually thirsty. Cuz she says, *"I don't have a husband. I'm not spiritually thirsty."* To which Jesus basically says, *"Oh yeah. You're not spiritually thirsty. I know you don't have a husband but that's BECAUSE men have been running your life for years. It's not just one man; it's men, and I know you don't THINK you're spiritually thirsty, but deep-down you thirst for the things only God can give you - closure, acceptance, significance, approval, passion. You just don't recognize it and so you're drinking from the wrong well."* He's getting her to realize that she's spiritually thirsty/inviting her to receive good news by FIRST confronting some of the bad news in her life. Cuz that's always how it has to start. If you're gonna find REAL satisfaction in Christ, you have to first see how you're trying to find satisfaction APART from Christ. It's what the Bible calls repentance - turning FROM something and TO Jesus - raising your "soul-bucket" UP out of empty wells and then lowering it DOWN into Christ.

So the woman says, “*Sir, I perceive you’re a prophet,*” - understatement of the year - “*Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.*” **What’s she saying?** She’s saying “*Jesus I appreciate your insight into my life, but let’s talk theology for a sec. Worshipping on Mt. Gerazim or Jerusalem? What say you?*” Cuz she’s deflecting, since often, when we’re confronted with our sin/our idolatry/just our false hope, it’s REALLY easy to not wanna talk about it **right?**...But again, Jesus is patient with her. 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 don’t know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. - And He’s not making a divisive political statement there so much as just stating OT history. Salvation did come from the Jews - BUT, He says, 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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’ The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah’s coming (he who’s called Christ). When he comes, he’ll tell us all things.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am he.’*” If anyone ever tells you, “*Jesus never claimed to be God,*” just point em to **v.26!** Jesus so clearly revealing Himself as the Messiah, and MORE than that, revealing it to someone at the absolute bottom of the social-religious hierarchy. And **why?** Not because He’s confronting her sin. This is often a passage people cite to say we have to be “*hard on sin*” and “*get in people’s faces when they do wrong.*” But that’s not what Jesus is doing. He isn’t punishing this women. He’s seeking to lead her into peace, by essentially saying, “*I see you. I see that you’re longing for so much more.*” We all are! This was one of C.S. Lewis’ big arguments. He said, “*For every desire you find in a creature there exists a satisfaction.*” So take a duckling. Ducklings wanna swim **right?** Well, that’s BECAUSE there’s such a thing as water. Babies get hungry and thirsty **right?** That’s because there’s such a thing as milk. Men/women have sexual desires not because we’ve evolved or devolved, but because there’s actually such a thing as...sex. And so Lewis says, “*If you find in yourself a deep thirst for which nothing in this world can satisfy, it must mean you were built for another world.*”...Jesus is saying, “*I see you. I see how spiritually thirsty you are. And I’m here to tell you, that thirst is ONLY quenched through worshipping me!*” Worshipping “*in spirit and in truth,*” meaning going beyond ritual, practice, even place AND aligning yourself with how God defines reality in Christ. “*Spirit and truth.*” Anything else will only ever leave you thirsty.

Tom Brady did a interview for 60 Minutes some years ago. He said this, “*Why do I have 3 Super Bowl rings and still think there’s something greater out there for me? And maybe a lot of people would say, ‘this IS it. Reached my goal, my dream, my life...Me? I think, God it’s gotta be more than this.’*” And obviously, Brady’s gone on to add more Superbowl rings, but after his 4th he said this, “*You know what my favorite ring is? The next one.*” Now, you might hear that and think, “*yeah that’s what makes him the GOAT.*” But what you should hear in that is a man who has literally had everything - mansions and money, superbowls and supermodels, and YET has NEVER had satisfaction!...Jesus is telling this woman/telling YOU that all you’ve ever wanted/ all the quenching you’ve ever desired from your job, your spouse, your friends, your hobbies, your fantasies...It’s standing RIGHT in front of you!

So just then Jesus' disciples come back. And it says, "*they marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?"*" - Cuz Jesus is clearly doing something scandalous, but far be it from His disciples to question Him - *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 I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the town and were coming to him.*" Greatest evangelism technique ever! "*Guys, you gotta come meet a guy, who literally just told me all the bad/shameful stuff I've ever done. He's awesome!*" Cuz that's what she's doing. **Why?** ...Cuz maybe for the first time, she knows real love! **You know what real love is?** It's being totally seen and totally accepted! Rejection is when you're seen, but NOT accepted. Superficiality is when you're accepted, but not seen. LOVE is when you're seen - in all your hurts, all your nasty habits, all your traumatic hangups - and still accepted. This woman has become an instantaneous missionary/is willing to go back to all the people, who've likely hurt and judged her in order to tell em, "*Don't look at me. Look at this guy Jesus. He just might be the Christ.*" **And why?** Because she finally now knows real love! As **1 John 4:19** says, "*we love because HE first loved us!*" If this woman was able to know that - with all her history, all her hurt, all her "spiritual PTSD" you might call it - how much more are WE invited to know it, given that Jesus hasn't just told us about our sin, but has actually died for it! You know you've encountered the love of Christ when you're not only willing to freely share your story of Jesus graciously accepting you despite the mess of your life, but when you're urgent to invite others to, essentially, be family with you in order to meet Jesus too...What started as an incredibly **scandalous interaction, becomes this exceedingly hopeful encounter**, because THAT'S what God is really like ESPECIALLY to those who are hurting!

CONCLUSION:

So let me close by just talking maybe a bit personally/pastorally to you. **First**, to those of you who perhaps came in here having a great week/great month/you're even just in a great season of life. Praise God for that! But please understand, if you haven't faced some kind of pain or suffering - I don't mean to be a downer here - you will. At some point, some joy, some dream, some hope, even some loved-one will die, and life will not have turned out the way you'd expected. In that moment, you're gonna find your soul thirsty. That's what pain and hardship do. They expose the wells in which we've been putting our "soul buckets." If that well hasn't been Christ and the love of Christ for you, then when that pain comes, you're gonna run absolutely dry. So even if things are good now, would you consider the wells into which you're putting the bucket of your soul? Cuz if they're anything but Jesus, ya gotta pull em up.

Second, to those of you who, you're here/you've heard all this...and you KNOW you're not satisfied. Maybe you're living with a kinda low-grade ache or maybe you're actively seeking to find satisfaction in people or things that only ever leave you "thirsty." And it seems like no matter what you do - no matter how much ya analyze it, plan against it, get accountability for it, try to escape from it, nothing quenches the thirst. **Friend, can I tell you:** Don't make it more difficult than Jesus does. Jesus says, "*The water I GIVE to you ... If anyone has the water that I GIVE ...*" **You see that?** It's a gift. That means wisdom can't find it. Power can't obtain it. Money can't buy it. Merit can't procure it. It's a GIFT. And not some abstract gift, but a real satisfaction that comes from knowing you belong to the One who sees you to the depths and still

loves you to the uttermost, so much so that He was, as **Romans 5:8** says, “willing to die for you even while you were a sinner.” So in a sense, all you need to do today is simply say, “Lord, I may not even really know what it means or how it’s supposed to look, but I know I need a new heart/a new well/a new source of satisfaction. So I give myself to you. Give me your living water.” That’s all you have to do, because as a gift, all it takes is to be received.

And the **Finally**, to those of you who might be thinking, “Look, I know what we’re talking about. I get it. But I’ve just dug my well so deep/dropped my ‘soul-bucket’ so deep into the wrong sources that I just don’t see the hope/don’t see the peace/don’t even see the ability to bring the bucket back up.” Friend, **listen to me**: On the one hand, yes, stop dropping your bucket in all these wells that never satisfy. But on the other, you gotta see that the hope this woman found wasn’t because she talked to Jesus, but because JESUS went out of His way to find and talk to her. And if Jesus can talk to THIS woman/invite HER to be in and with Him, then He can ABSOLUTELY talk-to and invite you. And NOT to excuse your sin, but to show you He’s already DIED for your sin! Cuz think about it: This woman comes on the heels of Nicodemus in **John 3** last week right? **And who was Nicodemus?** Nicodemus was educated, elite, religiously pure, a man, and named. **But who’s this woman?** She’s uneducated, marginalized, sullied, a woman...and unnamed. And yet Jesus invites BOTH of them - one telling him He needs the Spirit like wind. And the other telling her she needs satisfaction like water. **Because don’t you see?** Jesus is for everyone; no matter who you are, how deep you’ve dug, or how stuck you feel! Cuz as HB Charles says, “**John 3** taught us that no one is beyond the need of grace. But here in **John 4** we see that no one is beyond the REACH of grace.”...**Let’s Pray**: “Lord Jesus, in a moment, as we take up the offering, and reflect together, we pray very simply: Be in EACH of us a spring of water that wells up to eternal life, that we might be satisfied in you! We pray this in your name...!”