

A few months ago, I took a new medicine for the first time. I only had to take it once, but one of the side effects was I lost the ability to taste for about 24 hours. This was not a side effect I was expecting. When I took my first bite of food, I was so confused why it had no flavor. I took a drink of soda but couldn't taste anything. I went for one of my favorite candies, purple skittles—something that explodes with flavor. Nothing! I still ate that day, but nothing felt right. Nothing was enjoyable. Nothing satisfied. I was just going through the motions. What I experienced at a physical level, many of us know at a deeper level, a spiritual level, where no matter what we do, we feel restless and dissatisfied. We know something is off, something is incomplete, and we're getting exhausted and discouraged and we would do about anything for a change. We know this is not the way it's supposed to be. Our souls thirst for something that this world cannot satisfy. That's the very problem Jesus came to address. That's what our passage today in John 4 is all about. Let's dive in.

“Jesus left Judea and went back once more to Galilee” (John 4:3). The reason Jesus was leaving was because his following was growing and the Jewish leaders in the south were growing increasingly concerned about him and hostile to him. Jesus was going back to his home region, which was far less populated. John says, “Now he had to go through Samaria” (John 4:4), which is interesting, because no one *had to go* through Samaria. Jews and Samaritans had deep hatred for one another—Israeli / Hamas type hatred for one another. Jews didn't go into Samaritan territory; they avoided it at all costs. There were plenty of other roads Jesus could have taken, but he had to take this very unexpected road because he had a divine appointment he wanted to keep. “So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there” (John 4:5-6a). Let's pull this up on the map. Jesus was leaving Jerusalem and heading toward Galilee, and he went right through enemy territory to Jacob's well. You can still go there today. Only a few hundred feet away there is a Samaritan museum celebrating the Samaritan history of this region. This well was 7 feet in diameter and over 100 feet deep, fed by an underground spring. It had been used by the Israelite people for nearly 2,000 years. Jesus arrived at his place and “tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon” (John 4:6b). This is not the normal picture we have of Jesus. He's usually calm, poised, and in control, with a little smile at the corner of his lip. But Jesus had been walking in the heat of the day for hours; he was exhausted, trying to catch his breath, and in need of a drink. Jesus came in the flesh. He came near us. Jesus sat down and waited for his appointment to arrive.

“When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)” (John 4:7-8). We begin to see very quickly how surprised this woman was by the interaction: “The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?’ (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)” (John 4:9). Here we see the walls built up that this woman assumed would keep Jesus from interacting with her. This would be like going to the deep South in the 1950s, and a white man walking up to a drinking fountain that clearly said “colored” on it and asking a black woman for a drink from her water bottle. Imagine the shock in that scenario. That's what's happening here. “I am a Samaritan woman.” This woman assumed because of racial and ethnic divides, Jesus would want nothing to do with her. This woman assumed because of gender discrimination, Jesus would want nothing to do with her. These are two enormous strikes. And you know this woman was thinking, “If he knew my past, if he knew who I was and the mistakes I made, if he knew why I was here at the well in the middle of the day unlike all the other women in the village who came in the morning, if he knew my shame, that would be strike three, and this conversation would be over.” But throughout Jesus' ministry we see that the ground is always level in his presence. He loves and dignifies all people. In chapter three he spoke to Nicodemus, a wealthy Jewish man who was educated and part of the highest-ranking group in society, and he pointed him to

eternal life. Here is Jesus talking to someone on the extreme opposite side of the spectrum, a Samaritan woman who is a social outcast, and he is about to point her to eternal life.

Jesus answered her, “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.” “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?” (John 4:10-12)

She was asking questions about the nature of Jesus’ identity. Jesus told her that he had something to offer her that no one else ever had or ever could.

“Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’” (John 4:13-14). Jesus was saying that he could satisfy her thirst at a soul level—not simply something to alleviate her needs for a moment, only to have her needs come up over and over, but something that would meet the deepest needs in her life once and for all.

“The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water’” (John 4:15). Then Jesus made it personal: “He told her, ‘Go, call your husband and come back’” (John 4:16). The reason this was so personal was because her husband was the source of her greatest pain and shame. “‘I have no husband,’ she replied. Jesus said to her, ‘You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.’” (John 4:17-18). Now we see Jesus addressing the area of greatest brokenness and heartache in her life. At face value, it seems harsh. It seems like Jesus is being cruel, that he is finding where this woman hurts the most and is throwing salt in the wound. But Jesus isn’t being mean—he’s being merciful. This was the most loving and gracious thing Jesus could have possibly done in the moment. Why? How’s that? Jesus knew what this woman had been doing her entire life to satisfy her thirst. Jesus knew the “well” this woman had returned to over and over and over again to find meaning, to find value, to find self-worth, to find protection and provision. Whenever this woman’s soul got thirsty, she looked for another human being in a romantic context to meet her needs. And it never worked: five times married, now with a man who is not her husband. That’s the well she’s been going to her entire life. That well is dry. It left her parched, desperate, and hopeless, so Jesus is going right to the heart of the brokenness and emptiness in her life.

She could tell it was getting personal, way more personal than she was prepared for, so she tried to distract Jesus with a theological question that was far less intrusive. Jesus gave her an answer and basically said that what she had believed her entire life was wrong. Then the woman said in John 4:25, “‘I know that Messiah’ (called Christ) ‘is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.’” In other words, one day, all these questions will be answered when God sends the Messiah. “Then Jesus declared, ‘I, the one speaking to you—I am he’” (John 4:26). This phrase, “I am he,” in the original language is the exact same phrase used in the Old Testament when Moses asked God his name, and God spoke from the burning bush and said, “I am who I am.” Jesus was saying, “I am not just a teacher who has come to give you new insights; I am not just a political messiah who has come to bring you liberation. I am the one, true, living God., the one you’ve been waiting for, hoping for, praying for, the one you’ve been assuming would eventually come and make everything right. I’m standing right in front of you. Here I am.” God was graciously pursuing this woman. Last week we read in John 3, “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Jesus came to save people. This woman, for a dozen reasons, was the least likely candidate for salvation. Jesus went out of his way and made a b-line right for her and offered her eternal life.

Then Jesus' disciples returned with food. They were shocked to see their leader talking to this woman. She left her jar and headed back into the village, about a five-minute walk, and she told everyone she could find that the Messiah was here, and he told her everything she had ever done. They believed her, and a huge group of them planned to make their way outside the town to the well to meet Jesus, too.

But before they could come, Jesus started interacting with his disciples. "Meanwhile his disciples urged him, 'Rabbi, eat something'" (John 4:31). We've been on this long journey; you've got to be famished. You need nourishment. "But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about'" (John 4:32). That phrase reminds me of last Sunday night. Keren and the kids and I came to Crave, our high school ministry programming. We wanted to worship with the students, and at the end, I got to come up and pray over one of our high school students who was preparing to go on a several-month-long mission trip to another country. When I was done praying, one of the adult leaders told me that while I was on stage, my son was in a different part of the building, so sweaty from running around that he had taken his shirt off (which is a great look for the pastor's kid). As he was running up and down a hallway, apparently my shirtless kid saw a table that had about 200 cupcakes on it, set out for the students. He was in a trance. She said it was like he was being hypnotized and drawn to it without any ability to resist. When we were on our way home, I asked Hudson if he wanted to grab a burger for dinner, he said, "Dad, I had food to eat you know nothing about." When Jesus said that he had food to eat that his disciples knew nothing about, he wasn't talking about cupcakes; he didn't pack a snack bag they weren't aware of.

"'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work'" (John 4:34). What's the work that he was talking about? Meeting that woman at the well and telling her about eternal life. All the people she told about him were on their way; they were about to place their faith in him as well. Jesus said you can forget your sandwich; what fuels me isn't a few more calories in my system. It's living on mission, walking in alignment with God's will for my life and seeing people come to salvation.

Jesus has just had two conversations back-to-back, each of which dealt with a visceral need in every human being. Jesus says he can satisfy our thirst and satisfy our hunger better than anything this world has to offer. I want to dive into each of those two spectacular claims!

First, *only God's presence will satisfy your deepest thirst*. We see this in 4:13-14: "Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'" When we drink physical water, it meets our needs for a few moments, maybe for a few hours, or at very most, for a few days. We always, always, always need another drink. The same is true for the deeper areas of life, our deepest need for purpose, meaning, fulfillment, belonging. As people, we are hard wired to seek fulfillment, purpose, and belonging. Some do it through academics, some through sports, some through music, some through romantic relationships, some through friendships, some through gaming, some through success, some through wealth, some through possessions, some through promotions—like we all have a need for water to satisfy our physical thirsts, we all have a need, at an emotional, psychological and spiritual level, to satisfy our inner thirsts, our inner longings. Jesus is saying that nothing in this world will ultimately satisfy what our hearts are craving. This woman knew that. She had been married five different times and was now with a man she wasn't married to. Time after time after time, searching for fulfillment, searching for connection, searching for something that would bring her lasting joy, each time ending with her hopes dashed against the rocks.

Solomon discovered the same thing. He was a king who ruled nearly 1,000 years before Christ. He constructed some of the greatest buildings in the history of the world. He had unparalleled wealth, incredible power, and hundreds upon hundreds of wives. He knew every pleasure imaginable. But in

Ecclesiastes 2:17 he wrote, “I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” You can spend your entire life chasing after the wind and you’re never going to catch it. You can spend your entire life looking to satisfy that deep, inner thirst through what this world has to offer, and you’ll be just as thirsty as before. Jim Carrey is well known for saying: “I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of...so they can see that it’s not the answer.” He’s tried it all, and he’s saying that’s not it.

One of the books I recommended to you last week is CS Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*. In it he says, “If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.” Only a connection with that other world, only a relationship with God and truly encountering his presence will satisfy that longing. St. Augustine said, “You have formed us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

This is the offer Jesus extended to this woman: to find rest, to find hope, to find peace, to find purpose, to find love, meaning, and belonging, not in a relationship, a marriage, status, success, wealth, or anything else she might propose, but in him. This is the same invitation he extends to you: to find what your soul is thirsty for in the one and only place that can meet that longing! Later in John’s gospel Jesus says:

- “Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them” (John 7:38).
- “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).
- “This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

This is what Jesus came to make available: rivers flowing from within us, life to the full, eternal life. The world can’t offer it, but Jesus can. God’s presence, and God’s presence alone, will satisfy your deepest thirst.

That sets the stage for our second take away: *only God’s mission will satisfy your deepest hunger*. We see this in Jesus’ interaction with the disciples. They went into town to get food. They assumed when they came back to Jesus he would be famished and ready for a sandwich, but “Jesus said: ‘I have food to eat that you know nothing about’” (John 4:32). They were confused and he clarified: “‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work’” (John 4:34). Like our souls thirst in such a way that they will only ever be satisfied with God’s presence, our souls also hunger in a way that will only ever be satisfied by living our lives on mission and allowing God to use our lives to bring him glory by drawing others into relationship with him.

This is not only a task for pastors and missionaries. Roughly 1 out of every 75 Christians works full time in Christian work. There are a few who are called to work at a church or a Christian non-profit and give their entire vocation to telling people about Jesus and making disciples, but even though that may not be your full-time job, this is still a calling God has placed on your life. He has called you to give your time, energy, effort, passion, prayers, creativity, and resources to help others come to know him!

- “‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you’” (Matthew 28:19-20).
- “‘We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us’” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

This is something we are all called to do. There is something inside of you that simply won't be complete until you make this the focus of your work.

I have a good friend who attends this church who recently started going door to door, knocking to introduce himself to potential clients. Before he left the office, he prayed with his co-worker, not asking to make sales or grow business, but to be used by God to serve people he put in their path. That day he knocked on a door and a woman answered who was clearly in emotional distress. My friend asked if she was ok. She said that both her daughter and one of her grandchildren had just passed away. My friend prayed with her and connected her to the grief share ministry here at The Creek. He experienced the joy of not only "doing his job" but living on mission.

I know a mom of a newborn who attends The Creek. Whenever her child is feeding, she opens her Bible app and listens to the Scriptures. Not only is she soaking in God's word, but in the first year of her child's life, they will have had the entire Bible read aloud over them. She's not only raising children, but she's also making disciples and living on mission.

I have a friend who left a marketplace vocation to teach in middle school to make an impact on the lives of people in his community. Last week, before school started again, he walked through his classroom, sat down at each desk, and prayed for every one of his students by name. He's not only going to work, but he's also living on mission.

I have a friend who is a lieutenant colonel in the military who attends this church. He has been deployed multiple times and has hundreds of people under his command. Not only does he shine the light of Jesus at work, but for many years, he has given two of his evenings every single week to disciple the students of our church. God has called him to make disciples and he is saying yes!

I have a friend who attends this church who sold his company and made an incredible profit. Instead of buying a new house or a new car, he gave a huge donation to this church and said, "Let's change more lives for Jesus!" He's using his entrepreneurial skills to advance the kingdom.

No matter what you do—teacher, military commander, stay-at-home mom, salesmen, server—God is calling you to live on mission. Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Until you say yes to God and align the focus of your life with the focus of God's kingdom, until you are resolute that you are going to give your effort today for things that will last for eternity, there will always be a sense of discontentment, of spinning your wheels, of chasing after the wind. Only God's presence will satisfy your deepest thirst. Only God's mission will satisfy your deepest hunger.