

The Fountain of Living Water – John 4:1-15
Luke 3:19-20, 4:14a/Matthew 4:12/Mark 1:14a
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
Union Baptist Church – July 8, 2018

I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

As we begin our study of Scripture this morning, I just want to ask a few simple questions to help prepare your heart for what God is going to teach us in today's passage. As you think about your daily life, where does the Holy Spirit fit in as you go through each day? Does he have any role to play? What are the ways that you're interacting with him and seeking his work in your life on a typical day? If we were to walk through your day with you, would we see evidence that would lead us to believe that your Spirit-led and walking by his power? What would that evidence be? The Holy Spirit is described with many metaphors throughout Scripture...fire...wind...water...oil...and several others, and today Jesus is going to lead us into the Holy Spirit as living water. And what we'll need to consider is: *Am I drinking his living water and allowing him to quench my thirst, sustain and energize me, and flow out of me to others?*

Turn with me in your Bibles to John chapter 4, where we'll be focusing on verses 1 through 15 this morning. As we continue working our way through Jesus' life as recorded for us in the Gospels, we're picking up shortly after Jesus and his disciples had left Jerusalem following the first Passover of Jesus' public ministry, and had begun baptizing people in the surrounding countryside. This baptizing ministry was taking place simultaneously with John the Baptist's continuing ministry of baptism, and for John's disciples this had seemed like unwelcome competition.

But most recently in our study, we saw John patiently explain to his disciples that there was no need to worry or compete, because Jesus was what all the baptisms were about anyway and John's role had simply been to prepare the way for Jesus. Now John was perfectly content with stepping aside and putting all the attention on Jesus. And this is where we pick up this morning.

II. JESUS IN THE SPIRIT IN SAMARIA (Verses 1 to 6)

Let's begin with verses 1 through 6 of John chapter 4, which I've labeled in your sermon notes: *Jesus in the Spirit in Samaria*. I'm first going to read verses 1 through 3 of John chapter 4 and then we'll pause and add some additional details from Matthew and Luke before we read verses 4 through 6. So here we go: verses 1 through 3:

1 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.

We see here that Jesus had gotten wind that the Pharisees – who already hated John the Baptist since he had called them a brood of vipers and refused to baptize them unless they repented – these Pharisees had now heard that more people were flocking to Jesus for baptism than John. We can also conclude that most of the Pharisees already despised Jesus as well after he had humiliated them when he cleansed the temple. They would have been none too happy that attention was now shifting to Jesus. So upon hearing that the Pharisees were aware of what was going on and would likely be focusing on him now, Jesus left the Judean countryside to go north to Galilee.

But as we consider for a moment what Matthew and Luke have to say about this time period in Jesus' ministry, we discover more information about why Jesus decided to return to Galilee at this time. And his decision had to do with two key factors. First of all, with the fact that John the Baptist had been arrested by Herod and thrown into prison. Luke 3, verses 19 to 20, say this:

19 But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by [John] for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, 20 added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

And Matthew 4:12 adds this:

12 Now when [Jesus] heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.

After hearing of John's arrest by Herod and that the Pharisees would now be shifting their attention to Jesus instead of John, Jesus decided to leave the area. But this decision of Jesus was not motivated by fear. Instead, it was a decision prompted by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And this is the second, and really the primary factor, that led to his decision to return to Galilee. If you'll remember, Jesus has already been described in what we've previously studied of the Gospels as *full of the Holy Spirit* and following his lead in everything. We've seen that he's doing nothing without consulting and following the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And this is the second piece of information we discover as we look at the other Gospels. Luke 4:14 says this:

14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee,...

Far from being a human decision based on fear for his life, Jesus withdrew to Galilee out of sensitivity to the Spirit and God's timing. Jesus had much to do and accomplish over the next 3 years leading to the cross, and the Spirit indicated that the best choice for now was to lay low and get out of the hot-bed of the Pharisees animosity and Herod's desire to suppress John's criticism of his ungodly, immoral choices.

I do find it interesting that John the Baptist wasn't afraid to speak God's truth even to an immoral king who had the power to destroy and snuff out his life with just a word. Perhaps this has some relevance to us today in the era of political correctness, when Christians often stay silent and avoid taking a public stand on anything that could be slightly political. Did you know that Scripture teaches that one of the jobs of the church in the world is to be a pillar and support of the truth? This doesn't mean we're to be the moral police of the world, but it does mean that we are called to take a stand for right and wrong according to Scripture and be willing to publicly share God's perspective on issues. John the Baptist was certainly willing to do that and at great risk to himself.

So now that we've gotten some additional context on Jesus' decision to leave the Judean countryside and return to Galilee, let's see what else the Spirit had in mind for him on his return trip. Picking up in verse 4 of John chapter 4:

4 And [Jesus] 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.

We first need to notice that phrase, “had to pass.” On the surface it would appear that in order to get to Galilee the only way was through Samaria. But a closer look at the Greek here and an understanding of the geography and culture of the time indicates otherwise. The Greek word translated, “had,” in English has to do with something being necessary in order to accomplish a certain purpose; especially used in Scripture for “necessity established by the counsel and decree of God” (*Blue Letter Bible*). Also, owing to the history of the Jewish people and the Samaritans and the continuing conflict between them, Jews traveling from Judea to Galilee would typically avoid Samaria altogether by traveling on the east side of the Jordan River.

So it appears that Jesus had to pass through Samaria for reasons other than geographical necessity. What we find is that the Holy Spirit was leading him through Samaria on a mission – for a specific purpose that God wanted to accomplish near a town called Sychar. And if you haven’t noticed yet in your walk with God, the Holy Spirit quite frequently leads us to unusual places we wouldn’t ordinarily go apart from his direction.

Well you might be interested to know that the town of Sychar and the place where Jacob’s well is located is a place you should be quite familiar with from our recent study of Joshua. Do you remember the mountains of blessing and cursing in Joshua and the ancient town of Shechem, where Joshua and the Israelites built an altar and set up stones containing God’s Law? Well, Sychar was located in this same area, somewhere on or between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. And the *ESV Study Bible* identifies “the probable location [of Jacob’s well as actually]...in modern [day] Nablus...[or] OT...Shechem. This well – which is still there today, by the way – was once covered with vaulted stone and a Byzantine (4th-7th century A.D.) church. It is quite deep...It was also at the juncture of major ancient roads and near the traditional sacred site of Joseph’s tomb.” The town of Sychar is thought to be the modern day village of Askar, which is about 1 mile northeast of Jacob’s well (*NET Bible*).

So this same place where God had, much earlier in history, done some amazing things with Abraham, Jacob, Joshua and the Israelites, is where Jesus and his

disciples arrived at just the right moment under the direction of the Holy Spirit. And around noon, while his disciples traveled to Sychar to get food, a tired and thirsty Jesus sat down beside Jacob's well in the heat of the day.

III. JESUS AND THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATER (Verses 7 to 15)

Well, let's see now what God had planned at this unusual location for a Jew in the middle of Samaritan territory. Picking up in verse 7 of John chapter 4:

7 There came a woman of Samaria 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 forever. 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."

Now to properly understand the full significance of Jesus' conversation with this Samaritan woman, we need to understand a little Samaritan history. People living in Samaria "were descendants of two groups: 1) The remnant of native Israelites who were not deported after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.; 2) Foreign colonists brought in from Babylonia and Media by the Assyrian conquerors to settle the land with inhabitants who would be loyal to Syria" (*NET Bible*). And, of course, people from these two groups had intermarried over the years, so that Samaritans were considered "half-breeds" by Jews.

Additionally, if you're familiar with Jewish history, when the Israelite kingdom was divided into North and South after the death of King Solomon, the Northern

Kingdom set-up the town of Samaria as its own center of worship instead of Jerusalem. The kings of the North didn't want their people going to worship in Jerusalem and then becoming disloyal to them and joining the Southern Kingdom led by the tribe of Judah. This of course added to the opposition and conflict between Jews and Samaritans because Samaritans continued refusing to worship in Jerusalem. This conflict reached a fevered pitch in 128 B.C. when "the Jewish high priest...[actually] burned the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim" (*NET Bible*).

So the division and conflict and cultural separation between Jews and Samaritans was no small thing. And for Jesus, a Jew, to speak to a Samaritan woman and ask her to give him a drink was to cross a huge cultural barrier. Which helps to us understand the woman's response to Jesus' request for a drink: **"How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?"** And in case we're still in the dark on why she would be surprised, John adds a parenthetical note: **(For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans).**

Well, Jesus, always using every opportunity to make people think and lead the conversation deeper, turns the tables on the woman's question. Rather than just giving a reason why he was asking her for water...like...*I'm so desperately thirsty I don't care who gives me water...* Jesus points her away from her human concern about what's culturally appropriate to the heavenly reality that's staring her in the face. He says: *If you knew the gift of God and my true identity, you would quickly forget about the worldly barriers between us and ask ME for a drink. If you could put your earthly perspective aside for just a moment and see what's really going on here and who I actually am, you'd forget about those walls people have put up between Jews and Samaritans and simply ask me for what you and all people desperately need: flowing, life-giving water that will satisfy your thirst forever.*

As we were so recently reminded in John chapter 3, Jesus himself is God's love gift to the world and the Giver of eternal life to those who believe in him and are spiritually born again by the Holy Spirit. And here at Jacob's well, where a troubled and confused woman with a very thirsty soul had come to draw water, Jesus was offering living water to a woman of the world who, like the rest of us, so desperately needed it and longed for it.

A few chapters later in John, in chapter 7, verses 37 to 39, Jesus and John connect this living water Jesus was offering with the Holy Spirit. John writes:

37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Well, before we get too theoretical in John chapter 4 about what Jesus meant by living water, we need to understand that he's specifically talking in symbolic terms about the Holy Spirit and his work of raising spiritually dead people to new spiritual life, and then empowering them to live their new life in Christ and accomplish God's purposes. But of course, all this was way over the head of the woman at the well at this point. As happened with Nicodemus, she took Jesus literally and was quite skeptical of his claim to be someone significant who could provide a new source of flowing, life-giving water. She said, in a loose paraphrase: *Where do you propose to get this life-giving water since you don't even have anything to draw it out with? Are you really claiming to be greater than Jacob who was quite satisfied with the water from this very well and even gave it to his own sons and his livestock?*

Well, Jesus realized this woman needed to understand that he was talking about a very different type of water than what she was thinking about. So he gave her a contrast between the water of Jacob's well and the living water he alone could give her. Water from Jacob's well was good and would temporarily satisfy your body's thirst for water. But it would only be temporary and soon you would have to come back to the same place to get more of it. In contrast, the living water Jesus was offering her would satisfy her thirst forever...not just for a while until she had to come back and get more...and not only that, it would become inside of her a continuous, bubbling, leaping fountain of water springing up to eternal life. The picture Jesus gave her is twofold: 1) a permanent thirst-satisfying; and 2) a never-ending, pure source of rushing spring water. And if you incorporate the John 7 passage, it's also living water that flows out of a person's heart like a river and brings life to other people.

The Old Testament has numerous pictures of this kind of living water which always finds its source in the Lord himself. Jeremiah twice describes speaks of the fountain of living water and both times identifies it as the LORD himself...***the LORD, the fountain of living water*** (Jeremiah 17:13; Cf. Jeremiah 2:12-13). There's no other fountain of living water than the LORD himself. Isaiah also has several pictures of the LORD providing living water and he's always described as providing that water to those who ask him for it and seek it him alone. Listen to these passages from Isaiah:

Isaiah 12:2-4

2 "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation." 3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. 4 And you will say in that day: "Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted.

Isaiah 41:17-18

17 When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them. 18 I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

Isaiah 43:18-21

18 "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. 19 Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

20 The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, 21 the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

And all these passages in Isaiah are, of course, leading up to Isaiah 53...that powerful prophetic chapter describing the new thing God promises to do through the suffering Servant, Jesus Christ. Through Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit given to those who believe in him, God makes rivers in the desert, water in the

wilderness, fountains of living water that spread eternal life to spiritually dead people. And notice from that last Isaiah passage that God gives drink to his chosen people, who are described as *the people he created for himself SO THAT they would declare his praise*. The living water of the Holy Spirit satisfies our thirst, brings us to eternal life, and is meant to flow out of us to others as we praise God for what he's done and offer the hope he's given us in Christ to others.

Well, the woman at the well was still not quite getting it. She didn't have the full picture of Scripture like we do to inform her thinking and help her understand what Jesus was talking about. And this was all coming from a strange Jew she had just met who was making some very hard to believe claims. So even after the contrast Jesus provided between water from Jacob's well and the living water he would provide, she was still thinking literal water and I think continued having a hard time buying it. She said: **"Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."** This is my interpretation, but I take this statement to be made with a little sarcasm. Like: *This sounds a bit too good to be true, but yeah please, give me some of that magic water and then I won't have to keep coming out here every day to get more water.*

Well, this is where we're going to stop for today, and in our next message we'll see how Jesus gets her past her continued skepticism. This is *to be continued...*

IV. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

But as we wrap up and consider briefly what this all means for us today, I don't want us to miss the significance of the Holy Spirit as living water springing up within us like a fountain and then flowing out of us like a river. This is a profound picture that we need to embrace and understand and live out of in our daily lives. This isn't just a good word picture, but instead, the Holy Spirit as living water expresses the essence, the lifeblood, the heartbeat of eternal life in Christ and how we live it.

Did you know that in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit is mentioned specifically 92 times? How many times do you think the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the New Testament? 234 times! And the Old Testament is significantly longer than the New Testament. Do you think something drastically different related to the Holy Spirit might be happening? Fifty-five of those New Testament references to the

Spirit are in the book of Acts alone, which records the acts of the first believers in Christ...the first people who were baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit...the first who drank the Holy Spirit's living water and allowed that water to flow out from them like rivers throughout the world!

Jesus, in this conversation with the woman at the well about living water, was not just talking about some minor changes God was making in how things work in God's kingdom. His promise of living water to those who ask announced the long-promised day when, through the work of Christ on the cross, God the Holy Spirit, the Lord himself, the fountain of living waters, would wake people up from spiritual death and separation from him and would actually take up residence inside of them permanently, making them willing and able to live life with him and walk in his power...the day when the soul thirst every human being has for God could finally be satisfied forever for those who would simply believe in Jesus and through him find peace with God and be able to walk through life connected with him and filled with his power.

What had been described in Ezekiel 36 was finally here.

25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

This was not a minor change. This was earth shattering. And this is the true, present reality those of us who are in Christ live in today, whether we realize it or not. The Christian life is not meant to be lived in our own strength as we try to get busy doing things for God. That's a recipe for exhaustion and burnout. We are meant to live instead out of the bubbling fountain of the Spirit inside us, as we turn to him moment by moment and live a life of continual asking for what we need and then walking forward with trust that he will provide as we go.

And what I'd like to leave each of us with today, is the challenge to evaluate our own lives and to see if that's really the way we're living. Are we continually seeking and drawing on and drinking from the fountain of living waters that's

bubbling up inside us and ready to burst out and flow to other people? How are we doing that and is it a side note to everything else we're doing, or is it the energizing, empowering lifeblood that fills us up and makes us effective and fruitful in accomplishing God's will in our lives? One of the best gauges that will reveal whether or not we're really walking by the Spirit is the importance of prayer in our lives. If we're not praying, or if it's just something we're doing occasionally because we know we should, then we're not totally convinced yet that the Holy Spirit is the key to everything we do and truly is the fountain of living waters that quenches our soul thirst, gives us what we need for life, and brings life to other people.

What I see in my own life so often is a tendency to self-reliance and busy-ness, a resistance to pausing for even a moment to ask for what I need, and a resulting low-grade despair and anxiety about what difficult thing God might ask me to do next. And when I live like this, at the end of the day all I want to do is drop onto the couch in exhaustion. My friends, we daily have a choice to try and go it alone, to think it's all up to us, or to continually drink in the living water of the Spirit dwelling inside as we seek and ask and learn to listen and follow him wherever he leads.