

# John 4:1-26

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen.

And first 26 verses again. This story of the woman of Samaria. Before we look at this, let's turn to the Lord in prayer again.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for this, your holy word.

And we ask you, trusting in Christ's merits and depending on your Holy Spirit's power, that our reading and hearing of your word this morning would be effectual to save and keep saving us.

And so we ask for your help that we may listen diligently, readily and prayerfully. Help us to receive your word with faith and love.

[ 1 : 22 ] Lay it up in our hearts and practice it in our lives. To the glory of your great name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. Well, as we read this encounter of Jesus and this woman in Samaria, we are in a sense at the end of the first act of the good news story as John presents it to us.

He has played the magnificent overture in the opening of chapter 1, where he's introduced us to the main character, which he starts by calling the Word. And he's also called it the light.

And this is the light that does two things in this book. It's the light that is. The light who is creator. The light who is the light of all men.

The light who is the reason for which and the means by which all people are created. The light for whom we all live. The light that makes itself known to all who are alive, however much they might try and deny it.

The light that is. And he's the light that comes. Ever since darkness entered into the world, the light who is, as creator, has been coming as redeemer.

[ 2 : 41 ] The light that has been coming has been rejected by the darkness. Not received by his own, his own creation. But this light has kept coming.

Until a great climactic day when this light came as the Word became flesh. And lived among us. Full of the glory of God.

Jesus Christ, full of God's glory, came to be the tabernacle for God's people. The meeting point between God and man. And John has introduced us to another John.

John the Baptist. Who introduced and prophesied the coming of this light into the world as a lamb. Who would take away the sins of the world and reconcile us to God.

And as he did so, we see some of his disciples, those who understand what he's saying, transferring their discipleship to Jesus. At which point, John presents us the big event in this first act of the story, at a wedding in Cana.

[ 3 : 47 ] And Jesus gives the first of seven signs that we see in this book. A sign that would explain what he has come to do. And John has given a lot of teaching about what Jesus has come to do, since that scene.

Mainly in conversations with various people along the way. Until we come to this final scene in the act. This is the final scene change. Before the end of this act. And what John gives us in this scene, on the one hand, summarises all that he's said about Jesus so far.

But it also brings a new dimension to it. It helps us to see it in a new light. He literally takes us to a new place to get this new perspective. We even go beyond the Jewish territory into Samaria.

We see the beginning of the chapter. And so here is the light arriving in a new place, which allows us to see what it looks like for the light to arrive somewhere new.

What is it like when Jesus comes on the scene for the first time in someone's life? And to get us ready for this summary and for this fresh perspective, John rocks the boat a little bit.

[ 4 : 54 ] He makes us do a double take, which is what he's doing in verses 6 and 7. Imagine you're going on a journey with some friends and you take a break on the long drive and you stop in a pub

or a restaurant.

There's hardly anyone else in there except for one woman who's just sat at the bar. And while you're waiting for your food to arrive, one of your friends goes up to this woman at the bar and says, Do you come here often?

You might understandably ask at that point, What on earth is he doing? Is he trying to chat her up or something while we're in the middle of a long drive?

What is he doing? That is basically what some of the readers in John's day must have thought when they got to verse 7. You might not think that immediately, but it is a classic line that would make you think that.

Here's a man who's gone to a well and he talks to a woman at that well and asks her for a drink. That is a classic, almost cliché, chat-up line in the ancient world.

[ 6 : 05 ] And you'll see that in the Old Testament. That is exactly how Abraham's servant found a wife for Isaac. Jacob too, who had actually given this well. Maybe it was even at this well that they met.

He'd given this well to Samaria. That's exactly how he met Rachel. That's exactly how Moses met his wife. That if you'd watched a rom-com in those days where the man goes to talk to a woman at the well, you'd have complained about how unoriginal this story was.

Could it possibly be that Jesus is doing the same thing here? Given everything that John has said about Jesus so far, it is a pretty surprising turn of events. On the one hand, John has spoken of Jesus as a bridegroom.

That has been there. John the Baptist has called him a bridegroom. And he's even spoken about how he has no right to untie his sandal. The way Boaz did have the right to take the sandal of an unworthy redeemer.

Jesus is the worthy bridegroom. And John has no right to take his place. He's the one who was the true master of the wedding feast at Cana. But he made it very clear then that this was not his time.

[ 7 : 12 ] This was not his hour. But the way John has spoken about him, even in calling him a bridegroom, he has made it sound like it's about something much greater than just finding him a woman to marry.

So when we read Jesus saying, what is basically this classic Chesot line, it catches us off guard. You've got to wonder what on earth is going on. Have I missed something so far?

Now you might be helped right in thinking about all the times that water has come up in John's gospel, and every time water has come up so far, it's never just about the water. So there might be something more going on.

But you're still bound to ask, have I misunderstood what Jesus is looking for? Would you take me through this again, John? And that is exactly what he does.

And if we're surprised, we're not alone, because the Samaritan woman was pretty surprised herself. Our surprise is based on everything we've known about her, about Jesus so far.

[ 8 : 17 ] Her surprise too was based on what she knew about him. Except all she knew about him was that he's a Jewish man. That's all she knows about him. And just as we're starting to ask ourselves questions, it's the woman who actually gets to ask the questions to Jesus himself.

And so this woman is our guide, in a way, as we look for some answers from Jesus. And she's going to discover who Jesus is in four steps as we go along this conversation.

The starting point for her, the first step, as far as she knows, is this man has nothing to do with me. This man has nothing to do with me.

That's where she starts off. That's what she thinks. And she might understandably assume that the feeling is mutual. She would expect a Jewish man to think, this woman has nothing to do with me.

A Samaritan woman. But here he is asking for a drink. And as she points out to him, how weird it is for him to speak to her.

[ 9 : 21 ] Verse 9, How is it that you, a Jew, Jewish man, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria? John points out how weird it is in verse 10.

She's not wrong. Jews don't have dealings with Samaritans. Not to mention how strange it is for a man to be speaking to a woman out in public. And yet Jesus' answer is basically, it isn't weird in the slightest.

Because if you knew what I have to offer, if you knew what the gift of God is that I am proposing to the world, you'd be asking me for what I have. So why wouldn't I ask you for what you have to offer?

It's rather an intriguing answer, isn't it? So she takes the bait. As she does so, she discovers in verses 10 to 15, this man has something I'm interested in.

That's the second step of her discovery. This man has something I'm interested in. The beginning, of course, she doesn't get what he's talking about. Have you got some bucket hidden away somewhere?

[10:26] Do you have some secret special well that I don't know of? Can you somehow do better than our great patriarch Jacob who gave us this well and drank at this well with his family?

And Jesus basically says in verses 13 to 14, yes, I am greater than Jacob. I've got a far better well than this one. I've got a well that stops you from thirsting again.

With this well, you'll have a well springing up inside of you to eternal life. And boy, is she interested. And not just because she's fed up of having to fetch water every day.

Because look at what's going on here. She's fetching water at the sixth hour. That's that midday. That is not normal. Evening is when the women would usually come out to fetch water.

This woman has chosen the least likely, least convenient time to fetch water. She comes in the blazing midday sun. Nobody else in their right mind would come at this time of day.

[11:35] And that's probably just the point. It's probably just what she wanted. She'd pick the time when she's least likely to bump into anyone else. This woman is alone.

This woman is sad. And she's ashamed. And so she answers, Oh, sir, give me this water. So I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.

And at this point, when she's shown some of her colours, Jesus' response is to show her that he's a prophet. And so she comes to a third step in discovering who he is.

She learns, This man knows me well. He knows all about me. Just as she asks for this water that would spare her from thirsting and having to make this painful daily trip to fetch water alone, Jesus, seemingly out of nowhere, says, Go get your husband.

And she replies, But she has no husband. Now at this point, Jesus could keep on with the diagnostic questions, couldn't he? That's often what he does. And in these days, under the new covenant, singleness is a normal way to live.

[12:48] That's not a strange thing to say, I have no husband. End of conversation. But in this period here, to be a single woman was a strange thing. It meant you had no provision. It meant you were completely destitute.

So for Jesus to ask her, and then to assume that she was married, would be a normal thing. And it would be a normal thing to ask, Well, how come?

What's going on? Why didn't he ask for questions then? He doesn't do that. He takes this opportunity to show her that he knows what's going on. He reveals who he is and what he knows. Verse 17, 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. Now we don't know whether she's been widowed five times, or divorced five times.

And if they're divorces, we don't know whether the fault was hers or the husband's fault each time. Whatever happened here, we can see that she's been stigmatized.

[13:49] She's ashamed. There are bound to be rumours going around whether or not they were right. And she's in so much need that her best bet now was to accept a situation where she lives with a man who won't marry her.

And in this painful situation here, here comes a man who reveals to her that he knows. He knows her. He knows what's happened to her.

He knows what is happening to her. He knows where she is. Here is a prophet who knows her well. He knows all about her. And so in verse 19, she says, Sir, I perceive that you're a prophet.

And you might think that many seem to do that what she says next is a sort of a diversion tactic. He's asking personal questions. But he's a prophet. He's into theology.

So I'm not asking a theological question. And that will distract him for a while. But if we think that, and a lot of commentators do, I think that reveals more about us than about her.

[14:57] And it's especially recent commentators who do this. I think that reveals more about our attitudes than it does about her. because don't you think if she was trying to distract him with something irrelevant he'd been able to tell?

Do you not think that he'd be able to spot it and bring it back to the heart of the matter if that is the heart of the matter? Of course he could. But he doesn't do that. This conversation is going the way

Jesus wants it to go.

On the one hand, yes, she does have these relational issues that need to be addressed. But what has Jesus done in revealing his prophetic knowledge of her situation rather than just asking questions?

He hasn't just brought her situation into the conversation but he's brought up God and his knowledge of the situation into the conversation. When she says I perceive you're a prophet she's not saying wow, that was impressive or how do you know that?

She knows at this point that in this man God has come to speak into her life. And so she shows that she knows deep down what she needs more than anything is reconciliation with God.

[16:17] But she belongs to a people in Samaria that has developed their own practices and beliefs. They only accept the first five books of the law for example not the rest of the Old Testament.

They've set up an alternative centre of worship in Samaria a different mountain to worship on. They've always defied themselves by not belonging to the Jews. So that question is bound to hang over her head now isn't it?

And would have done all her life who's right? Who really knows God? Can I be reconciled with God being a Samaritan if they're right? And here is one who clearly speaks as one sent by God who can speak to her even in the darkness of her life in her sin and suffering but it's a man of God speaking to her.

And so in this fourth step she learns this man can sort out the most important question in my life.

This man can sort out the most important question in my life.

And the way she frames the issue is as an issue of mountains. Because that is the main question that has been hanging over these two rival societies for centuries. And she's not asking this question of which mountain should be used for worship as though it's just a bit of theological trivia.

[17:39] Just a bit of theory to just distract ourselves with. No, no, she's really wondering how can you a Jew ask me a Samaritan at the beginning and by now she's wondering how can you speak of God's gift to me as a Jewish prophet speaking on God's behalf as though this difference between Jew and Samaritan didn't matter.

Of course it matters. We've got to get this question sorted. Maybe she's starting to wonder if God is speaking to me through a Jewish prophet have we been wrong all this time?

Do I need to move? Do I need to leave all my family and all this community? Do I need to convert over there? Do I need to swallow my national prize and cross over to another mountain?

Should all of us be over there? And the answer is on the one hand that God's dealings God's salvation yes does indeed come from the Jews.

On the one hand yes you have been wrong. You've been worshipping what you don't know. But Jesus tells her that there's not only going to be a change in her own life story. It's not just about going to move to another mountain.

[18:55] There's going to be a shift in the story of the whole world. The idea of a temple on a mountain was only ever meant to be symbolic. It was only there as a temporary picture.

God doesn't live in particular temples on particular mountains on earth. God is spirit. He doesn't have a body like man. He is spirit. And so he's worshipped in spirit and in truth.

The day that the temple symbolized has come. It is coming. It has come. The worship of God can now be a global phenomenon.

Worship will no longer be in sketches and copies as this temple in Jerusalem is. even a bad sketch or copy in Samaria. The real thing, real living, fellowship with God is now a worldwide reality.

As people from every tribe, every tongue, every nation come to the heavenly Mount Zion, the heavenly temple that he has established. Just as we've done today in gathering.

[20:01] That is where we have come. It's a reality that he himself has come to bring in. Not just tell us about, but he's come to bring it. That's not something she grasped straight away and so she says, well, we'll at least have certainty when Messiah comes.

And so we come to this great climax of the conversation in verse 26. I who speak to you am he. The word order in English does make it obvious, but this is the first time in John's gospel that he uses that phrase I am.

I myself am. There are seven times in this book where he says I am something. I am the good shepherd, I am the way, the truth and life, I am the bread of life.

And there are seven times when he just says I am or I myself am. Echoing God's language of I am who I am in the Old Testament. And here's the first, I myself am the one speaking to you. And so here she fully learns. This man doesn't just answer the biggest question in her life, but fully resolves it, fully sorts it out.

[ 21 : 12 ] Because he doesn't just answer the question, he shows himself to be God himself, seeking that reconciliation with his people. And so it turns out he has come for her after all.

Suddenly we see a whole new layer of meaning to verse 4. He had to go to Samaria. Now it's not just geographical detail. It is geographical detail, he did have to pass through Samaria. But Jesus had to go to Samaria for her. And if you use John's writing, you realise there was a point to his telling us the time.

Not just telling us that it's the middle of the day, it's the sixth hour. And he came to a woman who had had six men in her life. And we've seen the number six before in John's Gospel, and it always suggests something is incomplete here.

And here is Jesus Christ saying, I have come at this sixth hour to be your seventh and last man. The only man that you will ever truly deeply need.

[ 22 : 26 ] But more than that, this is the time when worship has been focused on a single mountain, whichever mountain it is, that was the incomplete time.

I've come in to bring in the completion, the perfection of worship. The time when God is worshipped in spirit and in truth. He was seeking a bride.

But it wasn't just about this woman. Although it is through her that we learn about his seeking for a bride. Through her we learn that God is seeking worshippers to glorify and enjoy him forever, all over the world.

This body of worshippers is his son's bride that he has come to seek. So what do we learn from this encounter with the woman of Samaria?

Well just like this Samaritan woman, we learn that while we may think that Jesus is someone who has nothing to do with us, or mainly someone who has something we're interested in, Jesus is the one who knows us better than we know ourselves, and has come to sort out the most important question in our lives, the problem of worship.

[ 23 : 44 ] That's essentially what it means every time you see the mention of the word covenant in the Bible, the God who made you has stooped down to you even in your rebellion against him, to establish a deep loving friendship with you forever.

This is what the light coming into the world has all been about. From that first day of Adam's sin in the garden, he promised to kill that serpent and win at our friendship, from our friendship with evil to friendship with God, to worshipping God.

And as he came to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob and he came to Moses and he came to David and to the prophets, what's he doing? He's seeking worshippers. He's preparing a bride for his son.

And as Jesus came, became flesh, went to the cross to save his people, as he rose up and sent his apostles to make disciples in all nations, what was he doing? Seeking worshippers and preparing his bride.

We can so often think that Jesus doesn't really have anything to do with me. Unless I ask him to, that is. So Jesus might be for you, but he's not for me. I don't need to bring Jesus into the picture.

[ 25 : 05 ] I'm doing just fine, thank you very much. Or maybe he's got something I'm interested in, sort of useful, I guess. Maybe I could give it a go. And yet here he comes as one who knows us inside and out, saying he has come to sort us out, sort out the most important question in our life, to provide for the biggest need in our lives.

Now when he came here this morning, you probably expected to hear something about Jesus, but maybe you're thinking, I didn't come here to have Jesus barge into my life like this. Who is Jesus to make demands of me?

I didn't sign up for him to know everything about me like this. Can I opt out? Who is he to tell me what I need? I was asked recently back in Paris, does he really know everyone?

What about people who don't want him in their lives? What about people who don't necessarily believe in God? What will happen to them if they don't believe in God, but they've never really done anything awful?

What if at the end they discovered God was real all along, but they weren't really that bad? Is that enough just to get them in? Well the only answer to that is what if I came to your house and settled in and squatted and treated it like my own home and used your food and water and utilities and completely ignored you and anyone else who lived there and any rules or practices you might have there?

[ 26 : 40 ] Is it enough for me to not do anything seriously bad? Or isn't that just a terrible thing for me to do in itself? And if you simply see the way I'm behaving and living in your house, is that snooping or is that just you simply observing what I'm doing as I go about in your house?

This is God's world. He made it. The very fact that we're alive screams to every person each day that we owe everything to him.

The existence of every human life is a light trying to break through this darkness that we keep creating to try and smother it. And Jesus is that light, that life, that creating and redeeming light, the word of God literally in the flesh.

And he's come seeking his bride, seeking worshippers for his father, seeking to make us to be what he made us to be in the first place. If you think I'm only talking at this point to people who aren't professing Christians, not, let's be honest, it is frighteningly easy for all of us to forget about Jesus, think that there are maybe at least parts of my life where I can decide how much of a say Jesus gets to have in that part of my life.

It is painfully easy to be a practical atheist, isn't it? And how easy it is for us just to think of him as one who has something I'm interested in. Be that inner peace or friends, clear conscience, a bit of a fire insurance policy.

[ 28 : 29 ] Even if I just go to him to get forgiveness of sin, that's just about ticking a box and getting me into heaven, but I'm not really concerned about him being there. it's just about what I want, me and my wants.

You must realise that here is a man who knows you inside out. Here is a man who knows your needs much better, much more deeply than you think. You must realise that he knows your greatest problem is your relationship with God.

Your greatest need is reconciliation with God, to be brought back to him. He knows to have communion, friendship with God is literally what you were made for, and he should know it's what you were made for, because it was his reason for making you.

Not only does he know that, he has come to make that a reality himself, where we so miserably have failed. He is the one who came to seek worshippers for his father, come to seek his dear bride.

He is the one who came to provide this living water that never leaves us thirsty. He is the one who came to put living springs inside us to give us eternal life.

[ 29 : 48 ] But of course that was at the cost of his own thirst. As he would say, hanging on that cross, I thirst. It was at the cost of his life.

He came to love his bride and lay his life down for her. He came to do all that was needed to reconcile us to God. When the father raised him to life by the spirit, he gave him the holy spirit. He is now the life-giving spirit. He is the great well, the source of our life. Not just in the sense that everyone is alive, but the source of our spiritual, eternal, resurrection, life.

friends, if you're still mainly feeling miffed at the idea of Jesus making all these claims on your life, and ignoring the infinite blessing he has come to be for you, there will be a day when you will regret resisting him.

You'll regret not acknowledging him as your maker. And sadly that day could be too late. But I assure you, I promise you in God's name, acknowledging Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, will never be something you regret.

[ 31 : 09 ] It doesn't mean your life will be easy. People all around the world suffer for Jesus every day, but they suffer an even face death knowing that it's completely worth it.

Because he has come to sort out the biggest problem in their lives. And he's come to do the same for you. He has come to bring you back to a loving friendship with God, forever.

Let me urge you then, in Christ's name, simply to ask him for that living water. Come to him. Come to him not as someone you'd like to let in, as though it's for you to say, but as your God, the one who made you.

Come to him. Come to him not as someone whom you can use, but as your God and bridegroom come to be reconciled with you.

Come to enable you to glorify and enjoy your God forever. Come to him as the one who will give you eternal life. And what is eternal life according to Jesus?

[ 32 : 14 ] It's not just living forever. In John 17 he tells us eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. Have communion with him.

Come to him with these brothers and sisters that you see around you. And help others to come with you to him. Come to him no matter what your past has been, no matter what your future holds. Come to him each day. He will not reject you. He won't be like this woman's six man who can live here but I'm not going to marry you.

He has come for you. Come to him. You might be asking what do you mean come to him? Where? As man he is in that heavenly temple where we have come by faith together this morning.

As God he is spirit he is everywhere. Coming to him simply means to believe in him, to trust in him fully. Ask him in prayer for what he is offering you.

[ 33 : 27 ] It means stop resisting him. Stop rejecting him. Maybe you are thinking well rejecting him, disobeying him, even just in this one part of my life has sort of become my thing now.

I'm sort of a bit in too deep. It's sort of stuck in a pattern now. And this woman may have felt the same thing, especially if all her failed marriages were her fault. Jesus is saying no you haven't, it's not too late, come on, come and drink.

I want to give you a new life of love and worship, come to me. So let's go to him now in prayer, let's pray.

Amen.