

I invite you to open your Bibles to this morning's scripture text, which can be found in the book of John, Chapter 4 verses 1-14. This can be found on page 752 in your pew Bibles. We continue in our series "Captured by Love." Scripture reveals that Love provides opportunity.

Our Fathers Word

John 4:1-14

The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

Now he had to go through Samaria. 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, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

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.) 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.)

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 flocks and herds?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

-NIV

The Word of God for the people of God

Many years ago, during summer vacation, I participated in my first year of little-league baseball. This is a treasured time from my childhood memories, as this was the year we went on to become little-league champions. But this victory didn't come without practice. Lots and lots of practice.

We spent many hours practicing. We practiced and practiced and learned the fundamentals; how to hit, how to bunt, how to throw, how to pitch and catch. We learned all of the secret coaching signs. We honed our skills day after day in the summer sun. We could have practiced all summer but it would have been meaningless.

We had a great team; Little League World Series contenders maybe, but unless we quit practicing and went out and met the opposition, we would never know. The team would never accomplish anything until they played a game.

The act of *playing the game after careful preparation* is what living is all about. *Practicing and learning go for nothing* if we don't *go out* and use our skills. There comes a moment in time when we need to leave the safety of our pews and go out and meet the opposition and win them over.

This is precisely the opportunity love provides in today's scripture lesson. Like the story of Nicodemus in our last message, the narrative of Jesus's conversation with the woman at the well is treasured as a wonderful example of an evangelistic encounter. Jesus going out to meet the opposition, and to them win over in love.

We continue our series captured by love in this fourth chapter of the Gospel of John, where we find Jesus at Jacobs well, with a Samaritan woman, providing the opportunity for salvation. Love provides opportunity leading to life.

The Pharisees had heard that Jesus was baptizing more disciples than John the Baptist, and that John's popularity was evidently declining. Perhaps they had attempted to use this fact to stir up jealousy and contention between the disciples of John and those of the Lord Jesus. Actually, Jesus Himself did not perform the act of baptism. This was done by His disciples. However, the people were baptized as followers, or *disciples* of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus, at this stage in His ministry didn't wish to be involved in a controversy about baptism; so, he decided to quit Judaea for the time being and transfer his operations to Galilee. By leaving Judaea and journeying to Galilee, Jesus would prevent the Pharisees from being successful in their efforts to cause divisions. Judea was the headquarters of the Jewish religious establishment, whereas Galilee was known as a heavily Gentile region. The Lord Jesus realized that the Jewish leaders were already rejecting Him and His testimony, and so here, He turns to the Gentile people with the message of salvation.

Let's set the scene of this incident. Palestine is only 120 miles long from north to south. But within that 120 miles there were in the time of Jesus three definite divisions of territory. In the extreme north lay Galilee; in the extreme south lay Judaea; and in between lay Samaria.

There was a centuries-old feud between the Jews and the Samaritans. The quickest way from Judaea to Galilee was a direct route that lay through Samaria, using that route the journey could be done in three days but few Jews ever took that route. The region of Samaria was so despised by the Jewish people that they often took a very roundabout route to get into Galilee, this alternative route avoiding Samaria took twice as long.

So then, Jesus had to pass through Samaria if he wished to take the shortest route to Galilee. But we must understand, as Jesus continues to be so captured by God's love, he was compelled to take this route *not* due to geographical considerations, but rather by the fact that there was a needy soul in Samaria He could help.

As Jesus journeyed through this territory with the disciples, all the scenes of its past history were constantly before His mind. For this was an area which had many Jewish memories attached to it. There was a piece of ground there which had been bought by Jacob, who, on his deathbed, gave it to Joseph. On Joseph's death in Egypt, his body had been taken back to Palestine and buried there.

On the way they came to the village of Sychar. Just short of Sychar the road to Samaria forks. At the fork of the road there stands to this day the *well* known as *Jacob's well*. The well is about nine feet in diameter, and about one-hundred feet deep. It is not a springing well of water; it is a well into which the water percolates and gathers. This is a well that is so deep that no one could gain water from it unless they had something with which to draw the water.

When Jesus and His little band came to the fork in the road, He was weary and thirsty as a result of the long walk, and so Jesus sat down to rest by the well. It was midday, about noon, so the heat was at its greatest.

His disciples went on ahead to buy some food in the Samaritan town. Something must have truly been stirring in their hearts at this point of their ministry.

The love of our Lord Jesus was flowing through them, and little by little, perhaps even unconsciously, all the barriers were going down. Before they met Jesus, it is entirely unlikely that they would have even considered going into a Samaritan town for any purpose. This is being captured by love, where the love of God flowing through us moves us into action, allowing us to take that love forward into areas we typically would not venture, breaking down all barriers allowing the love of God to flow freely as a river of life.

As the Lord Jesus was sitting by the well, a woman came out from the village to draw water. Noon was a very unusual time for women to go to the well for water; it was the hottest part of the day. Sychar, where she stayed, was more than a half a mile away, and there was a well there. So it's a mystery why she would have chosen this well, at this time of day.

Perhaps its due to the fact that she was an immoral sinner, and she chose this time out of a sense of shame because she knew there would be no other women there to see her. Women, who drove her away from her village well, so she had no choice but to come here to draw her water.

Of course, the Lord Jesus knew all along that she would be at the well at this time. He knew that she was a soul in need, and so, He determined to meet her and rescue her from her sinful life. In this passage, we find the Master Soulwinner at work. We would do well to study the methods He used to bring this woman to the sense of her need and to offer her the solution to her problem.

Our Lord spoke to the woman just seven times. The woman spoke seven times also – six times to the Lord, and *once* to the men of the village. Perhaps, if we spoke to the Lord as much as she did, we might have the success in testimony she had when she evangelized to the men of the village following her talk with Jesus.

Jesus opened the conversation by asking a favor. Wearied with His journey, he said to her, “Give me a drink.” She turned in astonishment. The woman recognized Jesus as a Jew and was amazed that He would speak to *her*, a Samaritan. The Samaritans claimed descent from Jacob, and looked on themselves as true Israelites. Actually, they were of mixed Jewish and heathen descent. Mount Gerizim (Gair-ee-zim) had been adopted as their official place of worship. This was a mountain in Samaria, clearly visible to the Lord and to this woman as they talked together.

The Jewish community had a deep dislike for the Samaritans. They considered them half-breeds. That is why this woman said to the Lord Jesus, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman!?” Little did she realize that she was talking to her own creator, and that His capturing love rose above all the petty distinctions of men.

By asking a favor, the Lord had stirred her interest and curiosity. For one of the very few times in her life she had found one with *kindness in his eyes* instead of *critical superiority*; and she opened her heart. I think she must have unburdened her soul to this stranger. He now arouses her interest and curiosity further by speaking of Himself as being both God and Man.

Few scriptures in the Gospel record show us so much about the character of Jesus. He was first of all the gift of God – the One, God gave to be the savior of the world, His only begotten Son. But it also reveals to us the reality of his humanity. For He was also a Man – the one who was weary with the journey, and he sat by the side of the well exhausted.

The apostle John significantly stresses the sheer deity of Jesus Christ more than any other of the gospel writers while also stressing his humanity to the full. John does not show us a figure freed from the tiredness and the struggle of our humanity. Jesus is the word made flesh, that dwelt among us, who experiences the same human condition we do; life was an effort even for Him, just as it is for us. John shows us a Man who also was tired and had to go on.

His Gospel also shows us the warmth of his sympathy. The Samaritan woman would have fled in embarrassment from an ordinary religious leader or from one of the orthodox church leaders of the day. She would have avoided such a person. IF by any unlikely chance such a leader would have spoken to her, she would have met him with an ashamed and even hostile silence. But it *seemed* the *most natural thing in the world* to talk to Jesus. She was so captured by His love, by the warmth of His sympathy, she had at last met someone who was not a critic but a friend, one who did not condemn but who understood.

John also shows us Jesus as the ultimate barrier breaker. The quarrel between the Jews and the Samaritans was an old, old story. After the Assyrians invaded Samaria around 720 B.C., they removed nearly all of its inhabitants. Once they transported practically all the population, the Assyrians moved into the northern kingdom people from five other regions.

Some of the original people of the northern kingdom were left and inevitably, they began to inter-marry with the incoming foreigners. To the Jewish, this was an unforgivable crime. They lost their racial purity, and lost their right to be called Jews at all. Such a person is dead in the eyes of orthodox Judaism.

Between the Jews and the Samaritans there was an embittered hatred. This Jewish-Samaritan quarrel was more than four-hundred years old. But it smoldered as resentfully and as bitterly as ever. It was small wonder that the Samaritan woman was astonished that Jesus, a Jew, should speak to her, a Samaritan.

But there was still another way Jesus was breaking down the barriers. The Samaritan was a **woman**. It was strictly forbidden for a Rabbi to greet a woman in public, and this even included the Rabbi's wife, or daughter, or sister. For a Rabbi to be seen speaking to a woman in public was the end of his reputation – and yet, Jesus spoke to this woman. Not only was she a woman, but one of notorious character. No decent man, let alone a Rabbi, would have been seen in her company, or even exchanging a word with her – and yet, Jesus spoke to her.

To a Jew, this was an amazing story. Here was the Son of God, tired and weary and thirsty. Here was the holiest of men, listening with understanding to a sorry story. Here was Jesus breaking through the barriers of nationally and orthodox Jewish custom. Here is the beginning of the universality of the gospel; this is being captured by love, here is God so loving the world, not in theory, but in action.

If this Samaritan woman would have realized that the One to whom she was talking was God manifest in the flesh, she would have asked Him for a blessing, and He would have given her living water. She could only think of literal water and of the impossibility of His getting it without the necessary equipment, because by all outward appearance, the Lord had no means for drawing the water from the well. She completely failed to recognize the Lord, or to understand His words.

Her confusion deepened when she thought of the patriarch Jacob, who had given this well. He had used it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock. Now here was a weary traveler, centuries later, who asked for a drink from Jacob's well and yet who claimed to be able to give something better than the water which Jacob had given. If he had something better, why should He ask her for water from Jacobs well.

Just as Nicodemus did, the woman took the words of Jesus quite literally when she was meant to understand them spiritually. It was living water Jesus was speaking of. In ordinary language to the Jew *living* water was *running* water. It was the water of a running stream in contrast to the water of the stagnant cistern or pool. Jacobs well was not a spring well, but a well into which the water percolated from the subsoil. To the Jew, running, living water from the stream was always better. So the woman is saying: "you are offering me pure spring water, where are you going to get it?"

But the Jews had another way of using the word water. They often spoke of the *thirst of the soul* for God; and they often spoke of quenching that thirst with living water. Jesus was using terms that anyone with spiritual insight should have understood.

In the Revelation that promise is: "To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life." (Rev 21:6) The Lamb is to lead them to springs of living waters. (Rev 7:17) The promise was that the chosen people would draw water with joy from the wells of salvation. (Isa 12:3) The psalmist spoke of his soul being thirsty for the living God (Psa 42:1). God's promise was, "I will pour water on the thirsty land" (Isa 44:3). The summons was that anyone who was thirsty should come to the waters and freely drink (Isa 55:1). Jerimiah's complaint was that the people had forsaken God who was the fountain of living water and had hewed themselves out broken cisterns which could hold no water (Jer2:13).

Sometimes the Rabbis identified this living water with the wisdom of the Law; sometimes they identified it with nothing less than the Holy Spirit of God. All Jewish pictorial religious language was full of this idea of the thirst of the soul which could be quenched only with the living water which was the gift of God. The woman chose to understand this with an almost crude literalism. She was blind because she would not see.

Jesus went on to make an even more startling statement that he could give her water which would ban her thirst forever. Again the woman did not see it. And I think that this time she spoke with a jest, as if humoring one who was a little mad. "Give me this water," she said, "so that I will never be thirsty again and will not have to walk to this well day after day."

He was making nothing less than a Messianic claim. In the prophetic vision of the age to come, the age of God, the promise was “They shall not hunger or thirst” (Isa 49:10). It was with God and none other that the fountain of living water of the all-quenching water existed.

“With thee is the fountain of life,” the psalmist cried (Psa 36:9). It is from the very throne of God that the that the river of life is to flow (Rev 22:1). It is the Lord who is the fountain of living water (Jer 17:13). It is in the Messianic age that the parched ground is to become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water (Isa 35:7).

When Jesus spoke about bringing to men the water which quenches the thirst forever, he was doing no less than stating that he was the Anointed One of God who was to bring in the new age.

So the Lord began to explain the difference between the literal water of Jacob’s well and the living water, that, which he would give. Whoever drank from Jacob’s well would thirst again. Surely, she could understand this. She had been coming out day after day to draw from this well; yet her need was never completely met. And so it is with all the wells of this world. People seek their pleasure and satisfaction in earthly things, but these are not able to quench the thirst of their heart.

The water which Jesus gives truly satisfies. Whoever drinks of Christ’s blessings and mercies will never thirst again. Not only do his benefits fill the heart, but they overflow it as well. They are like a bubbling fountain, constantly overflowing, not only in this life, but in eternity as well.

The expression springing up into everlasting life means that the benefits of the water which Christ gives are not limited to earth, but will go on forever. The contrast is very vivid. All that the earth can provide is not sufficient to fill the human heart. But the blessings which Christ provides not only fill the heart, but they are too great for the heart to contain. They must be given away. Love must continue to flow.

The pleasures of this world are for a few short years, but the pleasures which Christ provides go on into everlasting life. Love provides opportunity.

I heard a story about a guy who applied for a job as an usher at a theater in the mall. As a part of the interview process, the manager asked him, "What would you do in case a fire breaks out?" The young guy answered, "Don't worry about me. I can get out fine."

That's exactly how many in today's world respond to a lost and dying world around them. If you asked them "What would you do if Jesus came back tomorrow?" they would probably respond, "Oh, don't worry about me. I'd be fine."

But what is all too easy to forget is that you're an usher! Ushering in the Kingdom of God! It isn't enough just to get out yourself, You are responsible for helping others know the way.

Heavenly Father,

We lift up our hearts to you with great thanksgiving,

For the many wonderful gifts you bestow upon us each and every day.

We thank you for your amazing grace and love,

and for your gift of eternal life,

that you have given us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our soul thirsts for you God,

Quench our thirst with your living water Jesus,

We drink of Christs blessings and mercies,

So that we will never thirst again, either here or in life eternal.

By your grace, may your Joy and Peace bubble over in our hearts,

Flowing into the hearts of those you have placed into our lives.

Oh God, draw them to you, so that those who are thirsty for you,

may drink freely from your river of life, Jesus.

AMEN