

RUF Bible Study – John
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John 4 – The Living Water

Ramchandra Katuwal says he's finally happy. Mr. Katuwal lives in eastern Nepal, is 49-years old and is married to Sharada. This is truly remarkable, for it isn't his first marriage. It's his 25th marriage.

Mr. Katuwal first married when he was 26 years old. His first wife eloped with her lover. His second did the same. So did the third. Over a 16-year period, Katuwal says he can't really remember what happened to them. He says he can only recall about nine of them. His 24th wife also ran away, so he resolved never to marry again. At that point he'd been married 24 times in 16 years. Prolific. Imagine the wedding showers. Consider the registries. (Not trying to make fun of him, and I know his culture isn't like ours, but still his friends must have been annoyed with more weddings than birthdays).

Then he met Sharada. They've been married for seven years, and he says he is content on concentrating on his children's education.²

Wow. There is something inside of Ramchandra Katuwal that never has been settled. There is a drive in there, a longing for something more, that has gotten him outside of what is normal and is exceptional even to us by our loose marriage standards. Mr. Katuwal wants more. Maybe he's found it. It's hard to believe Sharanda will be "the thing" but maybe.

Our passage of John 4 deals with such heart issues, such longings. It's actually a commentary on John 3:16, that famous verse you may know, "For God so loved the world he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

How big is "the world"? To what kind of people could this message spread to? John 4 answers that question. Even to people like the Samaritan woman at the well. Even to people like you and me. Do you think Jesus could save even someone like her? Even someone like you?

The Woman

This whole chapter is in contrast to the preceding one of John 3. There we saw Nicodemus, who was a rich, powerful, smart, influential insider coming to speak to Jesus at night. Here we have a poor, marginalized, intelligent yes, disregarded outsider coming to Jesus in the daytime at the well.

We read that Jesus stopped by a well to rest. He had to pass through Samaria, so he paused on his journey. It's interesting to note "he had to pass through Samaria." In fact, the Jews would do anything they could to avoid passing through Samaria. They hated the region, and they hated the people in it. Samaritans were looked down on, and that's putting it lightly. They were the people who had remained behind when the Jews were conquered in 722 B.C. They had married the pagans around them, adopted their customs and ideas, and now had mixed view of their faith. They only believed in the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch), and they had their own temple, on Mount Gerizim. The Jews despised them.

No self-respecting rabbi would be in the area. But Jesus says he had to go there, and here we find him tired, resting and thirsty. He stops at the well, and a woman walks up. A Samaritan woman. This is bad. 100% of the time, a rabbi would ignore her. He might even spit on her. Men didn't talk to women in public, not even their wives.

But Jesus talks to her, which shocks her. He asks her for a drink, and she cannot believe it. I like this woman, for she doesn't shrink away from Jesus but starts to talk to him. I don't think she is afraid of men, and has most likely been in tough situations before. She can handle some discomfort and awkwardness, but can this man? So she asks him why.

Before we look at the conversation, let's mention something else. It's the sixth hour, which means it's noon. She is there alone, drawing water by herself.

If we lived in that culture, we'd know that's a big signal about this woman. Women would go together to draw water from the wells either early in the morning or late at night. They didn't want to go when it was hot. Drawing water wasn't the worst job in the world; it's just one that women did. And they would go together, using the time to socialize, to catch up on each others' lives.

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For this series, I used commentaries on John from Boice, Skip Ryan, Gary Burge, D.A. Carson, Hughes, Wright, Calvin and Leon Morris and listened to sermons by as many people as I can find, especially Tim Keller, Ricky Jones, Fred Harrell and Scott Sherman. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

² http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7607901.stm

This woman is going at noon and by herself. Something is wrong with her. People don't like her, or she's avoiding other people. She's not only a Samaritan, not only a woman, but she's an outcast among the outcasts. Jesus has gone to the well to meet her. If you went to the wells, you were trying to meet women, because that's where they'd be.

Jesus goes there, and he meets her alone and has this incredible conversation. Before we continue, let's think about this for a minute.

First, isn't it interesting that Jesus was tired and thirsty? Our eyewitness author of John doesn't hesitate to call Jesus God. He's already done so many times. However, he also points out that Jesus was a man just like us. He wore out. He needed a break. He knows what it's like to get dehydrated, and he stopped.

Also, do you see how he got this woman alone? He went to the place where he knew she would be by herself. As we'll find out, she must have been a desperately lonely woman, although she certainly could have hidden that from others. She wasn't doing well in life. She was struggling. She was cut out even from her cut out people.

Jesus went to that place to be with her. Jesus is like that. He goes to places other people would avoid. He is willing to tackle tough people in tough places. And it seems like she is open to him. She's not been seeking Jesus at all, but he has come to find her. She's not asking questions – she's there minding her own business and trying to get some water. Jesus has invaded her space to talk to her. She's open to talking, though it's a surprising conversation for her.

I think this happens to many of us. We finally hear and meet Jesus when we're alone in our lives. It may be physically and actually alone or it may be metaphysically and metaphorically alone.

You have just masturbated for the fifth time this week, and your stuff is all around you, and you feel alone. You have gambled all your money away at the casino, and you have no one to talk you home. You're in jail for disorderly conduct, and you're too embarrassed to call your parents. You're walking back to your car, and he used you and you used him even though you said it wouldn't happen this time. No one asked you to the party, and you're by yourself. You didn't get picked for the team. You didn't make the show. You aren't the right kind of person with the right kind of figure or complexion.

When have you felt alone? When have you felt like an outsider? Can you relate to this woman at all? She's smart, she's trying to overcome the odds, she's a survivor. And Jesus meets her there in her hurt and loneliness as she's trying to do a simple thing this day.

Likewise, if you're wanting to tell others about Jesus, I would advise you to look for those who aren't doing well. Look for people who are alone in the way we're talking about here. Listen for someone who has broken up with his girlfriend, whose parents are divorcing, whose family is disintegrating, who is finally seeing and feeling his or her brokenness. God gets people alone and talks to them. We don't often even want to listen in groups, but by ourselves, we're open. Jesus would never have been able to have this conversation if all the women were there, but because of her broken life, because of her aloneness, he can talk to her. God even uses our messed up lives to get us alone so he can start talking to us. Look for people who need someone to talk to.

The conversation - thinking

So here we have a Jewish male rabbi talking with an outcast woman Samaritan. What do they talk about? Once Jesus gets her alone, what is his tactic and strategy? He lovingly engages her mind and her heart. Let's see how he does this.

After she asks Jesus why in the world he a Jew would ask her, a Samaritan, for drink, he starts with his usual strange and interesting talking to people. He says if she knew who it was, she would ask him for a drink. And he would give her living water.

Living water means running water, flowing water. A stream, a river, a spring. Something that flows instead of something that sits there and stagnates.

The woman is intrigued, but she's not buying it. This well has been here for a long time. It has a history. This well is deep, and you don't even have a bucket. How are you going to get water? Do you know of a secret stream somewhere nearby? Can you show me where it is?

Jesus says, *"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 again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

The woman is up for that, as long as they're talking about water still. I'll take some of that water, she says. If I could never have to come to get water again... She thinks about it, That would be awesome! An eternal supply of water. I'd be rich! Remember they're in the desert, and water would be a hot commodity. To have such a supply of clean water would be a dramatic life change for her.

Jesus says, "Go get your husband." What? How does that follow the conversation about water? We'll come back and see that it does, but at first it looks so strange, like an ultimate non sequitor.

My husband? She's startled. I don't have a husband.

You're right, Jesus answered. You can hear him looking at her, and I think he says this next part in loving concern. You have had five husbands and the man you're with now isn't your husband either. This is crazy. Jesus seems to know everything about her, and he goes straight for her heart.

She follows that up with something that makes sense, Sir I perceive you are a prophet. I'll say. She goes into a conversation with him about prophets and temples and where to worship. This is something people do. They divert the topic. He's gotten a little too close, so she's now trying to talk about religious things and get the focus somewhere else. But she's also intrigued about him. Could he be the prophet? The Samaritans didn't have a long history of prophets like the Jews did. Remember they cut the Bible off after Deuteronomy.

Then Jesus starts to talk about worship. Jesus says that God is seeking worshippers, people who will worship him in spirit and in truth. And that the temple discussion won't matter – he is the new temple.

It dawns on her. Maybe he's the Messiah, the Christ. The Messiah is supposed to come someday.

Jesus says, "I who speak to you am he." The woman left her jar right there and took off. She went back to her town, back to where she had been rejected, back to the very people who thought she was a whore and an bad influence and wouldn't talk to her and she told them, Come, see the man who told me everything I ever did." And they did. They went to hear Jesus. At the end of the chapter we read that because of this woman's testimony, people now knew that Jesus was the Savior of the world, and they had experienced that for themselves. They didn't just know it, they *knew* it.

I think we're justified in wondering, what happened here?

I want to suggest (and it's not original to me by any means) that Jesus engaged her head and her heart here. He made her think, and he made her feel.

How did he make her think? He talked to her about deep things. It's interesting to think about how he actually engages this woman on a more theological and "intellectual" conversation than he does Nicodemus. Jesus and his woman are talking about all sorts of things here, tapping into history, theology, conceptions of God, prophets, the temple, stereotypes and more. He's drawing her into the discussion, whetting her appetite and making her wonder about things.

That's true for us too, as we start to meet and understand Jesus. What was boring and dry becomes interesting. A sermon doesn't make you fall asleep anymore. If someone were to invite you to a lecture about Jesus or a sermon or to church or a Bible study, you might want to go. You're interested in hearing about him. You'd read a book if someone gave it to you. Jesus is making you think.

Look at the progression of how this woman, in just a short amount of time!, thinks about Jesus.

Jesus is:

Jesus – 4:6

Jew – 4:9

Sir/Lord – 4:11, 15, 19

Prophet – 4:19

Messiah – 4:25

Christ – 4:25, 29

I am – 4:26

Rabbi – 4:31

Savior of the world – 4:42³

That is some profound change in her understanding. Do you care to learn about Jesus? Are you engaged intellectually about him? Are you learning new things about him? Do you yawn when he's being talked about, or when you're reading or hearing about him?

It should not be. You should desire to learn more about him, and likewise to tell others about him.

The conversation – the heart

Ah, but Jesus isn't only concerned about information. He also goes right for the heart of this lady.

Too many of us thinking that we're following and loving Jesus if we can answer right questions about him. We know the answer to the question: Why do you think God would allow you into his heaven? Do you know the answer to that question?

It's an important question with an important answer, but knowing the answer is not the same as loving Jesus, following Jesus, experiencing Jesus and *knowing* Jesus.

That's why Jesus isn't content with information. Being a Christian is both the head and the heart. Following Christ is intellectual, but it's not only or merely intellectual. It's experiential.

Why does Jesus ask the woman about her husbands? It's really not that unconnected. He's been talking about living water. She's been nodding. She says she wants it. Then he shows where she really draws water from. If the living water is a metaphor for deep healing, deep cleansing, deep satisfaction, true meaning and love, then he is taking great pains to show her how she is going to a different source for these things, and that source will not satisfy her.

Her source is men. She's had five husbands is now living with a sixth man who she hasn't married yet. There's something about sex, men and power that controls her. It's in her heart. It's her water.

Let's not pick on women and sex here. We'll talk about other water sources. But sex is a big one. The power, the rush of excitement of sex. The allure of allure. The feelings of being able to seduce someone.

³ List from Burge, 156-157

This summer I read *Unhooked* by Laura Session Stepp: How Young Women Pursue Sex, Delay Love and Lose at Both. It was a sobering read, and expertly written. In her last chapter, she discusses a young woman she calls Alicia, a student at Duke who was especially adept at reflecting on her choices and how they've hurt and helped her. Alicia lost her virginity during college, but then pursued men in series of hook ups (unattached sex, formally called one night stands).

Sessions writes, "Hooking up offers girls the opportunity to exert their independence, explore their sexual desires and capabilities and try to keep their emotional lives under control. But some experts in the field of adolescence, even as they acknowledge the upsides, say hooking up can also act as an obstacle to real intimacy, which they call the hallmark of a satisfying adult life. They see potential for long-term dangers to young women and young men – physical, emotional and practical – if hooking up comes to define the way of being."⁴

But Alicia and these thousands of young women think it's fun to seduce men. They feel less obligated to a man because they've slept with him. They're quick to believe they can decide not to get hurt. They divorce their bodies from their minds, fighting against the emotional closeness they define as weak and feminine. They want to be powerful and masculine (though warped views of both). They squash their feelings of connection, which in turns leads to depression. Session writes, "The most difficult, dissonant moment may come when a girl understands that by trying to take control, she has simply done to herself what she meant to prevent boys from doing to her."⁵

Alicia puts the same feeling in her own words: "You try so hard to stay free and unattached and indifferent while you attach yourself all the while, and then suddenly it's over and the emotions of every time in that relationship when you should have stood up for yourself or denied him something, all surface. Every time you weren't indifferent pisses you off, and instead of being sad that you are hurt by the loss of someone (which arguably acknowledges your capacity to connect with someone, a positive thing), you are angry that you let that person hurt you... One, it glosses over the deep hurt/emotional wounds; two, you experience it both as a relationship and a hurtful battle with your attachment needs. Since it ends badly, you end up hating both your needs *and* relationships in general."⁶

So what happens? These women start to question if they're worth being loved. They feel distant from their true selves, unconnected from their hearts. As one put it, "I wasn't getting what I needed and couldn't speak up for myself because I was afraid of being rejected, even by someone whom I didn't even like or someone who was hurting me."⁷ This is tragic and so common.

Anorexia is connected to this as a way of ordering a world and controlling it. Rape falls into this, for there are times when both are drunk and things go too far, and he wants more and she lets him, so it falls into a gray area (and gets labeled gray rape). The women themselves aren't sure it's rape, and these instances go unreported by the thousands. Why? "I'm always scared the guy won't like me if I don't give him satisfaction... My fear of being worthless outweighed my fear of being raped."⁸

As one professor puts it, "Hooking up is purposely uncaring." How can you just turn on emotional caring if you've been practicing distancing yourself?

But you can't help it. You were made this way. You were made to be in relationship, to be in a committed, loving, caring, respected relationship. You can't put a condom on your heart, friends. It won't work.

Jesus knows that. He goes after this right love put in the wrong place and says *he* can fulfill it.

Jesus is tapping into Water as Life metaphor. He's the Living Water – he is life. He is thinking of Jeremiah 2:13, which says *for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.*

We are all looking for water to quench our thirsts. We were made to thirst, and to have our thirsts quenched by God. We don't know what to do, so we make wells for ourselves. That means we have to fill those wells, the water leaks and goes bad. It's not only sex. It can be anything. It can be NOT having sex. It can be virginity righteousness, being a good, moral person. It can be your grades, looks, success, power, status. It can be having the highest score in the world in Donkey Kong (see *King of Kong*).

It never will satisfy. It leaks. The cistern is broken. It can't hold the water you're looking for. It's not the virginity or the sex – it's deeper than that. It's the inner you, the longing to be made right, to be accepted and connected and committed to. To be cherished, loved and looked-forward to.

Can you identify your broken cisterns, your cracked wells? Where do you go for life? Where do you go for meaning and significance apart from God in Christ? In what areas do you find yourself getting mad and upset? Are you willing for Jesus to point those out to you, to "go there" with you? Has gotten into your heart deep enough so that he can discuss with you how your own life is needing change? Can you even think about this?

⁴ *Unhooked*, Session Stepp, 222

⁵ *Unhooked*, 227

⁶ *Unhooked*, 227-228

⁷ *Unhooked*, 229

⁸ *Unhooked*, 235

Her Response – Change

Do you see how this woman doesn't flip out when Jesus starts to identify her wells, her broken places? She doesn't say, "How dare you!" She says, "Hm, I think you know what you're talking about. She knows he's right, and she starts to wonder where and how she can worship correctly.

He must floor her with his last line before she takes off. He says, "I who speak to you am he." Pow! He is the Messiah. He is the one she's been waiting for. He is the one she's longed for. He is here. He is standing right there. He is God ("I am he" carries this connotation with what he is saying).

Her response is one of an attitude of personal repentance. We especially see that because, after being alone with Jesus, after thinking about him, after he goes after her heart, she changes. She repents. She drops her jar, again a metaphor for leaving her old life and ways (though she may come again to pick it up), and she goes to tell others about Jesus. She says, *Come and see this man who told me everything I'd ever done*. She's not embarrassed or upset about that. She's freely admits she's a sinner in need of grace and mercy.

Think of how she goes back to the very people who had rejected her. She returns to those who had marginalized her and made her an outcast. Maybe her former husbands were in that group. Maybe the women who whispered, "Whore!" just loud enough so she could hear were there in the crowd. She didn't care. She wanted other people to know about the Messiah, the Prophet, the Savior and Lord of the World. She was set free. She had received the true Living Water. And then so did others. This is the sweet, sweet picture of evangelism. Telling others about Jesus because he is setting you free, because he is the Living Water in your own heart.

Do you ever change? Do you ever feel convicted and stop arguing? Do you ever come to the place where you can acknowledge your broken wells, put down your jars and come to worship Jesus in spirit and in truth? Have you ever told anyone else about the love of Christ? It might be because you don't truly know that love for yourself.

How is this possible? Let me point out that Jesus says something interesting that gives us a clue. When he is talking about God seeking worshippers, he says, *"Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the father... 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."*

Did you hear that? What have we already learned in John does the word, "hour" mean? It means his death. Jesus is thinking about his death again. It's *his death* that brings in worshipers. It's *his death* that allows us to worship in spirit and truth.

Do you remember his death? Do you recall that on the cross Jesus was thirsty. He was offered a drink, but wouldn't take it. Do you remember on the cross when Jesus cried out, *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"*

That wasn't a random thing for Jesus to say. That is the first line from Psalm 22, which means that psalm was what Jesus was thinking about. The rest of the psalm goes on, we read, *"14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; 15 my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death."*

Jesus was poured out, so you could be poured into. He took the parched lip, the dying tongue, the dehydration, so that you could be assuaged, filled, satisfied. He was forsaken so you could be loved and accepted. He was the outcast, so you could be brought into the family of God. He took the pain so you could have the love. Jesus is the one who makes it right, who saves you. He is a spring, not a broken cistern. Springs don't dry up. They give life. You can stop working so hard to please something that will always, always leak. Instead turn to Jesus, who loves you.

You are thirsty. You know, don't you that drinking is not the answer. It matters what you drink. If you are thirsty and need hydration, if you start to drink a Coke, Mountain Dew or a beer, you are drinking, but you're actually going backwards in your efforts. Caffeine and alcohol *dehydrate* you. They make your body worse off.

Most of us wouldn't drink acrid, nasty water to solve our thirst problem. We know to stay away from the infested waters (though in some parts of the world they still struggle with this problem). But we're suckers for all the tasty drinks in QuickTrip. There are so many, and they are so sugary and cheap. They're delicious. They won't help.

Jesus says come to the living water. He will commit to you, and he will love you. Repent and believe the gospel. This is for believers and nonbelievers. You can do this radically for the first time, or you may have realized you have wandered off with other lovers, you have dug for yourself a secret well, and it's killing you with all the work it takes.

Get to the spring of living water. Later in John 4, we read the fields are ready for harvest. Come to Jesus now. Don't wait. Don't hold onto those places you go for seawater. Don't forsake the one who made you and loves you. Come to Christ.

This story from C.S. Lewis' *The Silver Chair* illustrates some of the feelings that come with giving up our agendas and accepting the living water that Christ alone can give. Not only for the first time, but for many times – our whole lives – afterwards.

The wood was so still that it was not difficult to decide where the sound was coming from. It grew clearer every moment and, sooner than she expected, she came to an open glade and saw the stream, bright as glass, running across the turf a stone's throw away from her. But although the sight of the water made her feel ten times thirstier than before, she didn't rush forward and drink. She stood still as if she had been turned into stone, with her mouth wide open. And she had a very good reason: just on this side of the stream lay the Lion.

It lay with its head raised and its two fore-paws out in front of it, like the lions in Trafalgar Square. She knew at once that it had seen her, for its eyes looked straight into hers for a moment and then turned away – as if it knew her quite well and didn't think much of her.

"If I run away, it'll be after me in a moment," thought Jill. And if I go on, I shall run straight into its mouth." Anyway, she couldn't have moved if she had tried, and she couldn't take her eyes off it. How long this lasted, she could not be sure; it seemed like hours. And the thirst became so bad that she almost felt she would not mind being eaten by the Lion if only she could be sure of getting a mouthful of water first.

"If you are thirsty, you may drink."

They were the first words she had heard... For a second, she stared here and there, wondering who had spoken. Then the voice said again, "If you are thirsty, come and drink," and of course she remembered... about animals talking... and realised that it was the Lion speaking. Anyway, she had seen its lips move this time, and the voice was not like a man's. It was deeper, wilder, and stronger; a sort of heavy, golden voice. It did not make her any less frightened than she had been before, but it made her frightened in a rather different sort of way.

"Are you not thirsty?" said the Lion.

"I am dying of thirst," said Jill.

"Then drink," said the Lion.

"May I – could I – would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realised that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

"Will you promise not to - do anything to me, if I do come?" said Jill.

"I make no promise," said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

"Do you eat girls?" she said.

"I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were angry. It just said it.

"I daren't come and drink," said Jill.

"Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion.

"Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then."

"There is no other stream," said the Lion.

It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion – no one who had seen his stern face could do that – and her mind suddenly made itself up. It was the worst thing she had ever had to do, but she went forward to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping up the water in her hand. It was the coldest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted. You didn't need to drink much of it, for it quenched your thirst at once. CS. Lewis, The Silver Chair

*"Come," said Jesus' sacred voice
"Come, and make My paths your choice
I will guide you to your home,
Weary pilgrim, hither come.*

*"Hither come, for here is found
Balm that flows for every wound
Peace that ever shall endure
Rest eternal, sacred, sure,
Rest eternal, sacred, sure.*