

A Jew and a Samaritan Walk into a Well, Part 1

John 4:1-42 (Part 1: John 4:1-18)

31 March 2018 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: How can we be satisfied in life?

Big Idea: Only Jesus satisfies.

Introduction

One of the greatest scourges of our time would have to be... the customer satisfaction survey.

Everyone wants to know if we're satisfied.

You finally wind up a call you've made to sort out a problem and you get asked to stay on the line to rate how satisfied you were with the service you received.

Or you buy online and a few days later, you get an email asking you to rate your experience.

My inbox is full of them.

You can't even escape the dreaded satisfaction survey when you go to a museum.

The other week, we went to the Museum of Brisbane in City Hall.

After wandering around for a while, we sat down to wait for our tour up the clock tower.

Sure enough, a bloke walks over with an iPad and asks me to fill out their satisfaction survey.

Big mistake on his part... because it meant that I told them exactly what I thought about their exhibits.

Companies, schools, cafes, banks, museums – everyone seems to measure their success on whether you were satisfied with your experience.

You don't always get asked whether you got the information you needed, but you'll always be asked: were you satisfied?

Because they know that you won't come back unless you were.

After all, we're told that the customer's always right.

Which, of course, is just rubbish.

Ask anyone who's worked in customer service and they'll tell you that the customer most certainly **isn't** always right.

Some people are just never satisfied.

I remember one of my customers being utterly aghast when the owner of the business explained – quite pointedly – that they were more than welcome to take their business to a competitor... along with their unreasonable complaints.

Yet I suspect that most of us actually aren't that different to the organisations we deal with.

We measure how successful our lives are by how satisfied we are.

That's a problem because we often feel quite dissatisfied with how our lives are going.

But life doesn't have a grievance policy or a customer service desk, so we have to make do with complaining to everyone around us.

Or by trying to squash our dissatisfaction and just press on living our lives as best as we can.

How can our hopes, desires and longings be satisfied?

Is that even possible?

Of course, most people would agree that if there is a god, then of course it's his job is to satisfy us.

What point is there to having a god that doesn't fulfil what I want?

In John 4, we're going to see that only God can satisfy us, but probably not in the way we expect.

Outline

Last week, Scott opened up the second half of John chapter three for us.

We saw that we all face a life-and-death decision.

The only way to escape God's just judgement is to trust in the one and only Son of God.

Everyone who rejects the Son and tries to hide in the darkness stands condemned already – there's no middle ground.

Even earlier in John 3, Jesus met Nicodemus.

He was a man at the top of the pile – probably rich, a spiritual leader of the country and politically connected in Israel.

Today, we see Jesus meet someone at the complete opposite end of the spectrum: an outcast woman from a neighbouring region.

Chapter four covers Jesus' trip to Galilee before he comes back to Jerusalem in chapter 5.

It's hard to know where to break the chapter up.

The first 42 verses are all about his journey to Galilee but it's too much for one sermon.

So we're only going to do part one today and look at the first eighteen verses.

We're going to see that **only Jesus satisfies**.

- A Sovereign Appointment (1-6)
- A Satisfying Gift (7-15)
- A Secret Need (16-18)

A Sovereign Appointment (1-6)

Jesus has been up in Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel.

He attracted some attention when he made a bit of a scene in the temple.

Making a whip and then using it to drive out people and animals tends to get noticed.

And he'd had a run-in with Nicodemus, one of the Jewish leaders.

It's not surprising, then, that word about him started to get around.

The number of people following him on Insta was going through the roof.

He was constantly being retweeted.

Today, people would say he was "increasing his influence" or "growing his platform".

More and more people wanted to follow him, so his disciples were giving them the initiation rite of baptism.

We don't know if he was trying to avoid all the attention, or if he was worried about stepping on Jack the Witness's toes or if it just wasn't time for a full-blown confrontation with the leaders.

Whatever the reason, Jesus decided that it was time to get out of town.

He packs his bags and leaves the city lights, heading for the nice, quiet regional area of Galilee.

In between Judea in the south (with the capital Jerusalem) and Galilee in the north was the region of Samaria.

Samaria wasn't a separate country to Israel, but it was home to a different people group.

After King Solomon died, the nation of Israel was divided into two – the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom.¹

The capital of the North was Samaria – hence the name.²

The Northern Kingdom was attacked and overrun by the Assyrians in 722BC.

The Assyrian empire had a policy of taking most of the people they'd conquered off into exile.

And they resettled the Northern kingdom with people from other places.

The Jews who were allowed to stay married the people who were shipped in, which means the Samaritans were only part Jewish.

Much later, the Babylonians conquered the Assyrians and the Southern part of Israel as well.

Seventy years after that, under King Cyrus, many of the Jews were allowed back to rebuild Jerusalem.

Their neighbours – the Samaritans – offered to help them rebuild.

But the returning Jews didn't want help from people who they saw as half-breed, unclean, sell-outs.

The animosity between the two groups lasted centuries, but more about that next week.

John tells us in verse 4:

John 4:4 (NIV11) ⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria.

That seems like a strange thing to write because there were actually three ways of getting from Jerusalem to Galilee.

You could travel to the right, across the Jordan river and up the Jordan Valley; or go to the left along the Mediterranean coast and then up or take the shortest route: right along the ridge in the middle, through Samaria.

I've heard it said lots of times that the Jews usually took the long way around to avoid going through Samaria.

But Josephus (who was a Jew) tells us that taking the shortest route through Samaria was normally used.³

Why did Jesus have to go that particular way?

It wasn't because there was no other option.

The answer is because he had a divine appointment to keep.

Jesus had someone to meet.

The God who's in control of the whole universe is in control of even the most seemingly insignificant little details of our lives.

I wonder how many God-created happenstances we miss?

Little things that happen which we fail to realise are the Lord's hand at work in our lives.

Bumping into that old friend we haven't seen in ages right when they're in need.

Or finally getting that opportunity one-on-one to invite the friend or co-worker you've been praying would read *The Word One to One* with you.

So Jesus began the 63 kilometre journey from Jerusalem to Galilee.

About noon on the second day of walking, he gets to a town named Sychar.⁴

It's not far from the bit of land that his ancestor Jacob bought and gave to his son Joseph (the Joseph of technicolour coat fame).⁵

When Joseph's bones were brought up from Egypt,⁶ he was buried on that plot.⁷

There was a well nearby named Jacob's Well (not the one that's halfway to the Gold Coast).

Although we know about Jacob's plot of land from the Old Testament, there's never any mention of this particular well.

But ironically, it's one of the few historical sites in Israel that we know for sure is authentic.

You can visit it today in the crypt of an Orthodox church.

Jesus arrives at Jacob's Well about noon.

After walking for a day and a half in the hot sun, he's tired from the journey (we're told in verse 6).

Jesus wasn't some kind of *Übermensch* – a super-human who didn't need to eat and drink.

When John wrote that "the Word become flesh" in 1:14, he really meant it.

Jesus needed to eat and drink; he got tired, just like us.

He really does know what it's like to be one of us.

One of the reasons we find it hard to pray is that honestly, we don't really believe that Jesus understands what it's like to be tired.

But here we see that he does know what it's like to be tired from a long journey or an overwhelming week at work.

He doesn't just know about it, he's experienced it.

And while he mightn't have experienced the sleep deprivation that comes with having a newborn, he does know what it's like to be exhausted.

He knows what it's like to fight temptation and ungodliness even when you just feel spent.

As you reflect on that this week, I pray that it might fuel your prayers.

It's taken us a while to set the scene because that's exactly what John does, but it sets us up for what comes next.

Jesus parks himself next to the well to take a breather while his disciples all go off to buy some food, verse 9.

At least, that's what you think if you're reading the account for the first time.

In reality, God had planned a "chance" meeting that would change the lives of many people.

A Satisfying Gift (7-15)

The second thing we see is that Jesus has a satisfying gift to offer.

Jesus is there next to a well in the heat of the day.

Not surprisingly, he's thirsty and wants a drink.

But the well's deep – it goes about 40 metres down today and it was probably twice as deep in the past.

You can't just scoop the water out with your hands; you need a bucket.

Well, well, well, along comes a Samaritan woman.

Here's someone who can help!

She was going to draw some water from the well, so Jesus asks her to give him a drink, verse 7.

Have a look at her response in verse 9:

John 4:9 (NIV11) ⁹ 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.)

As we'll see again later, this woman knows all about social divisions.

She knows about the divide between Jews and Samaritans.

"My people don't talk to your people, let alone drink from the same cup."

Drinking from a Samaritan's cup would make a Jew ceremonially unclean.

If you have a look at the footnote in verse 9, you'll see that it could also be "do not use dishes Samaritans have used".

Her answer isn't quite, "No," but she's confused, puzzled by the fact that Jesus would ask her for a drink.

"How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?"

She can't give him the drink that he needs.

It's a good question that she asks.

And why does Jesus need help?

On one level, obviously because he's been on a three day journey and when you're thirsty, you need a bucket to drink from the well.

At another level though, Jesus is the creator of the universe, as we saw in chapter one.

And we'll see later in the chapter – down in verse 34 – his disciples are worried about food but Jesus isn't.⁸

No, this situation isn't really about Jesus' need at all.

It's actually about hers.

She's saying something that's true without even knowing it: "I know that I'm not able to give you water."

What's true physically is true spiritually as well.

She can't give Jesus water to drink – it's him who needs to give water to her!

Why was Jesus asking for water when he knew she couldn't it?

He wasn't being inappropriate in asking his question, he was drawing out this truth.

He needs to give her the drink she needs.

Clearly, then, he's talking about a different kind of water.

He unpacks this a bit more in his reply: if only she knew who he was.

She doesn't understand who she's met; she thinks he's just some random Jew.

If she knew who she was talking to – the Son of God – it would've turned the whole conversation on its head.

If she realised who Jesus was, she'd be asking him for water instead.

Water is life; without it we die.

Jesus has a gift to give.

That gift, as he goes on to say, is living water.

Jesus is offering the kind of water we need to allow us to truly live.

John 4:10 (NIV11) ¹⁰ 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."

In the Old Testament, living water is a gift that comes from God.

Jeremiah talked about how God's people were looking for satisfaction in all the wrong places and rejecting him.

He draws the comparison between looking for water in a running stream (God himself) and looking for water in cracked vessels that can't hold it.

Jeremiah 2:13 (NIV11) ¹³ "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."

From the way she responds, it's clear that the woman gets a little bit of what Jesus is talking about.

She gets that he's talking about giving her water, even living water.

But she doesn't understand what that is or where it comes from.

She thinks that he's talking about even better H₂O: fresher, colder, spring water.

How's that going to happen though?

She basically says, "Mate, you haven't really thought this through, have you?"

"How are you going to give me water?"

This well's deep and you're missing something – you're not going to get very far without a bucket."

Jacob dug this well and gave them water to drink.

Jacob's Well is pretty impressive: even then it'd been around for more than a millennium and they could still draw fresh, clean water from it.

But there are times in history when it's gone dry.

Can Jesus really come up with something better?

We can tell from the way her question is written in Greek that she doesn't think that he can.

Jesus is either greater than Jacob or a faker.

And she thinks he can't do it.

Jesus and the Samaritan woman are comparing apples and oranges though: two completely different kinds of water.

If you drink from Jacob's well, you'll get thirsty again.

Since my little incident with kidney stones in January, I've been trying to drink copious amounts of water.

I even resorted to using an app on my phone to keep track of it.

I've been trying to drink so much that I often hit the point that I just feel bloated with the stuff.

There are times where I feel like I can barely take any more water on board, like I never want to drink another drop in my life.

But it doesn't take long for that feeling to go away.

Very soon, I feel like it's time to drink some more.

That's the nature of thirst.

It's quenched for a time, but it soon comes back.

If you drink from Jacob's well, your satisfaction will be temporary.

Jesus ups the ante by saying that his water is different.

If you drink from the water he gives, then you'll never be thirsty again.

Have a look at verse 14:

John 4:14 (NIV11) ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

What does that mean for Christians?

That we never need to have another glass of water again?

*** Drinks cup of water ***

Clearly not.

The living water Jesus is talking about is eternal life.

Jesus is offering eternal life.

A more literal translation of "never thirsting" is that "you won't thirst into the next age".

Revelation 7 describes what the next life is going to be like:

Revelation 7:16–17 (NIV11) ¹⁶ 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"

Jesus is offering living water that satisfies with the true peace and rest that he'll bring his people into.

Once you receive it, this water will flow up and out of you.

The idea of water flowing up and out of you mightn't bring a very nice picture to your mind. It's meant to be a picture of being spring in you, that produces eternal life for you.

When Jesus offers an alternative source of water, that's pretty exciting.

The significance is probably lost a bit on most of us because water is so easily available to us.

We just go to the tap, turn it on and water comes out.

In our family the struggle is to get up from the table and get more water from the fridge or the kitchen.

People in the ancient world didn't have that convenience.

If she wanted water, it was a real saga.

She had to walk to the well to get it and then carry it back home again.

It's a good way to avoid going to the gym, but it sure isn't easy.

She wants this water – count her in!

If she won't get thirsty, she won't need to come to the well anymore!

She won't need haul the water up in a bucket. Ripper!

She doesn't know how you get this living water, this gift of eternal life.

We do though, because we've read chapter three.

We need our sins to be forgiven.

Only then will we find peace with God and have the hope he gives us.

Eternal life – we saw last week – comes from God what he has done.

Because of his great love for us, he showed that love by giving his own son to die for our sin – 3:16.

It's only by believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus that you can receive eternal life.

Do you believe in Jesus?

Trust him today. Keep trusting him today.

Many Christians think, “But I’m not feeling satisfied.”

“I became a Christian, I’m trusting in Jesus and still so many things are going wrong in my life.”

Living for Jesus does change our lives in real ways for the better now as we learn to follow Christ more each day.

But Jesus doesn’t promise that life will be perfect now.

It can’t ever be in a sin-stained world.

We have to wait for the age to come.

That’s our hope, that’s our joy.

That’s why we can face today and tomorrow with joy, because we know that this isn’t all that there is.

Because we’re just passing through, we’re sojourning as 1 Peter puts it.

And one day we’ll receive the gift that Jesus offers – the new life in the age to come.

That’s Jesus’ gift – eternal life.

A Secret Need (16-18)

Finally, we’re going to see that Jesus is speaking to a woman who needs the hope of this gift of eternal life.

He was offering living water to a woman who was deeply dissatisfied.

It feels like Jesus is always making abrupt changes in the conversation, but the one in verse sixteen really takes the cake.

It feels like he’s moving the goal posts not just to a different field, but to a completely different stadium.

Jesus suddenly asks about her husband.

He tells the Samaritan woman to go and bring her husband back.

Instead of leaving though, she replies like this in verse 17:

John 4:17a (NIV11) ¹⁷ “I have no husband,” she replied.

In the second half of the verse, Jesus reveals that he knows that what she’s said is technically correct.

She’s been married five times and she’s shackled up with a bloke now, but he isn’t her husband because they’re not married.

It's hard to know why she answered that way.

She clearly felt the weight of her situation.

It could be that she was embarrassed by her life situation.

Perhaps it was just easier to say that than to say, "It's complicated."

It's actually just as possible that she said she's not married because she thought Jesus was going to make her a better offer.

I don't know if you've thought about what she was even doing there?

Especially at that time of day, when the sun was at its hottest.

Normally, the women came and used the well in the mornings and the evenings when it was much cooler and easier to lug the water home.

And why did she come alone?

Usually women came to the wells in groups because it was much safer.

Could it be that she was avoiding other people?

It seems likely that she was a social outcast.

Jesus often reached out to people who were rejected by their peers.

Like Bono, she still hasn't found what she's looking for.

What's even more puzzling is why Jesus even brought this up?

It doesn't seem like he was trying to shame her.

And then why did John include it in his account?

What does it tell us?

Firstly, we've already seen that Jesus knows the details of people's lives when they've only just met.

She's clearly so surprised in verse 19 that she can only conclude that he's a prophet.

Secondly, Jesus has drawn out this important detail that she's not married.

There's a sense of déjà vu about this situation for anyone who knows their Old Testament well – as John's readers would've.

You all know what déjà vu is, right?

It's the feeling that you've that you've lived through this before.

You've been here and events are repeating themselves.

The feeling that this's happened before is only heightened by Jesus asking about her husband.

There's this old guy in the Bible named Abram (later it's changed to Abraham) who God chooses to bless and promises that he'll be the father of a massive family.

Only problem is that he and his wife are childless.

Nevertheless, his son Isaac is born under miraculous circumstances – well after his folks shouldn't have been able to have kids.

When Isaac grows up, Abraham needs to find a wife for his son, but not from among the Canaanite people he's living amongst.

Abraham sends his servant back to where they came from to find a wife.

In Genesis 24, you can read about how the servant comes up with a plan which he brings to the Lord in prayer.

He'll find a well and wait for the young women to come and draw water.

He'll know that whoever offers to give him and his animals a drink will be the one.

Sure enough, Rebekah turns up.

Turns out that Abraham was her great uncle (sounds a little bit gross to us but he was sent to look for someone from the same family to marry).

She and Isaac end up getting hitched.

Then Isaac does exactly the same thing for his son Jacob in Genesis 29.

Isaac travels to a foreign land.

When he gets there, he meets a young woman named Rachel at a well.

Finding out that she's his niece makes her a good match to marry Jacob.

Then in Exodus 2:15-21 Moses, flees to the foreign land of Midian where he meets Jethro's seven daughters.

You guessed it – they'd come to water their flocks by a well.

Moses gets invited back to the family and he ends up marrying Zipporah.

Here, Jesus travels to a foreign land.

He meets an unmarried woman at a well – Jacob's well, no less.

She goes onto bring news of his arrival to all of her family later in the chapter.

It fits the pattern but there's an important difference – a twist if you will – Jesus doesn't marry her.

Instead, he's going to be her saviour.

This tells us something about Jesus.

Despite the Samaritan woman's disbelief that Jesus is greater than Jacob, this has been deliberately designed to show that Jesus really is in the same league as the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

This pattern identifies him with Moses as well.

And shows that he's a mighty servant of God.

This scene only happens at important moments in the Bible, when God is working by using someone to bring about his purposes.

Finally, it shows us something about this woman.

We don't have too many details, so it's possible that she was just very unlucky and husbands just kept dying on her.

It's much more likely that we're meant to see her pattern of serial monogamy as just absurd.

Especially now that she's gone from marrying men to living with them.

When I think of her, I can't help thinking of Zsa Zsa Gábor.

Actress, socialite, but probably best known for having nine husbands.

Honestly, I've got to admit I've got a soft spot for her simply because she everything about her was so over the top.

Not just the husbands, but the shoes and the "Darlinks" as well.

Zsa Zsa is quoted as saying:

"Of course I love being in love — but it is marriage that really fulfils me. But not in every case."

Clearly.

She says that marriage fulfils her, but her string of relationships says otherwise.

Her desire to find satisfaction in relationships deserves our pity and I think it's the same with the woman by the well.

She was looking for answers in relationships in an effort to fill the void of satisfaction in her life.

We all try to fill our lives with things that we think will satisfy us.

Mars ran an ad campaign that tried to tell us that Snickers satisfies.

The company doth protest too much, methinks.

Surely no one actually believed that?

That mix of sugary and salty caramel just leaves you wanting more.

There's nothing wrong with a Snickers once in a blue moon as part of a balanced diet, but it doesn't satisfy.

And yet we all look to things to satisfy us, even when we know they'll do about as much as a Snickers.

For some of us, it's relationships.

Others of us tell ourselves that a new toy will make us feel better.

Or a new house will fulfil the longing.

We believe that finding a new job or a getting a promotion will be the key to feeling satisfied.

I saw an article yesterday titled "'All-consuming': Aussie with \$866m fortune says success is 'insulating'."⁹

Jonathan Hallinan, a property developer, talks about the cost of success.

He might have a lot of money, but he knows that he's missed out on a lot of the joyful experiences in life that others have had.

And his relationships suffer as the drive for the next deal means that he even neglects the ones he loves.

"I'm with the most important people in my life, and really, I'm thinking about my next deal."

Mick Jagger tried his best to find satisfaction in all the wrong places.

And as he sang:

"I can't get no satisfaction"

We all have longings outside the gospel.

There's nothing wrong with work or relationships or sex, just like there's nothing wrong with a Snickers.

They're all good gifts from God.

But they won't satisfy our souls.

Only Jesus is enough.

In our broken world, even good things will never make us feel satisfied.
Only the eternal life he offers will give us the joy we're chasing.
Only Jesus can provide the answers to our deepest longings.

We started by talking about companies asking whether you left feeling satisfied.
Did this woman leave Jesus feeling satisfied?
Well, she hasn't actually left yet... the story continues next week.
But we're going to see that Jesus is exactly who they're looking for.
He's the only one who can satisfy her need.
Only Jesus satisfies.

Conclusion

This woman got a whole lot more than she bargained for that day.
She came expecting to quietly get some water, but Jesus offers her much deeper answers.
He offers her eternal life.

What about you?

As you've met Jesus this week, how will you respond to him?

Will you deny that you feel dissatisfied?

Or will you turn to Jesus and accept the satisfying gift he offers?

¹ 1 Kings 12:1-24.

² 1 Kings 6:24

³ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.118.

⁴ Or Askar as it's called today.

⁵ Genesis 48:22

⁶ Genesis 33:19

⁷ Joshua 24:32

⁸ John 4:34

⁹ 'The List — Australia's Richest 250: Jonathan Hallinan Says Success Is Insulating', accessed 30 March 2019, <https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/leaders/allconsuming-aussie-with-866m-fortune-says-success-is-insulating/news-story/c43b073dc726fa0d1acdc4bb3ff85f66>.

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John 4:1-42 (Part 1: John 4:1-18)

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Big Question: How can we be satisfied in life?

Big Idea: Only Jesus satisfies.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do organisations care so much whether we're satisfied?
2. Did Jesus really need to go through Samaria (v4)?
3. What does verse 6 tell us about Jesus?
4. What is the living water that Jesus offers (v10)?
5. Jesus is clear (v14) that the water he drinks will satisfy. Why does drinking living water mean that we will "never thirst"?
6. Why does Jesus ask about her husband?
7. Even as Christians, why do we often feel dissatisfied with life? Is that "ok"?