

HEALING WATER

Healing Deep Hurts

John 4:4-26

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I couldn't believe my eyes. I was reading a story I knew so well that I nearly had every detail memorized, yet I had escaped its impact. All these years of reading it, all these years of studying it, all these years of quoting it, and only a few summers ago did I finally understand it; and it set my soul afire. I'm praying that your eyes will be opened today to what I saw.

Some months ago I shared a foundational truth. I talked about *the three stories of the Bible*. I shared the first story that is told in the first chapter of Genesis how God created us in his image as his companions. You and I were designed to be offspring of God, partners with God and "princes" of God. You and I were made *in love*, and designed to be conceived and born *through love*. The second story of the Bible is told in the second and third chapters of Genesis and reveals how both our innocence and intimacy with God was lost. We discussed what really happened in the Garden of Eden. The problem with humanity stems not merely from the succumbing to temptation, from the unbelief of that moment, but it flows from the vision of people who ate from *the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*. From that point we human beings no longer enjoyed an innocence and intimacy with God. From that juncture, we became competitors with God, umpires in life with our own vision of good and evil. It's that competitive-umpire vision that motivated God to drive Adam and Eve from the garden. It's that competitive-umpire vision that would cause some of us to turn from the Samaritan woman in our text in disgust and revulsion and say, "Five husbands and living with a sixth man? How awful!" At the same time, that same umpire vision will cause others of us to turn in disgust on those of us who felt revulsion and declare, "How self-righteous!" In either response, we are acting as umpires, people who operate out of *the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*, people who operate out of the vision that separated us from God and brought our death.

Innocence that by nature is unguarded and intimacy that results from that openness never come with an umpire vision. As long as we focus on what's good and what's evil, what's right and what's wrong, there can be no openness. There can only be fear of judgment, of

being seen as wrong; and there can be pride: that we are righteous in our own eyes. This way of looking at life breeds fear and pride. Because it is an independent vision, because it does not focus on our Father's will, it by nature is deceptive and separates us from God.

The beauty of Jesus Christ is that he did not carry the umpire vision. When he saw the Samaritan woman, he did not turn away in revulsion or disgust. He didn't look down on her. He did not act as an umpire; he served her as a lifeguard.

The third story of the Bible begins in Genesis 4 and continues throughout the Scriptures. It reveals how God rids us of that umpire vision, how God pursues and restores us to innocence and to intimacy with him through the Tree of Life, Jesus Christ. It shares how God loves broken people and restores them as his beloved children.

The story of the Samaritan woman is a window for you and me to observe how God restores us. It reveals three facets in the process of restoration. The first is *encounter*. When the Samaritan woman realized that God was visiting her in Jesus, her healing began. We spoke about that last week. The second facet of this woman's healing is seen in Jesus' words. He said:

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. (John 4:10, NIV)

Jesus told this woman that if she was really aware of what was happening, if she really had a grasp on reality, she would ask him for *living water*.

What is living water? The woman didn't understand, and most of us don't either.

God through the prophet Jeremiah revealed himself to be "*The Spring of Living Water*." The Israelites were to consider God as their source of life. God confronted the Israelites through Jeremiah, telling them that they were suffering unnecessarily because they were directing their thirst elsewhere. They drew their security and joy from other wells. They did not recognize that only God could satisfy their thirst. They might have confessed faith in God, but their deeds betrayed their search and dependence on other wells.

When Jesus sat thirsty and weary at Jacob's well, he knew God was his life, his provision, his *Spring of Living Water*. He may have pondered again that prophecy. When the Samaritan woman approached, he saw God's provision for his bodily need in the rope and bucket that she carried. Then God's Spirit showed him more. He saw her burdened heart. He saw her pain. He saw her thirst.

When the Samaritan woman asked for living water, Jesus gave it to her. Do you know how? He began by saying, "***Go call your husband.***" The woman was living with her boy friend and had been married and divorced five times. She didn't have six men because she

wanted to be immoral. She did that because she had a thirst that neither men nor solitude could quench. You don't go through that many relationships unless you are thirsting for something you can't satisfy. What is it that this woman couldn't get in life? What is it that caused her so much pain in her relationships? What led her into immorality and broken relationships?

I know what did, do you? I can identify with her thirst. My thirst did not lead me into immorality. The cisterns I dug and the water I sought came in recognition, affirmation, and achievement. I was driven to achieve. I was driven to achieve because I found myself hungering for affection and admiration. I wanted to admire myself, and I wanted others to admire me. My grades had to be top flight and reveal my intelligence. My words had to win the affection of people. My sermons and work output as a young pastor had to impress. Nevertheless, whatever I did, there normally were a few who performed better. I can tell you that this foul water was making me sick. My priorities were extremely out of kilter. My life spun out of control. I recall how things were coming to a head in my family as they tired of my absence and irritability. Some friends confronted me about my jammed appointment calendar, and I remember clearly the utter disgust I felt when I realized how eager I was to hear comments about my sermons. The affirmation of the people was an addictive narcotic. It meant more than life to me. I couldn't get enough, and that frightened me. I, a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, was that thirsty. Anybody here thirst to be valued? Anyone thirst for respect? Anyone thirst for love? Anyone haunted or driven or struggling with decisions and priorities? Maybe your narcotic is different than mine or the Samaritan woman, maybe making money or some form of recreation, socializing or service is your narcotic. What well do you go to? Are you really at peace?

Jesus gave the Samaritan woman *living water* to drink as he unveiled her insatiable thirst. The same happened for me. My healing came as I closed myself in my office. With tears I confessed my unquenchable thirst to God and cried, "*What's wrong?*" The answer came quite unexpectedly. The Spirit of God spoke thoughts into my mind: "*Wes, you're hungering for love, and no one can love you as much as you need to be loved. Your wife can't, your mother can't, your friends can't. No one can. Only I can.*" "*Okay God,*" I prayed, "*but how much do you love me?*" A picture of Christ formed in my mind, and in that picture he spread his arms out wide as if to say, "*I love you this much!*" However, his wrists were scarred and the cross appeared in the background, and the words rolled into my mind, "*Wes, how much more could I love you?*" I nodded my acknowledgment and then prayed, "*I'll serve you with all my life.*" In rebuke the Lord said, "*That's not what I want. I made you to be my companion. More than serving me, I just want you to be with me, to be close to me, to walk with me.*"

I discovered that day something I didn't know how to name until recently. That day living water flowed into me. Love put my heart at ease. Although I had tasted forgiveness and had devoted my life to the Lord, Jesus removed a plug in my water line. Living, rushing water began to quench the thirst I had and feed a spring within my heart. Jesus did another thing that day for my healing: something he also did for the Samaritan woman. I'll share that with you next week.

My concern, however, is that you recognize that Christ is here right now to give you a drink and fill your heart with living water. You are so loved, so valued, so holy, so precious. Christ's blood was shed for you because he counted you worth it.

Are you sick of the water you've been drinking? Has it been bringing you pain? Jesus is talking to you right now. Do you hear him? He's exposing your pain and shame, but that's alright. He's doing it, so you can drink what will satisfy the thirst you could not quench.