

The mission of the Spirit

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Preacher: Nick Louw

- [0 : 0 0] Food. It's got to be one of God's best inventions, don't you think? I mean, it's one of the few things, food, that we both need and want at the same time.
- It both sustains us and gives us all the nutrients we need, and it gives us pleasure and joy. Food. And that's why food is so popular. That's why it's a multi-billion rand industry, and it also forms a large chunk of most of our monthly budgets.
- Our food budget. Because it's one thing that everyone is into. I mean, you'll never find someone who says, nah, food's not my thing. Nah, food's not for me. Unless, of course, there's something wrong with them.
- Everybody's into food. Food is central to life. It's central to our daily pattern of living. And that also helps us to understand what on earth Jesus means in John 4, when he describes his mission in terms of food.
- Did you notice that? I admit this is one of his stranger sayings, what he says to his disciples after that conversation at the well. But it's very powerful what he says about food here, when we understand just what he means.
- [1 : 1 2] And so have another look at it. John 4 from verse 31. I want you to focus on what he's saying here. So his disciples have just returned from a shopping trip in the Samaritan village to get some food.
- And I'll pick it up from verse 31. His disciples urged him, Rabbi, eat something. But he said to them, I have food to eat that you know nothing about.
- Then his disciples said to each other, could someone have brought him food? My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.
- Okay, so Jesus is saying that doing the work of God, his father, is like food to him. But what on earth does he mean?
- Well, I think what he's saying is that doing his father's work is the thing in his life that both sustains him and stimulates him. It's what keeps him going and it's what gives him his greatest joy.
- [2 : 1 7] First, it keeps him going. It drives him, just like food does for us physically. It keeps us going. That's why we need to eat most days. And I mean, for most people, eating isn't a duty that we do reluctantly.
- You know, it's not something that we go, oh, no, I've got to eat again. I promise you, I never come home and I go, oh, man, I've had such a busy day and now I've got to eat as well. No, of course not.
- It's something I look forward to. It's something that I can gather around with my family. I can enjoy this food. But it's what drives us, you know, in a way.
- It's what we look forward to. It's that brief bit of relaxation and pleasure in an otherwise busy day. It's not a duty that we have to do reluctantly.
- And I think Jesus is saying the same about his attitude to his father's work. You know, Jesus never says, oh, no, I've got to do ministry now. I've got to do my father's work. No, he looks forward to that.

[3 : 17] It's what drives Jesus. And if only the same could be said of us. You see, I think Jesus is giving us an example and a bit of a rebuke here.

Because sadly, instead of being attracted to the work of God on earth, I think instead of treating it like the sustenance for our souls that it is, we tend to treat the work of God more like a six-year-old treats his vegetables.

You know what I mean? As a chore, as a duty, as something we have to get through. Something we've got to do rather than something we want to do. It's funny, though, isn't it?

As you grow up, as you mature in your palate, the foods you didn't want to go near as a kid, suddenly you start to really appreciate. You notice that? Like broccoli in a potato curry.

If you have not tried that, you must. Come around to my house. I will make you some broccoli and potato curry. It's amazing. But you see, as you mature, you stop seeing vegetables as a chore and you start to realize they're amazing and you actually look forward to them.

[4 : 23] Well, I think the same goes for the work of God for a Christian. The more we mature spiritually, the less we see God's work as a duty that we have to do.

And the more we see it as something that we wake up each day wanting to do. And so this work sustained Jesus.

It's what he looked forward to. It's what drove him. But not only did it sustain him, it also stimulated him. It gave him pleasure. And we can see that from what he says next to his disciples. I want you to follow along in your Bibles.

So from verse 34, Jesus says, Notice, he says, Those involved in God's work are glad to be doing it.

Glad together. This work of God brings actual satisfaction and gladness and pleasure. Much like food. You know, after eating it brings satisfaction.

[5 : 39] This deep satisfaction that you're not hungry anymore. And also pleasure in the eating of it through your taste buds. Well, Jesus sees the work of God as something that brings a deep joy and satisfaction.

And he challenges us to see it like that too in our own lives. Because the truth is, there is no more important and more exciting work to be involved in on this earth than the work of God, what he is doing.

One day, in eternity, you will look back on this life and all that you will see as important that you have done. All that will matter in eternity is the work that you've done for God here in this short life.

And not only is it important and exciting, it is also, we see from this passage, something that every single one of us can be involved in if we are Christians.

But now to understand how. Because I think many of you are sitting here saying, no, no, no. You know, the work of God, that's what ministers and evangelists do.

[6 : 48] But not me. You know, I can't do that. But I want to tell you, you can. Because God has given everybody, every one of his people, an opportunity to be involved in this critical work that he is doing on earth.

But we need to understand how that is. And to understand how, we need to understand the context of this passage. So Jesus isn't just telling his disciples this out of the blue.

Something caused him to start talking about the work of God. What was it that caused him to start talking about this? Well, it's the fact that he's just been doing this very work he's talking about at a well in the middle of the desert with this woman, the Samaritan woman.

And this conversation, you know what strikes me about it in John chapter 4? It's so significant that John devotes a whole chapter in his gospel just to record the conversation and the aftermath of this conversation.

He sees this as something worth spilling ink over and spending very limited time they had in their scrolls, a very limited space.

[7 : 53] These gospel writers had to choose very carefully what they included. Well, John chooses to include this conversation as a central part of his gospel because in it, in this conversation, we actually see exactly what the work of God is that we can be involved in.

In the conversations we have day to day, we can be involved in the work of God often when we least expect it. So let's have a look at this conversation in a little bit more detail from verse 7.

Please follow along in your Bibles. Now, what's interesting about it starts out in a fairly ordinary way with Jesus asking for a drink. And that is something anyone can do, right?

You don't need to go to an evangelism course to ask for a drink. And often the most significant conversations we can have in life start out fairly ordinary, right?

We don't plan them. But what we see here is that Jesus was ready to use this fairly insignificant moment to do something profound, to do something quite significant, to do the work of God.

[8 : 56] So let's see what happens. Verse 9, this woman is surprised Jesus is talking to her at all because she's a Samaritan and the Jews just weren't meant to talk to Samaritans.

But Jesus didn't care because he knew that the work of God is more important than social norms. And so he gets to the point quite quickly. Verse 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.

Now at first the woman doesn't understand what he's talking about. They're at a well, so she naturally thinks he's talking about physical water. But it turns out he's describing something much, much better than any physical blessing or physical water.

Verse 13, Jesus answered, Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 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.

Okay, so what he's saying here is that this living water that he is able to give to this woman, that he's offering her freely. Notice, she doesn't need to go through any kind of religious ceremonies or keep particular laws to get this living water.

[10 : 18] He is wanting to give it to her. He's offering it freely to her. And he describes it as something that will truly satisfy the depths of her soul like nothing else can.

Now naturally she starts to understand this. So naturally she wants some of this water. Verse 15, the woman said to him, Sir, give me this water. She still doesn't quite get what he's talking about.

So that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water. She gets the fact that if she had this special water, she wouldn't be unsatisfied. But she still doesn't quite understand the spiritual nature of it.

But now, now is where it gets interesting. Jesus says, verse 16, Go call your husband and come back. Now this is interesting. This is kind of a change of subject.

It seems out of the blue. But what Jesus is doing is he's saying this to her, knowing full well, if we read on, knowing full well that this woman is at the end of a string of broken marriages and is right now in an illicit sexual relationship with someone who's not her husband.

[11 : 23] He knows this. So why does he bring it up? Why does he open this wound? Well, if you studied this passage before, and we did a few months ago when we were going through John, you'll know why he brings this up.

And the reason is because before he can give her what's going to truly satisfy her deepest needs, this living water, he first has to show her where she's been trying to satisfy that need in all the wrong places.

In her case, through sexual relationships. And that, in fact, is a very common way that people will try to fill the void in their souls. Especially in today's world, but it's always been a very common way.

The void, the vacuum that only God can fill, people try to fill it up with all kinds of things. Sex, entertainment, money, drink, even family, even good things can be used, made an idol to try to fill that void that only God can fill.

I wonder what it might be for you. I wonder what your tendency is to gravitate towards, to fill the hole in your heart.

[12 : 38] The vacuum that only God can fill. That we tend to fill with the things of the world, and we wonder why they never satisfy us. It was St. Augustine who put it well. He said, our hearts are restless until they rest in God.

And that's what this woman needed to realize, and that's what Jesus is trying to get at. It's only once this woman realized how she was wrongly trying to fill the void, why her heart was still restless.

It's only then that Jesus can give her what he knows she really needs, which is this living water. And then look how he does it a bit later from verse 25. They have this little side conversation about worship, which is worth going into, but we don't have time.

But look at how it concludes. Verse 25. The woman said, I know that Messiah called Christ is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us. Jesus declared, I, the one speaking to you, am he.

Then his disciples returned, and were surprised to find him talking with the woman, but no one asked, what do you want, or why are you talking with her? Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town.

[13 : 50] Notice something important that happens once this woman discovered the truth about Jesus. It's a little detail John includes that it's easy to read over. Right there at the end, verse 28.

Leaving her water jar, the woman went back to town. She came there. Why did she come to that well? What was her plan when she set out that morning? To get water. That was her only goal.

That was her only objective. To go to that well to get water, but she leaves without the water that she came to get. Why? What is John, the expert narrator, trying to tell us through that little detail?

Well, he's trying to tell us. Her physical need has, at that moment, become a very distant second to her spiritual need that Jesus has just revealed to her and which he says he can fill.

Her material needs are not even in the picture anymore. And right here, this story might be speaking to you this morning.

[14 : 51] Because you might, if you look at your life, if you look at your daily habits, you might still be prioritizing being driven by your physical needs above your spiritual needs.

Your physical needs might be much more important to you than your spiritual needs. And you might still think that the deep longing of your soul that you're feeling will be satisfied through those physical needs being met.

Well, this story is here to show you that they can never be, that deep longing can never be satisfied by anything that this world can give you.

Only Jesus can satisfy that thirst that you know that you have deep inside you. And that's what this story is here to tell us. But also, if you are a Christian, if you have found relationship with God, if you found living water, if you found salvation through Christ, this story is also here to show you what the work of God actually is that you can be involved in.

What the work is that Jesus was so passionate about and that he is calling you to be a part of. And you know what that work is? In summary, that work is the work of satisfying thirsty souls with living water.

[16 : 07] That is the work that Jesus was driven by and that is the work that he wants his people to be driven by. The work of satisfying thirsty souls with living water.

Because you see, if you're a Christian, you might not know it, but you actually have the living water that this world desperately needs.

And that broken homes out there and broken lives and unsatisfied people that we see on a daily basis desperately need. Because do you know what that living water actually is?

I'll tell you what it is. It's the Holy Spirit. In other words, the real presence of God in someone's life that only Jesus can bring. The Holy Spirit and what the Holy Spirit does inside a person when he enters that life, that is the living water Jesus is talking about.

And I'm not making that up. Jesus says so. John says so. In chapter 7, verse 38. You can turn there. I'll read it from verse 37. On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

[17 : 20] Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. By this, he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

Up to that time, the Spirit had not yet been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. Now, this is important, what John says right there. When he talks about Jesus being glorified, he refers to his cross, his death.

It's a strange way to be glorified, but that is actually the most glorious thing. That is what Jesus came to do. That was the culmination of his work to satisfy souls with living water.

But that had to happen before the Holy Spirit could come into our lives. Because he had to die for our sins.

To make us fit, to receive God's Spirit. And Jesus says, when we believe in that death on our behalf. When we believe in it, simply believe in it.

[18 : 25] He doesn't say, notice he doesn't say, in there in verse 38. He said, whoever comes to church on a regular basis, even though that is a good thing. He doesn't say, whoever performs good deeds.

No. What does he say? Whoever believes in me. That's his promise to you. Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water will flow from within them. Because once we believe in that death, on our behalf, we have our sins expunged from our record.

So that we can be fit to receive God's Spirit. That is the glory of the Gospel. That righteousness comes through faith in Christ alone. Because we could never earn the righteousness.

It's not our righteousness. It's Christ's on our behalf. And so when we believe, we are fit to receive God's Spirit. We are made clean. But notice that once we do, once we believe, and the Holy Spirit comes into our lives.

Notice, this is very important. Jesus goes on to say, whoever believes doesn't only receive the living water, but they become a source of that living water to others. Notice that.

[19 : 36] Rivers of living water will flow from within them. Flow from them. Not just to them. From them as well. That's what happens when someone receives the Spirit. And this is what I want you to realize this morning.

If you remember nothing else. Remember this. That to have the Holy Spirit is also to be a source of the Holy Spirit to others. And that is the work of God.

To bring God's Spirit into the brokenness of this world. We become, if we are Christians, if we believe and are saved and have the Holy Spirit, we become the source of living water for our broken, thirsty world and the people around us.

What an important work that Jesus calls us to. But how can you make sure that you are doing that work in the coming week and month and year if you're a Christian?

Well, to do that, you've got to do what Jesus did at that well in Samaria. And so, before we finish, I want to just bring out a few principles from that conversation that you can incorporate in your daily life, if you're a Christian, to help you to do God's work.

[20 : 47] The first principle is to be where the broken people are. Be where broken people are. You see, as Christians, we tend to avoid people who are caught up in sin and brokenness.

We tend to not want to spend time with them. We like our holy huddles. But look what Jesus did. He went specifically to where the broken people were because he knew they needed what he had.

Verse 3 of John 4. Jesus left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now, he had to go through Samaria.

Did he? Technically, no. If you look at the geography, the trip from Judea to Galilee, Jews would often go around Samaria. It was the long way around, but they would avoid Samaria.

There was a way to get to Galilee and not go through Samaria because the Jews considered the Samaritans unclean and that they would contaminate them. But not Jesus. He knew that he had a divine appointment at the well.

[21 : 51] And he knew that he could only do God's work if he went to where the brokenness was. And it's the same with us. You know, we tend to want to avoid brokenness and not spend time with people trying to satisfy themselves in sin for fear that it will contaminate us or worse because we think we're better than them.

And yes, while we must be careful to avoid temptation and falling into temptation, that is no reason not to be in the world and to be in the lives of the people who need living water.

Because you have what the world needs. Don't keep it to yourself. Don't keep it to yourself. So if you have the Holy Spirit in you, realize that you have the potential, much greater potential to be a positive influence on their lives than they have to be a negative influence on yours.

That's the power of the Holy Spirit. And so just here's a simple way to do that. Just learn to spend time with people who need Jesus. And you know how you can do that?

Do what you enjoy doing. Christians think we can't do what we enjoy doing because that's worldly. Actually, we must, as Christians, do what we enjoy doing. The sports, the hobbies we enjoy doing, but do them specifically with other people who enjoy doing those things who are not in the family of God.

[23 : 09] Build genuine friendships with them because you have what they need, but they'll never have a chance to find that out if you're not in their lives where they are.

Secondly, break stereotypes. By that I mean help people to see that Christians aren't who they think Christians are. And what struck me about Jesus and this woman is that he didn't act like the Jews were meant to act to Samaritans.

You notice that? Jews weren't meant to talk to Samaritans, let alone be in a vulnerable position. But Jesus not only initiates conversation with this woman, but he puts himself in a position of need by asking her for a drink.

So he basically breaks all of the preconceptions that this woman would have had for Jews so that she actually listens to what he has to say. Well, I think that is very wise.

And we've got to realize that people of this world have a lot of preconceptions as to who Christians are. What does the world think of Christians today?

[24 : 17] Well, they think, by and large, that we're bigoted, holier-than-thou types who are super judgmental and nitpicky. Pretty much like the Samaritans thought of the Jews.

And so before Jesus can have a significant conversation with this woman, he has to show her he is not who she thinks that he is. And often we have to do the same with non-Christians.

We've got to break the stereotypes that people have of us by going out of our way to show them that we don't think we're better. And we're not here to judge them.

We're not. But don't get me wrong, that doesn't mean we don't have to talk about sin. We do. And we have to talk about God's judgment on sin.

Notice Jesus doesn't avoid the topic of sin with this woman. He deliberately brings it up. But not as a mean to judge her. He doesn't say to her, well, you know, you've had five husbands and now you're in an illicit affair.

[25 : 19] Woe unto you. He doesn't. And he uses it as a way to help her. Not as a way to condemn her. He uses it as a way to show her the sin that can't satisfy her.

And that he can give her the only thing that will satisfy her. So that should be the attitude of Christians, I think. Towards those who think that all we do is judge them and point fingers at them.

And I'm thinking particularly of homosexuals. Homosexuals. These are people that we mustn't avoid and demean like so many unloving so-called Christians tend to do.

But we must love homosexuals. And we must go out of our way to show them that we love them. And that we're not the bigoted, judgmental Christians that they think we are.

But rather that we care for them enough to speak the truth to them. And show them what will actually give them the satisfaction that they're seeking in all the wrong places.

[26 : 20] We must be bold to speak the truth. But in love. Like Jesus did here. And then thirdly, the third principle we get from this conversation, and finally, is we must show people who Jesus is.

And that is the most loving thing we can do. Because it's only in someone coming to know who Jesus really is that they can have this living water. That's the only way we can pass it on.

Through the identity of Christ. And them coming to realize that and believing that. And that is exactly what Jesus does. He directs this woman through this conversation to the point of telling her who he really is.

That's the climax. That's how the conversation ends. When she discovers the identity of Jesus. And we've got to do the same with people. You know, we don't need to be skilled conversationalists to do that.

We don't need to go on evangelism courses, helpful as those are. We don't need gifts in evangelism even to do this. But we do need to talk about Jesus. That's that.

[27 : 20] If you want one evangelism tip from me. And I actually lecture evangelism at the theological college. There's a lot to say about evangelism. But if there's one thing I want to tell you.

It's learn to talk about Jesus. It's as simple as that really. I mean, I go there for six weeks. And that's really all I want the students to go away with.

Learn to talk about Jesus. Because when we talk about Jesus and who he is. And what he did on the cross. Those are the significant conversations in our life.

Those are the conversations that we will in eternity look back on one day. And say, I'm glad I had that conversation with that person. Those are the conversations that matter.

And those are the only really conversations that matter. Those are the conversations. When we talk about Jesus. Those are the conversations that will stick in people's minds.

[28 : 18] Long after we've stopped talking with him. Those are the conversations that count for something in eternity. Because those are the conversations through which God will pour out his living water to a broken world.

And so those are the conversations that should be our food as God's people. Those are the conversations we should long to have. That we should pray for. That we should look forward to.

That should get us out of bed in the morning. Jesus said, my food is to do the will of him who sent me. And to finish his work. Is that your food?

If you're a Christian. Are you seeking to be involved in God's work? To bring living water into broken lives? Is that what drives you? Is that what gets you out of bed?

Because realize. If you're a Christian. You have what this world desperately needs. You have the Holy Spirit. And so look for ways that you can be more involved in the brokenness out there.

[29 : 19] So that he can be involved in working in that. To bring life and restoration through you. Shall we pray that God would help us? Yes Lord.

Thank you for making clear to us what the mission of the Holy Spirit is. And what you call us to do in this world. And Lord. We pray that you would give us boldness to do that.

We pray that you would make it our food. Lord. We want to be able to say with Jesus. That our food. What sustains us.

What drives us. What pleases us. Is to do your work. To be involved in this exciting work. Of bringing living water to thirsty souls. Help us in the coming weeks and months. To look for opportunities.

Use us mightily. And bring healing to the brokenness around us. Through us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.