

Our Spiritual Need, Part 1

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[0 : 0 0] Put up your hand if you turned on the tap this week and you felt just a trickle of water come through because of, if you haven't yet noticed, Cape Town City's water rationing plans.

Have you been affected by it in any way? Yeah, there are some. Well, if you haven't, it's sure to come because we are still running out of water and the city has now put a crisis management plan into place and phase one has been initiated, which is water rationing, lower pressure and maybe even times of cutting off water supply.

So they recommend that you always have five liters of drinking water on hand. And it's getting quite serious. And if we don't lower consumption, listen to what phase two and three of the crisis management plan involve.

If it enters into phase two or three, we will not be able to get water from our taps anymore. You will turn on the tap and there will be nothing. And you'll need to collect a predefined quantity of water per person per day at allocated collection points.

And get this, the police and the army will be deployed at these points to ensure safety. Now, we hope it doesn't come to that. It sounds like something from some kind of post-apocalyptic movie starring Denzel Washington or something.

[1 : 2 6] But it's serious. This is real. This is as real as it gets. So pray that it doesn't come to that. But if it does, if it comes to that, it won't matter who you are or where you live or how much money you have in your bank account, will it?

Whether you live in a fancy mansion in Bishop's Court or a shack in Kailiche, whether you've got a university education or you don't yet have a standard six, whether you're white, black, rich, poor, criminal or law-abiding citizen, it won't matter.

You'll still need to come to collect water under the watchful eye of the South African Defense Force. Because all of us are the same when it comes to our basic physical needs, aren't we? When it comes to our basic physical needs, there are no divisions.

We are all just human and we have the same needs no matter who we are. And that is exactly what this morning's passage is about. Because this is true spiritually just as much as it is physically.

We all share a basic spiritual need as well as basic physical needs which unite us all. No matter who we are, we have basic spiritual needs as well.

[2 : 4 0] Although sometimes they're not as evident. And it's in this conversation between Jesus and a woman, oddly enough by a well, where he reveals to her the spiritual need that she never knew she had.

But she discovers that she does by the end of the conversation. We're actually going to tackle this conversation in two parts. This Sunday and then we're going to continue the conversation next Sunday. But what's interesting as we start to look at this very important conversation in John chapter 4 together, is that it's recorded straight after another conversation that we looked at three weeks ago.

Do you remember who that was with? Anyone? Nicodemus, yeah. Jesus had just spoken to this really important Pharisee type guy, Nicodemus.

And the very next conversation we see him having is with this woman at the well. And it's no mistake that these two conversations are together in John. Because it's difficult to find two people more different from each other than Nicodemus and this woman.

You see, we learn in this passage that she was a Samaritan woman. And if you don't know, Samaritans were kind of a half-breed offshoot from Judaism. And the Jews, it was taboo.

[3 : 51] They tried to avoid the Samaritans like the plague. It was taboo for them to be seen with Samaritans, let alone speak to them. And definitely not sharing a water jar with them.

That was something you just didn't do as a Jew. So that's why this woman is so surprised when Jesus asks her for a drink. But more than this, we see later as we read on, this particular woman had a rather checkered history with men.

And she was currently involved in an illicit sexual affair. And so she was shunned even in her own society. You'll notice as well, it's always important to notice the details of passages.

John mentions when she comes to collect the water at the well. It's to the sixth hour, which according to Jewish timekeeping would have been the middle of the day and the heat of the day. People didn't collect water from wells in the ancient world in the heat of the day.

They went either sunrise or sunset. And so she came here probably this time because she wanted to avoid everyone else. Because she was shunned. She was an outcast. And she didn't want to be seen.

[4 : 58] And so you couldn't have a person more different from Nicodemus. Nicodemus, John chapter 3, is this well-respected, super-orthodox, goody-two-shoes. While the Samaritan woman is the opposite.

She's despised, unorthodox, Samaritan, morally questionable, loose-living. And yet, Jesus reaches out to them both equally. Because they're both exactly the same when it comes to their spiritual need.

And so what is this spiritual need that they both shared? What is this basic spiritual need? Well, we all agree physically we need water.

I'm sure you wouldn't argue with that. No matter who you are, you need water. Because when we don't have it, we experience thirst. And thirst is one of the most intense cravings there is.

If you've ever gone a day or more without water, you'll know what it feels like really to be thirsty. Not just, oh, I want to drink. Let me get some fruit juice from the fridge. But really be thirsty.

[5 : 59] Your body actually craving liquid. And for people who lived in the ancient Middle East, like Israelites and Samaritans, without, you know, desalinization plants and piping systems, thirst was a very real daily reality.

They knew this need for water all too well. And that's why the Bible uses this familiar idea of thirst as a metaphor over and over again to describe another type of craving that people have.

Not a physical craving, but a spiritual craving. But a craving just as intense as physical thirst. So, we see this, for example, in Psalm 42.

I want you to turn there in your Bibles. Keep your finger in John. But turn to Psalm 42. Because this is one of the examples of this spiritual thirst that people experience.

And maybe, as we read it, you'll be able to relate. Maybe you won't. But let's see what it says. Psalm 42.

[7 : 07] From verse 1. As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Where can I go and meet with God? Okay, so this guy has a thirst.

His soul has a thirst for God. And notice it's not just a thirst to know God intellectually. Not just a thirst for an understanding about God.

But a thirst for God himself. The living God. The writer longs to meet with God. Where can I go and meet with God?

And he thirsts for that experience. To know God personally. Now, when I was overseas, I want to share with you, I fell in love with a woman.

[8 : 08] In another country. You'll be pleased to know she is now my wife. Jean. But when she was in another country to me, I longed to be with her. I longed to be in her presence.

Not just knowledge about her. That wasn't good enough. You know, if her parents had written a book on the history of her life and posted it to me, that wouldn't have satisfied my need for her.

Right? So knowledge about her wasn't enough. I needed to be with her. And that's in a human relationship. But it's the same in our relationship with God, which is the ultimate relationship we were made for.

No amount of learning about God will satisfy your soul's thirst for God. You know, we often think that just spending time reading the Bible on a daily basis is enough.

But I want to tell you it's not. It's a good habit, yes. And don't get me wrong. The Bible is absolutely essential in having a relationship with God. But it's still just a means to that end.

[9 : 11] We must understand. And if the Bible and reading the Bible on a daily basis is not doing that. If it's just satisfying our intellect. If it's just a way that we tick a box to say, well, we've done our daily quiet time today.

But it's not leading us into a living relationship with God. Then there's really not much point reading it, is there? If it's just satisfying our minds, that's not why God gave us his word.

The ultimate aim when we read the Bible should be to relate with God. And have our spiritual thirst satisfied in him. But I don't have that spiritual thirst, you might say.

I'm not like this guy in the Psalms. Thirsting for God. I'm quite happy without God. In fact, I didn't even need to come to church this morning. I was dragged here. I don't need God.

I'm happy without him. I don't thirst for him. Really? Really? Well, let's look at that Psalm again. Because as we read on, I want you to notice.

[10 : 15] So this Psalm about this guy thirsting for God. I want you to notice when he felt this thirst for God. What circumstance was he in that caused him to feel this thirst for God?

Look from verse 5. Look what he says. Why are you downcast, O my soul? He's talking to himself here. Why are you so disturbed within me? Have you ever felt that? Have you ever wanted to talk to your own soul and say, Why are you so disturbed?

What's the matter? Why am I feeling this way? Why am I feeling frustrated with this life? What's wrong? Have you ever felt that? Have you ever said that to yourself?

Let's go on. Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. Why? My soul is downcast within me. Therefore, I will remember you.

Okay, so when did this guy feel this thirst in his soul for God? It's when things weren't going well. It's when he was going through a really bad time that he felt his thirst for God.

[11 : 22] And this is not the only example. Turn a few pages on to Psalm 63. We see the same thirst. A different guy writing this psalm. Different writer, but the same spiritual thirst is recorded here.

Have a look. Psalm 63. From the beginning. You, God, are my God. Earnestly I seek you.

I thirst for you. My whole being longs for you. Okay, so the same spiritual thirst. But notice what situation caused him to feel this thirst for God in the first place.

Go on. In a dry and parched land where there is no water. You see, he was thirsting for something that the world around him couldn't give.

This was a different thing that caused him to thirst than the other guy in the previous psalm. It was his realization that the world around him was a dry and parched land.

[12 : 23] In other words, the world didn't have anything for him. The world couldn't satisfy him. Have you ever realized, have you ever felt that? Have you ever pursued something, happiness, satisfaction, security in the things of the world and yet no matter how much you have, you're still not satisfied?

Have you ever felt like this guy, that the world is dry and parched? It doesn't satisfy? Because it's only then that this guy realized that what the world couldn't do, only God could do.

And he realized his thirst was actually for God. But notice, this is important. Notice in both cases, the guys who write these psalms, they felt their thirst for God only when they felt the brokenness of the world.

The first guy, it's when he felt the brokenness inside himself. The disturbed, downcast soul. The second guy, he felt the brokenness of the world around him.

How it didn't have anything for him. But either way, it was when they experienced that brokenness that they realized that they were thirsty for God.

[13 : 41] And it's the same for you and me. It's when we come to realize that this life and what it offers can't actually satisfy our souls. It's then that we start to realize that our souls were made to find satisfaction in more than this.

But it's when we really feel the brokenness of this world, only that we feel that. That we realize that our souls are thirsting for God. It's when we're downcast. It's when we're depressed.

It's when we're sick. It's when our relationships with other people fall apart, on which we were pinning our hopes for happiness. In other words, it's when we feel the frustrations of living in a broken world and our souls cry out.

It's then that they're crying out for God. We're actually, what we're feeling, we're actually feeling is a longing for God, even if we don't realize it.

When we cry out, when we just had enough of this world. And we all come to that point sooner or later. Maybe this last week you felt that. Maybe you felt the brokenness of this world and you're just frustrated.

[14 : 56] Well, you know what that is? That's a thirst for God. That's a thirst for the only perfect thing in this universe. And so we thirst for God even when we don't realize that we're thirsting for Him.

Have you ever watched a baby that's hungry? Maybe you can go visit baby Jonah. And you'll observe, like with any baby, when they're hungry, they cry out even though they don't quite know what they need.

You notice that? They just cry. They just randomly cry into the air. And they're pathetic little things, aren't they? They have no ability to meet their own needs.

And so they just cry and cry and cry and cry. But the baby doesn't know consciously what it's craving. It's just knowing that something's wrong. And it's only when it gets what it's craving, when it gets milk, suddenly that its face changes.

Have you noticed how quickly a baby's face changes when it gets what it needs? Suddenly it's as if it's saying, oh, right, this is what I needed all along. This is amazing.

[16 : 02] Well, you see, it's the same with our spiritual thirst. We feel the craving, don't we? We feel the frustration almost every day. But we often don't know what we crave and we just cry out randomly.

We don't know what it is we need, but we feel a need. We feel a craving. We feel a craving. We feel a craving. Until we come to God and experience Him in real relationship and we go, oh, okay, this is what I need.

It's then that we realize that we've been thirsting for God all along. And no matter where you are on your journey through this life, you need to come to that point.

You will, God willing, come to that point of realizing that you needed God all along. Even if for years and years you've been denying that, God made you to thirst for Him alone.

And everybody has that basic spiritual need, that thirst for God, whether they know it or not. If Nicodemus had that thirst, even though he was this well-educated religious guy, he didn't think he needed anything.

[17 : 09] And yet Jesus told him, no, you do. The Samaritan woman had that thirst, even though she was quite successful at picking up guys.

She seemed to be able to navigate the world and relationships. Well, not so successfully, obviously, but she had no idea she had a thirst for God.

But Jesus tells her she does. Your work colleague, whoever that might be, at the water cooler or the coffee machine or the cubicle next to you, has that thirst, even though they don't realize it.

The stranger sitting next to you on the train has that thirst. The beggar at the streetlights has that thirst. Even if their hunger for physical food and thirst for physical drink is their first priority, even if that's overshadowed anything else, they still have this deep spiritual thirst.

We all do. Your next-door neighbor has this thirst, and you have that thirst, and I have that thirst. It's a thirst which we go on to see only Jesus can quench.

[18 : 17] And that's the next point that he teaches this woman. Because now that we've understood this concept of a spiritual thirst that all people have, now we're in a position to better understand what Jesus is saying to this woman.

So let's read through the conversation again. John chapter 4 from verse 7. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Give me a drink, Jesus said to her, because his disciples had gone into town to buy food.

How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? She asked him, for Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus answered, if you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, give me a drink, you would ask him, and he would give you living water.

So this woman had no idea. She had no idea about her need for God. And she was still assuming that all that Jesus was offering was something physical, as we see next.

Verse 11. Sir, said the woman, you don't even have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where will you get this living water? It's interesting. I don't know if you've noticed, these stories at the beginning of John, there's a constant misunderstanding of what Jesus is talking about.

[19 : 36] People always assume he's talking about something physical when he's talking about something spiritual. So you see it with Nicodemus. He must be born again, he said. But how can I go into my mother's womb and be born a second time?

He thought he was talking about something physical. You see it with the temple. When he's at the temple, he says, destroy this temple, and I'll rebuild it. And they say, but it took 40 years to build this temple. Well, Jesus was talking about the spiritual temple of his body.

And the same here. He talks about something more than just physical water, and yet this woman thinks that he's just talking about water, physical water. And she goes on, verse 12, and says, you aren't greater than our father Jacob, are you?

He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and livestock. Now, this is interesting, this mention of Jacob. Because another thing that you would have noticed in all of these stories at the beginning of John is that Jesus, in some way, in each of them, exposes a failure of the Jewish religion.

Something that the Jewish religion couldn't do for the people, for the Jewish people. And in each of them, the temple, the Nicodemus, the wedding where he turned water into wine, all of that, if we understand what's going on, they're not just random stories.

[20 : 51] They're pointing to the failure of religion, the failure of established religion, the failure of Judaism in this case, to bring us to God.

And Jesus shows how all of Judaism, all of the Old Testament, actually, in some way, points to him and what he can do. It's all fulfilled in him. Well, exactly the same is happening in this story.

Jacob, if you don't know, he was a patriarch of Israel, through whom God promised Israel land and abundance. And what Jacob did way before Israel actually settled the land, he went in and dug a well.

Because without water, you couldn't very well have abundance. And so he thought, well, let me give God a head start. Let me dig a well and have water. Now, this well that he dug, interestingly enough, to this day, is still providing water.

You can go visit it. It's in Israel. And it's a very reliable well. It's been there for over 2,000 years. And it's still providing water.

[21 : 53] It was a pretty good well. And so this woman says, surely you can't do more than Jacob did for us. Found this amazing well and dug it. I mean, you can't do more than that, can you?

She asks Jesus. Well, listen to his response. This is important. Jesus said, everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again.

And in fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life. So you see what he's saying here? He's saying, sure, yeah, Jacob provided you with water in a waterless land.

Well done, Jacob. That was a good show. But that can only ever provide for you physically. And you know what? You'll drink from it. You'll go back. You'll do your work. And you'll get thirsty again.

It can only ever provide for you temporarily. And that's not actually the real abundance that God was promising to his people. Which is something much more than just physical water.

[22 : 57] Physical blessings. You know, God's promises to us aren't just about improving our lives. As so many people think.

So many people come to God and think first and foremost of what God can do for us physically. We tend to do that, don't we? I mean, look at our prayers when we pray to God.

What are our first priorities in our prayers? Please protect my family. Please heal my sickness. Please provide me with food. And maybe a TV as well.

Maybe a car. You see, we're constantly bringing our physical requests to God. And we... The problem with that... Now, there's nothing wrong with that.

God wants us to rely on Him. And He's perfectly capable of providing anything He wants to provide us. Obviously, sometimes He doesn't. Because it's better for us not to have certain things.

[23 : 57] Physically. But the problem is that we tend to associate our need for God with our physical needs. And that's often where our need for Him stops.

When we've got everything we need physically, we feel that we don't need God anymore. And that's one of the reasons that God often withholds physical blessings from us. Because that's a terrible situation to be in.

Well, Jesus is saying to this woman here and to us this morning that there's something much more than physical needs you have. And you've got to realize that. Don't just live chasing after your physical needs thinking that's all you need.

Because you have a far deeper spiritual need that God wants to satisfy. But you first need to realize that you have it.

And so look what Jesus does next to convince this woman of her spiritual need. Very interesting. 15.

[25 : 00] Sir, this woman said to Him, Give me this water so I won't get thirsty and come here to draw water. Go call your husband, He told her, and come back here.

What? Huh? That's a change of subject. Why does she need to call her husband before He gives her living water? Have you ever wondered that? Jesus seems to do this quite often.

He seems to completely change the subject to something that seems so unrelated and yet it's not. Because we go on to see just why He told her to call her husband.

Verse 17. I don't have a husband, she answered. You have correctly said I don't have a husband, Jesus said. For you've had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband.

What you've said is true. Okay, this is another example of Jesus knowing all people. It's freaky, isn't it? He knows people inside and out. He knows their history.

[25 : 59] He knows their deepest thoughts and secrets. Because He's Jesus. He's the Son of God. But you see why He told her to call her husband and how it's not unrelated at all.

He told her to call her husband because He knew she was living in sin. He knew her seedy sexual background. And He knew that unless she comes clean with her sin, unless she admits it and lets it come out.

More specifically, unless she comes to terms with how she's been trying to satisfy her spiritual thirst in all the wrong ways. Then she'll never come to accept the living water He can offer.

Because we found out later in John just what this living water is. Interestingly enough, John leaves us hanging in this passage. If you were reading John for the first time and you got to the end of the story, you wouldn't actually know what the living water is that Jesus offers yet.

Until later in the gospel. From John 7, I'll read from verse 37. This is another account that happens much later.

[27 : 04] So here we find the answer to the question, what is this living water?

That satisfies our thirst for God? It is the Holy Spirit who, when He is in our lives, brings us into that real living relationship with God that we all thirst for.

But how does that happen? How does a Holy Spirit come to live in a sinful human? He's holy. We're sinful. How does that happen? How can the sinful have any communion with the holy?

How can a sinful human like this woman, like you and me, have a real relationship with a righteous and perfect and holy God?

Well, only if that human being becomes holy themselves. How does that happen? Does that happen from us coming to church and obeying the Ten Commandments and trying to be good and recycle and give money to strangers?

[28 : 29] How do we become holy? Well, no, because no amount of good works are going to take away the sin that is inside all of us. You see, this woman had hidden sin, which Jesus knew about, but she didn't want to come out.

Well, we all have that, don't we? We all have something that we're ashamed of deep down inside. I once heard it put this way. If there was a gallery and everything that you've ever said, thought, or done was on display in this gallery and your family and friends were all outside waiting to come in, would you let them in?

No. Because we've all got things that we know that we've done wrong, even by our own standards, let alone God's. We've all got sin. So how can a sinful human like us become holy and be residence for the Holy Spirit?

For this living water to come in and flow in us? To satisfy our spiritual thirst? Do you want to know how? Well, for that, we need to go to one more place. This is the last place I'll take you.

John chapter 19, towards the end of the gospel. And we've got to read again what happened after Jesus died on the cross. Now, remember, John has traced this theme of water, living water, right from here, John chapter 4, throughout his gospel.

[29 : 57] And I want you to read something here, which you might notice for the first time. John chapter 19, verse 33 onwards. This is after Jesus had just died.

He was still on the cross. When they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side of the spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

The man who saw it had given this testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. That's interesting.

There's this flow of water that came from Jesus' side when they pierced him. And John records this for us for a reason. Now, of course, you can give medical reasons as to why water flowed out of Jesus' side after he died.

Proving, in fact, that he did die from a medical perspective. And that may well be the reason that John mentions it. But I think he mentions it because it has a symbolic reason as well, especially given his obsession with this theme of water throughout his gospel.

[31 : 06] I think he mentions it because Jesus' death is what started the flow of living water, spiritual water that he's been promising to quench our spiritual thirst.

Because Jesus' death, his blood, forgave our sins. And that's why blood and water flowed together. When forgiveness came represented by the blood shed for sins, the Holy Spirit could come to be represented by the water.

Or at least that's what I think John is alluding to. But even if he's not, the fact remains, it was only when our sins were dealt with. It is only when our sins are dealt with that it's possible to have our thirst for God satisfied by his Holy Spirit taking up residence in our lives.

Because only Jesus' blood that can truly forgive our sins can make us holy, can give us Christ's holiness. And you see, that's why before Jesus can give this woman living water, she needs to have her sins dealt with.

She needs to come clean with her sins. And that's her role in that, in dealing with her sins, to come clean. She can't wipe away her sins. She can't undo her sins.

[32 : 19] She can't make up for her sins. But she can admit her sins. She can come clean with her sins. And confess how she's tried to satisfy her spiritual thirst in sin.

And Jesus is calling all of us to do that as well this morning. Because we've all done that. We've all tried to satisfy our spiritual thirst that only God can satisfy.

We've all tried to satisfy it in other things, haven't we? It's a natural human tendency to do that. And so that is her role, is to come clean.

To admit her sin. And Jesus' role in that was then to go on and die for those sins. So that even this outcast Samaritan woman can enter into a relationship with the Holy God, which she so desperately is thirsting for, as are you and as am I.

Every one of us, therefore, needs also to acknowledge that we have a spiritual thirst. Do you know that you are thirsting for God? Because the Bible says you are, whether you know it or not.

[33 : 27] And it may, sadly, take some really bad times in your life to convince you of your thirst for God. When the world fails to satisfy.

When you feel the brokenness of this world. You know, Adrian mentioned from Nathan's sermon last week, that God doesn't promise that our world will never fall apart.

Well, I can go on to say that sometimes God will cause it to fall apart, to convince you how much you thirst for Him. And so we need to recognize that all of us thirst for God.

Every time we feel the brokenness of this world in some way or another, it's actually a thirst for God that we're feeling. And then we need to admit the ways we try to quench that thirst in other things.

How we try to escape the brokenness of this world. Whether that be in human relationships. We think that'll help us to escape the brokenness of this world. Or whether it be in entertainment.

[34 : 28] Or drink. Or other sinful patterns of living. Which inevitably it is. When we don't satisfy our thirst for God in God, we will satisfy it in God's substitutes.

In idols. And that is in sin. And so we need to confess that. We need to confess our idolatry. We need to confess the ways that we try to satisfy our thirst for God in other things.

And then once we've done that, once we realize that that thirst for God can only be satisfied in Him, then we need to look to Jesus, who came to make it possible.

And we need to ask Him. We need to ask Him. See what He said to that woman? If only you had asked. Have you asked? Have you realized what Jesus can do for you?

Wash away your sins? Send His Holy Spirit to take up residence? To change you from the inside out? And yet He won't force that on you. You must ask Him. Have you asked?

[35 : 30] Have you asked Him for the living water? The free gift? That God wants to give you? That God made you to enjoy? To quench your deepest thirst for Him?

I'm going to close by reading that prophecy from Isaiah that Naomi read for us earlier. Because now we can understand that Jesus is the one who fulfills this prophecy.

Just listen to what God says through Isaiah. Are you going to do that this week?

Are you going to come to God? Are you going to ask Jesus? Are you going to listen? Are you going to pursue a relationship with Him above all other things? Because only that will satisfy your spiritual thirst.

Let's pray that that would be the case. Let's pray. Lord, we do thank you for this reminder that we are all desperately thirsty for you. Help us never to forget that.

[36 : 51] Help us to realize that when we feel the brokenness of this world, it's because we thirst for you. Thank you for opening our eyes to that this morning. And help us, Lord, to come to Jesus and to receive His Spirit in our lives, even in this coming week, that we may drink of the living water, that we may pursue relationship with you.

Help us not just to read the Bible and go to Bible study for the sake of it, but help us to pursue you. Help us to pin all our hopes of happiness and satisfaction in you.

And would you, by your Holy Spirit, satisfy us? In Jesus' name. Amen.