

## ***Finding the Satisfied Life*** **John 4:1-18**

What brings satisfaction in life? Back in 2001, the *Daily Telegraph* had the following headline on page 11:

*Trapped in a useless body  
Cerebral palsy sufferer sues*

The story included the following – I'm just picking out the main bits:

She craves a life like any other 21-year-old: partying with friends, studying at university and living in her own home.

But Calandre Simpson is more used to life in a wheelchair, requiring constant care "inside a body which doesn't work" but with a mind as sharp as any of her peers.

The cerebral palsy sufferer is suing obstetrician Robert Diamond, who has admitted liability for a botched forceps delivery which caused Ms Simpson "catastrophic" brain injuries when she was born ...

Ms Simpson, of Vaocluse, told the Supreme Court yesterday she was moving on with her life despite her disability.

She was studying for the HSC and hoping to enrol in a social work degree after being "realistic" she could not complete her first choice – a law course.

Ms Simpson cannot speak and is confined to a wheelchair.

She gave evidence using a laser mounted on a baseball cap on her head, pointing to a board with more than 600 words on it.

"I am still a person inside a body which doesn't work," she said. ...

"I really don't like school right now but it is because

I am 21 years old and I am frustrated that I am 21 and still at school.

"I am not happy at school. They talk down to you as if I was five."

Asked by her barrister what life was like at home, Ms Simpson said she wanted to move out "as soon as possible. I want my own life. I am home a lot in my own room, which is boring. Yes, I have TV, DVD, video and computer but they are just machines – I can't talk to a machine."

She said she wanted a full-time carer in her own home and a car to allow her further freedom. ...

Ms Simpson is seeking unspecified damages.

A sad story about a very unsatisfied woman. What would bring Ms Simpson satisfaction?

- Passing the HSC and getting a social work degree?
- Getting a huge payout from the court so she can gain her own independence?
- Being able to start all over again without a doctor making such a blunder of her delivery?

What would bring you satisfaction in life if you were in Ms Simpson's position? It's a difficult question – but a very important question. Just as important: what would bring you satisfaction in your own life? What is it in your life that prevents your satisfaction and contentment? Would changing your circumstances bring you contentment? Or does dreaming about changed circumstances distract you from the real issue?

That's the basic issue at the heart of this conversation. This woman thirsts a great deal – that is, she's unfulfilled and dissatisfied. Jesus offers to quench her thirst – to give contentment.

### Background: Jews and Samaritans

However, before we get to that, I need to fill in a bit of the historical and cultural background to help us better understand what's going on here. There were two major reasons why the Jews and Samaritans didn't get on.

The first was racial. 700 years before Jesus, the region of Samaria was overrun by the Assyrians as they set up their empire. They deported large numbers of Israelites and replaced them with other nationalities. People married across racial boundaries. Pure-bred Jews tended to look down on the result. At best, they treated them as second-class citizens. They weren't considered up-to-scratch.

The second reason was religious. The Samaritans only accepted the books of Moses as God's word – the first five books of our Old Testaments. They rejected the rest. They thought the books of Moses said the temple should be on Mount Gerazim – not Jerusalem. So, about 400BC, they erected a rival temple on Mount Gerazim. As you can imagine, that wasn't particularly popular with those Jews who thought Jerusalem was the place God chose.

A few hundred years later in 128BC, a Jewish leader named John Hyrcanus destroyed this temple on Mount Gerazim. As you can imagine, that wasn't particularly popular with the Samaritans. Even though the temple was destroyed, they still sacrificed and did other rites on this mountain.

With that sort of background, you can understand there being tension between Jews and Samaritans. Every now and then, that tension erupted into violence – which, of

course, only added more pressure.

### Physical Water

Jesus sits by a well in the middle of the day. A Samaritan woman approaches with a water jar. She's come to get water to take back to her house. The indoor plumbing we take for granted wasn't an option.

Jesus asks her for a drink. She's surprised:

- He's a man, she's a woman.
- He's a Jew, she's a Samaritan.

She says: "How can you ask me for a drink?" John fills in by way of explanation: *Jews do not associate with Samaritans*. Or, as the NIV footnote has it: *Jews do not use dishes Samaritans have used* – they feared it'd make them ceremonially unclean. Jesus does the unexpected. He cuts across the social norms.

It's worth pausing to note a huge contrast.

- In chapter 3, Jesus speaks with Nicodemus – an upright, moral, Jewish religious leader. He tells him he must be born again.
- Now, Jesus speaks with this unnamed Samaritan woman – not a pure Jew; not a man; not a highly educated person; and, as we'll find out later, not a particularly moral person. He offers her living water.

Jesus doesn't pick and choose. He doesn't just come for the respectable religious types. He doesn't just come for the morally upright. He's not concerned about race. He doesn't worry about academic achievement. Jesus thinks we're all in need of what He's got to offer and He's happy to offer it to all – no matter who you are or what you have or haven't done. There's no snobbery here.

Enough of the pause – back to the conversation. Jesus doesn't actually answer her question. Verse 10:

*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.*

At this point, we have an advantage over the woman. She doesn't know who Jesus is. To her, He's just some strange Jewish man, who doesn't seem to know proper social etiquette. He's just a weary Jewish traveller sitting beside her well. It's early in Jesus' ministry. He's not overly famous yet. We, on the other hand, know more. John's told us already the importance of Jesus:

- He's the Word become flesh.
- He's the One for whom John the Baptist prepared the way.
- He turns water into wine.
- He cleanses His Father's house – the temple.
- He must be believed to enter the kingdom of God.

We know something about Jesus. We've already seen something of His glory. This woman hasn't. She doesn't know who Jesus is or what He can give.

And so she responds at a purely physical level. She's like the Jews in chapter 2 and Nicodemus in chapter 3. They take Jesus' words at the surface level only. They fail to see the deeper significance. Verse 11:

*Sir you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?*

*Living water* referred to fresh, running water – usually from springs. You can understand the woman's confusion. As she looks around, all she can see is Jacob's well. There's no other obvious source of water. Jacob's well was fed by an underground stream – and so, at one level, you could describe it as *living water*. But, even so, this man doesn't have a bucket. How's he going to get water out of the 100-foot deep well? That's why He asked her for a drink in the first place. Even Jacob who gave the well needed a shovel to dig it and a bucket to get water out of it. Jacob hadn't provided a modern plumbing system to replace the daily drudgery of carrying the heavy jar to and from the well – nor has anyone else in the last 1000 years. So what's this strange man talking about? It all seems a bit cryptic.

### **Spiritual Water**

Jesus describes more fully the sort of water He means. Verse 13:

*Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*

At this point we need to turn to the Old Testament to understand what Jesus is talking about. The term *living water* referred to running water from springs; it was also a religious picture or metaphor. In Jeremiah 2:13, God declares:

*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.*

Here God's pictured as *a spring of living water*. That is, God's the source of goodness and life. He defines life. He gives life. He provides for His people. He's the true source of contentment and satisfaction. But His people turned away from Him. Instead, they tried to build their own "water storage" systems:

- false gods who can't provide them with anything;
- false gods who are inadequate;
- false gods who don't know what life's about;
- false gods made up by mere humans.

These false gods are cracked and don't hold water – they can't provide contentment and satisfaction.

In the arid land of Judah, landowners greatly desired properties with flowing springs. In the dry climate, they valued reliable sources of water. If they weren't there naturally, they'd build their own cisterns and seal them with lime plaster. Then, when rainwater came, they'd store it in those cisterns. Such water became stagnant. It wasn't as fresh as *living water*. The cisterns often developed cracks. The precious water would leak out.

There's a similar picture in Jeremiah 17:13.

*O Lord, the hope of Israel,  
all who forsake You will be put to shame.  
Those who turn away from You will be written in the  
dust  
because they have forsaken the Lord,  
the spring of living water.*

God's the source of true life and goodness. Forsake God and you forsake true life and end up in the dust. But that's exactly what God's people did.

The prophets looked forward to a time when living water

would flow freely – when God would do something to fix up His people's disastrous choices. For example, Zechariah 14:8 states:

*On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem,  
half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in  
summer and in winter.*

Isaiah 12:3 states:

*With joy you will draw water  
from the wells of salvation.*

God promises to do something in the future. God isn't talking about literal rivers or literal floods. He's talking about the spiritual problems people have. He's talking about their rebellion against Him. He's talking about the parched and unsatisfying lives that result. And He says He'll save people from that. He'll give them a true knowledge of Himself. He'll change them from the inside out. He'll give them a different quality of life altogether. He'll give them true life in proper relationship with Himself.

This is the *living water* Jesus offers. Jesus offers eternal life – life forever lived in proper relationship with God. Jesus offers the Spirit of God to quench the spiritual thirst of people. Jesus offers that which satisfies and brings contentment within the inner person.

This gets to the very heart of what life's about. As you look around at people in Australia, what do you see? I think there's both a settledness and a discontentedness.

The settledness surrounds the great Australian dream. At its heart, that dream hasn't changed much for many, many years. It's the dream of owning your own piece of Australia – having your own block of land and putting your castle on it. The dream includes having a wife and kids –

settling down and living happily ever after. Over the years we've added to the dream – a car, a swimming pool, a boat, and so on – but the basic dream remains the same. Some have challenged the dream. The 60s generation proposed an alternative lifestyle. But the dream won – it lives on as strong as ever. It's a settled thing, an enduring thing.

Yet, we also see great discontentedness. It pops up all over the place.

- Some turn to drugs to relieve the boredom or the inner pain.
- Some pursue excitement – extreme sports that push life to the edge and give that extra adrenalin rush.
- Some pursue the perfect partner who'll completely satisfy all their needs and desires.
- Some turn to counsellors and hope they'll solve their inner turmoil and inner emptiness.
- Some pursue religious experiences.
- Some try abusive behaviour or criminal activity.
- Some think having lots of friends on Facebook is the answer.
- Some just go after bigger and better versions of the dream.

People get on the treadmill and find it doesn't work and assume they just have to crank up the speed and put in more effort or try the treadmill next to it.

People search for this *living water* – but they search in all the wrong places. It's not in the great Australian dream – it's empty; it can't supply real inner contentment. Indeed, pursuing that dream leads to discontentment. It doesn't quench the inner thirst. It can't satisfy the inner being in any permanent way.

The Samaritan woman still misunderstands. Verse 15:

*Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.*

She's still at the physical level. She talks about her physical thirst. She talks about the physical journey each day to get water out of Jacob's well. She wants to save herself that thirsty burden of fetching water.

### **Dusty Husbands**

Jesus appears to change the subject in verse 16:

*Go, call your husband and come back.*

It's not really a change of subject at all. It aims to get the woman to face her real inner need – the emptiness at the centre of her life. It's a statement designed to help her better understand the nature of the gift Jesus offers.

She replies she has no husband. Jesus responds:

*You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.*

Now, it may be she was plain unlucky and she had five husbands drop dead one after the other – but it's pretty unlikely. And there are hints that her problem's bad morals, not bad luck.

- Women usually went to the well in groups. There's safety in numbers and it's more pleasurable doing a regular chore with companions. They usually went early or late in the day, when the sun wasn't as hot. This woman comes alone in the heat. It strongly suggests she's avoiding her neighbours.
- Further, she's now sleeping with a man she's not married to.

This is a very thirsty woman. She tries one relationship after another, but there's no satisfaction. Her move from one male to the next is simply a symptom of a deeper issue. She comes up empty every time. The well of her life is empty. She desperately needs *living water*, but she's looking in the wrong place.

This woman's dry mouth isn't her basic problem. Her failed marriages aren't her basic problem. Her problem isn't going to be resolved by being in the arms of another loving man. This is just the symptom. It should demonstrate to her that something's desperately wrong and needs fixing. Her need's to be in the arms of a loving God. Her greatest need's eternal life – knowing God and knowing the Son; being right with God.

We haven't got to the end of the conversation yet – but that's as far as we're going this morning. It takes another twist in verse 19 – but it's such an important twist that we're going to look at it separately next Sunday. It doesn't change the basic thrust of what we've looked at this morning – it just takes it to its logical conclusion.

### Having a Drink

Jesus continues to offer living water. It's not the stuff we get out of taps – it's spiritual water. It's not something to quench your physical thirst on a hot summer's day – it's something to quench the deep spiritual thirst in the depths of your being. It belongs to a different dimension. This water has eternity in it. It's the offer of a different quality of life altogether. It's a change that happens deep inside. It goes to the level of our deepest needs – the purpose of our lives and our relationship with our Maker and having things right at the core of our beings. The real problem

isn't in our external circumstances. The real problem's within. That's where the dissatisfaction and discontentment come from.

Where do you look for contentment and satisfaction in life? Where is your search taking you? Money? Fame? Pleasure? Possessions? Travel? Excitement? Drugs? Education? Financial security? People try these things again and again. For a time, they distract from the inner emptiness. They seem to offer a solution. They give a measure of happiness. But, they're mirages. In terms of true contentment and satisfaction, they fail. They don't deal with the inner problem. They don't deal with our deepest needs. Have you admitted that?

Jesus offers living water. He offers right relationship with your Maker – with God. He offers eternal life – life lived in proper relationship with God. He offers His Spirit to quench your inner thirst and emptiness.

This is God's salvation He promised. And it's not just about the future – about what happens when I die. It's a salvation on offer now and for now. He wants to deal with that inner emptiness and dissatisfaction now. He wants to bring an inner transformation that results in contentment now. He wants to change your character from the inside out – to make you into a person that looks like they're in right relationship with God.

- He's not offering you a bigger house or a larger salary or a position with more power. That stuff's empty as far as contentment's concerned. Why would He replace something that didn't satisfy with something else that didn't satisfy?
- What He offers is to change the self-centred and

self-focused attitude that's at the heart of your discontentment – that's actually the source of your discontentment. You get to give that up and focus on God instead. He's a far more worthy focus for our attention.

So the offer has to be accepted on His terms. Jesus Himself is the living water. You don't get to define what living water is. That's part of coming to the point where you truly realise that what you've tried doesn't satisfy – it doesn't truly provide contentment. It's not up to you to define living water in terms of money or power or success or fame or pleasure – and to say: This is what Jesus has to give me if He's going to give me true life. You can't even define living water in terms of solving your problems as you see them. That's all part of the self-centred focus that doesn't satisfy.

No. Jesus is the Lord who demands our surrender. He's not a bit of clay to be moulded into whatever shape we want. He's the Lord of the universe who moulds us. His offer of living water is an offer to change us into people who truly honour God – to clean us up from the inside out. It's what we're made for. It's where we find true contentment.

Have you accepted Jesus' offer? If not, will you?