

# THE LOOKOUT

DECEMBER 2023

## Unit: Gospel of John (Part 1)

### Theme: Light and Life

**Overview:** Life cannot exist without light, water, and food. That is true both scientifically and theologically. First in the order of creation was the creation of light (Genesis 1:3). Second was the separation of the waters (Genesis 1:6). Finally, God made food (Genesis 1:30). Everyone needs light to see (John 8:12). Everyone needs life, which God alone can provide (John 10:10). Everyone needs food (John 6:48). For three months we will study the Gospel of John, the “spiritual Gospel,” as an early Christian theologian called it. In Part 1, students will learn about the themes of light and life from John the Baptist, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the apostle John, and Jesus himself.

## HOW TO USE

Each week has a lesson aim, lesson text, and supplemental text.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: Study, Application, and Discovery.

Use the Discovery questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

**WEEK OF DECEMBER 17, 2023**

**LESSON AIM:** **Ask the Lord for a drink  
of living water  
that satisfies and saves.**

**UNIT:** Gospel of John (Part 1)

**THEME:** Light and Life

**LESSON TEXT:** John 4:4-26

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** John 7:37-39; Revelation 21:6; Jeremiah 2:13

## STUDY

# THE WATER THAT GIVES LIFE

BY MARK SCOTT

The Gospel of John is filled with contrasts: light and darkness; above and below; life and death; belief and unbelief; etc. It is also filled with words that possess a double meaning. A word can have its natural meaning, but it can also take on a deeper, more profound or symbolic meaning. For example, the word *temple* can describe a building (2:14), but it can also describe Jesus' body (2:21). There is physical bread (6:5), but there is also spiritual bread (6:35). There is a blindness of the eyes (9:2), but there is also a spiritual blindness (9:40-41); And in our lesson text, we read about two kinds of water: the water we drink (4:7) and a very special kind of water only Jesus can provide (4:14).

### Water

John 4:4-15

John 4 begins with Jesus' decision to leave Judea and begin his Galilean ministry. The most direct route to Galilee was to go due north through Samaria. That, however, was not the *normal* route, for the Jews hated the Samaritans and took pains to avoid them. But the text says, "He had to go through Samaria." Jesus had a divine appointment with a woman at *Jacob's well*. In this encounter, Jesus shattered gender, ethnic, religious, social, and cultural barriers. Since Jesus and the Samaritan woman met at a well, the conversation naturally started with water; and it became the metaphor Jesus used to speak about salvation.

Jesus was tired from his journey. He sat down and waited for the disciples to bring food. It was high noon (likely not the normal time for women to come to a well). Jesus initiated the conversation. "Will you give me a drink?" The woman was stunned by such a forward social taboo. She brought up the barriers of ethnicity and gender. The bad blood that existed between Jews and Samaritans was well-known and had a strong historical context. Jesus bypassed the barriers and kept engaging her by saying, essentially, "You probably should be asking me for a drink, if the truth be told." Jesus wanted to offer her the *gift* (translated from *dorean* in Greek, which is the same word used in Acts 2:38 for the Holy Spirit) of God, which was *living water*.

The unnamed woman did not pick up on the symbolism. She addressed Jesus politely by calling him *Sir* and pointed out that he had nothing from which to *draw*

water from the *well*. To her credit, she was interested in this living water, as evidenced by asking whether Jesus was *greater* than *Jacob*. For sure, she knew the historical background of this well (which is preserved to this day).

Then Jesus essentially said, "There is the water in this well, and then there is the water I can give you." Physical water is good for quenching thirst, but spiritual water can *spring up* to *eternal life*. The woman wanted in on that. At the least, she wouldn't have to face the social stigma of coming to that well again and again.

### Worship

John 4:16-26

The conversation abruptly turned when Jesus changed the topic from water to family. He asked the woman to call her husband. The literal translation from the Greek of her response is only three words, "Husband, no have." Then Jesus revealed so much more about her. Her marriage track record was a train wreck, and the man she was living with at the time was *not* her *husband*.

Because Jesus knew such details of her life (see John 2:25), the woman now thought he was a *prophet*. She changed the subject, either to escape the awkwardness of the moment or perhaps because she thought worship was a subject a prophet would want to speak about.

Verses 20-24 contain more worship terminology in a condensed space than anywhere else in the Bible. Samaritan worship versus *Jerusalem* worship—who is right about where to worship? Jesus answered that worship was not about geography. Proper worship (the kind that has always been pleasing to God) is about the person—one who is in tune with the *Spirit* of God and is guided by his *truth* (the standard of Scripture). Since *God is spirit* (a stunning theological truth), he is searching every nook and cranny of the universe to find *true worshippers*.

The woman was confident the *Messiah* would sort this out when he arrived. Jesus then revealed his identity with those famous words from Exodus 3:14, "I am." The woman progressed well in her recognition of Jesus—from a Jew, to Sir, to greater than Jacob, to prophet, to Messiah. Those who acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah will also find "the spring of the water of life" (Revelation 21:6). ■

## BIG DOORS, LITTLE HINGES

BY DAVID FAUST

No one knows the exact date of his birth, and his biography has many gaps. No photos of him exist, though artists have tried to picture his face. He was a business-savvy entrepreneur and a successful inventor, but late in his career he lost a lawsuit filed by his business partner and died before reaching the age of 70. Yet, this man's actions changed the world. In 1999, *Time* magazine selected Johannes Gutenberg as the Man of the Millennium—the individual who most shaped the world between the years 1000 and 1999.

An innovator in the use of moveable type, Gutenberg had buyers lined up to purchase the 180 Bibles that rolled off his printing press in the mid-1450s; but something bigger than a business transaction was happening. Gutenberg was an ordinary man, but his printed Bibles did extraordinary things: making God's written Word more widely available, opening the door for the Protestant Reformation, and forever changing the way information is conveyed.

### Unexpected Encounters

Wayne Smith, longtime senior minister at Southland Christian Church in Lexington, Kentucky, used to say, "Big doors swing on little hinges." In other words, small decisions have big consequences. Little-known people have a big impact. Actions that seem inconsequential at the time can change the world.

Has the Lord used little hinges to open big doors in your life? How would things have been different if you hadn't met a certain friend, worked in a particular job, married your spouse, encountered an influential teacher or coach, or lived in a certain community? Were there any close calls when you narrowly escaped danger or dodged the consequences of a bad decision? Have seemingly small incidents redirected your life in ways you didn't expect?

### An Unlikely Messenger

John 4 describes a woman's unexpected encounter with Jesus. Her story has been told for nearly 2,000 years, but

we don't even know her name. We call her simply "the Samaritan woman" or "the woman at the well."

Without reporting all the details, Scripture makes it clear her life was messy. After being married five times, she now was living with a man who wasn't her husband. When she headed for the well to draw water in the heat of the day, she didn't expect to hold a conversation with a Jewish man, and she certainly didn't realize her life was about to change forever.

Yet she was the one who heard Jesus say, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). She heard one of Jesus' earliest affirmations of his Messiahship when he declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he" (v. 26). This anonymous woman became a dynamic proponent of the gospel, offering her neighbors the tantalizing invitation, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" (v. 29). Was it a chance, random meeting she had with Jesus that day, or would it be better to say she had a providential encounter with the Lord?

The heavenly Father used a Samaritan woman with a water bucket and a German businessman with ink on his hands to change history. He can use routine conversations, unexpected interactions, ordinary people, and seemingly inconsequential events to make a big difference in our lives. Nothing in the universe escapes his notice. He cares about trivialities like the number of hairs on your head and what happens when a sparrow falls to the ground. Small details matter to God—even in the lives of ordinary people like us.

**Personal Challenge:** This week, take notice of how the Lord works in small things. Do you hear his voice speaking in a Scripture verse or recognize a God-given blessing that makes you feel grateful? Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work in your own life (or in the life of a friend)? ■

*David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.*

## DISCOVERY

### BY DOUG REDFORD

1. How did your “living by the light” project go this past week? Do you think you made progress in changing areas of behavior that needed change? If it helps, begin keeping a journal to help track your progress and to mark areas where prayer is especially needed.
2. As you were growing up, were there certain people whom you tended not to associate with? What were the reasons?

Ask two people to read aloud **John 4:4-26**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. What details in today’s lesson text provide insight into the humanity of Jesus? What details highlight his divinity?
4. What are some indicators that today’s culture is thirsty for the “living water” that only Jesus can provide?
5. Give three words that would describe the Samaritan woman before she met Jesus. Then give three words that would describe her after she met Jesus.
6. What do you think it means to worship “in Spirit and in truth”?
7. What is the most meaningful worship experience you have been a part of? What made it so?
8. David Faust notes how little hinges can open big doors. What are some events or encounters that may have seemed insignificant at the time they happened to you, but in time became life-changing?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: “I will . . .”
10. The Samaritan woman’s life was “messy,” as David Faust puts it. Do you know someone (in your family, in your neighborhood, through work, school, or your daily contacts) whose life could be described with that word? What can you do to help brighten that person’s life, especially during this Christmas season?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **John 1:1-18**. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■