
Hey, what's up, everybody? It's good to see you. This feels so good. I've missed you all. I've missed being here. It is really, really, really good to be back with all of you.

And if you joined us over the summer months, I've been away on an extended 3-month sabbatical, which I think is the longest time I've ever taken away since I've been here.

And that is a gift that our elders and all of you (I just want to acknowledge that) grant to our pastoral staff for every seven years of ministry. So that was the second sabbatical that I've had since I've been here.

It is a gift that I don't feel entitled to, I don't expect it, I don't think that it's something that I should have every seven years, so I'm really, really grateful when it comes.

You might be asking, "What is that all about?" And really this kind of stems from... I think one of the important things about taking time away came from some reading I was doing when I was in college. I remember reading that only 20 percent of leaders in the Bible finished well.

Just let that wash over you for a minute. Out of everybody you read about in the Bible only 20 percent of them finished well, meaning that when they hit the tape at the end of their life calling and ministry, they were able to hold their head up high.

And 80 percent made some sort of a dumb decision that hurt themselves and the people they loved and the calling of God on their life.

I remember as a young man reading that thinking, "How in the world do I finish well?" And I think there are a lot of ways to answer that question, but one of them is taking some time away before you make a dumb decision to evaluate your motives, to evaluate your calling—it's a reminder of who you are in Christ, not just what you do for God. And I think that is so important.

I figure every single one of us, regardless of whether we're in full-time ministry or not, we will, at some point in our lives, take some time away from the thing that we do, whatever that is, whether that's voluntarily or involuntarily. And I would much rather step away voluntarily and take some time to just remember who I am in Christ.

Man, it was just so good to be able to read the Bible without having to get up a sermon and to be able to worship with my family on the weekends. And we had some great family time.

Many of you know that we just sent our oldest off to college a few weeks ago—so a big, big transition in our family. My oldest is my only boy. Now I'm in a house full of girls so please pray. And it is awesome and totally weird.

So we just sent our son off. He's a freshman at Purdue. And I was waiting for you. I was waiting for you. That is a divisive thing to say in our church.

I remember when I was interviewing here 14 years ago, we were talking about serious stuff like doctrine, and what's your view of God's Word and the Holy Spirit and are you going to root for Purdue or IU?

And I remember at the time... I got that question so much in my first few years here. And I didn't know how to answer it because I really didn't have a dog in that fight because I'm from southwest Missouri. And so I tried to figure out who you were rooting for and then I'd go with that one. Or I tried to do this for a while, "Both. I just cheer for both." And that made everybody mad.

So, now that I've got a child at Purdue, I can definitively say, "Boiler up!" alright? And I know. I know. I just made about half of you really angry, but what else is new? That's why I had to go on sabbatical, alright?

Hey, did you guys enjoy the guest speakers this summer? Weren't they amazing? Man, they did a great job. And I actually thought you enjoyed them a little too much. I was wondering if I was going to have a job when I came back.

But I put that series together because I thought, "Who would I really want to listen to over the summer." So I just reached out to them, and they did an amazing job.

And not only that, I want to give props to you guys. You guys are so encouraging and loving and kind. Every single guest speaker texted me on Sunday afternoon and said, "Your people are amazing." So I just want to thank you guys for loving on them so well.

I also just want to give a giant thank you to our team as I was away. Our team has done an amazing job. You appreciate them and everything they do around here?

I don't know what this says about me as a leader, but things actually go better when I'm not around. I don't know how to interpret that.

Hey, if you've got a Bible or a device with a Bible on it, go ahead and find John, chapter 4.

I'm a little rusty, as you can already tell. Somebody said, "Hey, are you nervous?" And I was like, "Yeah, I'm really nervous." And they were like, "Don't worry about it. It's like riding a bike." And I was like, "Yeah, but the last time I took a break from riding a bike, and I got back on, I wrecked." So we'll see how this goes.

John, chapter 4—I want to put a cap on the summer series that we’ve been in with this stand-alone message I’ve just entitled *Dry Fountains*. You’ll know what I’m talking about here in just a minute.

And I also want to set up our fall teaching series that we’re going to jump into next weekend. So you want to make sure that you come and you are tuned in with us as we jump into this series, because I’m really excited about the content we’re going to cover this fall.

But, John, chapter 4, as you’re finding that I just really want to ask you this question. And I want you to sit in this for just a minute. What is it like to feel thirsty?

We can answer that in a number of ways. I want you just to take a minute to think about what that feels like. And for me, it’s always like being transported to the past, somewhere to a time when I was really thirsty.

Maybe for you that was when you came in from recess on a hot day in grade school and you stood in line at the water fountain. Remember those? Remember when we could actually use those?

Maybe it was a summer when you were out west, and you were on a hiking trip in the hot sun and maybe your camel pack burst a leak and you ran out of water and your thirst just increased with each depleting step that you took.

I remember the first time I traveled overseas the country that I went to, I don’t know if this is true now, but it was true then. They didn’t serve cold drinks. You’d go up to the little vender and they would maybe only have two or three drinks that were actually cold.

And the way it was told to me then was just like how you and I won’t go outside in the winter time without a coat or a jacket. Why? Well because we might catch a cold. They said, “Well, if you drink something cold, you might catch a cold.” At least that was true in that country then. I don’t know about now.

So I learned very, very quickly to be at the front of the line because they would run out of cold drinks after just two or three people. And I hated being thirsty. I don’t like being thirsty.

I googled the effects of thirst this last week. And I saw it’s just like a dry mouth, dizziness, and a headache. See, there’s thirst like I could really use something to wash down this burger kind of thirst and then there’s what we might call a debilitating kind of thirst. And that’s called:

Dehydration

That’s a different thing. That is not something that you want to mess around with. And most of us know that over 50 percent of our bodies are made of water, which means that you can go

days and days without food and survive. It's not very fun, but you can do it. But you won't last very long without water.

And when you begin to get dehydrated, you get a headache, you get dizzy, your throat is dry. And that's just the physical side effects. The emotional side effects are there too. You get irritable. You get cranky. You may even get angry and depressed.

Here are a couple of observations about physical dehydration. Did you know that you need to stay hydrated before you feel thirsty, because if you wait until you feel thirsty you might already be dehydrated?

It's like those of you who have little kids. You took them to the beach this summer and you were slathering sunscreen all over them and you were like, "Take a drink. You've got to drink some water." And they were like, "I don't want a drink because I'm not thirsty." "I know. Well you've got to drink before you feel thirst otherwise it might be too late."

Do you know that water is the best way to hydrate? And I don't know about you, but I was thinking about this this last week. When I was growing up, I didn't really like the taste of water. It just tasted kind of bland. It wasn't very exciting.

My drink of choice was Dr. Pepper, the nectar of the gods. Just hook me up to an IV of Dr. Pepper and I was just like good to go. When I got into college and I was a poor college student who couldn't afford it anymore, I just went for the generic Dr. Zipper. I didn't care. I was just going to drink that.

But here's the thing. The irony of Dr. Pepper is that it tasted sweet, and it seemed to satisfy in the moment, but you know as well as I do, it was just further dehydrating me.

Here's kind of the interesting thing. All of these years later I can't even remember the last time I had a Dr. Pepper. And I've actually developed a taste for water. I actually prefer water. I have this thing with me. I just carry it around all day long. I'm just drinking water. I prefer the taste of it more. And actually, if I were to have a soda, it would probably be way too sweet because my tastes have changed.

Now the same thing that is true with physical dehydration is also true in spiritual and emotional dehydration. See, all of us right now are really struggling with:

Spiritual and emotional dehydration.

The condition of the world, the condition of our relationships, all of us are struggling. What do I mean by that? Well, we're irritable. We're divisive. We're angry. We're depressed.

You've got to stay hydrated before you feel thirsty, meaning you can't wait until your life is in a crisis before you try to come to Jesus. You need to be coming to Jesus on a regular basis before you feel thirsty. And oftentimes that's counter-intuitive to us.

Did you know that throughout the Scriptures (we'll get to this in a minute) that Jesus refers to Himself as a fountain of living water? But for so many of us, we don't really have a taste for it. It kind of tastes bland. There are so many more exciting things out there that we could go after to satisfy our thirst: a career, financial pursuits, maybe some sort of sexual appetite.

Those things seem more exciting to us, and they are sweet to the taste, taste really good at first but they just dehydrate us all the more. We're going to have to wean our tastes. We're going to have to develop a taste for this living water.

And right now, in the condition of the world that we are living in, we are just reminded of how broken and messed up and fallen the world really is. And it just continues to be. And we're reminded of it all of the time, whether it's the ongoing pandemic, whether it's what's going on in Afghanistan, whether it's earthquakes in Haiti, or hurricanes in New Orleans, or even just our own junk in our lives.

We are fallen and broken people. We are thirsty. And as a result, we are angry and irritated and pointing fingers of blame. We want to blame somebody.

And we are turning to the equivalent of sugary drinks. There's a word for that. It's called coping. And we are trying to cope with our brokenness, listen to me, in ways that only perpetuate the brokenness.

Now the world is only acting like the world is supposed to act. What is really detrimental is when Christ followers begin to suffer from spiritual and emotional dehydration and instead of running to the source of living water, we settle for sugary drinks. And we run after all of the things where we find our identity. And we really act no different than the world.

I don't know how many people I've talked to who have told me about a family member or a friend or a co-worker like, "Man, I've been inviting him to come and I'm reaching out to him, but he doesn't want to because he's really been turned off by Christians over the last year-and-a-half.

Now, I'm not trying to blame it all on that, but I am saying that when Christ followers are no longer drinking from the fountain of living water, then the rest of the world looks at that and goes, "There's nothing there. Why would I run after that?"

I'm reminded of something that God said to the prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament. He said:

"For my people," Now, He's talking about Christ followers, "...my people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me—the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!" Jeremiah 2:13 (NLT)

He's basically saying, "Instead of coming to the fountain of living water, we've dug a well in the ground and this is where we're putting our own stuff to cope with all of our junk, with all of our problems, and it's running dry."

And due to our sin nature (we all have this sin nature) oftentimes we begin to wonder if this living water can really do for us what we thought it would do and so we turn to other things.

And as a result right now working relationships are suffering. Have you noticed? I went to three restaurants this last week and they were all closed because they can't hire enough help.

Friendships are divided. Families are strained. Marriages are collapsing because really what the pandemic and all of this strife has done has just brought to the surface the stuff that was already there, we just masked it with so many other things, but now we've got to face it. Churches are struggling. School board meetings are out of control. We are filled with fear and depleted of faith. We are quick to criticize and really slow to extend grace. In other words, the craziness out there is unsettling us in here.

We're thirsty. We're dying of thirst. And Jesus is sitting here saying, "I've got a fountain of living water if you'll just come and drink." The invitation is there.

I was reading a book this past summer. It's a book by Gordon MacDonald. The title is *Ordering Your Private World*. It's a great book. I highly recommend it. As I was reading it though, he has this sentence and it wasn't even really what the chapter was about, but this sentence jumped off the page at me.

He said, "The problem right now in our world is that so many churches are dry fountains, living water used to flow but now it doesn't." And it just hit me in between the eyes. And if a church is a dry fountain, that means that its people have dried up a long time ago.

Now, one of the things that I want us to do as a church... Listen. Right now things are crazy in the world and there are all kinds of problems and all kinds of divisions—you can either cope or you can hope. You can cope with the brokenness. You can continue to stay in this form of dehydration.

Or we, as a people, can come and drink deeply of the fountain of living water. What does that mean? Well, John illustrates this in our passage today. John, chapter 4. I want to walk through this and in this passage we meet a woman who is struggling with spiritual and emotional dehydration. She's thirsty. But she's been running around trying to quench this thirst in ways that only perpetuate the thirst.

Now, this is a really, really familiar passage but I want to encourage you not to tune out even though it's familiar. It always baffles me whenever I run into Christ followers, "Oh, I've heard that passage before," and then they tune out.

What are you talking about? The Spirit of God wants to bring fresh application, there's a reason why it's a familiar passage. The Spirit of God wants to bring fresh application. That's why the Bible says that it's a two-edged sword able to penetrate.

It's not just in knowing the details of the story; it's allowing the Spirit of God to breathe application into your life from that story. And as we look at this together, I just want you to be open to what it is that God might say to you through this passage.

Now, a little bit of context here. Jesus has just begun His public ministry. The religious leaders are comparing His ministry to His cousin, John the Baptist. In other words, they were being really, really divisive. And Jesus, what you'll find is that He has no time for divisiveness. Look at what it says in verse 3. It says:

"So he left Judea and returned to Galilee." Really interesting sentence here, "He had to go through Samaria on the way."

That's an interesting way for John to put it because He didn't really have to. He could have gone another way. Now in order to illustrate this, let me show you this map of the Holy Land during the time of Jesus. A lot of detail on here. Really, I just want you to focus on this: Galilee [to the north], Samaria [in the middle], and Judea [to the south].

And John says He was in Judea, and He had to get to Galilee and so He had to go through Samaria. Now, obviously you know that if you were google mapping this it would probably say that the shortest route was straight through Samaria. And it was.

But He didn't have to go. In fact, He could have gone around. And what you need to know is that during this time period most Jews (which Jesus was a Jew) would have gone around Samaria. They wouldn't have gone through Samaria and here's why. It's because they hated each other. They were a divided people.

They had very different perspectives on life, social issues, and politics. I know it's hard to imagine but it was true. There was just like this tribalism.

In fact, the division between the Jews and the Gentiles, between people who lived in Judea and Galilee and Samaria was so thick that Samaritans didn't want them traveling through there either. It didn't hurt their feelings.

In fact, if a Samaritan found out that a Jew was traveling through Samaria, he would do everything he could to give him a hard time. Hotels would jack up their rates, the police would pull him over for having a tail light out on his camel. Pop into a restaurant and the cook, if he found out that a Jew was there, he'd spit in his goat burger. They did whatever they could do to give him a hard time and to say, "You are not welcome here."

What I want you to see is that John said, "Jesus had to go through Samaria." But he didn't really have to. He wanted to. Because He knew that there was a woman who was on the other side of the track, so to speak, and they were divided in every kind of way. And Jesus knew that she was struggling with spiritual and emotional thirst.

So He arrives at the village of Sychar, which is right in the middle of Samaria, and it says in verse 6:

"Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime." That's important to remember. "Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Please give me a drink.'"

Now there is a whole lot more going on here than what you might catch if you just read this at a glance. This isn't just any well. This is Jacob's well, one of the great patriarchs of the Jewish religion.

Now, for some of you this will be review. Others of you let me just catch you up to speed. Back in the book of Genesis there was this guy named Jacob who bought this very land that Jesus is in here, and he dug this well, that Jesus stops at, to water his family and his livestock.

Jacob has a son. His name was Joseph. Maybe that name sounds familiar to you. Joseph was taken into captivity. He was exiled in Egypt where he lived out the rest of his life, and this triggered the captivity and the bondage of the Jewish people that would last for the next 400 years.

In other words, all of that stuff set into motion the division and the hate between the Jews and the Samaritans. John wants us to know this is Jacob's well. This is ground zero for the division that the Jews and the Samaritans would have had with one another.

So I don't think that it's any mistake that Jesus chose this well to sit down and to have a conversation with a perceived enemy who needs what only He can offer.

John says that Jesus got there around noon, it was the middle of the day, and that's when this Samaritan woman comes to gather water. It's kind of unusual.

In a first century world, clearly, they didn't have running water. They had to go to the well to get water. And they would go before the sun came up. Really for two practical reasons:

The first one is that the middle eastern sun is hot and so you would go before the sun came up. The second reason is that you needed water for your daily activities, cooking and doing laundry and all of that. So you would go early in the day to get water.

But John says that she showed up when the day is half over. I think there are only two reasons why. I think, one could be she overslept, which I highly doubt. The other reason (this is more likely) is she's trying to avoid people. She was hiding. She was concealing her authentic self, which is one key indicator of spiritual dehydration.

See, the well kind of served as the place of the local coffee shop now a days. Or maybe your Facebook newsfeed. It was a place where you went to check in with everybody, see how everybody is doing.

She had no interest in that because as we'll find as we read through the passage, she's a woman with a sinful reputation. She's actually been with five different men. So I would imagine that she's probably got some enemies, some people who didn't like her very much.

So she goes in the middle of the day. She's putting up walls because she doesn't want to talk to anybody. And Jesus is going to disturb her world. I would imagine that as the well comes into view and she sees this Jewish man sitting there, she was probably really irritated.

She's used to going to the well at noontime when nobody is there. Kind of minding her own business. And all of a sudden, she sees not just another woman there, not just another man there, but a Jewish man there. And I'm sure she muttered under her breath, "What is this guy doing here?"

She probably would have turned around and gone home but they've already seen each other. It would have been awkward.

How many of you ever been to the grocery store and you go down the aisle and there is nobody in the aisle but one person? And you're only looking for one item, but they happen to be standing in front of the very item that you want. Am I the only one? How many of you just kind of walk around them looking at other things like you don't want the salsa that they are standing in front of, right? It's just this awkward kind of a vibe.

I just pick that up with Jesus and this woman. She walks up. She's trying not to make eye contact. She's like, "Hopefully he won't even bother me. I'll just do my thing and leave." And Jesus disturbs her world by asking her this question that would have set her heart racing.

He said, "Could you give me a drink?" Seems innocent enough. But that was a loaded question. In fact, in the original Greek it's a little more personal in nature. In the original Greek Jesus said, "Can I drink from your bucket?"

That's weird today. If you're at Chick-fil-A and somebody is like, "Can I have a sip out of your sweet tea? Can I drink from your straw?" You'd be like, "Back up creep-o."

But this was even bigger than that because a Jew traveling through Samaria would pack his own dishes. He would not take the risk of eating or drinking off the utensils that a Samaritan had formerly eaten off of, even if they had been washed in soap.

Because to do that, to ever eat off a plate or drink out of a cup that a Samaritan had drunk out of, would make him ceremonially unclean.

Jesus didn't care about any of that. He was like, "Can I have a drink from your bucket?" And this woman, look at verse 9:

"The woman was surprised," that's putting it mildly, "for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, 'You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?'"

Now that is not a curious question. That is a, "You better get out of my face you're about to be pepper sprayed," kind of a question.

I envision her saying this with a New Jersey accent. Like, "You better back off. Why are you talking to me? We don't have anything in common gender wise, politically, socially. We have nothing in common. We are enemies. You shouldn't even be here right now."

And I love Jesus' response to this. It's filled with so much compassion. John says:

"Jesus replied," that may seem like a little word, but it's huge. He didn't react. He replied. He didn't meet her in the heat of that divisive thing or that accusational question. He just replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you..."

It's interesting that He would phrase it that way. He didn't say, "If you only knew the solution or if you only knew the thing that you've been looking for..." He said, "It's a gift."

"...if you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

Now notice Jesus didn't say well water. He said living water. And throughout God's Word, typically in the Psalms and Proverbs but then we see it again in Revelation is that oftentimes Jesus describes who He is and what He is offering as "living water".

It kind of reminds me of what He would say later on in the gospel of John, John, chapter 15. He says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. All you've got to do is stay connected to me. Abide."

And so often we make this harder than it needs to be. We think that it's a transaction between us and God. Jesus says, "No, it's actually like you just coming and staying connected to the fountain of living water."

Now, she does what many of us do when things get really, really uncomfortable: she avoids, she redirects, she changes the subject. Oh, she heard Jesus say living water. But she's going to respond as if He said well water. She says:

"But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water?"

And then she goes on. Verse 12:

“And besides, do you think you’re greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?”

Do you know what that tells me? She’s a church kid. She grew up in church. I don’t know her story and I don’t know what happened I don’t know the hurt and the pain that is involved, but she went to Sunday school because she knew her Old Testament history.

And she’s actually picking a fight with Jesus, which is what thirsty people do. And she’s actually scraping the bottom of the bucket and she’s like, “Who in the world do you think you are?”

And I love this. Unfazed, check this out, verse 13:

“Jesus replied,” He didn’t react. He replied. “Anyone who drinks this water,” He’s talking about the well, “will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.”

What Jesus is saying is, “I don’t just want you to have a drink, I want you to come, and I want you to have your thirst satisfied. I want there to be a spring of living water coming up within you.” And all that means is that we stay connected to the source.

Now, the conversation goes on. For the sake of time I don’t have time to unpack it all. You can read it for yourself later this afternoon. Jesus is going to drive down to just the truth that is in her life. But I want to skip ahead to verse 28 here. It says at this moment, after they had this conversation, it says:

“The woman left her water jar beside the well,” that’s a peculiar thing to do because she went there to get water, but she left the water jar there, “and ran back to the village, telling everyone,” such a peculiar statement, “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did!”

It’s like that is a good thing. Can I tell that you that if there was someone who knew everything that I’ve ever done, then the last thing that I would say to you is, “Go talk to him.” That’s not good news at all.

If you were like, “Aaron, we’re getting ready to talk to somebody who knows everything you’ve ever done,” I would panic. Because I know everything I’ve ever done, and I wouldn’t want you to know.

But she says, “This is good news.” There is something about being fully known and fully loved and fully accepted by Jesus that is really, really good news. She’s beginning to get it.

And it says in verse 39 that she goes back to her hometown, and she runs around and she’s like, “Hey, man. Come see a man who told me everything I ever did,” and it said that many Samaritans from that town came to believe.

Why? Because she convinced them? No. But because of her experience. They could see that she was different. They could see that something had dramatically changed within her. They could see that fountain of living water within her.

The question is is that normative for us today? I don't know that I always like the answer to that question.

Here's what Jesus did. Jesus drew the thirst out of her. He helped her to see it. That's what He always does. You've got to acknowledge that you're really thirsty. And then He quenches that thirst. He satisfies the deepest longing within us. And then He gives us access to this living water.

So here's, ultimately, the truth that Jesus gave that woman that day and this is available for every single person listening to this today:

In Christ you are deeply known, He knows everything about you, and you are deeply loved, there isn't any sin that you have committed any mistake that you have committed that throws Him off, and you are completely accepted.

And we don't hear this anywhere. See, we have this longing within us to be deeply known but we're scared that if we took off the mask and kind of laid out all of our stuff, we'd be rejected and judged and shamed. And oftentimes we are. Very rarely are you deeply known by somebody and deeply loved, let alone completely accepted.

And Jesus says, "What I've done for you is I have given you access to this water so that you don't need to pretend anymore, you don't need to fight anymore, you don't need to argue anymore.

And so many of our problems that we have right now are addictions that originate from trying to satisfy our souls in illegitimate ways. We're coping. And we're coping in ways that just perpetuate the brokenness that is there.

See, one way to understand sin—we're going to talk about sin this fall in this series that we're going to be in—but sin, really what it is, is thirsty people trying to satisfy their thirst in a way that really never satisfies.

Ever notice that you just keep getting thirsty again? Whatever addiction you have, whether it's caffeine or something stronger, you've just got to keep going back to it again. It just increases the thirst.

That's why God speaks so strongly against sin because He goes, "Basically you're settling for a substitute. It's never going to satisfy you." And the invitation is there from Him for us to come and drink deeply. And when we do, that's transformation.

What I want you to notice about the conversation with Jesus and the woman at the well is all the things that aren't in the conversation that we typically put in the conversation today.

I've got to be really careful as I spell this out because I don't want you to think that I am saying that this is not important. But just notice, there is no transactional language in the conversation before she experiences change. Jesus wasn't like, "Hey, I need you to confess your sin, and do you believe that I am the Son of God and repeat after Me, 'I am the Christ. I am the Son of the living God.'"

I'm not diminishing any of that stuff. I'm just saying that as we do that, we end up, unintentionally, turning our connection to God into a transaction. It was never meant to be that way. It was meant to be a relationship.

And Jesus offers her living water, and she becomes a missionary. She's completely and utterly changed. He didn't just offer her a drink; He offered her access to the source.

I love how Tim Keller put it several years ago. He said this:

"The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."

Now you water any of those things down or you put the emphasis too much on one or the other and you don't have the Gospel any more. You have a transaction.

And we've all got to recognize how sinful we really are—that is actually a safe place to be. To come and be fully authentic and go, "Yep, I'm broken. I'm flawed. I'm sinful. And yet, I'm deeply known and deeply loved by Jesus Christ."

You want to know the real irony of all of this thirst talk? It's that when Jesus went to a cross, He said only a handful of things that we have recorded. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do." Jesus had a conversation with a thief on the cross. Actually, very, very similar to the one He had with this woman here.

Jesus also said this, "I'm thirsty." Jesus was willing to be thirsty so that you and I could have our thirst quenched. Not just for all of eternity but for the here and now.

So here are three questions I just want you to ask of yourself. Here's the first question:

Are you thirsty?

And I want you to spend some time thinking about that. Are you thirsty?

Here's the second question:

How does that thirst commonly present itself in your life, meaning what are the effects of your spiritual dehydration? If you are angry, if you are fearful, if you are irritated, if you are divisive, if you say things online that you would never say to somebody's face, that's how your thirst is presenting itself. If you're addicted, that's how thirst is presenting itself. So you've just got to be honest about that.

Now, here's the third question:

Are you drinking from a well, a cracked cistern, or a fountain of living water?

Now, clearly this is an invitation to those who have not yet given their life to Christ to give their life to Christ. But this is also an invitation to those who have given their life to Christ to come back to the fountain of living water, because you might be drinking from a cracked cistern.

And right now we are living in a world that is hurting and broken and divisive. We do not need Christ followers who are perpetuating the hurt and brokenness because we are drinking from the wrong well.

So, this summer I was with a group of people in Wyoming, and we went on a hiking trip. It was like a 12-mile hike. So we hiked six miles out and into the middle of nowhere and it was a trail that the forest service doesn't often get to so there were trees down in the trail, a lot of brush had grown up in places where it had flooded.

A couple of times it seemed like the trail ended. And I didn't know if we were going to keep going or not. But the guide who was kind of leading out in front, he'd figure out a way. He kind of hunched down, "Yeah, I think I've found a way through here."

We'd climb over stuff. We'd go through some water, streams, to get back on the trail to keep going. But it took a long time because there was obstacle after obstacle after obstacle. The ground beneath our feet was uneven.

We got six or seven miles out, we stopped and had lunch by the river and then it was time to head back. Honestly, I was not looking forward to the hike back because of all of the obstacles, "We've got to go through all of that again."

But here was what was surprising to me. Going back, we made incredibly good time. We got back twice as fast as what it took to do the six miles in. And I was thinking, "Why is that?" Because we were still coming up on the same obstacles we had to navigate.

And it was as if the Spirit of God said to me that day; He's like, "Yeah, Aaron. The obstacles are still there but I've increased your capacity to navigate the obstacles. This isn't brand new to you anymore."

I don't know about you, but as I look at the conditions of our world and look at all of the challenges that exist at a global level, a local level, a regional level, and even in my own personal life, here's what I oftentimes fall into. I often will fall into this prayer, "God, would You please remove the obstacle in my path. God, would You please solve this issue. God, would you please bring healing over here. God, would you help me not to feel this way anymore."

And sometimes God will do that. Do you know what He does most of the time? He increases your capacity to navigate the obstacles.

I've asked God to make the ground beneath my feet solid. He says, "How about I give your feet solid footing for the uneven ground." That's a different thing.

And right now I don't know. I wish I could tell you, "Hey, man. Things are going to get better." And it might get better in the short term, but in the long term, just look at history. This world is broken. Always has been always will be until Jesus returns to make it right.

So the prayer we need to start praying is, "God, would you help us to navigate these obstacles in a way that represents You well to a watching world?"

Revelation gives us this promise. I want to end with this. It says this:

"For the Lamb," that's capitalized because that's referring to Jesus, "on the throne will be their Shepherd." It's capitalized because that's Jesus. "He will lead them," where? "...to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

In this world we shed tears. Why? Because this is a broken world. It is painful. And yet we have a Lamb who died on a cross for us to give us new life. He is our Shepherd leading us through to springs of living water. The question is: where are you drinking? Where are you going to sustain yourself for the trail ahead?

So, I'm super excited about this series that we're getting ready to jump into next weekend. For our fall teaching series, we're going to go through the New Testament book of Romans together as a church. And the reason why is I was doing some study this summer and I was just like, "What should we study this fall?" And God brought me back to Romans.

Those of you who have been in our church for a while know that I grew up in church, but I didn't necessarily grow up in Christ. There's a difference. And I was well on my way to either walking away from church or being a really good, self-righteous Pharisee. Those are usually the two options.

And as an 18-year-old I read the book of Romans. Not because somebody told me to. Not because of Sunday school. I just read it on my own. And it was when I got to chapter 8 that the Holy Spirit hit me like a lightning bolt and that's when I gave my life to Christ.

Did you know that almost every spiritual reawakening in history came after a study of Romans? That I know of. Romans is like the Mount Everest of the New Testament. It is Paul at his absolute best.

And Romans was written because the church in Rome had just gone through a massive cultural crisis that led to division within the church. Sound familiar? And Paul writes this letter to say, "Hey, listen. You all have different perspectives and opinions on all kinds of things: culturally, politically, and socially but here's what the Gospel is, and you're united in that."

And if Paul hadn't written Romans, we wouldn't be here today because it reunited the church so that way it could be a sending agency to Spain and around the world. It recalibrated the church in the midst of cultural crisis.

So, next weekend we're starting a study together as a church in the book of Romans. We're calling it *Recalibrate*. And next weekend every single person will get one of these journals when you walk in.

And this is a journal that our team designed over the summer, not just to be used on Sunday for you to take notes but also to be used every day during the Daily Bible Reading that comes into your email as well as in your small groups.

So everyone is going to get a copy of this journal. Come next week. Get one. Bring it back with you every week as we utilize this.

I want to say that these are not available today. First service people were like they wanted to get it right now. This is the only copy in the building. You can't have it. It's mine. So, you'll get it next week, alright? I want everybody to grab this as we study through the book of Romans.

I've taught sermons out of Romans. But I've never walked through it like this. So you can pray for me because it's a daunting book. But I believe that God is going to use it to hopefully do big, big things in the life of our church.

I'm excited. I really am. I'm excited about where God is taking us, where we're going. Because the last time we saw this type of cultural shake up was 1968. There were racial riots. There was an unwanted war. And there was a pandemic.

And out of 1968 came something called the Jesus movement that actually revolutionized, kind of breathed fresh wind into the life of the church. It wasn't perfect in every way. No movement ever is because it's man made. It's got men involved.

But I believe that we're actually heading into the reshaping of the future of the church. I believe that there is a day... I think that there are many really painful things that happened because of the pandemic. I do believe that there is a day when we'll look back and say, "God, thank You for allowing us to walk through that because what it did was it revealed our thirst."

And all of the things that we were running to to quench that thirst, they couldn't. So we get to be a part of this to see what Jesus is going to do in this culture in this world.

Father, we come to You right now and thank You that You are the fountain of living water. Forgive us when we keep running to cracked cisterns to try to satisfy a thirst that never will.

So, God, today as Christ followers we know the world is watching us in person and online more than ever and we don't want to let man-made personal perspectives to be a dividing wall of hostility.

We want to represent You well. We don't want to react; we want to respond. And that requires us to stay close to the fountain of living water.

God, I pray that You would take this study in the book of Romans and that You would use it in big ways in the life of our church because we want to be used by You to take back ground for the kingdom that the enemy has taken over the last year-and-a-half.

So may it begin with each one of us as we come to You now. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody says: Amen.