Living Sermons

A BILLY GRAHAM CLASSIC SERMON

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

JOHN 4:4, 10

"God offers all of us a gift tonight. It's something you can't work for, can't buy, can't earn. It's forgiveness of all your sins."

BILLY GRAHAM

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Transcribed and Published by **Livingsermons.com**

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

Preacher: Billy Graham

Publisher: LivingSermons.com

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Living Sermons

FOREWORD

Every human heart is thirsty for something it cannot name. In this message, preached in a stadium in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Billy Graham takes his text from one brief verse, “And He must needs go through Samaria,” and follows Jesus to a divine appointment at Jacob’s well with a woman who had been searching all her life.

Dr. Graham shows how Jesus crossed every barrier of race, nation and reputation to offer her “living water,” the free gift of God that cannot be earned or bought: forgiveness of all sins, purchased at the cross. With tenderness he traces her journey from curiosity to conviction, from a hidden past laid bare to the moment Jesus said, “I am He,” and she ran into town to tell the men, “Come, see a Man.”

His tone is warm and searching, sprinkled with the stories that marked his preaching: a Harvard student who cried, “I want something, but I don’t know what it is,” and a sincere football player running the wrong way.

In preparing this edition, we have preserved the preacher’s message and wording. We removed time stamps and broadcast material, trimmed a few spoken repetitions, arranged the transcript into chapters with subheadings, and corrected punctuation, capitalization and obvious transcription errors.

If you are thirsty tonight, come to the well. The One who waited for her is waiting for you.

Wisdom Epsi
— The Chief Editor, LivingSermons.com

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This book is a faithful transcript of a live sermon delivered by the preacher under the inspiration and unction of the Holy Spirit. Every effort has been made to preserve the preacher's exact words, tone, flow, and spiritual authority, while carefully proofreading and formatting the message into a clear and readable ebook format.

The message you are about to read was originally ministered in a live congregational setting. As such, it carries the weight, urgency, and atmosphere of that sacred gathering. Minor grammatical and structural adjustments have been made solely to enhance readability, without altering the substance, intent, or power of the original delivery.

Watch the live sermon from which this message was transcribed on YouTube

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Our standard is reverence for the Word of God. Our daily goal is to transform powerful live sermons into polished PDF and ebook editions for the edification of the Body of Christ. It is our prayer that as you read, the same grace, conviction, clarity, and impartation present in the live service will minister to you afresh.

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A Spirit-led Publishing Stewardship

MAIN MESSAGE BEGINS HERE

CHAPTER 1

HE MUST NEEDS GO THROUGH SAMARIA

ONE BRIEF VERSE

I want you to turn with me to the fourth chapter of John's Gospel, a wonderful story in the life of Jesus Christ, and just one verse of Scripture. It's a very brief verse. It says:

> *And He must needs go through Samaria.*
> JOHN 4:4

ON FOOT TO GALILEE

Jesus had been teaching. The scribes and the Pharisees had been listening. They had told Him that John the Baptist had just been imprisoned. And He taught as one having authority, and the people came to listen. And He taught in great simplicity, so that the common people heard Him gladly.

And now He has to go back to Galilee. He's down south in Judea; now He's going to go to Galilee. He doesn't get on a plane. He doesn't get on a bus. He doesn't get in a car. He walks. And while it wasn't a very long distance by today's standards, in those days it was a long distance to go from Judea up to Galilee. And He was going to Cana.

AN APPOINTMENT IN SAMARIA

But it says He must needs go through Samaria. Because, you see, the Samaritans and the Jews didn't get along. They didn't like each other; they avoided each other. The Samaritans had intermarried. They were not pure-blooded. And so the Jewish people would always go on the eastern side, or they'd go the western side, of the Jordan River, to avoid going through Samaria.

But Jesus, it says, must needs go through Samaria. Why? Because Jesus had an appointment there that He was going to keep. That appointment had been made centuries earlier, in the council halls of God.

JACOB'S WELL

You know, much of the Bible lands is desert. Water is extremely important. Wells are important. And in Samaria, at the foot of two mountains, was Jacob's well, that Jacob had dug.

CHAPTER 2

THIRSTY SOULS

BROKEN CISTERNS

There's not only water that you drink for your physical needs, but there's spiritual water. Jesus said, "I am the water of life."

Jeremiah said, "For My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

In a number of places the Bible refers to people who have no spiritual water. "Ye shall be as the garden that hath no water," says Isaiah, the first chapter. In Zechariah it says, "prisoners of the pit, wherein there's no water." 2 Peter 2:17: "These are wells with no water." Spiritual water.

THE TROUBLED SEA

The Scripture says in Isaiah, "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There's no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

It says that the waters are like our own hearts. Our hearts are troubled, and they never rest. I've watched the waters; they never seem to rest. They are always moving and disturbed. And God says there is no peace to those who reject God. There's no peace to those who are not living for God.

THE WRONG WATERING HOLES

Now, the scarcity of spiritual water throughout the world today is tremendous. People are hungry and thirsty. We read about it in our papers constantly. And people in this country are going to the wrong watering holes, searching for satisfaction, searching for something that only the Water of Life and the Bread of Life could meet. And that Person is Jesus Christ, who is the Water of Life and the Bread of Life.

"I WANT SOMETHING"

You can go down our streets in the major cities of America and see our young people searching for something. They don't know what.

Like that girl at Harvard University. She cried for several days, and finally the psychiatrist said, "I can do nothing with her." And so they called for the family to come, and the father and mother came. She finally blurted out to her father, "Father, I want something, but I don't know what it is."

And many people are like that. They are searching for something, and they go to all kinds of things—whether it's drink, or sex, or whatever it is—to try to find that answer. Maybe it's money, or maybe it's power, whatever it is. But it doesn't really satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts. They are searching for something that will bring satisfaction and quench this terrible spiritual thirst that only God can satisfy.

Water in the Middle East is very scarce, and it is often hard to obtain. A man who owns a well of water is sometimes better off than if he owned a well of oil. Many wars have been fought over water.

CHAPTER 3

AN APPOINTMENT AT THE WELL

A LESSON FOR THE DISCIPLES

In our text today, Jesus has been teaching in Judea. He's going through Samaria. It's the shortest way, but it's not the way the Jewish people of that day went, because they had no dealings with the Samaritans.

Jesus knew about the woman that He was going to see. He knew that He had an appointment with that woman. He wanted to teach His disciples a lesson in race relations, or a lesson in how to win people to Christ.

ALONE AT NOON

Jesus was weary. He sits down at Jacob's well. The disciples had gone to town to buy food. And this woman came. It was almost noon. Women usually came in the evening, when it was cooler. But this woman came alone, in the middle of the day, when it was very hot. Because of her character, she was probably a social outcast. She came with her water pot to get water.

"GIVE ME TO DRINK"

And Jesus asked her for a drink. That absolutely shook her, because Samaritans and Jews didn't even talk to each other. And certainly no Jewish person would ask a Samaritan for a favor.

SWEEPING AWAY PREJUDICE

In just that moment, Jesus was sweeping away many prejudices that people have, like race prejudice. One of the greatest needs we have in America is for the Lord to come into our hearts and take away our prejudice against other people who don't look like we do, and who don't have the same color of skin that we have.

(Applause)

It takes full-time prayer, saying, "O God, take this from my heart."

And then there was national prejudice, because the Jews and the Samaritans had nothing to do with each other. We have today a crisis in nationalism in many parts of the world. It's rising. That's the reason many people are concerned about the situation in the world, because there are many dangerous areas in the world. And I was always thankful for the work that people like James Baker did to help bring peace to the world.

TACTFUL AND KIND

But Jesus saw this woman there at Jacob's well, and He said, "Would you give Me a drink?" And she was astonished at such tolerance, courtesy and kindness that she saw in His eyes. And she said, "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask me for a drink, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with us Samaritans."

He didn't want to force religion on her. He begins on another subject entirely. He's tactful. He's diplomatic. He asks for a favor. He puts Himself under obligation to the woman.

CHAPTER 4

THE GIFT OF GOD

SOMETHING YOU CANNOT EARN

Jesus said, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that saith to you, Give Me to drink, you would have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.”

God offers all of us a gift tonight. It’s something you can’t work for. It’s something you can’t buy. It’s something you can’t earn. It’s a gift; it’s free. It’s spiritual water. It’s forgiveness of all your sins, because of the cross and the resurrection.

“HO, EVERY ONE THAT THIRSTETH”

Isaiah the prophet said, in the fifty-fifth chapter, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and you that have no money; come and buy, and eat; yea, come and buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? and you labor for that which satisfieth not?” the prophet asked.

The thing that you work so hard for, and the thing that you desire so much, and the thing that you go out to enjoy, doesn’t satisfy.

“THE WELL IS DEEP”

This woman replied. She said, “Sir, you don’t have anything to draw with, and the well is deep. Where are you going to get that living water you’re talking about?”

You see, she mistook the kind of water He was talking about. He was talking about living, eternal water. She went back to the well. She was talking about that water.

SPIRITUALLY BLIND

Now, the Bible teaches that we are blind to the glories and the thrill of the love of God and the Gospel. In 2 Corinthians 3:14 it says, "But their minds were blinded." In 2 Corinthians 4:3 and 4 it says, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

There's a supernatural power that blinds you. Spiritually blind: physically you have perfect eyesight, but spiritually you are blind. You were blinded by an outside spiritual force called the devil.

1 Corinthians 2 says, "But the natural man"—that's you—"receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

CHAPTER 5

LIVING WATER

A WELL SPRINGING UP

Jesus said, “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whoever drinks of the water that I give him will never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

He offers you that water tonight. Is your soul, is your spirit, is your mind thirsty for something more in life that you haven’t found?

Oh yes, you may be baptized. You might have been confirmed in the church. And you’re a good person, and you go to church. But deep inside your heart, something is lacking. There isn’t the fulfillment and the satisfaction and the peace that you would like to have, and that you believe God could give you. What should you do? Drink of the living water.

PROVIDED AT THE CROSS

Jesus provides the living water at the cross. He went to the cross, as Mrs. Baker so beautifully told us a moment ago. And there He was beaten and reviled. That wasn’t His real suffering. His real suffering came when He said, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

In that terrible, awful, mysterious moment, God had laid on Him the sins of the world—your sins and my sins. Everything I’ve ever done wrong was put on Jesus. He took the judgment and the hell that I deserve on that cross.

CHAPTER 6

SINCERE BUT WRONG

"GIVE ME THIS WATER"

Jesus was offering this woman water for her thirsty soul. Our souls are empty and lonely and guilty. She felt the emptiness of her own soul, and she said, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not." She was very sincere. But sincerity alone is not enough.

THE WRONG WAY IN THE ROSE BOWL

A few years ago in the Rose Bowl a man picked up the football. Everybody shouted; they were all on their feet because the score was tied. And he ran for a touchdown—but he'd gone the wrong way, and he scored for the other side. He was very sincere. You never saw a more sincere man as you watched him. But he was wrong.

You can be sincere in your religion, but you can be wrong. "There is a way," the Bible says, "that seems right, but the end thereof is the way of judgment and death." You may be on the wrong road.

MAKE SURE TONIGHT

God is asking you tonight to turn around, toward the cross, by faith. Repent of your sins and receive Him as your Lord and Master, and make sure of it.

There are hundreds of you here tonight that have religion, but you're not sure about your relationship with Christ, and you'd like to make sure before you leave here. You'd like to know that if you died tonight, you'd go to heaven. But you're not sure. You don't have that peace and that joy that you believe is there somewhere for you, and you haven't found it. Come and take of this living water, which is Christ, tonight.

Now, the kingdom of God is not entered easily. Jesus said you have to go through a narrow gate and walk a narrow road. And you may be misunderstood, and even persecuted, and you may suffer for your faith.

CHAPTER 7

“GO, CALL THY HUSBAND”

A SORE NERVE

So Jesus said to her, “Go call your husband.” Now He was hitting on a sore nerve. What a spot He touched in her life! He knew her sins. He knows yours.

What an overwhelming flood of guilt and remorse this brought to her! She shrank back. It was as if a thousand searchlights had been turned on in her heart, and every dirty secret in her life leaped into the glare.

CONVICTION AND REPENTANCE

No person can come to Christ until there’s conviction that you have sinned against God, and you have repented. And repentance means to change your mind, change your direction, change your way of living. It means that you’re willing to change.

“I HAVE NO HUSBAND”

She partly covered it up, and said, “I have no husband.” The Scripture says, “He that covereth his sin shall not prosper.”

Jesus gently reminded her that technically she was right. She had no husband. She’d had five husbands, and the man she was now living with was not her husband.

And she said two things: “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet,” and, “Please, sir, would you give me this living water? I want it. I need it. I need it in my life.” At that moment she acted on the light that she had, which wasn’t much.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO KNOW MUCH

You don't have to know much when you come to Christ. You don't have to know the whole Gospel. You don't have to know the Bible. You just come as you are.

The thief on the cross didn't know very much. But he turned to Jesus while he was dying and said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Just "Remember me." He had no time to join a church. He had no time to be baptized. He had no time for anything. He just said, "Lord, remember me." And that's all that was needed, because Jesus said, "Today you will be with Me in paradise."

CHAPTER 8

IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

HOW YOU WORSHIP

Jesus said, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” You and I are to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Where you worship God is not the important thing. It’s how you worship God. You worship Him in prayer, in the reading of the Bible, in giving to the church, in going to church. We worship God and we adore Him. And everything we do is an act of worship, if you know Christ. In all these ways we worship God.

“I AM HE”

And Jesus made the greatest of all revelations to her. When she said, “I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when He is come, He is going to explain all things to us,” Jesus said to her, “I am He.” I am the Messiah.

What a shock that was to her: that she was talking to the Messiah that the Samaritans and the Jews were both looking for, and that we are looking for today.

AT THAT MOMENT

At that moment she was converted. At that moment her name was written in the Book of Life. At that moment she was guaranteed a place in the kingdom of heaven.

CHAPTER 9

“COME, SEE A MAN”

A WOMAN EVANGELIST

And from that moment on she became a witness. She proved that she had met Christ. She left her water pot, and went her way into the city, and said to the men—she didn’t say it to the ladies, because they probably had nothing to do with her. The men knew her. So she said to the men, “Come, see a man which told me all the things that I ever did. Is not this the Christ that we’ve been waiting for?” And many Samaritans in that city believed.

Here was a woman evangelist, evangelizing among men, telling them about Jesus. She didn’t have much theology to tell them. She didn’t know what to say. All she said was, “Come and see Jesus, and Jesus will change your life as He’s changed mine.”

HAVE YOU COME?

Have you been to Jesus that way? Have you come? Are you sure your sins are forgiven? Have you been to the cross and said, “Lord, I have sinned. I’m sorry for my sin. I’m willing to change my way of life, and I come by faith. I don’t understand it all, but by faith I receive You as my Lord and my Master and my Savior”?

CHAPTER 10

THE INVITATION

"I'M THIRSTY"

We've seen hundreds of people come each of these two nights that we've been here. And I ask people to come and stand in front of the platform. And as they come, you're coming and saying, "Lord, I'm coming to You. I want to make sure of my relationship with You. I want this living water. I want this living water in my own life and in my home. I want this living water in my work. I want this living water at all times. I'm thirsty. I need God. I need to make sure. I need to make certain."

We never know when our moment is going to come, when we have to face God.

DON'T LET DISTANCE KEEP YOU

I'm going to ask you to get up and come tonight and make sure of your relationship with Christ. If you're with friends or relatives, they'll wait on you. And after you've all come, I am going to have a prayer with you, say a word to you, and give you some literature that you can take back to your home and study and read, and it'll help you to grow.

All over the stadium—from that top stand up there, we've timed it; it takes about five or six minutes for you to come. Don't let distance keep you from Christ, because you may never have a moment like this again. When will you ever have a moment in Pittsburgh like this again, when you can come and make a commitment like this?

SEAL IT PUBLICLY

Jesus said, "If you're not willing to acknowledge Me publicly before men, I'll not acknowledge you before My Father which is in heaven." There's something about coming forward publicly and settling it and sealing it in your life. Jesus died on the cross publicly for you. Now you can come publicly and say yes to Him.

You may be sitting down here, and you may be up there. You may be up here in that middle section. Wherever you are, God is speaking to you. There's a little voice that says you ought to come to Christ. We're going to wait on you as you come right now to this living water.

THE INVITATION HYMN

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

(Announcer) Just as hundreds of people have responded to Mr. Graham's invitation to make a public commitment to Jesus Christ, so can you, right where you are. Just call the phone number on your screen right now. Special friends want to help you with this important decision, so don't wait. Please call now.

YOU HAVE COME TO CHRIST

You've come tonight not to hear Billy Graham or to come to Billy Graham. You've come to Christ.

You that have been watching can come and drink of this living water and eat of this living bread that Jesus has promised. And it'll spring up in you, a well of everlasting life, and it can change your life, and change your home, and change your relationship with your neighbors and your friends round about.

Give your life to Christ tonight. Turn from your former way and say, "Lord, I'm ready for a change. But You're going to have to help me, because I'm too weak to change. I've tried, and it doesn't work. Lord, You help me." He'll help you. He loves you with an everlasting love, deeper than any love you've ever known on this earth.

CLOSING WORDS

(Closing Announcement) If you just prayed that prayer with my father, or if you have any questions about a relationship with Jesus Christ, why don't you call the number on the screen. There will be someone there to talk with you, pray with you and answer those questions. And remember, God loves you! If you would like to commit your life to Jesus Christ, you can contact us on the web 24/7 at peacewithgod.tv. Or you can write to us at: Billy Graham, 1 Billy Graham Parkway, Department C, Charlotte, NC 28201. Or if you are in Canada, write to: Billy Graham, 20 Hopewell Way NE, Calgary, Alberta. We'll get the same helps to you that we give to everyone who responds at the invitation.

On behalf of Franklin Graham and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, thank you for watching and thank you for your prayers.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Passages quoted or alluded to in this message, in order of appearance. An asterisk (*) marks a passage the preacher did not name by chapter and verse; the editors identified it.

John 4:4 — "He must needs go through Samaria"; the text of the message. (Chapter named; verse quoted.) *(Chapter 1)*

Matthew 7:29; Mark 12:37* — He taught as one having authority; the common people heard Him gladly. *(Chapter 1)*

John 4:5-6* — Jacob's well at the foot of the mountains. *(Chapter 1)*

John 7:37-38; Revelation 22:17* — Jesus, the water of life. *(Chapter 2)*

Jeremiah 2:13* — "Broken cisterns, that can hold no water." *(Chapter 2)*

Isaiah 1:30 — As a garden that hath no water. (Chapter named, verse not.) *(Chapter 2)*

Zechariah 9:11 — Prisoners of the pit wherein is no water. (Book named.) *(Chapter 2)*

2 Peter 2:17 — "Wells with no water." (Named by chapter and verse.) *(Chapter 2)*

Isaiah 57:20-21 — The wicked are like the troubled sea. (Book named.) *(Chapter 2)*

John 6:35* — The Bread of Life. *(Chapter 2)*

John 4:7-9* — "Give Me to drink"; the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. *(Chapter 3)*

John 4:10* — "If you knew the gift of God." *(Chapter 4)*

Isaiah 55:1-2 — "Ho, every one that thirsteth." (Chapter named, verses not.) *(Chapter 4)*

John 4:11* — "The well is deep." *(Chapter 4)*

2 Corinthians 3:14 — "Their minds were blinded." (Named by chapter and verse.) *(Chapter 4)*

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 — The god of this world hath blinded the minds. (Named by chapter and verses.) *(Chapter 4)*

1 Corinthians 2:14 — The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit. (Chapter named, verse not.) *(Chapter 4)*

John 4:13-14* — A well of water springing up into everlasting life. *(Chapter 5)*

Matthew 27:46* — "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" *(Chapter 5)*

Isaiah 53:6* — God laid on Him the sins of the world. *(Chapter 5)*

John 4:15* — "Sir, give me this water." *(Chapter 6)*

Proverbs 14:12* — There is a way that seems right. *(Chapter 6)*

Matthew 7:13-14* — The narrow gate and the narrow road. *(Chapter 6)*

John 4:16-19* — "Go, call thy husband"; five husbands. *(Chapter 7)*

Proverbs 28:13* — "He that covereth his sin shall not prosper." *(Chapter 7)*

Luke 23:42-43* — The thief on the cross. *(Chapter 7)*

John 4:24* — Worship Him in spirit and in truth. *(Chapter 8)*

John 4:25-26* — "I that speak unto thee am He." *(Chapter 8)*

Revelation 20:12, 15* — The Book of Life. *(Chapter 8)*

John 4:28-29, 39* — "Come, see a man"; many Samaritans believed. *(Chapter 9)*

Matthew 10:32-33* — Acknowledge Me publicly before men. *(Chapter 10)*

Jeremiah 31:3* — An everlasting love. *(Chapter 10)*

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

William "Billy" F. Graham Jr. (1918–2018) was raised on a dairy farm in Charlotte, North Carolina. In 1934, at age 15, he made a commitment to faith during a revival led by Mordecai Ham. He was ordained in 1939, graduated from Florida Bible Institute in 1940, and earned a B.A. from Wheaton College in 1943, where he married Ruth McCue Bell.

After pastoring in Illinois and serving as the first full-time evangelist for Youth for Christ International, Graham was vaulted into national prominence by the 1949 Los Angeles Crusade. This event launched decades of global outreach, including historic, extended crusades in London (1954), New York City (1957), Seoul (1973), and Rio de Janeiro (1974). Overall, he preached live to nearly 215 million people in over 185 countries and territories.

In 1950, he founded the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). Through BGEA, Graham hosted the syndicated *Hour of Decision* radio program for over 60 years, published *Decision* magazine, and authored 33 books—including bestsellers such as *Angels: God's Secret Agents* (1975) and his 1997 autobiography, *Just As I Am*.

A counselor to U.S. presidents, Graham appeared on Gallup's "Ten Most Admired Men in the World" list a record 61 times. His honors include the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1983), Congressional Gold Medal (1996), and an Honorary Knighthood (2001). Following his passing in 2018 at age 99, he lay in honor in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda, and a bronze statue of him was added to the U.S. Capitol in 2024. Billy and Ruth raised five children, 19 grandchildren, 44 great-grandchildren, and nine great-great-grandchildren.

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