

The Bride of Christ

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[0 : 00] Now, if you could take your Bibles and turn back with me to John chapter 4. This is going to be our text, our primary text for the sermon.

And so I want to begin by first asking a question. And the question is, what connects the two texts of Scripture that we read together? So we've read the Gospel of John, and we also read Genesis chapter 29.

Now, the similarity that you first are most likely to recognize is that Jesus meets the woman at Jacob's well. And we read together the story of how Jacob met his wife.

And throughout the Old Testament, the wells appear again and again. And this is quite easily attributed to the fact that until the Industrial Revolution, most people had to physically go and collect water from natural sources like rivers or streams or from man-made sources such as wells.

Not only for washing, agriculture, drinking. All of these are reasons why people are going to fetch water. And this forms the background of a number of the marriage or betrothal scenes that we see in the Old Testament.

[1 : 14] Where we have this type where we have a weary traveler who discovers a well. He meets his future wife and then proceeds to meet the family and get married.

So, for example, Abraham's servant sent out when Abraham was an old man looking for a wife for his son Isaac. His servant met Rebecca at a well in Genesis chapter 24.

We have this wonderful story of Jacob meeting Rachel in Genesis chapter 29 at the well. And then also in Exodus chapter 2, Moses, after fleeing Egypt, meets his future wife Sephora as she came with her sisters to water her father's flock.

And you might say that we just have coincidences here. However, it's quite clear that when you read Genesis chapter 29, that the providence of God is acting in all the small events.

So, God doesn't just act in the big events like, say, the crucifixion, but in the small events and where we meet people day to day. And so, God guided the steps of Jacob and he brought him to the field of his uncle.

[2 : 24] It was God who ordered these events and it's God who appoints this pattern of the events. So, you know, the Jewish people throughout history are very familiar with these stories, with the scriptures.

And by the time that we get to Palestine in the time of Jesus, there were synagogues all across the land where it served as a substitute for the temple. The people gathered there to worship on the Sabbath day and on holy days.

In the synagogue, the scripture was read in annual cycles. They read from the law of the first five books, followed by the prophets. And so, we have a Jewish people to whom the reading of scripture was a central part of their lives.

And so, the stories of the Bible were very well known. And especially the stories of the patriarchs and these providential patterns that God sets before us. And so, that brings us back to our question, what connects the two texts of scripture that we read?

So, we have the disciples going into town to buy food as they travel through Samaria on the way up to Galilee. Jesus is wearied. He's alone. He rests and is thirsty.

[3 : 33] He stops at the well. And Jesus meets a disreputable woman alone at this well. And you begin to see a pattern. Now, if your reaction to seeing this pattern is a slight panic, then good.

Because that's exactly the reaction that the disciples had when they come and they see Jesus in verse 27. It says that they marveled or they were astonished. At what? They were astonished that he was talking to this woman alone at a well.

The disciples knew that rabbis shouldn't be talking with women alone at the well. And John is planting in our minds this idea of this Old Testament pattern. In fact, just a few verses before, in John 3, verse 29, Jesus is called the bridegroom by John the Baptist.

So, what John is trying to tell us here, or should we say, why is John putting this story here in his gospel? David Parker took us through John chapter 1, or the start of it.

A few Sundays ago, where Jesus is identified as the Logos, that he is equal with God. At the end of John chapter 1, we have John the Baptist, who reveals Jesus as the Messiah.

[4 : 48] In John chapter 2, we have Jesus at the wedding at Cana, where he performs his first miracles. In John chapter 3, we have the story of Nicodemus. And so, you have a Pharisee, a scholar, and so you would think that if anyone was to know the identity of Jesus, you would expect it to be him.

Because the Pharisees should be the ones who know the scriptures the best. And so, if anyone was to be a member of this church of Jesus Christ, you would expect it to be him.

And Jesus gives a very clear gospel message. Some of the most famous verses that almost everyone knows are in John chapter 3, where we have the famous words of John 3, 16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. And yet, Nicodemus, this person who you would expect a positive response from, he leaves the scene and we don't hear from him again until later on.

And so, that brings us to John chapter 4, the Samaritan woman, which is the second major discourse in John's gospel. So, this is someone who is low down on the list of people who you would expect to come to Jesus.

[6 : 07] And yet, John is saying to us, this is who Jesus has come for. If you want to know who Jesus has come into the world for, and what they look like, it's like this Samaritan woman.

Because, and this is a story that we really need to understand. We need to understand who she is, and what this teaches us about the church. Because this is what the bride of Christ looks like.

It looks like this disreputable woman. And so, this is a glorious declaration, an image, or a picture of the gospel. So, we're going to break this down into three sections.

And the three sections are going to tell us about the church and about the grace of God. And so, we're going to know who we were, who we are, and who we will be.

So, point one, who we were. The first characteristic that John gives us with regards to this woman is that she's a Samaritan. So, she's a woman with her own beliefs, her own traditions.

[7 : 12] We don't know what kind of upbringing she had, who her parents were. We don't know if she had a troubled upbringing. We don't know if she had a stable upbringing. We know only a very few details of her life.

And Jesus brings out a few more details of her life further on. But whatever her background was, we know it was nothing like the background that Jesus had.

So, who were the Samaritans, you might be asking? So, the Samaritans we may know of. The good Samaritan, someone who does good deeds. But the Samaritans, they were descendants of Abraham, like the Jewish people.

We know from 2 Chronicles 30 that not all of the inhabitants of the northern kingdom were exiled after the invasion. And so, the land was settled by its occupiers.

And so, you have a mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish culture. The Samaritans had their own Old Testament. They had their own temple. They even had their own version of history.

[8 : 13] And the temple on Mount Gerizim, which is where this account takes place, this is somewhere where they had their own temple. So, this was built sometime after Alexander the Great and his conquests.

And during the time that they were occupied by the Greeks, Antiochus Epiphanes, who was descended from one of the rival families of Alexander, Antiochus Epiphanes, he ordered that all the Jews were to worship the Greek gods.

And the Jews in Judea, they refused. But the Samaritans in the north, they were quite easily turned over to worshiping the Greek gods.

And they made their temple on Mount Gerizim a place where they were to worship the Greek god Zeus. And so, this demonstrated to the Jews in Judea that the people in the north, the Samaritans, they were nothing like themselves.

They were no longer any doubt that they were not adherents to the Israelite faith. And you may have heard of the Maccabean revolt during a time when there was a leader called John Hyrcanus. [9 : 24] And he besieged Samaria, he destroyed their temple. And so, there's this tension that exists between the Jews and the Samaritans. And so, when we read in verse 9 of John chapter 4, where we see that Jews have no dealings with Samaritans, it comes as no surprise.

And so, what's surprising to the disciples of Jesus is that he stops to speak with the Samaritan women. So, this woman is distinct from Jesus by belonging to this other group, this group that is looked down upon.

But she's also an outcast from her own people. It's been noted by commentators that she comes to the well at midday. And I've been to Israel in the midday sun, and I know that with my red hair, it doesn't really work very well with the heat.

So, I know for a fact that it's not a good idea to be going around at midday in Israel. And so, typically, women didn't come to collect water at this time, because it was just uncomfortable. Usually, they would come early in the morning or in the evening. And so, the fact that she comes at midday indicates that she wasn't welcome around other people. She's likely shunned.

[10 : 38] Maybe other people talk about her. She's obviously got a questionable past. So, there may be people gossiping about her. And so, she comes to this well when no one else wants to.

And there she meets Jesus. And he's wearied by the midday sun, and he asks her for a drink. And so, what's the response of this woman?

In verse 9, she says, How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria? And so, her first response to Jesus is to question Jesus.

It's to refuse. It's a little bit different than we see in these other scenes in the Old Testament, where the water is given quite readily. But instead of helping Jesus, she just answers his request with a question.

And the conversation continues like this for some time. Jesus offers her this living water. She continues to delay in meeting his need.

[11 : 37] And she continues to be skeptical. She says, Where do you get this living water? And are you greater than our father Jacob? So, her natural response to Jesus is to question Jesus.

It's to be skeptical of Jesus. It's to refuse Jesus. But Jesus perseveres with her. And it's in this patience that Jesus has with her that she begins to see what he has to say.

And she begins to see that there's something different about this man. And perhaps that's a lesson for another day. The patience that Jesus has. And the lesson of being patient with people who are questioning.

People who are skeptical. People who are initially refusing the gospel. Jesus was patient with people. And so we should be too. So, she knows this authority that Jesus has.

And there's a change in her response. And now she wants what Jesus offers. Now, if we were sharing the gospel with someone. And we first get a refusal and skepticism.

[12 : 41] And then suddenly someone has a change of heart. And wants what's being offered. Then we'd be like, great. Our job's done. But Jesus doesn't stop there.

Because there's a key component missing thus far. This woman who has this questionable past. Belongs to false religion. She's an outcast from her own community.

And then Jesus speaks to her heart. But he asks her a question. Which cuts her down. Or a statement. In verse 16.

He says. Verse 16. Go and call your husband. And come here. And then the woman answered and says.

I have no husband. And Jesus said to her. You're right in saying I have no husband. For you have had five husbands. And the one who you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true. So Jesus exposes her sin.

[13 : 40] This woman is considered to be an immoral woman. It's probably why her community is rejecting her. Now it may be the case.

Some of this may be innocent. Maybe some of her previous husbands have died. But what's more likely is that she's run away from her previous husbands. And so what's very clear is that. The man that she's currently living with isn't her husband.

And so she's in clear violation of the sixth commandment. You shall not commit adultery. So this woman is living in immorality. She has a poor reputation. She's living in sin.

And so what does this tell us about the bride that the father has given to his son? It's that the bride is a disreputable woman. We, the church, are the disreputable bride.

We're undeserving of God's blessings. We did not earn our forgiveness. It's a marriage that happens by grace. And so Jesus comes for the people who you don't expect.

[14:45] Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 26. He puts it like this. For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards.

Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And so, if you think that you aren't good enough for God, then that's good because you meet the qualification. If you think that you're an outcast, then you should come to Jesus.

If you think you're not born of the right stock, well, you should come to Jesus. If you have doubts, if you have unbelief, well, you should come to Jesus. If you're a sinner and you say, well, you know, you don't understand.

[15:48] I really am a sinner. Well, you should come to Jesus. And so this is the characteristics that tell us about who we were, who this woman was.

And so we'll move on to point two, who we are. So there's a change that takes place. In verse 10 and in verse 13 and 14, Jesus uses a metaphor to teach this woman about salvation.

And the metaphor is living water. John's gospel is filled with these analogies. And Jesus repeatedly uses these physical, tangible items to teach us about spiritual truths.

So, for example, Jesus is the light of the world. He is the bread of heaven. He is the good shepherd. He is the vine. And all of these analogies teach us an aspect of a spiritual truth.

And so the living water that Jesus describes to us here becomes the spring of living water. And you see the living water that Jesus refers to here is the Holy Spirit.

[17:02] And you say, well, how do you know it's the Holy Spirit? Because John tells us in a few chapters over in John chapter 7, verse 37, where he says, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the scriptures have said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. And John adds the comment, now this he said about the Spirit.

And so this is describing the new condition of the Christian. The disciples of Jesus who responded to him in faith. God comes to dwell with them.

When you turn over a few more chapters to John 14 and verse 23. In John 14, 23.

If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words, and the Father, and the words that you hear is not mine, but the Father who sent me.

[18:08] These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

And so God chooses to come to dwell with us. So the Holy Spirit comes and he takes up residence in the one who loves Jesus.

And this is quite an incredible, a revolutionary truth that God chooses to dwell with us. People like this woman, this Samaritan woman who's a sinner.

She's unfaithful. She's a lawbreaker. And that's who she was. But Jesus offers her transformation. She offers her change and renewal.

And so this living water, the Spirit that comes into the life, this new life of the believer, it's a dynamic, transforming power to change us from being the outcast and makes us more like Jesus.

[19:12] The Spirit unites us with Jesus. It brings us into union with Jesus. And we share in his status as the Son of God who brought the salvation into the world.

The power that raised Jesus from the dead is made ours. This risen and indestructible life is made ours by the Holy Spirit coming to unite us with Jesus.

When he died and rose from the dead, we died. We were united with him and we rose with him by the Holy Spirit. And we stand cleared of all our sins.

So since we are united to Jesus, who is risen, we're no longer subject to death. We're no longer under its domain or under the domain of sin. The Westminster Confession describes it like this.

It says, So you see that more and more were changed into the likeness of Jesus by this living water. [20 : 19] The Holy Spirit coming to dwell with us. And so the living water is the power in the Christian life to spring us upwards towards God. And so if that's something that you want, then come to Jesus and drink.

So there's another aspect to this indwelling. The transformation that's spoken of here, it's not an instantaneous transformation. All of us right now, we're somewhere along this line of transformation.

We have this old self, which is under the power of sin with its characteristics, its desires. But now we've been brought into the church through union with Jesus.

But there's still sin that remains in our hearts. Each of us is muddled. None of us have quite made it yet. And this can maybe seem quite discouraging.

Paul describes this transformation of the Christian experience in the letter to the Galatians. In Galatians chapter 4.

[21 : 26] 5, sorry. Galatians 5, 16 and 17. Where he says, So you see, there's this opposing to each other.

So we find ourselves in between who we once were and who we're becoming. We have this future, this glorious future of eternal life with Jesus.

But we live in this tension, this opposition between old and new. We have this old nature that if it was given free reign, would push us further and further into sin.

Into more ingrained habits, into more hardness of heart. But then we have this new nature, this living water, this spirit of God that dwells in us.

That springs us upwards towards eternal life with Jesus. And so we live in this opposition between the upwards and the old. And this is what Paul tells us.

[22 : 42] He calls it the flesh and the spirit. And so the result that we have is we're somewhere along the middle. We find that we're on this path of opposing natures.

We have on one side, we have immorality. On one side, we have love. We have strife or peace. We have anger or patience. We have envy or kindness, lust or self-control.

We find ourselves somewhere along this line with the opposing natures. And this is what we ought to expect. This is what Paul teaches us. He's telling us to be prepared that we live on this path, that we're being transformed by the spirit of God.

That there is this dynamic power that is within us. But there is still this remnant of sin that remains in us. And so that brings us on to our third point, which is who we will be.

So where is all this going? What's the future look like? What's the future that we're heading towards? What is it that this dwelling of Jesus in our lives produces?

[23 : 56] What's the goal? And that's revealed to us in the next few verses. So Jesus offers this living water.

She refuses, but then responds. Jesus exposes her sin. And then she asks a question in verse 19. She says, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.

Our fathers worshipped on this mountain. But you say that in Jerusalem is the place where we ought to worship. Now, one way that people have looked at this text is to say that she's simply trying to change the subject.

That she feels guilty for her sin. That she wants to deflect the discourse to a controversial issue. Or some people have said, well, it could be that she really does want to know how to worship God.

That she has a desire to worship God. And so it's a genuine question. I don't really know the answer to this. But whatever the motivation that she has, the response that Jesus gives us is what's important.

[25 : 00] So where is it that she can worship God? Is it here on Mount Gerizim where the Samaritans claim the true, is the true location of worship where a few generations before the Jews destroyed their temple?

Or does she have to go down to Judea, to Jerusalem to worship? So which is it, Jesus? And he responds by saying neither. Because it's not going to be a temple on a mountain.

And so you say, well, where is it going to be? And it can be anywhere. And that's because the Holy Spirit has come to dwell with the one who believes in Jesus.

Because the bride of Christ is the new temple where God dwells. So this sinful Samaritan woman, she is to be the temple of God.

We, as Gentile believers, insofar as we believe in Jesus, we are the temple where the Spirit of God dwells. Jesus says, the Father is seeking worshippers.

[26 : 03] And Jesus sought out this woman in verse 4. At the start of this passage, you remember that it says that Jesus had to pass, that he had to pass through Samaria. This wasn't a coincidence.

It wasn't a chance meeting. Jesus sought her out. And he met her there at the well. And he knows her. He knows her needs. He knows her past.

He knows her sin. And he loves her. And he offers her eternal life. A new, transformed life. Because he went to this well seeking a worshipper.

To change her from who she was into what she will be. A temple of the Holy Spirit. A worshipper in spirit and in truth. And so the rigid regulations of the Old Testament of how one could properly worship.

The sacrifices which had to be made. The ceremonial washings. The special clothing. The restricted access to meeting with God in just one location. At specific times. Limited to the priesthood.

[27 : 07] This is gone. And in its place is the divine power and energy alive in the life of the Christian. By the Holy Spirit coming to dwell with us.

To animate us. And to renew us to new life. And we're fueled by the historical reality that Jesus did die and come back from the dead. So that all our past sins.

All our guilt that we hold on our shoulders. All of that is taken away and replaced by this living water that dwells in us. To transform us into worshippers that God seeks.

True worship. Spiritual worship. And so the goal of this transformation is true worship of God. It's to enjoy God. It's to give glory to God.

So rather than be married to sin. Or the world. Or married to the law. Which brings judgment and condemnation. And is only going to make us miserable. We're married to Christ.

[28 : 04] Christ who brings us forgiveness. Peace and joy. And the reversal in this story. The reversal that we have. Is that the woman who has committed adultery and fornication.

She becomes the bride of Christ. Christ. The pure bride of Christ. And this is the great reversal. Because the gospel isn't about who we were.

It's about who we will become. We start muddled. We start corrupted. We start sinful. And we become the pure bride of Christ. The gospel is about who we will be.

Paul said in Corinthians. After listing a multitude of sins. He says to them. And such were some of you. As one author puts it. He says. When the son of God came to earth.

To look for a bride. The choice of the father. Astonished the proud. Why? Because. It was astonishing. Because. The choice that the father made.

[29 : 04] Was this disreputable woman. And this is the glory of grace. Forgiveness is something that is a gift. It is not something that is earned. Jesus says.

Whoever drinks of this water. I will give him. Will never be thirsty again. And so to conclude. So what's this story. In John all about. It's about this adulterous woman.

A Samaritan. An outcast. Who has offered this transforming power. Of the Holy Spirit. To spring upwards towards God. That this woman. As a representation of the church.

The bride of Christ. That the characteristics of this woman. Are characteristics that we share. That we have been. And continue to be unfaithful to God. But Jesus perseveres with us.

Because he loves his bride. And so a question that I have. As we end our time together. Is with this truth in mind. What do the words. That we speak.

[30 : 01] And the actions that we perform. What do they tell the people around us. About God. Or to put it another way. What barriers do we put up. Between people and Jesus.

Do the people who know you. Your friends. Your family members. Work colleagues. Students. Do they think that being a Christian. Is reserved for the moral. For the good people in this society.

For the righteous. Do they think that in order to come to Jesus. You already have to have everything in your life. Ordered and fixed. Do they think that you have to belong.

To a certain social class. That you can't come to Jesus muddled. Our message. Is not to go into the world. To tell people how good we are. That we meet a stipulated moral criteria.

Our message. Is that Jesus came into the world. To save sinners. And the message of the gospel. Is that the disreputable woman. Becomes the bride of Christ.

[31 : 01] While we were yet sinners. Christ died. For us. So do people know that the gospel is for them. Whatever condition they're in. That the church is a place for the outcast.

For the rejected. For the adulterer. The immoral. The disreputable. The poor. The weak. We need to make sure that everyone knows. That the gospel is a universal call.

And it applies to all people everywhere. To repent. And to follow Jesus. And so let's follow the example of this woman. And be fruitful. As we say.

Come. See a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ. Amen.