

John 4: The Woman at the Well, Part 2

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[0:00] Weeks in a row with recording malfunctions! Ah, there we go. I just want to mention, before we go into the sermon, maybe a little mini-devotion.

! I've had the materials for this service in front of me for the last week in study and preparation, but in just these first 20 minutes of the service, the Lord spoke to me, even in a new way, from the same material.

Being here on Sunday is not optional for God's children. We have our personal devotion, our study of the Word, and our prayers at home. God does speak to us there, but as we come together, I believe He meets His people in a special way.

Reading the same material, God spoke to me differently when I heard Cal pray the Colossus today, when I heard Chris read the same passages I've been looking at. I think it's interesting. That's why, if you're wondering why I'm bringing an extra Bible with me up here, it's because I took note of something during this reading.

Anyhow. For I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, then to the Twelve.

[1:29] It's a reading from 1 Corinthians 15. In this, our most concise presentation of the Gospel message, Paul begins by stating that Christ died for our sins according to Scripture.

Christ died for our sins. Such a simple statement, but yet so forgotten. Not just forgotten in this world, but also forgotten for most of the pulpits in this land.

Every person that comes to Christ must face the fact that they come to Him as a sinner. But how do we here, gathered today, come to this passage?

Do we come to it as sinners? Who do we think we are in this story? Do we think we're Jesus? Or do we think that we are the woman?

What do I mean by that? Well, what do you think the point of this story is? I've heard many sermons from this passage.

[2:48] Most of the sermons I've heard view this as a handbook for evangelistic methods. Other sermons I've heard teach this as some sort of model for the Christian in the area of ethnic reconciliation.

In other words, do you come to this passage, and when you're reading it, do you think, look how wonderful it is that Jesus would stoop down to the level of talking to even a Samaritan.

And oh, even as low as talking to a woman. Do you see the woman at the well as someone less than you?

Maybe we should stop seeing ourselves continually as the dispensers of truth, but rather as the constant receivers of the truth and grace that is present in Christ.

Do you come to this thinking that you're better than the woman at the well? Or do you recognize that you are the woman at the well?

[4:03] Consider the section of John that we've been studying, starting with Ray's sermon and then Caleb's sermons and then Lawrence's sermon, who I haven't gotten a chance to listen to yet, so I'm a little out of the loop.

But consider the players we've seen over the last month. We all know John chapter 3 and we know the story of Nicodemus, the member of the Sanhedrin, the leader of the Jews, and we have a pretty high view of him when he comes in.

I think he gets respected more than this woman does. As a member of the Sanhedrin, it was his job or that committee's job to set standards for the community, to look at how ritual purity was to be enforced.

First, they were the interpreters of rabbinical tradition. In other words, they looked at Moses' law and decided what was clean and what was unclean and how the community was to live that out on a daily and yearly basis.

And then we have the Samaritan woman. Seems like two radically different stories. Let's look at two parts of the Samaritan woman.

[5:21] I mean, Samaritan woman. That's all. For the reader of the Bible, there's so much packed into those two words. How do Anglicans start their prayers in the morning?

You know, we actually might have heard a little bit of a misfire during our reading today because we had it in there, encapsulated in one verse. But what do we have? Do you know how Jewish men start their morning prayer?

By the way, to this day in 2019, if you're an Orthodox Jew, traditional Orthodox Jew, listen to how they start their prayer.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who has not created me a woman. Do you think that tells you a little bit about how the woman was viewed by the community she lived in? And a Samaritan. We, uh, Caleb talked about this a little bit last week. They only had the Pentateuch. They were viewed as half-breeds, not pure, so even their very existence cried impurity to the Jews.

[6:46] They worshipped on the mountain Gerenzim instead of in Jerusalem. Why were they so hated? Well, it was a two-way street. In the period between the Old Testament and the New Testament, when they began to do wars, Samaritans would do things like this.

They would take bones from corpses and sneak it into the temple on Passover and scatter it around the temple, making that area unclean.

Is that any different than the Roman invaders who would slaughter blood on the courtyards of the temple to make it unclean? So you can see the levels of hatred and tension that exist between the Samaritans and the Jews.

What do Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, what could they possibly have in common? Let's think back to John chapter 3.

Jesus tells both of them outrageous statements. Statements that because we've had them in our liturgy and our scripture readings that we often take for granted.

[7:59] But he tells one of them, you must be born again. And then he tells the other one, I will give you living water. Streams of which will spring forth from within you.

And they respond really the same way. How can a man be born when he is old? The woman, give me this water.

She's not asking for spiritual water. She's asking for, very practically she says, I'm tired of drawing water up from this well every day for hours. Give me this water.

We should not be surprised that when people come to Jesus for the first time, that they are confused about what he's offering to them.

That they confuse his eternal guarantees with their own physical needs. Why shouldn't we be surprised? Because they are spiritually dead to start with.

[9:06] They have no ability to understand the spiritual promises God is giving to them. So they plug in their own physical needs. That's why meeting Jesus truly for the first time is such a disruptive experience.

Jesus exposes a man or a woman to their sinful state. And like Adam and Eve, they recognize that they are naked and ashamed of who they are.

In the verses following John 3.16, the one that we'll often see held by a clown up at the football games, that we know so well, there's a few verses that we often forget.

John writes, This is the judgment. The light has come into the world, and people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

[10:20] But whoever does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God. And so, Jesus comes and exposes the works of the woman at the well.

And he tells her, Go call your husband and come here. The woman answered him, I have no husband.

And there's part of me that really loves that response, because I'm a sinner. I like to think I'm clever. She really is high. She's telling the truth, but she's not telling the truth.

Right? I shouldn't pick on my kids. I'm not, because I was the same as the kids. but when you have a kid come to you, and you ask them to tell the truth, you know when they're telling you the full truth, and the part of the truth they want to tell you.

That's what the woman is doing here. But Jesus knows the truth. And by the way, I'd like to point out, he clearly knew the truth before he made her the offer of living water.

[11 : 32] The offer of living water was not dependent upon her state. And he says to her, You are right in saying I have no husband, for you have had five husbands.

And the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true. And we say polite things when we study Scripture about how Scripture comforts us.

And we call it the living word fondly. As a matter of fact, we call it our diocese, the Anglican Diocese of the Living Word. But here the woman is faced by the living word, Jesus.

Just as we are faced by the living word. And it exposes who we are. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

And unless you think that you can hide behind polite language or hide from your Savior, hide from the living word, the author of Hebrews continues that no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of to whom we must give account.

[13 : 08] Even those who try to hide from the Savior at the well will one day stand before him without excuse. And so this woman stands and gives account to the living word.

She cannot deny the charges leveled by Jesus. Yet Jesus has offered her living water. Her sin has not disqualified her from this offer of life.

Rather, it has pointed out her need for the Savior. She is not perfect in her response. She doesn't recite the creeds or give a discourse on the prophets.

But our perfection or lack of perfection is not the standard of our salvation. But the question is, will she come to the light or will she run from it?

It is the direction she chooses not how well she runs. And she wants the living water even if she doesn't fully understand what is being offered.

[14 : 21] Because for the first time in her life, a stranger has offered her a hope that rings true. a hope that she, as a Samaritan woman, could never have hoped for.

The question is, what is this living water? It's a metaphor, for sure. But not the way we usually think about metaphors.

We usually think that this is a nice language that God uses to bundle up who he is. I'd like to think that since this living water is our only hope in life and death, that we would want to be certain about what is being offered.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote in a judgment against the sons of Abraham, God's chosen people who had departed to him.

He wrote this, Has a nation changed its gods even though there are no gods? But my people have exchanged their glory for that which does not profit them.

[15 : 39] Be horrified, O heavens, at this. Be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord. For my chosen people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and they have dug out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

John puts that same two-path option in front of his readers that Jeremiah did centuries before.

What's really the difference between Nicodemus and the woman at the well?

They both misunderstand what Jesus is offering. They both thought that their works, the cisterns or containers of water that they dug for themselves would save them.

Jesus reminds her that there is coming a time when those who worship God will worship him with spirit and truth.

[17 : 15] Jesus is not claiming that truth is subjective, that everyone who just worships God in spirit and truth can somehow work their way to God. He reminds them that salvation is of the Jews.

Does that make Nicodemus correct as he comes at night? But it's true that the God of Israel is Jesus. The truth has been revealed to Abraham and his children, but it's useless if it is not realized in Jesus.

Both Nicodemus and the woman at the well were raised in religious systems that put forth this idea that their salvation was based on their ability to follow either Jewish or Samaritan regulations.

In other words, they both were working to God the same way. They just disagreed whose sets of rules were correct. Functionally, there's no difference there.

neither Jewish nor Samaritan law and tradition and religious teaching allowed for the possibility that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

[18:32] They both believed that some could work their way to heaven. Both operated under the lie that somehow they could find themselves able to earn their place with God.

Both thought that their salvation was shown by their works. Nicodemus was self-righteous enough as he came in that he thought maybe he had a shot of making it happen. The Samaritan woman thought that she had blown it so bad that she would never have a chance and was already damned to failure.

That woman was heartbroken that day as Jesus came. There was a woman that had married five men and the man she was living with now and having a sexual relationship with was not her husband.

And this is a sin. She knows it. Jesus knows it. Jesus doesn't whitewash the fact and try to excuse it. And he understands that this sin separates her from God.

but he still offers living water. And I was reminded as Xavier read the psalm today the only thing that we can count is what we saw in that second verse of Psalm 51 that we read together.

[20:00] Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. But we can't do that. This is why we must come to Jesus.

He bids all to come to him that he might give them fountains of living water which involves him fundamentally changing a person.

our call like today. Oh God because without you we are not able to please you mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts.

Many preachers dance around what this living water is and I find it odd because it's just four chapters away that Jesus explicitly says what it is. Because later on in Christ's ministry he comes the last day of the feast the great day this is in John chapter 7 Jesus suddenly stood up and cried out if anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink whoever believes in me as the scripture has said out of his heart will flow rivers of living water this is the exact same language that he used with the Samaritan woman and John explains to him explains continues now this he said how are we born again through the spirit what is the fountain of living water springing up within us bringing us life being shared for the world it's the spirit the holy spirit but until a person meets

Christ and believes in him there is no transformation there's no renovation no self help book nothing that they can do will bring them close to God whether the person is Jewish or Samaritan or an atheist or a Muslim or a Hindu or Buddhist or Mormon or born Christian if faith has not been placed in Christ you have not been born again and the spirit has not given you new life so set aside the works of the flesh and turn to Jesus Jesus pointed out here the day has passed for the day has passed where Jews and Samaritans should argue whether it's

[23:17] Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem that God should be worshipped on Jesus is ushering in here a new age of true worship and he enables it with the Holy Spirit and the woman of the well as limited as her understanding of scripture is recognized that what stands in front of her who stands in front of her is the true Messiah Messiah and what is the evidence of her conversion well we'll cover that in a second because we have this little detour here in our passage these disciples are always messing things up right they always all these accounts of Jesus are wonderful and miraculous and then all of a sudden you have these annoying disciples come in and just completely misinterpret what's going on they come along to see what's going on and of course we see them freak out because this

Christ that they understand to be the Messiah is speaking to a woman and what's interesting to me is that John by the way keep in mind John's one of these disciples right what is he doing he's looking back at the life of Christ and understanding how he completely blew it and he points out that they didn't even have any concern they lost their minds over the fact he was talking to a woman and they never bothered to find out why he was even talking to her John keeps it real the woman

however doesn't seem too bothered by it because she has found new life she's probably used to Jewish men hating her and what is her response here in verse 29 or verse 28 so the woman took that water jar she left her water jar and she just set it there and she took off and she said to the people in the town that she returned to come see a man who told me all that I ever did can this be the

Christ and they went out of the town and came to Christ we'll conclude our narrative next week but there is a remarkable transformation that John is pulling out here go back and look at verse 11 the woman said to him sir you have nothing to draw water with and the well is deep where do you get the living water we have a small group Bible study that we do on Friday at the Sarkis house and we've been working through Genesis and we've been looking through all the romantic relationships of the patriarchs and how they courted people and the poor I don't have this in my notes I'm thinking off the top of my head

Rebecca that poor woman had to water all the camels in a well because the servant did not bring anything to do it with himself and because it was a test of God's work in the situation but I couldn't help but feel like very sorry for Rebecca who is constantly going to this well and pitching the bucket down and drying it up and thinking that the camels had come from this long journey it must have taken her hours hours she didn't eat crossfit after that she was probably just exhausted beat down fully exercised you can hear the exhaustion in this woman's voice here she says sir how are you going to get water from this well not only do you not have anything to draw it with but this well is exceptionally deep remember early when we looked at the calling of the people of the disciples where they lived in fish town or fishermen and were identified as they were just people that drew fish this was the well woman this is the woman who her entire existence was that stupid well and drawing water up from it hours and hours and hours every day that jar that she contained physical water in that defined her existence what does she do she leaves it there but she carries new water with her she has been transformed into the jar she is filled with living water and she brings life back to her people in the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit let us confess our faith in the words of the knives and the who is g you you you