

The Saviour of the World

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[0:00] thanks to Andre and Gary for reading so carefully. You can't take that for granted, you know. Did you hear the one about the wedding where the reader wasn't so careful? And instead of reading 1 John chapter 4, which is a great passage about love for weddings, the reader at the wedding wasn't so careful. They read John chapter 4, which is our passage today. And I'm told there was gasping when the reader read out, I have no husband, she replied. Jesus said, you are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is you've had five husbands and the man you have now is not your husband. You have to be careful about reading. And preaching is a bit of a tricky business as well. So speaking personally, my wife is due to have a baby today. So if I get my phone starts ringing halfway through, I have a full script and Andrew Price is going to bolt up here and I'm going to disappear. But sometimes preaching is a real pleasure. It's a real pleasure to speak on famous stories. A couple of weeks ago, I got to speak on water to wine. But I think last week, Andrew Price hit the jackpot because he got to preach on John 3, 16, which is, I think, the most famous verse in the Bible. I printed it at the top of your handout. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. People,

Christians, we all love this verse. I think it's because it perfectly summarizes the big aspects of the gospel. But actually, I think this is a shocking verse because I wonder if we fully understand it.

In many ways, the key verse of John chapter 4 is actually John 3, 16. See, John 3, 16 says there's a place called perish and a place called eternal life. It says that all people are either in perish or in eternal life. It says there's only one way to move from one to the other by belief in Jesus.

And that is a real shock. But I think the real shock is actually the word whoever. Jesus says whoever believes in him is the one who moves from perish to eternal life. Whoever.

The corollary or the opposite, therefore, is that whoever doesn't believe in Jesus perishes. All you have to do is do nothing and you will perish, no matter how good you are. I think that's shocking. Chapter 3, verse 36, between our two chapters, it puts it this way. It says, whoever rejects the son will not see life for God's wrath remains on them. Perish for eternity. God's wrath remains on them. It is shocking, I think. All people start off perishing. That is a universal problem. But God offers a rescue to whoever or to anyone who believes in his son. That is a universal solution. Universal problem, universal solution. And whoever could be anyone. Anyone can have eternal life. That's just what the word whoever means. It's anyone. Last week, we met Nicodemus. He is a super

[3:34] Jew. Surely too good to be included in perish. Surely the exception to the rule. Today, we'll meet a woman surely too sinful to be included in the solution. She represents the no-hopers in society.

All the exceptions to the word whoever believes. Surely they're the exceptions. And it will depend on what type of person you are and what type of family you have as to which part you find most shocking. So maybe you think that you and your family are so good, you're too good to be included in perish. You'll have to go back to Andrew Price's talk last week. Even Nicodemus needed to be born again.

Shocking. But this morning, we're with the other people who are shocked by the Samaritan woman's inclusion. See, surely God can't take anyone.

And in a room this size as well, there's bound to be people who think that surely their life is not what Jesus had in mind when he said, whoever believes can have eternal life. Well, today, John uses the contrast between chapter three or the man in chapter three and the woman in chapter four to persuade us that whoever believes in Jesus means anyone, even her, even me, even you. So John is persuading us that whoever means anyone. And so our big question for today, which I've put as point one on your handouts, is how big is whoever? How big is whoever? We're going to spend most of our time in point one.

And then for point two, we're going to see what the whoever people get. We're going to see what eternal life is. So point one, point two, and please keep your Bibles open. We're going to be looking a couple of times to the Old Testament, but I've put that on the screen. So you'll only need to keep your Bibles open at John chapter four. And the way John's gospel works is this. Jesus arrives from heaven.

[5 : 46] He performs miraculous signs. People follow the evidence. They believe he's the Messiah. God gives them eternal life. That's how it works. Jesus did miraculous signs, a miraculous sign in chapter two. Remember, he rescued the hapless groom from a bad social situation. He turned water into wine.

That was a pretty good sign. And last week in chapter three, Nicodemus, he saw the signs. He followed the evidence to Jesus. But we saw that for Nicodemus, seeing did not lead to belief, at least not yet anyway. And I think it's shocking that even he is not good enough as he is.

Jesus won't take him on any terms other than a complete fresh start. To get into God's kingdom, even he, even Nicodemus needs to be born again. And I think it's shocking because I think it's like denying the prime minister of Australia entry into the country at Tullamarine, you know, passport control.

If Malcolm Turnbull is denied entry to Australia, as he is, then what chance do the rest of us have? When we get to chapter four, things get even worse, actually, because verse four, chapter four, verse four, tells us that we're in the middle of Samaria. For Jewish Jesus, this is the religious badlands.

Verse six says it is noon. And that means anyone with a brain is in the shade and out of the Middle Eastern sun. A local woman arrives. She sees the tired and sweaty Jesus, and she's sure that she's going to be ignored because verse nine tells us that Jews do not associate with Samaritans. You see, surely she is the exception to whoever believes. And this is really interesting because she is not a dictator.

[7 : 46] She's not a mass murderer. But John uses her because she is the precise and exact opposite to Nicodemus in chapter three. On your handout, I've put a table which has their differences. She is the exact opposite.

John has put two of the exact opposite people. So thinking about some of their differences. Firstly, Nicodemus is a man. She is a woman, which is pretty obvious.

But that's enough for Jesus' disciples in verse 27 to say or to be surprised that Jesus would even speak to a woman. Remember back in their culture, men and women were not of equal status.

There's a nasty racial and religious divide that goes on between the two of them. She's a Samaritan. He is Jewish.

And it's hard for us to really appreciate that divide unless we, I guess, were to move to the West Bank. Maybe something like the Sunni Shiite division is closer to what we're talking about here.

[8 : 48] And in 4 verse 22, Jesus says the Samaritan woman's religion is ignorance. He rubbishes her whole religion. He says, you Samaritans worship what you do not know.

It's all ignorance for you people. But for Nicodemus, on the other hand, he practices the right religion. Jesus says, we, that is Jews, we worship what we do know.

For salvation is from the Jews. There's a status division between them. Nicodemus is a ruler on the Jewish council. Andrew Price showed us that last week.

He's from a capital city. But she is just a citizen from a backwater town. He's a Pharisee, a most observant Jew.

We can rightly assume that he's seriously upright. He's seriously, seriously moral. He's a rule keeper. She is a rule breaker. In verse 18, we learn that she's had five husbands.

[9:49] She's currently living with bloke number six outside of marriage. And I think even in liberal Melbourne, I think husband number six still has a bit of shock value.

Imagine, cast your mind all the way back 2,000 years and you get a feel for how shocking it might have been. It might explain why she's there alone, drawing water in the middle of the day while everyone else is in the shade, perhaps.

And do you see the contrast? Jewish ruler, Pharisee of Judaism, morally upright. In chapter 3, he comes to Jesus but does not believe.

But then Jesus meets a Samaritan country bumpkin. She's immoral. Her religion is ignorance. She's sexually scandalous. But if she is part of Jesus whoever, then we are all okay.

Let's have a look at their conversation. I'm going to go a bit quicker for the sake of time through their conversation. So in verse 7, Jesus asks her for a drink of water, which given their divide is really a waste of time.

[11:00] Because in verse 9, she says no. She says, verse 9, you're a Jew and I'm a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink? For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.

It's a racially motivated refusal to give a tired traveler the most basic human need. Just a glass of water, please. Then Jesus says to her in verse 10, if you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him.

And he would have given you living water. You see, we all know that she's actually talking to God. And if she really knew that that's who Jesus was, she would have asked him for a far better drink than some well water.

But at this stage, she doesn't know who Jesus is. She doesn't perceive his glory. She says, verse 11, Sir, the woman said, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep.

Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself? And I think she thinks Jesus is a fool. How are you, Jesus, going to give me living or flowing water?

[12:22] The well is way down there. Let's not pretend you have anything to offer me. I'm the one with the bucket after all. Even our patriarch Jacob, even he had to dig down deep to get water in this place.

You silly Jesus. You're too tired to even stand up. Pardon the pun, but this is not going well. Yeah. But Jesus persists with her.

Jesus persists. He makes it clear what he's talking about. He says in verse 13, Everyone who drinks this water, that is the well water, will be thirsty again.

But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

The woman jumps on this. She said, Sir, give me this water so I won't get thirsty and don't have to keep coming here to draw water. I think she mistakenly thinks Jesus is talking about physical water, about offering some sort of permanent spring water inside her rather than spiritual life.

- [13:35] Nicodemus made the same mistake, thinking that being born again was about physically becoming a baby rather than spiritual rebirth. And like Nicodemus, Jesus sticks with her. He persists with her. Verse 16, Go call your husband and come back, he says. And when you first read the conversation, this feels like we've taken a massive right-hand turn. It's hard to see what the husband has to do with eternal life. But when you think about it, it has everything to do with it. You see, if she were to make a list of reasons why God shouldn't give her eternal life, her relationship history would be at the top of that list. You see, eternal life is not for people who stuffed up their relationships to this degree. Maybe she lives in a small town. There's nowhere for her to run. Maybe she's ruined a few of the local marriages along the way. And she's been living with the hatred and dismissal ever since. Jesus knows it all. And she doesn't run away. Maybe she's happy to have someone to talk to.
- [14:49] And he says to her in verse 17, You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is you've had five husbands. And the man you have now is not your husband. What you have said is quite true. And even though Jesus is a Jew, even though he said this potentially offensive thing to her, she starts to address him as a sir. We saw in verse 11, verse 15, and now again in verse 19. Sir, I can see you're a prophet. And this is right about where Nicodemus started with Jesus in chapter 3, verse 2. But for Nicodemus, comparing her miracle to water to wine, her miracle seems pretty small. John doesn't even call what Jesus says to her as a sign. But as far as miracles go, I think this is absolute. Because Jesus had never met her. They are complete strangers. Just like in chapter 1, when Jesus sees Nathaniel sitting under the fig tree.
- [16:00] In John's gospel, a sign leads to belief. And that's exactly what is starting to happen in this woman. Verse 29, she says, Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah? But she is a Samaritan and Jesus is a Jew. How is all this going to work? How can she worship him? And I think that explains the question in verse 20. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain. But you Jews claim the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem. See, in some of the Old Testament books, such as Deuteronomy chapter 11, which I put on your handout, the Samaritans, they believe that God's temple should be on Mount Gerizim, which is in Samaritan lands. But the Jews say, no, no, God's temple was built by Solomon and it's actually in Jerusalem. One of the major differences between Samaritans and Jews is where God should be worshipped.
- [17:05] In verse 23, Jesus says, But a time is now coming, is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. You see, no longer by their attachment to a temple. It's no longer about where. And that's because the Old Testament, it speaks of a Messiah who will unite these two people, who will dissolve the where dispute between them. So there's a, if I could have the, on the screen. Hello, at the back. Oh, there is. Thank you very much. Sorry. So the Old Testament speaks of a Messiah who will unite the two people. And there is Ezekiel 37. And I've highlighted some of the main bits. It says, There will be one king over all of them. They will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms.

My servant David will be king over them. And they will have one shepherd, it says at the bottom. That's Jesus. And as Jesus offers this Samaritan woman eternal life, he is showing a fulfillment of these verses.

[18:15] He's showing who he is. One like David. And this is not about where the worship should happen, but who the worshippers should be.

Have a look in verse 23. It says, Yet a time is coming and has now come when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

For they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit. And his worshippers must worship in the spirit and in truth. So not so much about where, but who.

About what has happened to you. You can go on spiritual pilgrimages all over the world and you will never succeed in worshipping God. The key to worship is about a personal transformation by the Holy Spirit through the truth of Jesus' gospel.

And she says in verse 25, I know the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will tell us all things. And I think this is a positive statement from her. Clearly she doesn't understand everything.

[19:23] She says there's more to learn. But I think she's acknowledging the truth of what Jesus is saying. I think she's saying yes to him. And I think that makes sense of why Jesus reveals himself to her in verse 26.

He says, I am he. I am the one speaking to you. You've been waiting for a Messiah. I am the one. And John wants us to compare Nicodemus to the woman.

Because at every stage she walks towards Jesus. But in John chapter 3 verse 19, Jesus is light in a dark world. And at every stage Nicodemus walks backwards away from Jesus towards the darkness.

He has too much to lose. He's put too many religious runs on the board to want or to need a new birth. But this woman, all she does is step forward towards the light, towards Jesus.

Even when he rubbishes her religion. Even when he exposes her sinful past. She stays in the conversation. She keeps asking more questions.

[20:33] And I think she shows us just how huge whoever is. Even for a Samaritan woman. And if John has established her as a whoever, which I think is what he's doing.

The right question to ask is, what does she get? What does eternal life look like? And this is our second point. So, as preachers, you're supposed to find the unifying idea.

But I found a unifying letter. And it's W. So, water, wedding, whoever. There we go. So, water. Eternal life looks like water in chapter 4. Or living water.

It's about thirst, you see. Verse 13 says, Living in the Middle East.

Constantly with the heat. Constantly thirsty. The offer of a natural spring of fresh water would have had special significance. Probably like it does for Aussie farmers in drought areas.

[21:47] Water is life to them. And it's not explicit in the text. But maybe thirst explains her whole adult life. As she keeps moving from bloke to bloke.

Clearly searching for thirst quenching or some sort of satisfaction. The Old Testament prophets, they use living water as a picture of eternal life.

So, in Ezekiel 47, which is on the screen. In Ezekiel 47, here is a picture of water which flows from God's temple.

And again, I've underlined the main bits. Everywhere it flows, there is fertility. Everything it touches turns to life. Salty water becomes fresh. Nothing withers because this living water touches it.

This water which flows from God. That is a picture of what Jesus is offering the Samaritan woman. In fact, that is the exact picture that Revelation 22 picks up at the end of the Bible.

[22 : 49] Whoever believes will not perish but have eternal life. That is, a place in a paradise like this. Eternal life looks like a water or a living water.

The other W of eternal life is a wedding. Thanks, Gwyneth. This chapter takes place by Jacob's well. You see, both Jacob and Isaac, they married women they met at this exact well.

It is the dating single scene back in the ancient world. So, for Jacob's father, Isaac, Rebecca, she passes the test when she asks a weary traveler, sorry, when a weary traveler asks her for a drink of water.

And then he marries her. Jacob marries his wife, Rachel, whom he meets at the exact same well. The stories are in Genesis 24 and 29. And this is exactly where Jesus meets a woman who spent her whole adult life searching for the perfect husband.

At the wedding in Cana, Jesus steps up as the true bridegroom. In chapter 3, verse 29, John the Baptist says that he's the best man, but that Jesus is the bridegroom.

[24 : 09] And so when we get to chapter 4, it is not merely a sinner being included in whoever. This is not merely the Messiah uniting two divided peoples.

This is Jesus coming to look for a bride. And that is a very normal description in the Bible of Jesus' relationship with his people.

He is the bridegroom and we, the church, as one body, are his bride. And I want to be careful how I say this next bit because it's a bit of social commentary coming from me.

So I've got to be careful. But most people end up with someone as attractive as themselves. And don't make eyes at one another. But I think most people end up with someone roughly as attractive as they are.

But here in chapter 4, John gives us the full romantic symbolism of Jacob and Isaac's well to explain how a holy and beautiful Jesus meets and offers eternal life to the most ugly, sinful of brides.

[25 : 17] And the marriage metaphor here is a picture of the relationship that Jesus wants to have with all of us. It's a picture of what eternal life is, the most satisfying and closest relationship in the world.

And in Melbourne, regardless of who we say or who is allowed to get married to whom, here is the marriage that all people were made for. All people.

A better marriage, an eternal marriage with the best partner. No matter who they are. No matter what they've done. And so to those here who think they're too sinful for Jesus to bother with, the good news, the gospel, is that Jesus wants to marry you.

And I think that is shocking. Because we all have a picture in our heads as to who we think should be one of Jesus' followers. They should look like me, talk like me, act like me, speak like us, all that sort of thing.

The shock, though, is that if Jewish Nicodemus doesn't believe, but Samaritan woman does believe, you can no longer predict who will believe. It's a work of the Spirit.

[26 : 39] And that means that should encourage us to tell everyone. Tell everyone about Jesus' offer of eternal life. I wonder how we would feel if a bunch of people who look very different to us were to walk in here at the 9am service.

Now, it's easy to do the silly example. So people covered in tattoos and facial piercings, whatever they have on the train, which really scares me. It's really easy and it's a bit silly to do that one.

Because, yes, they look very different to us. But what about people who are homeless? What about people who are just rude? What about people who are annoying?

Would they get a welcome? It's another W. If Jesus wants her, then we should welcome everyone into his family.

And finally, perhaps you personally can give a dozen reasons why God wouldn't want to be in a relationship with you.

[27 : 47] John puts Jesus and a Samaritan woman together to say that Jesus is the Savior of the whole world. Anyone in the whole world can have a relationship with him, can have eternal life.

Anyone can be a whoever. Whoever. Even her. Even Vijay. And even you. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Amen? Amen. Let's pray. Father God, we praise you for Jesus. We praise you that he comes looking for whoever. Father, would we not limit whoever is for?

We're so grateful that he welcomes anyone, no matter what they have done. We're so grateful that whoever can move from perish to eternal life.

And so we praise you in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.