

Early Ministry Impact

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Date: 26 April 2015

[0 : 00] I want you to turn your Bibles this morning to John chapter 4, verse 43 through 54.

! Let's begin with prayer. Our Father God, this morning as we take up your word together as a body of believers, those who have been redeemed, whose sins have been forgiven because of the Lord Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross, those who have come by faith, having first of all been convicted of the darkness and hopelessness of our sinful state, and recognizing that there is nothing we could have ever done to earn your grace and your forgiveness.

We who have been drawn by your grace to become believers in the Lord Jesus Christ gather this morning to worship you and to delight in the truth that you've given to us.

And we pray for the work of the Holy Spirit this morning that I would preach with his enabling, that your people would hear with ears that are tuned by your Spirit, and that those who sit in our fellowship this morning that have never come to faith in Christ, some who are here and deceived by the enemy to believe that merely growing up in a Christian home was adequate, some who may even at one point or another have made steps that they have been led to believe are sufficient.

Father, those who are here that do not know Christ, we pray that your Spirit would convict them and draw them to saving faith. Father, those who are here that do not know Christ, we pray that your Spirit would be and we ask that Jesus, who we delight in as our Savior, and the Holy Spirit delights in lifting up, would be the one that is seen most clearly.

[2 : 33] And we ask this together in Jesus' name. We are in John chapter 4, and at the very end of this chapter, we come to a very interesting, little picture that is important for you to understand.

Let me help you see the picture by stepping back, if you would, for a moment to John chapter 1. So turn back in your Bible to John chapter 1, verse 10 and 11.

In 10 it says, He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. Now stop and recognize that this person that John is speaking about, in John chapter 1, verse 1 says, He was in the beginning.

He was the Word. He is the one who not only was at the beginning, but all things were made by Him, and there is not anything that has been created that was not made by Him.

And yet this is the one that, as it says in verse 10, the world has not identified and recognized. Verse 11, He came into His own.

[3 : 42] Speaking about the nation, the Jewish nation, it says, He came into His own, and His own people did not receive Him. And so, from the very beginning, and I want you to understand that in some senses, the early part of John is kind of an overview.

It's a little bit like going to the beginning of a book, and you turn to the index, and that little part that introduction explains, this is what the chapters are, and the chapter headers give you more or less an idea of what's going to follow.

John chapter 1 tells us, this is how the book is going to play out. The underlying theme that John the Apostle wants us to have fixed in our heart is that his book is written to bring us to the spot of recognizing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing in Him we might have everlasting life.

With that kind of as that overarching theme, you then find John step in to a couple early little incidents with Jesus, and one is the changing of water into wine, not something that was recognized by a great many people.

It was not something that kind of a high on the food chain in terms of public impact. It was his first miracle. Following that, he walks into Jerusalem, and he cleanses the temple.

[5 : 05] If he wondered about something impact, that was certainly high impact. He took care of the mess and the deceit and the wickedness that was going on in the very center of Israel, the temple itself.

And you would think that, well, that is a starting point. Everything kind of would go forward from there, and you would just see Jesus in his ministry and his effect kind of just climbing up the ladder one thing after another, leading to tremendous success.

However, if you come to the end of chapter 2, and I want you to just turn there just for a moment, it says this, that now when he was in Jerusalem, this is verse 23, at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.

They were impressed by what they saw. In fact, they liked some of those things. I mean, healing. How would you like to be able to receive healing without having to go to a doctor, just immediately taken care of, and the problems disappear?

He did things that people loved. And yet, as we read there, it says in verse 24, Jesus, on his part, did not entrust himself to them because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

[6 : 20] He knew that the attitudes of those that he was ministering to was really, hey, I'm interested in the miracle, and I'm interested in the good things you're doing for me, but I really am not interested in you stepping into my life and taking over and being in control.

I like some of the things you do. I don't want you to be in charge. And so we work our way through, and we then come to chapter 3 and 4 that give us this lengthy picture of several different evangelistic incidents and the outcome of those.

And remember, why did Jesus come into the world? He came into the world, as it says in John chapter 1. He came to be the Lamb of God. And we know also from both Luke and other places, it says he came into the world to save sinners.

And so in chapter 3, we have Nicodemus, a ruler who came to Jesus by night and asked some questions, and it ended up being this wonderful evangelistic opportunity. We don't know from this part of the passage at this point whether or not Nicodemus came to be a believer or not.

There's no indication of it. All we know is he asked some questions. He really didn't get it. Chapter 4, on the other hand, is a very interesting picture of Jesus as he is leaving Jerusalem and going back to his hometown area.

[7 : 41] He, as he is making this journey, stops at a well in Sychar in Samaria, and there he ends up having a lengthy conversation with a woman who was a known, wicked, ungodly sinner.

And what's the outcome of that conversation? She comes to faith. And not only does she come to faith, but immediately after coming to faith, she runs into town and tells all those who would listen to her about Jesus, is not this the Messiah?

And a lot of people there in Sychar believed in Jesus as a result, and they came to see Jesus as well. Additional people then flocked to meet Jesus where he was at the well, and the outcome of all of that is that it seems that there is a rolling revival taking place, and it's just beginning to kind of mushroom out and affect everybody, all these believers in Samaria.

It's great news. And you would think that from that little start, we're on the roll, and everybody's going to believe in Jesus, and the story's going to end up happily ever after. Wouldn't that be nice?

That's not how it works. And John gives us a clear and accurate picture of how the ministry of Christ would play out in the days to follow.

[8 : 55] And that's what we have in these verses, picking up there in verse 43. Let me read it to you and frame it, and then we'll move through and see a couple different points that are important. After the two days, he departed for Galilee.

For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his hometown. So as we look at this passage, what we find John the Apostle doing is wanting us to understand something about evangelism.

Is that important for us as believers? We've come to know Christ. We have the blessing of having confidence in where our eternal destiny is. We have joy.

I love the songs that we've sung this morning about the fact that when we know Christ, there is joy and peace in our hearts. And that's entirely true. But not only do we have that blessing of knowing Christ as our Savior, but we also have the responsibility of being witnesses to his grace.

Isn't that right? I mean, the reason I am here and not up there is for that principal purpose of sharing with other people the sweetness of the gospel and the hope that they have of knowing Christ as their personal Savior.

[10 : 10] And so you would think, man, that's what it's all about. And I would like to see how that's going to play out. John says, whoa, stop just for a minute. Understand, it's not always going to go the way you'd like.

And that's what we're looking at here in verse 43, 44, and 45. We find that there were people that were all about his miracles, but rejected his message.

There in 43, it says he left. He was going back to Galilee. That's where his hometown was. And in making this journey back, we are given this little picture there in 44 of what we could expect would take place.

He'd spent two days in Samaria. And Samaria had ended up being very, very responsible to the gospel ministry of Christ. Many people had come to believe in him. And yet we are reminded here that as he is headed back for the area in which he grew up, we understand that things weren't going to go the way they had gone in Samaria.

And here we're given this little reminder. Don't always expect everything in relationship to your ministry to other people to be as productive and as easy and as wonderful as what took place at the well with the woman.

[11 : 22] I think it's important for us to keep in mind that this attitude of disbelief was not just something of Galilee because earlier when he was in Judea, in Jerusalem actually, and he had been ministering there, there as well he had not been really well received.

We saw that back in chapter 2. As we noticed there, it says that, hey, people believed. They liked the miracles that they saw. But the truth of the matter is they really did not come to faith in Christ.

They liked the external fruit. They liked the physical blessings. But they really didn't have faith. And they were not all about having him expose their sins and bring the darkness of their heart to light.

How do we know that? Look for a moment, just for a turn back in your Bible, if you will, go to John chapter 3 and look at verse 19, 20, and 21.

I think it's important for us to track this. So turn back in your Bible. We're dealing with the truth that Jesus in his ministry, received by some but rejected by most. And this is the judgment.

- [12 : 27] 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.

For whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out by God. And so as Jesus is ministering first in Jerusalem and not well received, then for a moment, very favorably, in Samaria, now he's going back to Galilee, his hometown, and he makes this interesting little statement.

John writes this. He says, listen, understand this, that a prophet is not going to be received in his own hometown. Now, there's a little discourse or a little discussion whether or not that statement is, a prophet is not received in his own hometown or his own home country.

Both could be the way it is, and it was true. He was not received in his hometown, and he was not received as a general principle in all of Israel.

And so as you stop and ask yourself the question, why would that be? Why would it be that Jesus, the one who came to be the Savior of the world, and came in particular, first of all, to the Jewish nation, would not be received?

- [13 : 47] What would lead a person to be indifferent to their spiritual need? I want you to think about that, because all of us today are involved in ministry. I'm talking to you who know Christ.

All of us are involved in working with individuals, sharing, praying for them, with an interest in seeing them come to faith. What is it that makes them kind of tone deaf to their spiritual need?

Well, I want you to recognize a couple things in relationship to this. One is this. Sin is far more blinding and deadening than we might think. Sin is far more blinding and deadening than we might think.

I want you to turn in your Bible back to or forward. You're in John, so just go to Romans 1, verse 21. How does sin affect the sinner? Romans 1, verse 21.

It says, Although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God. Or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

- [14 : 50] I want you to think about that for a moment with me. It says here, they became futile in their thinking. How many of you have ever tried to do a math equation, and you had some of the starting principles wrong?

You copied them wrong, or you just didn't get your hands around the starting principles. Anybody else besides me have had that miserable experience? And you keep on doing the problem, and it just keeps on not working out.

The lack was, you didn't understand the core issue. Here's what it says. They became futile. They didn't get it. And as a result of refusing the truth of who God is, the outcome was that their thinking became progressively darker and darker.

And do you think they recognized, Man, I am descending into the abyss. My thinking is getting worse and worse. How many of you bump into people every day that say, I am becoming a more wicked person?

Anybody? The truth of the matter is, is every time, listen up, everybody say, they're following me here. Every time we say no to what the Spirit of God convicts us of, what's the outcome of that?

- [16 : 06] If we're a child of God, He won't let us get away, but what does it do? It brings firmer dealings. How many of you understand that? That's for the believer.

For the unbeliever, it just progressively dampens down. The sensibility and sensitivity we have to what God is in the process of teaching us.

And so here in Romans chapter 1, it says, their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened. When we squelch, the promptings of our conscience, or His Holy Spirit, things just get darker and darker in your heart.

And so when we think back to John chapter 4, and we recognize the general reception that Jesus received, you understand that as people were saying no, no thank you, I'm not interested, I don't want you messing with me, I don't want you interfering with my life, and my own little idolatries.

Every time the nation of Israel, and people all around said no to Jesus, the consequences were that they were darkening their spirit. And Jesus here understood what was going on.

[17 : 17] So in the first part of our lesson this morning, one of the things that I want you to recognize is that you can sit under the teaching of the Word of God, you can hear what God is saying, and you can be part of this fellowship, and yet not necessarily have come to faith just because you have quieted, you've squelched the ministry of the Spirit and the convicting work of God in your life, and it's a dangerous thing.

It's a dangerous thing. Well, you go back there, and it says, so when He came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed Him, having seen all that He had done in Jerusalem at the feast, for they too had gone to the feast.

And we find that here, and when He got back to the area that He'd grown up in, everybody was glad to see Him, but why were they glad to see Him? Do you think they were saying, hey, listen, I have this nasty sin problem, and I really want you to do something about the hard, dark heart that I have?

Most of the time, people are willing to recognize that there are problems in their lives, but usually they think the problems are, guess what? Everybody else.

Jesus comes along and says, hey, listen, the problem you have is sin in your heart, and I'm here to help you with it. No, thank you. I don't want you to deal with that. They wanted the miracles. They wanted His attention, but they were not willing to allow Him to touch the reality of the root of the problem, which is the darkness of their own heart.

[18 : 46] And so when we find this little passage here, verse 43 through 45, it gives us a picture that I think is important for us to understand. Hey, listen, not every time that you are engaged in ministry to other people will the light bulb go on, and will they immediately recognize what God is doing and be drawn to the cross.

And for some of you who are sitting here this morning who have loved ones that you care for and you are praying for, let me encourage you to know that your ministry does not change just because they don't receive it at the moment.

Christ knows what it's like to be rejected. He knows what it's like to pour His heart into individuals and have them turn their back. That didn't change His heart towards those people who rejected Him.

He persisted in His affection and His love, and we in Christ's stead are to do the same. It's important. Let's come to the second part of the message this morning and recognize another picture of conversion.

Verse 46 on to 54 is a little interesting story that is radically different from the Samaritan woman. How did the story go with the Samaritan woman?

[20 : 06] Remember, Jesus sits down at the well, a woman comes to visit, he asks about water, and from there on in, the whole conversation goes over to this issue of this woman coming to faith, and then she scampers back into town, and she says, hey, you've got to come meet this guy, and a lot of other people believe in Jesus as well.

Now, we have a completely different story. And I want you to recognize that one of the benefits of this kind of completely different conversion picture is that it reminds us that the Holy Spirit's work in drawing people to the cross is quite varied, and we've got to be careful that we don't get in a little box and say, well, this is the way it has to be.

You have to come to Christ when you're four years old, and your mother has to be the one who is doing devotions in your home and sharing the gospel, and you have to pray in your bedroom. Okay?

Or you have to have been at a Billy Graham crusade. Some of you have come to faith at a crusade. Or you have to be at a youth group event. Or you have to come down front.

I will never forget sharing the gospel with an individual as he was rolling in for surgery. He had already heard that he had cancer in his bowel, and he was a hard-headed German plant manager, and strangely enough, he said, his wife said, you need to come and pray for this guy, and I did.

[21 : 36] I'm walking down the hall towards the surgery, and guess what I'm sharing with him? I'm sharing the gospel with him, and he started crying, and he trusted Christ on the gurney. Died six months later. That's okay.

I'll see him in heaven. I've seen people walk down the front, and I remember someone saying to me, I need Jesus. Happens all different kinds of ways.

And we need to be reminded of the diversity of ways in which the Spirit of God works. And that's what we see in this case. We see another picture of conversion.

So let's kind of recognize as we work our way through this story of the different little signals that give us indications of the Spirit working in this person's life. We have the story there.

Here, an official comes to Jesus, and his son was sick, not just sick with the flu, not just sick with a little bit of a head cold, but he was dying.

[22 : 31] And so the man had made the journey from where he lived up to where Jesus was. And the journey from Capernaum to Cana was about 16 miles, which would translate into five or so hours.

And so I'm going to just, think with me here just for a minute, how many of you here walked five miles, five hours one way to visit anybody lately? Anybody do that? Five hours?

I mean, hey, we're stretching it when we drive five hours to visit somebody. You know, it's like family. And so here is a father who is willing to walk five hours one way to talk to Jesus.

And when he shows up there, we find there, when this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went up to ask and he came and says, hey, listen, you've got to do something for my son.

He's at the point of death. So Jesus said to him, unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe. Well, recognize, first of all, that the Spirit is creative in drawing people to faith through challenges and heartache.

[23 : 40] Do you understand that? There are some of you sitting here this morning that really are going through some very difficult moments in your life. It seems like the pieces are not just aligned properly.

And I want to challenge you to think, what is God at work doing in your life? If you're here and you do not know Christ, I want to encourage you to recognize that he may well be using those heartaches and those challenges, those difficulties, and those burdens to bring you to the point of recognizing you can't solve these problems by yourself.

And that's what happened with this man. I have no doubt that before he decided that it was reasonable to take a five-hour hike to see someone that he'd never seen before, that he probably had asked every other resident medical expert in the little town that he was living in, can you do something for my son?

No. No. No. He's dying. Well, I think it's reasonable for me to take a five-hour walk so I can ask Jesus if he'll do something for him.

So I want you to understand this morning, if you're here and the weight of life is pressing down on you, it may be that the Spirit of God is using those heartaches to draw you to realize that there is something in your soul that only Jesus can care for.

[25 : 09] I want you to recognize something else, that as you look at this, you find out that the heartache and challenge that this man was facing was something that at least prompted him to realize that Jesus could be the answer.

Now, if you go back just for a moment, back to John chapter 2, and we all referred to it, but I want you to look at it again. In John chapter 2, verse 23, it says that many believed in his name.

Now, does that mean that in this case necessarily they were saved? No, not at all. And the reason we know that is because of what we read in verse 24 and 25. They believed in the power that Jesus was manifesting.

They saw the evidence of something supernatural taking place, but their belief was not a belief in Christ as their personal Savior. And so, again, in 3.2, it says the man came to Jesus talking about Nicodemus.

He said, Rabbi, we know you're a teacher come from God. How do we know that? Because no one could do the signs that you're doing unless God was helping him. See, people saw the power of what Christ was doing.

[26 : 19] And this man had heard the stories and he recognized that Christ was someone that could do something unusual and as a result of that, he wanted to see Jesus face to face.

Now, let me carry this over into your life just for a moment. Do you realize that you and I are living examples of the miraculous power of Christ?

Do you realize? Say that with me. I do understand that. When I look in the... Stop. Everybody look. Hello. Okay. If you are here and you are a child of Christ, you are a living example of the supernatural power of Christ to do something that is beyond human ability and reason.

Am I right or wrong? Hmm? Yes or no? If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a... I'm something. That word creation there is a word that is used in relationship to the creation of the world.

Something out of nothing. Spectacular. Now, when I look at myself in the mirror and probably when you look at yourself in the mirror, you say, really? But when the Spirit of God is at work and we are growing in grace, do you know that other people see what is taking place and they're curious about that and then in the bankruptcy of their soul and the brokenness of their moment, they say, well, I don't know.

[27 : 50] The mess I'm in, I'd at least like to find out what He knows and how He's making it. You see, God uses heartache and challenges to draw people around you to wonder about the faith and the life that you live.

And that's part of what He does in evangelism. Well, I want you to recognize another thing that plays out here. We find that the Holy Spirit used Christ's rebuke of a limited view of His power.

The man comes and says, hey, I need you to do something for my son. He's five hours down the road. You need to come down there. You need to do something for him. And Jesus says here, verse 48, unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.

Bang! How's that for a favorable response when you walk five hours to talk to Jesus? What do you think? That's pretty stunning, isn't it?

What Jesus was rebuking was the attitude that many people can have of limiting the power of God to do what really needs to be done.

[29 : 01] Hey, you know, if you would do it my way, it may pull off. I read Tom Wolfe's interesting blog.

How many of you know Tom Wolfe, our missionary in South Africa? He had a winsome blog. By the way, if you're not reading Tom Wolfe's blog, you should. It is the best missionary blog I know of.

Now, I'm not a mega blogger reader, but that's a good one. Okay? And he was talking about the devastation of the prosperity gospel in Africa.

Just Google something. I want you to look up the ten richest pastors in the world. Do that. Do that. The largest percentage of them are in Africa.

That's stunning. A land of abject poverty as a general rule. I shouldn't say abject, but of challenging economic status, and yet, the idea of name it, claim it, God is there to do it your way, and by the way, if you need a Lexus, just ask and put something in the offering plate to help it along.

[30 : 15] You see, this idea that God's kind of a power that we can manipulate for our own purposes according to our own plan, Jesus says, hey, don't go there. I'm not about doing it your way.

I want you to recognize that the Spirit also uses persistence. I love what we read next. Verse 49, put your finger on it, the official said to him, sir, come down before my child dies.

How's that for blunt? Huh? The man blew right past Christ's rebuke and was unrelenting with his brokenhearted plea.

You come down before my child dies. One of the things that characterizes the work of the Spirit as that He prompts persistence.

He keeps on pressing. He keeps on bearing in. He keeps on convicting till we come to that point where we recognize that unless Jesus does something, there's nothing that can be done.

[31 : 24] And I love that. I want you to mark this man's persistence as something that was not credited to a character trait. Now, I want you to think about that for a moment.

Some people are easily discouraged. Others just bear in. I would say that this man's persistence was ultimately the work of grace in calling out to Jesus and saying, unless you do something, it's going to be a desperate situation.

And how did Jesus respond? Come to the last little bit. I want you to recognize the Spirit used Christ's words. Here we have the man say, you better come down before my child dies.

Verse 50, Jesus said, go, your son will live. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. Now, you stop and think about that. You've traveled five hours.

You finally see the doctor. And you tell him, you need to come to my house because my child is dying. And the doctor says, who are you to tell me how to do things?

[32 : 40] Go. Your son will be okay. How many of you would pack up right then and leave, going back and expecting your son to be okay? Okay. That man believed Jesus' word.

That's what happened. The Spirit of God prompted his heart to recognize that the one he was pleading with had the authority and the power to do something 16 miles away at that instant.

And he left. He left. Satisfied. As we find, when he got back, everybody said, hey, you're not going to believe this.

Five hours ago, your son got better. Hmm. Yeah. And then what we read there, it says, and he himself believed in all his household. Aren't you encouraged that we have this little picture of developing faith that isn't just like the woman at the well?

Huh? I mean, all we know is Jesus said to this woman, go call your husband, and she says, well, I don't have one, and Jesus says, well, yeah, that's true.

[33 : 58] You've had five, and the man you're shacking up with right now, you're not married to him, and she's, bang, saved. It'd be pretty spectacular if everybody got converted that way, but the problem is there aren't that many Samaritan women at the well.

There are other choices, and we have this man comes because he's driven by need and love, comes because of the bankruptcy of all the effort that he'd put in, and he comes crying to Jesus and said, you've got to save my son, and Jesus says, it's done.

It's done. And when he comes back to town and finds out the power of Christ over 16 miles, it's not just a matter of believing in a physical miracle, but it is a matter of believing in the one who came to save lost mankind.

Here's the truth. Here's the truth. There are some of you here this morning that desperately need Christ. And the truth of the matter is that it may be that the pressures and the heartaches and the difficulties of the moment you are in is nothing other than the gentle, persistent tapping of the Holy Spirit saying to you today, only Jesus can solve the problems of your broken heart.

Only Jesus can take away the burden of your sin. Only Jesus can forgive you and make you new again.

[35 : 39] Only Jesus is the Savior of the world. Do you know what it takes to come to faith? Not complicated. Number one, recognizing that you're a bankrupt sinner who cannot in any way redeem themselves before a holy God.

Number two, understanding that the day of judgment is coming eventually. And the Spirit of God is prompting you and tugging on your heart and saying, deal with it now!

Because what it says in the Scriptures, it says it's appointed unto man once to die and after that, what? there's judgment. And I would encourage you this morning if you are here and do not know Christ, today is the day that you need to humble yourself and cry out and say, I stand condemned before a holy God.

but I believe Jesus died for my sins. I can't save myself.

And I am willing to humble myself and say, the mess I am has no solution but Jesus. Don't let that pass.

[37 : 09] Don't let that pass. Let's close. Precious God, thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who came into the world to save sinners.

And I ask that as we sing this song this morning that your Spirit would work to draw people to the cross. make us a people that are passionate about lost mankind.

Make us a people that because of the Lord Jesus Christ live lives that are winsome, gentle, loving. That the unbeliever around us would be drawn to ask us a reason for the hope that we have.

And our answer would be Jesus. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. As we sing this song in closing, let's stand together and let me encourage you if you are here today.

as we call it