

John 4:4-29 PM

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[0 : 00] Why don't we pray while you stand. Dear Lord Jesus, we pray that we would simply know the privilege this evening of visiting with you.

Amen. Okay, so this evening we're in John 4. And by way of context, we've just come out of John 3, and we're all familiar with John 3.

We're actually all familiar with John 4, too. And so often that's the challenge when there's texts that we know so well. Jesus has had the conversation with Nicodemus about being born again.

What a wonderful, wonderful conversation. And then there is probably the most famous verse in the Bible. I don't even have to read it to you. John 3.16. Everybody knows what that says.

It's so well known. It's iconic, if I can use that modern term. And so Jesus is ministering in Judea. And now he wants to head back to Galilee.

[1 : 14] And verse 4, the start of our reading this evening, it says, And he had to pass through Samaria. Well, actually, he didn't. And actually, he shouldn't.

Because in going through Samaria, you're going through a neighborhood where, as a good, self-respecting Jew, you shouldn't be going through. Mostly when Jews would travel from Judea to Galilee, they would take the long way around, rather than going straight through Samaria.

Samaria was not an area that was considered clean for them, ritually or any other way. It was impure. The very dirt of the place was impure.

So in Christ wanting to go through Samaria, he is entering into territory that basically has a very deviant theology and is disrespected by Jews in a profound way.

And so he has to cross a geographic barrier, but there's indications he has to go through. There's a reason to go through, and that will be revealed to us.

[2 : 17] So verse 5, he came to the town in Samaria called Sychar, near the field of Jacob, where Jacob had given his son Joseph the well.

And it was the sixth hour, that's noon, when Jesus is there and he's weary, and he decides to sit down by a well. The sixth hour being noon, we know that it's hot, and along comes a woman in verse 7.

A woman, singular, from Samaria, came to draw water. Now she is alone. By definition, she is isolated. This is not normal practice for her or for those in the community.

This predates policing, law enforcement, structures like that. Safety was to be found in community. And she is manifestly not in community here. She is out in the noonday sun, isolated and very, very vulnerable.

And so she comes to this well. Well, that presents Jesus a problem. Not only is he in Samaria, he is now faced with a Samaritan and a woman.

[3 : 33] So there's a gender problem and there's an ethnic problem. So there's barriers here. He's crossing geographic, ethnic, and gender as he sits there and she arrives. And he says to her, shockingly, give me a drink.

He shouldn't even be talking with her. But he does. And I kind of picture her, particularly the women in the room can relate to this probably more than the men.

You're standing at a bus stop. You're alone. You're not in any particular danger, but you're feeling a little isolated. And then a guy shows up at the bus stop. One guy shows up at the bus stop.

You're not making eye contact. You don't want to engage. You don't want him to talk to you. And sure enough, oh, no, you got a smoke. You got the time.

You want to do anything but not talk to this guy. You don't want to engage. You don't want to make eye contact. You don't want to participate in this. That is exactly, I believe, how she approaches this.

[4 : 32] Well, oh, no, there's this strange guy. Maybe I'll just get my water and we'll be done with this and I'll get out of there. And oh, what does he do? Give me a drink. Oh, it's interesting that the disciples are gone for this interaction.

So as this interaction commences and he breaks those barriers and he goes through those geographic boundaries, the ethnic boundaries, the gender boundaries, I'm left thinking, well, whoever he has to go and meet, when it says in verse 4, he has to pass through Samaritan. This has got to be a pretty important person. There's something really on the agenda here as Christ decides to go this route and interact with someone there. And this passage reveals to us who that very important person is.

Verse 9, the Samaritan woman said to him, how is it that you, a Jew, ask me for a drink? She basically calls him out on what she knows to be true and he knows to be true.

This is a scandalous request. What are you doing asking me for water? Me, a Samaritan woman. So she identifies the problem. She knows that any rabbi, any leader, any self-respecting Jew would not be acting this way.

[5 : 55] So he's breaking so many rules. And Jesus answered her in spiritual terms. If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

So he is engaging with her intellectually. Another boundary broken. Because as a woman, she would have not have gone to school.

Many Pharisees didn't even address their wives in public. They wouldn't stoop to that. So the boundaries he's breaking are absolutely incredible. So we've got thus far in only 10 verses, geographic, ethnic, gender, and intellectual.

Those are the boundaries he's crossing. And the woman said to him, sir, I have nothing to draw water with. Sorry, you have nothing to draw water with.

So she is indicating to us that it's even worse. Not only is he in conversation with her, but he's going to drink from her jar.

[6 : 59] A Samaritan jar. A Samaritan woman's jar. Scandalous indeed. And she retorts in verse 12, are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it?

She's feisty. She's feisty. Really? You're better than this? You're better than the guy who gave us this well? You're on top of that? Really? She's pushing back.

Jesus continues in spiritual terms. Jesus said to her, everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again.

The water that I will give them, give him, will become a spring of living water welling up in them. Wow. So the offer is made.

And he actually finalizes it with actually a descriptor. He uses two words right at the end of verse 14. A spring of water welling up into eternal life.

[8 : 06] The offer is on the table for her. So she is the important person that he has come to see. This person who is ostracized from her own community.

Her response in verse 15, the woman said to him, sir, give me this water so that I do not, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come and come here to draw water.

Her response is literal and it's physical in terms of what she's interpreting. And Jesus said to her, go, call your husband to come here.

So he now turns it social. He now switches off the spiritual and he now turns it directly onto her. And this is not necessarily an unusual thing for him to do because if there's any substantial communication to go on at all, her husband should be there.

So it's kind of a normal social thing, but obviously he knows much better what's going on. The woman answers him, I have no husband. She's honest. Oh, if only we were all so honest before the Lord with our lives.

[9 : 17] Despite being vulnerable, despite being at some social risk, in circumstances she still doesn't understand, she is honest. And Jesus responds, you are right when you say, I have no husband.

For you have had five husbands and the one you now have is not your husband. So he simply reiterates the facts. Therefore, identifying that he knows her inside out.

He knows everything about her. And yet as we look at his words, we see absolutely no judgment at all. I always thought that this passage related to him calling out a woman who had lived a less than

healthy lifestyle, made really bad decisions.

And basically he's calling out and saying, I'm calling you in on that. I don't think that's the case the longer I look at this. There is no judgment to be seen in this.

In fact, this has taken me down the labyrinth or the rabbit warren of Jewish divorce law. And it's fascinating. In Jewish divorce law, a woman could not initiate a marriage or a divorce.

[10:33] Only the male could do that. A woman had no leverage to prevent or refuse a divorce. To use a very modern term, she has no agency whatsoever.

And so it's not a surprise that in identifying her circumstances, he is identifying a woman who, to the best of our knowledge, is abused.

She's ostracized by society, quite clearly. And her circumstances that he outlines are grievous and not of her making. By definition, not of her making. And let's jump to John 8.

You don't have to look it up. But we're all familiar with John 8, just following this, a little bit later. It's the woman who has been caught in the act of adultery. And she's dragged out in front of all the guys in public to be shamed and to be stoned.

And, of course, it's a means by which they can ambush Jesus. So the Pharisees brought this woman out who has committed adultery. And there's that famous response from Jesus.

[11:37] Let he who is without sin cast the first stone. And so the guys all drift away because they realize their hypocrisy has been exposed. And they don't take action. And when they go away, he says to her, it's absolutely beautiful what he says.

It's just the two of them now. And he says, has no one condemned you? And she says, no one, Lord. His response, neither do I condemn you.

Talk about countercultural. It's profound. But he goes on and says, and from now on, sin no more. So while he's gracious and honoring of this woman who has committed adultery and he doesn't destroy her, he also is not afraid to identify sin, of course.

So he identifies sin. So let's jump back to John 4. There is no identification of sin here. Now, is she sinless? Of course not. She's human like the rest of us. But for the purpose of this conversation, he is identifying no sin.

He is simply saying, I see you. I know you. I know your suffering. I know your rejection. I know the abuse that has been inflicted upon you.

[12:52] I know that there have been five men that have married you and then chosen to divorce you. And I know that the man you are with now, who is quite happy to live with you, will not even honor you with a marriage, even though you may want that.

It's a different twist in terms of how we view her and how he verbalizes what he does to her. There is no condemnation here. So it goes on in verse 19.

The woman said to him, sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Yeah, you think so? At this stage? Yeah, she's very, very clear on that. And so they go on in conversations about where to worship. And it's a theological conversation about basically what the Samaritans believe and what the Jews believe. That's another whole sermon. But the purpose of this for him is to guide her towards something far more personal in him.

But in intellectually engaging her, he also is theologically engaging her and thereby honoring her in a society that would not stoop to have a theological conversation with a woman.

[14:06] Another barrier, theologically broken. Verse 25, the woman said to him, I know that the Messiah is coming. He who is called Christ.

When he comes, he will tell us all things. And Jesus said to her, verse 26, And Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am he.

Just allow yourself to imagine this process. She sits before the God of the universe, identifying himself to her, Samaritan.

In Samaria. Not the most noble Samaritan, by any means. And he chooses to meet with her, to visit with her. And I don't want to read too much into it, but I find it fascinating that this happens at a well. There's frequent biblical references to well. And oftentimes, wells are locations of betrothal. Isaac and Rebecca, Moses, Zipporah, Jacob, Rachel.

[15:08] Wells all feature very, very prominently in them meeting and becoming couples. And so, in this weird way, this destroyed woman, relationally, is to meet the bridegroom.

The one who can meet all her needs spiritually. She is to meet her Messiah. And she says so. I know that the Messiah is coming. And he says, I am the Messiah.

I am the one that you are to meet. I am the one that is transformative in your life. And just when we reach sort of the pinnacle of that conversation, what happens?

The disciples arrive. They marveled that he was talking with the woman, but no one said, why do you seek? What do you seek?

Or why are you talking with her? Now, the word marveled in the ESV is translated in the NIV, surprised. In the RSV, astonished. In the message, shocked.

[16:08] Can I editorialize? Ticked, maybe? He is not where he should be. He is not complying with the social, moral rules that they have for him.

And so, they present to us a profoundly bad example of people who are not actually taking their cues from Jesus. They're his disciples. They should be. Instead of being a little more circumspect, they're kind of dismissing.

Because they're used to the social rules. They know the rules. You're breaking them. We're done here. And it seems to be that kind of attitude that is exhibited by them.

Interestingly, perhaps not related, but interestingly, right after the disciples arrived, she leaves. Isn't that tragic, perhaps? But what does she leave to do? She leaves to go back to the village.

Now, what's interesting here is she goes and she leaves her water jar. I have done some reading and I've tried to figure out how expensive a water jar is then. I have no idea.

[17:08] I suspect it's a valuable object. And she dumps it and goes back to the town. Verse 28. She left the water jar.

She went away into town and said to the people, come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. So, she drops the water jar. The very purpose of this trip at noon, to drag herself out in the hot and the sweat to go get water, has become irrelevant.

Even to the point where she dumps the water jar. It's no longer important. She has encountered the Lord. And to go back to verse 13.

Jesus said to her, everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty. But whoever drinks the water that I give will never be thirsty again. She has taken up that offer.

And she has found water that totally eclipses the water she was coming to look for. And she has got a job to do. With enthusiasm, she returns to the town to minister to the people that love her, the people that cherish her, the people that have nurtured her, the people that have been a blessing to her.

[18:18] Yeah? No. She returns to the village that rejected her, who despise her, who leave her alone, unguarded, to get water by herself at noon.

And she goes to them to express the Lord. Oh, that we would be so transformed by a meeting of Jesus. Oh, that we would allow ourselves to be so transformed.

And very deliberately, I didn't have it in the reading. But verse 30, and I'll skip to 39. And the reason I didn't have them in the reading is these passages that are so familiar to us, it's hard to be surprised.

It's hard to read it for the first time. So we didn't do it in the reading, but let me just finish off with these verses that follow. So in 29, it was in our reading.

She went back. Come see the man who told me everything I ever did. 30. They went out of the town and were coming to him. Verse 39. Many Samaritans from that town believed in him.

[19:18] Because of the woman's testimony, he told me all that I ever did. 42. 42. They said to the woman, it is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard it ourselves.

So she has gone from a social irrelevancy, at best, to a social influencer, as a result of one conversation encountering the Lord.

The people that despise her, she now ministers to. And the Scripture honors her so much here. It doesn't just say that the Samaritans came out of the town and believed.

It actually says they believed in him because of the woman's testimony. Wow. Isn't it amazing that John would see fit to put that in? And then they, in turn, speak to her.

The Samaritans speak to her and reinforce that point. It is no longer because of what you said, but because of Jesus. She has done her job in not being the focus of attention, but redirecting that attention onto Christ, who has transformed her life already.

[20:23] So what are we to do with such an interaction, such a beautiful and a profound conversation and meeting? There's plenty to learn here.

Jesus has come a great length to be with her. He has broken many, many rules, geographic, ethnic, gender, intellectual, and spiritual, to speak to her, a lowly Samaritan.

She is that important person that he has come across time and space to meet with. What a privileged human being, when you think about it in all of history, that she would be the one that he would be waiting at the well for.

And so our responses. What are our responses to be? Well, let's look at the disciples first. Let's sort of get them sorted out. That's quite easy. I have written on the back of my notes here because I wasn't going to talk about it, but the only thing I wrote here was application.

Let's not be like the disciples. That pretty well covers it off. They were insensitive to what the Lord was doing. They were unteachable in that moment.

[21 : 31] They weren't looking deeper. Why is he doing what he's doing? It must be special. And they interrupt a process of the transformation of a life. May we never do that because of our social rules, be they church social rules or other social rules.

May we never get in the way of what Christ is doing. And may we be humble in that regard. In terms of the woman, what an amazing example she presents to us. She goes to the well.

She encounters this man that is probably very intimidating and frightening for her given that she is alone. But she allows herself to sit under that penetrating gaze of a man who can see right through her.

For he has all knowledge when it comes to her. And she allows herself to sit there and be so taught. She allows herself to be known. She allows herself to be examined.

And in that context, she is honest. And as a result, I think it's very clear that she is brave. Oh, that we would be that brave.

[22 : 38] To sit beneath that gaze. To be known. To be honest with the Lord. Because if we are honest in that way, if we choose to submit ourselves to him, we suddenly discover that we too can be transformed.

That is his business. If we would only allow him. So, are we brave enough to be honest? Are we brave enough to be transformed?

If he can transform that life, chances are he can transform yours. As with the lives he worked with in Cambodia. Young women and young men sold for a couple of hundred dollars to tell them you are precious.

You are to die for. And I've had the privilege of seeing many such lives restored to health and dignity. Beyond what people could imagine. That is what the Lord does.

And that is what he seeks to do in our own lives. So, I would beg of you this evening to subject yourself to that gaze. To allow yourself that encounter.

[23 : 41] To be transformed. For he has come a very, very long way. And broken many barriers. To meet with you. Amen.