

The Failure Of Technology

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[0 : 00] Thank you. If you got a card, you'll know that what I'm talking about today is the failure of technology.

And if you want to understand that enigmatic title, then I will give you this simple illustration which goes like this. And these are two people and they're looking down a well and the water's here.

So there you have it. Now, the failure of technology is that this person says to this person, the well is deep and you have nothing to draw with.

And I really feel that that is one of the basic reasons why in a technological society like ours, Christian faith has been dismissed because the human problem is so profound and the Christian church apparently has no way of dealing with the profundity of it.

And therefore, people are turning to all sorts of people who have gimmicks for getting the water up. And so that you get that kind of reaction.

[1 : 31] It's, I mean, I've watched doctors work and I know how you go into their waiting room and into their treatment rooms and so on and how they are in control and they have machinery and they have medicine and they have all sorts of wonderful gadgets by which they can probe and find out what's wrong with you and how to deal with it.

It's all there. And when you go to a minister of the gospel and say, well, I have a very deep problem, how can you deal with it? And you say, well, listen to this.

You tell them a story. And they say, well... But you see, it's so unsatisfactory. How can you deal with such a profound problem when you obviously don't have any equipment to deal with it?

And so that's what this story is about today. And I'd like to share it with you. You all saw me put my glasses somewhere. Where did I put them?

Oh, yes. Okay. Let me just talk to you about this amazing story from John chapter 4.

[2 : 49] And again, a very familiar story, but perhaps one that, by God's grace, you could hear in a new way today. How does...

I got into a lot of trouble on Sunday because I preached on being quiet. You know, after... And from Thessalonians chapter 4, where it says, strive to be quiet.

Saturday, there was a march for peace activists. And the city is full to overflowing with activists in one area or another for one cause or another.

Everybody is getting organized. Everybody is getting active. The problems are being defined. People are taking them in hand. Somebody is doing something about it. We're changing the world.

We're bringing in something new. All this is happening because people who formerly had been passive are now active and they're taking responsibility for their own lives, taking responsibility for their own country, taking responsibility for their own world.

[3 : 55] Everybody's getting out there and we're all getting hold of the problem. We're doing it. And some asinine preacher says, be quiet. And so that was why I got into trouble.

I can defend myself, but I won't at the moment. The thing that is happening in our world then is that God has something very profound to do in our world.

And he is determined to do it in his own way, to take his own initiative and to accomplish it in his own time. And if you want to know what God is trying to do in terms of you as an individual or in terms of individuals generally, then this story is an excellent way of discovering just what it is that God wants to accomplish in your life.

Now, again, this is one of the places where our society is at fault here because the assumption we all work on is that I'm all right, but it's that guy that's in trouble, so help him.

And if you come and say, no, no, it's not him, you've got to deal with you first, that's not acceptable in our society. So you have to watch carefully how Jesus treats this woman.

[5 : 16] An amazing sort of picture. But Jesus approaches her at this well and says to her, I have a thirst, I am tired, I need water, will you give me some to drink?

He asks her to do something for him, something to meet a genuine need in his life. And one of the basic things that happens in our world is that you get a lot closer to people when they can do something for you than when you want to impose something on them.

So if you can open up to people in this way and allow them to do something for you, then at least you can get a response. So Jesus opens up to this woman out of his genuine fatigue and genuine thirst and says, I need something, can you do it for me?

Now what happens, and this is in the practical reality of daily experience in the business that I'm in, is that you don't wait till people are saints till you give them a job.

You give them a job in the hope that in doing it they will become saints. That's how it works. A lot of people don't think they're quite saintly enough to have to work at anything yet.

[6 : 35] And so they're working on being saints, but nothing's getting done. So what you do is you give people a job to do, and in the course of that, then they learn what it is to be a saint.

However, this woman responded, quite understandably, by saying that she had certain problems about why he, a Jew, would ask her a Samaritan, why he, a man, would ask her a woman to do this particular job, because Jews have nothing to do with Samaritan.

And you see, it erases the really fundamental problem about the whole of our society, because we have groups to which we belong.

And we tend to be pushed towards finding the identity and meaning of our life in terms of that group to which we belong. And she belonged to the Samaritans, and the Samaritans had no dealings with the Jews for very real and significant historical reasons.

The Samaritans had stayed in their country while the Jews had been taken off to Babylon. When the Jews got to Babylon, they were a people living in captivity.

[7 : 49] It was very important to them to preserve the purity of their race and not to become defiled by marrying into the people around them. So they became very much more zealous in their faith than the people who stayed at home and tended to meld into the surrounding countryside so that when the Jews came back out of captivity, they were pure Jews, having preserved carefully their identity by only marrying within their own.

The others had married outside. They had consorted with false gods. They had become corrupted. They had a new center of focus, which was Mount Gerizim as opposed to Jerusalem. And they had, as far as the Jews were concerned, given up on the responsibility they had to be the people of God.

And so this split happened. And you can go... And these Samaritans were living in the West Bank. I mean, that's exactly where their territory was.

And if you go to Israel today and you feel the antipathy between Jew and Arab, or... But you can pick anything. I mean, you can go between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland or between French and English in Canada.

You can go on and on and on, watching how these people, when they are pushed under any kind of situation, they tend to move towards their basic identity.

[9 : 13] And in that identity, they find themselves at odds with one another. They don't want to have anything to do with one another, lest they violate who they are as persons.

And so this woman quite rightly thought that Jesus was violating who she was, because the Jews, by tradition and by law, had nothing to do with the Samaritans.

And in that culture and in that society, a man would not speak even to his wife in public, let alone go to a total stranger and ask for a drink.

So you can see that there were real barriers to overcome. And I think that's one of the fundamental barriers which stands in the way of faith. And that is that usually our ethnic origin tends to be more important to us than anything else.

When you really come down where push comes to shove, that's who we are. And that's how we find out who we are. That's how we discover who we are. And therefore, you couldn't ask me to be a Christian because Christianity has nothing to do with my ethnic origin.

[10 : 27] You couldn't ask me to consider this proposition because I would be violating who I am and who my father and grandfather and great-grandfather before him was. The language that I've spoke, the culture that I've been raised in, you're asking me to consider breaking with that in order to relate to you?

And Jesus says, in effect, to the woman, yes, I am. And that's what makes it impossible. That's why people won't even consider who Jesus Christ is because he doesn't fit in to their ethnic origins, whatever they are.

And that has to be overcome. So he gives her a job to do. She recognizes a barrier which he has to overcome. And then Jesus offers her a gift.

You know that young fellow who just got offered \$20 million for carrying a football approximately a mile and a half during the next four years?

That's, I mean, if you reduce it, that's about what it is. \$20 million. So, but it was lovely to watch the from lady, a lady from somewhere, on the, ask him, well, what happens when you join your team and you're getting more pay than all of them put together?

[12 : 05] What happens? And he said, well, the fact of the matter is that I'm good for them. You know, because of what they're doing for me, the whole state of football here in Canada is going to be elevated onto a new plane.

It's going to get new publicity. It's going to get new prominence. The league is going to be better. The team is going to be better. Everybody's going to benefit from what I'm getting. I don't know how many believe that.

But, and he also went on to say, and I think, I mean, I think he's probably a fairly straightforward young fellow of 21. Boy, what a job.

And he said, I can't, this wasn't the money that brought me to this job. Now, a lot of people mightn't believe him. But there was some other quality that brought him there.

Now, the reason I tell you this is because I think what the gospel offers, which we describe as eternal life, is a gift of such enormous value that I, in all modesty, wouldn't feel that it was appropriate that I should have such a gift if everybody else didn't get the same gift.

[13 : 32] And therefore, I don't want to receive it. So it was interesting that this young fellow, even though nobody else was getting \$20 million for carrying a football, said, if I get it, then it's going to benefit everybody.

And I think that that's exactly what the gift of God is meant to do. If you get it, if you can accept the gift that is given, then it's going to benefit everybody.

It's going to benefit you, it's going to benefit your family, it's going to benefit your community, it's going to benefit your country, it's going to benefit your world, if you can receive that gift. It's an interesting postulation, and I leave it to you to see whether you can justify it or not.

So the gift is offered when Christ says to her, I will give you water so that you will never thirst again. This is where the question of not having any rope or pail to get the water comes in.

And he can't understand how Jesus can do this. And so she responds to this gift perhaps because she's a fairly isolated member of society because of her moral failure.

[14 : 50] And she says, all right, give me the gift, the water that I will never thirst again. Give it to me. And Christ says to her, well, okay, who will you share it with?

If this gift is something which when you get it, the first thing you'll want to do is share it, so go and get your husband so you have somebody to share it with.

Well, you know, that's what William Temple says about this. He says that one of the characteristics of people who have received this gift is that they want to share it.

And then he goes on to say if they don't want to share it, it probably means they haven't got it, which is a fairly deadly statement. But there's the gift.

And Jesus says to her, you need to share it. Get your husband. And she says, I have no husband. Now what he's saying then is he's asking in a sense a double question.

[15 : 56] He's saying, well, who are you going to share this with? Because the nature of the gift is that you will want to share it. And then he says, and open up your hands.

Let me see who you are as you receive the gift. You open up your hands. And she didn't quite at first say, do that.

She said, well, I haven't got a husband. And Jesus said, in this wonderful way, he said, you're right.

Profoundly right. You haven't got a husband. You've had five and the one you have now is not your husband. So that in effect, he made it easy for her to open up her hands.

He saw, he saw as it were, her whole hand, everything that she, that she had, he saw. That was, that was part of receiving the gift.

[16 : 56] And, and it's the same thing with us is that as God offers us this gift, so we have to open up our hand. Now, the, the tense moment comes in thinking, well, if, if I open up my hand at that very point, I will be disqualified from receiving the gift.

So here I am. I can't open my hand to receive the gift, and yet the gift is offered to me. What am I going to do? And so she tries, he tries to move, she tries to move sideways into what I call, she takes a jump out of her predicament into the religious, intellectual quagmire, which you can get people to do very easily.

You know, as soon as, as soon as you raise the question of personal faith, people want, a simple symposium on the whole of the world's religions as of now.

And, once you've completed that, I will then come back to your original question. So she does it. She says to him, my forebears worship in Mount Gerizim, you say you should worship in Jerusalem, who's right?

And, and thereby she, she evades the problem of opening up her hands. She, in a sense, keeps them closed, even though she now knows that he knows what she has in them.

[18 : 22] She still keeps them closed and, and uses this intellectual smoke screen to complicate the issue so that she doesn't have to go ahead any further than this.

And, you know, a lot of people spend the whole of their life asking intellectual questions about Christian faith. Paul Little has reduced them to seven questions that everybody asks and it's very, it's a very rare occasion when you get somebody who asks something outside those questions, you know.

And those questions come up over and over again. And, probably they're not answered very well over and over again too. But, that's what, that's what he does. That's what she does.

She jumps into this intellectual quagmire by asking the question about what the basic difference is between the Jews and the Samaritans. And, of course, what's the difference between good people and Christians?

What's the difference between Catholics and Protestants? You can go on and have endless variations on this question to, which will engender mountains and mountains of discussion that can go on forever and ever and you never get anywhere in terms of, of, of personal faith.

[19 : 32] but Jesus somehow is able to deal with it and he cuts right through it to the heart of what religion is all about. And he gives her a most surprising answer and he says, the quality of your religion will be expressed by two things and that is that God who is the father of the universe wants your worship and he wants your worship to have the quality of being in a worship which is in spirit and in truth.

That's the kind of worship he wants. That is, in spirit means that you are at the pinnacle of human and divine and divine encounter. That that's, that's the highest that you can be as a person.

That you try and discover what's there. The point of intersection between the spiritual reality of God and the spiritual aspirations of man and that's the point at which you worship.

The most you can know about God and the most you can know about yourself at the point where that comes together that's where worship is to take place. And then he tells her secondly that this, this worship is not to be according to any code or any definition or any blind ritual.

It's to be a worship which is without hypocrisy which is a worship of self-dedication to the God whom you have begun to know. The God whom you've begun to apprehend.

[21 : 02] The God of whom William Temple speaks when he says it's the point at which you commit as much of yourself as you know to as much of God as you know. It's that point and that's where worship is to be carried on for everybody.

And then he says you've got to worship not only in spirit but you've got to worship in truth and that means without hypocrisy and you know how hypocrisy undermines most of our worship and it's not and you're not allowed to worship in, you're not allowed any idolatry.

You know, they used to make great stone figures to worship and wooden figures and pearl and jewels and all sorts of figures like that. We mostly create idols of the mind now that we worship.

Ideas, thoughts, concepts that we worship them and we know those are less than God. And in the full Old Testament sense it's simply another form of idolatry.

And the truth that God has revealed about himself he has revealed in the person of Jesus Christ at the place of the crucifixion. That's, if you want to focus very clearly in on who God is, Christ on the cross is to be the center of your focus.

[22 : 17] And that's what he says about, about that. And what the woman is overcome with this and of course doesn't understand it as most of us go to church every Sunday and don't understand what's going on and I'll tell you why.

It's because sometimes the preacher doesn't understand what's going on either. And just sharing the confusion is not very helpful. But she hears this and it's just too much for her altogether.

And so she resorts now to what you call the perpetual deferral. She says, ah yes I know when the Messiah comes he will lead us into all truth.

And it's like that issue that's there on your desk to be responded to and it goes to the bottom of the pile again and again and again on the basis that one day you'll get around to doing something about it and you never do.

And she says, we know that when he comes then we will know and then we will act. And of course she is ready to defer it forever.

[23 : 36] When Jesus makes this magnificent statement when he says to her, if you're looking for the Messiah, I that speak to you am he. Right here, right now.

And it is the most lovely, gracious, simple, understandable confrontation that you can imagine. And it's beautifully portrayed in this story.

And it's portrayed so that we can know how God deals with us and how it is his purpose to give to us the gift of eternal life.

And that gift of eternal life is the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. That's how you grasp it, how you get hold of it.

And it's right there. And the perpetual deferral or the intellectual quagmire or the ethnic barriers and all the things that crowd into our minds to keep us from coming to that moment tell us a great deal about ourselves.

[24 : 46] But I don't think that we can escape the fact that the God whom we deal with in Jesus Christ is a right here, right now God whom we have to deal with.

It's not somewhere, sometime, if, and maybe. it's right here, right now. That's Barheads. Our God and Father, as Jesus Christ met this woman and with great love, great wisdom, great patience, had her open her heart to him as he opened his heart to her and made available to her the gift of eternal life.

God, and as she writhed in the agony of trying to defer her, receiving what was offered to her freely and unconditionally, how you graciously met her and drew her to the point where she, in fact, put her faith in the Lord Jesus.

And our God, help us to be aware that for each of us, the circumstances are precisely the same. That you in your love and your wisdom and your care and your grace and your mercy, bring us to the place where you want us, right here and right now, simply to open our hearts and to acknowledge you to be Savior and Lord and to know that from this moment, our lives are different because of the gift that you've given us.

in Jesus' name, Amen.