

What God Expects of the Church

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 July 2009

Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 0 0] these are words that have had a huge impact on many people throughout the ages words that tell of God's cleansing and his forgiveness and I wonder as we sing those words cleanse with hyssop purify me I'll be whiter than the snow I hope that everyone will sing these words from our hearts because that's what we're going to be reading about someone who really knew the cleansing and the purifying that God himself brought to pass in this woman's heart a real person just like us this evening a real real person and many just as I said that many people have been impacted by this psalm so also many people have been impacted by this chapter we've read it before you've read it many many times I come back to it I'll come back to it if God spares me again and again and again it's one of those chapters that if I had to choose something to give to someone's a part of the bible that I had to give to someone who had no knowledge of the bible this is the only part that they were going to read this would be one of those one of those chapters I would I would give to them because it tells so preciously and so powerfully of the impact that Jesus did make in a real person's life and can and does still do and I hope that we're able to see ourselves many women have been changed as they have identified with this woman's experience but it's not the gospel it's not just about males or females it's we're one in Christ Jesus and the bible speaks to all to both genders and so many men too have seen how they have they have been identified with with this woman that we read about in this chapter so let's just read some of the verses again verse 13 what Jesus says to the woman everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life the woman said to him sir give me this water so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water and of course as we know that by so saying she indicated she hadn't a clue what Jesus was talking about at that stage but as Jesus persisted with her gently slowly deliberately keeping the conversation going they came eventually to the stage where she did know that she what he was talking about and where her whole life was transformed from that moment onwards so that the person who went back to the village after coming out to draw water was a totally new person having been changed by her meeting with Jesus that's what we're all about this evening and we believe that Jesus the risen savior Jesus who gave his life for sinners for broken people like ourselves and rose again on the third day and was able to fix this poor broken person and has been continuing to fix poor broken people like you and I down through the ages and continues to do so this evening so it's our prayer this evening that he will speak to us powerfully because he is the risen savior everybody who knows how important water is it's become even fashionable to carry around a bottle of water when I was growing up when I was a student and when I was younger you would never even dream of carrying about a bottle of water it's usually a bottle of iron brew or something like that but nowadays it's been it's fashionable to carry a bottle of water and it's big business a multi-million pound industry has been created out of selling fresh clean mineral water and you get it in all kinds of shops and in railway stations and airports and and you name it and it's because it sells that's because medical research has confirmed that not only that we can't do without it but that we need to drink it regularly and everyone knows how important it is to drink clean water pure water there's absolutely no point in drinking contaminated dirty water you'd be you'd think it awful if somebody went about with an Evian bottle bottle and it was all gray and dirty it would be absolutely awful wouldn't it would be no use whatsoever so we know that not only water is necessary but it has to be clean and pure and the cleaner and the purer and the more mineralized the better than then the then and of course that's why the big names have occurred like Evian and Perrier and all these these names that people drink in the in the bible water has a special place and like today there were times and occasions where people were often reminded of how important it was to drink in Genesis 21 for example when

Hagar and her son Ishmael left Abram's home they ran out of water in the desert that would have been a complete disaster if God hadn't intervened and showed them where to go and provided that water that would preserve their lives and that would mean that that Ishmael would complete God's promise and he would become a great nation and throughout the bible you get times and places where God has to provide water for his people enough for them to drink and for them to thrive and survive and if you live in a hot country and even if you go down south or if you have a hot spell here you very often discover that you can't go very long without having to take a drink our bodies dehydrate very quickly and if you're on a journey even more so you dehydrate even more quickly because you're moving and walking and using up all your energy so it's no surprise to see that Jesus on this occasion traveling walking from Judea to

Galilee having to stop for a drink because he was weary this is one of the passages that shows us that even although Jesus was God in the flesh that he was subject to the kind of weakness and tiredness and thirst that every one of us is subject to as a human he truly was a human being that means he's someone that we can go to and we can know that he understands and identifies with what it means to live in this world our tiredness and our weariness and our hunger and our thirst it's no surprise either to learn that when the Bible talks about life it very often uses water as a symbol of life itself water was so essential to life so indispensable that it came to represent what life itself and even more so when the

Bible speaks about the kind of new and abundant and fulfilled life that Jesus came to give that's what he's talking about in verse 10 when he says if you knew the gift of God and who it is that's saying to you give me a drink you would have asked him and he would have given you living water and he's inviting this complete stranger whom he's only just meant to take the gift that he alone can give her and if she drinks of it she will never be thirsty again and at first of course the woman assumed he was speaking about the water in the well on which they were sitting and Jesus quickly made it clear that he was speaking about a different kind a different dimension of life altogether which only he had the power to give and he was willing to give if she asked and this woman at first was of course unaware of how much she needed what Jesus was offering her a kind of I suppose she was typical of women and men and every single generation unaware of why it is that they need Jesus perhaps there's someone here tonight and that's exactly the way it is with you you're here tonight perhaps out of duty somebody's asked you feel you've been persuaded to come you don't really want to be here and the real reason you don't want to be here is because you don't see the need to be here there are plenty of other things you could be doing plenty of other things you prefer to be doing and you really don't see why you need Jesus you think that it's okay for some people some people obviously have got something out of this this bible this religious stuff this church but not for you maybe you think you're in the prime of life maybe you think you've got everything going for you've got your whole life ahead of you and really if it comes down to although you wouldn't admit it to many people you have to admit it you don't see the need of being here because you don't see why you need Jesus let me try and turn that around if you'll please allow me to

[9 : 29] Jesus in this very chapter tells you what to do if that's you tonight this is where Jesus tells you what to do I ask you are you a Christian you say no I'm not a Christian and Jesus tells us here the reason why you're not Christian verse 10 you would have asked and he would have given you the living water so the reason you're not Christian tonight is you haven't asked if you had asked he would have given you that's his own word if you had asked he would have given you the living water he would have changed your heart so the reason your heart isn't changed is because you haven't asked okay so far so good but Jesus also goes on to tell us why we haven't asked the reason you haven't asked he says is because you don't know the gift of God you don't realize what you're missing you haven't wakened up to the truth you actually don't know the gift of God because if you did know you would have asked the reason you haven't asked for God to change your life tonight is because you don't know the gift of God you don't know how much you need him so your prayer tonight is to ask God to show you what that gift is and how much you need to have that gift right now tonight you don't know how much you need you're completely oblivious completely unaware of how much you need God you wish you were somewhere else you don't want to be here you don't think you need God and the reason you don't know think you need God is because you don't know the gift that he is offering to give you can I please ask you tonight to go to God and ask him to show you his gift now that's not too much is it and surely when you come to think about it when it comes to a matter of life and death and your relationship with God and your future because the Bible is all

about your future you whether you know God or whether you whether you don't and what eternity has for you surely that's something that would drive you at least to God and ask well Lord please show me how much I need you now I wonder if you're scared to ask that because you suspect that you'll have difficulty coping when he does when he answers that prayer well you have to cope with that problem I can't help you there that's between you and the Lord but if it is if it's something that you need to discover and to come to terms with tonight then please don't leave it you must go to the Lord and ask Lord show me how much I need your gift please show me how much I need your gift now this story has always challenged me but it has also um it challenges me in terms of two things first of all it challenges me as because it reminds me of what I should be doing as a Christian but it also challenges I hope those you see this chapter has something to say to every single one of us tonight we've already touched on that a few moments ago but it doesn't it doesn't let Christians off the hook I believe that may it makes me feel hugely uncomfortable it challenges the church to concentrate on what the church should be doing and what the church should be doing this evening as always is

reaching ordinary people with the gospel but more than that this chapter goes on this story goes on to tell me not only what I should be doing it tells me how I should be doing and Jesus is literally giving me a worked example a blow-by-blow step-by-step account of how what it means to go about speaking to someone about the gospel and whenever we come whenever we bring up the subject we all feel so uncomfortable and so inadequate and we all feel like hiding away and going and locking ourselves away into our homes and into our rooms and not wanting to face this enormously essential issue but it's true isn't it and what Jesus expects us to do he shows us how to do it and this is how he does it he does it himself so that by his example we can know that the gospel tonight is the power of God to salvation but there are no there are no tricks to it there is no ABC formula as to how to convert a whole a whole region the gospel is about ordinary people the kind of ordinary people that you and I rub shoulders with every day and every week people in our families and places of work our neighborhoods people that we come across the Lord has given us a responsibility towards these people people that we know and the story tells me how ordinary it is to witness how usual usual it ought to be to witness to someone to to speak to someone about the gospel look at what happens here here's an ordinary situation here's an everyday situation whereby a strange coincidence and I use that word coincidence deliberately I didn't say that it was chance I said it was coincidence that Jesus in the course of walking from one town to another happens to meet with a complete stranger and this is this is the kind of thing that happens to each one of us all the time now it's not every day it's not every occasion that we get the opportunity to talk to someone about the gospel or to or get to know them to that level and there were probably listen to this there were probably many times in Jesus life when he didn't get the opportunity either sure there were many people that met Jesus casually that didn't mean that Jesus got to the point where he was able to explain the gospel to them just the same way as there are in our own lives Jesus doesn't expect us to explain the gospel to everyone there's a difference that's a different thing for saying that that we don't do it at all which is how this just chapter challenges me so deeply and I believe that it ought to challenge you

I believe that this conversation here represents for us perhaps a lifetime of developing relationships with people who don't know the Lord and who are not followers of Jesus and it shows us that our responsibility as we follow Jesus that our responsibility is to do exactly what Jesus did here and to develop that relationship in a personal and in a loving and in a gentle manner to the point where that person gets to discover the greatness and the preciousness of Jesus Christ and you and I have to be the instruments whereby God speaks to that person now for many of us it's a cop-out because what we say is well oh the work of the gospel is God's work only God can bring about conviction in a person's life that's absolutely true but that's also a cop-out because God has said to us go and make disciples of all nations that means he expects not just the ministers in the church not just the elders in the church but he expects ordinary Christian people in their own small corner where they are through ordinary meeting and through ordinary dialogue and conversation to to look for and to pray for the opportunity when they'll be able to and say other people say well you know some people are gifted and I'm not gifted I'm not a theologian I can't really explain things and so so very some people are far far more gifted than I am

I'll I'll leave it to them well that's a cop-out as well of course some people are gifted that's true that's true wherever you look amongst Christians some people are more gifted at one thing than another

that doesn't change the fact that the Lord expects us to in our own way he doesn't expect you to have a gift that you don't have but neither does he expect you to do something that you're not able to do and I believe when I come when I come across people who ask well what is the future of the church in Scotland I have to say here it is and if it isn't here in John chapter 4 then it's finished it's gone if we're not prepared to take up this challenge and to do what Jesus expects us to do and to follow his example and to be prepared and to pray for opportunities to get to know people on a long-term level now this conversation happened by the way I don't think this conversation was as was as quick as the impression we're given in this chapter I think this is a summary of what happened I believe that a lot more was said than is written down in this chapter and I believe a conversation like this in our case would extend into days and weeks and months and years starting off with developing and winning people's friendship and showing people the love and the care and the concern it may be years before you're ever able to get an opportunity to talk to somebody about the gospel years we're we're in a world where we expect things to happen quickly we're in a fast food world aren't we when we expect us to to all of a sudden snap our fingers and things to happen as they do in other areas well God's not in a hurry and there may be people that that you are friendly with at the moment you're praying for opportunities to talk to them you're praying for them and it hasn't happened yet you carry on you keep going and keep asking the Lord who knows it may be years from now before you'll get that opportunity but you're there in the right place and you're you're asking God you're showing that person and you know what you'll never win that person unless you show genuine the genuine love of Jesus Christ to that person that concern that extraordinary love that goes the second mile that love that that will that will do more than the kind of ordinary love and the kind of ordinary concern that we find in the world Christian concern has to go the second mile and it's that way that people take note and they say there's something unusual about that person's interest in me there's something into something genuine about that person there's something really special about that person and I'm sure it's because he's a Christian there must be some connection between that person's extraordinary warmth what's so difficult about being warm don't suppose I'm acting very warm as I'm saying that but I'm trying to challenge what's so difficult about being approachable what's so difficult about being friendly to people showing people that we genuinely in a in a cold and in a broken world a world where there is so little real genuine concern oh we talk about it people talk about it it's dead easy to talk about it but it's a different thing altogether but that's what Jesus expects us to be because every soul is precious the easiest thing in the world for Jesus tired as he was would have been just to ignore this woman and she wouldn't have thought anything of it that's what everybody else did it what you weren't allowed to talk to women if you were a rabbi you certainly didn't talk to a Samaritan woman what he was doing took him beyond the bows he was pushing the boat out he was attracting all the criticism under the world the disciples marveled when they saw him talking to a woman they couldn't believe that he was putting himself in such a position but he was prepared to do it why because every soul is precious and I think we've forgotten that I wonder if I've forgotten that even as a minister every soul every soul every soul is precious every soul is a person who's either going to heaven or going to hell if they're a believer in Jesus they're going to hell heaven if they're not they're going to hell that's the fact and I think we very often lose sight of that fact and that's why it's important to come to a chapter like this and to be reminded of what God expects the church to be in this world and the church is also so easily distracted isn't it by issues and by campaigns and by by by by by by things which are of secondary importance and it's far easier to get involved in issues of secondary importance than it is to concentrate on reaching people changing lives with the gospel don't be distracted by anything even noble good causes in which we ought to be involved but don't let anything take your heart and your mind and your intention away from reaching people with the gospel and let's start believing in ourselves that sounds a terribly self-centered thing to say doesn't it that's the kind of thing you'd hear about in the world believe in yourself but the way I'm saying it is that the Lord has given us this task to do we have to believe that we are the instruments the bearers the heralds of God's good news to people so we have to believe that God will use even my my my awful hopeless approach to tell people about Jesus do you love people tonight do you love your unbelieving friend your unbelieving neighbor is it not too easy is it not much easier to spend almost all your time in Christian company and never go into the company of all unbelievers it's not unbelievers it's not that's awful that's awful I think that's terrible that we're not being salt and light in the world in which Jesus expects us to be salt and light in of course you need to have fellowship of course you need to have that but we also need to be developing relationships with our unbelieving

friends those of you who are leaving home shortly or those of you who are students I hope that you don't spend all your time amongst your Christian friends

[25 : 23] I hope that you develop relationships outside and to to seek the opportunity to share with them and who knows why the Lord has has brought you where you are and put you where you are today I hear lots of people talking about revival and they talked like this oh what we need today is revival and you know what they really mean is this well the reason why people are the reason why people are not being converted is because the Lord is not working in revival it's a way of putting the blame on God and it's a very pietistic way of saying well the reason why the church isn't doing this job as well as God's fault what else is happening in revival what else is happening in this chapter except revival but look how it happens did it happen when the disciples sat back when Jesus sat back and did nothing it happened through a conversation with one woman who then went into the town and had a conversation with others that's what brought about revival that's the way in which God moved so mightily in this in this in this city so that's the way in which this child this this chapter challenges me and I hope that we can become in time to come that we will continue to be and I know that many of us operate in this way anyway you have I know that many many people have a gospel minded approach and live in terms of of an urgency but if you're not then please ask the Lord to make you to make you an urgent witness and ask you to make you to make you an urgent witness and ask you to bring you into contact with people who you will love and win into the kingdom and that so that so that the kingdom will be reached but it's also a challenge to those of you who aren't Christians this evening does it not show you does this woman not show you the kind of person that perhaps you are this evening she was broken and she was bitter and she was bitter and she was belligerent and she was brash we would say today that this woman she probably looked like a perfectly ordinary woman someone you could meet the kind of person you could meet at any time going through this village but but this woman had issues that's what we would say today isn't it she had baggage what's more she had a reputation she was alone and she was alone and she was alone and she was alone the very fact that she was alone indicates to us that normally women came as a group to get water but this woman wasn't part of the group because she was never part of the group because she had been excluded she was a social outcast because of her baggage and those days because of her reputation people kind of kept their distance from her she was unusual she didn't fit into the rest of society because she didn't conform she always she woke up every morning the moment she drew her curtains she'd be wondering who was looking in her window wondering what she was doing as soon as she walked walked out the door people would turn their heads to look at her and she was made to feel the unusual kind of person that she was and it was all because of the past the baggage that she carried and the easiest thing in her mind and the easiest thing in her mind and the easiest thing in the world for a person like that is for them to feel that they fit nowhere not only amongst their own friends and their own neighbors but nowhere and least of all the church i wonder how many people there are in storn away this evening who actually would quite like to be here and have always wondered what it would be like to sit in a church but they feel that because of something they've done in their lives that everybody knows about or some way in which they're living that everybody knows about they feel ashamed and they feel as soon as they walk in that door that people's heads would be turning and people would be aghast to see them

and they think well that's not my place amongst all of these people who don't live the kind of life that i live i hope to the lord that that's not true and i hope that if you know anyone like that that you give them every encouragement and that you tell them that this is the very place where they need to be will you please make sure that no one is ever excluded from from the company of believing people from hearing the gospel because of any reason nothing should keep anyone from this place from hearing the gospel make sure make sure that nobody is prevented from hearing the gospel and sometimes all it takes is a little encouragement a little invitation sometimes that's all it takes but what else it takes is for them to know that when they come here that they will be welcome in the house of god some people i remember some remember speaking to a young girl she said i couldn't come to church because i didn't have the right clothes i said whatever you do don't ever let that happen again whether it's your past whether it's your appearance or whether it's whatever you come to hear the gospel because who knows what god will do in a person's life as they come as they are that's what god wants he wants us to come as we are with all our shame and filth and you know the tragedy the tragedy is that so many of us dress ourselves up and we act the right part

whereas our hearts which god can see are far from god that was god's great complaint in the old testament they did all the right things and yet their hearts were far from the lord and the lord is asking sinners people who are broken and empty and lost and dark people who have whose lives are filled with shame and like this woman they have a history as long as they're at them and they feel themselves they feel that there's no hope for them whatsoever and if there's anyone here this evening and you're conscious of being in that position then you are in the right place and you're hearing the word of god we're reading god's word and you're coming to terms with the jesus who has come into the world to save to rescue to transform people's lives and to bring healing to broken people this woman was broken she was broken because oh i guess there was a time when she when she lived the same kind of life as everyone else she grew up probably in an ordinary home she fully expected to live an ordinary life with an ordinary husband and have a family and then things for some reason started going wrong her relationship started going wrong i don't know whose fault it was it could have been her husband could have been herself it could have been adultery it could have been abuse it could have been violence there could have been forsaking we don't know what it was but she went from one husband the first marriage ended went to the second husband well that was unusual but it did happen by the time mr three came along everyone was talking about her and then four and then the one she had given up altogether as far as that was concerned she did with so many people to do in every generation she put her hope in relationships in love in affection she's not the only one you get it today how many songs have been written about broken love and broken promises and broken affection somebody leaving their partner or somebody leaving their their marriage or or whatever it is for someone else this is this is this woman her life could you could write a song about her life and it could be it could be as relevant today as it ever was there's nothing new under the sun it wasn't that in the 21st century that this kind of thing happened

has been happening all through the ages and this was the very person who came to discover the real answer was her relationship to god she was a broken person before god and she had to come to the point where she's she had to say lord i am broken please fix me that's what we all need to say to the lord this evening because in actual fact we're all broken you know these people who were so so quick to criticize her in sicker in in these people of course they believed just like the jews that if there was any chance of being right with god you had to live a respectable life there were two problems with that one it wasn't true secondly what happens when you don't live a respectable life what hope is there for the bad person for the person who goes wrong for the person who makes mistakes for the person who falls into outward shameful sin and it's no use for others who haven't fallen to look down on that person and say there you go because the reason that you haven't fallen is not because you're any better than she is it's simply because your circumstances have been different how easy it is to look down on others isn't it how easy it is to point the finger at other people jesus doesn't do that have you noticed how jesus dealt with this woman he doesn't deal in if anyone had the right and the authority to judge that woman and to say to her you what you have been married how many times and the person you have at the moment is not your husband how utterly shameful he could have said that easily he had every right to say he's the only person in the world that has the right to say it and yet he never does he because he didn't come to judge the world he came to save and neither must we judge the world we should have all kinds of people coming in here and as soon as we see them our message is not go away and sort your life out our message is please let me tell you about jesus he came to seek and to save those who are lost let me tell you how jesus saved me and i'll tell you what he can do for you instead of that we seem to think our mission is to sort out the world's moral problems that's not our mission at all it is to preach christ because only jesus can sort out the world's moral problems as he changes people's lives and as he creates new hearts within people just like we sang create within me a new heart lord that's what jesus can do and that's the jesus that we present to people to the whole world i hope this evening and the years by the time she had come to the well the years of hardness had taken their toll and she had built up for herself a kind of a persona in which she was indestructible you know what happens when you're aware of people talking about you all the time you develop a determination to make do with what you have to keep on moving on and to just make the most of life that's what she was like and it's so obvious as she comes to argue with jesus as he as he gently probes into her life and as he begins by so doing to unpeel the hardness that had wrapped itself round her over the years and by so doing gently work himself

into this woman's heart wherein lay the real fundamental problem that she was so scared of and so unready to confess just like ourselves there's no end to what people will do to stop people penetrating and there's no end to what you might do to stop god penetrating do you know how i know this woman was converted truly absolutely converted her testimony is this come see a man who told me everything i ever did you know what this was the first time that she had ever told the world what everybody knew in the first place she was totally unwilling to let anyone intrude until she met jesus then there was nothing to be ashamed of because her whole life had been changed her whole her shame was a shame of the past her darkness was a darkness of the past she had now been changed by the lord she was now a new person she was like the man in acts walking and leaping and praising god because of what god had done in her life and what god had done in her life he can do in yours tonight i don't know where you come from whether you're a regular here whether you're a visitor here i don't know what your circumstances are is there anything in this woman that just that strikes a chord well if there is then tonight those words that jesus said to the woman he says to you whoever drinks of the water that i shall give shall never thirst again that water is a gift you can't work for it you can't deserve it you can't earn it you can't decide tonight i'm going to sort my life out and then i'll deserve to come here and i'll deserve god's favor you can't do that god has to work a miracle in your heart he has to give you that free gift and he will give it to you as you ask him 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 give you living water that's the promise of jesus christ let's pray our father in heaven we stand before you each one of us none of us here deserves your mercy and your forgiveness and your grace not a single one of us we all stand in shame we all stand lord depending alone on the blood of jesus christ that was shed at calvary as the payment for our sin and we pray tonight lord that as we hear those wonderful words from a gentle loving savior who's not willing that any should perish but that all should come to know him we pray father that you will do a great work and bring your word into the hearts of many and show them what you can do and the change that you can bring about in a person's life in jesus name amen you