

Easter Sunday

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[0 : 0 0] the book of the gospel of John, John chapter 4. We're looking not so much at the resurrection at this point. This is an encounter where Jesus met a woman at the well. You know this story well.

It's an account, an incident in his life. And I want us to read this together, and then we'll pray and we'll try and make sense of this. John chapter 4, and we'll read from verse 4.

Now he, Jesus, had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon when a Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus said to her, Will you give me a drink? His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman.

How can you ask me for a drink? For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water. Sir, the woman said, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock? Jesus answered, Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water, welling up to eternal life. The woman said to him, Sir, give me this water, so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water. He told her, Go call your husband and come back.

I have no husband, she replied. Jesus said to her, You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband.

[2 : 2 1] What you have just said is quite true. Sir, the woman said, I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem. Woman, Jesus replied, Believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know.

We worship what we do not know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming, and has now come, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the spirit and in truth.

The woman said, I know that Messiah called Christ is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us. Then Jesus declared, I the one speaking to you, I am he. And then we'll read from verse 39.

Or sorry, we'll read from verse 28. Then leaving her water jar, the woman went back into the town and said to the people, Come, see a man who told me everything I've ever done. Could this be the Messiah?

They came out of the town and made their way towards him. Meanwhile, his disciples urged him, Rabbi, eat something. But he said, I have food to eat that you know nothing of.

[4 : 01] And then he goes on to say about his food is to do the will of the Father. But verse 39 is the account of the Samaritans now coming out, based on this woman's testimony, to hear Jesus. Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. He told me everything I've ever done. So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words, many more became believers. They said to the woman, We no longer believe just because of what you said. Now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world. We'll end our reading there. Let's come before God in prayer. Let's ask for his help. Our loving Father, we come to you this morning, and we pray, Lord, that as we have read your Word, that you would help us to understand your Word. And Father, we pray that as we understand it, that we would be, that we would embrace those great truths that we discuss or discern this morning. We pray, Father, that you would lead us and guide us. Father, we thank you that we do serve our risen Savior. And we pray, Father, that he, in a very real way, will become very real to each one of us. So speak to us now, we pray. In Jesus' name.

Amen. During our time on Friday, we were, people had an opportunity to share, and a few folk did share. And I remember Margaret, she just shared what the death of Jesus meant to her. It was the word life. And that's a good word to sum up what the death of Jesus means to us. He died to give us life.

He came to give us eternal life. He rises again to give us life. He is the way, the truth, and the life, as Gordon did at our last reading and reminded us of that great verse. I want to focus on another word this morning. I don't want to preach for very long. If you're used to my style of ministry, Easter and Christmas, I tend not to preach for too long. And what I want to do is to focus on one aspect of the resurrection. Tonight, we will look at the resurrection from a more theological point of view. And looking at 1 Corinthians 15, if Christ is not raised, we are still in our sins. So I want to look at that legalistic side and the importance of Jesus' death and his resurrection. But this morning, I want to try and keep it simple. And if I'm choosing a word about the resurrection that I want us to focus on, there's many things. The word I want to focus on is the word relationship. If Jesus has died and he's risen again, it is possible for us to have a relationship with him. Somebody shared that about the death of Jesus now gives them hope and purpose. And I want us to look at that.

I became a Christian in May the 12th, 1980, in the Kelvin Hall. And soon afterwards, I went on a discipleship course about what it means to be a Christian. And I remember that course. It was quite good as I was taught. It was just me and two other people. They were from the Brethren Church, although I was from a Baptist church. They happened to be doing the course. So I went along. And there I discovered a bit more about the gospel. Jesus died on the cross for our sins and what all that meant in the death and the resurrection of Jesus. And you could say I was beginning to put a theology or doctrine to the faith that I had just confessed in the Kelvin Hall. Armed with that good news, as it was explained to me, like many Christians, I started to witness. I started to witness to quite a few folk. And every tract that was ever produced, I seemed to get a hold of. I just loved handing out tracts. I used to have a wee bag with loads of different types of tracts. So if I met somebody and they said, I'm feeling a bit down, I've got a tract for that, boom, and they would get the tract if you were young or old or single or married, whatever you're going through, I had a tract just for that scenario. And I had my favorite tract. My favorite tract, I can still see it. It was a kind of long, narrow thing. It just opened up, and probably A5 when you opened it up, and it said on it,

God's way of salvation. And as I presented that tract, I thought, this tract is so good. It explains everything from the gospel, what God was doing, how it all works, and how we need to respond. And I quite liked it that way. It explained the gospel very logically. But therein lies the problem that the gospel doesn't come to us in that way. We try and present the gospel A, B, C. We meet somebody. We need to share the good news. So we come with our logical argument, accept, believe, confess, and so forth. But people don't always think that way. Patrick Sookdale, if you know Patrick Sookdale, he was a guy that started Barnabas Fund. He came to the Bible college where I was once. He probably said the thing that made probably the lasting impression on me above all the visiting preachers that we ever got. And he talked about how we share the gospel a bit like that, a bit like he was, the way he illustrated it was like the broadsheets and the tabloids. You've got the times and the telegraph in the days when they used to be this size. And there's an index at the front, and our contents page, if you want the weather, it's on that page, blah, blah, blah. And the headlines in the sport at the back, but very clearly laid out. Whereas he said the tabloids are just, you get the headlines in the sport and just a mishmash in between. We know a lot of text and a lot of photographs. And Freddie Star ate my hamster, and West Ham get beat by Everton at the back, and a mishmash in between. And we're just wee sound bites. And he said, when we become Christians, we try to present the gospel in this very clear, logical way. And he says, we can't do this. We want to try and take them from A to wherever, but you need to give them their head. And I think he said something like, sometimes you're trying to explain to somebody, and you think, wow, I'm in Romans,

[10:37] I'm really getting this clear. And then they'll turn around and say, what about spaceships or flying saucers? And you think, wow, where did that come from? They're not thinking the way we think.

And as I recall this this week, I remember early on in the first few years, despite my efforts to witness, I had to try and remember how I came to know the Lord. And often we come to the Lord, not because we've weighed it all up. Some people do. But most people come to the Lord because they come, not because they're aware of a soul that needs to be saved. They have felt needs. You come in your felt needs, and you think, I'm lonely, I'm depressed, I'm fearful, I'm anxious. And you come in that way.

And the night I was saved, it was just, Lord, what am I doing with my life? Where's my hope? Where is it going? And God broke in. He showed me I was a sinner. But that was really the need that I had at the moment. And that is why I like the story of the woman at the well. It's a very real story. And Jesus, and how Jesus speaks to her. So I want to just, a couple of thoughts on this. I'm going to show you a video of somebody's testimony. Then I'll say another few things. Then I'll show you another brief video.

of somebody's testimony. And then we're finished. So that's where we're going, just in these moments that remain. I don't want to spend long on this. But here is Jesus, verse 27. He has to go through Samaria. Samaria was not a place that the Jews liked to go. They were viewed as mongrels. They had a bit of Judaism, but they had a hodgepodge of other things. They were just not pure in that sense, dodgy people. And therefore, Jesus had to go through Samaria. And he meets a woman. It's bad enough to talk to a Samaritan, but a Samaritan woman was something else. And here you see the heart of Jesus. The disciples, you remember, when they come back to buy food, they're going, he's talking to a woman. You ask him. I'm not asking him. It was just dodgy. Jesus is such a person.

He is risen today. And he is interested in people that perhaps others aren't interested in. And that might be you. And he's very interested in you, as he's interested in this woman. And he talks to her about living water. She's coming. He talks to her at a point of felt need. He sees a link. She's coming to buy water. She's weary. She has to do this all the time. It's not a task she's really looking forward to. She just does. It's an ordinary day. But Jesus' challenges are about water. Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again. Whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst again.

[13 : 19] Indeed, it will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. And she thinks, that's great. Give me this water. She doesn't fully understand what he's saying, but it sounds good.

He's got her attention. And then he gets personal. He says, call your husband. And come back. And she says, I don't have a husband. And he says, you're right when you say you have no husband. You have had five husbands. And the man you're with now is not your husband.

And what you said is true. Now, we don't know if he's trying to put her on a guilt trip. But I think what impresses the woman is, here is somebody who knows all about me. It is that aspect that really impresses her. That's what she takes back. Here is a man who told me everything, who knows everything about me. Could he be the Messiah? He's not an ordinary man. He knows all about me. That is one of our basic needs here this morning. You want your husband or your wife to understand you fully. Sometimes they'll get it. Sometimes they don't. They don't get when you're down or whatever. Others don't. Family, friends. Strangers certainly don't. But to have somebody, to know somebody who knows you, who knows you well, every single thing about you, hairs on your head are numbered before you say anything. The Lord already knows. He knows all this. To me, that was impressive when I became a Christian, that Jesus knew me. And amongst about 2,000 people or whatever,

Jesus knew me. He knew my background. He knew where I was brought up. I didn't have five husbands, but I've lived a particular life. Jesus knew her life. He knew her, in many ways, lack of love.

Five husbands is a sign that she's not getting something right. There's something empty in her life. He doesn't give her grief. He doesn't start quoting the law to her and say, you know, you shouldn't have five husbands. We were thinking on Monday, weren't we, about people who perhaps live in a particular lifestyle that's not according to Scripture. But our main task is not necessarily to point that out. Yes, we take a stand in God's Word. We defend God's Word in certain ways. But our task is to preach the good news and leave the Lord. Only when the Lord converts do people change.

[15 : 43] Anyway, He comes and speaks to her. And she says, she becomes aware of spiritual things. She starts to say, sir, I can see that you're a prophet. And then she talks about worship. Our ancestors worshipped in this mountain, but you Jews claim you must worship in Jerusalem. Jesus then talks about true worship. He corrects her. He says, woman, verse 21, believe me, a time is coming and has now come when those who worship the Father will worship neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. But the Father seeks those who worship in spirit and in truth. She encourages, He encourages her to come to know the Father and to know His love and to know how that she can be accepted, worshipping it in spirit and in truth. And she says, I don't know about this. I don't know about one thing I know, the Messiah, when He comes, He'll explain everything. And then there is that great statement by Jesus that should send a tingle down your spine. I, the one speaking to you, am He. This Messiah that was promised, prophesied many years ago, suddenly this wee woman at the well meets the Messiah. And He says,

I know all about you, your husbands, your lack of love, your tedious life, your coming to this well. I am who you need. I am the Messiah who not only explained to you, I can be to you everything that you need. And that is really what the resurrection is really all about. She has this personal encounter with Jesus, but not just a Jew as the Messiah. It has such an impact on her that He's offering her living water. He doesn't just say it's just for the Jews. It's not for you. You've failed. You're miserable.

He comes and He says, if you knew who was talking to you, you would ask Him for more, for a better water than the water that you come for. And she's so excited by the fact that Jesus knows her. Look at, she says in verse 29, she leaves her water jar. Suddenly the humdrum of life is not that important.

That's the whole reason. She leaves her water jar and tells us something. She's excited. She runs away to tell others, come see a man who told me everything I've ever done. That is what impresses her. That is her felt need. She's had men in her life. Aren't they really interested in her for whatever reason? Might be her fault. Might be their fault. We don't know. But she's really struggled to have somebody who knows her. And now she's met somebody who comes and reveals himself. I know you. I know who you are. Could this be the Messiah? And then they come and they hear. They hear His words.

And they are convinced He's the Messiah. Not because just of her testimony. He said, that was good. But we believe, not because of what you said, but because we have met Jesus ourself. And really, that is what Easter is all about. It is about having a relationship, a personal relationship with a risen Savior. He walks with me. He talks with me along life's narrow way. When we leave this place, Monday will come. I don't think the weather's going to be great this week. A wet, cold, miserable April, April, or whatever. It doesn't matter what befalls us. Injury, illness, whatever, financial hardship, loneliness, depression, confusion. We have somebody who knows us and who chooses to give us living water and to walk with Him. I want to just show you then a testimony of a woman. She's, it's a wee bit old, but you'll bear with it. You'll get the picture. She's a doctor. Somebody very different from this woman at the well. She's a respectable person. Somebody who you would think has it all together. So, let's look at this testimony. A few more thoughts, and then another testimony, and we're finished. Thanks, Phil.

[19 : 53] Sally Venn, along with her Welsh husband, Carl, live in Bryn Mawr in South Wales. They're both GPs.

Well, I love it here. I've lived here for 22 years. It is beautiful, and I feel we're very privileged to live here. It's a very special, warm place to be. Very much a place where you can be yourself, and people are just very open and welcoming.

The people she serves were once part of a thriving mining community. They are no more. The mines closed during the 80s, and so I suppose what we're seeing is the legacy of that.

It makes it a hard place for people to live, but there's great hope here as well. Hello, Maureen. It's Dr. Venn here.

Hello, darling. Coming in. Nice to see you. Thank you. In our job, we see the fragility of life. We see things that can hit people, and as you get older, amongst friends and family, you realise that everything that we place our security on and in, in the world that we live in, ultimately can be stripped away.

[21 : 21] But Sally has discovered that her faith in Christ has given her something which cannot be stripped away. One of the things that has really hit me and has been particularly precious to me over the last three to four years is the growing realisation of the security that we have in Christ.

And this came really as a result of a health scare where I had a problem that is precancerous but could develop into cancer and hasn't been completely dealt with.

But what it helped me to see was that whatever happens, he is with me, and that there can be nothing more secure than that. That sense of security enabled Sally and her husband, Carl, to make a huge decision, to resign from their practice in the Welsh Valleys so they could spend more time in a land they've visited often and grown to love, India.

What I love about India is the freedom of that society.

Relationships are what's important and time for people is what's important. And people are not consumed by materialism, the getting of things, and that's what we found very appealing.

[22 : 37] Sally and Carl have come to Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh. They're here for ten weeks. We're training health workers who work in schools in various communities across India to support children and their families in adopting health-promoting behaviours.

So our main messages are really around hygiene, accessing immunisation and good nutrition. These are very simple messages, but they are life-saving messages. If communities can be transformed around those issues, then many, many lives will be saved.

Back in Brynmore, Sally and Carl continue to be doctors, but now as locums, taking on work as and when it's there.

And Sally is finding that her faith helps her cope without the security of working for a practice. There's a passage in the Bible that really helps me, particularly when I'm feeling anxious and worried about how I might cope with the day or where something's going to come from or what will happen.

And that verse says, My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in Christ Jesus. And that's a real encouragement to me. It's not necessarily what I want, but it's everything I need.

[23 : 50] And that is just a great security. And I don't need to look anywhere else because he will provide it and look after me. There is someone who came to know Jesus as her own Lord and Savior.

He walks with her. He talks with her. How do we know this Jesus? Maybe you're here this morning and you don't know him personally. You've heard about him. And even in the news this week, I saw a wee trailer for something.

I don't know what it was. And this guy, he must have been in his 30s, said, So Jesus was actually a historical figure. He thought he was kind of made up. He was very real.

And on Friday, we remembered his death. How can we have a relationship with Jesus? Because he died on the cross for you and for me. He took that barrier that separates us between us and God.

And it's our sin, our personal sin. People today, they'll say Easter Sunday is a time just to spend time with family and friends. Not really interested in God. And such were you and I at one time.

[24 : 59] And they won't reach out to him. They will get by on their own strength. But if you're a Christian, you know that there has been a barrier between you and God. And that's been your sin.

And you've had to come and confess that. And you don't have to earn your way into God's favor again. Jesus has died for your sins. That's what Good Friday is about.

That's why the cross is important. Because he has died for our sins and his sacrifice has been accepted, he has been raised back to life. His sacrifice for sin has been accepted.

Death has been defeated. Sin has been defeated. And therefore, we can come confidently before him. We don't have to live a life to please him to be accepted. We come as we are, as sinners, with all our weakness.

Let this woman at the well. With all our frailties and misunderstandings. We come as we are, saying, Lord, forgive me. Forgive me for my sins. Come into my life and make me whole.

[25 : 55] And in these living waters. This water just speaks of life, doesn't it? And refreshment. It's this picture of just joy and peace. Even in the midst of difficulties.

She went home with no water, yet knowing joy. A whole town knew the joy of the Lord because they had met with Jesus. And that's what's possible. Christ, the risen Savior, offers us living water that wells up all the way right through to eternal life.

Not living water for a week, but all the way right through to eternal life. And that's what he offers us this morning. He offers us this every day.

And maybe you already know this. Maybe you don't. Maybe you're here and you're going through the motions. Maybe even as a Christian, you've forgotten. You've seen it theologically. You know the verses.

But do you really feel the Lord loves you and cares for you and walks with you? I want to just close by listening to one more testimony. This time it's by a man quite well known.

[26 : 57] If you know rugby, you'll know this guy. So we'll watch this and then a few words and then we'll close in prayer. I will close in song. Thanks. Wigan, in winter.

It's a far cry from the balmy beaches of the South Pacific. But in 1993, it became the new home for the former New Zealand all-black, Inga Twigamala.

As well as having to adapt to a different country, he also had to change to a different game, from rugby union to rugby league. Well, there's a lot of difference.

First of all, it's the two games that are miles apart. It's totally different games altogether. I came here and not expecting to do a lot in the first few months.

But I was thrown into the deep end, meaning that my whole training schedule had to be different to that of what I'm used to. They brought me through some physical training that I've never encountered in my whole life.

[28 : 22] And for three and a half months, I used to wake up at three o'clock in the morning running the bath so I could soak my body in it. And it was hard. It was really hard. I mean, the level of fitness that is required to play rugby league is out of this world.

One of the highlights of Inga's career was with the New Zealand all-blacks. It was his very last game with them, against the Barbarians. Twigamala goes. Twigamala over the 22.

Twigamala all the way. A magnificent score. It was when he was a schoolboy that Inga was challenged by what he saw happening in the lives of his best schoolmates.

And I started seeing a real change in them that made me sit up and think, well, what's going on here? You know, these boys were just real bad boys, really mischief, got into a lot of mischief and trouble.

And to see them change, I couldn't accept it because I thought, no, these are my best friends. These are the friends that I always used to hang around and get into trouble with. But I saw something that I've never seen in a lot of my friends, and that was I saw peace.

[29 : 29] I saw joy. I saw love. I wanted it as well. I wanted to be part of it. I didn't want to miss out. And it was then that, you know, through an economics teacher of mine, Anita Turner, she explained to me that the three steps of salvation.

And I needed to recognize that I'm a sinner and confess with my mouth that God sent his son for me. And to believe that he will come into my life and change me into his child.

I remember that night when I went to bed. I remember I did, I did, I wake up for an unknown reason.

I just woke up and I felt this awesome peace, anointing peace, that just came over me. I mean, I felt it from inside me.

And that was, that was when I knew that I was forgiven. I knew that God had accepted me. I've always liked to know that I can go out in the field and really express myself.

[30 : 38] You usually have that tag that Christians are wimps. The generation we're living now, it's not cool to be a Christian. And that is what a lot of the people in the world think today.

That being a Christian is for a sister season. And it's not right to be a Christian. And I'm thankful that God has opened my eyes to the reality of it all. One of Inga's teammates at Wigan was hugely influenced by his faith.

He not only went on to become England Rugby Union captain in 2005, but also a fellow Christian. His name, Jason Robinson. He was a Christian.

He was a Christian. He was a Christian. He was a Christian. He was a Christian. He was a Christian. He was a Christian. He was a Christian. He was a Christian. So, that one word about the resurrection, it's about having a relationship with a living Savior. And that's what the Lord would want for you and every single one of us this morning.

To have that real relationship with him today, tomorrow, and the days that lie ahead. To witness, to serve him as we serve and as we follow him.

[32 : 12] We're going to stand. We're going to sing. It's one. Yeah, I think we usually sing this at Easter. There is a hope that burns within my heart. We have a hope.

We have a hope today. We have a hope tomorrow. So, let's think of that relationship that we have with our risen Savior as we stand and sing this together. Thank you, folks. Let's close in prayer.

Our loving Father, we praise and thank you. And we look forward to that day, Lord, when we are truly home. When we experience the love and joy of seeing our Savior.

But we thank you, Father, that we can know that in a great measure, even these days, Lord. Even among sorrow and trials and pain and suffering. For you walk with us.

You lead us. You guide us. You strengthen us. You give us peace and joy in believing. We pray, Father, that we will know that, Lord, in the coming days. And I pray, Father, for any here this morning who still don't know you, perhaps, as Lord and Savior.

[33 : 09] I pray, Lord, that you would speak to them even in their felt needs. Lord, that they might come to Christ, the fount of living waters. And find in him all their needs met. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Thank you, folks. Please remember the celebratory cake for Ruby this morning. Thank you, folks.