

## "To See the Harvest in Front of Us"

### *John 4*

Our theme for 2020 is 'Open our Eyes'. The last time I preached on this theme was before the COVID-19 virus affected our world. That message was from Zech. 4, which encouraged us to have our eyes open to see the small things God is doing all around us. However, sometimes God wants to do big things too. In addition, He wants us to have our eyes open to see that when He saves even one person (which seems 'small') we have to realize that that may be the start of something big. And every person saved is a big thing. Angels rejoice when even one sinner repents (Luke 15:10).

Here in the Gospel of John, John the apostle presents side by side by side two people who need saving. In John 3 it's Nicodemus. In John 4 it's the Samaritan woman. From a human perspective you couldn't paint a more opposite picture. The respected, righteous, serious, searching well-off Pharisee comes to Jesus for spiritual answers at night. In John 4 you have the disrespected, culturally unclean, indifferent, flippant, most-probably poor despised Samaritan woman who encounters Jesus in the middle of the day. It is not a coincidence. John pairs these two together to remind us that both in the eyes of God are really the same and we often don't see them that way. This reminds us of our need to open our eyes to see that ...

### **Everyone Needs to Be Saved** **(Ch. 3 & 4)**

The 'righteous' Jew is self-righteous and the 'immoral' woman is probably a victim of bad circumstances, but both need Jesus. With both, Jesus uses different words and different methods to speak to their need for salvation. With the self-righteous Pharisee Jesus challenges his biblical intellect by asking Nicodemus why doesn't he know about spiritual birth when God clearly shows it in Ezekiel 37, where God's Spirit brings dead Jewish bones back to life? With the Samaritan woman, Jesus catches her attention by offering her access to living water so that she'll never have to be thirsty again. Spoiler alert: both will get saved. Nicodemus will take more time because perhaps he has more to lose. The Samaritan woman has little to lose and comes to Jesus far quicker.

But that's just to remind us that everyone needs salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The ones who look good and even do good, do it to make themselves look right before people and hope before God. Nevertheless, God does not accept anyone based on his or her good works. It's whether you believe Jesus is God's only Son sent to die for our sins that determines God's acceptance of us. If we're honest we're less inclined to witness to the nicer people, the religious people, the do-gooders of society because their niceness lulls us into forgetting they still need Jesus. Yet we may not witness to the disrespected and culturally unclean of society thinking they would have no interest in Jesus. So John puts these two back to back to remind us of everyone's need for salvation. Moreover, he sets us up at the end of chapter 2 for this. In Ch. 2 Jesus performed the miracle of turning the water into wine at the wedding in Cana in Galilee. Then He went to Jerusalem for the Passover where He turned the tables over the first time in the Gentile Court, causing a raucous. And they demanded a sign (since they heard He already did one up north) to prove He had the authority to do this. To which He answered that He would destroy the temple and raise it in 3 days (referring to Himself). Then we read this at the end of Ch. 2,

*23 Now while He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs He was performing and believed in His name. 24 But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all people. 25 He did not need any testimony about mankind, for He knew what was in each person.*

To illustrate this we then hear about Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman.

After Jesus encounters Nicodemus, Nicodemus slowly fades from the scene and we don't hear a response from him until later. After this Jesus and His disciples leave for the Judean wilderness and we encounter John the Baptist once more. People approach John and tell him more people are going to Jesus and His followers for baptism instead of John. John wisely points that he is the friend of the groom and not the groom. Jesus is the One who should be followed. Whoever believes in Him will have eternal life.

So Ch. 4 begins with Jesus leaving Judea to go north to Galilee because people are aware of His growing following while John is still ministering. To avoid any possible tension between the two groups Jesus leaves for Galilee but He must go through Samaria. While Samaritans and Jews did not get along, many Jews still travelled through Samaria because it was quicker. When we read that they did not have any dealings with one another it was mostly because the Rabbi's ruled that it would be sin to be found indebted to a Samaritan. Once in awhile there might be a slight skirmish if the Jews passed through but mostly they just avoided each other. The disciples do buy food there, so it wasn't unheard of for Jews and Samaritans to have some interaction. But only when necessary I'm sure.

Jesus "had" to go through Samaria. There was divine purpose along the journey. Too often we're so focused on the goal of wherever it is we're doing (go to the store, get out; go to work, come home; go to church, get out quickly; go to the gym, get out; go to the kid's game, get out, etc.) that we miss divinely arranged appointments to connect with a hurting believer or a soul in need of saving. So often God's goal is in the journey:

## **Don't Miss the Journey for the Goal** **(4:4-15)**

The disciples will not get this when they come back. They don't know why Jesus is talking to this woman since according to the Rabbis to talk with any woman in public makes you unclean, let alone a Samaritan. And to accept water from her would also be considered unclean. Jesus shows her that none of these concern Him because they are not biblical. Sometimes we are so concerned about what people think of us, for fear of being associated with someone we may not normally associate with, that we miss the opportunity for them to hear about Jesus. Everyone needs Jesus. Only Jesus knows their hearts. Remember the one who most people would think was least likely to accept Christ in these two chapters accepts Christ (and someone else we wouldn't expect either accepts Christ before this chapter ends).

So let's be a little more sensitive to God's purpose in our life in our mini journeys that we make to the store, the game, work, getting the mail or wherever it is we're going to that is so important [!]; to be open to connect with people who need encouragement or need saving.

Jacob's well is still around today. A Greek Orthodox monastery was built over and around it to preserve this holy spot. The well is 75-100 feet deep and still draws water. There is a ledge upon which one can sit. Jesus sits at Jacob's well, which would bring back memories of Gen. 24 where Eliezer finds Rebekah, Jacob's' future wife. Jacob would later buy this piece of property near

Shechem in Gen. 33:19. The same spot of land that Joshua would lay to rest the bones of Joseph in Josh. 24:32. None of these things are lost to the Jewish reader nor to Jesus.

The woman comes alone at the 6<sup>th</sup> hour (noon) to get water, obviously to avoid other women. The cultural thing to do was that Jesus would withdraw Himself from the Samaritan woman in silence while she finished getting her water. Instead, He talks to her (!) and asks her for water (making Him indebted to a Samaritan!) risking becoming unclean because He has no vessel for water. The typical water vessel while travelling was a leather pouch you would roll up when empty and carry easily, then fill as needed. She acknowledges these cultural faux pas by asking Him why He is talking to her. As with Nicodemus, who Jesus bypasses pleasantries about being from God and tells him he needs to be born again if he wants to see God's kingdom, here Jesus bypasses cultural commentary and says to 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."*

Both Jew and Samaritan understood the 'gift of God' to mean the life-giving Word of God that God gave to Moses at Mt. Sinai. The Samaritans, however, only accepted the five books of Moses as the Word of God while the Jews accepted the Old Testament as the Word of God. Also, in Jer. 2:13 we see the connection between God and living water:

*Jer. 2:13 "My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.*

Living water was also a metaphor for a running spring as opposed to well water. And His reference to His own identity is a reference to God giving His Son (Is. 9:6) who gives life to people (Is. 42:5-6). All these little things are going on in that brief statement. Jesus puts some spiritual bait on a hook. Will she bite? She does! She knows He is intimating that He is a special Jew so she flippantly says 'You think you're better than Jacob who gave us [not true ☺] this well as did all his descendants and it [miraculously] survives to this day?

Jesus offers her 'living water' which she mistakes for a spring, meaning for her she doesn't have to go to the well at noon avoiding people anymore. And Jesus knows this because He knows what's in the hearts of mankind. So He asks her 'Go call your husband and come back.' Meaning, let me speak to the man of the house and we will make a covenant (much like Jacob and Abraham in Genesis did with sharing water with their neighbours). And now the unspoken 'elephant in the room' is out in the open. 'I have no husband.' And Jesus knows this and [I believe without judgment but with compassion] says,

*You are right when you say you have no husband. <sup>18</sup> The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."*

And at this point we have often felt that she is an immoral woman who avoids everyone else and Jesus points out her sin. I no longer think that way. Here's why. If she were an adulterer, why would other men marry her? Why wasn't she stoned to death (which is in the five books of Moses)? And if she is so immoral why did the townspeople listen to her because normally a man would not listen to a woman's report (check the disciples who didn't listen to the women's report that Jesus had risen from the dead [Luke 24:11]).

The fact that she was married 5 times probably means some of those husbands died. A woman could not initiate a divorce. She may have been divorced 5 times by men. If that were the

case the community would avoid her because there was “obviously” something wrong with her. However, if she lost a number of husbands to death, they would still be suspicious of her and avoid her because she was bad luck. And so who would want to marry her again. She is probably an older man’s servant who needed someone to keep his house and feed him. They probably had an arrangement. This woman wasn’t immoral; she was in pain. She suffered all her life with these multiple marriages that led to death or unacceptance. There’s no children here so she may have been barren. Another social stigma. She is a woman who has suffered most of her life, who Jesus will now redeem her suffering for the salvation of her community (and here is the link to Joseph).

She senses He must be a prophet to know her history so she avoids the subject and enters into a historical theological debate: who are the true people of God, the Samaritans or the Jews? My way of religion is fine, I don’t need yours. But Jesus makes no apologies for the truth of God and tells her that

## **No One Comes to God without Atonement** **(4:19-26)**

We worship here; you worship there. Not a new argument. If you’re going to claim you’re connected with God through Abraham and Moses then we need to be clear and God’s Word and promises extended beyond Abraham and Moses to Abraham’s descendants, ultimately to David, ultimately to Jesus. And the place of worship is Jerusalem at the tabernacle/temple. Why? Because that is what God’s Word says. And that’s where God accepts the sacrifice so your sins can be atoned for (not on Mt Gerizim).

That is the bottom line argument of religions. How do you get your sins forgiven? How can God accept you? If Jesus is God’s Son then He is the way, the truth and the life and no one can be forgiven except through Jesus, whose sacrifice atoned for your sins.

### ***The source for salvation is narrow (vv.19-23)***

At some point in our presentation of the gospel, we have to graciously yet unapologetically state that Jesus is the only way. Most religions acknowledge or are historically rooted in the truths of Scripture. Some add to the Scriptures while others deviate from it. You have to return to the root of truth, the Word of God and stick with it.

However, while the source for our salvation is narrow,

### ***The availability of salvation is wide (vv.23-26)***

This is where Jesus was going. When He said a day is coming when neither of us will worship on either mountain but in Spirit and truth, he was pointing towards worship of Himself not limited by geography, ethnicity, culture or sex. Jesus’ sacrifice does away with the need for temples to make sacrifices. So everyone now worships in Spirit and truth. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit at salvation unites us because we believe in the truth.

Then Jesus declares to this Samaritan woman in a clear statement that He is the Messiah, the One Moses prophesied would believe Him in Deut. 18. She obviously believes Him, drops her water jar and goes back to her village declaring she has found the prophet to come like Moses – the Messiah. And many believed what she said (v.39). Meanwhile the disciples are so caught up in Jesus’ cultural faux pas that they misunderstand why Jesus brought them that way. Normally, Jesus says, reaping and harvesting are two different seasons. But not in God’s economy. I planted, the

Samaritan woman is the first fruits of the harvest and now she is planting and the harvest is coming to you. So the disciples have to accept whether they are going to be used by Jesus to minister to people they are uncomfortable with. But here's the thing they needed to learn from this Samaritan woman:

## **Those Who Accept the Gift of Life are Required to Share it With Others** **(4:27-42)**

They end up staying two days in Sychar with Samaritans. Eating their food, Drinking their water. Staying in their homes! This is what happens to people when they get saved. Barriers come down. Fears disappear. Hearts are open. And people worship together in spirit and truth.

All because one person is saved, who then shared her joy with others and many more were saved. When was the last time you and I were engaged in a spiritual conversation with someone about God, Jesus or salvation? When was the last time you prayed for yourself to have an opportunity to share Christ? If you can't answer the first question is it because you can't answer the second question? How can we have a heart for people's souls if we're not praying for them? If we're too caught up in our own little world with work, kids and recreation that we're missing the divine appointments God wants us to have while we're on the journey to glory. We are here for a reason. You are saved for a reason. There are people in your life that God wants you to connect with to share Christ. You accepted the gift of life when someone else shared Jesus with you. Why aren't we doing the same for others? This woman was saved for less than a day! And she told others.

Notice the chapter does not end yet. Jesus and the disciples head to Galilee where a royal official (a Gentile who works for Herod most likely) asks Jesus to come to His house and heal his son. *"Jesus said 'You may go. Your son lives'. The man took Jesus at His Word and departed."* And found out that his faith in Jesus was rewarded. Wow, what faith!

Let us think about these three people in these two chapters. The nice religious person. The poor, long suffering, misunderstood woman. And a politician who works for the guy you would never vote for. All came to believe in Jesus! What if you and I made a 3-column list with headings of: nice religious people I know, poor, hard-done by in life people I know and people I associate as total opposites to what I believe in? Then you started praying for them and asking that God would not only save them but that He might give you and me divine opportunities to share Jesus with them. I pray our eyes have been opened to the harvest right in front of us and our hearts have been reminded of our responsibility as Jesus' disciples to go make disciples for Jesus.

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