

## Jesus Friend of Sinners – Bridge Builder, Barrier Breaker

3/17/19 – Pastor Randy

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John 4: 3-30

So he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

He had to go through Samaria on the way. Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"

Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

"But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?"

Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."

"Please, sir," the woman said, "give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water."

"Go and get your husband," Jesus told her.

"I don't have a husband," the woman replied.

Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband— for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!" "Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?"

Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father

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*is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."*

*The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."*

*Then Jesus told her, "I am the Messiah!"*

*Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, "What do you want with her?" or "Why are you talking to her?" The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?"*

*So the people came streaming from the village to see him.*

From this story, God has something to say to us about Himself, about us, and about what it means to love like Jesus loved.

A. What do Jesus actions reveal to us about God?

I. God's grace breaks through human barriers!

When Jesus addressed the woman her response was, "Why is someone like YOU you are speaking to someone like ME?"

There were a number of cultural barriers that would have normally prevented interaction between Jesus and this woman.

a) She was a Samaritan and Jesus was a Jew. Jews avoided contact with Samaritans.

The tensions between the Samaritans and Jews in Jesus' day were a revival of the tensions that had existed during the era when Israel was divided into a northern kingdom (Israel) and a southern kingdom (Judah). The region occupied by the northern kingdom was known as Samaria.

In 722 B.C. the northern kingdom was conquered by Assyria and the land was repopulated by non-Jews. The people of Samaria considered themselves to be descendants from the Jewish tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (hence the woman's reference to Jacob as "our Father"). They maintained that Mt. Gerazim, the site of their temple, was the place God originally intended for the temple. (see Deut. 27:1-7). The Jews, however, viewed the Samaritans as

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impure Jews, almost on the same level as Gentiles, due to the influence of the pagan peoples with whom they intermarried during the exile period.

b) Jesus was a man and she was a woman. Jewish men did not speak with other Jewish women in public. She was both a Samaritan and a woman.

c) There was yet another barrier. The traditional religious barrier between the religiously observant (*haberim*) and the less observant “common people” (*amme haares*). As both a Samaritan and a member of the “common people” who did not strictly follow the food laws, this woman, and her water jar – the jar Jesus was asking to drink from - would have been considered ceremonially unclean. This is an intramural (within the same faith community) barrier similar to the barriers Christians create that divide believers into categories of “the spiritual” and “the less spiritual”.

All the self-identification boxes that she would have checked placed her on the lower end of the social status scale while the ones Jesus could check would have put him on the higher end of the social scale.

Jesus broke down each barrier; ethnic, traditional, and socio-economic boundaries. In their place he built a bridge called love.

Some Christians would rather prevent Muslims from living in their neighborhood, viewing them as people to be feared and despised, rather than welcome them as neighbors to be loved. Should we curse them, or should we pray that they would come to know and worship the true living God; the One Who sent His Son Jesus to redeem them?

2. God’s grace breaks down the wall of separation caused by our sin. Sin is frequently identified in scripture as that which separates us from God. In Isaiah 59 we read, “...your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.” The veil in the temple was a physical representation of the spiritual separation between sinful mankind and his holy creator. One of the key – if not the main - NT metaphor used to describe what God has accomplished

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through the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is “reconciliation”: The bringing together two formerly separated parties.

No where in the text is she identified explicitly as a sinner, but the implication is obvious. When Jesus asked her to go get her husband, her response “I don’t have one” while true, was intentionally brief so as to avoid exposing the shame of her multiple marriages and current immoral lifestyle.

Jesus grace broke through the barrier of her shame. She came to the well alone. Most likely the time of her arrival at the well – the 6<sup>th</sup> hour - should be interpreted according to Jewish time, meaning it was noon. This would explain why she and Jesus were alone. The heat of the day would not be the typical time women would go to the well to draw water for the day. This begs the question, “Why did she go at this time?” The answer most certainly is due to the shame and stigma she carried because of her marital and sexual history. We don’t know why she had been married five times. Did her husbands die? Was she the victim of five unfaithful husbands? Neither of those are likely. Even though men had a lot more freedom to initiate divorce, by this time in Judaism divorce was no longer the exclusive right of the husband. Rabbinical law allowed for three remarriages at the most, so five is extreme. Even if all five husbands had died, that raises some questions in and of itself. If you are dating someone for the purpose of determining if they might be your future spouse, and you discover they have been married five times and every spouse died, I imagine you might hesitate before becoming number six. But even if she might somehow justify her practice of serial marriage, there was no justification for living with a man she was not married to. In spite of her lifestyle and history, she was not irredeemable in Jesus eyes. There was living water, new life, and eternal life available for her!

Jesus answer exposed her sin without shaming her as a person. Sin needs to be exposed if it is going to be cleansed and removed. He knew about her sin and he still initiated a conversation with her!!

3. God’s grace reaches down and lifts up.

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Jesus' reaches down to us in the degradation of our sin in order to lift us up and transform us into true worshippers of God.

Notice that the woman's reply to Jesus here compared with her previous replies? She is not nearly as talkative. She is very brief. Now Jesus really has her attention. His word of knowledge concerning her immorality caused her to acknowledge that He was a prophet. She proceeds to do what most people do when they begin to feel convicted of her sin – she engaged in religious speak. She wanted to shift the focus off of her and onto theology. Jesus put a quick end to her attempt to redirect the conversation towards the Jewish-Samaritan debate about the proper location for worship. Jesus redirected the conversation back to the heart of the matter: Not where a person worships but who, and how, a person worships. Worship which is acceptable to God must be performed in Spirit and in truth.

Worship in Spirit – worship that is motivated and directed by the Spirit

Worship in Truth – worship God as He has revealed himself/ not idolatry

We are not commanded to worship God as much as we are invited and called to become worshippers of God. Worship is what we were created for. Humanity is most dignified when it expresses worship to God. It's not the command of a megalomaniac tyrannical Lord saying, "Bow down and worship me!" One day everyone will express worship to God.

Jesus came to turn sinners into willing worshippers: To turn people who had become diminished and degraded; people like us who were turned inside out and upside down because sin had turned us in on ourselves. Jesus came to people who were upside down and inside, out right side up and right side out.

God didn't send Jesus to help us better adhere to a set of religious rituals and practices. He sent Jesus so we could be forgiven, set free from the power of sin, inhabited and empowered by the person of the Holy Spirit, so that our affections, attitudes, and actions would reflect the glory of God.

There is a connection between Jesus' offer of living water and his announcement that the time had come for God to create a family of true worshippers. Salvation enables us to worship; to reflect and shine with the glory of God. Becoming a child of God whose life reflects the glory of God

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(worship) is synonymous with being fully alive. Jesus, Paul, and Peter all describe Christian conversion as an experience whereby the convert is brought to life spiritually. The technical term we use is regeneration. When Jesus said to the woman that he had “living water” to offer her he was using water in a figurative sense to represent the life that she would could receive from Jesus through the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit is superior to water. Water satisfies and sustains us only physically, and only temporarily. The Holy Spirit has the power to satisfy and sustain us physically and spiritually, and to do so eternally. Sin degrades and leads to death. Jesus came to bring life by giving removing the stain and shame of our sin, filling us with His Spirit, so that we can come alive, beginning to worship God in Spirit and truth; beginning to learn to reflect glory of God now...and perfectly in eternity.

B. What does this encounter reveal to us about us?

This woman’s sin issue was both unique to her and common to all of us. It was unique in the sense that no two people’s sinful rebellion against God manifests itself in the exact same way. I have only had one wife, but she had been married to five men and was with a sixth man who she was not married to. This was scandalous behavior. Just because my sin was not exactly similar to hers, doesn’t mean I have been free from my own scandalous behavior.

Where everyone can relate to this woman is in her and our propensity to hide our sin because of the shame of our sin. I see this more frequently today that I did in years past. There seems to be a reluctance among Christians to acknowledge the severity of their past sin. I understand that it is embarrassing to talk about the fact that I may have committed adultery, or stole, cheated, engaged in physical abuse of others, was a drunk who recklessly drove under the influence. But the truth is that only when we face our sins for what they are will we feel the need to bring them to Jesus, setting them at the foot of the cross, receiving his amazing grace, and experiencing true freedom. Sin must be exposed before it can be eradicated.

The second thing this woman teaches us about ourselves is that we need to

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recognize that our need for real life is available through Jesus and actual through the Spirit. Our thirst for the life the comes from the Spirit must become so much stronger than our thirst to satisfy our physical appetites. Real life comes from living a life of authentic worship.

Our problem? We fail to recognize our deepest need. C.S Lewis – *It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.*

### C. What Should We Do?

We need to barrier breaking, bridge building friends of sinners

1. Look for the people on the margins. Build bridges to them. Look out for the left out. Accept the rejected. Seek to understand before making judgments. Don't act with prejudice. Be prepared for divine appointments.
2. Care more about their needs than their feelings and their wants. Be willing to serve their needs without strings attached. No I will help you if you come to church. Example: Benevolence
3. Follow Jesus "incarnational" model. Jesus identified with us in every way...except he didn't sin. Look for ways to identify with others.
4. Live close enough to people so they can see the difference Jesus has made in your life. It is not a difference of perfection, but a difference that shows our humble willingness to acknowledge our faults and failures

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