

“Jesus, My Savior”

John 4:1-42

November 2, 2008

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READ or WATCH John 4:1-42

I don't vouch for its authenticity but supposedly the following radio conversation took place between a US naval ship and Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada, in October, 1995.

The first contact was from the Americans to the Canadians: “Please divert your course 15 degrees north to avoid a collision.

The Canadians responded: “Recommend you divert YOUR course 15 degrees south to avoid a collision.

Americans: “This is the Captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.

Canadians: “No. I say again, you divert YOUR course.

Americans: “This is the aircraft carrier USS Lincoln, the second largest ship in the United States' Atlantic fleet. We are accompanied by three destroyers, three cruisers and numerous support vessels. I demand that you change your course 15 degrees north, that's one five degrees north, or counter-measures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of this ship.

Canadians: This is a lighthouse. Your call.”

http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=2357

When you encounter truth it might be time, as was said in the movie “Sahara,” time to reevaluate your decision making paradigm.

The conversation, in John 4, is about such a truth encounter.

It's a conversation between Jesus and a woman whose name is not even given.

I don't know why she's not named, but it does help us think of her as a kind of "everyman" – one person representing everyone, maybe even us.

You know from the account given us in John 4 that the woman had been married five times and was, at the time of this conversation, living with a man who was not her husband.

It would be easy to consider her as very different compared to most – to consider her an extremely immoral woman.

But the text does not tell us whether her husbands died or divorced her.

Remember it was almost impossible for a **woman** to divorce her husband in those days and almost as impossible for a woman to make a living without being with a man.

Given the very little information we have about her, I'm not inclined to judge her too quickly.

But I can feel a great deal of empathy for her.

She's made many attempts at finding love and security, all foiled by her failure or the failure of others.

And even now she's in a relationship with no security.

In the story, we know that the woman came to get water in the heat of the day.

Many suggest she came at that time, instead of the more usual cooler hours of the morning, because she would be less likely to encounter the silent judgment or even whispers of the other women.

What was life like for her?

- She wasn't young but she wasn't old.
- She wasn't rich but she apparently wasn't destitute.
- She wasn't alone but she might have been lonely.
- She had a religion but she wasn't sure about it.
- She was alive, but I get the impression she wasn't really living.

The text doesn't say she was suicidal or even depressed but I wonder if she often felt like the comic-strip Garfield's friend Jon:



Listen to Tom Brady, three-time “Super-bowl” champion quarterback, of the New England Patriots. (www.youtube.com “interview with Tom Brady” on “60 Minutes”)

I contend that Tom Brady, the Woman at the well and many others are in the same “space” regarding life; **they know there is something more but they don't know where to find it.**

Samaria was an area of Israel that lay between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north.

Jesus was on his way north from Jerusalem, in Judea, back to his home territory of Galilee when he stopped by a well near the town of Sychar, in that territory of Samaria.

Maybe like Islam's or Mormonism's relationship to Christianity, the Samaritans had some of the same beliefs as the Jews but the differences were fundamental and incompatible.

One author wrote, “The Samaritans...were the result of the deportation of the ten northern tribes when Israel was conquered by Assyria in 721 B.C. The Assyrians brought in others to populate the conquered territory and these intermarried with the few Israelites that remained. They came to practice a faith that was a variant of the Mosaic faith of Israel. Israelites regarded them as (illegitimate) heretics, imposters in the Promised Land. The Samaritans even set up a temple at Mount Gerizim, but the Jews, in a frenzy of patriotism, destroyed it near the end of the second century B.C. So, there were religious, racial, and historical animosities between the two peoples and mutual contempt.” (John MacArthur on-line sermon on John 4)

A woman came to draw water and Jesus, tired from the journey, asked her for a drink.

But in what follows, he offers her living water.

There are four aspects of the story I want you to see:

I. The gift Jesus offers is universal – offered even to Samaritans!

Not only was Jesus, a Jew, talking to a Samaritan but he was talking to a Samaritan woman.

It was probably inappropriate for a man to speak to a strange woman but it was certainly inappropriate for a religious teacher, a Rabbi, to do so.

Then you compound her religion and her gender with the fact that she was a five-times-married-cohabiting woman and it is no wonder the disciples were surprised to see him talking to her.

And even she was surprised!

John 4:9 “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (And the author adds: “For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.”)

When the author added that about not associating, he literally said, the Jews don't use with Samaritans.

It is very likely she was specifically saying, you people won't even drink from the same cup we use, and you are asking me for a drink?

If we think of the Jim Crow laws of our own country not that long ago, with separate bathrooms, eating establishments, and even separate drinking fountains, you get an idea of what she is saying.

But ask her he does!

There are no racial, gender, or social barriers Jesus will not cross to reveal himself to those he seeks to save.

Whether you are man, woman, Samaritan, Jew, Muslim, Mormon, Hindu, prostitute, nun, rich, poor, black, brown or white, Jesus said he had come to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10)

Later, just before his return to heaven, Jesus charged his followers with these words: Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea **and Samaria**, and to the ends of the earth.”

To a very parochially minded group of followers, both Jesus and the Gospel writer are intent on letting them know that Jesus is what the Samaritans say at the end of this encounter – “This man really is the Savior **of the world**.”

- Jesus is not some tribal god or national god.
- He is not the product or purview of the English speaking world.
- He is the Creator God who came into the world not to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:17)
And that world contained this religiously confused, morally desperate, socially ostracized woman at the well.

There is not a person here, regardless of background and history, whom Jesus will not engage – the offer is universal!

The second thing I want you to see is:

II. The gift Jesus offers is satisfying and eternal.

And so Jesus says to the woman, John 4:10 “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.”

In this text, neither the “gift of God” nor the “water of life” are explicitly defined, but they are apparently the same subject.

The Apostle John uses this word “gift” only one other time when he writes in Revelation 22:17 “Come! Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free **gift of the water of life**.”

Whatever Jesus is offering **is from God** and **is a gift**, and the gift is called “living water.”

Before Jesus can explain what he means, the woman responds,

John 4:11 “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?”

I don't think, as some do, that the woman's response is obtuse, that she just doesn't get it.

Jesus was obviously using a play on words when he said the gift of God was “living water.”

And when the woman responds, she's thinking of the same play on words.

She begins with the literal physical well and water (“The well is deep”) but she likewise continues with the spiritual when she introduces her religion into the discussion.

When she brings up Jacob, (the patron saint of the Samaritan religion) she is bringing up her religion.

The Samaritans did not accept any of the Scriptures except the first five books of what we call the Old Testament – the Pentateuch.

I think the woman is saying something such as, “You talk about a gift from God and living water, but I want you to know that our religion is sufficient.

Her attitude is: Who did this man think he was?

The woman was quite content with Jacob's well and Jacob's religion and didn't believe this man could provide anything better.

But Jesus responds to show her, among other things, that her religion and her beliefs are insufficient.

John 4:13-14 “Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never

thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

As I said at the beginning of the message, I think of this woman as a kind of “everyman.”

Like so many, she is going through the motions of life, she seeks relationships, she does her job, and she even has her religion but it doesn’t suffice.

There’s an emptiness, a hollowness, a lack of compelling purpose.

Oh, we too can go through the motions of life, but why?

Jesus offers more than the motions of life; he offers life itself.

I don’t think Jesus and the woman are talking past each other.

I think Jesus now responds to her introduction of her religion when she implies the greatness of Jacob.

He offers something infinitely greater and better.

Listen to Jesus describe the “living water:”

- The water the woman drew from Jacob’s well would satisfy thirst for only a short time.
- The “water” that Jesus offers satisfies once for all time – “will never thirst.”
- In fact, the water Jesus offers “will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”
- And remember, “eternal” is not just about life in the future, but of life now, a whole new relationship with God now.

When we describe the Christian experience, when we describe the benefits of being a Christian we are tempted in two ways: one is to promise too much and the other is to promise too little.

I know of people who want and expect Christianity to be an emotional high much of the time.

They want to feel the presence of God and see unique, even miraculous daily evidences of his care.

And thus they want their Christianity to also be pervasively utilitarian – if I’m sick, I expect God to make me well; if I’m out of a job, I expect God to find one for me; if I’m lonely, I expect God to bring someone to me.

But when I read the Bible I see a much deeper well, satisfying much deeper needs.

Philippians 4:6-7 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And **the peace of God**, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus

Psalms 103:11-12 “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is **his love for those who fear him**; as far as the east is from the west, so far has **he removed our transgressions from us**.

Deuteronomy 31:8 “The LORD himself **goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you**. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” Matthew 28:20 “Surely **I am with you always**, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 6:31-33 “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Philippians 4:19 “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

I think the Westminster Shorter Catechism captures it well when it asks and answers the question: “What benefit do believers receive from justification, adoption and sanctification **in this life**?”

“In this life, believers receive the assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Spirit and growing and persevering in grace to the end of our lives.”

On other occasions we have thought about the combination of “peace with God” and the “peace of God.”

The truly satisfying nature of Christianity is both.

We are now at peace **with** God because, by God’s grace, through Jesus, we are no longer God’s enemy.

And again, by his grace, we also now have the peace **of** God in our hearts and minds – we belong to him and are guarded by him no matter what the circumstances, until the day we see him face to face.

The gift that Jesus offers is soul-satisfying and forever.

But there is a third thing I want you to see:

III. The gift he offers is by grace, regardless of how “messed up” our lives have become or how far “off” our theology has been.

John 4:15-20 “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.”¹⁶ He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”¹⁷ “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband.¹⁸ 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.”¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet.”²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

Contrary to many, I don’t think we have to interpret the woman’s initial comments here as sarcastic or even evasive.

I think it is just as possible to interpret her words as responsive.

Yes, she continues to use the metaphor of water from the well, but after all that has been the metaphor they have both used from the beginning of the conversation.

So she may be saying, “Sir, I do want that living water; I do want something more substantial than what I now experience in my life and religion.”

So then why does Jesus bring up her past and her current immoral living arrangement?

I believe, most of all, Jesus wants to dramatically demonstrate he is not just another traveling rabbi.

By miraculously, omnisciently, knowing her past he indicates his uniqueness and he pulls her personally, with all of her failures, fears, disappointments and life-weariness, right into his story.

He’s saying, “I know you, I know everything about you, and I offer you life!”

Maybe this woman was widowed and/or divorced five times because of circumstances beyond her control or more likely, she contributed to the problems.

Maybe there were social and economic reasons why she was living with a man who was not her husband or more likely, she was complicit here as well.

But Jesus comes and pays little attention to her marital status (not because it wasn’t wrong for her to be living with someone who wasn’t her husband) but because (as one author put it) he didn’t want her to “think of herself as a being condemned to haul water and pleasure men.” (He wanted her to understand) that “she could be a witness to salvation, a sharer and proclaimer of great good news.” (Denise Lardner

Carmody in Blomberg (BBR(5) 1995, 13)

The woman is moving closer to understanding who Jesus is.

She says, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet.”

And when she raises the issue of the correct place for worship, Gerazim as the Samaritans believed or Jerusalem as the Jews believed, I don’t think she was obfuscating the matter or intentionally evading it.

I think she was raising a fundamental issue – who has the truth?

Today when we wish to discern a person’s understanding of true Christianity, we might simply ask, “Who do believe Jesus is?”

That one question is at the root of most of what Christians ought to believe.

Similarly for Samaritans and Jews, the fundamental question for them was where is the right place to worship?

This question is very important to her personally.

- Can this man (Jesus) offer better “water” than Jacob?
- Is he offering a “life” superior to the one I’m living?

And how does Jesus respond?

John 4:21-24 “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

“Woman, it is not your religion that will save you.

“Yours happens to be wrong. And it is true that the Messiah will come from the Jews, but the point is that the life I offer is not through a religion; life is not about a place of worship; it is about a personal and truth based relationship with the living God.

Jesus called it “the gift of God.”

It is all grace, and it is offered regardless of how “messed up” our lives have become or how far “off” our theology has been.

Lastly this morning, and most importantly, I want you to see:

IV. The gift Jesus offers is himself.

John 4:25-26 “The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, **“I who speak to you am he”** ...

How can I know God? How can I have right relationship with God?

I want to believe that there is purpose in life and that death is not the end – but how do I believe that?

Jesus says, “Believe **me!**”

- It’s not worshipping in the right place or in exactly the right way.
- It is not about your rituals or your religion.
- It is not about being good enough to earn my favor.
- It is about coming to me and trusting me.
- I am the way, the truth and the life.

John MacArthur tells of the time when he was preaching to a group of Hollywood Christian actors and movie makers.

A man came to him afterward and said “I want forgiveness of sin, I want to know Christ.” And he was broken, just broken.

There and then the man put his trust in Jesus.

His first reaction was, “This is...this is relief, this is great.”
He said, “I never...I never believed it could be this wonderful.”

MacArthur said I asked him what brought him to this point of trusting Jesus.

He said, “This weekend I really did some gross, horribly sinful things and they just burned on my mind. So I went to my priest and in that little box, I confessed all my sins.

The priest then told me to go, to take my beads and say 30 “hail Mary’s” or whatever it was.

“So I took my beads,” he said, “and I went over to the altar and I started saying my “hail Mary’s” but then I stood up and I threw my beads the length of the church as I shouted at the top of my voice, “Who am I kidding, I don't need ritual, I need forgiveness.”

And then the man said, “I just had to come somewhere where I could hear if Jesus could forgive me.” John MacArthur John 4:1-26 sermon

The gift Jesus offers is himself!

In him there is forgiveness, in him there is life, and in him there is peace with God and the peace of God.

Jesus has come to seek and save sinners.

Luke 5:30-32 “But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” 31 Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

It is us he came to save!

Dallas Willard wrote, we are “The flunk-outs, the drop-outs, and burned-outs. The broke and broken. The drug-heads and the divorced. The HIV-positive and herpes-ridden. The brain-damaged, the incurably ill. The barren and the pregnant too many times or at the wrong time. The overemployed, the underemployed, the unemployed. The unemployable. The swindled, the shoved aside, the replaced... The lonely, the incompetent, the stupid. The emotionally starved or emotionally dead.”

Even the moral disasters will be received by God as they come to rely on Jesus, count on him. Murderers and child-molesters. The brutal and bigoted. Drug lords and pornographers. War criminals and sadists. Terrorists. The perverted and the filthy and the filthy rich... Sometimes I

feel I don't really want the kingdom to be open to such people. But it is. That is the heart of God." *Willard, The Divine Conspiracy,, 123-5*

And the story ends with these words: John 4:39-42 "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in (Jesus) because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."

⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers. ⁴² 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."

The gift Jesus offers is universal – even to us.

The gift he offers is satisfying and eternal.

The gift he offers is by grace, regardless of how bad we have been or how far "off" our theology has been.

The gift Jesus offers is himself

The woman at the well met him and it changed her life.

- Oh, she still had to draw water each day,
 - she still had to deal with her marital situation,
 - she probably still got sick from time to time and
 - she eventually had to face death – of loved ones and her own
- BUT she now knew Jesus and her life made sense
because Jesus was in control of it all.

I wish Tom Brady could find that same peace and purpose.

Have you?

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Additional Notes and Quotes

The emptiness, even futility, of life without Jesus:

Actor-comedian Woody Allen stated, "More than anytime in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and hopelessness; the other to total extinction. Let us pray that we have the wisdom to choose correctly."

Taxi driver Jose Martinez said, "We're here to die, just live and die. I live driving a cab. I do some fishing, take my girl out, pay taxes, do a little reading, then get ready to drop dead. You've got to be strong about it. Life is a big fake. Nobody gives a damn. You're rich or you're poor. You're here, you're gone. You're like the wind. After you're gone, other people will come. It's too late to make it better. Everyone's fed up, can't believe in nothing no more. People have no pride. People have no fear. People aren't scared. People only care about one thing and that's money... Life is nothing." *From Can Man Live Without God by Ravi Zacharias*

Ecclesiastes 1:2-11 "Everything is meaningless." ^{Ecc 1:3} What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? ^{Ecc 1:4} Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. ^{Ecc 1:5} The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. ^{Ecc 1:6} The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. ^{Ecc 1:7} All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. ^{Ecc 1:8} All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. ^{Ecc 1:9} What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. ^{Ecc 1:10} Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. ^{Ecc 1:11} There is no

remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.

George Sanders



On April 23, 1972, he checked into a hotel in Castelldefels, a coastal town near Barcelona, Spain. He was found dead two days later, along with five empty bottles of Nembutal. Sanders was 65 years old. He left behind a suicide note that read: "Dear World, I am leaving because I am bored. I feel I have lived long enough. I am leaving you with your worries in this sweet cesspool. Good luck." His friend David Niven recorded in his autobiography *Bring On The Empty Horses* that Sanders had predicted, many years earlier, in 1937 at age 31, that he would commit suicide at the age of 65. In 1972, he fulfilled this prediction. Sanders' body was cremated and the ashes were scattered in the English Channel. (Wikipedia)

"A curious law of reversal seems to apply in matters of faith. The modern world honors intelligence, good looks, confidence, and sophistication. God apparently does not. To accomplish his work God often relies on simple,

uneducated people who don't know any better than to trust him..." Yancey p39
Reaching for the Invisible God