

John 4:1-30

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[0 : 00] I'm sure that we have read this chapter many times. If you haven't, then I am so privileged to have read this chapter for you for the first time.

I often wonder what it would be like, as someone who grew up with the Bible and who is so familiar with the Bible, I often wonder what it would be like to read these accounts for the very first time. And the kind of questions that would naturally arise in my mind. I would be asking, where is this story taking place?

I'd be asking where Sychar was, where Palestine was, who this woman was, this unknown stranger, this lonely woman who had gone out of her home and her town to get water that day and I'd met this stranger, this strange man who asked her for a drink.

And I'd be wondering who the man was and what kind of language he was using when he spoke about living water and offering her what appeared to be something impossible, kind of water that she would never be thirsty of again.

[1 : 16] I'd be asking all of these questions. And I don't think I would be satisfied until I discovered the truth behind them. I hope that's you this morning.

If you're not familiar with the gospel, I guess that most of us are. But just in case there isn't, then I hope that these questions plague you until you discover the truth.

And as you do, I hope that you put your trust and your faith in this same man that this woman put her trust in.

And I hope that your life is transformed to the extent that hers was. For this woman, this was an everyday routine.

Water was essential. Water, of course, is essential in every area in the world. But in those days and in that culture, in that climate, you couldn't survive for long without water.

[2 : 24] Water was a constant need. You needed it for drinking. You needed it for cooking. You needed it for washing. And so you had to go to the well. There were no taps.

You had to go to the well every day, probably more than once. And that was no easy routine because you needed so much of it. And water is heavy.

Normally, the women went out early in the morning for water at the beginning of the day. And they went out as a group. So the fact that this woman was on her own at the well in the middle of the day, it specifically tells us it was the sixth hour, which means 12 o'clock, the hottest part of the day.

The alarm bells should be ringing. And you should be asking, why was this woman on her own?

And the more you find out about her, the more you discover that she was an unusual person.

She wasn't part of the crowd. She didn't fit the norm. And we'll find out a little bit later on why that was the case.

[3 : 38] But in any case, she would have gone out, as she would usually do, to get water. Little did she know that that was the day when her whole life would be changed.

And I'm not exaggerating. She came back a different person through having met none other than the Son of God.

She didn't realise it at the time. For her, this was a stranger, a strange man. And he did something most unusual. He spoke to her. It just didn't happen. If you were a man in Palestine, you just didn't do that.

You certainly, if you were a Jewish man, you certainly would never speak to a Samaritan woman. Because the Jews and the Samaritans did not like each other.

There was historic animosity and conflict between the two histories. Nonetheless, by the time that woman returned to her home, her whole life had changed.

[4 : 54] She had no idea when she went out that midday to do something ordinary that it would result in total transformation. And it was all through that one short conversation she had with this stranger.

It's a fascinating story. But it's a story that repeats itself time and again, both in the Bible and outside the Bible. It reflects the way that God operates in order to redeem people and to restore them into a right relationship with himself.

That's what the Bible is all about. And that's why Jesus came into the world. But let's take things one stage at a time as we just spend a few moments thinking about the woman at the well.

Several things strike me about this passage. And in sharing these with you, I hope I'll be able to explain the passage to you. And we'll be able to think about it together.

Several things strike me about this passage. First thing that strikes me is that coincidences are not random. Very often we think about coincidence as random, as an arbitrary event.

[6 : 26] But if we believe, as I hope you do, that there is a God who rules over everything, then coincidence is not random. What do I mean by coincidence?

Well, the very beginning of this account tells us how Jesus was travelling from one place to another.

That's something he did regularly. Except on this occasion, he had to go through Samaria.

And simply because he was tired and he was thirsty, he sat down. It's the kind of thing that any traveller would do. There's something really ordinary about this.

And yet that was precisely the moment. If he had gone through that area one hour previously or one hour afterwards, they wouldn't have met.

And yet, somehow, their paths crossed. And that coincidence was to result in the woman's life being changed.

[7 : 35] It's not random. It reminds me that there is a God who rules over all and who had it within his plan that these two people should meet and that within their conversation that this woman would be changed.

I can't help also, knowing something of the history of the Bible, put two and two together.

Remember, we're told specifically where this well was.

It was the well that Jacob in the Old Testament had given to his son Joseph. Why was that significant? Again, because coincidence is not random.

Way back in the Old Testament, Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, had been commanded by God to leave his country and he had to make his home in a new land.

Now, that was a very difficult thing to do. But he did it because God had told him to. Jacob was born there. Now, when you bought a property in those days, that was your way of saying, this is my home.

[8 : 50] Nowadays, we buy properties and the chances are we'll probably sell the house in five or ten years' time and move somewhere else. That didn't happen in those days. So when Jacob bought this plot of land, that was his way of saying, this is my home forever.

And the reason he said that, it was more to it than he liked the scenery. The land was the place where God had promised to his grandfather and the place where God had given a specific promise that said, listen to this, in your seed, all nations will be blessed.

Jacob, along with his grandfather and his father, believed God and they believed that that land was truly significant and that God was going to do something truly marvellous one day, which is exactly what happened.

Because centuries later, here is the same well that Jacob bought and gave to his descendants. And the Son of God himself sits on the well and meets this woman.

And through that conversation, the woman is changed. She's brought to faith. Her life is transformed. Not only so, but after that, she goes back to her own village and she tells everyone else, who knows how many other people came to faith in Jesus, through that woman's testimony.

[10 : 23] Come and see a man who told me everything that I ever did. What that reminds me of is this, that our small acts of obedience, you might think that they are insignificant and that God's never going to do anything with them.

You're wrong. Our small acts of obedience are the very things, the very components that God pieces together to build his plan.

Just like Jacob buying that piece of land and leaving it to his descendants, a small act of faith was what God took and made it the occasion and the location where this woman's life would be.

Who knows how God is going to use our little acts of faith and obedience today. So, there's no such thing as random coincidence.

Coincidence is God ordering the events and the happenings around us to bring about what he wants. The second thing that strikes me about this is how God works in ordinary conversation.

[11 : 39] Sometimes it's difficult to strike up a conversation. Sometimes, there are some people who are better at it than others. I have to say that for myself. I'm not good at starting conversation with a stranger.

Perhaps it's something to do with a Scottishness. Some cultures seem to find it easier for there to be conversation than others.

We're very private in the West, aren't we? you go on a plane or a train and you don't really have anything to say. You just kind of keep yourself to yourself. That's not really a good thing.

And as Christians, I feel challenged by that. I feel that we should be far more given to conversation, even if you don't get much response from the person next to you.

Something that we need to, I think, cultivate. cultivate. Because it's through conversation that people get to hear, perhaps for the first time, about Jesus.

[12 : 39] And I have to ask myself a very challenging question. When's the last time I spoke to someone about the gospel? That's a really challenging question, isn't it?

When's the last time that I spoke to someone? When's the last time you spoke to someone about the gospel? I don't mean the last time that you gave a theological discourse.

God doesn't expect that of us. But I do wonder why we're so ashamed, why we're so embarrassed to say that we're Christians. Because the person that you're speaking to may be the very person who needs to hear the message of Jesus.

I know that the reaction is likely to be one of cynicism and apathy and indifference. I know the kind of world we live in and yet I also know that we live in a world of great need and great emptiness and loneliness where the one thing that people need to hear is the message of Jesus.

And who knows, maybe in your life, as you go about your ordinary, everyday routine that is within and the plan of God for you to come into contact with someone, just an ordinary conversation that may be the piece in the jigsaw that's going to result one day in that person coming to know Jesus as their saviour.

[14 : 11] This was an ordinary conversation except it wasn't. It sounds ordinary to us because we think nothing of perhaps asking someone when Jesus didn't have a pail or a container so perhaps he needed some help to get water from them.

We don't think there's anything unusual but let me tell you, this was dynamite. You just didn't do that. You didn't, if you were a man, you didn't talk to a woman.

Now, I'm not defending that. I think culture has moved on and societies have moved on thankfully but that was the reality of the customs at that time.

The disciples, we read there, were surprised when they returned from the shops and they found that Jesus was speaking to a woman. They were gobsmacked and so the woman was just as surprised.

In fact, she was taken aback. She was possibly slightly offended that Jesus would break or someone like this, this strange man would break with custom to do this.

[15 : 28] But I'll come on to saying in a little moment in time, Jesus is prepared to break with all kinds of human custom because this is important. because this woman may seem insignificant culturally but as far as he was concerned, every soul is significant.

Every person is significant significant and unique in the eyes of God and it was for people that Jesus came into the world in order to transform them, in order to restore them into a right relationship with himself.

And that ordinary conversation, as it begins, it develops. Jesus very quickly introduces, subtly and gently, he introduces the gospel in a very, very clever way.

He says several things in this conversation that strike me. First of all, several things about the human condition. He says this, everyone who drinks this water will thirst again.

Everyone who drinks this water will thirst again. Now at first, the woman had no idea what he was talking about. She thought he was talking about the water in the well but very quickly it becomes apparent that that's not what he's talking about.

[17 : 00] He's talking about something a lot more profound, a lot more important. And when he says this, he's describing the woman's life in one sentence.

Everyone who drinks this water will thirst again. He's saying to the woman, this is not the first time you've been to this well. You come here every day.

And every time you come here, it's a chore. I don't know how far away the well was from the village but it would have been a walk and it would have been hard work for her to come with her container or perhaps two or three containers and to bring them back to the village.

Every time she'd bring them back she would know that this would be short-lived. It wouldn't be long before after using the water she would have to come back again. Besides, the water, the quality of the water was not always guaranteed.

The well was deep. who knows what lurked at the bottom of it. Who knows what kind of other components there were down there that would make the water dirty and give rise to all kinds of diseases that we know about in the time that we live.

[18 : 21] That was a picture of this woman's life. a life where things ran out.

A life of constant replenishment, constant need, constant thirst, constant deficiency. A life of emptiness.

And it wasn't just this woman's life. It's a picture of the human condition as God sees it. And it was ever thus. Ever since our first parents took that fateful step of walking away from God, the human condition has been one of emptiness and need and brokenness and shame.

So Jesus is describing the woman's continuous need that will never be ultimately satisfied. I can't help thinking also that Jesus is also describing the woman's ignorance when he says if you knew the gift of God and who it is that asked you for a drink you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

So the problem with the woman and with all of humanity is we don't know God. That's what he says. He says if you knew the gift of God and if you only knew the person who's talking to you you would ask him you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

[20 : 05] The problem with humanity is not their genius their ability their skill their cleverness their academic abilities abilities they are vast you only need to look at the world around you to know that humankind is amazing and yet at the same time humankind is lost and we need to be brought back into a right relationship with God because we're under God's condemnation.

the truth is God knows that and he's done something about it to rescue us. If only we knew if you knew Jesus said the gift of God but the third thing that this conversation the third thing that strikes me about this conversation is the woman's reaction.

she's not going to take this sitting down she's on the defensive right away. It seems like as soon as Jesus begins to talk about her relationship with God she becomes very prickly and at the same time she becomes religious but not in the right sense in the confrontational sense and she reflects so much she represents so much the kind of person that you and I might talk to in today's world.

As soon as you begin to talk about religion they will bring up all the controversial issues of the day. Now for her it was the ancient conflict that there was between Samaritans and Jews but that wasn't the important thing.

The important thing was her relationship to God and whether she was reconciled to God and whether she knew God and of course the answer to that was no.

[22 : 15] The reason for that was because deep down there were many scars there was a history which was very very painful and one which Jesus had to gently and lovingly reach and he did so with amazing skill.

All of this religious talk was a front it was a mask to shield the woman from what lay inside which was something she didn't want to visit she didn't want to uncover.

See the truth was that this woman had had four marriages and the man that she now had was not an authentic husband.

Now we don't know what her history was we don't know why all of these relationships failed. We don't know to what extent she was responsible. She may have been to some extent and she may not have been.

She may have been a victim. She may have had four successive abusive relationships with husbands. We don't know. But the interesting thing is that what needs to happen in that woman's life is first and foremost to be reconciled to God.

[23 : 47] And that way she would God would transform her life forgive all her sin create within her a new beginning a new raised abundant eternal life life.

That she didn't have there and then. God was able to do in her and for her what no one else could have done.

in a way perhaps that explains why she was on her own. At midday when the norm was for the women of the village to come out as a group she was on her own.

Perhaps she was marginalized. Perhaps she had a reputation in the village. I don't know. But I do know this that whatever her circumstances that she needed God in her life.

And we are surrounded by people as a church whether we are in Aberdeen or London or Glasgow or Edinburgh or wherever we are we are surrounded by people who need to discover the same Jesus that this woman discovered.

[25 : 19] The last thing that this passage reminds me of is the reason why Jesus came into the world. Simply this to seek and to save those who were lost.

And all through the Gospels you see him coming into conversation with different kinds of people. There are some rich people, some poor people, some respectable people and some not respectable people.

But Jesus doesn't discriminate because each in their own way, each man and woman is a fallen man and woman who needs to rediscover God for himself or herself.

people like that woman would have been marginalized by the religious classes of that day. That's where religion had gone so badly wrong in the days of Jesus.

And that's why Jesus was such a revolutionary. That's why he said, it's not the righteous that need the doctor, it's the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but I've come to call sinners to repentance.

[26 : 40] That's why he went after the marginalized, the people like Zacchaeus, the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the people who were on the edges of religious society at that time, people who were despised and who were just simply untouchable like this woman.

Like another woman in Luke chapter 7 who came to discover the same forgiveness and newness of life in Jesus Christ and as she turned away from her life of sin she discovered the joy of what it meant to know Jesus and to follow him.

The joy of his forgiveness and the liberty, the freedom that that gave her. Ultimately Jesus would secure that forgiveness by dying on the cross where by his death on the cross sin was paid for. The sin of that woman was paid for. The sin of Zacchaeus was paid for. The sin of you and me our sin was paid for. And on the cross Jesus took the guilt of our sin instead of us.

And rising from the dead was God's way of verifying the truth death. The accomplishment, the victory that Jesus secured on our behalf.

[28 : 27] And that's why today the eternal life that God offers us is a gift. It's not something we can work for. We can't ever earn our way into God's favour.

it's God's gift that he offers us and that we simply have to take.

If you knew, said Jesus, the gift of God, please note that word gift. Let me leave that with you this morning.

you would have asked him and he would give you living water. Water that becomes within us a well of water that springs up into eternal life so that we may never thirst ever again.

That's what he continues to offer to people today. Whoever you are, male or female, whatever your condition is, you need God.

[29 : 36] You need to be reconciled to God. You need to be saved. And those of us who are saved, as a church, we need to share this message with the people around us.

That's the task that God has given us so that as representatives of Jesus, we go out with the same message to the same need to those people around us.

who, like this woman, are trying to meet their needs with all the wrong things. They're trying to quench their thirst with all the wrong things.

When all the time Jesus has come into the world to save them. Let's make that known in the days and the years to come.

Our Father in heaven, we pray that you will remind us of the freeness of your, the free offer of the gospel.

[30 : 42] And if there's anybody listening right now who has never yet come to discover that for themselves, we pray that this may be the moment that they will simply put their trust and take what Jesus has done for them, accept it, and so they will come to discover this great life that Jesus has given to us.

We pray that you will remind us of our responsibility to speak to others about the gospel. We pray that you will give us the opportunity to do so, like you gave Jesus with such an incredible result. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for what you did in this woman and for how it inspires us and encourages us to share the gospel with others. In Jesus' name, Amen.