

John 8:11 / John 4:10

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- [0 : 0 0] I'm going to do what I did last night and ask you to look at two texts of Scripture. We'll begin with a second one and then work back because I'll preach in the other order.
- John 8 and verse 11, just to read that one first, John 8, 11. Jesus asked, has no one condemned you?
- The woman says, no one, sir. Then neither do I condemn you, Jesus declared. Go now and leave your life of sin. Then we'll begin in chapter 4, the other passage that we read, John 4, and I'll just read verse 10.
- 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.
- I choose these two passages of Scripture tonight because of the theme of a fresh start.
- [1 : 1 0] We're working through John's Gospel in St. Andrew's at the moment on Sunday evenings. And last Sunday night I preached on that story in John chapter 8. And my intention was just simply tonight to take that story.
- And as I thought about it, I wondered how it would work if I took these two very famous stories, didn't deal with either of them in depth, obviously, but just allowed each of the stories to give just a little of their own message and see what the two together, how they might reinforce each other as they tell us about the grace and the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ and giving people a fresh start.
- There are many people in the world tonight, aren't there, who would just love to be able to, in some way, begin again. Their life has been so complex.
- Perhaps they've been hurt by so many people. They've struggled in some area of their life. Their relationships are so difficult. They just don't know how to sort it all out.
- And deep down they just wish they could start in some way afresh. Well, Jesus offers a fresh start spiritually to everyone.
- [2 : 3 1] It doesn't mean that all of the other things are immediately sorted out and forgotten, but it means that our sins are forgiven and forgotten. We're given a new heart and we start again with Him.
- The great passage in John, perhaps about that, is just back one chapter in John chapter 3, where Jesus speaks to this man Nicodemus and tells him about the new birth, that God can give somebody a new heart, make them a new person, begin a new and everlasting life in them.
- And that is a life that will never, ever end. If Jesus has given you a fresh start, who knows how long ago it was, but say thank you again tonight that He did that in your life.
- And if you're still looking for that start, please think about it tonight as we look at these two stories. Now, the first story is about this woman, often known as the Samaritan woman, whom Jesus meets at a well.
- He's tired and thirsty from his journey. And this woman comes up and Jesus asks her for a drink.

- [3 : 56] The woman is surprised that a Jew and a man asks her, a Samaritan and a woman, for a drink. But of course, Jesus has no problem breaking the protocols of His own society and jumping over these boundaries that human beings are laying down.
- And he, the Jewish man, is happy to speak with a Samaritan woman and offer her the gift of life. Now, as I was thinking about this particular woman and the imagery that I read from verse 10, I couldn't help but go back, as some of us perhaps do, we go back to things that we read a long time ago.
- They just stay in our minds. And I thought of the silver chair and C.S. Lewis and Jewel and the lion, if you know the passage. Jewel is desperate for a drink.
- There's a river with wonderful, cool, clear water. But there's a lion as well. Are you not thirsty, said the lion. I'm dying of thirst, said Jewel.
- Then drink, said the lion. And Jewel begins to be driven nearly frantic by the sound of the water. Will you promise not to do anything to me if I do come?
- [5 : 24] I make no promise, said the lion. Jewel was so thirsty now that without noticing it, she had come a step nearer. Do you eat girls, she said. I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms, said the lion.
- Didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it. I daren't come and drink, said Jewel. Then you will die of thirst, said the lion.
- Oh dear, said Jewel, coming another step nearer. I suppose I must go and look for another stream then. There is no other stream, said the lion.
- And that's the crucial thing, isn't it? That's what Jesus is saying throughout this gospel and clearly in this story. There is no other stream.
- If you're thirsty, you have to come to me and drink, says Jesus. So let's think about that thirst of the story for a minute or two.
- [6 : 32] And then I want to go on to the theme of worship just very briefly and connected with that. And maybe say something also about the way in which this story is making very clear that anyone and everyone is invited to come and to drink.
- And then we'll move on to the next story as time allows. But here is Jesus, as I said, inviting this woman to drink, offering to deal with her thirst.
- Thirst here, something she feels, of course, physically. But Jesus knows that the thirsting that she feels is operating also at a much deeper level.
- And he's offering to deal with her spiritual thirst. She says to him, well, are you greater than Jacob, our father? Father, this well goes way back and it's satisfied people for centuries.
- And you see, that's part of the point of the story as people first read it. Jesus' well is better than Jacob's well.
- [7 : 40] Jesus has come to fulfill the Old Testament and he's come to offer something far better than the Judaism or the religion of this Samaritan woman could ever offer people.
- Jesus' well is better than Jacob's well. Jesus' water is better than anyone's. And he uses this image of water to speak of life.
- In verse 10, he speaks of living water, meaning spiritual life. And in verse 14, he pushes it a little further and speaks of eternal life.
- If you drink of this water, you will never thirst again. And I think verse 14 is also saying something that I would connect with the new birth that I mentioned earlier Jesus talks about in chapter 3.
- You see in verse 14 how Jesus uses the language of a spring within. If anybody comes to me, he says, this will bubble up forever.

[8 : 50] He's offering to do something inside this woman's life. He's offering to give her a source of water deep within that will bubble up there forever and satisfy her for always.

Now, one of the reasons I want to connect these two stories is because often I think that maybe people miss one of the points that I think connects them, which is that these women, while sinners, may be more sinned against in some ways than sinning.

They're often portrayed in fairly lurid ways. And each of them is pictured as if she has lived her life sort of prostituting herself.

As we look at this story in John 4, I often wonder if that's fair. I accept that this woman and her real thirst has to do with a failure in one relationship after another.

You know, remember how Jesus says, go and get your husband. And she says, well, I don't have a husband. And Jesus says, well, you've had five. And now you're living with somebody else.

[10 : 15] So he knows her story. And that to her is a big part of her story, yes. Notice she says in verse 29, come see a man who told me everything I ever did.

He's just given me my life story. Well, from what we know, in a sense, he hadn't. He's just told her about all her failed relationships, her continuing searching for love, you might say, in all the wrong places.

Nobody has ever given her the kind of love and security that she has been looking for. If she's trapped in this cycle of behavior, I'm suggesting to you that she might have been in some ways more sinned against than sinning.

Because in that culture, it was men who could dump a woman, who could divorce somebody very easily. So it looks to me as if one man after another has dropped this woman.

And she's gone looking for someone else. And he has disappointed her and failed her. I don't think it's fair to think of this woman as if she's some sort of harlot, to use another word.

[11 : 32] But here is a woman who is now thirsting desperately for love. And she meets here the kind of man that she's never met before.

I think of her when she first meets Jesus as being pretty feisty as I imagine her. I feel she's a very real character.

And we can imagine something of what she looked like and the look in her eye. Imagine her with her hand on her hip, looking this man straight in the eye at the well. Because she's used to talking to men.

But as she goes into the conversation, she realizes that this man is different from any other man she has ever met. And this man is simply offering her a gift.

He's offering her grace from his heart. You see the language in verse 10? If you knew the gift of God, you would ask me for this water.

[12 : 36] In verse 14, the same kind of language. The water that I give, and you will never thirst. It's all a gift, a free gift.

It's all of grace. All Jesus wants from this woman is to give her a fresh start in his grace. I want you also to connect this kind of story with what we were thinking about this morning, with the importance of the cross and the whole story.

All of these stories in a gospel like John make sense at last in the light of the cross. That's why Jesus has come. I think it's interesting to reflect on the fact that in all of this talk about water and thirsting, the story is moving to the day when Jesus will hang on a cross.

And it's in John's gospel, in this gospel, that Jesus says, I thirst. Jesus went to the cross and suffered, if you forgive me, I say it quite deliberately and literally, Jesus suffered the hellish thirst that we deserved so that we might not go to the place of eternal thirst.

Jesus is going to die for this woman. He's going to thirst for her because he wants her thirst to be satisfied. I also want you to think, just very briefly, about the theme of worship that Jesus goes on to talk about.

[14 : 16] It may be, of course, that this woman changes the subject to worship because the thing is getting too personal. That's something I've done, we've all done, when things are getting too personal in conversation, and you move it to something a bit more controversial or theological.

And she moves the discussion to the difference between Jews and Samaritans and the place for worship. Verse 20, our fathers worship on this mountain, she says, Gerizim.

But you Jews claim that the place is Jerusalem. So, let's talk about our ethnic argument. Let's compare our religions. Let's talk about the place of worship.

And Jesus picks up on it, but of course, he says to her, the real issue is not where you worship, but whether you worship in spirit and in truth.

Whether your worship is, if it's spirit and truth with a small s and a small t, if it's authentic worship from the heart, or maybe Jesus was hinting at something else, that you need to worship with a capital S and a capital T, that it's worshipping the Father in the spirit.

[15 : 34] through Jesus, who is, in John's gospel, the truth. But whatever we make of that discussion, Jesus does call her to real worship, and he says, God the Father is seeking, seeking people like her to worship him.

him. I want to try and ask you to connect in your minds that whole theme of worship with this woman's search for something authentic and satisfying.

Jesus is saying, as the whole Bible says, that it's only when we find him that we actually are satisfied, that anything else is the worship of an idol, a God that will fail us, whatever that God might be.

I've only begun to think of this recently because teaching some pastoral theology at the Free Church College and reading stuff that has come from the United States more recently about issues like addictions of various kinds.

And a lot of these Reformed writers in the States are saying that the way to think of addictness, some of you will not agree with this, you may be professionally engaged in this kind of area, we can talk about it afterwards.

[16 : 59] But they're saying one key way of thinking about addiction is in terms of idolatry, that people, instead of putting the Lord Jesus Christ in number one place, are devoting themselves to someone or something else, that they're treating almost as a God that will give them satisfaction.

But it doesn't matter how much they worship this God, how much time and money they invest in whatever it is they're hooked into, it never satisfies, but it just leaves them more and more and more thirsty.

And at last, the only answer to that kind of false God worship is to worship the true God and find the satisfaction that He alone can bring.

So I think Jesus is very happily in this story allowing the woman to talk and she brings it to a discussion on worship and He brings it to where He wants that discussion on worship to go to.

Only He can satisfy this woman's thirst when she gives Him her heart and life and she worships Him instead of worshipping anything else.

[18 : 21] But before we leave the story, I also want you to see in the story the importance of seeing how what Jesus is saying to this woman, He's saying to anyone and everyone, and how this woman is actually an illustration of how open the gospel is.

You see, for example, in verse 14, the language of whoever, it's absolutely universal.

It's open to all. Anyone and everyone is invited to come. We've had the word world in the previous chapter again and again.

For example, in verse 16, for God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son. And then at the end of this story, you get the word world again.

That's how the story ends. Verse 42, this man really is the Savior of the world. That's the point of the story, that Jesus is for anyone and everyone.

[19 : 33] And one way of seeing this is in your own minds to compare the previous chapter and the story of Nicodemus with this chapter and this particular woman.

Nicodemus in the city, this woman in the country. Nicodemus comes at night, this woman comes at noon. Nicodemus is a man, this is a woman.

Nicodemus is a Jew, this is a Samaritan. Nicodemus is respectable and educated and all the rest of it. This woman is very different. Nicodemus has a name, this woman has no name, and so on.

You can find a dozen, maybe 20 ways to contrast these as two sorts of opposite people. And I think that's a key part of the point of these two stories being put together in the gospel here.

that it doesn't matter if you're a Nicodemus or a Samaritan woman, two opposites. Jesus loves you and Jesus wants to talk to you and Jesus wants to give you a new heart and a fresh start.

[20 : 46] He's a Savior for anyone and everyone here and anywhere in the world. Jesus, and Jesus alone can slake your thirst and be worthy of your worship forever and forever.

Let's turn more quickly to the other story in John chapter 8. Of course, a story that's controversial because you'll see in your Bible some wonder where it belongs.

It doesn't look as if it belonged originally in this place in the gospel of John. But I believe it's part of God's word.

Whoever first wrote it and here it is in front of us in John chapter 8. Now this is again a very famous story that even people who don't know the Bible strangely for some reason sometimes know about.

And when I think of this story for some reason my mind goes back you may not see the connection immediately but the connection is because of the idea in the story of grace and the emphasis on grace rather than anything else.

[22 : 08] Grace against law in this story. My mind goes back to a movie called The Magdalene Sisters. Which is a few years ago now but I think it's this century won Best Film Venice Film Festival several years ago.

Maybe a decade ago I'm not sure. And it's about the Magdalene laundries. These are places run by the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland and also in Scotland.

I was amazed that the last of them closed in the 1990s. and they were run by these nuns and young girls were sent to these places because they were regarded as having sinned and having shamed people dangerous in some way and they were sent to these laundries.

The theology behind it as far as I can see from reading a couple of books about it was that they would work and deal with the dirt in their lives by literally cleaning the dirt from other people's clothes.

It was meant to say to them you are dirty and the only way to deal with it is to be punished by dealing with other people's dirty washing in the Magdalene laundries.

[23 : 35] And I find the film I'm not recommending that all of you wouldn't be to the taste of everyone here but I find the film very powerful and very moving.

It focuses on three girls if I've got the names in the right order. The first one Margaret is actually well I'll just say the word she's raped there's a wedding going on and she's raped by a cousin upstairs and the thing that happens is that she's sent to the Magdalene laundries.

You know the attitude is well the guy's doing what guys do but she's sent because she is she's now a figure of shame so she's sent as a teenage girl to these laundries.

The second girl Rose I think gets a baby out of wedlock sent to the laundries baby is taken away from her and the third one Bernadette a very pretty girl is sent because her local priest thinks that she's a bit too pretty and flirtatious and she's in moral danger so get her into the laundries away from boys.

and many women stayed in these places and died at an old age in these places they were institutionalized never had a proper life and some of them had done I mean literally they'd done nothing and they ended up in these these laundries and as I said the theology is you're dirty you will deal with other people's dirty washing and maybe after a few years of this you will begin to deal with the stain in your own life it's the exact opposite of this story and the attitude of Jesus to this woman who's been caught in the act of adultery actually last Sunday evening I do promise I will finish on time so we're not going to get through this story now but last Sunday evening I preached on this and as we were leaving a woman in the congregation not a member of our church which someone who sometimes comes to visit said that long time ago when she was a young woman and it's more than one church life ago she was a Catholic and she wanted to become a nun and in the process of thinking through it she paid two visits to Magdalene

[26 : 10] Laundrie didn't realize all that she knows now about it but she might have ended up as one of the sisters of mercy so called in charge of one of these places so here is this woman taken by people with an awful attitude to her and they want to ask Jesus what he wants done the main image I'd like you to bear in mind of Jesus here is that he is being asked to act as a judge and he does act as a judge but he's a judge who's able to give grace to this woman I called the sermon last Sunday night so where's the guy which somebody thought was a reference to Guy Fawkes the day before I mean no connection with Guy Fawkes but anyway so where's the guy because the point is that here is this woman being dragged by these religious authorities in front of Jesus and they say this woman has sinned she has committed adultery well she's been caught in the act presumably there was somebody else involved where is he again it's all right through history the double standards here standards for men and for women

I won't start as I did last Sunday night going through some of the literature of our own you know 18th and 19th century novels and the like and the way again and again you see these double standards right through our own story and our own literature but here is this woman taken on her own there's this vindictiveness against this woman and this group of people are really acting as judge and jury they've already condemned the woman but they want to trap Jesus as the story says in verse 6 they want to have a trap as a basis for accusing him and they say to him this woman was caught in the act now in the law Moses said that she should be stoned what do you say you see the dilemma is whichever way Jesus goes they hope they'll have him there are problems on both sides but just to illustrate it on the one side maybe they might be thinking well if Jesus says stone the woman what will the crowds think now of this man who's been preaching grace and mercy so he might lose his following but he goes the other way and says oh don't stone the woman well what is he saying about scripture and the law of Moses so they hope they've got him in a dilemma in whichever way he goes they're going to have him for some reason and trap him now what Jesus does is I think confront them as a judge he bends down and starts writing on the ground with his finger and there are lots and lots of ideas about what he's doing here some people think he's just doodling that he's waiting for a moment or two that he's maybe illustrating his you know his attitude to these people who have brought this woman maybe that he's taking time to think maybe that he's praying you know they have all these kinds of ideas others try to work out what maybe he was writing if he was writing and they say maybe he was writing something from scripture from the law like Exodus 23 do not help a wicked person by being a malicious witness so that he's writing from the law and turning their law against them and what they're doing others think maybe he wrote

Jeremiah 17 and 13 those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they're forsaking the Lord the spring of living water so that he's writing a judgment against them from the Old Testament and maybe because it includes the idea of living water it sort of fits into the story here where Jesus has been talking about come to me and I will give you living water others think about the picture of the finger of God and Daniel you know Belshazzar and the rest of it you know the story from Sunday school many many and the rest of it a finger of judgment writing words of judgment on a wall and they associate that with Jesus so lots of ideas we don't know of course but idea that I came across from some years ago was somebody suggesting that Jesus is ironically playing the part of a judge particularly a Roman official in that society what the judge would do would be sitting he would on a tablet he would write the sentence then he would stand up and read it so maybe that's what Jesus is doing he bends down on the ground and writes the sentence he's saying okay you want me to play the part of the judge

I will write the sentence and he writes it on the ground and then he stands up and reads the sentence and the sentence is let him who is without sin cast the first stone and so Jesus hasn't broken the law Jesus is yes writing the sentence but he's done it in such a way that none of them can throw a stone they begin to go away one by one intriguingly of course in the grace and mercy of Jesus do you notice that he is the one who could have thrown a stone he is without sin but he doesn't do that what he does is turn to the woman in grace and mercy and say that he doesn't condemn her I mean try and think of this woman and how she has just been feeling a few minutes before she might have been feeling ashamed angry sullen upset resigned to her fate who knows she might think I'm going to be dead in a few minutes and then suddenly all her judge and jury and executioners have slunk away one by one and she's left alone with Jesus and once again like the woman in the other story you get the feeling that this woman is happy to be in the presence of this man who is different from every other man she's ever known she stays there she could have run away but she stays with Jesus for some reason he says has no one condemned you and she says no and then he says these amazing words neither do

I condemn you go now and leave your life of sin he's not saying that she's not a sinner and he's not saying that sin doesn't matter but he's saying I am willing to give you a fresh start now begin your new life leave the old one behind and live a new life I give you permission to make a fresh start in my grace and mercy and power and of course again this was a costly forgiveness to think about what we thought about already today around the Lord's table for Jesus to remit this woman's penalty and sentence is for him also to be reminded that he is going to pay the ultimate penalty the ultimate death sentence on behalf of other sinners throughout time throughout the whole world

[34 : 35] Jesus is going to die for her and for us so that we might not have to face the eternal death penalty for our sins that our sins deserve so I want you as I conclude tonight to hear these words of grace from Jesus and again to contrast Jesus with the kind of theology that I introduced from the Magdalene Laundries again it may be not mean much to some people here but Johnny Mitchell there's a Joni Mitchell song called the Magdalene Laundries which she wrote about these places and she says of these girls in the song we're trying to get things white as snow all of us woe begotten daughters in the steaming stains of the Magdalene

Laundries these poor girls trying to deal with their own stains in these steaming stains of the laundry and this poor woman taken by these men and the nerve they had just trying to trap Jesus no grace no mercy in any of these things these men are men of just law and these nuns were nuns of just works but here is Jesus the Jesus of grace who forgives this woman and who invites her to begin a new life a new life with him and a life will last forever and whoever we are and wherever we've been and however respectable our past or however respectable our sins Jesus comes to us too and he says if you're thirsty come to me and drink and he says if you're ashamed of something come to me and be forgiven

Jesus offers all of us grace and mercy from a heart full of love whoever we are whoever our friends are Jesus offers us Jesus offers them a fresh start in his grace amen I'll leave it there again man ground PAUL to see you in all you