

The Change Question: Do You Want a Different Life?

Series: The Questions of Easter

John 4:1-44

February 28, 2016

What a wonderful day today. You know, there is so much criticism about the church today. People saying that the church is still inside the walls, not engaging in the needs of the community, not caring about the hurts and pains of those outside the walls.

Well, today proves that's not the case here. We've prayed for people that most of us don't even know. Our week of prayer and fasting to fight the Satanic evil of drug addiction next week and our engagement with our community is proof. And of course today, we are making a real impact on the issue of hunger in our community. Thank you to all who have helped, and especially Vicki Cook and Susan Miller.

During the season of Lent, we are focusing on "The Questions of Easter" – questions in the Gospel of John that help us on our journey to Easter.

We've dealt with the forgiveness question, and found that we and those around us need God's forgiveness, and our own.

We've dealt with the life question, and found out that there are a lot of reasons people come to Jesus, but the one that is the most authentic is to come to Jesus because we love Him.

We've dealt with the grace question, and found that we must be born again, and that comes only through the grace of God: God's riches at Christ's expense.

If you missed any of these messages, you can listen to them from our webpage: germantownchurch.com.

Last week, we looked at John 3 and Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a disciplined man, a member of the respected religious leadership group and ruling council. He was a learned man. He'd have been honest in business, a faithful husband, a church leader, diligent in his Bible reading, and absolutely fanatical about morality. So no one was more moral, legalistic, and upright than this man. Yet he needed something that Jesus had. And so does today's person.

READ JOHN 4:5-30

Now, I find it amazing that this story is in the Bible. All of our understanding of 1st Century dynamics of the second-class nature of women and the Samaritans seem to be ignored by John's inclusion of this story in his Gospel. In fact, other than Mary the mother of Jesus, there is not a woman in the New Testament that has more written on what she said than this woman. And the result of this encounter is remarkable.

This second interview in the Gospel of John is fascinating, in that the Samaritan woman is all that Nicodemus, last week's interview, was not.

- Nicodemus was a Jew; this woman was a Samaritan.
- He was a man; she was a woman.
- He was learned; she was ignorant.
- He was morally upright; she was sinful.
- He was wealthy and from the upper class of society; she was poor, and probably almost an outcast.
- He recognized Jesus' merits and sought him out; she saw Him only as a curious traveler and was quite indifferent to Him.

- Nicodemus was serious and dignified; she was flippant and possibly boisterous.
- Nicodemus properly worshipped God in the right place; she, well...
You know your church is a red-neck church if:
 - The finance committee refuses to provide funds for the purchase of a chandelier because none of the members knows how to play one.
 - When the story of Jesus feeding the 5000 is read, people ask whether the two fish were bass or catfish, and what bait was used to catch 'em.
 - The pastor says, "I'd like to ask Bubba to help take up the offering." Then five guys and two women stand up.
 - Opening day of deer season is recognized as an official church holiday.
 - A member of the church requests to be buried in his 4-wheel-drive truck because, "It ain't never been in a hole it couldn't get out of."
 - The choir is known as the "OK Chorale".
 - High notes on the organ set the dogs on the floor to howling.
 - People think "rapture" is what you get when you lift something too heavy.
 - The choir robes were donated by (and embroidered with the logo from) Billy Bob's Barbecue.
 - The collection plates are really hub caps from a '56 Chevy.

It is hard to imagine a greater contrast in personalities than that which existed between these two individuals.¹

Part of the appeal of this encounter is the exchange between the woman and Jesus. They meet near a place called Sychar, which stood at a fork of the road, one branch of which went toward Capernaum and the other branch to Nazareth. The well at which they talk was located about ½ mile from the village. Here, at a hot and dusty fork in the road, Jesus helps clear up the confusion of years of confusion about religion and in the process, teaches us what is most important.

It appears to me that the statements of this Samaritan woman are assertions of what many people think about religion.

First, Religion is about who you are. Verse 9: "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?'"² In other words, she is saying, "We Samaritans are to you the scum of the earth, but we will serve well enough when you are thirsty!"

CHILDREN'S HOME YOUTH AT VINEVILLE.

People believe that religion is only for certain people, or that only certain people should be part of our church. But religion is not about who you are. Jesus says, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who I am..."³ Religion is about who Jesus is. This woman was a Samaritan, a member of the hated mixed race, was known to be living in sin, and was in a public place. No respectable Jewish man would talk to a woman under such circumstances. But Jesus did. The gospel is for every person, no

¹ Merrill Tenney, John, the Gospel of Belief, p 92

² John 4:9 (NLT)

³ John 4:10 (NLT)

matter what his or her race, social position, or past sins. Jesus crossed all barriers to share the gospel, and we who follow him must do no less.⁴

The second religious confusion is Religion is about what you can do. Verse 11-12: “But sir, you don’t have a rope or a bucket,” she said, “and this is a very deep well. Where would you get this living water? And besides, are you greater than our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his cattle enjoyed?”⁵

So many people have the attitude that if I do this or that, God will accept me. So religion involves some cosmic set of scales and requires a set of actions or appeasements that will cause God to look away from some of the other, less moral moments and restore the balance of our lives.

The woman correctly observes that Jesus doesn’t have a rope and believes that he also is nothing special. But Jesus tells her, “People soon become thirsty again after drinking this water. But the water I give them takes away thirst altogether. It becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life.”⁶ Religion is not about what you can do; our actions are so weak and temporal that we can do nothing to quench our thirst.

The third religious confusion is Religion is about what you no longer have to do. Verse 15: “Please, sir,” the woman said, “give me some of that water! Then I’ll never be thirsty again, and I won’t have to come here to haul water.”⁷ The woman mistakenly believed that if she received the water Jesus offered, she would not have to return to the well each day. She was interested in Jesus’ message because she thought it could make her life easier.

But if that were always the case, people would accept Christ’s message for the wrong reasons. First, Christ did not come to take away challenges, but to change us on the inside and to empower us to deal with problems from God’s perspective.⁸ Second, once we encounter Christ, we are not to sit and do nothing about it. Sometimes Christians excuse themselves from witnessing by saying that their family or friends aren’t ready to believe.

Imagine yourself sitting at an overwhelming feast of food, while friends, family, and the multitudes of starving people are outside, and you don’t invite them to eat with you. Jesus, however, makes it clear that around us a continual harvest waits to be reaped. Don’t let Jesus find you making excuses. Look around. You will find people ready to hear God’s Word.⁹

The fourth religious confusion is Religion is about where or how you worship. Verse 20: “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?”¹⁰ There are some people that believe you’ve got to do this type of prayer or that type of singing to be really religious.

CHRISTIAN GATHERING AT MOREHEAD STATE MUSIC CAMP.

⁴ Life Application Bible, John 4:7-9

⁵ John 4:11-12 (NLT)

⁶ John 4:13-14 (NLT)

⁷ John 4:15 (NLT)

⁸ Life Application Bible, John 4:15

⁹ Life Application Bible, John 4:35

¹⁰ John 4:20 (NLT)

Jesus tells the woman, “But the time is coming and is already here when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for anyone who will worship him that way.”

The final religious confusion is Religion is about intellect. Verse 25: “The woman said, “I know the Messiah will come—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”¹¹ Explain everything to us? Some people do believe that if you know the right keys, the right incantations, if you could just learn one more mystery, everything would be clear. But the only thing we have to know is this: Jesus is the Messiah. He is the only one who can save us from the religiosity of wrong belief.

The rest of the story is that the Samaritan woman immediately shared her experience with others. Despite her reputation, many took her invitation and came out to meet Jesus. Perhaps there are sins in our past of which we’re ashamed. But Christ changes us.¹² Repentance is what makes religion more than ritual.¹³

It was Mother Teresa who said, “You will never know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you’ve got.”¹⁴ REPEAT

As the woman retold her story to the people in her village, she began to realize something about the living water of which Jesus spoke. A sense of excitement welled up within her. An inner change was taking place. As her belief that Jesus was the Messiah grew, it was as if a spring of new life was bubbling inside of her.

Jesus had to overcome the obstacles of the woman’s indifference, materialism, selfishness, moral depravity, and religious prejudice, ignorance, and indefiniteness. Nevertheless, in this conversation, He led her straight to the beginning of an active faith.¹⁵

Eric Hoffer, moral and social philosopher, said, “People will cling to an unsatisfactory way of life rather than change in order to get something better, for fear of getting something worse.”

COMMENT

“The living water that Jesus offers is the most precious gift of all. To drink of it is to drink deeply of Jesus’ spirit of love and truth. Once your thirst for new life has been satisfied, you will be content, no longer thirsting for pleasure, power, or wealth - no longer burdened by the crushing weight of guilt and self-condemnation. Living water, the Spirit of Jesus, means peace with God. One more thing. You can’t contain the excitement of living water. The joy overflows! You want to share this precious gift with everyone you meet. You *must* invite them to come and see for themselves the Christ who gives the gift of living water.”¹⁶

Are you thirsty? For salvation? For a deeper spiritual life? Are you willing to change in order to receive Christ complete and fulfilling living water?

¹¹ John 4:25 (NLT)

¹² Life Application Bible, John 4:39

¹³ David Smith. From the files of Leadership.

¹⁴ From Christianity Today, Aug. 18, 1989, submitted by Don Maddox, First Presbyterian Church, Sherman Oaks, CA.

¹⁵ Merrill Tenney, John, the Gospel of Belief, p 96

¹⁶ Encounters on the Road to the Cross, Robert Martin Walker