

Mission: Method And Mindset

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's turn back to John chapter 4. Over the last three weeks, we've been looking at Jesus's conversation with the woman at the well. And it's a fascinating passage for us to look at because it's got so much to teach us. Last week, we saw that this passage reveals how the gospel answers the ultimate questions of life. In a very ordinary looking conversation and a very ordinary well in the middle of nowhere, really, Jesus points us all to ultimate reality.

He points us to God, who is spirit, who is to be worshiped in spirit and in truth. God, the God who transcends physical reality. The God who's not confined to a location or to an object and the God who alone is to be an object of worship. The week before that, we saw in this passage that the gospel meets our most personal needs, our struggles and our insecurities, all the things that make us kind of want to just hide in the corner. When it came to being impressive in terms of religion, this was a woman who did not match up at all. And yet, the passage reveals that that's exactly the kind of person that Jesus has come to save. And so, already we've seen in this passage an amazing combination of ultimate answers about the whole of reality. And at the same time, Jesus giving us hope and healing for all of our deepest personal needs. And that's part of what makes the gospel so wonderful. You can look around us and we can see just the vastness of the universe. And we can think, I'm so tiny. And yet, at the same time, we can look at our own lives and we can look at our hearts and we can think, my problems are so huge.

And yet, the gospel meets both of these needs. The gospel is the answer to both. It explains our place in this enormous universe that we can never get our heads around in terms of size. And at the same time, the gospel offers us healing for everything that's gone wrong in our lives. But there's one more thing that I want us to see in this conversation between the woman and with Jesus.

John chapter four is giving us brilliant teaching about our mission as a church. And that teaching is summed up in the verses on the screen. Jesus said to his disciples, my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Do you not say there are yet four months, then comes the harvest? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest.

And on that topic, we're going to explore two things that Jesus gives us in this chapter. He gives us a method for mission and he gives us a mindset for mission. And so we'll look at these two together. So first of all, we're going to think about method. The mission of the church is summed up in the words that we read at the very beginning of our service in Matthew 28, go and make disciples of all nations. That's what we are to do as a church. We are to go out and make disciples, go out with the good news of Jesus to the people who are lost. We and as people respond to that call, we are to welcome them into the church, nurture them, encourage them, teach them so that they too can go out with the good news of Jesus and make more disciples. So you've got disciples reaching out and making disciples who are nurtured so that they can then go out and make more disciples themselves. That dual work of evangelism and discipleship is what lies at the heart of the mission that Jesus has given his church. And that of course means that it lies at the heart of what we should be doing as a church this week and every week of our lives. And I've got no doubt that for every disciple in here, that is what we want to see happening in our community. We long to see people come to hear about Jesus. We're desperate to see them come to faith and to know the incredible peace and joy that only Jesus can give. And we dream of seeing people go from being unbelievers to becoming committed followers of Jesus who will then go out and reach out to others. And of course, that's what we all were. That's what I was, an unbeliever who became a believer. And by God's grace, I'm trying to reach other believers. And that's what so many of you are as well. That's what we want to be. That's our mission. That's what we long for. That's what we're trying to do.

That's what church is all about. And yet so often, we find ourselves thinking, I just don't know how to do it. We have people in our community, people here today who we love so much and who we long

to see come to faith. But we think,

[5 : 24] I don't know what to do. We don't know where to start. We don't know what to say. We feel inadequate. And we actually often feel quite scared of trying to tell people about Jesus. And there's lots of reasons why we can feel so, so paralyzed. We can be scared of people reacting badly. We think, well, how will this person respond? We can be scared that, you know, we'll start talking and then we'll just clam up and we won't know what to say. And sometimes, and I hear people say this, we can even be scared that we'll actually do more harm than good. And if we try to talk about Jesus, we'll make such a terrible job of it, we'll actually put people off rather than help share the good news of the gospel with them. All of these things can cripple us.

And their feelings that I've have, and I'm sure everyone here does as well. What do we do? Well, one helpful thing for us to do is to actually think in a little bit more detail about some specific strategies for speaking to people about Jesus. In other words, we need to learn a method for mission, a method for sharing our faith. And the best person that we can learn that method from is Jesus. And there's lots that we could say about this. I just want to highlight three brilliant things that Jesus does in this chapter. John 4 is a magnificent demonstration from Jesus about how to share the good news. He does three fascinating and wonderful things. Number one, Jesus found something to talk about. That's one of the wonderful things about this conversation. It starts with something so simple. Jesus goes up to a woman and he says, give me a drink. It's so simple. But through something so basic, Jesus makes a connection and conversation flows from there. And it's so crucial to recognize this. And often, you know, we emphasize the importance of the fact that the church cannot grow without the work of the Holy Spirit. Nobody can come to faith in Jesus without God's help, without God graciously working in our hearts. And so this woman's conversion is completely dependent on the work of God, the Holy Spirit in our heart. But at the same time, it is also absolutely true that if Jesus had not asked her for a drink, she wouldn't have come to faith. It's reminding us that wonderful conversations about the gospel are going to start almost always with something very ordinary. So if you think about trying to share the gospel with somebody this week, I doubt very much that that conversation is going to start with you, forwarding someone up and say, Hi, can I come around so that I can witness to you?

I think that's how to end a conversation rather than how to start a conversation. And that's not how it works. A gospel conversation will start off with something simple. It'll start off with something like, do you want to go for a walk? Do you want to watch the football together?

Can you give me a hand in the garden or with the sheep? Do you want to come for dinner? Now, these starting points might not always reach a conversation about the gospel. I imagine that there's lots of times that Jesus asked someone for water and it didn't lead to a conversation about the gospel. It might not always lead to it, but this is definitely where it starts.

Jesus made a connection with this woman and it got them talking. That has to happen. Talking has to happen. But not only that, the conversation has to be friendly. It has to display the warmth and kindness that Jesus displayed. Often we can approach witnessing, we can approach our work of mission and shading the gospel in a way that is a little bit like walking up to somebody and throwing a bucket of cold water over them. You go up to somebody and you dump the gospel on them and then you run away as quickly as possible. You leave them shocked, confused and thinking that we are just weird. Because we are weird if we do that. It's not a normal thing to do. That kind of witnessing is not good at all because actually it's more about us just not feeling guilty about the fact that we're not shading the gospel than it is about actually reaching the person in front of us. Jesus doesn't do that at all. He's so different. He's so beautifully different. His starting point is gentle and simple. But what's more, and we saw this a couple of weeks ago, in speaking to this woman, Jesus was stepping over cultural boundaries. And so we saw that the woman's circumstances would no doubt have been a bit of a scandal among the community. She'd had multiple husbands. She's now living with somebody in a culture for whom that was taboo. But Jesus spoke to her. He spoke to her even though she was a woman and Jewish rabbis didn't speak to women in this way. He spoke to her even though she was a Samaritan and the Jews and Samaritans didn't talk to each other. And he spoke to her even though her private life was messy. Despite all those hurdles, Jesus made a connection with her and he did it by finding something very simple to talk about. And it's all a wonderful reminder that if we are going to fulfill the mission of

[11 : 00] God in our community, step one is talking to people. And by talking to them in the way that Jesus did, we will build up a relationship with them. And that relationship we pray will lead to

opportunities to share the wonderful news of Jesus with them. Jesus found something to talk about. Second thing that Jesus did in this passage was that he gave her something to think about. Jesus gave her something to think about. And it's so important that we remember that step one, talking to people, is just step one. It's a first step. Chatting to someone's good, but it's not really witnessing if all it is is just chatting. And this is the hard part. How do we get from an ordinary conversation to a conversation about the gospel? How does Jesus make that step? Well, one of the key things that he does is that he says things that will make her think. And that's really what makes the difference between a conversation about water and a conversation about the gospel. Jesus says things that will make her think. And you can see examples of that. Verse 10, if you knew who it was who was speaking to you, you'd ask for living water. Verses 13 and 14, whoever takes the water that I give will never be thirsty again. 16 and 17, go call your husband. She says, I have no husband. You're right in saying I have no husband. 21 to 24, he gives this great description of ultimate reality.

God is spirit. Those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. Now, the first thing I want you to notice about all those examples is what Jesus doesn't say.

So he doesn't, in any of these, he doesn't give a full and complete explanation of how the gospel works. So he doesn't mention the cross. He doesn't mention faith or forgiveness or church or any of the many of the other things that are absolutely crucial to God's plan of salvation. Instead, he says things that will make her think. Some of these are in relation to the big questions of life.

As we said, verses 21 to 24 are all about ultimate answers. Others are in relation to very personal circumstances like 16 and 17. It's talking about the woman's private life. All of it, though, made the woman think. And I think that that's a very important lesson. So often, we can think that witnessing needs to involve setting out every single detail about Christian salvation, explaining everything in two minutes so that we'll take somebody from knowing nothing to knowing everything that they need to know. I think that happens almost never. Hardly ever do you have that, because it's not really possible. You can't explain everything. It takes a lifetime and more to learn everything that God has done for us through Jesus. And that's reminding us that your conversation with somebody this week about the gospel might just be a small link in a long chain that God is using to draw someone to faith in him. And so what that means is that you don't need to say everything. You can't say everything. It's impossible. But what we do need to say is we need to say something that will make them think. Something that will make people think.

And that raises another crucial point about evangelism. I think that over the years, evangelism has often been done in a way that implies that we as believers think that unbelievers are stupid. Now, we don't think that. And I'm not saying that people did think that, but I'm saying that the way we've often spoken has given that impression. And so the kind of message that will kind of go up to somebody and say, you know, you've got to get your house in order. You've got to realize that you're a synod and that you're going to hell. You need to come to church.

[15:17] That kind of thing. Often it's well intentioned, but it can so easily come across as though we're talking down to people as though we are right and they are stupid. We are superior. They are inferior.

We need to talk. They need to listen. And there's that kind of top down relationship. And it's incredibly off-putting. It's very off-putting and I think actually unhelpful. Most importantly, it's not what Jesus does. It's not what Jesus does. Jesus speaks to this woman in a way that shows that he has the highest respect for her intelligence. In fact, in verse 24, Jesus gives this absolute unknown ordinary woman who's a scandal in her community. He gives her one of the most profound theological statements that have ever been made. He does not speak to her in a way that implies that he thinks she's stupid. He speaks to her in a way that will make her think.

And that's exactly what we need to do. We want to speak in a way that shows that we don't think the person in front of us is an idiot, but that we believe that they're intelligent and that we want them to really think about the claims of Christianity. Now, you might be saying, okay, Thomas, that's great. How do I do that? How do you do that? Well, there are lots and lots of ways that you could do that. But I want to just give you three examples of statements that you could say to somebody this week that I am pretty confident will make people think. So I'll just give you three examples. First example is to say to them, say to someone tomorrow, church was absolutely brilliant yesterday. Now, you might be thinking, well, church wasn't brilliant. Well, if it's not, tell me why it's not. And in all seriousness, if you don't think it's brilliant, tell me why, tell me what we need to change and think about what you need to change. Because one thing is absolutely true is that if we are being biblical

as a church, then church will be brilliant on a Sunday morning. And if you do find church brilliant, and I know that some of you do find church brilliant, then just tell people, just tell people, tell people that church was brilliant. And I guarantee that that will make them think. Second thing that you can say is that you can finish a sentence or a conversation with the words, that's why I love Jesus. Now, let me explain what I mean. So suppose you're talking about politics. It's very easy to talk about politics at the moment. And you see everything that's going on. We see division, we see controversy, we see mistakes, we see corruption, we see broken promises. And we all find it incredibly frustrating. And with everything that happens in our country and in other countries, you can have that conversation and you can finish that conversation. Well, you can finish that conversation by saying, well, isn't it just ridiculous? And then you walk off. Or you could finish that conversation by saying, that's why I love Jesus, because he's so different. Or if work is heavy going, and you're talking to someone about all the pressures that you're under or about all the things that they're going wrong, you can finish that sentence by saying, oh, yeah, it's going to be a rubbish week. And then you just walk off. Or you can finish that sentence by saying, but that's why I love Jesus, because

[18:46] I know that he's promised to be with me through all the struggles that work will bring this week. Or if you hear about people getting mistreated, or if you feel mistreated yourself, you could end that sentence by saying, well, the world's a mess. Or you could say, that's why I love Jesus, because he was so compassionate towards everyone, no matter what their story or their circumstances were. So you can tell people the church was absolutely brilliant. You can finish a conversation with the words, that's why I love Jesus. And then say why. And the third thing you can do in order to make people think is the most obvious one at all of all, you can say to people, what do you think? And so supposing you're talking about a moral issue, say there's a big question in society about a moral issue, about life death, about immigration, about abortion, about end of life stuff, about whatever it may be. Instead of kind of feeling that you have to kind of bombard people with our convictions, just ask them, what do you think? What do you actually think about these things? If we're talking about problems in our society, when we think about drug deaths, homelessness, inequalities, strikes, just ask people, what do you think? What do you think?

If we're talking about health, and if we're maybe even talking about death, ask people, what do you think? If we're talking about our community's needs, ask people, what do you think?

Ask them, and let them answer, let them ask questions. And you know, if anyone's here not yet a Christian, not sure where you stand, what do you think?

Please think about what you think, if that makes sense. And these statements, they might not go anywhere immediately, but they will make people think. And if God is at work in the person in front of you, then he'll be one step ahead of you all the way, and he'll be at work through it all.

So Jesus, he found something to talk about. Jesus said something that would make her think. The last thing that Jesus did is that Jesus told her who Jesus is. Jesus told her who Jesus is.

[21:12] And that's really the culmination of it all. In verse 26, the woman says to him, I know that the Messiah is coming, he was called Christ. When he comes, he'll tell us all things. Jesus said to her, I who speak to you, am he. And this is where we want our conversations about the gospel to reach. We want them to culminate in us talking about who Jesus is.

That Jesus is the one in whom reality and experience makes sense. That Jesus is the one who can give us ultimate answers. Jesus is the one who can give us a worldview that is intellectually satisfying. Jesus is the one who reveals what God is really like.

That Jesus is the one who's come to give us hope and healing and salvation. That Jesus is the one who's come to meet our deepest personal needs. That Jesus is the one who is so gracious and merciful and kind that Jesus is the one in whom we all have to put our trust. We might start off talking about water or about the World Cup or about whatever, but we want to reach the point when we are talking about Jesus. And as we try to find a method for mission, there's so much for us to learn just from looking at how Jesus spoke to this woman. And so maybe if you feel paralyzed going into this week as a Christian you're thinking, I want to tell people about Jesus, I feel so paralyzed, I don't know what to do, then maybe your prayer this week can be Lord Jesus, when it comes to sharing my faith, please help me to do what you did. Please help me to be just like you. And I can tell you right now that every single Christian in here, you are all wonderful people to talk to because I've talked to you all and you're wonderful to talk to.

And for the people you know and love who've not yet come to faith in Jesus, your conversation with them can be a wonderful conversation. You absolutely can do it. But in these verses, Jesus doesn't just give us a method for mission, he also gives us a mindset. And in many ways this is perhaps even more important because even if we do have the right methods, we're never going to share the good news of Jesus if we don't have the right mindset. So how do we get the right mindset? Well again, the best thing that we can do is look at Jesus. And I'm going to be very brief here. And again, there's loads in this passage. But let me just point out three things quickly.

[23 : 59] First of all, in verse 34, Jesus describes working on God's mission as food. That's the image that he uses to describe. Engaging in God's work as far as Jesus is concerned is food. Now that's such a fascinating image because it tells us that Jesus saw reaching people with the gospel as something that will be at least four things. It'll be satisfying. Food satisfies hunger. It gives us what we crave. It will be nourishing. Food builds us up. It makes us stronger, healthier, fitter. It will be energizing. Food empowers us to work, to keep going, to press on. And it tastes good. Food, good food, tastes good. Jesus saw his mission as all of these things, satisfying, nourishing, energizing, and tasting good. And I think this is incredibly important because so often if you imagine talking to somebody this week about Jesus, I'm pretty sure you're tempted to think that it's going to be that it's going to disturb you because it's going to interfere with life and it's kind of easier just to avoid. It's going to drain you because it's probably going to go badly and it's probably not worth doing. It's going to discourage you because you're probably going to fail and you'd be safer off not trying and it's probably going to taste unpleasant like celery. You should eat it but it's disgusting. Sorry to everyone who likes celery but someone likes celery. It's disgusting. It's so easy to think like that about mission but it's the wrong mindset because that makes evangelism look like a duty or a burden or something that you should do out of guilt. Jesus doesn't think that way. He thinks that God's mission is food and he's absolutely right because sharing the gospel this week will not disturb you. It will satisfy you. It will not drain you. It will nourish you. It will not discourage you. It will energize you and it will not taste unpleasant because when we see people come to faith in Jesus that is going to taste so, so good and I can prove that I'm right because I want you to fast forward seven days and imagine that you're sitting here next week and thinking back to having had a conversation with somebody this week about Jesus. This time next week as you look back on the week that's gone by will you think oh well I wish I hadn't had that conversation or will you think I'm so glad I did? Because it's food.

It's good food. We need to think the way Jesus thought. We need to think of it as food. Second thing that Jesus teaches us in terms of mindset is that we see that his mindset for mission was one of urgency highlighted very clearly in verse 35. Do not say there are yet four months and then comes the harvest. Look I tell you lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest. I think there's an incredibly incredibly important word in this verse that we all need to write in our hearts. Isn't that one? Ah. So often we are wasting time looking back on the past and so often we are wasting time worrying about what the future may or may not bring and all the time we are missing the fact that the fields around us are white. They are ready for harvest. The mission of God is happening right now and this is where Jesus's mindset is so magnificently sensible because we can't go back to the past. It's gone and we don't know what the future will bring. It's out of our hands. The only thing we can have any impact on is now.

The only week you can have any major impact on in your life is this week, not last week and not the week that comes in three years time. The key thing is now and I'm going to probably insult everybody in the room when I say this but I'm going to pick on everyone.

Older people in general are obsessed with the past and everything was better then.

Younger people in general are obsessed with the future and about everything that they want to change and that everything wants to be different. Now there's a lot in the past that's precious and there is a lot in the future to be excited about but if you are living in the past or living in the future you are missing what really matters because what really matters is right now, this week, this opportunity, this mission field that's on our doorstep, this congregation as we are right now at the location that we are in God's plans for us, this is where we can work. This is the fields that are quite for harvest, we are the laborers that are here. Just leave the past there and leave the future in God's hands and let's just go for it right now. Jesus has a sense of urgency and then thirdly Jesus makes a wonderful emphasis in verses 36 to 38 where he highlights the fact that mission is something that we do together. In these verses he describes two key roles in the mission of God,

sowing and reaping. In God's mission we sow, that means going out with the gospel, it means building up relationships with people, it means sharing our lives with them, telling people about Jesus with words, showing people the difference that Jesus has made in their lives in the way that we behave and in God's mission we reap and so we see people come to faith, we welcome them into our church family, we build one another up and we learn more and more about what Jesus has commanded and taught us and then we go out and we seek to sow more seed in the harvest field together. The key thing that Jesus is emphasizing though is that all of this is done as a team. One sows, another reaps, there might be a huge gap between the sowing and the reaping and we should expect that. The next person to come to faith in Carlyle that might be because of work that somebody's done miles away or it might be because of something that somebody said decades ago but at the end of the day that doesn't matter because we all share in the joy of the harvest, we all as Jesus says here, we all rejoice together, sows and reapers, one great team. All of it's in God's hands, the key thing we're recognizing is that together, together all of us, we can serve on God's mission. And so here are two incredibly important questions that we need to consider as a church. Is it possible for you to sow this week in terms of the gospel? Through a conversation, through a text, a card that you sent to someone, a gift, an email, a walk, a dinner, is it possible for you to sow? And then the second question, is it possible for you to reap this week? Could a friend or a family member come to faith this week? Or could somebody who struggled to be certain whether or not they are a Christian who's kind of caught, yes, no, don't really know, could they take that step forward this week where they have that sense of yes, I actually am, I can go for this. Could someone new come to church? Is it possible for you to sow? Is it possible for you to reap? There is only one answer to both of those questions. The answer to both is yes. So what the heck are we waiting for? Let's go for it.

[32 : 18] Let's go for it and share the good news of Jesus. If you are anything like me, you will be able to find a million excuses not to push on this week with Jesus' mission. It's something that I struggle with so much and that I feel so useless at, but that's all because so often I have the wrong mindset. Mission is food, it is urgent and it's such an amazing thing for us all to do together.

Jesus in this passage gives us a method for mission and a mindset for mission. Last thing I'm going to say is this. Maybe you're listening to all of this and you're not yet a believer.

And so you may be like, well, I'm not really sure if this is for me. I'm not sure if I believe in everything that the gospel is claiming. I'm not sure if this is for me. Maybe you're sitting here thinking that. And so maybe if you're not sure what you're standing, you're thinking, well, Thomas, that entire half hour sermon, well, what's it got to do with me? Maybe you're thinking, what has it got to do with me?

Well, the answer to that question is one simple word. What's it got to do with you? It's got everything to do with you. It's actually all about you.

It's all about you because we love you and we want you to come to know Jesus and the amazing peace that he gives, the security that only he offers, the answers that only he gives, and the hope that he gives you for all eternity. Without him, without him, we are heading for a lost eternity. But all the time he's calling you to come to put your trust in him so that you can be loved by him today.

You can be safe in him forever. That's what the gospel message is all about. You are everything that we are trying to reach. You are part of the reason why God has a church in Carlyle because he wants you to be one of his disciples as well. And so if that means that this week somebody asks you for a walk or asks you for dinner or asks you to watch the football, you know, you could think to yourself, oh, this guy's a Christian. This girl's a Christian. Why is she doing that? Is she doing it because she wants to witness to me? Well, the answer is yes.

[35 : 21] That's absolutely why she's doing it. And you might think, well, that's a bit off-putting. Well, really, why is that person doing that? It's because they love you. And they want you to know that Jesus loves you as well. And I want you to know, anyone here who's not yet a believer, I want you to know that the day that you profess faith in Jesus, that is a day that will taste so, so good.

So good for you, so good for us, and most of all, so good for Jesus. Amen. Let's pray.