

Iain Macritchie: John 4

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] If we could turn back to the chapter that we read together in the Gospel according to John chapter 4 and I'd like us to once again read the words that we find in verses 28 and 29.

John 4 28 29. So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, Come see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?

Now over the next six weeks that I'm with you here, sometimes in the morning and sometimes in the evening, I'd like to start a mini series with the title Encounters with Christ.

Now this will involve us looking together at different people throughout the scripture who have had a variety of different kinds of encounters with Christ.

A lot of the stories that we will study together are perhaps stories that you are familiar with, stories that you've heard preached many, many times in years gone by.

[1 : 24] Yet I think it's important for us to revisit these stories and to refamiliarise ourselves with them and apply them to our lives here and now.

Tonight then we're going to begin our series by looking at the account that we have before us here in John 4, the story of the encounter of the woman of Samaria.

Although I took verses 28 and 29 as my text this evening, I'd like us to look through the chapter as a whole and look at the words that build up to these words that we find in verse 29.

Come see a man who told me all things that ever I did. Can this be the Christ? There is a lot of ground that could be covered in this chapter and I don't for one moment expect to be able to look at every last detail.

But what I would like us to do is just under three loose headings look at a thirsty man, a thirsty woman and a thirsty world.

[2 : 36] Thirsty man, a thirsty woman and a thirsty world. At the beginning of the chapter we read of Jesus going on a journey.

He had to leave Judea for a controversy surrounding baptism. We won't go into that just now and he and his disciples were making their way to Galilee.

However, before reaching Galilee we read that he needed to go through Samaria. Now geographically speaking this wasn't necessarily true.

There were other ways that Christ could have taken to have got to Galilee. He could have perhaps crossed the Jordan at Jericho. But you'll notice that the word needed here has so much more behind it than Jesus merely taking a quicker route.

God had a specific purpose for Christ taking this route. After a journey for some time Jesus and his disciples came to that town called Sychar.

[3 : 44] Now Sychar if you haven't heard of this town it's only claimed to fame really as we read in the chapter that we have before us is that it was near a plot of land that Jacob had given to Joseph many years before.

It was at a well on this particular plot of land that we find the disciples leaving Jesus here on his own while they went into the village to try and get some food.

They were tired, they were hungry. It was about the sixth hour in the day and in the Jewish clock that would have made it about midday. The day started at 6 a.m. and the sixth hour would have been noon where the sun would have been at its hottest.

And so verse 6 tells us that Jesus, wearied from his journey, sat by the well. Here we have a thirsty man.

And you know these words that we find in verse 6 they're so, so precious. So easily skip over them. Jesus, wearied from his journey, sat by the well.

[4 : 58] You see here we have before us the perfect example of Christ in his humanity. Like us he hungered, he thirsted, he felt pain, he needed sleep.

And as J.T. Ryle puts it, in all things his body was framed like our own. What a comfort that is to us tonight. We have at the right hand of God the Father, a high priest who has been touched with a feeling of our infirmities.

One to whom we can come to in prayer safe in the knowledge that he is well aware of what it is to be tired and weary in this world.

We're not coming to a God that is so far removed from us that he doesn't understand our difficulties, our trials, our temptations because he himself has experienced so many of them for himself.

But how is it? It's a question that many people ask, how is it that God could have these infirmities? How is it that God could feel tired and weak and hungry?

[6 : 18] Well it was Thomas Watson, the 15th century preacher and author who said, a cloud over the sun makes no change in the body of the sun.

So, will the divine nature be covered with the human, it makes no change in the divine nature. So just because we see clouds over the sun, it doesn't mean that the sun's there.

And just because we see Christ in his humanity, it doesn't mean that he was not God. Here we have sitting weary and thirsty at this well, God, both God and man.

Two distinct natures, perfect in one body. Now as he sat there by the well, a woman came along the woman of Samaria and she came carrying a pail in order to draw water.

This was Samaritan woman who quite frankly had a reputation, a woman who was known to be leading an immoral life, a woman who was possibly an outcast in society.

[7 : 28] So what did Jesus do? Well, using the theme of water, using what was no doubt at the forefront of this woman's mind, he began to open up a door to a spiritual conversation.

He tried to bridge that gulf between him and her. And he did so simply by asking her for a drink, give me a drink.

Now to our Western ears, the conversation that follows would seem pretty insignificant between Jesus and this woman, but in the Middle Eastern culture of the day, this was far from the case.

In fact, the culture of the day that would see Jesus, a Jew, speaking to this Samaritan woman, would have been outraged.

So many social protocols would have been defied. But you know, Jesus wasn't interested in whether she was a man or a woman, a Jew or a Gentile.

[8 : 35] He looked past these things. He showed a personal interest in her as an individual. What a lesson that is to us as the Lord's people, as we decide who it is we're going to witness to.

Now completely taken aback, this woman ignores Christ's simple request for a drink and instead focuses on the fact that he has spoken to her at all.

He said that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria. This is where the Lord seizes the opportunity to give this woman the Gospel.

We read in verse 10, if you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

Jesus, by his answer, shows that in actual fact, she is the one who is in need of water, spiritual water and he is the well that is able to supply it.

[9 : 44] Christ is, of course, here talking about salvation and that water of life which is able to bring such lasting, indeed eternal satisfaction.

Her response in verse 11 shows so clearly that she has absolutely no clue what he's talking about. Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. And how often is it when we try and share the Gospel with friends and families and folks in our communities that often they cannot understand what we're saying.

The dialogue continues and Christ promises that if she drinks from this living water that she will never thirst again. What an offer! She will never thirst again.

But by but he's revealing more and more of himself to her. He's sharing the promises that are attached to drinking from that water of life.

[10 : 52] It's still that Penny doesn't drop. This woman is clearly blinded by the physical, by the physical well and the pale and the water that she's unable to discern the spiritual truths in what Christ is saying.

I wonder as you sit here tonight in Carloway Free Church, if you're being completely honest with yourself, do you thirst?

I mean, do you really, really thirst? Are you, as I said in my prayer, looking for something to quench that thirst in this world?

Are you launching out into the darkness, filling that void in your heart time and time again and time and time again? Yes, it's filled for a while, but then all of a sudden it feels empty again.

Is that you tonight? Have you experienced the refreshment that is to be found by drinking from fountains of living water?

[12:04] Or do you, as I once did myself, do you, as we read in Jeremiah 2.13, do you drink from the broken cisterns that hold no water? Do you drink from these stagnant pools around us, those pools that when all is said and done leave you with this unpleasant taste in your mouth and leave you desiring something purer?

It's at this point in the conversation that Jesus appears to, all of a sudden, change the subject for no apparent reason.

He asks the woman to go and to call her husband. But notice what's really happening here. Up until now this woman has had absolutely no understanding of this water of life that Christ has been talking about.

She hasn't seen, her need of it, sorry, her eyes have been spiritually closed. She hasn't had a spiritual thirst, if you like.

And isn't it true that we can't really see her need of a saviour. We can't really see where Christ fits into our lives if we don't see ourselves as sinners in the first place.

[13:28] So what Christ is really doing here is not asking her to go and get her husband so that he can speak to him because Christ already knows that she doesn't have a husband. Rather what he's doing is he's making her aware of a sense of guilt, a consciousness of sin.

He's awakening within her a thirst for this water. The mention of a husband is the best way of reminding this woman of her immoral life.

And so friends, often this is the way that the Lord works. The Holy Spirit when he's striving with us, he often shows us ourselves, our filthy, rotten, sinful hearts, and in doing so he convicts us and shows us our need of Christ.

The shorter Catechism is a little book that contains such a wealth of theology. It's perhaps not in vogue these days, but I think it should be. It's a little book that has so much theology in it.

And it's so simply put, there's a question, there's an answer. In Question 87 reads, what is repentance unto life? The answer is repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth with grief and hatred of sin, turn from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavour after new obedience.

[15:10] Now this woman who had been so talkative, asking so many questions, wanting to find out so much about this, this well and the possibility of her never having to draw water from it again, she replies with a short answer, I have no husband.

Her mouth is closed as the Lord speaks to her experience personally. She begins to, just as that Catechism says, she begins to get a true sense of her sin.

And as one commentator puts it, never does a soul value gospel medicine until it feels its disease. Now if you're here tonight and you don't know Christ as your own personal saviour, I urge you never to neglect the reality of the eternal danger that awaits you.

If you're not spiritually cured by the medicine of God's precious grace, that you wouldn't stop seeking Christ until you find him and that you too are able to drink from these fountains of living water, that you too can experience the liberty that's to be found in the new and living way of Christ.

[16:38] Jesus our Lord, Jesus then reveals more of himself, more of his divine nature in the very fact that he knows all about this woman.

In verses 17 and 18 we read, you write in saying that you have no husband, for you've had five husbands, and the one that you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.

Instantly, just like that, Christ here unmask this woman's sins. He acknowledges the truth in her statement when she said, I have no husband, but he goes on further by exposing her breach of the seventh commandment, you shall not commit adultery.

This woman was trying to cover up the truth by being economical with the truth. She thought or sought it's worth safe that her past wasn't known to this man that she met at the well, but he knew

all about her. Every last little detail.

And you know in the same way that the Lord knew everything about this woman, so too does he know everything about you and about me.

[18:02] Every word that we've spoken, every thought that we've ever had, every action we've ever taken, whether good or bad, he knows it all.

Now supposing all the thoughts that you've had today were played on that screen above me.

Supposing all the thoughts that you've ever had in the past month were played on that screen, and the whole of Carloway came in here to watch.

How would you feel? How would I feel? The sheer shame and humiliation of her sins being exposed is a terrifying thought for all of us, Christian or not.

I think it's true to say that we would do all in our power to turn off that screen so that all our sinful thoughts and actions would be kept hidden.

Otherwise our reputations would be ruined. People would no doubt stop speaking to you as they find out the thoughts that you've had about them, and you would be an outcast in this village.

[19:17] But you know, that is the difference between us, between me, between you, and a merciful God. Because the woman of Samedá, she was an outcast.

The very fact that she came to the well on her own in the heat of the day it shows us this, because most women would have come for water in the cool of the morning or the cool of the later afternoon, but not this woman.

Her background, her past history with men would have meant that she was widely known. She would have had a reputation, as I said, and consequently she was isolated. She didn't want to be seen in public.

I'm sure that if she lived in Karloway, many of us would be speaking about her, but we wouldn't want to associate with her. But you know, that's not the example we're given here in scripture.

Christ, when he meets her. He doesn't instantly condemn her. What does he do? He shares the gospel with her. He shows her that he's interested in her, interested in the well-being of her soul.

[20:29] Friends, we live in a broken world with broken people who are living broken lives. And it's our duty as ambassadors of the kingdom of God to always show the poor and needy sinners that are around us, the love of Christ that should dwell in us so richly.

Spiritually speaking, this woman's eyes began to open. We notice that she's not denied her immoral lifestyle, but rather by acknowledging Christ as a prophet, she's affirming that his knowledge of her lifestyle is in fact true.

She still doesn't know Jesus as Messiah, but nonetheless the Holy Spirit is clearly working in her bit by bit, showing her who Christ is.

I'm sure many of us in here who are Christians can perhaps relate to this, remember back to the early strivings of the Spirit. The Spirit gradually revealing more and more of ourselves and revealing more and more of Christ bit by bit, showing us our need of him.

It would be wonderful if there were anyone in here tonight with whom the Spirit of God was striving.

[21:56] The woman of Samaria then goes on and she asks Christ where should she worship? How much could be said about why she asked this? We don't have time to go into this just now, Christ's basic response was that under the New Covenant, in other words following the finished work of Christ on the cross, it soon wouldn't be where she worshipped that mattered, but rather who she worshipped and how she worshipped.

Christ is here emphasizing the importance of worshipping him in spirit and in truth. Friends, it's not what we get out of worship, but rather what he, how he wants us to worship him.

Let us always remember that. Now, unable, although her eyes are being opened, unable to fully comprehend what Jesus is telling her, this woman is still confused and she expresses her hope that one day the Messiah would come and answer all these difficult questions.

It's at this point that the whole story reaches such a powerful climax when Jesus replies with the words, I who speak to you, am he.

Jesus reveals himself fully to this woman. He's the only answer to her questions, the only solution to her spiritual problems.

[23:39] He is the only one that can quench that thirst that the things of the world cannot even come close to. Perhaps, like the woman of Samaria, you are here tonight, you are confused, perhaps you are ashamed of your past, perhaps you're ashamed of your present.

Friends, if that's the case, you come to Christ, you come to him and you ask him, you plead with him to reveal himself to you, even this very night in a saving way.
I can guarantee you in his own perfect time, he will not turn you away. No matter what you've done in the past, no matter what baggage you or I have, he will not turn us away.
If we put our trust in him, he will wipe all our sins away. He will cast them in the depths of the sea, never to be seen again as far as East is distant from the West.
Surely, surely it is worth pursuing Christ for this freedom, for this liberty that is to be found in him. And lasting not just for the blink of time, but for the endless ages of eternity.
[25 : 06] You know, just as Christ was willing to reveal himself to this woman of Samaria, he is tonight willing to reveal himself to the greatest of sinners in Carlyway.

At that point, the disciples show up amazed at what they're seeing before him, Jesus. Before them, Jesus speaking to this Samaritan woman, they remain silent.

Perhaps they know that there is some spiritual transaction taking place, I don't know. But you know what happens next is beautiful.

If you look at verse 28 again together, you notice that as soon as this woman, as Christ reveals himself to this woman, what does she do? Does she nod politely and say, yes, thank you, go home and carry on with her life as if nothing had happened?

Is that what she does? No. She leaves her pot, she goes into the town, she leaves her pot, she goes into the town and she proclaims to the people, come, come see a man that told me all things ever I did.

[26 : 38] Can this be the Christ? All this woman's inhibitions and shame and guilt have been overtaken by a spirit led desire to tell anyone and everyone about her encounter with Christ.

Her status as an immoral outcast, it doesn't matter anymore. And all she wants is for others to come and to see this Christ for themselves.

And you know, she may have left her bucket at the well, but is it not true to say that she took in her heart the well with her to the people?

What an example of evangelism we have here. We could all learn so much from this. She didn't read any special books or go on any special courses.

All she did was tell the people, come see a man. This is so important friends. The world can see through us when we are not being natural.

[27 : 51] Her, her witness was authentic. It was natural. It was real. It was from the heart. And how, how we ought to follow this, that we would go into the, the hedgeways, the highways and the hedges of, of Carlyway, that we would compel people to come in, not by going through some cold clinical process, some kind of tech sheet, but by showing them that we too have met with Christ, by showing them in our walk, in our conversation, that we have met with our saviour.

Friends never ever, ever be ashamed to invite people to church. Don't be worried that they won't get it, because that's true.

They won't get it. That woman of Samaria, she didn't get it until bit by bit by bit. The Lord opened her eyes, but what did she do? She remained listening to his word.

Let us always then have confidence in, in the scriptures preached. Let us have confidence in the fact that if we bring anyone into this place, anyone who's never even been in a church before, that he is more than able to break down any barriers, to pierce their conscience, to pierce the hardest of hearts through the workings of his spirit.

Do we truly believe that? Or do we think that we have to have the word plus, plus, plus, plus?

[29 : 39] Do we believe that this before us here is a fountain of living water?

The people listen to the woman and they begin making their way to Christ. Hearing her testimony has made them want to find out more about this man.

No doubt they see a huge difference in this woman that they knew in days gone by, and they want to see who and what has changed her. Verse 39 says that many Samaritans in the town believed in him because of her testimony.

Allow me to ask you, allow me to ask myself even, when was the last time we shared our testimony with someone?

When was the last time we said to our friends, our family, our neighbours, the workman who's working round our house, whoever it is, when was the last time that we said, come, come see a man that told me all things ever I did. Is this not the Christ?

[30 : 57] There is, friends, a thirsty world out there, a world that is looking for a real Christianity. No, just as the Lord blessed the testimony of this woman, so too can He bless your testimony to others. And this can so easily be a means of leading people to come here and to find out more about this Christ for themselves.

I know it's not easy, I know it's not easy sharing your testimony with others and being, studying for the ministry, I know that when we do anything for the Lord, the devil is right on our back ready to stop us and to persuade us that we should stop, that we should close our mouths, that we shouldn't really say this.

You know I'd like to challenge every Christian in here tonight that you would come before the Lord in prayer, that you would through faith ask Him to provide you with an opportunity to share your faith with someone else, that you would be given that holy boldness, that courage to lovingly, and it's important that we do it lovingly, not in a spirit of judgment, that we lovingly lead even one soul to the well of living water.

As the people are making their way to Christ following the testimony of this woman, he's meanwhile addressing his disciples, they had been urging him to eat some food, they'd been in the village getting some food and they were trying to get him to eat some food, but his response isn't linked to his next meal, but rather to the Samaritans who are making their way to him.

[33 : 04] In verse 5, using the growing of the grain in the surrounding fields as an illustration, Christ tells the disciples that the fields are white for spiritual harvest.

The fields are white with spiritual harvest. Now one commentator makes this observation, it's quite interesting. The disciples only had to lift up their heads and look at the Samaritans coming towards them, their white clothing forming a striking contrast against the brilliant green of the ripening grain, and looking like white heads on the stalks that indicated the time for the harvest, the people that were coming, they were the harvest.

In the same way that Jesus knew the unspoken story of the woman at the well, so too did he know the heart of each and every Samaritan that had not yet reached this well.

In his deity, in his lordship, Christ knew who were going to be taken in the harvest, and David Meredith touched on that this morning.

When they arrived, they asked him to stay with them, which he did for two whole days, and their time with Jesus hearing his word, it only confirmed to them that this woman's testimony was indeed true.

[34 : 46] Now tonight, can I close with this? It's so true that there is a field around us here in Carlyway that is so ready to be planted in.

A field that is crying out to be planted in. There are souls in this church tonight that are ready to be planted in.

And we all, you and me, we all have a responsibility to sow that seed of the Gospel.

It's not just ministers, it's not those who are called to preach. We all are called to sow the seed of the Gospel, to tell all those around us.

It's urgent things. This is the most urgent thing that you could tell anyone. To tell them, come see a man who told us all things that ever we did. We have a responsibility to earnestly water the seed of the Gospel that is preached so faithfully, week in, week out, to water that seed with our fervent prayers on our knees, toiling with the Lord, pleading with Him that He would bless this seed and that we would see much increase in Carlyway Free Church for the glory of God.

[36 : 22] Many more believed in Him we read because of His Word. Let us always, as I said earlier, let us always have confidence in this Word. And as we come and as we hear it preached and as we read it ourselves, let us always expect that the Holy Spirit can pour out on this Word so that we can see a great harvest in this community.

Christ needed.