

The Saviour of the World

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[0 : 00] Well, if you could keep that passage open, and we'll come to God and pray for his help as we consider it together. Let's pray. God, our Father, we do thank you and worship you that we can come to your word and meet the Saviour of the world. We thank you for him, for the Lord Jesus.

We thank you for what he holds out to us today. And we pray, Lord, that as we consider him and consider his gift of life, that you would give us a heart to receive it, to take hold of what he holds out to us today, and to have and to enjoy life with you forever.

We pray in his name. Amen. Amen. Well, this morning, we're stepping back into the drama of John's gospel. If you were here last week, you'll remember that John pressed pause for a bit and took us away to check our facts with the other John, John the Baptist. But now I see verse one, Jesus is back in the foreground.

We're picking up the action. John continues the tour, so to speak, because now it's time, says John, for us to see this scene in the gallery of the work and the life of Jesus. And it is such a special scene, isn't it? It will be familiar to lots of us. Perhaps it's the first time you're hearing it, which is just wonderful. In this passage, there are so many threads, so many different colors and textures that are woven together into this beautiful picture of Jesus as he speaks to the woman at the well. And all we can really do this morning is to tease out a few of those threads and see where they lead. To keep us from getting lost in the detail, we need to step back first and remind ourselves of the bigger picture. So far in his gospel, John has been showing us that now Jesus has come, the old is gone, the old rituals, the old place of worship, the old prophecies, the whole old order of coming to God is coming to an end. Not because the old was bad or wrong, but because it was simply the prequel, just the overture, the preparation for the new. And that new order is what Jesus is now bringing, what we sometimes call the kingdom of God. To draw out an image that Jesus himself uses in this passage, the old order was like the plowing of the field and the sowing the seed and the slow, steady growth of the crop. All that was simply the preparation for the harvest. And now, says Jesus, open your eyes, look at the fields, they are ripe for harvest. So Jesus has come doing a new thing. He is the king bringing God's kingdom and he's shown us how we can be part of his kingdom by believing in him. But now in this scene, John wants to show us who it is who can be part of Jesus' kingdom. Who is Jesus doing it all for? Who has he come for? Well, here we see the answer clearly is any and all of us. There is no one whose life or history or background can stop them from coming to Jesus. That is great news for every single one of us this morning. In this room, there will be a mix of people from all different walks of life, different backgrounds, different stories to tell. Some of you have been believers for many years. Some of you have not yet believed in the Lord Jesus. But John wants us to know that whoever you are, Jesus came to save people just like ye. And John invites us to see that in three ways this morning. Most of our time will be spent on his first invitation. I say that so you won't think we'll be here for too many hours. At first, John invites us to see our need.

[4 : 34] So to get us there, to get us to our need, John starts with some geography, doesn't he? I've got a slide here, I think, with a map. Brilliant. To show us, help us see Jesus' movements in this section of the gospel. Jesus started up the top there in Galilee. Then he came down in chapter two to Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which is in Judea, at the bottom of the screen there. And that's where he's been up to this point in the gospel. But now, chapter four and verse three, we read that Jesus went back once more to Galilee. He's going back up to the top. But you can see there, to get there, he has to go through the middle bit, Samaria, the bit in yellow. And that's a really important journey. And to help us understand why that's an important journey, there's another map here. Great. It's the same bit of land, but a thousand years before that. And you can see there, there are two kingdoms, the kingdom at the bottom in orange, the kingdom of Judah. And the kingdom at the top in blue is the kingdom of Israel. You can see that they're divided. There are two kingdoms there, under King

David and

King Solomon. That had been one kingdom. But then King Solomon's son, called Rehoboam, he was a bit naive. He thought he could have it all, and he lost half the kingdom. And another upstart called Jeroboam took the top half, Israel. So it was divided. You can see that story later, if you like, in 1 Kings chapter 12.

But from that point onwards, the kingdom that God had raised up under David was split. And not just in the sense of geography, the kings in the north, in the blue bit, they worked really hard to make sure that people didn't go back to the south. And to stop them from going down to worship God in Jerusalem, in the orange bit, they set up idols for people to go and to worship instead. So over the years, the northern kingdom, the bit in blue, became more and more spiritually corrupt. And then God allowed the northern kingdom to be conquered by another kingdom called Assyria. And the Assyrians made the northern kingdom even more corrupt by bringing their gods and their beliefs into Israel, basically destroying what was left of true faith and worship.

[7 : 14] Now, fast forward a thousand years, and what was once at the northern kingdom is now Samaria. And what was once the southern kingdom is now Judea. And the result over those hundreds of years was a deep and bitter resentment that existed between the Jews of Judea and the Samaritans of Samaria in the north.

In the same way that if you want to understand politics in the UK today, you need to start a thousand years ago and work your way forward. Well, it was no different in that part of the world in the time of Jesus.

The map can come down now if that's okay. Thank you. Brilliant. The Jews thought the Samaritans were spiritually filthy, corrupt, a lost cause.

And the Samaritans thought the Jews were stuck up and self-righteous. And it had been that way for generations. Those wounds were not going to be healed overnight.

And so with that in mind, here's Jesus leaving Judea, and he's heading north, and he's going through Samaria. He finds himself near a village in the heat of the day.

[8 : 39] He sits down by a well. And now we know our history, we should be thinking this can only end badly. Okay, an Englishman in New York doesn't scratch the surface of the difference between the Jews and the Samaritans.

Then verse 7, a Samaritan woman came to draw water. And to her shock, Jesus speaks to her. He asks her, will you give me a drink? And what's more, verse 8, not only is he a Jew, but Jesus is alone by this woman at the well.

At this point, we could cut the tension with a knife. And her reply is understandably frosty. Verse 9, you are a Jew.

I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink? For, as John tells us, Jews do not associate with Samaritans. See, this whole scene is set up to scandalize us.

Jesus, how we've seen that he is the Christ. And here he is having a conversation with a Samaritan. A spiritual mongrel.

[9 : 50] A lost cause. And a woman, no less. In a patriarchal society. On his own. In broad daylight. What's more, the fact that the woman was there at 12 noon.

Suggests that she was on the fringes, even of her own community. He only went out at the hottest part of the day. If you didn't want to bump into anyone on the street.

Socially. Religiously. Spiritually. She is the lowest of the low. And yet, Jesus speaks to her.

Is interested in her. Draws her out. And then offers her something she had no right to have. 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.

[10 : 54] If only you knew who I was, he says. And what I could give you. Understandably. She is confused by the offer. Where can I get this living water?

She asks. And where are you going to get it from? Which well do you know that I don't know? Can this Jesus be greater even than the Jacob? Who gave us this well of water?

Well, the answer, of course, is yes. The old has gone. The new has come. What is then this incredible offer? Jesus explains. Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again.

Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

I'm not asking if you're thirsty, says Jesus. I'm asking if you're thirsty. Not thirsty for water, but thirsty for life.

[11 : 58] Hungry to be whole. Longing to be satisfied. Jesus is not offering H2O here. But spiritual and eternal life.

Life that never runs out. That quenches our thirst. That satisfies our hunger. And gives and gives and gives. In the words of a man called Henry Scugol.

This is the life of God in the soul of man. Eternal life. Eternal life. That is a hard offer to refuse, isn't it? This woman certainly thinks, so, sir, give me this water, she says.

So that I won't get thirsty. But still, she misses the point. Because she thinks, I won't have to keep coming here to draw water anymore. See, she still hasn't seen that Jesus is not offering her a solution to her felt need.

But to her ultimate need. And so, as if to bring home to her and to us the depth of this need of ours, Jesus suddenly changes the subject.

[13 : 08] He's not talking about water anymore. Go and call your husband, he says. Bring him here. Well, it turns out she doesn't have a husband. But Jesus knows that, doesn't he?

What does he say? Verse 17, you're right. When you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands. And the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is quite true.

See, he knows her. Inside and out. He didn't have to ask. She didn't have to answer. Before he knew. See, Jesus hasn't really changed the subject, has he?

What Jesus is drawing out of this poor, disgraced, and hungry woman from the fringes of the fringes of society is her deep longing to be whole.

And to be welcome. To be satisfied. She's been looking in all the wrong places. We're not told why she had five husbands.

[14 : 10] Perhaps they died. Perhaps they left her. We're not told. But it paints, doesn't it, a tragic picture of someone who has kept going back and back and back to the same old sources.

Hoping that this time, this man, this husband, will give me something that satisfies. Only to find again and again and again this water, these men, cannot answer the ache in her heart.

Or a need to be whole. The fact that she's living with a man who's not her husband suggests that she's not just a victim in this story, but her own worst enemy in that tragic search.

Her search has led her to sin. But still her sin cannot satisfy because while she stoops to greater and deeper depths of sin to meet her felt needs, while her greatest need is being ignored and starved and suffocated.

C.S. Lewis, as ever, captures the problem well. He says, if I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

[15 : 35] If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to suggest the real thing.

If we cannot fill our gaping need to be whole, whatever we use, however hard we try, then it suggests that we were made for something more than what this world has to offer.

Lewis is only really echoing a much older prayer by St. Augustine. We were made for God for God. And never satisfied. Always searching and never finding. Our felt needs. Whatever they may be for ye today, if like this woman, it is for intimacy.

Perhaps for happiness. Or for security. For belonging. To feel welcome or to feel free. Those felt needs are only really the symptoms.

[17 : 07] Of our ultimate need for eternal life with God. So much of our lives are wasted taking spiritual painkillers. And trying to treat the symptoms and numb the pain while the disease itself goes ignored.

I wonder, do you ever find yourself searching, trying, working to fill those felt needs?

While the gaping need remains. Well, if so, do you see the wonder of Jesus' words? Jesus offers here the real thing to the person who was furthest from ever, ever finding it for herself.

A person considered by the world to be a spiritual lost cause. Doomed. Never to know eternal life. But cursed forever to be searching for it. Well, if you knew who I was, says Jesus, you would only have to ask.

It's yours on request. Just ask and you can have it. This great gift. Living water. Eternal life. Sometimes it's said that this woman is the social and spiritual opposite, in a way, of Nicodemus. [18:26] The message of Nicodemus was that however high you climb, you can never qualify to enter God's kingdom. Then the message of this unnamed woman at the well is that however low you stoop, you can never disqualify yourself from the grace of God that brings us into his kingdom freely.

Jesus' offer here is a scandal. If he offers this eternal life to this woman, who will he not offer this life to you?

Who here today could not ask Jesus for this gift of life? And who, when they ask, would Jesus not give it to you? Well, the answer clearly is no one.

No one. Any of us could ask Jesus today for eternal life and have it. That is his promise. Perhaps this morning you're just starting to come to church.

And wondering about Jesus and wanting to know more. Well, the good news is that you can ask Jesus today and he will meet your greatest need forever.

[19:49] He knows what you need. If you come and tell him honestly how much you need him and ask him to give you this eternal life, he will.

Perhaps you've been coming to church for years, but you have never asked him. You've never asked him for eternal life.

What's stopping you? What would hold you back if Jesus offered this gift to, humanly speaking, the furthest person from his kingdom? Well, does he not hold it out to every one of us today?

Let me urge you, if that's you, to ask him and to watch him fill your life. Perhaps you asked him a long time ago and you know his life is in you.

But even as Christians, we can go on through the days, end up still living to treat the symptoms and looking for solutions to our felt needs first, on our own, in our own strength.

[20:55] Instead of coming back to Jesus time and time again to have that ultimate need fulfilled and satisfied. Why do we do that when his gift is so free?

Friends, let this woman at the well remind us all this morning how very, very needy we are. How much we need Jesus to give us life to the full. How far we have been from him in our lost condition and how gracious he has been.

How gracious he has been when we least deserve him. In giving to us so freely what we could never earn. If Jesus came for people as needy as me and you, well, who is there that he didn't come for?

Who is there that he cannot save and give life to the full? And that brings us on to John's second and briefer invitation here.

Having seen our need, we need to see our Savior. To see our Savior. This is the other piece of the puzzle, isn't it? We can see how deep our need is, but if we don't see that Jesus is able and willing to meet it, well, we'll never come.

[22:16] Who is this man who can offer the gift of eternal life so freely to this poor and needy woman? Well, based on his knowledge of her life, she thinks he must be a prophet.

And that presented a problem for her, didn't it? It raised all the bad blood between Jews and Samaritans. Again, our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, she says.

But you Jews say that we must worship in Jerusalem. But Jesus isn't just there as a Jewish prophet, is he? But as the Son sent from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And remember God's promise that we read earlier in our service from Ezekiel 37. Those two kingdoms, that one kingdom broken in two.

Well, what did God promise? I will stick it back together, he says. Like two sticks joined together into one stick. And over this one kingdom, one king.

[23:16] And in this one kingdom, God says, my dwelling place will be among them. See, everything that Jesus says here about the worship of God, no longer in two places, but as one, in spirit and in truth.

Well, it's really no more or less than what Ezekiel said so long ago, except that Jesus is saying he is here to do it. Soon the divided kingdom and its divided worship won't exist anymore, he says.

The time is coming and is now here when you will worship the Father, neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. Because the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

Because the dwelling place of God is no longer this building or that building, this place or that place. But a person, the king.

The united worship of a reunited kingdom will be in and through the one true king, Jesus Christ. See how Jesus has led this woman from her most obvious need in that moment for water, through her more pressing and deeper need for intimacy, and all the way down to her deepest and most basic longing.

[24 : 41] What does she realize she really wants most of all in verse 25? I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.

She sees that her needs are only an echo of her longing for this one true king. When the king is here, he'll have the answers. The king will know how to make us whole, to put us back together, to bring us as one to God and lead us in worship of him in spirit and in truth.

Jesus has led her all the way down to her very deepest need before revealing that, in fact, her need is for him. He is who she has been waiting for.

Jesus declared, I who am speaking to you, I am he. See, how do we know that Jesus himself is able and willing to meet this great and deep need of ours?

Well, it's because of who he is. He is the king bringing God's kingdom. This woman could be part of his kingdom through him.

[25 : 53] And to our never-ending surprise and delight, so can we. It's a lovely subplot in this very familiar scene.

We only really begin to see it once we've picked up on John's obsession with weddings. See, Jacob, who's well, Jesus is sitting next to you.

Well, Jacob met his wife by a well in Genesis 29. And Jacob's father, Isaac, had also found his wife by a well. In Genesis 24.

Which makes calling any church outreach project the well a bit of a risky move. But here is a woman who we know has had five husbands.

And he was nearly on number six. And who should meet her than the one who we have come to know as the bridegroom. Come to seek his lost and wandering bride.

[26 : 56] And where else should they meet but by a well? If that picture shocks you, let me suggest that it should. Not because John is suggesting anything inappropriate.

But because he is telling us this is the kind of bride that this bridegroom goes for. A bride like this. She's not clean.

She's got a history. She's living in sin. She doesn't quite get him. Folks, that was once all of us. But if Jesus is who he says he is.

If he is the bridegroom from God. If he is the Christ, the Messiah. Then who we are is beside the point. If we see who he is.

Then who we are pales in comparison. Because our place in God's kingdom does not depend on who we are. But on who he is. She longed for the Christ. And here he was.

[27 : 58] Do you see the Savior? Have you taken hold of him? Finally, once we have seen our need.

Once we have seen our Savior. Well, John invites us to share him. To share him. Briefly, again, John invites us to tell our world.

The disciples arrive back from the town. Again, surprised as any of us have been. That Jesus is talking to this woman. They start asking him about food.

Has he had something to eat? Again, we're back down at the level of physical food and water.

Meanwhile, however, this woman from the well has gone back into the town.

Verse 29. Telling people, come and see a man who told me everything I've ever done. Could this be the Messiah? See, who is it who really sees Jesus? Who gets really why he came?

[28 : 56] Well, surely it's this woman. And we know because she is going and telling people about him. And bringing people to him. That is the work at hand, says Jesus.

That is his bread and butter, so to speak. Lift your eyes from off the ground, he says to his disciples. Open your eyes. Look around.

The harvest is ready. Even now, the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life. It's time for the slow growth of the centuries to bear fruit and come in.

That's what that woman is out doing, isn't it? What Jesus wants his disciples to be out doing too.

They have other things going on. But look at this, verse 39.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. He told me everything I have ever done. See, her simple words led her neighbors to eternal life.

[30 : 01] To the source of eternal life. Remember, these were people she had once lived her life avoiding. Out of shame. But as soon as she was made whole in Christ.

As soon as her life was in him. Well, she went out and found those very same people. And told them what he had done for her. And his words go even further than hers, don't they?

Verse 41. Because of his words, many more became believers. And so, brothers and sisters, however we do it. However we are sharing our lives with non-Christian people.

However we're talking to them. However we are bringing them to Jesus. However we're pointing them to him. That is what Jesus would have us do. It's easy for us to say, isn't it?

It's not time for the harvest. For whatever reason, people don't want to hear about Jesus. Perhaps people will be offended if we tell them. Perhaps we will get into trouble for talking about him.

[31 : 04] But Jesus, our Lord, says it is time for the harvest. It is time. If we would look up and see. So let's be praying for a growing love for Jesus.

A clearer vision of him that leads us to share him. With the people in our lives who do not yet know him. So that they too would say with the Samaritans. We no longer believe just because of what you said.

Now we have heard for ourselves. And we know that this man really is the Savior of the world. He is the Savior for all of us.

Perfectly able and willing to save whoever we are. To take away our sins. To give us eternal life. He is the Savior of the world.

So let us each take up his offer today of eternal life. And let us take that offer out into our world this week. And proclaim him. Let's pray together.

[32 : 06] God our Father. We do thank you and praise you for our Lord Jesus.

Who is the Savior of the world. We thank you that he is the Savior for each one of us. However we come to him. And whoever we are.

Father. We thank you again that you call us so freely to him. And we pray that by your spirit you would give us each a heart to come. To confess our need.

And to receive eternal life. Father how we pray that for those who do not yet know him. That those even in our midst today. Would come and receive from him the gift of life.

And Lord for those who have followed him for many years. We pray that you would give us a heart to come back again and again. Not to look for that life. In any other place.

[33 : 08] Than from the Lord Jesus each day. These things we pray and ask in his great name. Amen.