

Found: When Ordinary People Meet Jesus – Jesus and the Insecure

John 4:1-26

By [David Strain](#)

September 28, 2014

Each week over the last several Sunday evenings we've been looking at some of the encounters between Jesus and ordinary people in the Gospel stories. These people come from different backgrounds, different ethnicities even. Their problems, as we've begun to see, are complex; they are varied. But in each case so far, they leave their meeting with Jesus changed forever. Tonight we're going to be thinking about what happens when Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well near the town of Sychar. In the pockets in the pews just in front of you you'll find copies of the Bible. If you would take one and open it to page 888, halfway down the right-hand column you'll see John chapter 4 and we're going to read through verse 30. Before we do that it is our practice to pause and pray and ask for God to help us understand His Word. Would you pray with me please?

Our Father, we pray that You would open the Bible to our understanding. There may be some of us here who have scarcely ever heard the Word of God preached. Some of us perhaps have heard it over and over but have never truly understood. Many of us know the good news about Jesus but every one of us this evening stands in fresh need to meet with Christ. We are thirsty; our souls are parched. And so we're coming like deer wandering in the desert, panting for flowing streams. We are coming to You, O Lord, the fountain of living water, praying that as the Bible is read and explained You would pour out the Holy Spirit that streams of living water may begin to flow within us, welling up unto everlasting life, to the deep and solid an unfailing satisfaction of our souls. In Jesus' name, amen.

John's gospel, chapter 4, page 888. We're going to read verses 1 through 30:

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "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." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" 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?" They went out of the town and were coming to him.

Unkept Promises: Insecurity, Satisfaction, and the Bankruptcy of Self

Insecurity is a terrible thing, isn't it? Simon Cowell, one of the judges on the talent show, *American Idol* - you may know him as the obnoxious Englishman - Simon Cowell is quoted as having said, "People confuse ego, lust, and insecurity with

true love.” I think that’s an insightful statement. People confuse insecurity with love. Sometimes our quest for security and identity and significance latches on to the wrong objects. We look to human relationships to supply our deepest heart need. Earnest Becker is a Pulitzer Prize winning author. In his book, *The Denial of Death*, Becker explores how we invest in other people in particular, especially in a romantic relationship, ultimate significance as we seek to find meaning and security and self-worth. He says this, “The self-glorification that modern man needed in his innermost nature he now looked for in the love partner. The love partner becomes the divine ideal within which to fulfill one’s life. Spiritual and moral needs now become focused on one individual.” Not everyone does this, of course, but it’s not at all uncommon. We want our spouse, our loved one, or the loved one we dream of to supply the deepest craving of our hearts for satisfaction and significance. We want them to be the ground of our identity and our worth and our security. But there is a problem with that. Listen to Becker as he goes on. “No human relationship can bear this burden of godhood. If your partner,” he says, “if your partner is your all, then any shortcoming in him becomes a major threat to you. What is it that we want when we elevate the love partner to this position? We want to be rid of our feeling of nothingness. To know our existence has not been in vain we want redemption, nothing less. Needless to say,” adds Becker, “humans cannot give this.”

The result again and again of looking to love relationships, especially romantic love relationships to provide our security and our identity and our self-worth is the eventual collapse of the relationship. They can’t bear the weight that we’re placing on them. No one can ever meet those expectations. You meet a man, he’s the man of your dreams; you meet the woman of your dreams. Being with them is intoxicating, overpowering. You can’t think of anything or anyone else when you’re with them. But then after a while as you learn them - who they are, how they think of the world and their place within it and even more to the point as they learn you and get under your skin and see your issues - after a while it becomes quite clear, doesn’t it, that Mr. Wonderful or Miss Perfect isn’t really going to deliver the peace and the rest and the security and the identity that you’d hoped. In fact, by looking to them to provide these things you’ve doomed the relationship from the start. They could never ever hope to provide them for you and so if we’re not very careful we leave behind us a string of broken relationships, one after another, searching for security, never finding it; looking for identity and self-worth in yet another human relationship and then another and then another and each one disappoints.

In the account we’ve just read a few moments ago from John’s gospel chapter 4, we find Jesus meeting with a Samaritan woman whose life really does reflect the pattern we’ve just outlined. Hers is an extraordinarily contemporary story, as I’m sure you’ll agree as we explore it together. She has had a string of failed marriages, five of them to be exact, and she’s currently living with a man who is not her husband - verse 18. Verse 6 tells us Jesus meets her at the sixth hour. That means she’s come out to the well to draw water at midday, the hottest part

of the day when she could be sure that none of the other women from the town of Sychar would be there. Normally, you see, this would be a communal exercise. The women of the town would all come out together to the well to chat and swap stories as they drew water for the day. But she doesn't want to be there. She doesn't want to be the butt of the gossip. She knows, actually, that her life is a scandalous one and so here she is alone, ashamed, soul-sick. She is seeking, desperately seeking, but she's been looking in all the wrong places. She believes she can't be alone. She has to be in a relationship; her self-worth demands it. As Becker put it earlier, she wants to be rid of her feelings of nothingness to know her existence has not been in vain. She wants redemption; nothing less. But she has found to her cost, over and over again, "no human relationship can bear this burden of godhood." And so what we have in this account is the record of a woman whose heart craves satisfaction but who does not know where to turn to find it. And it is precisely in that condition that she meets Jesus. And although she doesn't know it yet, it is this meeting and nothing else that can address the thirst of her soul.

Let's take a look at John's account together; see what happens next, shall we? I want you to notice four things here. First in verses 1 to 9 there is a scandal that Jesus flouts; a scandal that Jesus flouts. He ignores the scandal completely; I love this about Jesus. He is utterly unconcerned about the opinions of others when He is reaching out in love and grace to hurting souls. There is a scandal Jesus flouts. Then secondly in 10 to 15 there is a satisfaction that Jesus offers. Jesus knows exactly what she needs and He offers it to her on the spot. A scandal He flouts, a satisfaction Jesus offers, then thirdly 16 to 18 there is the self Jesus demands that we face. We will never find satisfaction unless and until we come to see ourselves as we really are and find a way to deal with what we see there festering in our hearts effectively. The scandal Jesus flouts, the satisfaction Jesus offers, the self Jesus calls us to face, then in 19 to 30 finally, the salvation Jesus brings. The salvation Jesus brings.

The Scandal Jesus Flouts

Let's think about verses 1 to 9 first - the scandal that Jesus flouts. He's heading back from a season of ministry in Galilee. I'm sorry, he's heading back to Galilee from a season of ministry in Judea and the shortest route home is through Samaria. Worn out from traveling the hot, dusty road he stops, verse 6, at Jacob's well and sends the disciples into town to buy lunch. It's just then that the Samaritan woman comes to draw water and so He asks her for a drink. It seems to us a perfectly natural thing to do, doesn't it? He's thirsty, here's the well, she has a bucket, she can supply His thirst - "Give me a drink." Nothing controversial about that except, look at verse 9 - she is quite astonished at His request. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)" John adds.

What's going on? Obviously there's some controversy that we may not be aware of. For her part, the Samaritan woman specifically mentions two issues that shocked her when Jesus asked for a drink.

A Samaritan woman!

First, she is a Samaritan *woman* or rather He is a Jewish *man*. And according to the rabbis, Jewish men were not supposed to publically interact with women. According to Kent Hughes, one of the commentators on this passage, there was even one group of Pharisees who were known as the bruised and bleeding Pharisees; they were a fun bunch. Bruised and bleeding because they were supposed to close their eyes whenever they saw a woman in public. One would expect, really, if you were going to do that that you would stop walking, but apparently misogyny and intelligence are mutually exclusive traits and so they were the bruised and bleeding Pharisees! They closed their eyes when they saw Jewish women. Jewish men did not talk to women in public. That was the first issue.

A Samaritan woman!

The second is that she is a *Samaritan* woman. The Samaritans, as you may know, were a people group descended from Jews living in the north of the province who had intermarried with immigrants several centuries before. They actually claimed to be the true custodians of Israelite national and religious identity. They rejected all the books of the Hebrew Scriptures except the first five books written by Moses and they went on to build a rival center of worship on Mount Gerazim under the shadow of which Jacob's well, where the action in our chapter all takes place, was located. Of the Samaritans, the rabbis declared that for a Jewish man to eat their bread would be the equivalent of eating swine flesh. To eat Samaritan bread is like eating pork for a Jewish man - repulsive, unclean. Don Carson, another commentator, records a popular Jewish prayer that really sums up the antipathy felt by Jews towards Samaritans. It said this, "Lord, do not remember the Samaritans in the resurrection." In other words, Jews and Samaritans hated one another. That's why the woman is stunned in verse 9 as Jesus asks her for a drink. He's asking to use the same vessels she's using and to share water with her. It's actually a stunning thing for Him to do. That's why the disciples in verse 27 are nonplused when they come back and see Jesus talking with her they want to know, from her, "What do you seek?" and they want to know from Him, "Why are You talking with her? I hope no one's seen You, Jesus! This is just not done!"

A Savior who Crosses Prejudices and Transcends Boundaries

This is a scandalous thing. They don't dare voice their concerns but those concerns are bubbling away nonetheless. But can you see how Jesus' willingness to court scandal for the sake of reaching this needy woman would

have communicated to her particularly in a powerful way? She is herself, after all, the butt of gossip and scandal, cut off even from her own community, but here is Jesus willing to risk scandal to make a connection. You need to know, as this woman began to learn, that Jesus Christ is not like other people. He's not like other people. He comes to us, crosses prejudices and transcends boundaries, racism and sexism and bigotry - they never stop Him from reaching us and changing us. The artificial barriers we like to erect to keep people like us out, not like us rather, out, may well order our society and constrain our behavior out there in the world. The nice, neat barriers that we've built to keep people not like us - they often constrain our barriers out there in the world, constrain our lives out there in the world. But here we learn that they have absolutely no meaning when it comes to Jesus Christ; none. It's not the opinion of others that Jesus is interested in; it is your heart, and He is prepared to penetrate, to get under our skin and begin to deal with us up close and personal regardless of what people might think. There is a scandal that Jesus flouts.

The Satisfaction Jesus Offers

And then notice that Jesus gets right to the point, doesn't He? There is a satisfaction that He offers - verses 10 to 15. Look at the passage please. Verses 10 to 15. The Samaritan woman is shocked that Jesus would ask for a drink and she says so. I rather imagine Jesus smiling at her and simply saying, "Well then, this is really going to knock your socks off. If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is asking you for a drink you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water. You really don't understand what's going on here, do you? I'm thirsty for water because the day is hot, the journey's been long. But you are thirsty for something much, much deeper and I can slake that thirst with living water." That's what He offers her but she really doesn't understand what's going on. He's talking about living water; she thinks He means running water. Verses 11 and 12 - "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well, drank from it himself as did his sons and livestock."

She is not tracking with Him so He takes another run at it with a word of explanation. Verses 13 and 14 - "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Probably in the back of Jesus' mind is Jeremiah 2:13 where God rebuked His people Israel for two evils. First, "They have forsaken me," God said, "the fountain of living waters." And secondly, "They have hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." You see what Jesus is saying to her? "You've been coming to this well looking to satisfy your thirst day after day after day and it works for a moment, but then the thirst returns. That is a picture of your life - a series of broken cisterns that do not hold water. You're trying to slake your thirst with things that can never satisfy, but I, I

have the satisfaction that you need. I'm the fountain of living water. Won't you come to Me and drink?"

A Confusion in Terms

If you look at her reply, poor woman, she still doesn't quite understand. "Sir, give me this water so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." They're talking past each other. It can be a frustrating experience; I'm sure it's happened to you. It happens to me as a Brit living in the United States all the time. I remember on one occasion, actually during my ministry in London when a family from the United States had come to worship with us and I had given the man my card. Years later after we moved back here to the United States, I met him again and he came up to me with great enthusiasm and told me that for all those years he'd cherished my card and kept it in his pants. Well in Britain, one's "pants" are garments not usually brought up in polite conversation and so you can imagine my confusion and discomfort at the awkward revelation. We're using the same language but we mean altogether different things with comedic results. And I think something like that is going on here. They're talking past each other, aren't they? Almost comedic in the way the conversation develops. He's talking about salvation; she's talking about plumbing!

An All-Satisfying Savior

But for all her confusion, we can see what she couldn't. We can see that actually Jesus has penetrated already her deepest need. She's been trying to satisfy her deep insecurities in a series of relationships with men, she's always been left thirsty at the end. But Jesus wants her to see, as Earnest Becker put it so well at the beginning, that "no human relationship can bear this burden of godhood." He wants her to grasp that He offers her something no merely human relationship can. Can you see His point? He alone can satisfy your heart thirst for security and identity and peace because He's more than just a man; He is the Lord God made flesh who is Himself the fountain of living water and you must go to Him to drink it in. But if you do, you will never thirst again; you will never thirst again. He can satisfy your heart.

The Self Jesus Calls us to Face

The scandal Jesus flouts, the satisfaction Jesus offers, thirdly, the self Jesus demands we face. It's clear the Samaritan woman is not tracking with Jesus at all so He changes strategy in verse 16. It reads like an abrupt right turn in the conversation, a non sequitur. It is not - you see He knows where she's been looking to quench her longing heart all this time and so He puts His finger directly on it. Verse 16, "Go call your husband." Now this is a sore spot Jesus is pressing on and He receives, albeit a truthful reply, still nevertheless a rather curt one, "I have no husband." As it turns out, Jesus knows far more than she is willing to

reveal. Look at the passage; verse 17 and 18. Do you see this in the text? “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands and the one you now have is not your husband. What you’ve said is true.” Five times she’s been divorced. The Greek of the text puts the emphasis on the word, “your.” When Jesus describes their present living arrangements, “The man you now have is not *your* husband.” Do you see the implication? She’s not just a serial monogamist; she’s an adulteress as well. Her need to be loved, to find security in the affection of men, has driven her to an entanglement with another woman’s husband.

Exposing the Futility of Self that makes us Flee to Christ

Now why does Jesus do that? It seems terribly unkind, doesn’t it? He rips open the band-aid covering the festering wounds of her soul. But Jesus knows that if she is ever to find real satisfaction, true and deep and lasting and real, she needs to see clearly the inadequacy of the alternatives to which she has been turning all along. He’s highlighting for us the contrast between the broken cisterns that cannot hold water and the unfailing wellspring of living water that Jesus can cause to bubble up within everyone who believes in Him. Satisfaction in Christ and the glutting of our spiritual appetites on the fast food substitutes of sin, those are mutually exclusive. The Samaritan woman needed to see clearly the options before her - the emptiness of drinking from the unsatisfying well of human relationships or the unending supply of deep soul-clenching grace only Jesus gives. And we need to see the options clearly too. Unless and until you see the futility of looking to your relationships for your significance instead of to Christ you will never find peace; never. Our relationships were never meant to bear that kind of weight, but Jesus can. Jesus can. And so He wants us to face the cracked and barren dustbowl desert of our sin-parched souls honestly and then He wants us to run to Him - the only oasis in the desert, and drink.

The Salvation Jesus Brings

The scandal Jesus flouts, the satisfaction Jesus offers, the self Jesus calls us to face, and then finally the salvation Jesus brings. Look down at verse 19 for a moment. “The woman said to him, ‘Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.’” Now it is common at this point to suggest that the woman is using a diversionary tactic. Jesus has gotten a little too close for comfort, so the argument runs. All this talk about her sin is making her nervous and so she tries to divert the conversation with some good theological argument. “The Jews worship in Jerusalem, the Samaritans worship on Mount Gerazim, just over here, Jesus, so which is it? Let’s not talk about my sin; let’s have an argument instead.” It’s a red herring; an attempt to draw Jesus away from the personal issues into abstract debate.

Diversion Tactics

I don't think that's what's happening at all; not at all. Her recognition of Jesus' supernatural insight is genuine, I think. "I perceive that you are a prophet." She does not yet fully understand who He is, though He will eventually reveal Himself to her in verse 26. "I'm the Messiah," He will say. "The reason I can give you living water and satisfy your heart is because of who I really am." She doesn't understand all of that quite yet but she knows He understands her heart in a way that can only be true if God was at work. She has been exposed, her heart laid bare, her sin uncovered. And so her question about the proper place to worship, it's not really a diversion. And Jesus, notice Jesus doesn't treat it like a diversion, like a red herring. This is a man who, according to verse 29, has fathomed her heart in a way no one else ever has. She knows that in Jesus whatever else is true she's dealing with the supernatural even if she doesn't get all the details quite yet and so she asks Him with urgency about where she should go to deal with her sin-sick soul. "Do I go to the Jerusalem temple or are the Samaritans right after all? Where do I turn to get right with God?" Now it's no longer an abstract theological debate; now it's vital and urgent.

True Worship and True Truth

And the essence of Jesus' answer is that relating rightly to God no longer requires buildings and priests and animal sacrifices. No, what is required now that He has come is faith in Him alone. Look at verse 23, please. Jesus tells her, "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. For the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." It's an amazing statement. He tells her the temple and all the rituals and sacrifices it involved has become obsolete now that the Truth, capital T, has stepped onto the scene, now that the real thing has come, now that the perfect Priest and the perfect Sacrifice at last has arrived. Now that Jesus is here, well then, temples and sacrifices and priests become altogether redundant. They were only ever meant to point forward to a deeper and great reality anyway, a reality that Jesus embodies. He would die to deal with sin once for all, bearing our sin in His body at the cross. It's not an earthly altar you need; it's Jesus crucified that you need. "We must worship the Father in spirit and truth," Jesus says. Or to paraphrase His point, to get right with God what we need is the Holy Spirit connecting us to the truth - the reality that has come now only in Jesus. The place where you can get right with God no longer has anything to do with buildings - not this building nor any other - and it has everything to do with Christ, the true and perfect sacrifice for sin. He can make your conscience clean. He can give you a right standing before God. He can wash you and cleanse you and satisfy and nourish you. He can answer the longing and no merely human relationship can ever, ever, ever fulfill.

A Call to Flee to Christ

I'm so glad that you can this evening. I do want to urge you, before you leave this place, to respond to Jesus Christ who invites you to come to the fountain and drink, who invites you to come to Him, to cast your cares on Him, to pour out your heart to Him, to seek forgiveness from Him, to find satisfaction in Him. He is the one you need and He is offered to you tonight. Come to Christ, come to the waters, without money and without price, and drink never to thirst again. Would you pray with me please?

Our Father, we thank You for Jesus in whom there is soul satisfaction for all who believe. Save us from looking to broken cisterns, to relationships particularly, but to the many things to which we often run for the satisfaction and rest and peace and security of our souls. And instead, would You draw us to the fountain of living water, the God-Man Jesus Christ, who gave Himself to make us clean. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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