

Sermon Series Four: Believe and Live
(The Gospel of John: Signs of the Messiah - 1:1-12:50)
John 4:16-26, 28-29, 39-41
Facing the Truth

Little in life is more difficult than facing the truth. It is much easier to hide from the truth, deny the truth, embellish the truth, resist the truth or even appear to do away with the truth. But Christianity begins by bringing people to the truth. No one will ever enter heaven without coming to grips with the truth that they are sinners who are guilty before God in danger of judgment and no one will ever enter heaven without embracing the truth that in Christ they have a Savior! As we come to our text we see Christ once again engaging a lost soul with the offer of the gift of eternal life. We also see him as the consummate evangelist sharing the good news with the best of people to the lowest of people (from a “scholar of the church” to a woman of ill repute). And part of what he is teaching us is some very important guidelines that will lead us to effective evangelism. You will see God drawing the lost to Christ through you when:

I. You are driven to look for opportunities to witness.

The text tells us that Jesus was driven by God - that he had to pass through Samaria (4:4). Why? It was because his trip would lead him at the perfect time to the perfect place where a woman was in desperate need of him, the Savior. *Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ must always be at the top of our agenda. We must always be looking for opportunities to share our faith - to share our story.

II. You dare to go where no one else will go.

Jesus, a Jew, was traveling to minister to a person who would be hated by Jews just because she was a Samaritan. Jesus faced a number of barriers that he had to bridge - the barrier of ethnicity, the barrier of religion, the barrier of morality, and the barrier of gender. Jesus would have to do what would be absolutely outside his comfort zone in order to bring this lost woman to belief in him. *We too must crossover these very same barriers in leading people to Jesus.

III. You use a physical need to introduce the all important spiritual need.

Jesus used the physical need for the “living water” of a spring fed well to introduce the Samaritan woman to the “spiritual living water” which would meet her spiritual need by cleansing her soul and giving her eternal life. This water would be the true “fountain of youth” that would cause her to live forever in heaven with Christ.*It is also important for us to use physical needs that we all share to introduce unbelievers to their all-important spiritual need.

IV. You lovingly bring people face-to-face with the truth (4:16-26)

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 we will 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.”

But as you confront people with the truth you will discover:

1. They will often change the subject or try to cut off further conversation concerning the truth. Three times this woman will use a diversionary measure. Three times she will try to change the conversation:

1) They might try to cut off the conversation in order to protect their privacy or preserve respectability (4:17). Jesus has called her to go and get her husband which immediately stirs up within the woman a conviction of sin. She is living a life that is not only immoral, but a life that is in a mess. She has already had five husbands and is currently living with a man. Her response is curt, potentially misleading, (“I have no husband.”) and could be understood as her being unattached and thus available.

2) They might change the subject by bringing up a controversial issue (4:19-20). She changes the subject to one of the most divisive religious issues of her day. There was a dispute between Jews and Samaritans regarding the proper place of worship that had gone on for centuries. Was the proper place of worship in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerazim? The Samaritans believed that both Abraham and Jacob had offered sacrifices there and had built a temple and engaged in sacrifices there.

3) They might claim to believe in God and Jesus (4:25). In a final attempt to end her embarrassment, the Samaritan woman affirms her belief that Messiah is coming. Her affirmation that he will explain everything to us is consistent with the fact that rather than looking for a royal Messiah from the house of David, Samaritans apparently expected a teaching Messiah. She may even be wondering if this stranger could be the promised one. She believes in God and even believes that Jesus is a prophet, but she has not come to the place where she recognizes Jesus as her Messiah, Savior, and Lord. On many occasions we hear people say that they believe in God or even believe in Jesus, but they have not come to a correct understanding of what that means.

2. You will have to stay on topic and lovingly but firmly continue to confront them with the truth.

1) You must reveal God's knowledge of the sin in their life (4:16-19). Jesus reveals that he knows her life's circumstances without having been told by anyone. She has been married five times and is now living in an adulterous relationship. She is amazed at his seeming omniscience and declares him to be the prophet, like Moses, that the Samaritans were looking for. She is forced to recognize that Jesus is no ordinary stranger. Clearly she is sobered by his knowledge of her secret, but is also liberated from the need of concealing it any longer. Just as a surgeon must treat an ugly cancer, so the Great Physician must deal with sin to bring spiritual healing. She has begun her journey to faith in Christ.

2) You must bring them to an understanding of true worship and a true relationship with God (4:21 -26) Now what does that involve?

(1) They must come to understand that the worship and knowledge of God is not limited to a location. Jesus tells the woman that the real issue was not where God's people have worshiped in the past, but how they would worship him in the future. The Samaritan worship at Mount Gerizim was based on ignorance regarding Israel's role in God's plan of salvation. Salvation would come from Messiah who was from the tribe of Judah. But not only is Samaritan worship dismissed as being based on ignorance; Jewish worship in Jerusalem is called obsolete. Why? Jesus's ministry inaugurated a new age in which the Holy Spirit would indwell individual believers rather than worship being focused on a temple or holy place. Having a relationship with God is not about meeting him in a particular denomination or at a particular location. God can be worshipped at any time and in any place because the relationship with God is found in a person - the person of Christ. Once we have become a believer, we become individual "temples" of the Holy Spirit and have constant and intimate access with God (First Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). It is not about God coming to *a place* but about God coming to *your place!*

(2) They must come to understand that a relationship with God is based on spirit and truth. All true faith is an act of worship. It is an act of full surrender, total commitment, and trust. Because God is a spirit, *proper worship of him is also a matter of spirit* rather than physical location. To worship him in spirit is to worship him in the manner that he has prescribed. God has a rightful claim to worship and is daily seeking those who will acknowledge his claim and will bow their knees and ascribe him worth. To worship him *in truth* means to worship the true God, honestly, genuinely, and to exalt God for who he is. It is to accept what he has said in his Word and to believe that Christ is who he says he is. The Samaritans worshipped a God whom they did not really know since they rejected most of his revelation in the Old Testament and had added pagan concepts to their

faith. If the Samaritan woman truly believed that Jesus was a prophet, she would have to accept this statement. She would have to come to God on his terms. **The combination of spirit and truth here points to the need for complete sincerity and complete reality in our approach to God!

(3) They must come to a proper understanding of God and Christ. A true idea of God is essential to a right belief and service of him. Worship is all about him. All unbelievers, like the Samaritan woman, must come to an understanding of who Jesus is. Christ proclaims himself to be the Messiah and to be equal to God. He is the deliverer, the anointed one whom God sent into the world so that the world might have life by believing in his name.

V. You understand that people come to Christ through the testimony of experience grounded in the teaching of God's Word (4: 28-29, 39-41)

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 ... Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "it is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

People always come to Christ as a combination of a believer's personal testimony and the sharing of the salvation message from the Word of God. It was the witness of the Samaritan woman that grabbed their attention. It is amazing what God can do when believers take a step of faith, initiate a conversation, and show interest in the lives of others. God is able and willing to use our small gestures of kindness and expressions of interest to help bring people to faith. But equally important is our clear explanations of the way to salvation. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

***** The Power of a Changed Life**

Pastor Steve Yeschek, Crystal Lake, Illinois, lost his sister, Judy, after a five-year battle with cancer. She was a woman who, as Steve described her, was a party animal—a big drinker with a self-contented lifestyle. She was someone everybody loved, because she exuded excitement and a thrill for life. When Steve tried to share Jesus with her over the years, she would laugh it off and keep partying. But at the age of 44, her world caved in. She found out she had breast cancer. She later learned her husband had cancer, too. Adding to the devastation of these two blows, she discovered her husband was having an affair. He subsequently announced he didn't love her anymore and left her. It was in that context that she began to ask eternal questions and soon prayed to receive Jesus as her Savior. From that time

until her death, Jesus and his Word and purpose became her priority. With the same gusto she lived life as an unbeliever, she now approached her new life in Christ. Her greatest aim was winning others to Christ. She boldly shared her faith even as she was undergoing surgery after surgery, praying for a miraculous healing from the Lord. Judy ultimately came to see that the greater miracle would be for her friends and family to come to know Christ. Even as she struggled for every breath, she talked her way out of the hospital about ten days before her death so she could be baptized and publicly proclaim Christ as the only way of salvation. Judy invited everyone she knew to come to her baptism service. Under the Spirit's anointing, she powerfully and urgently shared her testimony. Her 84-year-old father came to faith in Christ that night and was baptized—along with her ex-husband, a number of nieces, a college roommate who was a New Age cultist, her aunt, her sister, and others. Ten days later, Judy died. Even still, more people came to know the Savior. When Steve read the message she had prepared for her own funeral service, another 100 people prayed to receive Christ that day.

Conclusion

John brings this story to a close by revealing the purpose of this account. It is to declare that Jesus is not just the Savior of the Jews, not just the Savior of Americans, not just the Savior of the elite, not just the Savior of the poor, not just the Savior of those who are white or those who are black; he is the Savior of the whole world. Interestingly, Christ is called Savior of the world only in one other New Testament passage (First John 4:14). The Messiah is never called “Savior” in the Old Testament. This is important because by recognizing Jesus as Savior of the world the Samaritans accept that salvation may be from the Jews, but it is ultimately for all people. Jesus’s harvest among the Samaritans signals the return of a part of the unbelieving world to God as a first sign of the universal scope of Jesus’s saving mission. The message of the Savior will eventually reach every part of the world. So what are you doing in helping people to face the truth that they are sinners in need of a Savior? What are you doing to share the great news that God does not have favorites, but that Jesus has come with a message that is relevant to each and every person in the world? No matter how far down into the muck and mire of sin they have gone, the Savior is reaching out to them, longing for them to believe and receive him. You have a significant part in helping them to face the truth.

*****Mission Trip Transforms Hospital**

In her book *Radical Gratitude*, Ellen Vaughn tells the story of a family friend named Jerry: Some years ago Jerry was in Russia on a short visit with Prison Fellowship International. He and a group of friends visited a number of prisons, and finished their work a few days early. They asked their hosts if they could go

visit children in the hospital. They were taken to a 750-bed hospital in Moscow at the end of the Leniniski Prospect. Most of the beds were empty. This is where children with cancer and blood diseases came to die. There was a cafeteria but no food. No trained nurses, no laundry, no disinfectants, few medicines, no lab work. The children's families brought in and prepared food for them in the empty hospital kitchen. This was the national clinic for children, where patients came from all over the Russian Federation. A staff person brought a young girl in an old wheelchair to Jerry. She was about 14-years-old, with thin brown hair and dark circles under her eyes. "She has about 4 months to live," the woman told Jerry. "We have no medicines to help her." "What is her name?" Jerry asked. He bent down to the girl's level. "Eugenia," the woman said. Jerry rocked on his heels. Eugenia was his daughter's name. What if his Eugenia was dying and needed medicine? What would he do? What would this Russian Eugenia's dad do for his daughter if he could? The staff people told Jerry that the drug protocol for Eugenia would run about \$18,000 (U.S.). Jerry is not a man of wealth, but he turned to a buddy with him, a cattle rancher. "Ed," said Jerry, "if we can't find someone to donate the money to help this little girl, I'll sell my car, if you sell your truck, okay?" "You drive me crazy always trying to swing these deals," Ed said. "But that's why I come on these trips with you. Okay." But selling a car and a truck would only take them so far. There were lots of kids who needed help. Jerry returned to the U. S. and got on the phone. Within two weeks, a prominent children's clinic had given him tens of thousands of dollar's worth of drugs packed in cooler boxes with dry ice, and Jerry was on a plane back to Moscow. Jerry and his friends raised millions of dollars, and the clinic became world-class. Furthermore, they teach nurses and doctors who travel all over the Russian Federation. Eugenia's cancer went into remission. Vaughn tells what happens when Jerry and the others got back to Moscow with the first planeload of medicine: "When he and his buddies walked into the hospital in the night, Eugenia's mother saw them coming. She ran down the dim corridor, her face incredulous, and burst into tears. 'You are Jesus, are you not?' she exclaimed in broken English."