

Armagh Baptist Church – Sunday 2nd August 2009
“How Jesus deals with Sin in those who are outside the Church”
John ch.4:1-42

Introduction

I'm not sure how good your memories are here in Armagh. But if you can remember back to the first Sunday night in July I was preaching on the second half of John ch.3.

We noticed that John had a few things to say about baptism in that passage:

(i) Jesus was baptizing out in the Judean countryside (v.22)

(ii) John the Baptist was also baptizing at a place called Aenon, near Salim (v.23):

*‘Because there was plenty of water there,
and people were constantly coming to be baptized.’*

(iii) Baptism is not a ceremonial washing or sacramental ritual (v.25-26), even though that's what the Jews and the followers of John the Baptist were arguing about.

We saw that baptism cannot save anyone, no matter how much water is used, whether it's sprinkling or immersion, baptism cannot save anyone - but Jesus can!

And that was John's message (vs.31-36).

He pointed them, not to *his baptism* as the answer to their sin problem, **but to Jesus**. He pointed men, women, boys and girls to Jesus for salvation, not to himself (v.30).

As we come into John ch.4 we find that baptism is still a contentious issue in vs.1-3. The Pharisees have heard that Jesus is baptizing more people than John the Baptist! Isn't it amazing how human beings can turn something that is supposed to represent submission to the Lordship of Christ into a competition for personal glory!?

I'm sure neither Jesus, nor John the Baptist were counting!!

Personally, I have lost count of how many people I have baptized over the years.

But John adds in here, that Jesus didn't actually baptize anyone – his disciples did! Jesus was being careful that no-one could say that they were more important than anybody else, because they had been baptized by Jesus, as opposed to one of his disciples. That's not what it's all about at all. Although for a while in Christian circles even here in this country there was almost something special about going to be baptized in the River Jordan in Israel. Again that's not what it's all about either! Who baptizes us, and where the water comes from, makes no difference whatsoever!

Anyway, when we come to v.3, I think it's very interesting that Jesus just gets off-side to avoid this controversy escalating. He leaves Jerusalem and heads back once more to Galilee up in the north. We're told in v.4 that *‘he had to go through Samaria’*.

Now, a lot of ink has been spilled on that statement alone in John ch.4.

Why did Jesus have to go through Samaria?

No self-respecting Jew would have gone through Samaria – even though it was the most direct route, and the quickest route, from Jerusalem to Galilee. Instead they would have crossed the Jordan and travelled up its Eastern side, and then crossed back into Galilee at its northern end - A longer, more arduous journey. I think Jesus just wanted to withdraw from the limelight at this point, to cool the situation that was beginning to develop with the Pharisees over baptism. But he was also going to Samaria on a mission – to meet with the woman at the well!

Very soon, in our studies in the Acts of the Apostles, we will read about Philip's mission trip to Samaria in Acts ch.8. But Jesus got there before him in John ch.4. Jesus said in Matthew's Gospel (10:6) that he had been '*sent to the Lost Sheep of the house of Israel*' first and foremost, but even then his mission was never an exclusively Jewish mission. By Matt 28:20 he was telling his disciples to go to all nations!

As the storyline of the Acts of the Apostles unfolds, we find that the Gospel went from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and then to the uttermost parts of the earth, to the gentiles. In fact Samaria was like a half way house between Judaism and the Gentile world, because Samaritans were half Jew & half Gentile. They were a mixed race. That's why the Jews would have no dealings with them – but Jesus did!

In John 4:5 He makes his way into Samaria, and he heads for a town called Sychar. We're told this town was near to the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. In fact Jacob's well was still there, centuries later. So Jesus, tired as he was from his journey, sat down by the well and waited. We're told it was the sixth hour – that's midday – noon – the hottest time of the day! Most people would have been having their siesta at that time of the day, but not Jesus, nor the person he was about to meet...

1. The Character who met Jesus (vs.7)

'A Samaritan woman came to draw water...'

Who was this woman? This was highly unusual – for a lady to be coming to draw water in the middle of the day, in the strong heat of the sun. I remember when I was staying in Bonga Refugee Camp on the Sudan-Ethiopia border, conditions were very primitive to say the least. But every morning, before I was even up, the ladies of the Uduk Tribe had already hoisted their 10 gallon plastic containers onto their heads and had walked down to the river to fill them with water, and then to place them on their heads and walk up to behind the building where I was staying to fill a large oil drum with water. This was then pumped up into an overhead tank, and beneath that was a very primitive shower which I shared with a frog or two

each morning! Those ladies may have made several journeys to fill the tank, but there is no way you would have seen them out in the heat of the day doing that. They got up early to do it before the sun got too hot. This was hard, back-breaking work!

And that's exactly what the ladies in Sychar would have done. They would all have been out early in the morning to draw their water, to feed their flocks and to take water back home for their families. This would have been the meeting place, for the women to have a good chat with each other, and for them to socialize.

So why did this woman come alone, in the middle of the day?

It's because she was an outcast from her village. The other ladies didn't want anything to do with her. She was ostracized, because she had some dark secrets.

The other women didn't want to talk to her, but Jesus did – and that's why he made a point of being there at midday, when she would be there. The disciples had gone into the village to buy food (v.8) so Jesus and this woman are alone at the well.

Jews and Samaritans would not have got on in those days, so this is very unusual. For Jesus, a Jew, to be about to talk to a Samaritan would have been cutting across a major cultural barrier. But even more than that, for Jesus, a Jewish *man*, to be about to talk to a Samaritan *woman*, would have been seen as even worse! Jews looked down on women – but to talk to a Samaritan woman would have been a real cultural taboo!

2. The Conversation she had with Jesus (vs.7-15)

Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?'

The amazing thing is that it was Jesus who started the conversation with this woman.

Or maybe we shouldn't think it amazing at all.

After all, Jesus was God's Son, He was the Creator of this world. He had made everything and everyone in it – and that included this woman, even though she was a Samaritan woman. There was absolutely nothing racist about Jesus. He reached across all the taboos and cultural do's and don'ts to reach out to this woman where she was, and to have a conversation with her. I wonder do we do that?

Do we try to open up conversations with those who have come to live in our country from other places? It doesn't hurt to be welcoming, and Jesus was certainly that.

But it's not just that he spoke to her, it's what he had just said to her that almost makes her fall over in amazement. He, a Jew, had just asked a Samaritan woman to give him *a drink!* This would not normally happen. A Jew was usually very concerned about being ceremonially clean, and would only eat and drink out of 'clean' vessels. Jesus had just sat down at a well after a long journey, he had no vessel with which to draw water, so he was actually asking to drink from *her* water pot! Another taboo!

And that's why this woman responds in the way that she does (v.9):

*'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?'
(For Jews do not associate with Samaritans).*

Her immediate reaction is to put up the barriers again.

She was 'safe' behind the social taboos that had built up between Jews and Gentiles. But Jesus has lowered the wall, if you like, he has started the conversation, and now he has her attention. And so he tries to go a little deeper with her...

She has just come to draw water in the middle of her daily routine, doing the mundane tasks that she would have done every day, but Jesus wants to introduce her to something she has never even thought of before, so he continues (v.10)...

*'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.'*

Jesus is trying to get her to lift her head for a moment.

This woman, because of her hidden secrets, and her sense of shame, probably went around with her head down each day, minding her own business, hoping nobody would notice her. And yet here is a Jewish man trying to talk to her about God!

Jesus is trying to get her to think, not just about the water in that well, but living water! He's also saying that this living water is a gift from God that could be hers, just for the asking! In fact, he's suggesting that all she has to do is to ask **Him**, and **He** could give her this living water – this gift from God! What on earth could he mean?

But in v.11 the woman hasn't got the message. She's still thinking about the water down in the well. She hasn't even picked up that Jesus is trying to talk about something spiritual: *'Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?'*

For her, 'living water' would have meant 'running water' – water from a stream, or fast flowing river. She knew there was nothing like that in her area around Sychar. Did this Jewish man not know that hundreds of years earlier their Patriarch Jacob had dug this well and given it to his family and their descendants? Surely this Jewish man should have known that, for at least Jews and Samaritans could both trace their heritage back to Jacob, the grandson of Abraham!?! What was he on about? Was he greater than Jacob? Who was he? I'm sure she was beginning to wonder...

But Jesus then tries to make the move from physical water to eternal life in v.13:

'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I will give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

Jesus was only using the idea of a drink of water to get this woman's attention, as a point of contact between them, but now he's trying to move on to speak of spiritual things, to talk to this woman about something she really needs – eternal life. And again he's telling her quite clearly that **He** can give her this eternal life. He is the source of eternal life. But she still hasn't got it!

(v.15) *The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.'*

Now she's just looking for an easy life. Not eternal life, but an easy life. For her *bliss* would be to not have to keep coming to this well, carrying her water pot on her head, alone, with no other company, to let down her water pot, fill it with water, put it up onto her head, and walk all the way back into town again. That would be 'bliss', to not have to do that anymore. But Jesus was talking about something far more important!

He's not getting through. But then in v.16 Jesus brings her to the crux of the matter:

3. The Crux of her encounter with Jesus (vs.16-18)

Out of the blue, he says to her, as a complete stranger:

'Go, call your husband, and come back.' (v.16)

What's she going to do now? What's she going to say?

At this point she could have said anything. As far as she was concerned this man didn't know a thing about her, and he didn't need to know, he had no way of finding out. She could have just passed it off: 'Oh, my husband's away today!' But she didn't.

Look what she says in v.17: *'I have no husband'* she confesses.

And then, I'm sure she nearly fell over when Jesus said this:

'You are 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.' (v.17b-18).

What has Jesus just done here? He has skillfully put his finger upon the sin in this woman's life. And yet he has done so in a non-condemnatory way.

This woman had been married to 5 husbands, and now, having got fed-up with marriage, she was just living with another man, who was not her husband at all!

Divorce was very common in those days, just like it has become very common in our society, over the last 50 years or so. Before the 1960s it was very hard to get a divorce

in this country. You had to prove in court a reason for wanting to get divorced, and blame had to be apportioned. It was usually only granted on the grounds of adultery before 1960. Nowadays you can get a divorce for almost any reason. It may cost you, but you can get it. And that's the way it was in Jesus' day. In fact there were some Jewish rabbis who said you could ask for a divorce just because your wife burnt the toast that morning – for the most trivial of things!

It was very likely that this woman had not only been married 5 times, but that she had gone through the pain of death or divorce 5 times as well.

I'm sure this was a woman who was hurting. Jesus knew that. He's not harsh with her, he's not condemning her, but he has put his finger upon the sin in her life.

Let me try to get across to you, what this would have been like. This week I noticed on the BBC News website a story of a serial bigamist. Let me read it to you: (Sheet).

If you met that woman in a coffee shop one day, how would you approach her? Would you talk to her at all? Would you very quickly be condemning her for her sins? Or would you tactfully try to talk to her, and after gaining her trust, eventually try to point her to the Saviour who could save her from her sins, and grant her total forgiveness? I wonder? How you would treat that woman, is probably how you would have treated this woman in Sychar too! And yet Jesus deals with her so graciously. He has confronted her with her sin, he hasn't avoided it, but he hasn't condemned her either. And so the conversation continues for a while. She doesn't run away in disgust!

4. The Conversation continues with Jesus (vs.19-26)

She is now prepared to talk 'religion' for a while...

She realizes Jesus is a prophet, otherwise how did he know so much about her?

So she's content to talk about the pros and cons of Samaritan as opposed to Jewish places of worship! (The Jews worshipped at their Temple in Jerusalem, but the Samaritans thought that the place to worship was their Temple on Mount Gerizim).

It would be a bit like someone in Armagh debating which of the two Cathedrals would be best to worship in – the Roman Catholic one or the Church of Ireland one!

Jesus again very skillfully helps her to see that it's not so important **where** you worship, on that mountain or this mountain, in that building or this building – but **how** you worship. He says that the time has now come for true worshippers of the Living God to worship Him '*in spirit and in truth*' for these are the kind of worshippers the Father is looking for: '*God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.*' (v.24)

God is looking for our *spiritual* worship – worship that comes from our hearts, not worship that is all taken up with physical ritual, and going through the motions of some ancient form of worship. Our worship must be spiritual – from the heart. In fact from hearts that are now indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God – hearts that have been born again, as we saw in John ch.3 with Nicodemus.

And God is also looking for worship which is *truthful* – worship which is based on, and guided by the Truth of God’s Word – the Bible. Some people say it doesn’t matter how we worship God. We can worship God in our own way. But clearly we can’t. God is looking for spiritual worship, and worship which is guided by His Word.

It’s at that point that the woman herself brings the conversation around to talk about the Messiah – when the Christ would come. She says, *‘I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes he will explain everything to us.’* He will lead us into all truth. And she was absolutely right!

What she wasn’t expecting was for Jesus to say, *‘I who speak to you and he!’* (v.26). Here Jesus reveals himself more clearly to her than to anyone else in the whole NT! When she starts to talk about the Messiah, Jesus simply says, *‘I, who speak to you, am he!’* I am the Messiah – as clear as a bell – and yet this was to a Samaritan woman!

What a privilege she had that day – to talk to face to face with the Messiah! But as the truth of all of that was sinking in to her heart and mind, the conversation is interrupted, because the disciples arrive back from their grocery shopping in town!

They are immediately surprised to find Jesus talking to a woman – in Samaria! But none of them dared to open their mouths to say ‘What do you want?’ to her, or even ‘Why are you talking to her?’ to Jesus. They are dumb-struck! That brings us to...

5. The Consequences of this encounter (vs.27-30, 39-42)

What followed that conversation that day, was amazing.

She left her water pot where it was, almost as if she’d forgotten why she’d come to the well that day! She leaves, it and she hurries back to the town, where she was an outcast, and she says these amazing words:

‘Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’

Now, just think about that for a minute. Bearing in mind who this woman was, and what we have just found out about her, that she was a woman with 5 failed marriages behind her, a woman who had probably been in and out of the divorce courts, and a woman who had now given up on marriage, and had just taken up living with yet another man, is that what you would expect her to shout out for all her town to hear?

'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did.'

This man had just confronted her with her sin. This man knew absolutely everything there was to know about her, and yet she's no longer hiding her sin and shame. She's found someone who knows all about her, who knows her better than she knows herself. But she's found someone who doesn't condemn her for all of that, but who has actually shown his acceptance of her by asking her for a drink from her water pot! *'Could this be the Christ? Could this be the man who can forgive me for all my sin?'*

Answer – absolutely! Yes, He can, and He will.

He will not only forgive her for all her past sins, but he will forget them all too, cast them into the sea of his forgetfulness, and then welcome her cleansed and forgiven, into the Family of God. She can become a new creature in Christ, she can have a fresh new start, she can be born again of the Holy Spirit of God.

What she needed to get right with God, was exactly the same as what respectable, religious Nicodemus needed to get right with God. They both needed to be born again.

So now she's caused a stir (v.30). The people come out of the town and make their way towards Jesus, who was still sitting at Jacob's well with his disciples.

And the amazing thing is (v.39) that *"many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus why? Because of this woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did'.*

In fact, when they got out to him, they urged him to stay with them. And he did – for 2 days – and as they listened to his teaching, many more became believers in Jesus!

(v.42) They had come to realize that *'this man really is the Saviour of the world.'* That's how Jesus deals with sin in the life of someone outside the church – **in grace!**

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