

Our Loving God and His Going Son!

John 4:1-42

By Elbert McGowan

(Brian Sorgenfrei) We're going to be reading from John 4. Starting in verse 1:

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 and 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.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one other, "Has anyone brought Him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

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."

(Elbert McGowan) Let us pray one more time.

Father, I need You. I need Your Spirit to give me boldness, to give me passion, to give me wisdom and to utter the things of the Lord. We all need You and we need You, Holy Spirit, to apply these truths to our hearts so that we may be conformed to the image of Your Son and our Savior, Jesus, who is the Christ. And so help us to glean from this passage, this passage of things that You would have us to, that a dying world may see a loving Savior. Help us, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Our vision for what something should look like must impact how we behave in the present. Let me say it another way, that what you see about something in the future, it has this way of shaping how you and I behave in the present. Two examples — let's take a couple who's newly engaged and all of a sudden this

engaged young lady envisions herself in her wedding attire. She envisions the people who will be there as she and her new husband make their covenant vows. She envisions what type of flowers she wants. She envisions what type of food she wants her guests to eat. She envisions how she wants her hair. And immediately after the engagement, she diets, she works out, she tried on a hundred dresses, she sends out invitations, she tastes food from different restaurants. What about a new couple expecting the birth of a child? They envision bringing that child home. They envision the child having diapers and wipes and its own room and its own crib. And once they find out they're pregnant, they embark upon nine months of realigning their entire life because they perceive a vision, something bigger than they can imagine.

I want you to do something for me. I want you to think about the kingdom of God and I want you to think about what the kingdom of God will look like when it is consummated by the return of the Lord Jesus. I want you to envision who we shall be standing next to, shoulder to shoulder, bowing before one common Savior, singing His praises forever. I want you to envision who will be there with us, according to the Scriptures, not according to who we want there or who we think should be there, but when we open up the Bible and we see from the Bible - who does the Bible say will be there with us on that great day, that we shall spend eternity with?

John sees a vision. John sees a multitude too numerous to count. John sees people from every nation and tribe and tongue. John sees people who were scorched by the rays of the sun. John sees people who went about in this life hungry and thirsty. John sees them who had no shepherd in this life with a shepherd in the next and with food in the next and with shelter in the next and with drink in the next. Jesus seems to think that former adulterers and prostitutes and drunkards, those lame and crippled and blind and unwise according to the world's standards — the poor, the addicts, the beggars — that they all have a place in the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And because Jesus tells us in John chapter 5, Jesus says, "I only do what I see My Father doing. My Father loves Me and He is pleased to show Me what He is doing and whatever He does, that is what I do in My earthly ministry." And so you see Jesus Himself getting a vision of what the kingdom looks like, and then in His earthly ministry, guess what — He behaves in such a manner as to make that future reality present, right now. In other words, Jesus beholds the glorious day when the nations will be paraded in front of Him, when the nations will be given to Him as His inheritance. It makes perfect sense that when we read the Scriptures we see Jesus moving towards those same people to make that a reality now.

That's what Jesus is doing tonight. He's moving toward someone who is broken, who is an outcast, who is no doubt a horrid sinner, and He does not ignore her. He does not go around her. He goes straight to her. And if we're honest, that type of ministry is intimidating. It is hard and it is perplexing and it is taxing. This whole idea of moving towards the broken, moving towards people who are racially

different, politically different, religiously different, economically different. In all the ways in which we can make their differences stand out, we look at that and we think, “No way. You want me to go there?” And what Jesus says is, “Yes way. Look at Me. The servant is not greater than the Master. The servant must do what the Master does.” And so in this passage what Jesus is saying is, “Saints, be spurred on in your doing. Be not afraid. Be faithful, even though it's hard.” So what does Jesus teach us here? If we are going to take this seriously, what does He teach us?

The first thing He says - be adamant about taking the Gospel there, wherever “there” might be, be adamant about it. Jesus says, expect adversity. Jesus says, anticipate God's working. And finally, have an attitude of eagerness. So it's four “A”s — be adamant, expect adversity, anticipate God's working, and have an attitude of eagerness.

BE ADAMANT

First thing, Jesus shows us He is adamant about taking the Gospel over and up there. In verses 1 and 2 we see that Jesus has to leave Judea because He's getting more popular and causing an uproar and He chooses not to deal with that right now and so He wants to retreat. He wants to go back to where He was initially. And so when you look at it in verse 1 and verse 2, it says that Jesus left Judea in the south and departed again for Galilee, sixty to seventy miles north. But the text says that, verse 4, “He had to pass through Samaria.” Now Samaria was right in between, right in between Judea and Galilee. And the text says He had to go through Samaria in order to get seventy miles north.

Now, let's look at why John says He had to. Option number one is, perhaps this is the only way. Perhaps the only way to get north is to go due-north. That's not really true though. Read any commentator and you will realize that there was another way that most devote Jews took and it involved traveling east from Jerusalem, crossing over the Jordan, traveling north along the Jordan, crossing back over the Jordan in the north to go west again in order to get to Galilee. That was the most taken route. And so when it says that Jesus had to go to Samaria, no, He didn't have to because it was the only way there. We know from historians that there was another way that was frequented by the Jews so option one doesn't work.

Option number two — maybe He went there because it's the shortest way. Going due north saved Him about thirty to forty miles, but since when does Jesus do things because of its convenience? He goes and dies on a cross. He tells religious leaders, “You are of your father, the devil.” Then He heals people on the Sabbath knowing that this is going to cause an uproar. Jesus doesn't make decisions in ministry because it's convenient. If it's convenient, then why die on the cross? Why go and do that if it's convenience?

I think it's option three and it's when we let the Biblical text and the context of the passage inform us as to why Jesus had to go to Samaria. And if you know John chapter 3 then you know Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus. And Jesus tells Nicodemus this. He says that — let me find it — verse 14 chapter 3 — “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.” In other words, what is Jesus saying to Nicodemus? Jesus is attempting to get him to jog his mind. Go back into your Old Testament and you remember when the Jews grumbled because the Edomites would not let them pass through their land and so they grumbled at the Lord and the Lord sent fiery serpents that bit them but the Lord told Moses, “Hey, erect this serpent and put it in the clear sight of My people and that though they may be bitten, they can look to this for salvation.” In other words, they must look outside of themselves for deliverance. And what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus is, “Someone greater than Moses is here. Someone greater than that bronze serpent is here. God is not going to put up another bronze serpent; He's going to put up His bruised Son on a cross and so that My people can look to the cross and be saved.”

And then in one sweeping verse, Jesus takes this idea that the Jews were God's covenant people and in one verse, one verse, “I don't just love them that way, I love the world this way.” Look at one verse down, verse 16 — “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever would believe in Him should not die but have everlasting life.” What Jesus is saying is, “Nicodemus, My love extends far beyond Jerusalem. It extends far beyond My Old Testament covenant people.” All of a sudden, Jesus is saying, “I will be raised up and this world will look at Me and they will see and believe and be saved.” You know what Jesus does? Right after His interaction with Nicodemus, where does He go? He says, “I'm not just going to talk about it; I'm going to show you. I'm going to show you because I'm going to leave Jerusalem and go where? To the Samaritans. I'm going to show you that I am expanding your vision of the kingdom of God and yet those people up north, your enemies, those half-breeds, those people who have perverted themselves by intermarrying with Gentiles, those people who have established their own place of worship here so that they don't have to come to Jerusalem, those people who have their own version of the Bible that does not consist of everything else you have in your Scriptures, those people right up there where animosity and tensions are high,” Jesus says, “Yep, I love them too.” And He leaves Jerusalem and He heads right up there. I think that's why He had to go to Samaria. It wasn't because it was convenient, it wasn't because it's the only way, it was because God's love extended even to them, even to this woman, even to this woman broken by her sin, even to this woman who was a public disgrace, Jesus says, “My love is deep for even her.” Therefore He leaves.

What does this mean for us? This means that if Jesus is adamant about taking the Gospel out there, over there, up there, down there, it means that we as believers, we must as well. In other words, the kingdom of God is like a mighty

river. It's begging to be unleashed and it is not to be made into a stagnant lake. God's love wants to roam and break forth and move even to the unmovable. Even to the people who we want to do away with, Jesus says, "No, My love wants to go even there." This is why RUF exists because men, faithful men, our founders saw a void. They saw a segment of society unreached, and they said, "We have to go there, beyond the walls of our church; we have to take the Gospel there and there and there and there!" That's why I'm here, because of Bebo Elkin standing in a committee meeting about church planting and standing up and saying, "Why don't we do RUF at Jackson State? The Gospel needs to go there!"

This is why the Lantern Clinic exists. You have the working poor in our nation who don't make enough money for adequate healthcare. They are overlooked because they are unprofitable. But you get a group of people out of this church who see a need, who see a people group who are overlooked, and they go and set up a clinic so that those people over there might benefit from the kindness of the Lord. This is why home and world missions exists, because you have people who see and pray and go and send. They have this burden for the expansion of the kingdom. We have to be adamant about taking the Gospel there. This could be co-workers, people in your own neighborhood, the poor that we overlook. God says we take the Gospel there.

EXPECT ADVERSITY

The second thing Jesus shows us is that adversity is to be expected. Now it's a given that in this world, the world is hostile to God, that ministry is not easy, and if someone says it's easy, run. It's hard. It's taxing. And you see it in John's gospel. As Jesus gets more popular, He is more hated. And if you ever engage in this type of ministry, you will realize that it is hard. And what we tend to think is — race, culture, economics, politics, religion, those things are what make ministering to those people hard. And Jesus says, "Uh-uh, that's not it." Behind what we see and can sense that there are some things even more difficult than we are competing against and it's not race, it's not money. What we see here, Jesus exposes us to a woman so different. She has malfunctioning eyes and ears. She has misappropriated affections and she has misinformed religious faith. That behind the differences that lie between she and Jesus, that their lies some greater things. And it's this idea that this woman can't see or hear correctly.

How do we pick up on that? First of all, it's a tool that John used throughout his gospel, that Jesus presents clear truth and it's completely misunderstood by people. In other words, He comes to Nicodemus and says, "You must be born again." Nicodemus is like, "What?! Do I go back into my mother's womb? What are You talking about?" He missed it. Can't see, can't hear, can't understand. You see it in the temple when Jesus goes and says, "Destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up." "What?! It took us forty-six years to build this. What are

You talking about?” And the same thing happens here. Jesus goes to this woman and He says, “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.” And the woman replied in verse 11, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with and this well is deep. Where do You get this living water?” Missed it.

And it gets worse. Jesus goes on to tell 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.” Now it is obvious what Jesus is doing here. He is saying, “Someone greater than Jacob is here! I have water that satisfies your soul and not just your body. Do you know who you’re talking to? Do you know who is in your midst? Because if you did, you would have said to Me, ‘Sir, satisfy me! I am searching and longing and I am still left thirsty!’” The woman missed it again. He is saying that Jacob's well is no match for His. He is saying that someone greater than the father of Israel is here. He is saying that He will permanently supply water for her soul. He is saying that she will be satisfied with Him and what He offers. And the woman says, “Give me this water now so that I will not be thirsty again or have to come here to draw water.” Completely missed it — she can't see and can't hear and can't appropriate what Jesus is saying.

But there are misappropriated affections. Jesus poignantly goes to her and says, “Go call your husband and come here,” and the woman answered Him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You were 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.” All of a sudden Jesus is showing us something, that when our faculties don't work correctly and we can't see and hear, then what we do, we latch onto other things for contentment and satisfaction, and this woman is latching onto men. She's chasing it, and one man after another, disappointment after another, disappointment after another, she's finding that they cannot supply the deepest need of her soul. Finally, misinformed faith.

And I wish I could write a book on this — the weird things you hear when people realize you're a pastor. I mean, you're sitting in Starbucks writing and small talking and all of a sudden somebody, “What do you do for a living?” “Oh, I'm a pastor.” And right there, as soon as they find that out, here comes the religious questions. That's what's going on here. This woman perceives that He is a prophet. “Okay, well now I need to show that I'm religious.” And her faith is misinformed. She is caught up in physical worship. Does it happen here or down there? And Jesus says, “Neither, but the day is now here for you will not worship there or in Jerusalem, that the Lord is seeking worshipers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth.” In other words, Jesus is saying that “Your entire perception of relationship or relating to God is bent, it's skewed. There is some truth in there because you do perceive that I'm a prophet, but it's skewed.” That's the adversity — dealing with the human heart, dealing with fallen man. That makes it hard.

But there's something else that makes it hard and we see it in our passage by way of the disciples' reaction to this woman when they see that Jesus is talking to her. And you see that when the disciples came back they marveled that He was talking with a woman. They marveled. And one commentator has said that that word marveled, it is very much dependent upon the context; that it can be marveled in a sense of "Wow" or it can be marveled in a sense of "Man, why are you talking to them?" And that's what's going on here. The disciples come back and they see Jesus interacting with this woman and they thought it and they thought it and they felt it but they would not say it. That makes ministering to those people hard, right? It's not just adversity here with them but it's adversity even amongst your own people. Once you get to the heart of the matter, we realize that those people are just like us, that they were in darkness as we were, that they have misappropriated affections as we do, and their theology isn't there, so we need not be afraid of the other barriers that keep us from engaging them. We know the secret. We know that we are dealing with a fallen person with misappropriated affections and misinformed religious faith. That's it!

Now by way of illustration, let me give you an example of how this works. Some of you know that my father is a recovering crack cocaine addict. My father is a deacon at Redeemer now and is restored and has been sober for seven years and he's a believer. But do you know how this came about? It's because my mother heard Mike Ross on the radio preaching the Gospel in 2001 and my mother went to Trinity Presbyterian Church on Northside Drive, the only African American in that church, and my mother joined that church and my father made a profession of faith and joined that church. And do you want to know what happened? For the first time in my life my mother went to the leadership of the church and said, "We need help! We need help! This is what's going on in my home." And do you know that those elders went to crack houses and got my father? Do you know that those elders went into my mother's home and poured out pain medications that my father was taking? Do you know that they drug tested my father before service every week? Do you know that they found him a Christian rehab to be in? All of a sudden, it doesn't matter that he's black, it doesn't matter that he's on crack. What matters is they understood the Gospel and they understood the cross of Christ.

And when we move towards broken people in broken situations and the Spirit of God is at work, God gets glory through our faithfulness. And what God is calling us to, and I do say us, myself included, is to move towards those people. I wouldn't be standing here if those men had not been faithful. And the text says that many Samaritans came to faith because Jesus pursued one person. If I had to tell you that I became a believer and three cousins of mine had become believers and one who is resting with the Lord right now who died of lupus last year, all because the Gospel came into my home through those men. That's powerful. And that's what you see happening here. Jesus is not afraid and He pushes through adversity and He calls us to do the same thing.

ANTICIPATE GOD'S WORKING

The last two points — I need to make this very quick. Jesus tells us to anticipate God's working. In other words, believe, believe that you're not just out there alone doing this, that someone is going before you. That in two instances in Matthew chapter 9 and Luke chapter 10, we get this phrase, "the harvest is plentiful; the laborers are few." In Matthew it's in Capernaum. In Luke it's said about Jerusalem. In other words, Jesus goes into Capernaum, He says, "The harvest is plentiful. Look, look out here and see!" He does it again in Jerusalem. You want to know what John does right here for us? Look at what he says. Look at what Jesus says. Verse 35 — "Do you not say that there are yet four months, then comes the harvest? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest." Where is Jesus saying this? In Samaria! He is saying this in Samaria amongst those people, those broken half-breeds. Look at them. There is a harvest to be had even there. Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria as well!

Why? Why is the harvest to be had? Jesus says it — verse 38 — "I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored and you have entered into their labor." In other words, Jesus is saying when we go, we are not there alone, that the Father and Son and Spirit have went before us and we are going there to get in on the work that they're already doing. That's why our RUF exists. It's not because we're good preachers; it's not because we're young and hip; it's not because we're faithful and available. It is this. It is because God is going before us on our campuses. It is because the Spirit of God is going before us and then raising up students who desire Him and who want to know Him and who want to love Him and who want to serve Him. And what Jesus is saying right now, even amongst them, there's a harvest to be had. In other words, labor in faith.

AN ATTITUDE OF EAGERNESS

Last thing — He says the attitude we should have is eagerness. And Jesus says, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish this work." In other words, Jesus is saying that, "This mission that I'm on right now, it's food to Me. I delight in it. This is not a burden. It's taxing but it's satisfying." And Jesus is saying the same thing to us, that though it may be hard, if we firmly believe that God is working before us, that we can even enjoy ministry even when it's hard and even amongst people that make it hard. Jesus is calling us as the church, and I do say us, myself included, to move towards the brokenness to expect adversity, to anticipate God's working even there, in those places, and to be eager about it. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for Your Word and thank You that You speak to us and You challenge us; You challenge me. Thank You for the harvest to be had in places

where we did not see and could not imagine. Thank You for not abandoning us. Thank You for going before us, Holy Spirit. And I do pray that You will use our time in this text to shape us, to have us ask the hard questions about our lives and our own priorities. Thank You for this church and for the many, many people here to get this. We love You and we thank You. Amen.

Now receive the Lord's benediction. Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, may He equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and honor and dominion, forever.

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