

Wielding the Weapon of Prayer

by Dan Augsburger

The sermon explores the transformative power of prayer through the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, emphasizing the need for reconciliation and understanding God's gift.

Duration: 28:42

Scripture: Isaiah 55:1

Topics: "Prayer Power", "Forgiveness And Reconciliation"

Description

This sermon focuses on the story of the woman who met Jesus at the well in John 4, highlighting the themes of forgiveness, worthiness, and the transformative power of encountering Jesus. It emphasizes the importance of knowing the gift of God, understanding the one offering the gift, and the significance of prayer in seeking a deeper relationship with God. The sermon also touches on the impact of forgiveness on answered prayers and the need to reconcile with others before approaching God.

Transcript

Father in heaven, I'm grateful that I have the opportunity to stand before your people this morning and to share what you have shared with me. Father, they need to hear from you. Please make me nothing.

Please empty me of my own ideas so that you might come through clearly. Please forgive me. Please forgive us of all of our sins.

Please give us a desire to hear, to understand, and to accept. Send the Holy Spirit so that when we leave this place, we will be more effective Christians. I ask this in Jesus' name with much gratitude and advance.

Amen. Turn, if you would, with me and your Bibles to John, the fourth chapter. John, the fourth chapter.

In John, chapter four, there's a well-known story. It's one of my favorite stories. It didn't used to be, but every time I look at this story, including this morning, I see things that I've never seen before.

And so today, I want to spend some time talking about the story. I want to tell you the story briefly and then do something that maybe you've not seen done before, and that is share this story with you from the perspective of the main person, the woman who met Jesus at the well. The story talks about the fact that Jesus was traveling and he went to Samaria.

And there he was tired, and he decided to linger by the well, sent off his disciples to get some food, to do some things for him, and he was there at the hottest part of the day. It was a time when the well was abandoned. No one came because it was too hot.

And while he was there, a woman came, a Samaritan, the Jews normally didn't have much contact with. She was a Samaritan. A Jewish man said, if I can help it, I never want to lay my hands on a Samaritan.

And he was a man, and they didn't feel comfortable talking with a woman alone. And as we'll learn later in the story, she not only had been married five times, but she was living out of marriage with a man, and so she was actually someone who went out of her way to avoid people. And there Jesus literally broke the bread of life to her.

And she began to react to his questions the way that we pray. And there's so much to learn as Jesus, step by step, encouraged her to see in him something very special beyond just what she could get out of that well. And finally she responded.

She had no qualifications, but she went and she brought an entire village to Jesus. Something tells me that no matter what our past is, if we have a personal experience with the Lord Jesus Christ, our testimony can be so filled with authenticity that others will know that we have found something that is real. And you know, if you look at the pages of history, there are thousands, if not millions of people who had that personal encounter, some of them at the risk of their own lives.

They realized it was not just fine-crafted fables, so many words, but it was actually God himself that came in the person of Jesus Christ. I'd like to share with you the story from her perspective, as she shares what happened to her, to another person. My day started like any other.

I woke up next to this guy. I'd been married, you know, quite a few times. Everybody in the town knows I've been married many times.

But I woke up next to him. I never really meant things to happen this way, but that was kind of where I was. You know, I remember when I was a child and we used to play together.

We used to have so much fun together. We would go to the temple. We would go to the well together.

That was a big activity. Everyone was there. We could visit together.

I remember in my teenage years, we talked about the future and when we would get married. I became a young woman and I was excited, full of joy, so much potential. The future was ahead of me.

And yet, maybe through bad luck, maybe through, I'll have to admit it, maybe some bad decisions, my life started down a way that, well, it ended up the way it did. Sadly, the village tongues started wagging. First, they talked to me.

Then they talked about me. And then they got quiet when I came around. Eventually, they avoided me and, to tell you the truth, I began to avoid them too because I had been hurt so much that I didn't feel like being hurt anymore.

In fact, before they could hurt me, I would reject them. You see, I didn't have much value in my own eyes. I didn't have much value in anyone else's eyes either.

And so I came to the well at the hot part of the day thinking that there would be no one else there. But there was a man there and when I got close, it was a Jewish man. And much to my surprise, he did the unthinkable.

A Jewish man, figure this, asking me, a Samaritan, not only that, but a Samaritan woman, would you give me a drink? Well, I couldn't believe it and I had to ask him the question and we find the answer. We can read it together in verse 10. He said to me, if you knew the gift of God and who it is who says you give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

I asked him, well, how is it that you want to ask a drink from me because we don't have any dealings with you? But he responded and he said, you know, if you knew the gift of God and you knew the one that was offering you the gift, you would have asked for something more. I've got to tell you the truth. I wasn't sure I understood, but I was convinced of one thing.

Whatever it was, I wasn't worthy and when he knew about me, he'd quickly withdraw the offer. I mean, everyone knows about me in this town. I'm not worthy.

Everyone knows that. So that was a rather curious thing and I frankly wondered what kind of man he was. You know, I went to the well.

Was he better than our own father, Jacob? Well, I asked him, I said, are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well and drank from it himself as well as his sons and his livestock? And this man said to me, whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst, but the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life. He told me, he said, you know, if you have the water that I'm offering, you'll never be thirsty from that water again. Well, to be honest with you, I didn't understand, but I knew one thing.

I wanted to avoid the people at the well, the people that could hurt me, and if he could offer me such a thing, boy, I wanted it for myself. I said, guess what? I asked for it. Wasn't sure how he'd respond, but I thought I should ask him.

Sadly, he didn't want to leave things alone. I was kind of hopeful that something could change. I wasn't sure anything could change.

He asked me, listen to this, he asked me to get my husband, and I have to admit to you, I lied to him. I lied to him. I didn't want him to know.

I mean, he kind of liked me. He probably thought I was married, and it was nice having someone friendly to me. I was afraid if he really knew about me, he would reject me, too.

Actually, I didn't completely lie. I told him a half-truth. It was a convenient half-truth, but he didn't buy it.

He didn't buy it. Notice, this is what he said, verse 16. Jesus said to her, go call your husband.

The woman answered and said, I have no husband. He said to me, you have well said I have no husband, for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband. In that, you have spoken truly.

You see, he didn't buy it. He knew of the marriages. He knew what was going on.

I guess everyone does. I didn't think he would have, though. That's why I go to the well at noon.

But he was different. Apparently, he knew all about me, but he really loved me. He really cared about me.

And then he answered further and began to tell me about things that kind of changed the way I saw things. Jesus said, woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father. You worship what you do not know.

We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. He told me that things were changing. What had felt comfortable in the past wasn't going to be comfortable in the future.

Something was going to change. He said, the hour is coming, and now is when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father is seeking those who worship him.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. To be honest with you, I began to wonder whether maybe I wasn't really worshiping in truth in the way that we worship. Never really thought of that before.

This sounds dumb, but I had to ask him, might you be the Messiah that we've been looking for? Might you be the Messiah that we've been looking for? And he answered, I who speak to you am he. I to you who is speaking to you am he. I have to tell you, friend, I dropped my water jug.

I had to come. I had to tell you. You need to go and see him for yourself.

He's like no one I've ever met before. He's like no one I've ever met before. I'd like to comment now just a moment on what we heard about in this story.

There may be some people here who find themselves in challenging circumstances for whatever reason. Maybe life has dealt them bad luck, a lot of bad luck. Maybe, and I'm sure for most of us there have been moments when we have made less than perfect decisions.

And sometimes those things come together and things just kind of take a life of their own. And perhaps as you sit here this morning, maybe you're feeling lonely. Maybe you're wishing you could find your way into the kind of happiness you see that some people here might have.

Deep in your heart you're saying, I want something better. Maybe as a result of what's happened, your life has changed. Maybe you don't have the kinds of close friendships you have before.

When I was younger, because I was short and overweight, you wouldn't believe it now. I had trouble having close friendships. And you know how I responded to the hurt and the rejection? Before anyone got close to me, I rejected them.

I only allowed them to come so far and then after that, sorry, you can't get any closer. And I know there's a lot of people like this in this world, sadly. Because they're afraid if people will really know who they are, they will be rejected.

That's, I believe, what this woman was somewhat doing in her life. Well, you wish you could change, but you don't know what to change, nor do you know how to change. Here at Gateway, you have heard about Jesus.

You've encountered people who love him. They want you to know him too. I'd like to suggest this morning, you need to know what this woman heard from Jesus.

You need to know, first of all, the gift of God. Then you need to know the one who is offering you that gift. Why? Because you see, like this woman, even though you know what this gift is about, you may be saying to yourself, if these people really knew me, they would know why I'm not worthy of receiving that gift.

Jesus didn't say, if you knew the gift, claim the gift. He said, if you knew the gift and you knew the one, you would ask. Sadly, there are many who don't know the gift.

You need to know the gift if you don't know it. There are some who don't know the one and they don't realize that that gift can really be theirs. And then Jesus said, if you knew the gift, you knew the one, you would ask.

And what does it mean to ask? It means to pray, right? He said, if you knew the gift, you knew the one, you would pray to receive that gift. And that's why this is actually about prayer this morning. I'd like to tell you about the gift very briefly.

If you have a Bible, open Isaiah chapter 55, verse 1. Isaiah chapter 55, verse 1. It says, Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. And you who have no money, come by and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

The first thing about this gift, it is absolutely free. This is a free gift. Notice what else this gift is, John 3, chapter 16 and 17.

John chapter 3, verses 16 and 17. It says there, For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have what? Everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

Some people think that God is a spoilsport. He just comes around and criticizes and condemns people. And some people think that's what Christians are like.

But I'm glad Gateway is not that kind of place. I saw proof of that last night at the care group at Johnny's house. What an amazing experience.

Like I said, the half hath not been told. I had heard. I thought I understood.

But I didn't begin to know. Notice what else this gift is. First John chapter 5, verse 11.

It says, And this is the testimony that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. This gift is new life, a life given in his Son. And finally Romans 6, verse 23.

It says there, For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is what? Eternal life. Jesus said, If you knew the gift. And then he said, If you knew the one.

I want to just briefly mention some things that strike me about Jesus as the one offering the gift. First of all, he loves us while we are still sinners. Romans 5, verse 8 says while we were yet sinners, God died for us, right? It doesn't matter if we're sinners.

There is love in God's heart for us. Notice Psalms 103, verses 8 to 12. Speaking of God's mercy.

It says there, verse 11. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards those who fear him. On a clear day you can't see the sky.

God's mercy is infinite. Not only do we learn that God loves us while we are sinners, that his mercy is infinite, but God has literally given himself for us. Look at Romans chapter 8, verse 32.

It says there, He who did not spare his own son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Verse 31. If God is for us, who can be against us? He gave us his Son. Now I could go on and talk to you about the fact that he's not ashamed for us.

He's not ashamed about us. Not ashamed to say we are his brothers and sisters, and that even now he lives to intercede on our behalf. Jesus said, if you knew the gift and you knew the one, you would ask, you would pray.

In this story, we find some other things about prayer. First of all, many don't know they can ask. The woman didn't realize she had the opportunity for something better.

Jesus had to tell her, you must ask. Secondly, many don't know how to ask. Some people think you have to pray in a fancy, complicated way, but Jesus said, if you knew the one, you knew the gift, you knew the one, you would ask him, you would make a simple request.

Someone said, when you feel most hopeless, when you hardly know what words to use, that's when you can pray the most effective prayer. You don't have to know some kind of formula. God knows what's in your heart.

You just tell him. That can be a complete prayer. And then, as I said, many are not sure that they are worthy to ask.

Don't even think about it. Jesus said, I didn't come to call the righteous, but I came to call what? Sinners. People who are unworthy.

Then there are three other things that I also want to mention. Three things that can get in the way. Critical things.

First one we find in Psalm 66, no, 1 John 3, verse 22. 1 John 3, verse 22. It says, And whatever we ask, we receive from him, because what? We keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

The reality is that in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, as we get to know him, we come to love him, we are attracted to live in a way where he can bless us. And when it comes to prayer, it says, God is able to answer the prayers of those who obey him easier than those who don't obey him. Why? Because sometimes we're living in ways that will only cause the problems to continue.

And when we're serious with God, we say, God, I really need a change. God can bless what we're trying to do when we say, what does this Bible say about the way that I should live? Okay? That's what we find in 1 John 3, verse 22. Whatever we ask, we receive because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight because he loves us.

Another point is in Matthew 5, verses 23 and 24. It says there, If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has ought against you, and you leave your gift there at the altar, go your way.

Okay? Reconcile yourself with your brother.

First be reconciled with your brother. Then come and offer your gift. Now, I need to get a little personal with you on this.

There was a time in my life when I prayed much, but I didn't get a single answer to prayer. I was going through some difficult circumstances in my own life. I could not afford to have God's silence.

Then one day I read this verse, and I saw it in a whole new way. And I said, I must write some letters to people because I know they're upset with me. I wrote about 20 letters.

I was young. I tended to speak and then think about what I'd said. First lady I wrote, I said, I know I hurt your feelings once.

I never tried to make things right. Would you please forgive me? Another person I wrote, and I said, I have no idea why you're upset with me, but for whatever I've done, I've learned that my relationship with you impacts my ability to get answers to prayer. Would you please forgive me? I want to be part of the solution.

It's interesting. The first lady wrote back and said, it's not a big deal, but if you want to be forgiven, Dan, I'll forgive you. The next person wrote back and said, Dan, from the day you came ten years ago, I've disliked you.

I don't know why. I owe you more forgiveness than me. And we became immediate friends.

Another person I wrote, wrote and told me how angry they still were with me, but I'd done my part. And another person only wrote me five years later to say, Dan, God has convicted me. I'm going to ask your forgiveness as well.

But you know what the practical outcome was? Prayer after prayer after prayer was answered. Some of you came the other night when I shared my testimony of answered prayer. It was the result of writing those letters that all of those answers to prayer began coming.

We often either minimize or discount that which the Bible says on prayer. We must not. You know, I've shared my testimony with probably hundreds of people by now.

And I've had more than one person say, Dan, God wouldn't expect me to make things right with another person. But I have to tell you, God is more patient than you are. And he's not going to have you overlook things that will dramatically improve your life.

Bitterness destroys a person internally. God cares too much to answer your prayers when he says, you know, I can't do the band-aid job. I need to take out the sore.

And so in love, he says, you know, if you go to the altar and there remember that your brother, your sister, has something against you. Leave your gift of the altar. Don't forget about what you were doing.

It's important, but first go and do what you can. You can't force them to change, but do what you can to be reconciled. Then come.

Then come back, you know, and offer your gift. I can tell you that in my life it made a dramatic difference. The other thing is forgiving other people.

Jesus said, if you do not forgive your brothers, it's in, if you're wondering, Matthew 6, verses 14 and 15, it says if you do not forgive your brothers their trespasses, God will not forgive you yours, right? That's what it says. Very clear. And, you know, people minimize that too, but I just want to share a tiny, short testimony.

I was down in New Zealand at a convention. Johnny was there with me. And there was a woman with her husband and several brothers.

The year before, none of them had been members of the church. Most of them, none of them had been Christians. They were druggies and alcoholics.

But she'd heard me speak on this matter of forgiveness. She went home and she began praying for her family at 4.30 in the morning. And she had been abused by a man when she was 11.

And she told her brothers, we need to go back. I need to forgive this man. I've learned about prayer.

And as a result of forgiving this man of this heinous thing that had occurred in her life that had literally destroyed their family, one after another, every member of the family chose to become a Christian. It's amazing. The same convention, I was going home, given a ride by a young woman, a young mom.

And she said, Dan, I need to tell you a story. For a long time, I had horrible back problems. I went to the physiotherapist, the occupational therapist, you know, all of those people trying to get help, doctors.

Nothing happened. Nothing changed. But then I went to a prayer meeting.

And there, someone came to me out of the blue and said, you need to forgive someone. I've been impressed about it. She thought, well, they don't know me, not my church.

But it's true, I hate a lot of people. Another person came to her and said, I feel impressed. You need to forgive someone.

And that made quite an impression. She went home and she said, God, there must be something here. And it's true, God, I hate a lot of people.

She started going through the list. God, I hate this person. I hate this person.

I need to forgive that person too. Going through the list. And finally she said, God, maybe I need to forgive the whole group.

I choose to forgive all of them. She said at that point she felt a hot spot at the top of her back. And it went down her back.

And when it left, gone was the back pain and she was completely healed. I listened and realized that there must be something with forgiving other people that can even have an impact on our physical well-being. It's interesting when this woman heard Jesus say, if you knew the gift and the one offering you the gift, you would ask.

In the end, she asked. She knew that something had happened. At first she had seen some kind of strange person.

But then she had believed, she had received, and she couldn't stay quiet. If you know Jesus, you're going to be praying, right? You're going to be putting your name on this card and doing your best to bring those people to these meetings to know the gift and know the one, right? That's what you need to do. Sadly, the disciples of Jesus had been out shopping.

They'd been busy doing good things and they hadn't figured out that Jesus was in the business of saving Samaritans too. And they said, what are you doing? And some of us get distracted and forget that we're here to help others know the gift and the one, okay? Would you do me a favor? Would you choose to do the work of Jesus? Putting your name, sharing, praying, so that many will come, August 21. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, I'm grateful that you've given me just a few moments to speak on prayer. Thank you, Father, for the story of this woman. A lot of us are like her.

Father, we may not be in bed with another man, but we're in bed with the world and there's so many of the values of the world that we have. And sometimes, Father, because of that, we don't fully appreciate the gift nor do we feel worthy of that gift. But thank you for her story.

We receive this day. Help us, Father, to ask. Help us, Father, to ask in a way that you can answer.

I ask this in Jesus' name with gratitude. Amen.

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