

The Friend of Sinners

by W.F. Anderson

Jesus, as a friend to sinners, bridged the racial, sexual, and moral barriers between himself and a Samaritan woman, offering her living water and spiritual life.

Scripture: John 4:1-26

Topics: "Jesus Christ", "Barrier Breaking"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the interaction between Jesus and a Samaritan woman at a well in John chapter 4. He highlights how Jesus breaks down three barriers between himself and the woman: racial, social, and moral. Jesus, as a friend of sinners, shows no prejudice and engages in conversation with the woman, even though Jews and Samaritans typically did not interact. He also demonstrates his knowledge of her past, which astonishes her and leads her to question if he is the Christ. The preacher emphasizes the importance of recognizing Jesus as a friend who can break down barriers and bring people to himself.

Transcript

Look at our Lord, and this morning, and this evening, I would like to talk about our Lord Jesus as a friend. First of all, as a friend to sinners, and then secondly, tonight, as a friend to his disciples. But I would like to look at this selected passage in John chapter 4, with which you are all very familiar.

But again, try to get a look at our Lord Jesus as he interacts with a particular individual. John chapter 4, and it's a rather lengthy passage, but we'll begin reading at verse 1. Now, when the Lord knew 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 to Galilee. He had to pass through Samaria.

So he came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's wife was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about six hours.

There came a woman from Samaria 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 a drink of 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 with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle? Jesus said to her, everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again.

But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. The water that I shall 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, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.

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 he whom you now have is not your husband. This you said truly. The woman said to him, sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.

Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men 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 now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

For such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. The woman said to him, I know the Messiah is coming, he who is called Christ.

When he comes, he will show us all things. Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am he. Just then his disciples came, and they marveled that he was talking with a woman.

But none said, what do you wish, or why are you talking with her? So the woman left her water jar and went away into the city, 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 city, and were coming to him. Meanwhile the disciples besought him, saying, Rabbi, eat.

But he said to them, I have food to eat of which you do not know. So the disciples said to one another, has anyone brought him food? Jesus said to them, my food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. There were three great barriers that our Lord Jesus had to overcome in reaching this woman, at least three.

But there are three tremendous barriers, three gulfs that existed between her and him. The first of those gulfs was a racial one. He was a Jew, she was a Samaritan.

The second of those gulfs, or barriers between the two of them, was sexual. She was a woman, and he was a man. And that had a great deal of significance in the culture of the first century.

And the third barrier that was between the two of them was moral. She was an impure, fallen woman, and he was purity incarnate. And there was a tremendous gulf between the two.

And the story unfolds how our Lord bridged those gulfs, tore down the barriers, and brought that woman to himself. And it's a beautiful story. Let's talk about those barriers or gulfs between the two of them, first of

all.

How our Lord showed himself to be a friend to this poor Samaritan woman. The first barrier was racial. The Samaritans were looked upon as a mongrel race, half-greed, greatly despised by the Jews.

Their history goes way back in the Old Testament, to the 8th century, when the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians. The mass of the people were deported from that northern kingdom of Israel to other lands. It was a settled policy of the Assyrians in order to keep down rebellion.

When they conquered a country, they deported the population en masse, and settled them in a foreign country. That way, a great deal of the patriotism and my-country-tis-of-thee sort of sentiment was destroyed, and therefore the people were not as liable to revolt against their conquerors. Gentiles were taken and brought into that northern kingdom of Israel, and in the process of time they intermarried with a few Jews who were left.

And after that intermarriage, there came this race known as the Samaritans. Though they were a half-greed race in the eyes of the Jews, part Jew, part Gentile, therefore neither one, and thoroughly despised by Jews who looked upon themselves as pure-bred descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They developed their own religion in course of time.

They had their own mountain, Mount Gerizim, on which they worshipped. They had their own temple, and they had their own priesthood, and for all these reasons and various others, there was a great deal of enmity between the two peoples. In fact, in the history of the people of Israel, there were those times when Samaritans were publicly cursed in the synagogue services.

If there were a court case in which a Samaritan were a witness, he was not allowed to testify because he was an inveterate liar who could not trust the word of a Samaritan. And there were periods, sorry to say, in the history of Israel when a Samaritan was not allowed to convert to Judaism. He was not worthy to become a convert.

They would not allow him to become a member of the nation of Israel. Now, it's not all one-sided. The hatred was gladly returned by the Samaritans, and there was a long history of that animosity that lay between the two of them, so that a Jew making a journey from the south to the north, going from Judea to the northern province of Galilee, or vice versa, would add many, many miles and a number of difficulties to his journey by crossing the River Jordan, going up through Peraea, and then recrossing and coming back into the northern province of Galilee.

If at all possible, he would avoid going through the country of Samaria so that he would not be defiled by contact with these despised people. Our Lord was making that journey from Judea to Galilee because of the opposition that was rising about him, but he went through Samaria, and that was the first barrier that he faced was this racial barrier between the two. You'll note in the story itself, you have this comment, evidently by John, that Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans, and the word that John uses here indicates no friendly dealings.

They would not sit down at the same table. They could buy from the Samaritans as the disciples had gone into the village to buy food. You could do that, but you could not have any friendly dealings with them.

You could not sit down in the same dining room. You certainly would not sit down at the same table. You could buy from them as necessity arose, hoping of course to get a sharp bargain.

You could do that, but you could not have any friendly intercourse with these despised Samaritans. That's the first barrier. Our Lord Jesus had to overcome the first gulf that he had to bridge.

The second one was sexual. She was a woman, and he was a man. Now, some in our country today are having problems with us male chauvinists.

You should have lived in the first century. It was totally beneath the dignity of a Jewish man to enter into any serious conversation with a woman. Some of the rabbis used to say it would be better to burn the scriptures than to discuss them with a woman.

She simply was not worthy of having a serious conversation with a Jewish man, and certainly not about the scriptures. And when a Jewish man was going to the synagogue for the services, he made sure that his wife walked several paces behind him. He would never have thought of walking side by side with his wife.

That was, by and large, the position of a woman in first century Judaism in Palestine. And for our Lord to be talking seriously with a woman was an astonishing thing to his disciples. And you read that in the story.

When they came back from the village, they were surprised that he was talking with a woman. That was beneath their dignity to consider such a thing. And our Lord had to bridge that gulf that you don't do that kind of thing with a woman in the first century.

And the Jewish men had a prayer that they made, many of them made, every morning. They said, O God, I thank thee that thou hast not made me a Gentile, or a Samaritan, or a woman. And that was the Jewish morning prayer that many of the Jewish men prayed every morning.

Now, that's the whole attitude that our Lord faces in that culture as this woman comes to that well where he is sitting resting. And the third gap that he has to bridge is a moral one. She has had five husbands, she's living with a man who is not her husband now.

And I take it from Latona the whole thing, she has gone through five divorces, and she's simply living with this man. And it goes beyond that. I'm assuming certain things in this story.

I'm assuming that when John talks about the sixth hour, he is describing noon. There's some problems about daily chronology in the gospel, but I take it that when John uses the term sixth hour, and I take that because of how he describes our Lord's crucifixion later on, but when he talks about the sixth hour, I assume he's talking about noon. I take it that's why our Lord was weary, having journeyed all morning under that hot eastern sun walking, and as busy and as active as our Lord was with all his preaching and healing, by the time he got to Sychar he was tired, and he sat down and rested on the well.

It was in the heat of the day, that hot eastern sun at noon, and this woman had come to draw water. Now, eastern women simply do not draw water at noon. Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the noonday sun.

Excuse me, brother, but that's an old saying. You know, and nobody goes out to draw water in that noonday sun. I think that was written by an Englishman, wasn't it? But no woman would go to draw water at noon.

You do that early in the morning or late in the evening. And this well was a mile from the village. And a woman who had to have water for her work for that day would go out early in the morning before it was warm, before it got real hot, and draw the water and carry it back to the village, to her home.

She would not come at noon. Now, there could be various reasons why she came at noon. Perhaps she did not draw enough that morning, and had to return at noon.

But again, they did not eat at noon. There were two meals, the morning and the evening meal, and I'm not sure there would be a reason of necessity for her to draw water at noon. So I'm making a second assumption.

My first assumption is that this is noon. My second assumption is that she came at noon regularly to draw water, and our Lord knew that. And I'm assuming the reason for it was that she had been ostracized by the women of the village.

The village well was the back fence today. Well, maybe we don't have back fences today. That's where they gathered and talked and had their socialization and traded gossip and all that.

Of course, women don't trade gossip any more than men do. But that's where they had their socialization. That was the meeting, the congregating place for the women of the village when they came to draw water in the early morning hour.

And I take it there may have been a day when she came up a little late, and when she got there, all of a sudden all the conversation stopped. And very quickly, the women remembered that they had left the breakfast in the oven, and they forgot to turn the gas off, and they had to get back in a hurry. Well, the washing machine was still running, and they forgot about it.

It might overflow, there'd be suds all over the kitchen, or whatever it was. But whatever the reason, they all had business, and they had to get home in a hurry just as she appeared. And after a few mornings of this, she began to get the message.

The Samaritans did, after all, believe in the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses. That was their bible. And the books of Moses had some pretty strong things to say about adultery.

And they began to drift away whenever she showed up, and she got the message. And so she stopped coming in the morning, and she started coming at noon when nobody else would be there. And my assumption is she had been ostracized by the women of her own village because of her reputation.

And here she comes with that defensive attitude, and it shows up in the story. Here she comes with that defensive attitude, not expecting anybody at the well, and all of a sudden here's a Jewish man sitting at the well when she comes to draw water. And I'm sure if our Lord hadn't spoken to her first, she would never have said a word to him.

She would have gotten her water and got out of there as quickly as she could. Now I want to look at how he bridged those three barriers, those three gulfs, tore down those barriers between him and her, and brought her to himself. Let's look first of all at the racial barriers.

Our Lord was a man without prejudice. He knew that the people of Israel were the chosen people of God, not because they were God's favorites in any sense of the word, but because they were God's chosen

instruments for whom he was going to reach the world. And God had given his special revelation to the people of Israel.

That was nothing for him to boast about, nor for them to boast about. Paul is very clear in Romans chapter 3 that that presents a greater responsibility. Those greater privileges always give greater responsibility.

It was not a matter of boasting, it was a matter of responsibility. So, there was no racial pride in our Lord Jesus. His heart was as wide as the whole world.

He didn't shut anybody out. He had come in fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, and he had his first responsibility to the people of Israel because God had made promises to them. And God, being a person of his word, sent his son as the Messiah of Israel, and Paul tells us that toward the close of his letters to the Romans.

He came to fulfill those promises. He did that, but there wasn't a bit of racial pride in him, and he didn't look down on any person because of his birth, or his color, or his nationality. That simply couldn't exist in the heart of our Lord Jesus, so it wasn't here.

There was no prejudice in his heart against this woman because she was a Samaritan. Now, the way he showed that is to ask this woman for a drink. Give me a drink.

Now, I take it that wasn't artificial. I take it it was genuine and real. And one of the lovely things about our Lord Jesus that I see as I go through the gospel is that he was not only aware of his limitations, he wasn't ashamed of them.

And he didn't try to conceal them. And when he was thirsty, he was willing to say he was thirsty. And when he wanted a drink, he was willing to admit that he wanted a drink, and he said, give me to drink.

And when he was tired, he didn't try to conceal it. He sat down and rested at the well. There was no pride about him.

He didn't have to impress people that he was stronger than he really was. He had that glorious self-acceptance. He knew who he was, he knew what he had come to and he wasn't ashamed of either.

And he didn't have to pretend. That's why people could be so comfortable with him. There was no pretense about him.

He was simply himself. And since he was thirsty, he would ask for a drink. Now, there's something that fascinates me in the story later on.

This woman, of course, is astonished. How is it that you, being a Jew, ask a drink of me, which I'm a woman of Samaria? First a woman and second a Samaritan. And she couldn't get over this.

A Jewish man, and she could tell he was a Jew by his appearance and his dress. There was no halo around his head. All she saw was a Jewish man, and that's how our Lord traveled around the country.

By the way, that's how the disciples first saw him, simply as an unusual Jewish man. It took them two and a half years to come to the confession, knoweth that Christ is the Son of the Living God. And she saw him as that Jewish man.

How is it that you, being a Jew, ask a drink of me, who am a woman of Samaria? And then when he offers her living water, and of course what she was thinking of was an artesian well. That was the idea of living waters over against the kind of well from which you had to draw. Something that bubbled up.

And when you go back to the Old Testament in the book of Proverbs, it's a wealthy man who has his own artesian well. And that's the way she saw it. Boy, he can give me an artesian well right beside my house, or inside my house.

I'll never have to come and draw water again. Give me that. Yeah, I'd like to have some of that.

That's what she meant by living water. But when he offers her living water, he said to her, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. She said to him, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep.

Where are you going to get the water? Every traveling company in the Near East would carry a leather bucket and a line for just such an occasion as this. You come to a well, it's deep, you can't reach down, and get the water, you carry a leather bucket and a line, and you let it down to get the water. He had neither line nor a leather bucket.

I figure the disciples carried it with them thoughtlessly, perhaps, when they went into the village. But you wouldn't travel in the Near East in a party without it. She takes a quick look, sees that he has neither one of them, and says, the well is deep, how are you going to get the water? He gives a knee.

But now that tells me something about his request. When he said to her, give me to drink, she would be coming with her bucket and her long line. He didn't have a bucket, and when he says to her, give me to drink, he is saying to her, I'll drink out of your bucket.

And no Jew would ever have done this. They wouldn't have sat at the same table, far less drink out of the same bucket. But in that one statement, give me to drink, our Lord has reached that racial barrier.

I'll drink out of your bucket. And I remember hearing the story of a missionary from Africa who didn't understand all the rules that many Western missionaries kept. Missionaries who employed some of the native Christians to help them plan some repair work around their homes.

And when it came time for a meal, there was a separate tin cup for the natives to drink from while they had their time. But this missionary, being unaware of all these rules by which Christians lived and sometimes disgraced their Lord, had a native Christian helping him build a shed in the backyard, storage room. And he called him to his wife and asked her if she would fix him coffee.

They were going to take a break, so your brother can relax. Obviously he was not English, he wanted coffee, not tea. So he had his wife fix him coffee.

And he told the native, come on, let's go get some coffee. And his wife had poured the three cups of coffee, and they sat down at the table, and the native just sat there. And the missionary said, what's the matter, don't you like coffee? Oh yes, but this isn't for me.

Well, of course it's for you. And he says, you mean the kind of cup from which you drink? Yes. Many years later, that missionary was leaving the field, and at a farewell meeting for him, one of the elders got up to speak.

The elder had been that young man as many years before, and that's the story he told. It had made that kind of impression on him that here were white missionaries who would let him drink from their china. He couldn't get over it.

But I'll tell you one thing, he loved those people desperately for that one simple act that the missionary thought nothing of. That's our Lord in John 4, I'll drink out of your pocket. And he leaped that gulf.

The culture had built, long years of history had enforced between the Jews and the Samaritans. But the second barrier was sexual. She was a woman and he was a man, and the man did not talk seriously with a woman.

And our Lord just obviously bridged that by getting into a serious discussion with her that involved theology. And what fascinates me is that when we go to talk about the nature of God, and when I sit down and talk with a Mormon about what God is like, that he is not animal, that he is not physical, he is not material, one of the verses I turn to is a verse that Jesus Christ said to a woman, God is spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. And he did her the great honor of taking her seriously.

And one of the greatest theological truths in the word of God he gave to that Samaritan woman, and he took her seriously. He did not think that she was beneath talking with. Not talking to, talking with.

It's about the very nature of God. Let me suggest a book to you. Dorothy Sayers was an English Roman Catholic detective story writer.

I don't know whether you've read any of her detective stories or not. Her main character is Lord Peter Wimsey, and if you have educational TV, there is a British production, plays of her detective stories that are absolutely fascinating. But she was also a Roman Catholic lay theologian, and she wrote numerous essays and articles about Christianity, defending it against the whole sweeping tide of modernism going through the universities of her day.

She wrote some of this stuff way back in the 1930s. She delivered an essay, delivered an address to some society in England back in the 30s, that she titled Our Women Humans. Women's lives had never been heard of, and she was not a women's liver.

She was a biblical student, and the title of that article is Our Women Humans. University has published it. If you can get a get hold of it.

Our Women Humans. And in the course of that article, she said she could understand why Jesus had so many women followers in his day. He was the first man they ever met who took them seriously, who did not crack jokes about them, who made no snide remarks about women.

He treated them as human beings made in the image and likeness of God, and he took them seriously. And that's what our Lord is doing right here. He is taking this woman seriously, and discussing even deep theological truths with her.

The whole question of the Messiah, the question of the right worship, the question of the nature of God, the question of our relationship to the living God. These he discusses with a woman. He took her seriously.

And I think some of us men could learn from our Lord Jesus. But finally, there is this barrier, the moral barrier, because she was, she was quite a sinful woman. And our Lord puts a finger on that when he says to her, don't call your husband.

Her response is, I don't have a husband. And then the whole story comes out. You've had five of them.

The man you're living with now isn't your husband. And you're right. You said right, she won't have a husband.

Now, our Lord puts his fingers on her moral situations, just as I assume the women of the village did. The way they did it drove her into isolation. The way he did it had just the opposite effect.

When he put his finger on her moral conditions, it did not drive her away. Do you see the effect of it? She goes into the village and says, come see a man that told me everything I ever did. That's what she had been trying to cover up.

Now she says, it's all out in the opening notes, everything that I did. And she's glad. She's telling everybody else, he knows everything that I've done.

And she's glad of it, because he is not standing in self-righteous condemnation of her when he exposes her sins. It's for the whole purpose of forgiving it and healing her. And she could sense it.

And there's a great relief that the whole thing is out in the opening. Wasn't it that way when you came to the Lord Jesus? Wasn't there a tremendous sense of relief that everything you've been trying to cover up and conceal was out in the open, and it was in the open in the presence of one who wanted to forgive it? And you begin to understand what John is talking about in 1 John chapter 1, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. That if we walk in the light, the very thing we feared, men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

The very thing we feared is now our joy, because when we came into the light, and everything we were was exposed, what did we find? Exactly what we did not expect. We came into the light, and we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. Why didn't you want to come to God before you became a Christian? Because everything would be exposed and you knew what you deserved.

But when you took the step into the light, you found instead of condemnation there was forgiveness and cleansing by the blood of our Lord Jesus. Wasn't that a tremendous relief? Do you know anybody else that you would have trusted the whole story to? I remember sometimes the Mayors students coming into my office, and some of them having real problems with their relationship to the Lord Jesus. And I would send them to John chapter 4, that's the reason for themselves.

And I remember saying to one girl one day, now suppose as you sit here you suddenly become aware that I know everything that's gone on in your life over the past years, since you were a teenager, you became a teenager, that you suddenly discovered that I knew everything that you had ever done. She immediately responded, I'll be out that door without opening it. He told me all things, whatever I did.

I just wanted to see. Can it be? And it's a word of astonishment. I know our Savior says it's not just the Christ, but the way it's expressed, it's almost too good to be true.

Can this be the Christ? Is it possible that to our little Samaritan village, and to me, an outcast, is it possible that the Messiah is here? It's too good to believe. And that was the attitude when we went back to the room. But everything had been out in the open, and when it's in the open with him, there's a tremendous sense of relief.

Now I take it that's the way it's going to be at the judgment seat of Christ. Everything about us as Christians is going to be out in the open, but it's going to be in the open in front of him, and there's going to be a tremendous relief that it is. Do you mind having him know everything about you? You would certainly mind having the rest of us know everything about you, but do you mind having him know anything about you? No.

No. And there's another thing about the judgment seat of Christ that's over against our judgment of each other now. You see, it's what it says.

When we praise each other, there's always a secret fear that it's really not the truth. If you really knew me, you know, you wouldn't give those words of praise or say you've done a good job. And when we are criticized, there is always the secret hope that the other person really doesn't see the whole picture.

We never get that really true evaluation here and now. We're aware we're prejudiced in our own favor, and we rather suspect everybody is prejudiced against us. But when we stand in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will know this is the true evaluation.

Say no question about it. And we will be glad. We will be glad.

He has made the evaluation. It's all out in the open before him. So let me go a step further.

This says something to me about the kind of person I ought to be. Our Lord did not overlook her sin. He did not ignore it.

He put his finger on it. But I want to be the kind of person that can lead someone else to that place without my standing in self-righteous condemnation and sending the other person away. Not to sit in judgment on that person, but to be able, in the grace of God, to bring that person to that point where they will be glad that they have come face to face with the issue of their sin.

To be that kind of person. That's the kind of person our Lord Jesus Christ was, and is. So if any of us is struggling with sin in his own heart and life, then he hasn't taken to the Lord Jesus.

Look, step into the light. And if we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, isn't that right? And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That's what he did for this woman.

But, the end of the story, that's really not the end of the story. Very often we say, well look, this was such an exciting thing for this woman. What a relief.

Running into the town and telling everybody, here's a man that told me everything I ever did, come on out and see him, isn't this the Christ? And very often we notice that she was so excited and so blessed by it that she left her water pot right there. Of course, she came back to get it. That was too essential of an item just to leave it there.

But at the moment she forgot all about it and ran into the village, a mile down the road to tell the people, here's a man that told me everything I ever did. But don't you forget, he was just as excited as she was.

He forgot his lunch.

And when those disciples came at that moment with the food they had bought and they said, master eat. Oh no, I've got food to eat that you don't know anybody about. And he was so thrilled and excited by that contact with her that he didn't want his lunch.

Now that's our Lord Jesus. That's our Lord Jesus. So thrilled himself to have brought this woman for himself.

So he didn't want his lunch. My food, he said, is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work. What a tremendous Lord.

Still the same. Still excited by people coming to him. Still excited when we come to him, haltingly, trustingly, and again commit ourselves to him and lay the whole story open before him.

Still the same Lord Jesus, the friend of sinners. Let's pray. Our loving Lord, how gentle and kind you are with the wayward.

You remember how strict and stern you could be with the hypocrite. But with a genuine sinner, how gentle, how understanding, how kind, like that gentle, gentle surgeon probing the abscess to cleanse us and to heal us. You probe the whole area of our sin to cleanse and to forgive and to heal.

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