

I saw a cartoon a while back that shows a medieval Crusader, standing in full armor and holding his shield. He also held his long sharp spear at the throat of a prisoner on the ground. The prisoner on the ground is saying, “Tell me more about your Christianity. I’m terribly interested!”

That’s kind of the picture lots of Christians and non-Christians have of what we’re going to talk about this morning. This week we’re continuing to talk about that scary E-word. Evangelism. Today we’re looking at, “Evangelism as a lifestyle.” Our scripture today (and for the next couple of weeks) is a little long, so I won’t ask you to stand, but if you have your Bibles handy, please turn with me to John 4:4-42

Every Christian receives the commission from Christ to be part of furthering His message. We can see that clearly in Acts 1:8 where Jesus says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” in the coming weeks I hope that these sermons will help individuals, couples and families become evangelistic in their outlook and habits of life. I want to encourage all of you to relate in genuine ways with unbelievers and seek to share Christ through healthy relationships.

As Christians, our values should be principles that we prize, principles God has begun to build into us. The fact that we identify them as values doesn't mean we've "arrived".

Because we value them, they're what we want God to work into who we are as individuals and as a church.

This value of evangelism is one that's not second nature to many of us. Some of us avoid it -- resist it -- even run from it. I remember when I was first saved in a non-denominational youth group. Mr. Lou, the Presbyterian pastor who ran the group, had the audacity to suggest that Christians shouldn't just grow in our faith, we also need to share it. I remember a sense of fear welling up in me.

Even though I've been taught about how to share Christ in effective ways... and I do... sometimes, lifestyle evangelism is a major challenge to me. Not because I don't live a Christian lifestyle, but because I don't regularly form the kind of quality relationships to make effective witnessing possible. I've been a Christian for 50 years, and so my circles are mostly Christians. You all. Christians from other walks of life. Pastors and others in full or part time ministry... If you spend all your time around Christians, it's mighty hard to develop the kind of meaningful relationships with the lost that are needed to reach them for Christ. I need to work on that, and I imagine some of you do too. So, let's work on it together.

Who better to show us how to relate Christ's message than Jesus Himself. As He encounters men and women in the gospels, He defines for us gracious, personal interaction with needy people. The story I read earlier is a familiar one, and since we'll be looking at the same story from different perspectives for the next couple of weeks, I encourage you to read it during the week this week. It's the story of Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at a well. This woman has deep needs. By every human standard, she's didn't matter to anyone. If she had dropped dead carrying water back from the well, few people would have noticed and even fewer would have cared.

For one, she's a woman in a culture that viewed women as less than fully human. They had few rights and were considered practically property. She's a Samaritan. Samaritans were pretty much despised by surrounding peoples, especially the Jews. But, in His amazing way, Jesus transforms this woman's life; and at the same time, He models the sort of personal witnessing to which He calls us. What does He show us?

First, in verses 4-15 he shows us that Christ's witnesses need to connect with thirsty people.

The account clearly shows how Jesus met people on their own turf. Jesus knew what we need to learn. Harvesters must get in the field. Fishermen go where the fish are.

Someone said, "Fishing in your bathtub might be terribly convenient, but it's not highly effective."

That's the difference between us expecting people to come to us, and us going to them. Jesus had 132 contacts with people in the gospels. Six were in the Temple, four in the synagogues. All the others were out in life situations. One of the accusing comments the religious leaders threw at Jesus was that He connected with people they considered down-and-outers -- outcasts -- little people, rejects in their religious culture.

How does Jesus connect here? He begins by crossing barriers to demonstrate her value. First, Jesus crossed cultural barriers. Verse 4 says Jesus had to go through Samaria. That statement is true geographically, but it wasn't true culturally. Samaria was straight north if a traveler was headed to Galilee. But no self-respecting Jew would travel through Samaria. The proper Jew would cross over the Jordan to the east, then go north, then back west to get to his destination.

The Samaritans were a mixed race and they mixed worship of God with pagan rituals. After Jews were deported to Assyria, the Assyrians repopulated areas with captives from other countries to settle the territory and keep the peace. Those new peoples intermarried with the few Jews left and formed the mixed race. So, the Jews hated the Samaritans

because they weren't pure and felt they'd betrayed their religious heritage. The only reason Jesus had to go through Samaria was to keep divine appointments.

Second, Jesus crossed social barriers. There were two odd things in the woman's behavior: First, there was a closer well to which she could have gone. Secondly, women would come to get water early in the morning or late in the evening when it was cooler. This woman either chose to go or was forced to go further and to go at mid-day to avoid contact with the "proper" women.

Think about her situation. Women had no power. Men could divorce women, not the other way around... She hadn't divorced one husband after another and moved from one to the next and the next and the next. She didn't move from man to man. She was discarded by one after another. Now, she's living with someone. He's not her husband. And that's not necessarily because she had no standards, but because no one cared about her. With her reputation, no respectable Jewish man would talk to her. No rabbi would ever engage a woman, even a "good" woman, in spiritual conversation publicly. One rabbi is quoted as having written, "Better to burn the Law than give it to a woman".

Jesus ignored social and gender barriers... all that was meaningless, compared to God's value of this woman. Her spiritual needs mattered far more than her situation. How

often do we quickly pre-judge people and peg their value before we will consider interacting with them, especially about our message of Christ and their eternity?

Third, Jesus also crossed religious barriers.

The disciples were raised in a culture greatly different than the Samaritan culture. They would have been shocked out of their minds to return from their shopping trip and find Jesus conversing with a woman, and especially a woman of the Samaritans.

Everything Jesus is doing here conflicts with learned, practiced religious and cultural behavior. If you follow Jesus into personal evangelism, He will likely bring you into conflict with traditional church culture.

But He's not concerned about the disciples' opinions of His actions. He's consumed and compassionate about people who are self-destructing. He forces His followers then -- and us now -- to take a hard look at our cultural attitudes, especially self-righteous ones. He connected by crossing barriers to put Himself in contact with the woman.

He also connects by using human need to teach spiritual truth. Verse 7 -- she comes to draw water; Jesus says, "Will you give me a drink?" She's shocked. Verse 9 - wait just a minute-- You're a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?

Then He stirs her interest with an incredible offer -- verse 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... As He so often does, Jesus uses what's at hand to present Truth. Here's a thirsty woman coming for water, and He says those amazing words: If you only knew God's gift and Who's talking to you, you'd be asking to have your deepest thirst quenched permanently.

He describes living water and she misses His meaning. He's turned to the spiritual -- she's still fixated on the physical. Even by verse 15 she's still thinking it would be nice not to have to come out to draw water all the time. But she needs the Source of living water to satisfy the deeper ache in her soul. She's been trying to get it satisfied in all the wrong places. She's been looking for a relationship with a man that will fulfill her life. Jesus knows that, and he also knows it isn't working.

What's living water? In John 7, Jesus says, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, "From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." ... this He spoke of the Spirit, who those who believed in Him were to receive...."

Jesus is offering her spiritual life. She needs to experience the Holy Spirit, who will come into her life make her a new. He wants her to be born again. But, like Nicodemus in John

3, she misunderstands. He speaks spiritual Truth in word pictures and she stumbles over them... “You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep.” The well was at least 60 feet down to the water. Without rope and bucket you can’t get water out. When He says living water, she hears running water. That’s what the term meant -- a fountain or a spring, compared with a well or a cistern. How will you get this running water? She’s knows that she’s talking to someone unique: it’s in her question, “Are you greater than our father Jacob?

Jesus moves on: everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I give him will never thirst; the water I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

She knew Jesus spoke truth with “drink this well water and you’ll get thirsty again”. She’d come to that well for years. But there’s a water that’s different: I’m offering you living water -- the one who drinks it will never again thirst.

Jesus Christ provides a resource to believers that’s constantly available -- so when we experience emptiness and thirst in life, it’s always there. Maybe we don’t realize there’s always a place where our deepest inner thirst can be satisfied. We don’t have to try to get it met the same ways unbelievers try. God’s Holy Spirit is a life-giving Spirit; as we know Christ more and more, we learn deep satisfaction with

the life He provides. “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.” Something is still blocking her understanding.

Jesus knows what it is, and so He moves to deal with it. As He does, in verses 16-24 He shows us that Christ’s witnesses show people their need.

Notice how Jesus takes the lid off the incredible needs in her heart. He does it by raising the sin issue.

He cracks the door open by saying: Go call your husband... He’s baiting her; He hasn’t yet demonstrated that He read her life like an open book. He puts His finger on the symptom which demonstrates the real sin issue in her life.

I -- I don’t have a husband. With that, she stakes out a position. Maybe it’s a bit of cover up. Her whole life revolved around trying to satisfy her thirst with relationships. Every one failed miserably. But still she tries. Her words are the opening Jesus was waiting for. He moves on with the reality of sin. You’re right -- you’ve had five -- the one you have now is not your husband.

All the pain and guilt of her existence, her past life littered with sin, failure, rejection, guilt and unfulfilled desires is exposed. Jesus knew she’d had five husbands. He knew she was the immoral outcast of the village. He knew she’s now

living with a man. But He doesn't speak truth to condemn her, he does it to bring her face to face with her sin problem.

She needs to understand she isn't hopelessly bound up in her past and present choices and circumstances. That earlier offer of living water, in reality, life, forgiveness, freedom was made by this man, who knew the awful truth. It's His offer that can heal her.

Jesus touches the sin subject and the conversation suddenly moves from water to a question: Where is the best place to worship God? The twisted nature of our hearts is that we try to hide our deepest spiritual issues -- like sin -- with denial. Denial is the smoke screen to keep our dirty secrets hidden. Sometimes hiding is expressed in what we could call generic spirituality. Religious people, especially, assume that all they need is to try harder in order to fix what's inside all of us. The religious response: if I can turn my life around, try harder, Fix what's wrong with me...I'll be fine. Only after all the self-help methods we try fail, does Jesus' offer of living water become relevant... We usually don't reach for a new rope until we've come to the end of our current rope and have nowhere else to turn.

He didn't hold back on addressing the sin problem. The bad news of the gospel we share is that all have sinned -- Romans 3:23. That's a very unpopular message, but it's

critical to Christ's message. It's one that is critical to our message too.

Once the sin issue is laid open, Jesus presents His incredible answer. In verses 25, 26, 29, and 39-42 He shows us that Christ's witnesses present the solution.

Her response is revealing: "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

Maybe she's being evasive; changing the subject to escape unpleasant probing by Jesus. But maybe it's an admission that Jesus is dead right: "I perceive that you are a prophet. You've looked at my heart; you're right on. You know everything about me." She'll return to the village later and tell people, Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did.

She's admits He's right; this is who and what she is and has done. But then she links it not with evasion, but an honest plea for help. "Where do I go to get life?" is what she is saying. You Jews say that the only place to offer the sacrifice that can cleanse my sin is in the temple in Jerusalem. We say it is here on this mountain. Where do I go? How can I find God?

Jesus' words, fit beautifully: "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 worshipers 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 truth."

In other words: Your question about worship's locale will soon be irrelevant. By his death and resurrection, Jesus would destroy the external forms of worship on earth. He says, "your knowledge is incomplete, it's garbled. You've got some truth but there's also error mixed with it; you're misled."

True worship is done in the human spirit. It's worshipping from the heart in truth --honestly and openly before God; it's not a "put-on". She can't believe it's that easy: In verse 25 she says, "I know that Messiah is coming; when he comes, he will show us all things."

Yes, I know you are right, but we must wait until the Messiah comes. We cannot expect these kinds of things in our time." She's not ignorant of God's Truth. She connects worship in spirit and truth with the promised Messiah. When He comes, He'll clear this up and tell us how men must worship God.

I'd just love to have heard this conversation, especially the words spoken then. She tells Jesus she's waiting for Messiah. And Jesus declares Himself.

I who speak to you am He... If anyone ever tries to tell you, like the DaVinci Code book and movie suggest, that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah, show them this verse:

I who speak to you am He. Now she knows. Unmistakably, Jesus identifies Himself -- Who He is and therefore what He has the power to do. Now she must respond.

Her response now, and the villagers' response later, indicate that in very short order they all receive His Word and believe Jesus is Who He claimed to be. We could spend hours looking at all the fascinating aspects of this passage. But we need to apply it.

So, what are the steps we need to take

As we close today, let me challenge us all... Challenge us to follow Jesus into the lives of thirsty people. Not to preach at them and try to force Christ on them, but to come alongside them where they are, build a relationship with them, listen to them, and tell them about the one who can meet their needs and heal their hurts.

You see them everywhere... They're chasing thirst-quenching possibilities. Some in relationships, some in experiences, some in drugs or alcohol... There are dozens

and dozens of different things people will chase down and incorporate to try to satisfy their thirst for reality. But the pursuits are as empty as the people who go after them.

Like Augustine said, "the heart is forever restless until it rests in Thee, O God."

Will you follow Jesus into the realm of real, meaningful relationships with thirsty people? Are you willing to pursue this? To make personal lifestyle evangelism a real part of your life? Will you make room in your life to follow Jesus into people's lives?

It won't be easy; most of us will have to make some major attitude and time adjustments; but it's the need of the hour. And the investment will pay eternal dividends like no other.

The greatest use of your life and mine is to spend it on something which will outlast it.

Today I am putting out a challenge to each of you – I want to challenge each of you to invite at least one person to come to church with you each week, a different person each week, for the next 4 weeks. Whether or not they come is in God's hands, but the challenge is to be faithful in reaching out to the lost around us. Will you take the challenge?

Let's pray.