

Love for the Lost

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Bible Text: John 4:1-10

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John chapter four and we are going to read verses one to 26. You can find this on page 1263 in the pew Bible. The pew Bible is the New American Standard and I am going to be reading from the New King James version so it is a slightly different translation.

Just to remind you, we have been going through our mission statement as a church over the last several weeks and I have been gone for a couple of weeks so we have taken a little break. But we are at the ninth in what I think is a 10 part series. You may get a bonus 11th part. We will see. But for now it is nine out of 10 parts and we have been looking at our statement which is kind of summarized in this idea that we are committed to God and we talked about how that... how we think that works itself out in terms of the priority of worship, both public and private and of living the Christian life in obedience to God. And then we looked at the idea of loving others, loving other people and how we... that we work that out in terms of our love for those outside the body and meeting the physical needs and trying to be concerned about social justice and things like that and then also how we love one another within the body and what the fellowship of the body is to be like.

And so tonight we get to the third main section of our mission statement which is we are committed to growth and we take this ... we have a scriptural background for this which I will get to in the sermon. But growth can be considered in two ways. And one way is outreach in terms of welcoming people from outside the church and seeing the church grow by evangelism and by people coming to know the Lord. The other way that we can think about growth is in terms of our growth in maturity for those who are in the body. And these are both important.

Tonight we will address the first issue, that of outreach. And to do that we are going to look at this passage from John four where Jesus interacts with a woman who is outside the body of believers and how he deals with her.

So let's look at what the Lord says to us. I will read verses one to 26 in John chapter four. Listen to God's Word.

Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), He left Judea and departed again to Galilee.

But He needed to go through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman of 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.

Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says 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 then do You get that living water? 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?"

Jesus answered and said to her, "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."

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 and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "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 spoke truly."

The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."

Jesus said to her, "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. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such 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" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things."

Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."¹

And there we will end the reading of God's Word. May he bless the reading and the preaching of his holy Word.

Well. At the international conference that many of us went to two weeks ago, during the Sunday school hour on the Sunday when we were there in the adult class Andy and I were partners in that little activity we did, so we are winking at each other. They were given an activity where they had us get in groups and they said, "Ok, we want you to name for us five people," or, you know, write up on a list five people who are not believers with whom you have a relationship, you have regular contact and for whom you would like to pray. And the encouragement was for us to specifically focus in on one unbeliever.

And what was interesting to me was that this was not an easy task as you might think. Oh, well that is easy. Well, it is not an easy task. And you might in your own mind think about how easily you can come up with five names of unbelievers, not relatives, not Christians in other churches that you think should be in better churches, but unbelievers that you have a relationship with, a friendship with in whose lives you are regularly involved. Because if you are like most Christians today, once you have been in the church for any significant period of time, the number of unbelieving friends that you have will disappear and if the people in this room are consistent with what the statistics say.

And we can understand why that happens because we get involved in church activities and the people that we are like minded with and after all it is uncomfortable to have friends that don't agree with us on these most essential issues.

But I ask you to consider how can we as a church be committed to growth if we are not committed to loving lost people? If we are not committed to loving lost people, the only way we are growing in terms of adding to our ministry here is by getting people from other churches. And, fundamentally, that is not what the Bible is encouraging us to do. It is encouraging us to love those who are lost. Committed to growth means we have to be committed to lost people.

Well, how do we do that? How do we do that? This text tells us some significant things about it. And, if you are following along, we have an outline in the back of the

¹ John 4:1-26.

auditorium and you will see that our main point this evening is that true love for Jesus will manifest itself in a genuine love for lost people. And the application is that we then ought to go to the lost people around us with the gospel.

Well, let's observe as our first point this evening that Jesus loves lost sinners and you must also love lost sinners. And, children, if you would like to draw a picture, you might draw a picture of this woman at the well and what Jesus does as he comes to this lost sinner to minister to her.

And this is really is one of the striking things about Jesus' whole ministry is that he does not conform to the norms that the rabbis of his day were expecting. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus had a concern for the lost and those who were considered undesirable in the culture.

Matthew 11:19 Jesus is accused of being a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Do you get that? Jesus was a friend of tax collectors and sinners, people that were looked at undesirable by the religious leaders of the day.

And when Jesus ate with the tax collector Zacchaeus and he was criticized for that, he says that he Son of man came to seek and save that which was lost. That was part of Jesus' ministry. He went to those people, to the lepers, to the prostitutes, to the outcasts, to the Samaritan women. Those would be the kind people that Jesus loved and ministered to and these were the kind of people that Jesus has called us to love. And if you are a servant of Jesus, you have to love the people that Jesus loves. And that includes people that are not like you, people who are unlovely in your eyes.

A number of year ago some of you will remember this. We had a man in our congregation who was running a mission to people struggling with homosexuality and he was getting referrals from churches so he was really trying to minister to people who were at least tangentially involved in churches and needed help trying to come out of a homosexual lifestyle. And this man's strategy was to recruit members of the churches to disciple and to work with people that might need help. So if somebody came from a particular congregation he could say, "Well, here are some people in your congregation that are trained to minister to you."

And so he came to me and another man in our congregation and he said, "Would you be willing to go through the training?"

And of course like, "Oh, sure. I will go through training. Training is good."

I didn't think I would ever, you know, actually get assigned a person, but I did get assigned a person. And I thought, well, I have had the training. So, you know, I will be fine. And then I met the guy that I was supposed to work with, with this other man in our congregation. And I realized that there was no way I was going to be able to do that in my own strength, to befriend and to love this person.

And it wasn't because of the sin he was struggling with. It was because of ... he wasn't like me at all in any way. We had absolutely nothing in common at all.

And I thought, "Lord, how am I going to do this?"

And yet here is Jesus telling us that we have to love lost sinners. We have to love lost sinners. And he shows us in this text how he does it.

The second point in your outline, your love must be intentional. It must be intentional. The first few verses in our text tell us that when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making more disciples than John, then Jesus left Judea and he goes up north to Galilee.

And most commentators think that the issue here is that John the Baptist had been arrested. There is just too much pressure. It is clear that Jesus' time has not come. His ministry isn't over yet and it is not time for this final conflict that leads to the crucifixion. So he moves away from Jerusalem and Judea where the opposition is greatest and he is going to go up north up to Galilee and the area where he is from where this kind of rabid hatred of him is not so great and he is going to go there to continue his ministry.

Well, it tells us in verse four that he needed to go through Samaria. And that is very interesting because he didn't really need to go through Samaria. It was the shortest route. So here is Judea and here is Galilee and there is Samaria lying between. And so, yes, if you want the shortest route you would need to go through Samaria. But in actual fact, many Jews did not go through Samaria. They went miles out of their way to go around Samaria. And why was that? Because they hated the Samaritans. And there is a saying among the Jewish rabbis that it would be considered a desecration for your shadow to pass over the shadow of a Samaritan as you were walking by. I mean, that is how much they hated them.

And why was it that there was this hatred? Well, the Bible tells us in Israel's history after the split between the southern and the northern kingdoms that the northern kingdom was conquered by Assyria and those people take away and this was the Assyrian's policy to prevent rebellions. They brought people from all over their empire and resettled them in this area. And if you remember that those people were having trouble.

And so they said, "We had better send a priest back there and show them how the god of that land likes them to operate."

So these people learned about the Jewish God, but they also brought all their idolatry with them from wherever they were. They were genetic mongrels in a sense, but they were also spiritual mongrels. And when the Scripture describes these people it says they feared the Lord yet they served other gods.

This is the start of the animosity with the Samaritans. But then later when the southern kingdom was exiled and they were sent to Babylon they come back after 70 years and

they are given the assignment of rebuilding their temple and guess what happens? The Samaritans, this mixed people they say, “Hey, let us help you build the temple. We worship your God. Let us get involved in your project.”

And this is the response that the Jews give to the Samaritans at that time. “You have nothing to do with us to build a house to our God, but we alone will build to the Lord our God.”

See? So they said, “You guys aren’t part of us. We don’t want your help.”

And from that time on there was antagonism between the Samaritans and these Jews that were rebuilding their temple.

And the Samaritan response was to build their own temple up on Mount Gerizim and there they built their own temple. And during the Maccabean period, during the time between the testaments, the Jews destroyed that temple and knocked it down.

So the Samaritans continued to worship on the mountain. And you can see this long standing hatred between these two groups. And the Jews considered these Samaritans like swine or like lepers. And for this reason many strict Jews would rather walk miles out of their way than even go through the land where the Samaritans lived.

So Jesus did not need to go through Samaria in the sense that was the only way to get where he was going. He needed to go there because there were lost people there whom God had given him to save. That is why he went there.

And you might consider where Samaria is around our little neck of the woods. Have you ever been down to People’s Park? Have you ever just hang out and watch what is going on in People’s Park?

For some of us on the campus a fraternity or a sorority house can look a lot like Samaria. For those not on the campus, anybody on the campus can look like Samaria.

And you get the idea. Your neighbors, the people around you that don’t seem to be like you.

But the question is: Who has God placed in your life who is lost? Jesus was intentional. He went to Samaria for a purpose, to find and to seek that which was lost. And your life must be intentional also. Where are the lost people that the Lord has put around you?

So your love for the lost must be intentional.

Our third point is that the love for the lost must be genuine.

So Jesus doesn’t just go to Samaria. He actually interacts with the people that he finds there.

You see in verse five our text tells us that when he came to this city called Sychar he was near this plot of ground that Jacob had bought and then given to his son Joseph and this is where Joseph's bones were buried when the people came back out of the Exodus. They buried his bones. So it was a sacred spot in Israel's history. And there about a mile outside of town there was a well that they called Jacob's well. And it was at the foot of Mount Gerizim. This was a mountain of blessings from Deuteronomy, the mountain where the Samaritans had later built their temple and the Jews had later destroyed it.

And we see in verse six that at the well Jesus was tired. And, as a side note, this is a good evidence that Jesus was fully human and didn't just appear to have a human body. He was human. He was tired in his human body. And he sat down by the well and it was the sixth hour and the sixth hour by the Jewish reckoning would be about noon.

Now the people in this climate which was very hot were no dummies and they would not normally go to the well at noon. They would go to the well in the evening when the heat was lower. But they usually had to go every day and yet here comes this woman out to draw water, verse seven tells us.

So what does this mean? Well, there are several things we need to note about the woman. She was a Samaritan, as one of the hated enemies of the Jews. She was a woman. A Jewish rabbi would not have wasted his time talking to a woman. In fact, the Jewish rabbis had saying. They would thank God that they were not a Samaritan, not a slave. So I am not a Samaritan, God. I thank you. I thank you that I am not a slave, so I am a free Jew. And I thank you that I am not a woman. That would be how the rabbis prayed.

So she is a woman and she is also an outcast.

There is a reason why this woman is coming to the well at noon when nobody else is there. And I think we infer what that is when we hear her describe her situation in life, having run through four husbands or five husbands and living with a man not her husband.

Even by the Samaritan standards she is an immoral woman and an outcast.

So she comes to the well every day alone by herself. And what does Jesus do when she comes there? Does he whistle and look the other way? Does he kick the sand and write with his toe in the dirt? No. He doesn't. He talks to her.

This is a radical thing given the circumstances. And he does more than just speak to her. He asks her a question. He says, "Give me a drink. Give me a drink." He asks her to do something for him.

And you understand that the way the Jewish rabbis interpreted the law at this time, if you shared a drinking vessel with someone who was unclean, you yourself would be unclean.

This would be like talking a bowl that a dog had licked or something in their eyes and drinking after a dog.

And you get that in verse nine. The woman says, “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.”² She is shocked that he wants to get water from her because he doesn’t have his own drinking vessel and will have to share hers.

And it is helpful because here he is interacting with her, talking to her about something important to her and asking her for help. Isn’t that interesting? It is an incredible way that we can interact with unbelievers to actually ask their help.

Pride is a huge problem with us and the last thing some of us would like to do is to ask an unbeliever for help. And yet that is what Jesus does here.

A couple of years ago in the *Credenda Agenda* Gary Hagin wrote, “Jesus said his disciples would be fishers of men and a curious lot of anglers we are, too. We launch our boats out onto the seas of our city streets. We post revival flyers on channel buoys as we row. Finally we hold lighted signs on the bow of the ship announcing ‘Fish fry tonight,’ and expect the fish to come jumping out of the water into our Coleman coolers. Why doesn’t this work better? Well, lots of reasons, but one is that we have lost our ability to hold conversations with our neighbors, citizens of popular culture. And so we have no bait, no hook and no pole. But no matter, we just keep whistling for those fish to leap at our command like so many trained dolphins.”

You have to be able to engage lost people. And this is what love demands. Jesus was genuinely interested in this woman. And we can see that from the types of questions he asks. He takes time and he invests in this woman. And if you are going to minister to lost people you have to be prepared to invest time and energy. There are some of us who can get on a plane and have one, you know, have an evangelistic encounter every time we are flying somewhere. But most of us aren’t like that. For most of us evangelism is going to take place by patient and diligent relationship development with unbelievers whom God has providentially placed in our lives.

This is what love means.

And we have to ask ourselves. Do we have any idea how to talk to unbelievers? Do we talk to unbelievers with a genuine interest in their well being?

How often do we do that? Jesus loves sinners genuinely and that is what we must do.

And we also see as our fourth point that our love for the lost must be ultimately spiritual. So Jesus very deliberately draws this woman into a spiritual conversation. It is really not about the water, is it? You notice he never gets a drink of water. If you were to read the whole text down here, after he reveals that he is the Messiah to her, she runs off. He

² John 4:9.

never gets a drink of water. That is really not what it was about. He was trying to point her to something more important, living water.

He says in verse 10:

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”³

And if you look down in verse 14 he says:

“...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.”⁴

And this is what he was really interested in. This is why he had to go through Samaria, that he wanted to point this woman, a lost sheep, to eternal life. And that is what true love for lost people entails, going to them and being intentional about going to them, being involved in their lives with a genuine concern but having a desire to see them saved spiritually.

And so you might ask yourself. How many times have I stopped short of pointing people to the source of living water, people with whom I have a relationship that God has given me?

Some of you who are new in the congregation won't remember our former associate pastor Andy McCracken, but when Andy was in town a number of years ago he was very intentional about what he did in his ministry and Andy was a volleyball player and a good volleyball player and so one of the first things he did was to find a group of people to play volleyball with and just to play and to develop friendships. And he did that, but it didn't stop with just having friendships with these folks. He wanted to love them spiritually and he had a concern for their souls. And so he eventually got a number of them involved in an evangelistic Bible study that we were doing that they heard the gospel and because of his intentional effort to reach out to them.

And it is convicting to me. I have been in town a long time, much longer than Andy has been in town now and I went through a phase when I was in graduate school where I played basketball over in the [?] at lunch time a couple of times a week. There were guys I saw week in and week out and yet never pointed them to Jesus Christ.

The same thing is happening and I play soccer also. You know, we show up. We play soccer together. But I am not taking that next step. And it is convicting.

And you might think that your own situation, friends that you have who don't know the Lord need to be pointed to the source of spiritual life.

³ John 4:10.

⁴ John 4:14.

Jesus shows this woman her life is a wreck and the only solution is the Lord Jesus Christ and Jesus points this woman to that fact.

And this is really what is reflected in our mission statement. So if you look on the back of your outline just for a moment you will see what we say about outreach. Our desire is that by the power of the Holy Spirit we communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to the Bloomington community and the Indiana University campus with the expectation that God will use this witness to draw men and women to himself and that we will grow, people saved as Christ would use us.

And so you see some specific things we are hoping to do and the first one is really what I have been talking about this evening, seeking to emphasize outreach and the development of lifestyle evangelism by each member. That just means befriending unbelievers and pointing them to Jesus Christ.

But you see other things to try to help in this, to provide training for evangelism and to encourage outreach Bible studies and to have an outreach committee which is doing things like the Andrew dinner that we did a few months ago and leading us and trying to keep outreach in front of us. And we want to see this in our preaching.

And look at F. I thought this was interesting as I read it. Seeking to have 10 percent of the congregation be involved in outreach on a weekly basis.

So I am not sure exactly how we measure that, but, again, as we look forward to this fall retreat, it might be something to think about is that are we sitting back and saying, "Hey, we have got an outreach committee. Those guys handle outreach."

Are we saying that outreach is a way of life for us, that as we love the people God has put into our lives we reach out and we minister to them?

So Jesus had a love for the spiritual wellbeing of the lost.

And then we see as our fifth point, your love for the lost must ultimately flow out of your love for Jesus Christ. So as you listen to this you may be thinking, well, this really too much. I am not Jesus, after all. And I have difficulty with what you are saying here.

But I have you consider a couple of things. The first is before you are going to be able to reach out in love to lost people, you have to recognize that you yourself before God are a lost person. The Scripture says that your righteousness is as filthy rags in God's sight. The Scripture says that Christ died for sinners, not for righteous people. And it is only by understanding you are a lost sinner saved only by the grace of God that you can begin to love other people who are lost.

John Newton in his famous hymn *Amazing Grace* says:

I once was lost, but now I am found.

I once was blind and now I see.

And if Jesus Christ had not found you, had not opened your eyes, had not sent somebody to love you, you wouldn't be here. You would not be here. You wouldn't have come here because you would have been one of those that God says hates God. That is how all of us are by nature. But Christ loved you and came and gave himself for you. That is the kind of love for the lost that we have benefited from.

And so we have to keep that in mind if we are going to love the lost.

We also have to recognize that Christ is glorified in the salvation of the lost. This is very significant. Why a person in Samaria? Well, it is because Jesus Christ has been given the nations by God. And we can see that in Psalm two. The Messiah is the heir to the nations and Jesus Christ is going and saving his people from all types of people around the world and all nations. And when people are saved who are lost, Jesus Christ is glorified. And if you have been saved, you ought to want Jesus to be glorified as he was in your salvation. And this also motivates us to reach out to the lost that Jesus might be given more glory.

And then I think we also are helped when we understand that Christ will be with you and will go through you. He will be with you and go through you when you love the lost. And we see this quite clearly in Matthew 28 verses 18 to 20. It is sometimes called the Great Commission and this is actually in our mission statement. We refer to these verses.

Jesus says, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go..."⁵

Right? Not stay and wait for them to come to you.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."⁶

Go because he is with you. Go because all authority has been given to him. And go because Jesus Christ is building his church with lost people and he will use you.

A number of years ago *World* magazine had a story about some children in Bosnia. And this was after the war there and there were a lot of uncleaned up mine fields and a couple of three children around 11 or 12 years of age wandered into the mine field and some mines blew up. And the children in the minefield were calling out for help for several hours and there were people around the edge of the minefield, but no one would go in to the minefield.

And it is easy for us to say, "Ok, we can understand that." I mean, after all, there are a lot of reasons not to try to go into a minefield when there are people there dying and we could reason it out. It is too dangerous, you know. I can't risk it. It is too costly. It won't

⁵ Matthew 28:18-19.

⁶ Matthew 28:19-20

succeed. All I am going to do is kill myself. There is now way we get in and get out of there. It won't work anyway. They are not my children. It is not my responsibility. It is somebody else's responsibility. I have got to take care of my children. I am not trained for this. I am not equipped. I don't have the right preparation to in there and we need to wait for the UN mine sweepers. Somebody else can do it.

There are lots of good reasons not to go in to help people. And those three children all died by the time the mine sweepers got there. And, unfortunately, we treat evangelism the same way. Don't we make the same excuses? It is too costly and I might ruin this relationship. It is not my responsibility. Somebody else will do it. It is not my gift. I don't have the... I am not equipped for it.

And it is not for us in this country for us that dangerous, is it? It is not as dangerous as going into a minefield. For people in China and some other places it is. But it is not that dangerous for us. Jesus loves lost sinners and you must love lost sinners intentionally, genuinely and spiritually and you must recognize that only through his grace will you be able to do that, to be the kind of person that will go to the lost around you.

Now as we prepare to come to the table we come here recognizing we need grace. We come asking the Lord to strengthen our faith and strengthen our resolve and to recognize what it cost him to save lost people like me and you. And we understand that and he will help us then to love the lost around us. This is what true love for Jesus Christ produces, a genuine love for the lost around us. Go to the people that he has put around you.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, when we consider what Christ the Lord Jesus paid to save lost sinners such as we are, we marvel. We are amazed and we thank you for the mercy that you have shown us. And, Lord, we ask you to forgive us, because far too often we are so complacent about the people that you have put into our lives. It is just too much of a hassle for us to reach out, to take a chance, to invest time and energy in unbelievers, people who are different than we are. Lord, would you please forgive us for that attitude and would you be pleased to work in our hearts that we would love the lost people that you have put in our lives, not just some superficial love, not just a love that is trying to mark off a list of things to do, but a genuine love that wants to see men and women and boys and girls come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, to drink from that fountain which knows no bounds to have eternal life welling up within them. And, Lord, we ask that by this means you would be pleased to grow our congregation and you would add to our ministry because we are reaching out in love, that we would be seeing adults, more adults being baptized here as converts to Christ. And we ask for your help in this and we thank you for your promise of blessing and for the grace that we know Christ gives his people to fulfill his commands. We pray this in his name. Amen.