

“The Invitational Approach” – John 4

Somebody tell me what it means to you to be a Christian. In just one or two sentences, tell me what you get out of it. What are the benefits of following the risen Lord? Is it the peace and joy you have even in the difficult times of life? Is it the forgiveness of your sins and the release of guilt? Is it the promise of Heaven when you die? Is it the full and abundant life that can be had in the here and now or the rewards in Heaven that you are looking forward to in the there and then?

Aren't you thankful for all that? Aren't you glad? Would you trade it for anything in the world? Now, aren't you glad you don't have to tell anybody about it? Aren't you thankful to God that telling others about Jesus is not a requirement for entry into Heaven? I mean, that could get uncomfortable, right? It might be awkward to have to tell somebody else about all the wonderful gifts God has promised us. What if they rejected you or thought you were weird? What if they asked a question you didn't know?

Let's just all be grateful that God put pastors and evangelists and missionaries on the earth to do all that so you don't have to! Right? I know you are busy people. You have kids and grandkids and jobs. Plus, you have pride and actually telling somebody else about Jesus might interfere with all that. So, don't worry. Somebody else will tell people the Gospel. You don't have to. And hopefully they will tell your kids and grandkids. Hopefully they will tell the people that you love so much. Just be glad you don't have to.

I hope you are picking up on my sarcasm because I'm laying it down pretty thick. And yet that is absolutely the way that the vast majority of people live. It's the most precious and powerful gift that could ever be given and it doesn't cost any money to give it or receive it and yet...eh, somebody else will tell the people.

What would you say if I told you I had found the greatest place to eat not far from here? If I told you that the food was homemade, healthy and delicious; the prices were very inexpensive and the service was great and the portions were huge, what would you say? You would ask me where it was and what the name was, wouldn't you? Then we would all go there after church today and we would have a great time.

But what if you found this same place and told me about it and I said, *“Oh, yea, I found that months ago and I eat there twice a week now. It's great!”* What would your response be then? *“Gee thanks, jerk! Why didn't you tell us about it before?”* Right? You would be mad at me if I didn't tell you, wouldn't you?

We are concluding our sermon series on evangelism today and all the different ways there are to tell other people about the Gospel of Jesus. But maybe you still haven't heard one that matches your personality yet. You have gifts that God gave you but you aren't as bold as Peter or as smart as Paul. You aren't comfortable giving your testimony yet like the blind man and you don't feel like the relational or serving approach would work very well for you either. Well, I have one more for you and it is surely the easiest one yet.

I mean, I thought the blind man did it pretty simply. All he said was, *All I know is I was blind and now I see.*” But the woman at the well evangelized in what may be an even easier way. Do you remember what she said? She basically pointed toward Jesus and told her friends, *“Come and see.”*

Let's turn to the Gospel of John this morning and see what the woman wanted us and everybody else to see. The story of the woman at the well is one that I'm sure most of you are familiar with. I'm not going to read the whole story but I want to start with verse 4 and go through verse 19 to start. There are two things I noticed as I read through this story again that I had not noticed before. The first one is found in this part of the story.

John 4:4-19 says, “Now He (Jesus) had to go through Samaria. **5** So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. **6** Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. **7** When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” **8** (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) **9** The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) **10** Jesus answered her, “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.” **11** “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? **12** Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?” **13** Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, **14** but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” **15** The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” **16** He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” **17** “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. **18** The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” **19** “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet.”

That last sentence is almost comical. Yea, I bet you do realize He’s a prophet, there sweetheart. I bet she looked like she saw a ghost when He told her about her love life. And the ghost was her. It can be scary to find out the sins of other people but there is nothing scarier than being shown your own sins. She now had a clear vision of who she was and what she had done and it had to be humbling.

I can tell you from experience that this is a miserable place to be. When you run smack dab into who you really are; when you see who you have become left to your own devices it is an awful place but it is an absolutely necessary place to be if you are to ever be right with God. I think most people are in agreement with **Romans 3:23** that says we are all sinners. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. Anybody that is intellectually honest would have to agree with that.

The problem is that none of us are as bad as that person over there. Right? We’re good people. We mean well and over all we are way better than lots of people we know. Why, my cousin’s friend knows a guy that is way worse than me. He’s a real sinner. He needs Jesus. Me? I’m doing okay. I mean, compared to Hitler, I’m a saint.

Realizing you are a sinner along with everybody else in the world and comparing yourself to other people...that’s not such a bad place to be. But when Jesus confronts you with who you really are; with the depth and depravity of your personal sins that are now on full display in front of the One who died on the cross for those sins, that’s miserable.

For the woman at the well, what Jesus said in **verses 17 and 18** was enough to show her who she really was – a sinner in need of a Savior – but also who Jesus really was – that Savior. For the first time she has a clear vision of who she really is and Who Jesus really is and that was enough.

If you go on reading in **verse 25**, the woman says, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Now, if you really read this and think about where she was coming from, you realize what she is really saying is, “Okay, mister, you are either the Messiah or you need to leave me alone. This is not comfortable for me to talk about with just anybody.” She is asking if Jesus is the Messiah. Is He God in human flesh? Is He the one that has come to forgive and heal and save?

Jesus answers plainly in **verse 26**. *“I, the one speaking to you am he.”* In Hebrew, it is “Messiah.” In Greek, it is translated “Christ.” Both words mean the same thing: the anointed one. It is a title given to Jesus that means He is the One anointed and appointed to die on the cross for the sins of the world and rise again the third day. All of that was prophesied hundreds of years before Jesus was born. It is one thing to read about Jesus. It’s another to face Him.

It is one thing to admit to a friend that you have some sin in your life. It’s completely another thing to have your sins pointed out to you by the One who is going to pay for them. Imagine, if you will, a court room setting. The stately judge is sitting in his black robe behind the massive wooden bench. Armed security is at every corner. A stenographer is there to type every word of the trial. And it is your trial.

Two guards bring you in, shackled at the waist and the feet, dressed in prison clothes and brought slowly towards the judge. Your criminal record is brought out of a file and your own attorney starts to read it out loud in front of everyone. It is page after page of everything you have ever done that has displeased God. Every sin you have ever committed is written down in horrifying detail.

The judge hears how when you were three you lied to your mother. But it goes on, year after year. Lying, cheating, stealing, lust, gossip, adultery, murder, idolatry, violence, even the coarse words you said in fun and the times you used God’s name for no reason. The attorney reads for what seems like hours and hours. Every impure thought, every curse word, those times you got drunk and the times you ate too much. Every sin is mentioned. Nothing is left out.

Finally, the attorney stops reading and closes the file. The judge asks you how you plead. It’s a question you have no choice but to answer truthfully. You know you’re guilty. The judge knows your guilty. Everybody knows you are guilty so that is how you plead. The judge looks at you and says, *“I have no choice but to sentence you to death. No pardons, no appeals, no waiting. Take him away!”*

But just then your own attorney, who has read every sin and knows you and knows your case better than anybody, stands up and offers to take your place and all you have to do is agree to it. That is what the woman at the well is experiencing right here in **verse 26** when Jesus says, *“I, the one speaking to you am he.”*

Galatians 3:13 says, *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.”* **1 Peter 2:24** says, *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”* That means by His wounds you have been forgiven and spiritually healed. And **2 Corinthians 5:21** says, *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin.”* That is the Messiah. That is the Christ. That is Jesus and that is who the woman at the well knew was speaking to her.

I want to see something else in this fascinating true story. Let’s go on to read **verses 28-30**. *Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” 30They came out of the town and made their way toward him.*

Now, if you have heard this story preached on before, you may have heard that it was not common for this kind of interaction to happen. But I don’t know if you really understand just how ridiculously scandalous this whole scene was. First, a Jew would NEVER talk to a Samaritan. A man would NEVER talk to a woman. And NOBODY would talk to a woman like this who had, what might generously be called, loose morals.

But here is Jesus, breaking ALL the rules and I love it! But I bring all that up because it plays a part in what she says in **verse 29**. Can you imagine a woman – especially a woman like this – going into town and telling everybody in a loud voice, **“Let me tell you about the Messiah!?”** Nobody is going to listen to her with that approach. The approach she uses is the approach of someone who is admitting she has done wrong and is just encouraging others to go check Jesus out and see for themselves.

I love that she leaves her water pot. She was in a hurry but she was coming back so she just left it and went and told everybody that would listen, *“Come and see. Come and see for yourself. Don’t take my word for it. My word is no better than my reputation. Come and see.”* She didn’t try to debate them or prove anything to them. Just come and see. Spend some time with Him and let Him show you who you really are and who He really is. I don’t have to know all the answers. I don’t have to take up for Jesus or convince you on my own. I’ll let Him do that.

All you have to do is come and have a real encounter with the risen Jesus and He will do the rest. It’s interesting to me that nothing is said of the disciples telling anybody about Jesus while they were off buying food. They went into town and were at the grocery store buying sandwich meat and chips for lunch when the Savior of the world is outside of town talking to a loose Samaritan woman about her eternity.

But I don’t blame them. It might have been uncomfortable for them. Somebody might reject them or ask them a question they didn’t know. Besides, they were hungry and they were doing the Lord’s work. So, who can blame them? They surely knew somebody would tell the people about Jesus. Right?

So, what does this look like for us today? The woman at the well just pointed at Jesus and said, *“Y’all go check Him out.”* What does the invitational approach look like for us? Well, are we inviting people to church? Is that the invitational approach? Well, it can be and will probably be part of it. But surely there’s more, right? Surely we can invite people to church and we should but the goal is not for them to just come to church. We want them to come to Jesus. So, say His name. Invite them, not to Christ Fellowship but to Christ. It’s not even about inviting them to God. The God they have heard of may be different than the God who is Jesus. So say the name of Jesus. There is power in the name. There are blessings in the name.

So, here’s what’s going to happen. Later today, maybe tomorrow or the next day, you are going to cross paths with somebody who is hurting. Maybe they are hurting mentally, physically or spiritually. Depending on how they are hurting you may need to help them with food or medicine or just a listening ear. But after you help them in that way, just point to Jesus like the woman did. Just tell them to try Jesus. Tell them you don’t have all the answers. Tell them that when you were hurting how your relationship with Jesus helped you. You don’t have to say much more than that if you don’t want to. Invite them to church, sure. But invite them to Jesus!

How about you? Have you had an encounter with the risen Savior, Jesus, the Christ, the anointed? When you do, there’s no excuses to be made because you no longer compare yourself to other people. You compare yourself to Him and you see Him as He really is. That’s a scary place to be but it is a place necessary for true salvation.

All you have to do is come in faith and see for yourself. Allow Him to forgive you of your sin. He has already taken your place. He paid the debt you couldn’t pay and all you have to do is believe. That belief will show itself as a changed life that looks more like Jesus every day. Do that right now as the music plays.