

How Did Jesus Treat Messed Up People?

Interviewing John about Jesus

I read a brilliant book recently called *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*, by Donald Miller. And Don sets his book up with a devastating observation:

If you watched a movie about a guy who wanted a Volvo and worked for years to get it, you wouldn't cry at the end when he drove off the lot, testing the windshield wipers. You wouldn't tell your friends you saw a beautiful movie or go home and put a record on to think about the story you'd seen. The truth is, you wouldn't remember that movie a week later, except you'd feel robbed and want your money back. Nobody cries at the end of a movie about a guy who wants a Volvo.

But we spend years actually living those stories, and expect our lives to feel meaningful. Truth is, if what we choose to do with our lives won't make a story meaningful, it won't make a life meaningful either.

How meaningful does your life feel?

There is a story told in the Bible about a woman who gets a new sense of meaning in her life, and we're going to look at that tonight. Perhaps you are familiar with it. It's the story of a Samaritan woman who meets Jesus by a well. He asks for water, she is a little shocked, and a discussion about water turns into a discussion of faith and her being saved.

Do you recognise that story?

I thought so. It's quite well known.

All this month we've been working through the book of John and imagining it is a chance to interview that disciple about Jesus. And the question we would ask John tonight is this: How did Jesus treat messed up people?

Well I think one of the ways He does – John might say - is to give their life meaning. A sense of purpose. And then he might point to this story as proof.

I used to read this story with WAY too much familiarity. It was one of those passages in the Bible I tended to flip over quickly because I'd read it so often. You know what I mean?

- Some passages are speed bump passages: God uses them to slow you right down and shake you to the core.
- Other passages become straight neighbourhood roads that we feel so familiar with we drive over them hardly aware they happened. Yeah, yeah, Jesus meets woman by the well. He talks to her when others wouldn't, he shares faith with her, and she believes. Next.

But God graciously threw down a speed bump in that neighbourhood road and I've come to realise this may be one of the most remarkable stories in the entire gospel of John.

You see, it's a story about purpose. It's the story of Jesus unveiling His purposes on earth, and it is the story of a messed up woman getting a new sense of purpose herself. And underlying all that is God's incredible love for His people.

So even if you have heard this story before, I want you to hear it again. With speed bumps. And to help that we are going to walk through it piece by piece with the help of my friends here. They'll read a bit, I'll talk a bit, they'll read a bit, I'll talk a bit. They'll read a bit... and hopefully, you'll hear a story of purpose.

The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) 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.) **John 4:1-9 NIV**

Now the first thing you may be wondering is this: who are the Samaritans? When you hear that name you might think of the most famous Samaritan in the Bible – the Good One. All these religious dudes walk passed a dying man, but the good Samaritan stops, cares for the man, shelters him in a hostel and inspires tens of thousands of charities throughout history.

What is so surprising to early hearers of *that* story is that the good man *was* a Samaritan. That was the shocking fact, because all Jews assumed Samaritans were the scum of the earth.

The Samaritans were actually related to the Jews. They were both descendents of Jacob. But over the centuries the Samaritans had mixed with other nationalities and cultures to become a watered down and twisited version of Judaism. And because of that there was no love lost between the them and the Jews.

But they had things in common. They both believed in just one God, they both believed they were a part of God's elect people – *because* they were descended from Jacob - and they both believed in a coming Messiah. So while there were certainly clear differences between Jews and Samaritans, the differences were not as great as each of them would often suggest. The closest analogy I can think of is what it was like between maybe the Catholics and the Protestants in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. A lot of hatred, a lot of nationalism, some definite religious divides but more shared theology then they may have cared to admit.

But still – they really didn't like each other.

So here we have Jesus travelling north from Judea to Gallilee and it says "*Now he had to go through Samaria*".

Well, yes, and no.

This is important. It is *true* that going through Samaria was one of the quickest ways north, but it was certainly not the *only* way. And most Jews wouldn't go that way. They would take a detour to avoid passing through Samaria altogether. But Jesus HAD to go there... and the word that translates "had to" means this was a matter of purpose.

This was something in His Spirit He HAD to do. John is hinting that the story we are about to hear was meant to happen. Jesus was not going there by accident. He had a rendezvous...

And so it is that at about noon, in the heat of the day, Jesus arrives by a well in Samaria, where He is soon joined by our Samaritan woman. And Jesus, a Jew, asks her for a drink. Her response shows the tension that existed between them. A JEW, drinking from the cup of a SAMARITAN! Unheard of.

But it soon becomes clear that Jesus' intentions are more spiritual than nationalistic.

*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." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I 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 so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." **John 4:10-15***

In Australia we have a story about a magic pudding. This magic pudding is like a Christmas fruit cake, but what makes it magic is that it is never ending. No matter how many spoonfuls of this pudding you take, it is still as complete as the moment it came out of the oven. It's like a bottomless cup, only it's a pudding bowl. Now this magic pudding also happens to walk and talk and have a bad attitude, but that's beside the point.

What's important is that it never ends. You'll never go hungry with a magic pudding around. A little bloated maybe, and annoyed by his complaining, but never hungry.

And that is what this woman thinks Jesus is offering her: some type of magic pudding water supply. A supply of water that will never dry up. Whether she sincerely believes Jesus can do such a thing, or whether she is just humouring Him, I don't know. But she wants this magic water. Hardly surprising in a hot, dry land like Samaria!

Only, Jesus isn't talking about H₂O. Or magic puddings.

He is offering her something far more life-changing. Forgiveness and eternal life.

First, He talks about "the gift of God", which is God's gift of His forgiveness and salvation. And then, when He talks about living water, it is a metaphor for what happens when we become Christians. He's taking the well that this woman has to keep coming back to and comparing it to the fact that when we are saved Jesus' presence in our life is so life giving and his forgiveness so complete that it wells up into eternal life. Jesus is teasing her with the gospel.

Only she misses the point. She still thinks Jesus must be offering the magic pudding. So He gently throws her a curve ball...to show her that more is at stake than free water...

*He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 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." **John 4:16-18***

Wham... Imagine the power of this moment. Here is our woman talking to this Jewish teacher who she doesn't know from Adam. Suddenly he makes it painfully clear that she may not know Him, but He CERTAINLY knows her. In fact, He knows things that she'd rather He NOT.

In today's world where divorce is all too common, it is hard for us to understand the degree of shame this woman probably carries for the life she has lived so far. In saying that she has had 5 husbands, and more importantly that her current live-in partner is not her husband, Jesus is pointing out that she has had a lifetime of heartache and shame.

And it is entirely possible that she has not told everyone about her history – or at least not all of it. Later she will make the fact that Jesus supernaturally knew her relational history central to how she witnesses about Him. Now consider this – if her life story was broad public knowledge, would she have been that amazed that this man knew it? No, Jesus was bringing up the secrets of her life here and laying them out, naked by the well.

I doubt many of you have had 5 husbands or wives and are currently living with some other person. So let me personalise it for you. This may be the equivalent of Jesus sitting opposite you and saying

- *"I know you and I know you've been cheating on your husband or boyfriend or your girlfriend or your wife.*
- *I know you and I know you've been up late surfing porn.*
- *I know you, and I know you've been cheating on your tax or your tests.*
- *I know you, and I know that you are harbouring fantasies that make you sick to the stomach.*
- *I know you, and I know what you did on that last business trip.*
- *I know you, and I know how you betrayed your friend when you thought no-one was listening."*

We make such a mistake if we think that our sins are hidden from Jesus. He knows us intimately! There is nothing in our life, past, present or future, that Jesus does not know about in every wretched detail. The Bible tells us that He knows every hair on my head, which is a fancy way of saying there is NOTHING, I mean NOTHING that He doesn't know about us. The good, the bad and the ugly.

So imagine what is going through the heart of this woman at the moment. "Here is a man that knows my shame, and yet what He is offering me are words of LIFE."

That is what Jesus does to us even today. He knows everything about us, and yet He loves us. He sees all our grime and yet he embraces us. He understands all our motivations, and yet He longs to forgive us.

This is outrageous love! If another person treated you like this you'd never leave their side!

Anyway, it's here the conversation takes a new turn.

*"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he." **John 4:19-26***

John only gives us snippets of the conversation between this woman and Jesus. But what we can see here is that their discussion turned from a story of personal salvation to one of God's plan for all people. And this is important. Let me explain what I mean with a quick theology lesson. And I warn you – this will be the heaviest part of the sermon. But you're good for it.

If you look over the Old Testament, there are a few big themes that emerge.

- God is a holy and perfect and loving God.
- We were created to live in a subservient relationship with God.
- Despite the fact that God is holy and perfect and loving and we were created to live in a relationship with Him, humans constantly try to live outside of that relationship. The Bible calls this sin.
- God has slowly but surely been unfolding a plan to remove that sin and restore the relationship that we broke.
- That plan would involve the life and death of one called the Messiah - God's chosen one. That Messiah is Jesus.

The thing is, this entire story, in the Old Testament, gets played out in a Jewish context. The Old Testament calls the Jews "God's Chosen people" and the Old Testament is largely the story of THEIR relationship with God. Even the Messiah will come from the Jews. And while the Old Testament hints that He will bring salvation to all nations, you could be forgiven for believing it would be largely a Jewish affair.

But Jesus comes along and says *no no no guys – the message of salvation I have come to bring will be for all the people. Jews, Samaritans, Greeks, Turks you name it.* "A time is coming..." Jesus tells her, when Jews and Samaritans and all those who worship God will do so together.

These days Christianity is a global phenomenon. There are literally billions of believers across the four corners of the world and of every nationality. Just look around you here at Westlake! But back then, the fact that we would all be worshipping God as part of His family was a radical thought that Jewish believers simply couldn't have imagined.

Jesus and the woman then get into a discussion about what that worship will look like.

At the time the Jews believed that worship was to be done in the Temple in Jerusalem, while the Samaritans believed it was to be on the sacred mountain on which Jesus now stood. But Jesus introduces her to far more radical idea. A time was about to come when worship wouldn't just be a thing people did in some special place, but would be a part of a true Christians very life. True worshippers of God would soon be worshipping God in the power of His spirit and in the full knowledge of the truth about Jesus. It would not be about place, but about life.

Then she tells Jesus that the Messiah will come one day and explain all these complicated things to her anyway so He needn't worry. It's here that Jesus plays his ace card. *"I am that Messiah you've been waiting for."*

Now here is the thing I don't want you to miss: He tells all this to this woman. At Christmas we often wonder how amazing it must have been for the angel to come down and tell Mary that the Messiah will be born to her. Or how incredible it must have been for the shepherds out in the field when those angels announced the birth of the Saviour. But consider this: for the first time, Jesus is publically spelling out one of the great plans of salvation – that the Messiah will come to save people of all nations –and that He is that Messiah. And He declares that not to some prince or president or potentate but to this messed up woman by the well.

I think that is so cool.

How does Jesus treat messed up people? He makes them a part of HIS PURPOSES.

*Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him. **John 4:27-30***

Most Bible commentators believe that this woman is at the well in the middle of the day because she wants to avoid people. She is probably an outcast because of the life she has led. So I love the picture her being so excited by what she hears that she rushes off ...leaving her water jar with Jesus.

I think John tells us this detail because he wants us to know that telling the rest of the town about Jesus had suddenly become an all consuming passion for this woman. What was important to her before - getting water, buying a Volvo - suddenly felt unimportant. Her former concerns just didn't have the power over her. Jesus has invited her in to something so much bigger than herself and her shame.

But the disciples miss the point that something of eternal significance has just happened.

*Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor." **John 4:31-38***

We are going to go over this part very quickly. But the thing I want you to see here is again this idea of purpose.

I have a lot of sympathy for the disciples. Once it hits lunch I'm ready to eat. And to make matters worse they've brought food back, so the smell of lunch is rising in their nostrils. But Jesus turns everything into a teachable moment. He tells His disciples that he's in no rush to eat because *"His food is to do the will of Him who sent me (God) and to finish His work."*

Jesus is saying to His disciples – *"That thing that just happened here with this woman? That's what my life is all about. I came here for the express purpose of bringing pardon to people everywhere, and this woman was a part of that. And you are going to see this happen on a big scale, so be ready. Now, pass me a sandwich. (No, the Bible doesn't really say that last bit, but I like to imagine it.)"*

Once again, this is yet another reminder that this meeting with the Samaritan woman is not some chance encounter that Jesus makes the most of, but part of God's very salvation plan of history.

So what happened to our messed-up Samaritan woman? Did she marry her live-in lover? Did she give up her life of sin? Did she open a chain of Living Water Wells? Well, we don't know much, except for the profound effect she had on her town.

*Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world." **John 4:39-42***

Jesus talked about the harvest being ready and this woman was already out there with the tractor. She goes and tells those in the town about Jesus, and it says that "*many Samaritans of that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony.*" This messed up woman who people usually had many opinions of but never the time of day for is suddenly seeing people come to believe in Jesus because of HER testimony. He came to save all people, and immediately He is using her in that purpose. How phenomenal is that?

And many other townsfolk are at least intrigued enough to find out more. So they go back to see Jesus. Now think about this: All this can't have transpired in a few minutes. There must have been at least some passing of time for the woman to go back, share the story, have some believe, spur others on to go find out more, and then for those people to track Jesus down. Right? What – a few hours? A few days? I don't know, but here's the thing – Jesus was still waiting for them. He is going to Galilee but he hasn't left yet. Why? Because once again this is not a chance encounter. It is purpose. He KNOWS the power the woman's testimony will have, so He waits.

When the people from Scyhar find Jesus they beg Him to stay with them. Which He does – for 2 days, teaching them about His great purpose of salvation and even more come to faith.

Do you see why this is such an incredible story? Or am I just having an excitable day?

Here's the big idea of this sermon: the purposes of Jesus mean that the lives of even messed up people like us can have purpose.

So what does a life of purpose look like for us?

1. First, acceptance His salvation.

Beyond all the grand purposes we see playing out in this story, at the very heart of it is Jesus personally offering this Samaritan woman forgiveness and eternal life. Before her life had purpose, she had to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Simply put, she needed to become a Christian.

Some of you here tonight need to become Christians. You have been coming along to church or youth group and you have heard about the love Jesus has for you. You have heard the gospel. But you haven't yet made the commitment yourself. It's like you keep coming back to the well, listening to more of Jesus, and then leaving uncommitted and thirsty. And you wonder why you still feel empty!

If that's you, it's time to make a decision. You will not have a life of genuine purpose until you make the decision to accept the fact that Jesus died on the cross to pay for YOUR life. He knows what you've done, He knows what your fears are. And He is saying *come. Put down the water jar. Stop chasing Volvos. Let me give you living water.*

Please – don't waste another second of your life. Jesus is inviting you in to something so much bigger and more amazing. But you have to make the decision. Become a Christian tonight.

These last 2 points are for Christians.

2. Let your whole life tell of His greatness

There are two things I notice about how Jesus deals with the woman at the well. First, He declares some remarkable things about Himself. He tells her He is the Messiah. He tells her that He is the source of eternal life. That He has come to save all nations, and that He will be worshipped by all people. And He knows every detail of our lives. THIS IS

NO ORDINARY MAN and Jesus wants the woman to see that. Guys, our lives have purpose as we start to realise the greatness of Jesus.

Then, when this woman discovers the greatness of Jesus, she is compelled to tell others about Him. What is the basis of her testimony about Jesus? It's the fact that Jesus had told her "everything she did", not that He was offering eternal life. The thing that excited her was Jesus' omniscience – a fancy word for the fact He knows all. It was not just what *she* was going to get out of the relationship.

It's another sermon entirely to talk about God's individual will for our lives, and many sermons more to explain this in any great detail. But for all of us I think one key elements of a life of purpose is to know the greatness of Jesus and to make His greatness known.

Says Isaiah 26:8: LORD, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts

And this is not a matter of occasionally telling people about Jesus. This is about living a life that shows how great Jesus is.

Here's another question worth seriously asking about ourselves everyday: what does the way I am living my life today say to others about the Jesus I claim to follow?

3. Live to make His purposes your purposes.

My guess is that many of you were deeply struck by that quote I read at the start of this sermon because you, also, are pursuing Volvos rather than the purposes of God. I don't know about you, but I'm tired of pursuing Volvos.

I want to live for bigger purposes. I want to live for the things that matter to God. And don't think this is about living out a particular purpose for your life. I spent years getting anxious because I didn't know what God's specific will for my life was. I was convinced that God had this "one thing" that He wanted my life to be about, and I was petrified of missing that. I had this weird view that God was up in heaven with an envelope that showed exactly what David Grebert was to do with his life and if I missed it my life would be a waste.

It took the grace and wisdom of an older friend in the Philippines to make me realise that God doesn't operate that way. There is no "head of the pin" purpose that if you miss you're stuffed. If, along the way, He has specific desires for me He'll make those things clear. He always has. But what was most important is that we live true to the corporate purposes of God. The things He calls ALL His followers to; To make his greatness known. To love Him with all our heart and soul and mind. To love others with a radical love. To love His church. To grow in greater holiness. To care for the sick, the poor, the widows and the orphans. Man, there is enough there to keep you purpose driven for the rest of your life. And that's the point.

I want to live in a way where my choices are shaped by the things that are important to God. Our purposes and our desires need to be informed by His.

So here's a second question worth asking yourself: does the way I am living my life today feel true to the big obvious purposes of God for us all?

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