

John 4:26-54

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 November 2023

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] We're in John 4, verses 26 to 45. John 4. So if you've got a black church Bible, that's page 889. While I was on holiday last week, I read a biography of an American minister from the last century called Jack Miller.

Jack Miller, some of you might know him. He actually preached here a number of times in the 80s and 90s. He was related to someone in our presbytery. Jack Miller was a great character. The title of the biography is *Cheer Up. Cheer Up Jack Miller*. It was one of the things that he used to say. *Cheer up, you're far worse than you think you are, but God's grace is greater than you realize.* And one of the things Jack Miller talks constantly about in that, well, they talk about him, is that he was the chief confessor.

That as the minister, as one of the elders, he was the chief repenter in the congregation. And so I thought I'd try it this morning. I am a grump.

You might not think that. You might think, well, he's got a very jovial personality. But my default is grumpiness. And that's why John 4 is just such a wonderful chapter, particularly for me, but I hope to you also.

[1 : 18] Because it's one of the happiest chapters in all of the Bible. It began as a detour. Jesus and his disciples, they go through Samaria, but it finishes up with a mini revival.

These Samaritans, lots of them saying, Jesus is the savior of the world. And it comes through the testimony of a dubious woman with a checkered past.

And verse 27 is the result of Jesus' interaction with her. And what we find is that living water is now bubbling up in her life, and it overflows into the lives of many.

And so we follow the progress of the gospel amongst the Samaritans. And at the center of this passage, Jesus opens up to the disciples what is going on.

And he says, look, see, behold. And all the categories are categories of joy and satisfaction and gratification and nourishment.

[2 : 25] It's a chapter that's about joy and happiness and overflow of eternal life. It's about a new moment in history of sowing and harvesting and reaping.

And what is at the bottom of all this happiness? Where does this spiritual enjoyment come from? And that's really helpful if you are someone who is tempted by spiritual grumpiness.

There is a temptation, it's particular to Presbyterians, I think, of a creeping crankiness. It happens, doesn't it, to Christians after a few years.

You've left all the spontaneous joy behind the rubbish you sing in youth camps, those 70s choruses. But now we've grown up.

Now we've settled into the grim grind of discipleship. And of course, none of you are tempted by that. But I want to give you three refreshing spiritual realities that are found in this passage.

[3 : 31] The first is gospel joy. Gospel just means good news. The second is gospel hunger. And the third is gospel sight. So let's take each three. Gospel joy.

The tone. It's important, I think, if you look at that. The tone is one of happiness. Overwhelming joy. We can see it, can't we, in the excitement of the Samaritan woman.

Look at verses 27 to 30. The disciples come back to Jesus. They'd left him alone. He was at the well.

He's tired and hungry. He's on a long walk. And they've gone off to town to get some refreshments. And there's a Samaritan woman who's come out in midday, in the midday heat, to gather and get water.

Which is completely the wrong time to get water. You don't need to do that if you were trying to avoid all contact with people. And Jesus breaks all the customs of the day.

[4 : 32] And he speaks with her. And he simply asks her for a drink, doesn't he? And from that point on in the conversation, it is the woman who takes the initiative.

Jesus is just answering. And it's wonderful to watch it. And you see the way it works. Jesus asks a question. And then Jesus answers her questions.

And they are stunning. He moves her at a pace. He takes her deeper each time until she reveals, doesn't he? Can you see it?

She says he is the Christ. She calls him the Christ. What's the situation? The disciples return to the well.

They find Jesus talking to the woman. And they cannot believe it. So verse 28. The woman leaves her water jar. She goes back into town. And she says to the people. She says, come and see a man who told me everything I ever did.

[5 : 36] Can this be the Christ? The Lord's anointed one. The Messiah we've been expecting. And the people, they go out of the town. And they come longingly to him. There's something disarmingly honest and natural about this woman.

She goes in the heat of the day to get water. She leaves the water bottle. Because she has discovered, doesn't she, something infinitely more wonderful.

And she races back to tell everyone what's happened. She came out with a jug to draw water. But she returns to the town with the water of eternal life welling up and overflowing in her heart.

As soon as she gets an inkling that this Jesus of Nazareth is God's Messiah, she drinks the living water. And as soon as she begins to drink the living water, she becomes a fountain of living water. For other people as well. She doesn't even think about it. It just overflows from her. One of the best commentators on John says this. It is the nature of faith that we want to bring others to share eternal life with us.

[6 : 48] When we become partakers of it, the knowledge of God cannot lie buried and inactive in our hearts and not be made known. And so this woman, she's got amazing eagerness and enthusiasm to go to the town.

And she wants the people to go out and meet Jesus. She doesn't stop for a moment to think this is an enormous, massive, uphill battle that my witness is going to face.

I mean, if she stopped for a moment, she'd realize there's going to be a terrible reception, isn't there, to her witness. She says, hey everyone. I met a man at the well.

And they are going to say, not again. And she says, he told me everything I ever did. And they say, everyone knows what you've done.

And she says, no, no, no. He might be the Messiah. And they say, yeah, yeah, yeah, right. The Messiah appears to you. But in verse 30, it tells us that what she said worked.

[8 : 02] And the people continually scream out to Jesus. Now, how does she do it? What is the key that makes her message so successful?

I mean, if you look at her message, you will not find it in any training manual. It is all a bit mixed up. It begins with a massive exaggeration. It says, come see a man who told me everything I ever did. It's not right. Could this be the Messiah? Literally, it's maybe, maybe not. This woman needs, doesn't she, to do a term in adult Sunday school.

She needs to go on evangelism training with Rico Tice. She knows her reputation. But what I want you to see, what is incredible to me, and I hope to you, is that instead of hiding her reputation, she leads with that.

She'd been so ashamed that she wanted to go to the well at a time when no one else was there.

She was so ashamed of her reputation, but now she leads with that.

[9 : 19] She doesn't care anymore about her reputation. So long as people go out to Jesus, she's been gripped by the grace and the kindness of the Lord Jesus. And at the same time, Jesus knows the very depths of what she's done and how she's lived and how she's deceived.

And he keeps talking with her. And he offers to her this life. He doesn't say, you're too far gone. He doesn't say, this isn't for your type of person.

He accepts her. He honors her. He welcomes her. And those things grab her heart and change her. And that grip of grace gives her this lovely, joyful freedom. And the only possible explanation is that she is no longer gripped by the fear of exposure.

Are you gripped by that? All her past mistakes with men. All her fear. All her drinking from the wrong places that's been kept hidden in the dark.

[10 : 38] It doesn't enslave her anymore. Because she's now drunk from the well of living water. And it starts to spill over. It's something you see, isn't it, when someone becomes a Christian.

It's something I wish I would see more often in my own life. There's something really beautiful, something liberating about this change.

And so, in this moment, she moves from living a lie and trying to conceal her sin and her foolishness. And keeping it in the dark to being perfectly free and open.

And living in the daylight. She's playing a very different game, isn't it, than the one she came to the well with. And suddenly she says, everyone in town needs to hear this.

And she goes into the town and she treats everyone as if they're exactly the same as she is.

There's no one above me, no one beneath me.

[11 : 50] There's no class anymore, no social divide. Everyone needs to hear this. She thinks, she feels, I think, instinctively that there's a new center in her life.

There's a new resource that she has. And she's speaking out of simple and profound joy. And she is a wonderful example to us, I think. She does what all of us should do.

And so, for many of us, isn't it, for many of us, we think we cannot bring our sin to the light. We cannot bring it into the open. And we keep it in.

It's like this with children, isn't it? Let me speak to the children. Look up for a minute, children. And so, when you've done something. And you are in a bad mood about it.

And you're in a grump about it. And mum and dad say, you can tell us. You can tell us about it. And what do you think?

[12 : 52] You think, don't you? You think, I can't. I can't do it. I can't do it. Does that make it better? It doesn't, does it? And when you bring it out into the light, what is there? There is forgiveness, isn't there?

There's forgiveness from mum and dad. And there's forgiveness from the Lord Jesus as we bring things into the light. And then what happens?

There is liberation. There is freedom. And children, do you know what? It's not just you. Grown-ups are like this too. We hide our sin and we want to control it.

And the answer is to know that Jesus knows it. And to accept that and to bring it into the light.

Nothing has changed in this woman's outward circumstances. She's still got this trail of guys. She's shackled up with someone else. Nothing has changed about that.

[13 : 48] And yet she's an example to us. She speaks. She speaks about Jesus and what Jesus has done in her life. And I think if there is a cure for spiritual crankiness and misery, it is returning to the grace and being gripped by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so I can say to you this morning on the authority of the word of God, Jesus knows you in your depths. But he welcomes you.

And he loves you and he embraces you and he will share his life with you. And he's not. She doesn't stand on her own self-righteousness. She does the opposite.

She stands on Christ's word. And as we gather Sunday by Sunday, as we speak to people about the gospel, we're not testifying to our own self-righteousness.

There's nothing technique or self-conscious about this witness. Christian witness is not telling people, get your act together for goodness sake.

[14 : 59] It is not pointing to your self-righteousness. It is being freed from that and it is pointing to the Lord Jesus, who is the source of living water. And that's the source of gospel joy.

The second thing is gospel hunger. The disciples are scandalized when they come back. They're shocked Jesus is talking to a woman. The culture was a sexist culture.

The culture was a racist culture. Religiously divided. But they very wisely, it's one of the only times in the gospel, the disciples hold their tongues.

They don't say anything. It's a very wise course of action. If you find something in Jesus you're scandalized by, if you find something in the Bible that you don't agree with, and we'll come to this in chapter 14, for example, when Jesus says, no one comes to God except through me, there is no one who comes to God except through me, he slices every religion out of the pie, it's a very good idea to keep listening, because when we listen, it means that God is about to reveal something to us.

And that's what happened. The disciples, the followers of Jesus here, they've got no time for this scarlet Samaritan woman. They are totally focused on food.

[16:22] Verse 31. They badger him. Come on, eat something. We've gone to all this trouble to buy food for you.

Now we finally got rid of her. Sit down. You're starving. I'm starving. Let's eat. In verse 32, Jesus says, I've got food you know nothing about.

And in verse 33, you've got to love the disciples. Has he had a packed lunch? What's he been doing?

They go, what are you on about? And then in verse 34, Jesus says this, my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Now, think about this.

Don't you find this amazing? Think that Jesus refuses physical food when he's so hungry. I can't refuse food when I'm not hungry.

[17:23] But this conversation, it's so pressed on him. He is so absorbed by this conversation that he cannot even think about physical food. Jesus finds what he's doing spiritually so nourishing, so strengthening, it's more important to him than eating.

He's put so much energy and focus into leading this woman to the water. He doesn't really care about his own physical thirst or hunger. He's not anti-food at all. He loves food.

We see that in the Gospels. But he's saying there's something more important. There's something more nourishing. There's something more satisfying to him. That man shall not live by bread alone, but every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

And what is more nourishing and more satisfying to him is doing the work, doing the will of the Father and finishing the work. Finishing his work, which I think is a reference to the cross. It's the same word that he cries out on the cross, it is finished.

The context is, this woman has been brought, as indeed, to a saving knowledge of the truth. And in doing it, Jesus is completely in line with the will of God.

[18:38] The God we saw last week seeks those who worship him in spirit and in truth. And nothing brings Jesus more soul satisfaction than that.

Nothing feeds his heart more than this. We had a really encouraging prayer meeting on Wednesday night. And Ruben led the first little party. He said one thing which really has struck with me since then.

He says, Jesus loves to hear your voice. It's beautiful, isn't it? Nothing feeds Jesus' heart more than this. And I think the idea is here, actually this woman, whose life is total car crash, has begun to enjoy this same food.

It's the heartbeat of all those who are gripped by God's grace. It is the source of sustenance to do the will of God. In the Old Testament, David said, your law, oh Lord, is sweeter than honey.

The psalmist says to you and I, taste and see that the Lord is good. The Lord is better than your Sunday lunch. And Jesus takes us deeper, doesn't he?

[19:51] He's not just talking about the will of God, he's talking about doing it. And he says, there's nothing like it. I cannot live without it. He is so concerned for people to have living water. It's his highest pleasure.

It's gospel hunger. And thirdly, there's gospel sight. At the heart of this passage, I'd missed this until later on in the week, there are three commands.

I don't know whether you spotted them. They all have to do with sight. Look at verses 35 and 36. Look what it says there.

It says, look, I tell you. Lift up your eyes and see. Three commands. Jesus says the same thing three times.

Look, lift up your eyes, see. And Jesus wants to raise our expectations. And he wants to raise our eyes, not just to the urgent needs of friends and family, but to the power of God's word.

[20:58] And the immediacy of God's word, that God can make a change in you and I from darkness to light, from thirst to living water, in an instant. And this is a unique insight into the heart and mind of Jesus.

What he's saying, he's saying, look around you. What is going on, disciples? The Samaritans are pouring over the hill to him. And the disciples say, let's eat, let's eat, let's eat, food, food, food.

And Jesus says, no, no, no. See the Samaritans. What you're seeing is fruit for eternal life. He's saying that the sowing and the reaping are coming together at the same time.

In other words, the time between sowing and reaping has been collapsed. So the usual way is you sow in the spring and there's a gap from when you sow to when you harvest.

But as Jesus sees the Samaritans coming to him, Jesus says, the word of God is so powerful, it doesn't need months for it to work immediately. Now, why is this important?

[22 : 09] This is important because if you go in your Bible, Amos chapter 9 for a moment, you can go there if you want, if you don't want to, I'll read it. But it's a fairly unknown section in Amos chapter 9. The prophet speaks the word of God there.

And he tells us about the day, the time when the Messiah comes. And in verse 13 of Amos chapter 9, he says, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes who sows the seed, the mountains of the hill shall drip with sweet wine.

And all the hills will flow with it. And I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel. So here is the promise of God that in the day of the Messiah, sowing, harvesting, making the best wine will all come together.

It's not that the normal processes have been sped up. It's that there's something about the seed of God's word that is so powerful that it all happens.

And we don't control it. So the sower takes the seed and before he puts it in the ground, there's a bottle of red wine in his hand. Do you see the picture?

[23 : 22] It's a picture again of overflowing life. It's a picture of blessing. It's a picture for you and I of the gospel going out and exploding. Do you see that?

I mean, do you have that sight? The Samaritan woman herself has just received her sight. It's already flowered in her life. And now she's planting seeds and they're coming from everywhere. And the response to her lovely, honest witness is the first group in John's gospel to come to faith. So far, all the rest have been individuals.

Individuals. But here it is a group. Jesus says she's earning the wages. She's receiving wages, not just the harvest. She's entering into the joy which the Lord has given in the overflowing living water as she sees people move towards the Lord Jesus.

And that's the way it works with God. And so every word we speak, every prayer we pray, every attempt to reach out with the love of God to others participates in the joy of the Lord Jesus.

[24 : 43] It's the picture of witness in the New Testament. To witness to the Lord Jesus is not forcing yourself to impose yourself and your views on others.

It is an overflow of truth and grace. It is being honest about who you are. It's being honest about your needs and your failures. So if you say to somebody, if you say to someone, actually, I struggle with forgiveness as a Christian, and you tell somebody who is not a Christian, they will be very interested in that.

And I know that many of you here have been Christians for a while, and you likely feel pretty inadequate about this area of your life. I know I do. Some of us will feel as we talk about this that every time I open my mouth to speak to others about Jesus, I've put my foot in it.

I've gone too far, I've gone too fast, I've said too much, or I've gone too slow, and I didn't say enough. And many of us feel we ought to be taking more initiative in this.

And when we've taken the initiative, we've been overbearing and impossible. And there's lots of failed attempts in our lives. And with the cultural animosity towards Christians, the temptation is, isn't it, to be silent, to go underground.

[26 : 10] I had a conversation in Cafe Nero the other week, I was doing preparation in there, I was by the window, and there was a road rage incident, just quite often is, isn't there, just on Xbridge Road opposite the bank.

And I looked at the person opposite me as we were both gawping at it. And I said, kind of raised my eyebrows, said it's terrible, isn't it? And then he started to lament all the violence of our culture.

And he said this, what are we going to do about it? And I said, well, I had a Bible open, so I said, well, Jesus' view would be that there's violence inside of me and inside of you.

And he happily told me a story about his own road rage. He said he was cycling, I don't know where he was cycling, and he got so angry with a driver who'd cut him up that when they got to a traffic light, he pulled the driver out of the car and beat him up so they needed hospital treatment.

I was pretty surprised, I was just drinking a flat white. I said to him, how do you deal with your guilt over that stuttering away?

[27 : 29] He said, I'm a good person and I've atoned for it. When I started to talk about Jesus, how Jesus deals with that by dying in our place, the guy was completely disinterested and bored.

I was stuttering and not being particularly coherent. I lamely invited him to church, I said I know the preacher there. He said, too busy, too many things to do.

It was very friendly but a total fiasco. A total fiasco, I completely blew it. I've been reminded as I've looked at this passage this week, the importance of responding.

Can you see that? of responding to people's questions. Jesus, apart from opening the door by asking for a drink of water, the rest of the conversation is driven by the woman.

That is a big weight off her shoulders, I think. It is not the grim, grinding guilt of getting the gospel out. It's the honest, joyful response when people criticize you or they criticize Christianity or they ask you a question, the truth of your life and my life, it will come out to our friends.

[28 : 50] It comes out in the decisions that you make, in the attitudes you have. And then we've seen how Jesus so beautifully answers those questions. He takes it deeper each time until she receives the living water.

and the joy that comes from that is so wonderful that it will overcome and overwhelm our fear. It overwhelms the temptation that I feel and you feel to stay silent. And so, two clear promises of Jesus as we finish.

as we refuse to stay silent and seek to answer people's questions. Number one, Jesus promises there will be fruit, verse 35. There will be eternal abiding fruit in the lives of others.

Just think about what's going on here for a minute with me. The Samaritan woman's witness is deeply flawed. but it gave Jesus great joy and it bore fruit.

[30 : 03] Didn't it? And your imperfect and feeble attempts to witness to Jesus Christ, they are accepted by God through Jesus Christ.

And so, let me tell you this, you don't have to get it right. And there's reward in it. It's not that you're cleverer or braver than anyone else.

It is because of the spiritually satisfying joy of being engaged with God. So, number one, Jesus promises that there will be fruit. Jesus promises us, secondly, that God has actually gone before us and is working.

Look at verse 38. God I send you, I send you, I send you, to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored and you have entered in that, into their labor. Some people think that that could be John the Baptist or the Old Testament prophets, the others. I think it's most likely that the others are God the Father and God the Spirit who moves ahead of us, who is seeking worshippers, who seeks people, who speaks to people, who saves people.

[31 : 22] It's not that we are seeking people, it is God the Father. He is working much harder for your friends or family or the people in your life than you are. And so if we testify to what God has done and point to Jesus Christ, God has gone before and we enter into his work.

And you and I need eyes to see that. That is spiritual sight. And so the passage finishes and the Samaritans ask Jesus to stay for two very fruitful days.

Verse 42, they say these amazing words, it is no longer because of what you said that we believe, we've heard for ourselves and we know that this indeed is the saviour of the world.

It's great, isn't it? God works through ordinary flawed witnesses. He works through the ordinary and flawed woman to bring people to Christ.

She doesn't convert them. What she does is she points people to Jesus. And as they come to Jesus they know living water and forgiveness and freedom from their past and eternal life and salvation for themselves and they begin to experience gospel joy and gospel hunger and gospel sight because they call Jesus the saviour of the world.

[32 : 50] and they are amazed that Jesus has included them outsiders in God's salvation. But they say it's bigger than us. It's got to go to the ends of the earth that he is the saviour not just of the Jews or of the Samaritans but the saviour of the world and my saviour.

Can you see John 4 holds these two things? It is both personal very personal and global. And when you discover that there's no joy like it.

And I would love you to know this joy. That joy would be great wouldn't it? And we pray this joy for healing further afield. Let's pray that God would do it here.

Let's pray. Amen.