

**JESUS, THE PERSONAL LIBERATOR**  
**One on One: Drawing Nearer to Jesus**  
**Dr George O. Wood**

We've used the fall months of September and October to share some insights about drawing closer to Jesus. We've looked at the earlier chapters of John's gospel together. We're not going to take the entirety of John's gospel. I want to spend again an evening in this early part of the gospel. John 4. I want to read most of this chapter about an encounter that Jesus has with one person. "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. Jesus tired as he was from the journey sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?' His disciples had gone into 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? [They still don't. There's a community of about 500 Samaritans left and they still don't associate.] 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.' [I've been there. The same well has been there 4000 years. When you let the pail down it seems forever before it hits the water. When you drink the water it is cool and delightful to the taste. And it doesn't need to be treated or anything like that. It's good water. That's something you don't always know when you're drinking water over there.] 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 herd?' 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.' He told her, 'Go and 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 said is quite true.' 'Sir,' the woman said, 'I see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped 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 know for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and is now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. For they are the kind of worshippers the father seeks. God is spirit and his worshippers 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.' When his disciples returned they were surprised to find him talking with a woman. No one asked What do you want or why are you talking with her? Then leaving her water jar the woman went back to 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. 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,

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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.' Many of the Samaritans of that town believed in him because 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. 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 just what you said. Now we have heard for ourselves and we know that this man really is the savior of the world.'"

The scripture this evening has such a rich content to it that one could literally spend months dwelling upon each verse. It is a banquet meal of scripture. But I want to focus especially on the theme this evening of Jesus as the personal liberator." The one who gives freedom.

In the world today we have bad freedoms and we have good freedoms. Because of the evil that is in the world people are seeking all kinds of wrong freedoms. Freedom from moral restraint. Freedom from decency. Freedom to indulge. Freedom from contracts. Freedom from marriage. Freedom from parents. Freedom from responsibilities. These are the false freedoms. The freedoms when attained are really only chains that bind.

Yet because we have in us as human beings a haunting consciousness of what is right, people also seek good freedoms. We strive in our society for political freedom, freedom to speak, freedom to worship, freedom from oppression, freedom to pursue happiness. In a day when the words "freedom" and "liberation" are words well used and perhaps words misused, Jesus is in the marketplace of ideas and his concept of freedom is in contrast, in competition, to the freedom of today.

He is of course for the good freedoms, which we cannot achieve through our own efforts. He offers a certain kind of freedom that no one can gain on their own ability. An example of that freedom is the freedom he gives through one individual. I find myself so loving those particular passages of scripture where Jesus takes a moment to peel away from the crowd. There were so many people he could have spent all his time in large groups. But as you know in reading the gospels a good deal of the content of the gospels focuses on Jesus' conversations with the individual. Which shows the treasure and the value he places on a personal human life.

As we come to this great scripture before us I want us to divide the story up into three parts. The part before this woman's liberation. Then the process by which the Lord brings liberation into her life. And thereby the process he's bringing to ours as well. Then the effect that that liberation creates on all the principle people in this scripture.

Before liberation. Jesus is going along the road, which will take him through Samaria. Coming from Jerusalem up through to Galilee. That road if you were traveling a straight line would be one, which would take you about a hundred miles, rough miles.

If you're on a tour of the holy land you will not go as a general rule the route that Jesus went. The direct route. Even as people in Jesus' day did not go the direct route. The pious Jew did not want to contaminate himself with contact with Samaritans which were a group of half-breeds. They were Jews who had been left in the land 6 centuries ago as a result of the Assyrian captivity, intermarried with people in the land and had an adulterated faith. They had their own version of the Torah, the law. So the Jews didn't have any use for them.

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Jesus comes to this person, this woman at the well. I want us to look at her before the Lord set her free. She has a number of strikes against her.

For one thing she was a woman. That was a strike against her in biblical days. She was regarded as property. Many of the rabbis forbade to greet a woman in public. One of the prayers in the synagogue, one of the daily prayers, was “Blessed art thou o Lord who has not made me a woman.” Some of the more orthodox rabbis then as well as today say that better the words of the law should be burned that delivered to a woman. There was even a group of the Pharisees, the bruised and bleeding Pharisees, called that because they shut their eyes when they saw a woman and therefore were always walking into pillars and houses and walls. That’s why they were called Bruised and Bleeding.

She was a woman. In many societies and cultures today that is a strike against someone. It’s interesting to see in this country the tremendous interest in South Africa. And the promotion of justice in South Africa. What is not commonly talked about is that all over Africa there is not only the matter of white apartheid but all over black Africa there is no justice for the woman. She’s still a piece of property in most places.

She was a woman and that was number one against her.

Evangelists and prophets can get in to a lot of suspicion when they talk one to one with a woman alone. But, by the way, he’s not talking with her behind closed doors but out in the open. He’s risking his reputation by talking with her.

The second thing that is a strike against her is that she was a Samaritan woman. Contemporary Jewish thought in Jesus day was a Samaritan was something equivalent in rank to a dog. In fact, “dog” was a common name for a Samaritan.

A third strike against her was she was socially outcast. She was not only a woman, not only was Samaritan but socially outcast. How do we know that she was socially outcast? We presume it from the fact that she was at the well at noon. People just don’t go to the well at noon. Normal watering time is at the beginning of the day and the end of the day. In fact, if you’re in a society that’s relatively primitive the way that you communicate culture and share in the town gossip is the daily trip to the watering hole.

It’s unfortunate that our society has lost that. Other than the church and the school we have no central meeting place. Our sophisticated society has rendered us as people who live in individual enclosures and monasteries, separated by apartment walls and condominium walls and back yard walls. We don’t have the commonality, which makes a dynamic society. We are not advanced at all.

Here she is socially outcast, in the heat of the day, a bad time to go get water. But at least she’s alone, no body to bother her.

To be socially outcast in Sychar, which was the nickname given to Shechem was to really be socially outcast. Because Sychar itself means a drunken town or a lying town. When you can’t habituate with people of that kind of society and are alone you really are an outcast.

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The fourth strike against her was that she was an immoral socially outcast Samaritan woman. She was ashamed of this. She didn't want to admit to the live in relationship that she had. He says, "Go call your husband." And she says, "I have no husband." She didn't say, "I have no husband but I'm living with a guy right now." She's ashamed. She simply says truthfully "I have no husband." In an immoral relationship she stood before the Lord.

I think a fifth strike against her probably was she was an *older* immoral, socially outcast Samaritan woman. How do we know that she was older? She'd already had five husbands. Divorces didn't happen quite as quickly in those days as they happen in ours. This person in a society that did not condone divorce at all to have already gone through five husbands and to be living in a live in relationship with the current man was to suggest an individual who was deeply discontented with her human relationship and was looking for something in life which male relationship and sexuality could not satisfy.

Then the Lord also reaches past this other barrier in that she was interestingly enough semi-religious. We know that because when Jesus sort of puts his finger on the need in her life she immediately reverts to an old theological argument – Who's got the right religion? She uses her religion as a defense. Like a person you're talking to about the Lord will say, "That's all good for you but I'm a good Catholic." That means going to mass once every three months. Or "I was raised in the Assembly of God church." Or "I joined the Baptist church once." Raising the religious argument. If Jesus would liberate her he must go past the fact that she was encapsulated within her society in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree position as a woman. He must bring her into citizenship in the kingdom, which has neither male or female. He must reach past her ethnic identity as a Samaritan where he is building a society that is neither Jew nor Greek. He must bring her out of being a social outcast into fellowship with people. He must bring her out of immorality into being a moral and forgiven person. He must bring her out of being an "old" person into a person with a new birth. He must bring her out of her semi religion into an informed and correct and vital view of God.

Jesus does all that with her. In fact, Jesus in talking with this woman, says something to her that he never says even to the informed rabbi Nicodemus. He says about himself "I am he." I'm the Messiah. He didn't speak in such clear language to the religious leadership. But here he is liberating her with this of his life. Working past all the objections and all the things that would seem to exclude her from his presence.

I share that because if we come to Christ at all, one of the hurdles we must get over is the hurdle of feeling like "I don't belong here." There are nice people who are Christians. They're not like me. All of us if you've come to Christ as an adult and come out of a life that's been so radically different from what it means to be a Christian, having to get past the word of Satan coming to you saying, You don't belong. You'd never fit in with that group. Not you! Look at your habits, look at your thought life, look at your background. Jesus cut through all of that stuff and got right to where her heart was, right where her need was.

Now let's look at her as Jesus begins the process of reaching her.

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Jesus in reaching her sets before us an excellent example of how to be a good personal witness. I find his approach to this woman some of the fundamental steps of being one on one with people who do not know the Lord.

The first step which Jesus employs is social contact.

He meets her. He talks with her. He's willing to risk his whole reputation on one person. There might be those who would criticize him for spending time talking to this Samaritan woman at the well. But he will risk his reputation for the person to establish social contact with her.

Jesus has this habit of going where people are that need him. And there he is speaking with her.

Another thing he will do with her is he will establish a common point of interest. He will look around and establish something that they both have in common. That is their mutual need for water. He who's the Word, who is the Lamb of God, who is the source of life presents himself to this woman as tired, thirsty and alone. One of the effective ways that Jesus uses to reach people is to make himself vulnerable. To come as one who has a need that the other person can meet. He does not come as superior, better than you. But he comes softly, delicately, humbly and establishes that point of contact and common point of interest in water.

The next step Jesus takes in reaching her is he arouses her interest. He says "If you knew who it was that was speaking to you." If you knew...the effective thing to witnessing to others I would say is a matter of looking around in our own personal life and seeing that which arouses interest.

The fourth thing that the Lord does is he doesn't go too far with her. He says, "Go call your husband and come back." He could have at that point launched on some kind of long monologue with her and told her all about who he was. But he said enough to pique her interest that she wanted to respond to him.

Then he did a very important fifth thing. He did not condemn her. What was keeping her from drinking living water was her sin. But Jesus did not say to her "For this conversation to go any further you're going to have to go back to your first husband and quit wearing lipstick." Can you imagine what some people would have to work on to get this woman the gospel? Jesus knew that if he could get her to identify with him things would untangle themselves if she followed him. But he doesn't start by dumping everything on her and saying, You don't match up to my standards. He doesn't condemn her.

And Jesus also was not shocked by the extent of her sins. He doesn't say "I've never met anybody as bad as you!"

A sixth thing Jesus does in the important process of reaching this woman is he sticks to the main issue. The main issue is who are you going to worship. She wants to get into an argument as to where the place of worship is.

There needs to be a way we kindly answer people's questions and get back to the central question of what do you do with Jesus.

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Jesus sticks to the main issue and reminds her that they who worship the one true God will worship him in spirit and in truth.

The last thing he does in the process of reaching her is he confronts her directly. She says “I know that the Christ is coming and when he comes he’ll explain everything to us.” At that point he says, “I am he.”

There must be that moment if we’re to come to Christ in our own personal lives where we let the Lord confront us directly with his presence. I am a Christian not because of the philosophy which Jesus espoused. I’m a Christian not because of the Sermon on the Mount. Not because of the ethical ideals that Jesus taught. But I am a Christian because there was a moment in my life where Jesus healed me through the Holy Spirit and said to me, “I am he. I am the living Lord.” We can never be an effective Christian unless we’ve responded to that appeal that the Lord has made to us.

We want to look thirdly at the effect of this liberation.

The effect that it has on Jesus. Jesus says to the disciples, “I have food that you do not know of.” Jesus was saying that the most important thing that nourishes me is not natural food but it’s to be doing the will of Father, sharing the good news with others.

The effect on the disciples it also has. Jesus reminds them that they have not been looking for a harvest in the world. That their focus has been upon material things. The Lord is saying look around you everywhere there is a harvest.

Then there’s the effect on the woman. Everything in her life is changed. The thing that really was the catalyst as when Jesus told her of her past life. What surprises me when she comes back into the village she’s telling everybody, “I have met someone who told me everything I ever did.” I don’t think that was a surprise to anybody in that village. If you’ve ever lived in small town or in the days when there was a community telephone line, you had the chance to know everything that was going on. I think it’s been well talked about in that village about husband number one and number two, and three, four and five. Everybody knew that. So when she came back and said, I met a man who told me all I ever did. What was it in that testimony that attracted the people in that town to come and see Jesus? I think it may have been that for the first time this woman opened up and admitted it herself and spoke freely about it and looked at her past honestly and authentically and said, I am now ready to face life. I’m no longer running from life. Here’s what I am. I openly admit this is what I am and what I’ve been and I’m ready to change. We all know that that’s essential for change.

You can not help a person who is in alcoholic bondage who refuses to admit it. Real freedom does not come until a person says I am an alcoholic and I need help.

That goes for drug dependence. Homosexuality. It’s true for our need for God. We do not achieve freedom until we say, “I am a sinner.” If we’re abusive – physically or verbally – we’re not going to get freedom until we have the Lord unlock the key to our heart and we’re openly and willing to admit it. We’re no longer playing a game of being a nice person.

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This woman goes back to the town and says I've met a man who told me all I ever did. It had a tremendous life changing effect upon her. The Lord in opening her up to honestly opened her to personal freedom and liberation and He freed her from the past.

It had an effect on the town as well. The town came out to see who it was that brought this woman such freedom and such joy. It was in that town that Jesus was professed as Savior of the world. No one had ever called him in the gospels, "The savior of the world" until this moment. Some had seen him as the savior of the Jewish people. But it was at Sychar that Jesus is owned as savior of the world.

That means Christ is not only our personal savior but in that act of salvation is he included me. He included everybody. There is no one cut off from his care.

So before us tonight is the savior of the world who brings us into freedom by helping us to be honest with ourselves and honest with him and forgives us our past and sets us on a new road in life. Jesus gave this lady water so she would never thirst again. That water is available to us in our life as well.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your word,. For your personal ministry to each one of us. Maybe we're here this evening and we have a background that is every bit as confused as this woman. We wonder if anyone could ever break out of such a tangled life. But you know it all, Lord. And you come and you bring your word of hope to us. You say I've got water for you to drink. I know you're thirsty. I know you've tried this thing and that thing. You thirst in the empty wells of this world. But I have water for you. I have life for you. You invite us to come to you and we thank you. Lord we also pray that in our own life if we're here tonight as a believer that we may be sensitive to people that are around us, who are every bit as much the Samaritan woman to us. Individuals in our world. We can find the place where they're alone and turn a conversation around to a life changing experience for another individual. We say at times, Lay a soul upon my heart and love that soul through me. We focus on that one individual who most rests upon our heart that we would like to see come to you. We ask you give us the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit to see you work in our life to bring them to you. We thank you that you have come to give us life and water. We praise you that you are the giver of freedom in our life. In Jesus name we pray. Amen. `