

Good morning, Fellowship. How are you? Good to be back with you again this week. If you have a Bible, we're going to be back in John 4 this week. Last week we looked at the beginning of John 4 and we read a compelling story. Jesus travels to Samaria, a place that most religiously conservative Jewish people wouldn't travel to because they despised the Samaritans. Upon arrival, Jesus meets a woman at a well and enters into her life and story by asking her for a drink and essentially her friendship. This woman has come to the well in her pain and in shame and Jesus meets her there. They talk about the source of her pain – her 5 divorces – she expresses her hope for the Messiah and He reveals to her that He is the Christ. Those stories, the life-changing kind, where God's grace shows up in dire circumstances and brings healing, redemption, and transformation – those stories always astound me as I am sure they do many of you.

I have a friend with one of those stories. My friend grew up in an impoverished home (like sometimes living in a car impoverished). It was a home filled with physical, verbal and emotional abuse. By 8, she had witnessed adultery and constant fighting between her parents before they divorced when she was 10. As a teenager, she rebelled, got pregnant, had an abortion and as a result sank into a deep depression. In an attempt to medicate her feelings, she turned to drugs and partying and even attempted suicide in her early twenties. Soon after, she got married, continued partying, had multiple affairs, but eventually had a daughter that pulled her out of some of that. Occasionally she would seek out some of her old, unhealthy coping strategies to escape the misery of her own unhealthy marriage. She had another affair, got divorced, stayed with the man she had the affair with and continued on in another unhealthy and toxic relationship.

But one day, she woke up and realized they needed help. The only way she could see their relationship getting better was to walk through those doors. And so, they did. And when they did, they met some incredible people here, people who came alongside of them and eventually led them to the Lord. They were married, baptized, and repurposed. The days of drinking and partying to drown their sorrows morphed into days filled with prayer and the reading of God's Word. They have been and are being transformed.

What an incredible story, right? **This story, this woman's story, it matters.** It's powerful. It's inspiring. It's hopeful. It's a story filled with unexplainable grace – **grace that transforms from the inside out.** Those kinds of stories must be shared. The woman's story from last week, the woman at the well, it has to be shared. Because in sharing – it impacts the lives of others. Let's read about the impact the woman from last week has when she shares her story in John 4:27-42.

²⁷ Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?"²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" ³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." ³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. ³⁶ Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

Let's go back to verse 27. Jesus' disciples have been away in the city finding food for the group and upon return they find their rabbi – their leader and teacher – sitting at the well with the woman. They're shocked He's talking to her.

Remember last week, I told you that no self-respecting Jewish rabbi would engage a woman – especially a single woman – in public. It was taboo and, in some cases, it was illegal. This was a misogynistic, male-dominated culture. In many places, women were distrusted, disrespected, and disliked. Some rabbis taught that theological education, learning from the Bible, was for men alone. To teach women or girls was a waste of time and a profaning of that which was sacred. That's why this moment is startling to them. They're thinking, "What's Jesus doing? Why is our rabbi talking to a woman in public?"

Jesus is teaching His disciples something here. **Last week, I told you that Jesus was breaking down religious and cultural barriers to a relationship with Him. Here He's breaking down the misconception – the lie – that women don't matter as much as men.** He's breaking down the lie that women don't have value which would have been completely counter-cultural. He's breaking down that lie but He's doing that so He can build something back up. He's re-establishing the value of all of His people. Jesus, in this moment, is teaching His disciples that the value of all people, and in particular women, is determined by Him. **Jesus determines the value of ALL people.**

Jesus is reminding us that all people matter to Him – not JUST the people we think are valuable. He does it again later in this passage when He stays two days with the Samaritans. In this time, to touch a Samaritan would have made someone Jewish unclean. Jesus isn't just touching a Samaritan, He's staying in their homes. **Jesus, in His dealings with the Samaritans and with the woman, is restoring to them the God-given dignity they deserve. He values them.**

Genesis 1:26-27: ²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Like an artist who writes his initials at the bottom of his masterpiece, God has imprinted His image on each of us – that we would always know our value – that we would always know where we came from and who created us.

Listen, I can't be the one to determine the value of people because I can be jaded by my own experience. If left to me, I'll withhold value because of culture, because of the other person's sin or opinions, or for a number of superficial reasons. I must let the Lord determine who is valuable and follow that example. And in this passage, He's reminding us that ALL people possess value – even the people that culturally have been despised or those who have had no voice. No matter what we think – all people possess value.

Illus: You have probably seen the illustration where a pastor holds up a \$20 bill and says, "Who wants this?" And someone will raise their hand. He calls them down and then he throws the 20 on the ground and asks, "Do you still want it?" Oh yes! I still want the 20. Then he crumples it up. "Do you still want it?" Then he throws it on the ground and

stomps on it. “Still want it?” Of course. Why? Because the \$20 bill never lost its value. And you are like that \$20 bill. It doesn’t matter what you’ve been through, what you’ve done, or what’s been done to you. You are still valuable because God made you that way. That’s the message for the woman at the well. But in this moment, what he’s telling the disciples is that we have taken people and we’ve assigned them a new value. So, if they were created as a \$20 bill – we all were stamped with that value by God – what we tend to do as humans is assign a different value. We elevate some to \$50 or \$100 and we demote others to less than that. We’ve said, “You’re only worth \$1, or \$5, or maybe even less than that.”

Jesus is here to say; all of my people are valuable and should be treated as such. You matter to God. Every single one of you in this room – you possess incredible, God-ordained value. But Jesus isn’t finished teaching His disciples in this story.

After the disciples return to Jesus and marvel at His conversation with the woman, she runs back into town to tell everyone her story – of her encounter with Jesus – and says, “Come, see a man who told me all I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” The disciples, relieved she’s gone, sit down with Jesus and begin to eat the food they’ve brought back. They urge Jesus to eat the food as well and then He makes a comment that confuses them, “I have food to eat that you don’t know about.” Much like the woman was confused by His offering of living water at the beginning of the chapter now His disciples are confused about Him having some “secret food.” Peter’s all like, “Yo, someone sneak Jesus some food in here? Is He holding out on us? He got some garlic hummus and pita stuffed away in His tunic?” I hope that’s the only time y’all have heard someone say that line right there! Hummus and pita stuffed in a tunic. That’s weird. I’m sorry.

And then He explains, “My food is to do the will of the Father and to do what He wants me to do.” Leading into this moment, Jesus has been on a 3-day journey. He shows up to that well exhausted, thirsty, hungry but now Jesus’ focus isn’t on the physical. His disciples are focused on the physical. They’re thinking about their hunger. They’re ready to eat and move on to Galilee.

But Jesus’ focus isn’t on the temporary or on being hangry – it’s on the eternal. He isn’t focused on His 401k, what college His kids will get into, where He lives in Dallas, or how He can store up treasures here on earth. He’s focused on the eternal. He knows something big is about to happen. He shares a metaphor: There are typically four months between the time a farmer plants or sows the seed into the ground and when he reaps what he has sown. There are four months between planting and harvesting. Four months between planting and eating the fruit. During that time the farmer can do some watering or some tending to the soil but he can also relax and enjoy the promise of a harvest.

In this story, those four months have happened in a moment. The harvest is ready now. The sowing and reaping happen in a flash. He’s gathering a harvest – an eternal harvest – and He’s excited about it. It’s almost as if He’s too excited to eat based on what He knows is about to happen. He says, “the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.” The seed is sown at the well and now the harvest is coming in. It’s why Jesus says, “Look up!” Imagine Jesus sharing this with His disciples and in the distance the Samaritans are beginning to walk towards Him. Jesus is gesturing His hands towards them, “The fields are ready to be harvested.” Jesus is excited – He’s rejoicing over the salvation of the Samaritans before it even happens. **That which He values is returning to Him.**

Jesus rejoices in salvation. He rejoices over the redemption and transformation of what He values. When people – stamped with His image move from death to life – when

they move from distant to near – when they move from alienated to belonging – when they move from lost to found – He rejoices. His life was dedicated to moments like this. **He is all about gathering fruit for eternal life so that He and we might rejoice together.** Understanding the value God has for all of His people increases our joy – it impacts our rejoicing when those people – no matter who they are – return to Him.

I grew up in a non-Christian home. We went to church a handful of times. We weren't even Creasters – Christmas and Easter folks. We would show-up randomly. I became a Christian my sophomore year of high school while attending church with friends. I immediately began praying for, talking to, hoping for my parents and my sister to become Christians. I wanted them to have the life that I had and I wanted the promise that we'd spend eternity together. By the end of my senior year, both my sister and mother had become Christians. My dad was a different story. I remember him telling me, "Rich, I have too many questions about God. But if I ever get those answered then I will become a Christian." For the next 2 ½ years I prayed, longed for, hoped for the day that my dad would make that decision. My sophomore year of college, I still remember where I was. My sophomore year, I get a phone call from my mom on a Sunday afternoon and she says, "Richard, I need to let you know that today at church your dad went forward and prayed to receive Christ," I began weeping right there. The person I was with thought someone had died. This was full-on ugly cry. Like snot all over my face ugly cry. But these weren't tears of sadness – they were tears of joy. I was rejoicing in the lost being found. The next weekend I went home to see my family and I'll never forget walking up the driveway and my dad meeting me there and us having the longest hug.

One of God's precious creations had come home. I was celebrating. Jesus was celebrating. He has celebrated over every one of you who have placed your faith in Him. When we understand the value of His people, we can join Him in the rejoicing when they return to Him. **Jesus determines the value of all people. He rejoices in their salvation. Here's the last thing I want you to see this morning. Redemption stories possess power. Jesus uses the story of the woman to redeem an entire group of people.**

The disciples have been able to follow Jesus and they've been able to see His power and what He's capable of but they haven't been able to put those stories into action. They show-up to Samaria more concerned about food and more concerned about Jesus following cultural protocol than they are concerned with the people of Samaria. They're clueless that they have a message to deliver. They're clueless that they have something to offer the people there. They're clueless that Jesus values those people and wants a relationship with them. They literally have the Source of Light and Life with them – something those people desperately needed and deserved and don't share it.

Yet, the woman of Samaria – the woman at the well – who has just had her pain and shame exposed – has already run off to tell her story. And really, it's not HER story. It's God's story. She's telling others His story as it has intersected her life. She abandons taking water back to her home in order to take others to Jesus. Her story matters. Look what happens in verse 39. "Many Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me all that I ever did.'"

She's one of, if not, Jesus' first evangelist. She's sharing God's story, through the lens of her life, to others. Her story is an invitation to come and see more of Jesus for themselves. They come out to see Him – they come to meet Him and when they do – they decide to invite Him to stay for a couple of more days. And then we're told, "And many more believed because of His word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.'"

Many believed because of her but more believed because of Him. They're no longer just believing because of Her but because of their interaction with Him. Her story led them to belief and Jesus' word led to more. Their faith is growing because of their interaction with her AND with Jesus. This is amazing, right? These people, who weren't a part of the Jewish faith, have now been invited into a relationship with Christ. They were half-bloods when this story started, but because of this woman's changed life, they have now been made 100% pure. **And I want you to notice this morning, this woman was not theologically trained. She didn't go through a "How to tell others about the time you met Jesus at a well" Training Experience. He's breaking down the concept that only theologically trained MEN can have a significant spiritual impact in the lives of God's people.** God showed up in grace and truth and released this woman to tell of His power showing up in her life.

John Piper says, "That's the amazing upshot of Jesus' trip to Samaria – a surprising spiritual awakening in the town of Sychar. An unlikely woman becomes the means of an unlikely people turning to the Jewish Messiah, even though they were not even full-blooded Jews. This should encourage us in the pluralistic, religiously and ethnically diverse world that we live in. God has a people in Samaria, and He has chosen surprising instruments to reach them – maybe you."

So, how do you join in? How might God be inviting you into the salvation and transformation stories of His people? You need to share your story. **God has given you a story to share.** Your story possesses power because it's God's story in you. It's the story of your salvation – of when you recognized Him as the Christ and placed your faith in Him. It's the story of Him showing up in your pain, shame, and suffering and bringing healing. He has placed you somewhere to share your story. The woman in John 4 has a unique story and it set her up to tell God's story uniquely to the Samaritans. The disciples didn't bring the town back with them. She did.

Listen, me showing up at your family reunion or in your neighborhood or at your workplace to talk about Jesus is less powerful than you telling them. This is your story to tell wherever God has placed you to tell it – wherever you live, work, and play.

"Through the gospel, God forgives, heals, fills you with love and power, sets you free, and enables you to live an altogether different life. You know this if you believe the gospel, because if you believe it, you know how well it works. The gospel of Jesus Christ changes you. And when it changes you, you talk about it."
- Jeff Vanderstelt

I don't know how your story is going to impact those around you. God will choose to use it how He wants to and needs to. It might inspire someone to follow Jesus for the first time or to follow Jesus more closely. **But you have a powerful story inside of you and it needs to be told because your story matters and the people around you matter to Him.**

I have one more story to share – about another friend from Fellowship. I want you to hear her story because her story isn't the type that gets told much because it lacks the dramatic flair. But it's just as impactful and needs to be told. Why? Because it's still about God's grace. These stories are just as exciting – they're just as inspiring because it's still God's grace showing up in the lives of people that He values dearly.

My testimony is not as profound or 'aha' as others. I was raised in the church and grew up knowing my love for the Lord, but it wasn't until after college that I began pursuing an

intimate relationship with Him. While I had always been a believer, it was through an invitation from a colleague to attend Fellowship that encouraged me to really build on my faith. From this point 5 years ago, my perspective on life has completely changed as I try to focus more on what my God-given purpose is rather than what I selfishly want to do out of my life on earth.

As I continue to see God work in my life, I have continued to find encouragement from interactions with those around me. Whether it be my colleague that invited me to Fellowship or my mother-in-law who gifted me a study bible or random acts of grace recurring throughout the day, God has absolutely used the people around me to guide me into a deeper relationship with Him.

God's grace is all over her story. It's simple but compelling. God drew her in early, has never let her go, and He's using people around her to encourage her to grow more fruit and now her story is being shared to do the same. I've attempted to share different kinds of stories this morning so you'd see they're not all the same but all just as significant and so you'd know **your story matters. Your story matters because you matter. You have value. Your story matters because your creator and Savior rejoices over your story of redemption. Your story matters because redemption stories possess God's power. Who needs to hear it this week?**

Communion – At this time, our ushers are going to come forward to pass out the elements for communion. I want you to spend some time reflecting on God's story in you – how He drew you to Himself and how He's shown up since you started following Him. Reflect on how His body being broken and His blood being poured out transformed you. And then pray about who needs to hear your story – God's story in you – who needs to hear that story this week?