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We are in John Chapter 4 and in the middle of the encounter that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman at the well. Last week we ended right at the point in the conversation where Jesus told her that He is the “I AM” – the Messiah, the Christ, God in the flesh. Let’s pick up this scene in verse 27.

***John 4:27-28***

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, "What do you want with her?" or "Why are you talking to her?"

I can imagine that the disciples had a hard enough time following Jesus into Samaria, but then to come back and find Him talking to a woman – and alone at that. Remember, as we discussed last week, this was culturally unacceptable. You see the disciples were bound not to the will of the Father but to their cultural norms of what is right, what is wrong, what is clean what is not clean, and what is acceptable and not acceptable. This is one of the biggest problems with religion, it takes a person’s eyes off what God might be doing and fixes them on silly notions invented in the minds of men; notions which God does not share.

So what were the disciples wrestling with? It was the rules and the presuppositions that underlie these rules—namely men did not associate with women in public because of misguided notions of the value and worth of women compared to men when it comes to spiritual matters. In addition, the disciples were very concerned about what others might think if Jesus broke the rules.

Let’s talk about the rules. These rules about men and women were based on fear and not fact. Basically, they feared that associating with women in public would

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lead to sexual immorality; thus, if such interactions were looked down upon and those who break such rules were stigmatized, they would be able to curb a spread of such behavior. Unfortunately, because of their misguided notions of the value and worth of women, in day-to-day life only the women were stigmatized by this social moray and men were essentially free to carry on as normal.

Like all fear based rules, they are much better in theory than they are in application. In *Matthew 5:27-30* Jesus makes it clear that the root of sexual sin derives from the corruption which lies within the human soul of both men and women alike. Therefore, a rule which, in practice, tends to just stigmatize women is not founded in truth. Besides, think about the male arrogance that underlined this practice; it placed the issue of sexual temptation and sexual sin on the backs of women under the notion that if we can just keep women covered up and behind closed doors then there will be no problem. This was absolute foolishness then and still is today.

Sadly we still have these kinds of fear based rules all around us. Ok, we might feel better because in most Western cultures we don't keep women covered up and locked inside, but within the *religion of Christianity* we still tell men that they cannot counsel women and that it is improper for a man to be seen teaching a woman or talking to her alone unless she is his spouse or significant other. The rules also apply to women giving any spiritual guidance and instruction to any male that is not a child. I will guarantee you that just about every church operates according to these rules. They will tell you it's not legalism it's just "good practical sense" to keep temptation under control. Sadly, many churches even have people on staff walking around keeping an eye on this stuff, all in the name of Christian accountability. They are ready to confront and judge with no understanding of the appointments of God.

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You can throw out all manner of religious and “righteous” sounding reasons to justify this practice, but in reality, it is a fear based practice that is established on wrong belief and unbelief. Thus, it does not solve the problem of sexual temptation and immorality and never will. It just sets up an environment where everyone focuses hard on keeping the outside of the cup clean all the while ignoring the dark and poisonous brew that lies within.

Fear based rules have always failed and will always fail. They never result in the expected outcome because the true issue – the real problem – is spiritual and not physical; thus, the true solution has to be a spiritual solution and not another vain attempt to manage through religious rules. In addition, fear based rules always tend to create a stronger perversion on the other side of its application. For example, in this ancient culture the stigmatization of women was out of control. In our culture, we see the same lopsided effect. The church should be the safest place for people to build deep, safe, close and intimate relationships as the love of God is shared amongst each other. Instead, everyone plays relational gymnastics to ensure they will not be accused of an “appearance of evil.” This is not of God and does not lead to an environment where the Agape love of God freely flows. It’s no wonder that so few these days are drawn to church and instead are being drawn to other places where they seek intimacy and connectedness.

Fear based rules are developed as an attempt to control the evil that is rooted in our sinful nature. But that evil is in reality so dark and so deep it can never be tamed by mere man made rules. History shows that no amount of prohibition has ever really solved the issue of sexual sin or any other sin for that matter. It is for this very reason that God makes this incredible offer of living water to anyone who wants to shed their old nature of sin and corruption and receive in its place a new nature which comes from God.

***John 2:12-13***

But to all who believed Him and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn! This is not a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan—this rebirth comes from God.

***2 Corinthians 5:17***

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

This offer is incredible. If you are willing to partake of the living water God will supernaturally make you new and give you an entirely new nature which is created in His image. And contrary to our old nature, this new nature is created in His likeness which is fitting for one who becomes a child of God.

***Ephesians 4:24:***

You must display a new nature because you are a new person created in God's likeness—righteous, holy, and true.

So the only solution to the depravity that lies within the heart of all men and women is not to develop more fear based rules that alienate and stigmatize; but to live from, or display this new nature, and continually drink from the living water, which, by the way, is a euphemism for the Holy Spirit. As Jesus told this woman at

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the well, He is the one who gives this living water and it will take away the thirst of the old sinful nature altogether.

***John 4:13***

People soon become thirsty again after drinking this water. But the water I give them takes away thirst altogether. It becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life.

God Himself is our solution. When we continually drink of His living water the Holy Spirit satisfies the deepest longings in our heart such that we no longer thirst or desire the corruption that lies within our old nature. So the answer to the corruption in the heart of man is not religious rules based on fear, or any other misguided notion, but surrender to the person of Jesus Christ so that you will have a new nature with new desires which are in alignment with the heart, the character, and nature of God. And if you continually drink, your new nature will dominate your being and sin will not be such a powerful issue in your life.

***Galatians 5:16-26***

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of

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which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Another aspect about fear based rules is that they are often prejudicially applied. In this instance, the rules tended to favor the men (which is often the case). This was based on an errant belief that men are superior, men are the ones with whom God deals, and men are somehow innately more spiritual than women. What a crock. This is another lie that has been perpetuated in religion throughout time but it is based on a misunderstanding of the Word of God and the heart of God. This misunderstanding came because of the natural tendency in our sinful nature to confuse *function* with value or worth.

Now, it was the writings of the Old Testament, specifically the Torah, from which grew many of the social customs of both the Jews and the Samaritans. But they made a critical error in applying the Torah believing that since God instituted a system of worship which was to be managed by men that women must by default be of lesser value and worth to God. Yet, God never said, much less insinuated, anything of the kind. They confused *function* with worth and as a result the entire society operated upon this wrong belief. Fortunately, in the New Testament God specifically reveals to us His heart and corrects the errors which come when we judge by our own human wisdom.

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***Galatians 3:27-29***

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

Did you catch that? There is no distinction in the eyes of God between male and female, but all are one in Christ. In *1 Corinthians 12* Paul specifically deals with our tendency to give value, honor, and worth based on *function*. Similar to the Old Testament Jews, those in the early church started to honor one and dishonor another based on *function* – those with more visible and cool spiritual gifts were being given preference over others. But Paul makes it clear that this is not to be the case for we are all part of the body of Christ and all parts are critically necessary regardless of race, gender, wealth, size, stature, or gifting. The hand needs the foot and the foot needs the eye and so on. Then he says that when we live according to these misguided beliefs we miss the heart of God for even in our own bodies we naturally give greater honor and protection to those parts of our body that are weaker. In God's economy things often are upside down and inside out from the way we naturally think. I love it!

Finally, we come to the fact that the disciples' thoughts indicated that they cared more about how they would be perceived by others than they did about the work of God. They were so blinded by their own bias that they had no clue that Jesus had to have been about His Father's work. Why else would He be out there talking with this woman? Instead of showing up all excited to see what God was doing, they were caught in the throes of religion which always places a higher value on what others think than it does what God thinks. Fear is a powerful force in our

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lives (even if it is wrapped in nice sounding religion), but for a believer you must understand that it is not of God and will always lead you to miss the work of God.

***John 4:28-30***

The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?" So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

Honestly, I do not think that at this point there was any shred of doubt in her mind as to whether Jesus was the Messiah or not. After all, she left her water pot, in the middle of the heat of the day, and ran back to the village and went around telling all the men what Jesus had done. This woman who had been bound by public shame and shunned by her own village was now running around risking total public humiliation all for the sake of Jesus.

How could this be? The Pharisees did not respond with this kind of zeal when Jesus told them that they were defiling "His" Father's house. Nicodemus, a leader of the Jewish people, did not respond this way when Jesus told Him that He was the Son of Man and came from heaven and will return to heaven. Yet this despised Samaritan woman whose life had been devastated by the choices she made was now letting everyone know about the Messiah.

What does this tell you about faith? I have always said that faith is combination of 3 things and true faith is birthed only when these 3 things are present (actively believing the truth). First there must be truth. Having faith in a lie will get you know where. This woman learned the truth that Jesus is the Messiah. Second, she



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had to believe this to be true. It was not enough for her to hear Jesus say it; she had to determine in her own heart that she was going to believe it. When Jesus told her about her life she knew that at a minimum He was a prophet, but by the time their conversation was over, she was convinced He was the Christ. Third, her belief had to be transformed into faith through action. If what she believed was true, if she was talking to the Christ, it would naturally demand immediate action. People have been waiting centuries for the Messiah to come. She had to tell them; after all, this is not only life changing news but world changing.

So what does she do? She jumps up, puts her pot down, and runs to the village to tell everyone she can find about Jesus. This is amazing and I believe demonstrates the power of God to transform a life through faith. Remember, she had everything going against her: she was a Samaritan, she was a woman, she was considered to be immoral, and she was a societal outcast. Yet, she risks whatever last remnant of self esteem that she could muster to go and tell the people who have rejected her that she has met the Christ. I believe that as soon as she put down her pot and took that first step toward her village that her heart was transformed by her faith.

I love it. God did not come to the men of the town; He did not come to the powerful and the elite; He did not choose to reveal Himself to someone who was popular and a social rock star; and He did not come to one who was considered by others to be pure, holy, and righteous. You see the Father does not see the way we see. He does not judge the way we judge. What did He see when He saw this woman? He did not see her sin, He saw someone who would worship Him in Spirit and truth. So He picked her to bring His message to the Samaritans.

Imagine for a moment what she must have been thinking. She just jumped up and started running to the village. Do you think that on her way she got afraid? Do

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you think she thought that maybe she made the whole thing up in her head? Do you think she was worried about how she would be received by the villagers who have rejected her for so long? Do you think she thought herself unworthy of such a great task?

I am sure that these thoughts and more ran through her mind. I say that because of how she carefully thought through her approach to those in the village. We will get to that in a second, but what I love about true faith is that it centers us at our core and stabilizes even the craziest thoughts that shoot through our minds. Faith even overcomes the wild torrents of our emotions. When we choose to actively believe the truth we will find ourselves standing in the safest place we have ever experienced; regardless of what is going on around us or what might be around the corner. In addition, true faith gives us the strength to do what we would never otherwise, in our right mind, consider doing.

It is obvious that this woman knew a lot about the egotistical nature of men. I know the New Living Bible says that she told everyone about Jesus, but the New American Standard says she told the men. This is probably the better translation since in the Greek the word is in the masculine tense. This would also be consistent with what we know about the times of that day. Anyway, she does not just come right out and tell them that she met the Messiah. If she would have been this direct they would have dismissed her as being nothing more than a woman, an immoral one at that. Discovering the Messiah is a man's job not something a woman could figure out.

So she baits them just like Jesus did with her. "He told me everything I did! This statement would have instantly grabbed their attention. First they would have been astounded that a man was actually talking to her but then to tell her about her life. Something was up. "Could he possibly be the Christ?". She just tossed it out there

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and then left it to their manly ego to decide if this could possibly be something they need to go and check out themselves.

They took the bait and they bit hard. They “knew” that if anyone was going to make the determination that this was the Christ it would be them and not some immoral woman. I love the fact that even a baby believer who is operating in true faith can go and confidently do the job that God has assigned to them regardless of the cultural, societal or religious norms of the day. This truth should give us great confidence that when God is leading us we have no real boundaries especially ones created by fear. Also, notice that this woman did not overreach, she did not exaggerate or use hyperbole; she did not try and act as if she understood anything more than just the little piece of truth that she was given. It is almost like the fishes and the loaves story. God takes a little and with faith multiplies it to feed many.

What happens next is nothing short of civic uproar. She is running all over town making sure that everyone knows what is happening and they all come streaming out of this village to go and meet this person she is talking about.

While all this is going on in the town, John shifts the lens shifts back to a dialogue between Jesus and His disciples. It was time for the disciples to learn that their own cultural, historical, religious, and even moral boxes of personal bias must be shattered for as Jesus said in *Luke 7:35*, true wisdom is justified by her deeds. In the work of the Kingdom, one must see as God sees and not as man sees.

### ***John 4:31-38***

Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples were saying to one another, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" Jesus said

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to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work." Do you not say, "There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest"? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. "Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together." For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' "I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."

I am not sure if you understood what just happened, but Jesus just told them that their entire perspective on life was out of place. They are so obsessed with their own notions of what is right and what is wrong, who is right and who is wrong, what is and is not socially acceptable; and, of course, with their own personal needs that they have missed the heart of God. The Father cares about people and He is actively seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and truth. Thus, they need to lay aside their personal biases, lay aside the "rules," and align their thoughts with His thoughts, their goals with His goals, and their purposes with His purposes, so that their life can be bound to the will of the Father.

I also love the way Jesus crossed this artificial boundary of the intangible when He said: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work." This is something we all seem to struggle with, but to a true worshiper of God, the intangible is as real as the tangible.

For example, when you come to that place where you truly believe what the Bible says about your spiritual depravity—believing that without total dependence upon Jesus you can do nothing, you cannot even contemplate going a day without feasting in the Word of God. You realize how much you need it and you can see,

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feel, and know the result in your spirit of not spending time with God. In fact, for a true worshiper, the Word of God truly becomes your living manna, the food by which your *New Creation* lives.

In crossing the line of the intangible, Jesus takes the disciples thoughts away from food, away from the rules, and focuses them on the passion of the Father. He uses their immediate surroundings to make this point. There were two harvest seasons in Palestine. The first took place around March or April and the latter around August. It is this first harvest to which Jesus was alluding. He looks around and there in the midst of the fields that surround this village were probably crops that were ready for this first harvest. But when He tells them, “lift up your eyes and look on the fields for they are white for harvest,” what do you think they saw? They saw the people of Sychar streaming from the village toward them. And what a sight that must have been. Yes, a harvest that is ripe for easy reaping.

Jesus explained that they had work to do. An entire village of people was coming and all they had to do was be ready to harvest and enjoy the fruits. While they were totally unaware that God was at work or would even do a work in such a loathsome place as Samaria, Jesus was busy sowing and this woman was busy laboring over the fields. She did the work of an evangelist (the work that God had assigned to her) and in her simple faith brought all these people to see Jesus.

The disciples, on the other hand, had been living and traveling with Jesus yet they went into Sychar and said nothing about the fact that they were traveling with the Christ. They did not even consider sharing that news because they were selfishly bound by their own prejudice and bias. They just wanted to get their food and leave that God forsaken Samaritan village.

But God is so merciful and loving. Even though the disciples would have missed it all, Jesus wanted them to be part of this great work and wanted them to enjoy the

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fruit of God's marvelous love. God always blows my mind. We can get so arrogant sometimes and so focused on our own little life and the things that we think are important that we are not even aware that God is always working around us actively seeking true worshipers. He is sowing, others are laboring and still others reap the harvest. What part might He have for you?

In fairness to the disciples, they probably believed they had been doing the work of God; after all, Jesus told them to go to the village and get food. They were just being obedient. But they were blind and their minds were fixated on what they were doing for God and not on what God was doing. That is why we must remember that our goal is not "doing" the work of God but *oneness* with God. We are to say so close in fellowship with God that we live according to the desires of the Spirit and not fall prey to the demands and thoughts of our old sinful nature. This is such a common ploy of the enemy. He gets us to focus on the work that God has assigned to us, whether we love it or loathe it, and in so doing causes us to become self-focused and not God-focused. Please beware of this trick.

### ***John 4:39-42***

Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, "He told me everything I ever did!" When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay in their village. So he stayed for two days, long enough for many more to hear his message and believe. Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world."

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Jesus was faithful to keep this one appointment and God turned it into a huge work. But it started with the one. If Jesus would have been bound to the cultural, historical, religious, and moral boxes of the day, none of this would have ever happened. You never know how big, how large or how fantastic God's plans might be so you must always be bound to the will of the Father and not judge people or circumstances by your own bias utilizing your own wisdom. You need the wisdom of God; no other wisdom will do.

It is really unfathomable that the first group of people to declare that Jesus is the Savior of the world is a bunch of Samaritans. This shouts to me of the unending mercy, compassion, and love of the Father. Last week after the teaching someone asked me why a benevolent God would send lions to kill people who were living in Samaria. If you remember this happened about 750 years or so before this encounter with Jesus and the woman at the well.

Assyria had captured Israel and deported most of them to other territories within their kingdom and they took people from other lands and transplanted them to Israel. But when they came they brought all their own gods and worse than that they started to intermarry with the few surviving Jews and further corrupt them with their idolatrous worship. So God sent lions after the people to kill them. The people prayed to their own gods to remove this curse but of course they could not for they were not truly gods, but merely demonic spirits that were represented by the little wood and stone idols.

This caused the local inhabitants to finally acknowledge that the God of Israel was the true God of the land and He reigned supreme. So God called off the lions. Then throughout the centuries, they continued to give homage to the God of the land even building a temple for Him on Mount Gerazim. But consider God's purposes in all of this; He wanted to preserve the remnant of His people so that one

day He could bring them the Good News of the Kingdom of God. He knew that if He left them to their own devices, they would have been so steeped in demonism that they would have lost their Jewish consciousness, lost any sensitivity to the things of God, and self destructed like so many other civilizations before them. Even if they would have survived as a people group they surely would not have been looking for the Messiah; they would have missed it altogether. Instead, what we find is a people group ripe for the harvest. Yes, God was faithful to preserve His people and water their seed of hope throughout the ages. Now these half breed Jews are amongst the first fruits of Jesus' ministry.

God's plans are so wonderful, loving, and merciful. Sometimes we get so caught up in our own misguided notions of what is just and what is not just, as if we can hold up some standard of righteousness and apply that to the living God. If you think about it, we're often ridiculously incredulous. But if you are a careful student of history, you will see that God's love and mercy always abounds. So instead of trying to judge Him with our human reason, we should bow to Him in true faith and like these Samaritans worship Him in spirit and truth.

Let's pray