

Nobody to Somebody

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[0 : 00] Folks, let me encourage you to do everything that you can, and I mean that, to have John chapter 4 open in front of you. I don't think this is any exaggeration for me to say. I think this, these verses, are some of my favourite in the whole Bible.

And I'd love for you to see what I've seen this week in them, how glorious they are. So please get John chapter 4 open in front of you. Anyone ever read Vanity Fair?

Talk about the magazine. Hans, we've heard of Vanity Fair. Right, we've heard of it. Okay, so, good, good. Madonna did an interview with Vanity Fair in 1991.

An interviewer asked her how she was coping with her newfound musical stardom in 1991, right? What do you make of what she said? Here's what she said. My drive in life comes from this horrible fear of being mediocre.

I still have to prove that I'm somebody. My struggle has never ended, and it probably never will. So there's Madonna talking in 1991.

[1 : 14] In her words, she longs to be somebody. And I take it she's talking about that deep longing inside of her that yearns to be fully known, fully loved, and fully satisfied, and for that combination of those feelings to be in her life and to stay.

So every human being on this planet longs for, right? To be fully known, fully loved, fully satisfied. And the problem is that we as human beings go searching for this in all kinds of places in our lives. Job promotions, house extensions, romantic relationships, online purchases, social media likes. And is it not true, friends, that like Madonna, we find that these things can never quite give us the thing that we're grasping for, to be a somebody.

I love what C.S. Lewis once said. He said, if I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation for it is that I was made for another world.

And you see, into this human satisfaction vacuum, the astounding claim that Jesus makes in John chapter 4 is that only he can give us what we're searching for.

[2 : 42] Right? Only he can do this in our lives. And the added wonder of what Jesus says is that he offers it in conversation with a woman who society has concluded is not a somebody.

Society has concluded that she is a nobody. Now, if Jesus had a PR manager, and I've checked, and I don't think he did, someone helping him with his public image, somebody with the job of trying to help him climb the opinion polls, they would be freaking out at this encounter we read about in John chapter 4.

Because it defies the social etiquette and the social expectations of the day. And what we're going to see here as we journey through this is that Jesus tears up and throws out the boundaries playbook in just about every conceivable way as he lovingly goes all out in his pursuit of the heart of this woman.

Let's see these, will we? Here's what he does. First of all, he defies the racial boundary. Verse 4. Do you see where he is? Where's he going? He's on his way with his disciples back up north to Galilee.

And he's going through this area called Samaria. An area that as far as the Jews of this day are concerned is enemy territory.

[4 : 15] You see, this is historical tension all to do with the kind of people that are living in Samaria. Who they are, how they got there, what they stand for. And in the eyes of the Jews of this day, the people just to the north in Samaria, aren't thoroughbred.

Right? They are sellout pick and mix Jews whose religious lives are kind of like looking at a knickerbocker glory ice cream. Right? If you can picture that in your head. All sorts of different worldly colors and religious flavors going on in this one bowl.

One of which is Judaism. It's all kind of mixed up. And no one really kind of knows what's going on. All sort of things going on. And the Jews look at it and they say, knickerbocker glory. They are. But we are pure vanilla. Right? We're thoroughbred. We are the Jewish people. These guys aren't. Their very existence makes a mockery of who we are and what we stand for.

And if you look at verse nine, it's not just my opinion on that. John tells us at the day, do you see? These two groups of people don't mix. They don't associate.

[5 : 26] It goes both ways. Jews hate Samaritans. Samaritans hate Jews. So what Jesus is doing here, we've got to understand. It's like a Russian man popping up in a cafe in Kiev and saying, can I have a latte, please?

This is hot and this is tense, what Jesus is doing here. He's defying the racial playbook and he's defying the gender playbook.

Here is a man talking with a woman. Here is a rabbi, a religious teacher, who in this day to be talking with a woman would be seen as a waste of his time.

That's why verse 27, if you cast your eyes beyond our verses this morning in this chapter, the disciples return to this scene and they are surprised.

Do you see that word? As they see Jesus talking to this woman, they are surprised. Our English word, I don't think quite captures the strength of it here. In Greek, it's more like they were absolutely gobsmacked that Jesus was talking with this woman.

[6 : 33] He's ripping up the gender playbook and he's ripping up the social one as well. Verse 6, when does Jesus stop for a drink? And I love all these details that John gives us.

When did he stop for a drink? Thirsty from the walk as he would have been as a human being. He stops at noon.

You see, he stops at the hottest part of the day in search for a drink. Now, have you ever been in a hot country? You know that feeling. You plan your day around the morning and the evening because in the afternoon, when it comes, it's factor 50 on and you're hunting for the shade.

You're staying inside. It's what we did when we were in Louisville. We planned our day around the morning and Aircon was our friend in the afternoon. And in this day, women would go in groups to the well to get water first thing.

Makes sense, doesn't it? You wouldn't go at the height of the day. You would go first thing. And yet, here is our woman on her own, do you see, at the height of the day.

[7 : 41] Which tells us, what about her in terms of how she's viewed in her community? It tells us that she has been shunned. And it tells us that her life is now about not showing face in public.

Lest anybody see you. Should we be around today? This would be baseball cap on, hoodie up, shades on, doing her shopping in the 24-7 Asda at midnight.

Desperate to get in and out before anyone clocks that I'm here. What is it we would say if she were around today? This is somebody who we wouldn't touch with a barge pole.

Just don't want to go near her. Don't associate with her. Jesus is ripping up the social playbook. And, he's ripping up the moral one as well.

And this is maybe where we'll slow down just a little bit and think about what we're told about this woman. because as Jesus meets her, do you see how he brings up and deliberately so the most painful feature of her life to date?

[8 : 57] That's why I never think Jesus would make a good Brit. He doesn't do small talk, does he? He goes straight for the issue. The Lamb of God goes for the elephant in the room.

The very reason that this woman is being shunned. And he does it. We need to understand this as we think about its application to our own lives. One of the ways is that Jesus does this not to shame her.

He does it not to out her. He does it to win her. This is the woman that he's come for. And this is the God who knows her and sees her as a good physician, desperate to treat the wound with his scalpel of grace.

Here is the God of the psalmist who would bend near and knows the brokenhearted. Here is the God who is close to those who call on him. And here he is, verse 16, and what does he say?

And this is it. What does he say? And it kind of comes out of left field, really. Trying to get my head around that all week. How did it go from water to husband? How did it get there? What does he say? He says, go and get your husband.

[10:11] And she replies, verse 17, I have no husband. You're right, says Jesus. You have had five husbands and the man that you're now with is not your husband.

Jesus, fully man, fully knowing God. Now listen, we need to resist the temptation to think of this woman like some kind of character from Sex and the City or Friends.

Like those sitcoms that we used to watch in the 90s. She is this free and modern, independent woman who's casually slipping out seamlessly from one relationship to another. Right?

No right, no wrong, no rules for me. This is this woman. No, that is to read her through 21st century Western eyes. But she's a first century Middle Eastern woman.

She's had five husbands who are no longer her husband. And the only way that that can happen in this day as I understand it is through one of two ways. It's through death or it's through divorce.

[11:22] Friends, personally, I know that for many of us that words will bring to our minds all sorts of painful memories. And I'm so sorry. But perhaps in particular this morning, you need to see how Jesus loves this woman for whom that has been the heartbreaking reality of her life.

for when it comes to divorce, as I understand it in this day culturally, the expectation is that the power to initiate that is not on her side.

It's on the man's side. So could it be that this woman has been on the receiving end of divorce five times? Could it be that she's been used and treated like trash by men for what must have felt like her entire life?

Could it be that divorce has only got easier for him and more painful for her each time it happens as each husband comes and goes? And could it be that the guy that she's with now will not marry her because he doesn't want the baggage that goes with her and the baggage that goes with that?

And you bring all that together. When she says, I have no husband, friends, our hearts should break for this woman.

[12:50] And then our hearts should be captivated by how the God of the universe come down in human flesh treats this woman. As Jesus and this woman meet, friends, there are alarm bells going off all over the shop with this one.

Racial, gender, social, moral. She is the last person conceivably on planet earth that you'd expect and you'd be advising Jesus to associate with and yet, and yet, friends, he wonderfully does.

And I love John chapter four. Do you know why? Because I think there's a big banner that says right above it, welcome to the dignity revolution. welcome to the sexual revolution.

As Jesus steps in, maybe even the first man in this woman's life interested in her, not because of what he thinks he can get from her, but steps in longing to know her because of what he can give to her.

As the one who knows all things about this woman, and rather than that knowledge repelling him from her, do you see how the knowledge of that, it almost as if it wonderfully draws him to her.

[14:15] Oh, I love that Nicodemus, Israel's finest, and we're trying to see this in the context of John, Nicodemus, Israel's finest back at chapter three came looking for Jesus here in wonderful and beautiful and powerful contrast.

Jesus initiates the loving pursuit of Sumeria's worst. As author Rebecca McLaughlin so powerfully puts it in her wonderful little book, Jesus Through the Eyes of Woman, we see Jesus as a magnet for those who feel like scraps of human metal on life's junk heap, picking up the broken and abused and drawing them into his kingdom of love.

This is who Jesus is. And he's still this Jesus today. And friends, what does he offer her?

He offers her two things. He offers her, first of all, to be the perfect husband. Her perfect husband. And I'd never seen this before until probably about six months ago when we were planning and thinking about this series.

Come with me and see this. What number man is Jesus on the scene of this woman's life? You have a bit of maths this morning. What number man is he on the scene in this woman's life?

[15:49] She has had five husbands and the man that she's with is not her husband. Which means that Jesus steps on the scene of this woman's life as the what number of man?

The seventh man. Seven, that number in the Bible that represents and symbolizes God's perfection. Jesus steps on the scene of this woman's life as the seventh man.

Where all before her previous husbands had failed her. Jesus has come. He knows her. He's come to win her and to draw her in to be part of his bride.

Not through cheap grace, but through the thing that every husband was called to be and at Jesus as he personifies this he calls every single husband ever since as we focus on him to be. He has come to win her through costly sacrifice. Jesus will own her shame.

[16:58] Jesus will pay the price for her mistakes. Jesus will take her sins on himself. Jesus will bear the punishment of the condemnation that stands over her if you flick back to chapter 3 where the world labels her damaged goods.

Jesus goes to the cross to make her pure and spotless. As he dies and he sheds his precious blood on the cross for her.

The woman that society said was not worth it. Jesus says yes she is. And he says to this woman and get this friends, daughter no longer do your scars define you.

Come to me and let my scars define you. That's what he offers us this morning. life in his scars.

That's what she gets in him and in turn by her faith in him. That's what Jesus gives her. She comes to share in his perfect righteousness and life and to have Jesus' father as her father.

[18:18] Friends, who's getting the better deal here? Is not the gospel wonderfully magnificent? This is what's held out to us this morning in Christ as Jesus embodies the words that we hear the groom vow at weddings.

It's always one of my favorite parts. All that I am I give to you and all that I have I share with you. And it's why I always think that it's so profound in our culture that traditionally when a man and a woman get married the woman takes the man's name as if to say everything about her life is now caught up in his name and who he is.

And of course our marriages friends are temporary. They're pointing to the great marriage that is the reality. That's exactly what it is to be the bride of Christ. If you're a Christian here this morning your life is caught up in his name.

Friends, the gospel is astonishingly good news. Lord, to that hymn that many of us would have grown up singing, I love it, blessed assurance Jesus is mine.

Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine, heir of salvation, purchase of God's, born of his spirit, washed in his blood. Those are things that are true of you. See, Christ offers to be to this nobody.

[19:41] He offers to be her perfect husband. And he offers to give her life, deep life satisfaction. Verse 10, taking the language here, he offers to give to this woman living water.

Living water. Verse 14, what does he say? The water I give you will be like a spring of water that wells up into eternal life. Of course, as she goes back and forth and back and forth and back and forth and back and forth and back and forth from her home to this well every day.

Jesus taps into the reality of her every day. Home with a bucket, water runs out, thirsty again, back you go, caught up in this endless Middle Eastern cycle of always being thirsty, never quite having enough.

Jesus taps into it to get her to understand the nature of the restless, always searching but never arriving spirit that human beings have and he says, I can give you and I take it by his spirit in us, drawing us to him, a spring in your heart whereby your thirst, the thirst of your soul can be quenched and you need go searching in life no more.

No more. Well friends, that takes us to the first of the two questions I think we need to ask ourselves as we take in what Jesus is saying here and it'll be really quick, okay?

[21:15] As we think about the claim that he makes, friends, what's going into our systems? Just think about it, just take the language he's using, are we drinking from the fountain of him that he talks about here?

What's going into our systems? In 1901, it was an American doctor called John Harvey Gerdner who coined the term New Yorkitis because he watched the way his fellow New Yorkers were living their right lives.

They were running around from thing to thing and how he perceived in so many of them because of the way that they were living, they were producing edginess and impulsiveness and that was 1901. That's the world that we're living in, isn't it? That's the places, the things that the world offers us. Isn't it not true that our world attaches significance to a person's life so often around their perceived busyness and productivity?

Because important people are busy people and you're not important, you're not busy, you're not important. It's why when Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg came out, I can't remember when it was, and he talked about how in his wardrobe he's only got one outfit because he doesn't want to

waste time in the morning thinking about what he's going to wear so he's got the same outfit all the way through.

[22 : 37] We hear that, we love it because we think yes, he's important, he's busy, that's what we need to do. And yet into our world that says your significance is tied up with what you do, Jesus steps in and he saves us out of it and says come and find rest, little child in who I am today and who you are because you're in me.

Do you find that in your heart all the time as we live our lives in this world running about from thing to thing? It's probably the biggest thing that I was convicted of in sabbatical. Just run around doing thing after thing after thing after thing.

And I see in my heart, I see what were the two things he said? Impulsiveness and edginess. I see it all the time. And Jesus calls us to be fully satisfied in him. Do not let the world define who you are, but to be fully complete in him.

Friends, are we drinking from the water he gives us? And that's a big challenge of this passage, isn't it, to us? Are we drinking from the water he gives us? Are we carving out time to listen to his voice as we open our Bibles and finding rest for our souls in the places that Jesus tells us we'll find rest?

And it's why our gatherings, as we gather together on a Sunday, they are soaked in scripture. Because these are the words of eternal life. These are places where we want to drink as we feast on God's word, get it into our systems.

[24 : 13] Friends, are you soaking your soul and drinking deep from the fountain that Jesus calls us to drink from? Getting these things into our system and delighting ourselves in his promises.

You know, I've got a good friend called Pete who I see every day on the school run. And I clocked a few weeks ago that he's got a tattoo. Right? Strange place, strange tattoo.

It's on his inner left thigh he's got a tattoo. And it's of a bird. And I said to him, Pete, buddy, if you don't mind me asking, why a bird?

Of all the things that are kind of trendy just now, bird ain't one of them. And do you know what he said? He said, this tattoo I've got here, it's a sparrow. Because what he does, he cycles everywhere in town, and I'm not a cyclist, I don't know, but apparently when he goes to cycle every day, and I see him do it, he lifts up the bottom of his trousers.

I don't know why he does it, he just does it, he just lifts up his trousers, and he sees the sparrow every morning. And he says, every morning I remind myself of what Jesus said about the sparrows. What did he say?

[25 : 19] He says, one of them falls to the ground without my father knowing about it. And because that's true, how much more does your father know your needs? How much more does he care for you? And he says, I look at it every day on my calf as a cycle, and it reminds me what Jesus has said is true of me as his child.

Friends, every day drinking from the fountains that Jesus tells us to drink from. I'm not encouraging you to get a tattoo, it's your call, right? But what can we do to be getting Jesus' life-giving water into our systems?

What's going into our systems? And second of all, what's going on in our hearts? In terms of how we view different people in our world. I love, and here's what I love, and I was thinking about it this week, I love seeing the young John, and I take it he's writing here as an older man, let's just assume that as he writes this gospel, I love seeing the young John in action as you read him in the other gospels, learning the discipleship ropes from Jesus.

Now you can look at this in your own time, in Luke chapter 9, if you look that one up later, you see Jesus passing through Samaria with his disciples, and you see Jesus being rejected by the Samaritans.

And it's John, along with his brother James, who are fuming that the Samaritans have the brass neck, to turn down their Messiah.

[26 : 49] How dare they? What do they say? If you read it up, they say, Jesus, will we call fire down from heaven on them, and we'll watch as the Samaritan village gets singed?

Genuine question. There's bitterness raging in John's heart as he thinks about this group of people. There's anger as he thinks about them.

It's ugly as you see John's heart in Luke chapter 9. And yet, here he is, isn't it not incredible, writing as an older man, with the spirit of God having worked away in him as he mulls deeply on who the

crucified and the risen Jesus is, and Jesus' love for him.

As John writes his gospel, what conversation that Jesus has with anybody gets the most air time? What is the one that's almost right up top as if to say this is who Jesus is?

It ain't a conversation with Nicodemus. It's a conversation with this Samaritan woman. Friends, I love it. It's almost as if John as he holds her up, is holding his hands up and saying, how wrong was I?

[28 : 03] I went all anger and bitterness, but Jesus chose compassion on the cross and his way wins. And his way always wins as we think about people in our world and as we take in the dignity revolution that Jesus offers us here.

Friends, let me just give you a case in point as we close. I'll tell you about a woman who most of us in the UK, back in the early 2000s, used to laugh at.

And her name was Jade. Jade Goody, if that name means anything to you. She became famous in our culture as one of the first contestants ever to appear in the UK version of Big Brother.

And people in our world used to call her the blonde South London Chav. That's what she was nicknamed as. It's always good for a funny, silly line. But she made a big mistake on a celebrity edition of Big Brother.

In the heat of the moment, she uttered an unacceptable racist word to another contestant, and it was caught on camera. And she immediately apologised to the lady, and they made up. But that wasn't caught on camera.

[29 : 14] Damage was done, and all of a sudden, she becomes the most hated woman in Britain, spending her days trying to avoid the cameras, avoid the spotlight with her young family. And Jade developed cerebral cancer years later after this, and the tragedy was that she spent a number of years believing the lie that her cancer condition was punishment for what she said, in her own words.

And she died in March 2009 at the age of 27. By all thinking it was a tragic case. But here's what I read about Jade only three or four weeks ago, and I can send you the link if you want it.

Here's what I didn't know about Jade. Not so long before she died, she became a Christian. And at her funeral, this is what the minister of the church that she went to, who knew her, talked about. He talked about her love for Luke's gospel. And he said this at her funeral, Jade read there how Jesus welcomed those who weren't particularly religious, and how Jesus spent time with people like her, down-to-earth people whose lives, like Jade's, were at times flawed and difficult, but whose lives were precious to God.

Fully known, fully loved, and I take it fully loved, fully forgiven, and fully satisfied in who Jesus is.

[30 : 44] Friends, this is what he offers us this morning. life. He offers us life. And maybe just the band guys could come back up if you want.

There's been three people who've been in my mind and my heart as I've been thinking about this week, as we think about responding to this. The first one is if you don't know the life and love that Jesus is talking about here.

Friends, the invitation to you today is to respond to what Jesus has said and to come and drink from the living waters that he gives us.

Second of all, friends, if you hear and you feel the pain of this woman and in some level you know what it is to be at your lowest, because I want you to know that Jesus knows you, he loves you, he died for you, and the same invitation he makes to that woman is true for you.

Do not let your scars define you. Come and let his define you. And the third group of people, I love how often the psalmist would talk about recalling the joy of our salvation.

[32 : 00] For others of us here today, we need to recall who Jesus is, rejoice in who he is, and just lap up the living waters that he gives us as we take him in.

So in a moment I'm just going to pray and then we're going to sing two songs just to give us the space and time for these truths to sink in. Two songs that talk about who Jesus is, where he is now, and the fact that one day he's coming back.

So let's just be silent, and I'm going to pray, and then we're going to stand to sing. Heavenly Father, thank you that the psalmist calls you the father of the fatherless.

Thank you that that is who you are. You are the God who welcomes the outsider. You are the God who sent your son to die for sinners.

And Father, just pray this morning for those three categories that we've thought about. Father, for those who don't know you, Father, for those this morning for whom this is really painful, life right now is tough.

[33 : 15] And for those of us here today, Father, that we would recall the joy of our salvation as we think about who Jesus is. Father, be moving amongst us by your spirit, I ask and pray. Father, would you be bringing by your spirit in us healing and assurance and knowledge and joy and that sense of peace because of who he is.

Father, help this week our hearts to be fully satisfied in Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.