

Across the Street - Around the World

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Preacher: Alistair Begg

[0 : 00] I invite you to turn once again to the portion of scripture that was read for us from John chapter 4. And may I take just a moment as you're turning there to say what a delight it has been to be afforded the privilege of being here for the days of this week.

First of all in the events of the conference and then to have the privilege of this pulpit on the Lord's Day morning and evening. When I left Scotland in 83 I couldn't have imagined that anyone would even remember my name by 2008.

And to be in this place on this evening is a matter of some significance to me and something for which I am very, very grateful to Willie for the invitation.

If you were present this morning and we consider the picture in Revelation chapter 7, then what we look at tonight in John chapter 4 is, if you like, one of the moments in time where God, the master artist, goes about the business of painting in, if you like, others into this great canvas of his grace and his goodness.

And before we turn to the verses, let's turn to God in prayer. Let's pray. Make the book live to me, O Lord.

[1 : 23] Show me yourself within your word. Show me myself and show me my Savior. And make the book live to me. For Jesus' sake we ask it.

Amen. Amen. I wonder, does it appear unduly harsh to suggest that the disciples were more concerned about sandwiches than they were concerned about salvation?

And could it possibly be that present-day disciples are equally confronted by such a charge?

In danger of making the same mistake, but making it in a different way. John tells us that while they were away, that is, the disciples in the town buying food, Jesus, who later on was going to dispatch these same characters into the world to Jerusalem and Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth, with the story of good news, Jesus, while they were away, was engaging in essentially cross-cultural evangelism.

And the surprise on the part of the disciples, which we read in verse 27, is equal to the surprise of the Samaritan woman, which we will consider in a moment as found in verse 9.

[2 : 55] While the woman is asking the question, could this be the Christ, the disciples are asking the question, could someone have brought him food? Now there is an understandable dimension to that, of course, and we don't want to chastise these poor souls.

They were sent off with the express purpose of finding food. But nevertheless, the disciples are involved in the developing saga of the sandwich, completely unaware that the villagers are making their way out of the town towards Jesus on account of what has been taking place while they've been gone.

And that's why, in verse 34, Jesus gives them an explanation. Here he says, it's what I am about. It's to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

And then from an explanation to an exhortation. I'm telling you that you shouldn't be saying four months more and then the harvest, although I know it's routine for you to do that.

No, I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields. You'll find that they are ripe for harvest. Now what I want to note with you this evening is that this exhortation of Jesus, this call of the kingdom, if you like, is one that needs to be issued and reissued, reconsidered in every generation.

[4 : 18] And indeed, all of our lives and our lives together as churches and as congregations of various places need constantly to be measured against the plumb line of that which Jesus has called us to do.

It is very easy, as in business, so in church, for a company of people to lose our focus. We may begin as a lifeboat station and we may very quickly become a marina.

We may start with the express purpose of going out from the harbor into the seas to reach those who are wandering and who are squandering their lives. And then suddenly, somehow, gradually, along the way, somebody says, you know, I don't think we'll go out this evening.

It's so nice here in the harbor area. Why don't we just sit on the boat and chat for a while? Or maybe we'll sing some of those songs that we all enjoy. There's nothing intrinsically or essentially wrong with that.

But it's just that the focus has gone, isn't it? It's just that they were put there to be lifeboats. They're not pleasure craft sailing around in the harbor.

[5 : 26] However, the late Professor John Murray observed on one occasion, the passion for missions is quenched when we lose sight of the grandeur of the gospel.

The passion for missions is quenched when we lose sight of the grandeur of the gospel. When we somehow or another minimize in our minds the extent of all that God has accomplished in Jesus and the opportunity that God has provided for us to be the servants of that story.

Now, it's quite interesting the way in which John lays out his gospel. And in chapter 3, those of you familiar with your Bibles will know that we have the encounter there between Jesus and Nicodemus. In other words, the encounter in 3 is with someone who is religious or from a religious background. He is male. He is in a position of influence. And then in chapter 4, we have another encounter. Someone else meets with Jesus, this time a woman. She is not particularly religious, it would seem. Indeed, we could say that she's actually from the other end of the village.

[6 : 37] She's on the other side of the tracks. And when you take the record of the encounter with Nicodemus and the story of Jesus and the woman at the well and you read your Bible carefully, what do you discover to be almost the fulcrum in between these two encounters?

Well, let me suggest to you that it is actually the 16th and 17th verses of John's gospel which read as follows. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him, like Nicodemus if he would, or this woman if she might, whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn this woman, but to save this woman through him. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. And so John goes on and underpins, as it were, the theology, the dealings of God, the explication of what God is about, if you like, as he describes in these narratives these remarkable encounters.

It is a word of reminder to us, isn't it, that when we take the magnificence of these few verses that we're focusing on, 16, 17, and 18, when we remind ourselves that when doctrinal clarity and orthodoxy doesn't issue in evangelistic focus and fervor, something has gone wrong.

[8 : 32] Let me say that to you again. When in the life of an individual or the life of a church, doctrinal clarity and orthodoxy does not issue in evangelistic fervor and focus, something has gone wrong.

Ian Murray, writing of the Puritan, says, if we prize the beliefs of a former age, why should it be that we fall so far short of that earlier generation in the winning of souls?

Many of us delight to read those books and reinforce and reaffirm these doctrinal foundations. And Murray says, well, if we're going to do that with their theology, how about we match them in their passionate longing to see unbelieving people become the committed followers of Jesus Christ? Surely the evil one has cause for great celebration when he finds that rambling theological explanations have replaced the appeal of Christ's ambassadors.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Now what I would like to do is note with you, first of all, this encounter, this encounter between Jesus and the lady.

[9 : 51] As has been mentioned, William said that this is a familiar story. It is known by most of us. And he was going to read all the way from the beginning of the chapter.

And I said, no, please don't read the beginning of the chapter. We will cover the beginning of the chapter in a way that will probably scare you. So he's waiting to be scared as of now.

What I want to do is instead of rehearsing the narrative, in other words, just tediously going through again and saying, you'll notice she said this and she said that, at great risk, what I want to do is invite the woman to speak for herself.

By a great miracle, we have her here with us this evening. So why don't we let her just speak? Here she goes. It started out as a routine day.

I usually go to the well in the middle of the day to avoid the other women. It's hot, it's sticky, and I'm always alone. It caught me off guard to have anyone speak to me at all because nobody's usually there.

[10:58] And particularly for a man to do so. I was immediately in the defensive. This kind of thing doesn't happen. Men don't speak to women in public and certainly Jews don't speak to Samaritans.

He was a man and I'm a lady. Well, sort of. He aroused my curiosity by suggesting that I was actually the one in need of a drink of water and that he could supply living water.

It didn't make much sense to me because he clearly had nothing with which to draw water. He was the one asking me for a drink in the first instance because there was no way he could get water. I actually asked him, I said, do you think you're greater than our father Jacob who built this well? He just let it go. But looking at the well and pointing to it, he said, everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again.

But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst again. sign me up for that, I said. I would like that because I don't enjoy coming here making this trip day after day in this way.

[12:11] But you know, when you have the sneaking suspicion that something else is going on in the conversation, when you think that there's another dimension to it, well, it was just like that.

That's how I felt. And I was right because out of the blue from nowhere he said, go and call your husband and come back.

At first I thought to myself, which one does he want me to call? But then it was as though he could see right through me.

It wasn't that he looked at me unkindly. His eyes were kind and compassionate. And all I managed in response was to say, I have no husband.

Well, he didn't try and wring any of the dirty details out of me. In fact, when it became clear that he knew all about me, I said to him, you surely must be a prophet.

And I started into a question about where you go if you're seeking God. Should we go the Jewish place or the Samaritan place? If you were offering a sacrifice, where are you supposed to go if you're seeking God?

[13:16] And he said, it's actually the reverse. God is the one who's doing the seeking. Well, I said, let's just leave this.

When the Messiah comes, he'll explain everything to us. And then without so much as batting an eyelid, he said, that's me, the one speaking to you.

I'm the Messiah. Speaking to me, a no-name Samaritan woman who's had five husbands and a live-in lover who comes to the well alone for obvious reasons.

To me, my life to this point, a broken series of failed beginnings and shattered hopes. To me? Well, just then, his friends returned.

And then it was all about sandwiches. Who got the ham and cheese? Who got the chicken?

Where's the sandwiches? What are we doing? So I used it as an immediate opportunity to slip off.

[14:20] I just, in fact, I even left my water pot. And I made straight for town. And that's why I'm here. That's why I've come back to town. I've come to ask you if you would come and see this man who told me everything I did.

I think he may well be the Christ. Well, that's the encounter. Let's move now to the impact.

To the impact. When you consider this woman's history of relationships, to have her arriving in town issuing an invitation to come see a man may not have been just so unusual.

Indeed, the cynics, when they heard her, were probably saying, she has another one. She's in the town. I'm telling you, I heard her.

She was going up the high street shouting, come and see a man. Well, she's had five. She's on her sixth. Is this the seventh? Well, in actual fact, it was the seventh.

[15:32] But this was to be a man of a very different kind. something, someone, radically, entirely different. And the impact is immediate and is chronicled for us by John.

If your Bible is open, look at it. Then, leaving her water jar, verse 29, she went back to the town, said to the people, come and see a man who told me everything I ever did.

That's verse 29. Look at verse 30. They came out of the town and made their way towards him.

Now, you may have read that a hundred times. But think about it. Think about how hard it is to get

people to do stuff.

Even people who know you. Even people who like you. Even people who are predisposed to whatever it is you're inviting them to do. But this is none of that.

This woman reappears in the town. She says, I have met a man by the well. He's told me things about me that no one knows about me. And I would like you to come and see him.

[16:34] Verse 30. They came out of the town. Look at verse 39. Many of the Samaritans from the town believed in him because of the woman's testimony.

Verse 40. They then urged him to stay with them. And he stayed for two days. And verse 41. And because of his words, many more became believers.

But the grand finale is in verse 42. They said to the woman, We no longer believe just because of what you said. Now we've heard for ourselves and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. We now have heard him by his own proclamation.

and we believe that he is the Savior of the world. And then they have two days listening to Jesus. Doubtless similar to what took place as is recorded by Luke in the 24th chapter.

[17:44] How Jesus begins in the prophets and begins to unfold for them the great story of the Bible. Telling them all the things in the Bible concerning himself.

making it clear that he is the one who fulfills all the Old Testament prophecies. That when Isaiah the prophet cries out, Turn to me and be saved all you ends of the earth for I am God and there is no other into the context of pluralism and syncretism in his day with all the different idolatries and all the different warring factions.

And Isaiah has the responsibility to stand in the middle of all of that and say, there is no God save one God. And this is what this God says. He calls you to turn to him and be saved.

The totality of the earth because he is God and there is no other. And all of this now melding into the delivery that comes from Jesus.

The universality of the gospel pounding out as it were and drummed into the minds of these fledgling followers of Christ. Now when you think about this and you imagine going back to business and to the responsibilities of another Monday.

[19:00] What is the message that we take across the street and around the world? What is the message? It is an unpalatable message. It is regarded as a foolish message.

It is largely an unacceptable message. And frankly, it is a difficult story to tell. There was a time in this city when, if you like, the philosophical or theological givens, the underpinnings of the nation were such that there was nothing particularly peculiar or dramatic about an assertion concerning Jesus and his place in history.

But this is a very different Buchanan Street. This is a very different West End. This is a very different generation.

But our proclamation remains. Jesus Christ is the only Savior because Jesus Christ is the only one qualified to save.

It is impossible for us to hold to biblical proclamation and play footsie as it were with the pluralism of our time.

[20:19] For a long time our next door neighbor was a Jewish doctor. He always wanted to know where I was going and what I was doing. He and his wife were friends to my wife and I.

He wanted to know if I was a Unitarian. He wanted me to be a Unitarian because that would make us closer to one another. He just didn't want to know that I believed and followed Jesus.

Why? Because Fred said that Jesus isn't the Messiah. I said Jesus is. We can't both be right. And when we engage with our Hindu friends as we do if we eat in any decent restaurants around here we are engaging with people who believe that God has been incarnate on multiple occasions.

Christianity says that the incarnation is a unique and unrepeatable event. We cannot both be right. Our Muslim friends gathering under the symbol not only of a crescent but under the symbol of scales are living with the notion that if in the long run their good may outweigh their bad they may be accepted into heaven.

Christianity says it would be impossible if we lived a thousand lives for our good to outweigh our bad. And therefore our story is the story of what another has done on our behalf.

[21 : 49] The righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God. Indeed the story that this woman went back into the town to tell which if you like is the old old story is so phenomenal so wonderful that it behooves us to live it largely and to proclaim it loudly.

One day you see at the name of Jesus every knee will bow Muhammad will bow Buddha will bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Do you realize how politically incorrect the last five sentences are? The encounter is as narrated the impact is as recorded and the lesson finally is as you have it in front of you.

When the disciples finally figured things out at least enough to listen to what Jesus was saying he said to them I don't want you to keep saying you know four months more and this would be a terrific time for harvest.

I want you to realize that it is ripe for harvest. Now of course the commentators I think even Willie Barclay has this in his commentary he says that it may well be that Jesus is looking back as it were over the heads of the disciples they are engaged with him he is now looking out to cycle to the town and even as he is having this dialogue with the disciples the woman is leading the charge out of the town and the people are coming and their headdresses in the white and with the gold bands around them and so on are coming en masse out and it would even look from the distance as if it was a field of barley bobbing in the breeze and it may even be that he said to them guys why don't you just turn around and look down the street and you'll see that the harvest is right here the harvest is coming right at you did I say to you this morning I'm jealous for the opportunity of this place I'm not looking for a job please understand this I just want to reinforce for you how excited I am that after all these years this vibrant bible based

[24 : 08] Christ exalting congregation exists right in the heart of this city and I have seen the pictures those marvelous pictures shot down the cannon street of all those crowds don't whatever you do send them as postcards to your friends without recognizing that every face in that crowd needs Jesus that every individual that comes walking past this door needs to know Jesus that all of the hordes of humanity that come crashing down through the central station and the airports and so on are in need of the message that this lady went back to proclaim that you see is the lesson that Jesus is teaching we sang those dreadful words I immediately wrote them down in hymn 322 didn't we and those who cast that word aside are lost like driftwood on the tide are lost like driftwood on the tide what a graphic picture are we going to leave it up to Lennon and McCartney to call out to us from the 60s and 70s hey look at all those lonely people where do all they come where do they all come from look at all those lonely people where do they all belong father McKenzie is no use to them he's darnin' his socks in the night when the prophet spoke concerning even the people of God in Jeremiah's day

God speaks concerning his people and he says my people have forsaken me the spring of living water and have dug out their own cisterns broken cisterns that can't hold any water what a picture here is the spring of living water rejected and here are the poor souls digging out cisterns in which there is no water there's a graphic picture not only of the predicament of God's people 600 years BC but it surely is a graphic picture of the city of Glasgow here on the 22nd of July 2008 people digging out cisterns that can't hold water that's what this lady had been doing presumably looking for love looking for freedom and in the gaze of Jesus and in the compassion of Jesus and in the words of Jesus she is met by kindness she is met by clarity and she is met by truth Jesus is no longer physically present to meet the women at the well that's why he has given his spirit to his children so that we may meet those women and those men at the well and those women and those men are very familiar with the strident tones of evangelicalism they are not so familiar with hearts of compassion and eyes of tenderness and hands that engage in their need every successful city center ministry that I have ever known in my reading has combined not only an absolute passionate call to people to be reconciled to God in the proclaiming of the gospel but it has been accompanied by an engagement with the needs of the community take

Moody in Chicago take Spurgeon in London take even the tent hall in its best days in the city of Glasgow there is a reason that people came into that building and it wasn't simply because of the quality of preaching but it was because of the use of kettles and teapots and blankets and rugs and engagement with people in their need half the people that would have been able to speak to this lady would have ignored her lest they were found talking with her there is a risk isn't there the risk if you like that is represented in Jesus when he goes to Matthew's house and the Pharisees come and say I can't believe he's going to Matthew's house you see some of the people that go to

Matthew's house have you seen the parties at Matthew's house Jesus said you know it's going to take some time for the penny to drop

I didn't come to call the righteous I came to call sinners to repentance well look at how it finishes even now he says the reaper draws his wages even now he harvest the crop for eternal life so the sower and the reaper may be glad together in nature it's unusual to reap where you haven't sown or actually to sow and not to reap but in the spiritual realm it is usual that there would be reaping where someone else has sown therefore the sower ought not to complain and the reaper ought not to grow proud so that we play the part that we've been given because after all one can plant and another can water but only God can make things grow thus the saying one sows and another reaps I sent you to reap what you haven't worked for others have done the hard work and you have reaped the benefits of their labors well as I said to you at the beginning of our time we pray for you as a congregation and one of the things we pray it's what 25 to 3 now at home and so we're 4 hours and 25 minutes away from our evening service and when we gather for our evening service and meet for prayer beforehand it is not uncommon for this place to be mentioned in prayer by men who have never been here but who as a result of the visits of some of your folks have taken on if you like a part of the burden share vicariously in the excitement of all that you're doing and are asking God to show himself strong so that lots of people like the religious

Nicodemus in 3 and the irreligious lady in 4 may become committed followers of Jesus do you ever wonder what happens to people when you close the chapter and you say I wonder what happened to her next she's gone she's gone from the record do you think she might have shown up in Jerusalem on the day the sun turned dark and stood there and looked and realized that the man on the middle cross was the same man as the man at the well did she hear him say it is finished did she say oh I get it now he knew all the things I had ever done but his blood has cancelled everyone oh Lord such grace to qualify me as your own there is a new song in my heart father thank you that we have a bible to turn to thank you that the lord jesus is kind and compassionate was there ever kinder shepherd half so gentle half so sweet as the savior who would have us come and gather round his feet thank you that we can look to you tonight seated as we are in the heart of this city aware of all of its crises and crimes and confusions and aware too of the extent of your love and the immensity of your grace and we pray that you will stir in our hearts as individuals and as a church family giving wisdom to those who are in leadership guiding those who minister the word so that in these coming weeks and months and years there might be that great wonderful sense of harvesting where others have sown and sowing so that others who come after us may know the joy of reaping where we've labored we commend ourselves to you and we seek your grace in

[33 : 21] Jesus name Amen Amen