

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Offence or Evidence?

John 4:15-22

Intro: As most of us are aware, we currently live in a society that values “politically correct” speech above all else. In some areas of the country, the PC crowd is more vocal than in others but in the realm of social media, there is no limitation of distance to hinder someone from declaring their moral dissatisfaction over anything that offends their own sense of decency or decorum. In fact, not even common decency or decorum will prohibit their outbursts! It’s a good thing none of them were around in the first Christian century to hear Jesus teaching the people or speaking to individuals. I’d venture to say that if they had overheard His conversation with the woman of Samaria, especially the section which we’ve come to today, they would all have declared Jesus’ comments to be intolerable and bigoted.

Today, we’re going to look at two comments that Jesus makes to this woman of Samaria that on the surface may seem a bit harsh or even cruel by modern PC standards but in fact, they are the epitome of grace and divine love.

15 – Up to this point, though much has been said by the woman and by Jesus, it doesn’t appear that any of it has really touched the woman deeply. Sure Jesus, a Jew, had spoken to her first, surprising her since she had never known anything but scorn from her Jewish neighbors. Still, her reaction to His words was not much more than surprise. It’s also true that Jesus had aroused her curiosity by offering her a new type of water, living water, which would be a fountain of water within her springing up into everlasting life. But even this offer must have been received lightheartedly and perhaps even humorously by the woman. It’s clear from her response that she was merely concerned with her own personal convenience. It was an amusing game, verbal jousting with this interesting Jew, but it was not serious. She may’ve even continued to lower her bucket into the well. But Jesus will now reveal such knowledge of her own personal situation that it forces her to think that this Jew is much more than just interesting.

16-18 - Jesus jolts her to her senses with just one sentence. It was not unkind; everything he said to the woman was kind. Still, it was a sentence

that must have hit the poor woman like a sudden slap in the face. In one fell swoop, the Lord exposed her most serious failing and deepest source of guilt. Jesus said, “**Go, call your husband, and come here**” (16). Right then, she was reminded to her failure. “**I have no husband.**” This is the shortest response she gives in the entire conversation. Why? She’s convicted and wants to end this line of discussion as quickly as possible.

Jesus then responds by first agreeing with her and commending her for being truthful, then reveals that He knows what her marital status has been and currently was at the time. At this point all the woman’s pretensions vanished completely, and from here on out, though she’ll try to change the subject twice (vs20 and 25), she now knows that all her thoughts and actions are exposed before this man who is able to tell her all things that she had ever done.

Millions of books have been written about Christianity but we shouldn’t let that obscure the fact that at the very heart of Christianity, there’s a great simplicity. Christianity involves a twofold revelation: **1)** the revelation of God (primarily in Jesus Christ) and **2)** the revelation of ourselves. The two are related - no one’s ever seen God without, at the same time, seeing themselves to be sinners. This is the experience of all who have seen Him—Job, Moses, Isaiah - when they saw God, they immediately confessed their sin. The opposite principle is also true: no one’s ever really seen himself unless God has been present to reveal the true state of his heart to him. Christianity begins by bringing people to the truth about their own depraved condition; not to shame, frighten or embarrass them but to convince them of their need for Jesus Christ and prepare them to understand who He is and all that He’s accomplished for them by His death and resurrection. Jesus said, “**Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance**” (Mark 2:17). It is only when we as sinners have recognized the true nature of sin and its gravity that we will come to the One who is our soul’s only true Physician.

In nearly every area of society today, the thought of sin is distasteful and actually discussing it is even less popular. Christians seem to be the only ones who broach the subject and are often criticized for talking about it too much. Christians do this not because they love sin but because they’re realists. They recognize that sin is a constant reality and the number one

problem of all of mankind. Also, they recognize that the Bible insists on this everywhere.

Scripture has confined all under sin (Gal 3:22) meaning the whole world is a prisoner of sin. Solomon said (1 Kings 8:46) **There is no one who does not sin**. David, **There is no one who does good** (Ps 14:1). **Ps 143:2 No one living is righteous**. Isaiah, “**We all, like sheep, have gone astray, we have turned, every one, to his own way** (53:6). Even John, in his first letter, said; “**If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us**” (1 John 1:10).

This is also the focus of the first two chapters of Romans. Here, Paul reveals the universal nature of man’s sin in a more comprehensive way. According to Paul, there are 3 types of men: **1) the hedonist** (Rom 1:18-32) - materialism is the basis of his life. His moral standard is only what he determines it to be. Thus, he’s decided to live for his own enjoyment and for whatever fleshly pleasures he can find. Why is he a sinner? Because, the path of his life leads away from God and away from any real beauty, truth or inner satisfaction.

2) The moral man (Rom 2:1-16) – a man who has high ethical standards but does not trust in Jesus Christ as his Savior. Most folks would put themselves in this category. Why does God consider this man a sinner? 2 reasons: **1st**, he’s fallen short of perfection: God’s standard for true righteousness. It’s the standard Jesus lived up to, the only perfect human being there ever was. **2nd**, he falls short of his own standards, no matter how high or low they may be. Whether he claims to live by the 10 Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount or just the Golden Rule; no one is able to live up to even the lowest standards of morality completely and consistently.

3) the religious man (Rom 2:17-29) – a man whose faith rests solely in religion. He doesn’t deny being a sinner; he just attempts to escape the results of sin by being a good churchgoer. “I’ve been baptized and confirmed. I give generously to the church and volunteer my time.” Why is this man a sinner? Because God not only requires complete perfection, He also requires a change of heart and none of the trappings of religion can do anything about that. In short, **Romans ch1-2** declare that all man are incurably sick with sin and there is no hope for any one of them apart from

faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in His work of atonement.

The only way to properly prepare the soil of the heart for the seed of the Gospel is to plow it with conviction. That's why Jesus told her to go get her husband. He forced her to admit her sin. There can be no true conversion without real conviction. There must first be conviction and repentance and then there can be saving faith. Jesus had aroused her mind and stirred her emotions but He also had to touch her conscience and to do that meant dealing with her sin. That is the essence of the Gospel: ***all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*** (Rom 3:23). But the flip side of that truth is that ***there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus*** (Rom 8:1).

19-20 - a prophet – What Jesus just said forced this woman to the realization that He's no ordinary individual! But, instead of listening to Him, she again tries to change the subject but bringing up the difference between the Jewish and Samaritan religions. Apparently, it's much more comfortable to talk about religion than to have to face one's sin!

This religious rivalry began as a result of Israel's captivity by the Assyrians 750 yrs before. After being conquered, most of the 10 northern tribes were carried off to various parts of the empire while conquered people from 5 other countries were brought into the area. Those ethnic Jews who escaped captivity quickly began to intermarry with the newcomers, producing a race that was partially Jewish and partially Assyrian, something expressly forbidden in the OT and to the pure-blooded Jews of Jesus' day, this was an unforgivable sin.

Of course, Judah was eventually conquered by the Babylonians and were also carried off into captivity but the Southern Jews were able to retain their national identity and ethnic purity. After 70 years of captivity, a remnant returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city and the Temple around 450 BC. When the Samaritans offered their assistance in the rebuilding efforts, the Southern Jews refused it. In anger, the Samaritans then built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, in violation of the Mosaic law. This was the temple the Samaritan woman was referring to. Eventually this became a rival temple and the religion of the Samaritans became a rival religion.

She may have been genuinely interested in this subject or at least

interested in what a prophet would have to say about this ancient and bitter controversy. But it seems more likely that she's just trying to change the subject again.

21-22 - Jesus had spoken to the woman of Samaria about her sin, reminding her that she was living with a man to whom she was not married. This would've been enough to make the PC crowd act as if their hair was on fire. But, after the woman had obviously and politely tried to change the subject by asking the Lord's opinion on the rival Jewish and Samaritan claims about God and the forms of proper worship, Jesus had the nerve to claim that, at least in His day, the Jewish way of worship was the only valid one and that Samaritans knew nothing of spiritual matters. Instead of dodging the question or just trying to be polite, Jesus speaks forcefully and makes it clear that all religions are not equally acceptable before God and even that some worshippers actually act out of ignorance and unbelief.

Note that while addressing the woman's question, Jesus didn't claim any racial superiority. This was no time for racial pride: Jesus didn't go to Samaria to offend the Samaritans but to win them! Still, their religion was man-made and Jesus wasn't going to allow this Samaritan woman to believe that just any religion of human origin (based on human ideas) is acceptable to God. Human religion wasn't acceptable then and it's not acceptable today. Thus, salvation was **of the Jews** alone because only the Jews had a religion that originated in God. Plus, it was only in Judaism, with its system of sacrifices and temple worship that there was any true sense of the holiness of God and of the necessity of a substitutionary sacrifice as the grounds of forgiveness and of an acceptable approach to Him.

Understand, salvation is always of God's grace not of any human merit or effort. So, since grace was offered to the sinner by means of the death of an atoning sacrifice and since in Christ's time that sacrifice could only be offered at Jerusalem by a legitimate priest, a descendant of Aaron, it's obvious there could be no salvation for anyone except through the Jewish priesthood and this was only available to a circumcised member of 1 of the tribes of Israel. Jesus was trying to impress this undeniable truth on the woman: that God alone had the right to establish both the means and the method of approach to Himself. Jesus is encouraging her to turn away from any trust in human religions.

We don't know if there was more to this part of the conversation but Jesus could have used several examples from the OT to illustrate this truth. Rahab aligned herself with Israel and her God, eventually being accepted into the tribe of Judah. Ruth was the widowed Moabite daughter-in-law of Naomi. When Naomi decided to return to Israel, she asked Ruth to go back to her family. What was Ruth's reply? **Ruth 1:16** - Ruth desired to worship Naomi's God - Jehovah. But note, she couldn't say "Your God will be my God" until she had first said "Your people will be my people." Ruth is confessing her need for a change in nationality before there could be a change in her God.

Naaman – a general in the most powerful army of the day (Syrian) but had leprosy. He was sent to Elisha and was healed. Elisha refused to receive any payment from Naaman but Naaman had 1 request for Elisha (**II Kings 5:17**).

Think about it! from then on out, regardless of which pagan god was worshipped in Syria; every night when Naaman prayed, he did so on dirt from Israel, praying to Jehovah, the God of Israel. Here's a Gentile who's willing to come as a Jew, wholly relying on the same grace that was shown to him by the God of the Jews when He healed him.

There are more but these examples will suffice to show that Jesus was entirely in line with the OT tradition when He said that, before His time, the Gentiles had to become Jews in order to be saved. But we must not overlook the fact that as Jesus was reaffirming these truths, He was also predicting a major change that was to come shortly. It's true that salvation was of the Jews, but very soon the offer of salvation would be extended to all people and the way of acquiring it was by faith alone in the complete and perfect sacrifice that He alone could provide by dying for sinners.

God didn't nullify His promises to Israel – He fulfilled them in Jesus. The day Jesus died on the cross, the veil of the Temple, which separated man from God, was torn in two from top to bottom. This signified that God was done with sacrifices because the perfect sacrifice, the final sacrifice had been offered in Christ. Not only was the priesthood ended (Jesus is our High Priest) but the Temple was now unnecessary because the only way to God is thru Jesus.

Offense or Evidence? The Lord's words weren't meant to offend the woman but to focus her attention and force her to see her own great need. Jesus

says the same thing to everyone at some point in their life, if only they will hear Him out. Some people get offended and refuse to listen any further. Some people are so shocked by their own sin they can't imagine how a holy God could love them or want to have anything to do with them. Do not despair! Go back and look again at what Jesus said at the first (16). What did He say to the woman? "**Go, call your husband**"—that's true; it was a necessary attempt to establish her sinfulness—but then He graciously finished the sentence by saying, "**But when you have done that come back again.**"

"**Go, call your husband.**" That was a word for her conscience. "**and come here.**" That was a word for her heart.

He speaks the same way to us. We must see our need. We must face the truth about our own condition. But we must also hear His warm invitation. "**Come to me**" (Matt 11:28). The way is open to forgiveness and salvation.

