

Believing for Ourselves
John 4:39-42

Thanks be to our God, He has ordained many ways for you and me to hear His precious truth, to respond to His message and power and to give our hearts to Him in salvation. And we each have our own story as to how that has taken place.

And also thanks be to God, He assures us that His blessed salvation is not reserved only for those who have led a wholesome lifestyle, always saying the right things and doing the right things.

But also, and very importantly for us to know and accept is that while yes, leading a wholesome lifestyle as some might seem to be able to do is a very, very good thing, we will still never be able to earn salvation and eternal life through even our best of human efforts.

And these scriptures are clear in their teaching, that though some of us might be able to present an excellent lifestyle, deep within each of us is that "desperately wicked heart" that the Prophet Jeremiah warned about in his words of chapter 17 where he said, "Our heart is deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked, so wicked that even we can't know it".

And as these "Gospels" clearly tell us, the only remedy, the only cure for our "desperately wicked heart" is through the blessed atonement that the Lord Jesus made for us on the cross, the "shed blood" of the Lamb of God.

We studied about that truth just recently in John chapter 3 where Jesus said to us,

¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:17)

With that, let's pause for a moment and read about this story of this blessed encounter between this woman and our Lord Jesus. This is a long read, but necessary for us to gain the right understanding about all that is taking place. Verse 1 of John chapter 4,

¹ Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that He was making and baptizing more disciples than John ²(although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³ he left Judea and departed again

for Galilee. ⁴ And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."

¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

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

ever did. Can this be the Christ?" ³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him.

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

And folks, pay close attention to these next words, because it's here that we'll concentrate most of our thoughts today. Verse 39,

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." (John 4:1-42)

An experience that I have shared with you on other occasions is one that involves our daughter. I believe that it helps to illustrate one of the central messages that's being given to us in this scripture passage today.

All through our daughter's growing years, she had been well schooled in the fundamentals of Christianity. And being part of a Christian family, living within a Christian school environment where we worked, she learned far more than the average teenager would learn about God and His plan for salvation.

She memorized scripture and she could speak it back out fluently. And because she was so well versed in the things of God, as she left home after graduation, both she and we assumed that she was truly saved.

But it was some five years later that she called us one Sunday night and told us that she had just received the Lord as her Savior.

In that conversation, one of the statements that she made has given me one of the clearest understandings that I have ever learned about true Christian conversion. She said, "Daddy, all those years as a teenager, I believed in God because you believed in God. He was your God and I believed in Him because I trusted you". "But now, I believe for myself."

And much the same can be true for all of the members of our Christian families. Over these many years of family life together, my wife and I have spent untold hours talking about the Lord, sharing family bible devotionals, reading and praying together, sharing thoughts and beliefs.

And yes, because my wife has a quiet and gentle personality, for the most part it has been me who has done most of the talking. And because my wife loves me and trusts me, she accepts most all that I have to say as being true and trustworthy. And she has taken much of what we have talked about to be her own personal beliefs.

And again, that seems often to be the common order of things in families. And it can also be true within other close relationships. We care for and trust a person so much that we accept their beliefs as being trustworthy enough to be acceptable as our own beliefs.

And that is probably one of the reasons why God gave the command in Deuteronomy chapter six, that as parents we are to not only hold His commands deeply within our own hearts, we are to teach them diligently to our children, and we are to speak of them continually, as we lie down, as we rise up and as we walk along our way, daily pouring out God's truths into the minds and hearts of our family members.

But we must at some point stop and clearly understand, that while all of this teaching and learning as a family is good and necessary, true salvation and eternal life will only take place for us when we take this Gospel into our own hearts and accept and own it for ourselves, personally.

Let me say that again, true salvation and eternal life will only take place for us personally when we take this Gospel into our own hearts and accept and own it for ourselves, personally.

Here in the scripture passage that we have been studying in the Book of John chapter 4, we find that a similar thing seems to be taking place with these Samaritan people.

Recall the situation and circumstance for a moment! It began with an encounter between the Lord Jesus and a Samaritan woman, a woman with what some would call a “questionable” reputation.

Here, in only a few moments of conversation, this woman became convinced that this strange young man in front of her was very different and very special, more special than anyone she had ever known before. He somehow knew things about her that He could not have known except by supernatural means.

Remember as we think about these words, you and I have the advantage of hind-sight. We have read this account on other occasions, probably several times, and we know the story well. We also have the advantage of the presence of the Holy Spirit in us who defines and interprets the words that we have read.

And so we know that there was even more supernatural grace than that woman could have ever imagined that led up to this special encounter at this well.

For example, we know that the woman coming to that well at that exact moment was no accident. No “chance encounter”. The words given in John 6:44 that I have quoted for us so often tell us that her being there at that well at that exact time was part of something much, much bigger, that this dear woman was drawn to be there by God the Father. Jesus said in those words of John 6:44 that,

⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.
(John 6:44)

And in John 6:65 Jesus also said,

No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.(John 6:65)

And so, this seemingly random incident was not random at all, but came as a result of God drawing that woman to that place at that moment.

And the same can be true with you and me. You and I might think that we are going to a particular place to do a particular thing because of some personal decision made in our own mind. And to some degree that may very well be true, because we do exercise our own will continually in most all matters. But very graciously intermingled within our own willful actions are the plans and the purposes of God.

Also, sometimes it may not be our own willful decisions, but the decisions of others that when carried out prove also to be the divine will of God.

You'll recall that that was so when Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt, that though the brother's actions were very sinful, God was making a provision for them and for their families many years in advance. Though the brothers intended harm, God was working out His plan within their sinful behaviors, bringing good to the future nation of Israel.

And dear friends much the same takes place in our personal and family lives every day. We work within the opportunities that we have in front of us, making plans and following those opportunities as we think best, most often not even thinking about how God's hand may be guiding the decisions we are making.

And because of that, we need to realize that having to uproot our families and move because of some good thing or because of some bad thing in our job should not be taken simply at face value. We need to keep in mind that God is continually at work within those same situations, working out His special plans and purposes for us.

Oh dear Christian, God very purposefully leads you and me down paths and through thought processes that He intends. And for the most part, we are unaware of His intervention.

But from the words that we have been reading in Acts 17, we can clearly know that most every step we take is being guided by our Lord. Listen again to those words.

²⁶From one man he (God) made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far

from each one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.
(Acts 17:26-28)

These are precious, precious words and so absolutely true. But folks, unfortunately, as it is with horses in that old saying, "you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink", so it is with you and me. Yes, our Lord is ever and always at work, "leading you and me to water", but unfortunately too often, we are reluctant to drink. And this thing about "free will" that many of my Christian friends seem to treasure so much, can become a serious stumbling block.

But thankfully, most all of God's plans are effective. And He will get us to where He wants us to go through one means or another.

He will draw us and He will enable us to be at a particular place at a particular time. And through one means or another He will enable us to see and to hear His message.

And yes, that "free will" response of ours that I mentioned a moment ago is still in the mix. But somehow God can insert His plans into ours and then both His plans and our plans become one.

I love a metaphorical example that R. C. Sproul gave about how our "free will" can mysteriously meld in within the ordained Will of God with the two becoming one. His example involves how in Pittsburgh the Allegheny River comes flowing in from the north and the Monongahela River comes flowing in from the south meeting there to become the Ohio River, the two rivers becoming one, leaving no way of discerning one from the other.

And I am so glad that God does it that way because my "free will" would have never gotten me saved. It was only as God's Will flowed into mine that I was able to receive His blessed salvation.

As for this woman at the well, we can't know all the hidden mysterious workings of the Holy Spirit that were taking place as the Lord Jesus began His ministry within this woman's heart. It is clear that Jesus knew her well and that He was giving her every opportunity to give her "free will" response.

And dear Christian, please do keep in mind that this encounter was far, far bigger than your and my small minds want to at first recognize and accept.

Please understand that the Lord Jesus truly is God. And as the Second Person of the Trinity, He “foreknew” everything about this woman. He knew about all her many sins even during the moments that she was committing them, during all those years leading up to this day. And it was His desire that she would stop doing those awful immoral things.

Dear friends, our God is not blind to your and my daily behaviors. He sees everything that we do . . . everything that we have ever done. He knows every right thing and every wrong thing that we are involved in.

Nothing is hidden from God’s sight. Every part of who we are, everything we say and do is laid bare before His eyes. That truth given to us in Psalm 139. Listen!

- ¹ O LORD, you have searched me
and you know me.
- ² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- ³ You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
- ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O LORD.

- ¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”
- ¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. (Psalm 139:1-4, 11-12)

Our sinful involvements are never hidden by the darkness. And please realize a very important truth, that in a sense, our dear Lord is compelled to watch as we do the immoral and vulgar things that we do.

He had personally seen the behaviors and the illicit lifestyle of that woman. He had been there in the dark bedrooms of her illicit lovers. He had been compelled to observe as she willfully violated the precious laws and precepts that He had lovingly put into place for her protection.

And He wanted her to change, "He wanted her to change". So, as we said a moment ago, it really was no accident that she showed up at that well on that day at that time. That dear woman was drawn there at that exact moment so that she could have an encounter with her Savior. And thanks be to God, she seems to have responded in the right way.

We don't know this woman's thoughts that preceded her coming there at that moment. It may have been as simple as, "I'd better hurry and get water before I fix supper for the kids".

Her thoughts were probably not on such high matters as salvation. And most likely, she didn't even have any idea that she needed a Savior. Before a person is saved, they seldom do. But I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit knew her needs and He had prepared her heart for that exact moment in time and that exact place when her life would be changed forever.

Thinking further on these words given to us here . . . even though this woman had lived an immoral lifestyle, she had obviously been taught about the things of God. And she had at least a general knowledge of who God is and a person's need for a Messiah. She indicated that in her words to Jesus.

And the same is true with most people today, especially here in America. People have a general knowledge of God. And most seem to have at least some form of belief that God truly is God, but they seem to go no further.

This woman had heard the truth from others in the past, and to some degree she had believed it. But now for the first time, she heard it directly for herself. And here suddenly, those truths seem to "come alive" for her.

Perhaps it was her mother or her grandmother who had first told her about God and about His Messiah who would come someday to save them. But in her years of being on her own, having to grub out a daily living, she might have forgotten those truths. But now, here at this special moment in time, those truths were being made real to her personally. And now she believed for herself.

And folks, "real truth" and real conversion has a way of exciting and provoking us to want to share it with others. And that was so with this woman. She went immediately and shared her newfound truth with others, others that had probably been similarly prepared by the Holy Spirit.

And no doubt, some of those who believed because of her testimony were probably not the best of the community. She was a woman of low estate, immoral and unclean. So these friends of hers that came out to meet Jesus might have been of her same low estate.

But thanks be to God, everyone is invited to the great banquet of Christ, even those of low estate, those out there in the highways and byways.

Folks, you and I are very much like this woman. We may not have had five husbands and we may not be living with one that is not our own, but we are in other ways every bit as sinful. We are wretched sinners in need of a Savior. And salvation is at everyone's fingertips if they will only listen for a moment and accept Jesus' words.

Another thought! That woman had no ability to save herself and neither did she have the ability to save anyone else. So her telling the people of the town of her experience was not salvation to them. They had to personally and individually come to Jesus for that part.

They first believed because of the words that she said to them. But their real salvation had to come from a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus.

It is simply that way and only that way! It has always been that way and it will always be that way. Salvation is found in no other.

We must come personally and individually to Jesus. We must let Him dig deeply into our sinful being and let Him tell us everything that we have ever done so that we can repent of those sins and be cleansed.

A personal encounter with Jesus is absolutely essential to salvation. We cannot get there on the "shirttails" of our parents, or our husbands or our wives. Salvation is intensely personal. It requires personal conviction and personal repentance.

Folks, you and I must not allow our religion to remain at the level of God being our God because He was our Daddy's God. We must move on and have a personal encounter with Him ourselves. He must become our God simply and solely because we believe and we have put our trust in Him.

These words in John chapter 4 again as we close,

⁴¹Many more believed because of His (Jesus') word; ⁴²and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world." (John 4:41-42)

Pray with me!