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John 4:5-26

JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING: LEAVING IT ALL BEHIND

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Throughout our lifetimes we have to make conscious choices whether to keep something or leave it behind. It is not an easy thing to do and we go through some very difficult times. A child may sleep with a special blanket or a stuffed animal or two. They represent security and they love taking them to bed at night. But the time comes when they go to school. They don't want their classmates to make fun of them for sleeping with a teddy bear. They make the conscious choice to give it up. We go off to college and then graduate. What do we take with us in our new home? What do we leave behind at Mom and Dad's? What do Mom and Dad do with their child's old room? Do they leave it as is or turn it into a den or workroom? We get older and we can't keep up the house. We need to downsize. What do we keep? What do we give away or throw away?

It is not easy. We may leave things behind with tears or we may never think of them again. When it comes to our spiritual lives there are many things that we need to leave behind if we want to walk with Jesus. A Samaritan woman found that out and she would never look back. JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING: LEAVING IT ALL BEHIND.

Jesus had been baptized by John at the Jordan River. He was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where he would be tempted by Satan. He would call his first disciples. He performed his first miracle at Cana changing water into wine. He attended the Passover festival in Jerusalem where he cleansed the Temple for the first time. He was visited by Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin at night. It was there that Jesus spoke of his mission in the words that are so familiar: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

Jesus always backed up his words with actions. He was returning from Jerusalem to Galilee. Galilee was north of Jerusalem. We hear: "Now he had to go through Samaria." So often we gloss over words like this. We must understand that for the average Jew it would say: "Now he had to go around Samaria." You see that Jews did not associate with Samaritans. Usually, the Jews went out of their way to avoid contact with the Samaritans. They would cross the Jordan River and travel on the east side of the Jordan even though it was much closer going through Samaria.

When the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the people were led away into captivity never to return. There were still some of the people left, but the Assyrians brought in people from other lands to work the fields and produce other natural resources. These people from other countries had their own customs and they had their own gods. As a result, the land of Samaria was kind of a mixed bag. People were familiar with many of the things of the Old Testament. Some of the things they liked, others they didn't. They felt that they were free to pick and choose. The strict Jews of Jerusalem would have nothing to do with these people. They went out of their way to avoid these people, sometimes laughingly.

Jesus would not avoid them. He had to go through Samaria. If God so loved the world, then he loved more than the Jews. He loved all people. That would become abundantly clear on the day of Pentecost, but here was a preview. The Old Testament had spoken many times about God's plan of salvation for the world. There were many divine "had to's." Jesus had to be lifted up, had to do his Father's will, had to bring other sheep and had to rise from the dead, among others. These things were not optional. God's plan of salvation was very clear from the beginning. Jesus would do everything necessary to carry it out. He had to do it. There was no other way. There was no other plan of salvation.

Jesus was tired from his journey. He had walked some 40-50 miles perhaps over the course of several days. It gets pretty hot in Palestine and Jesus needed rest. It was about noon and Jesus sits down at a well outside of town. He looked like a tired Jew to most people including the woman he would soon meet, but she would see that he was something far more than that.

Jesus would strike up a conversation with a woman there. This would be remarkable for several reasons. First of all, she was a woman. Secondly, she was a Samaritan. Jews did not associate with Samaritans and men did not discuss spiritual matters with women. A Jewish rabbi talking to a Samaritan woman? Absolutely scandalous! If Jesus' disciples had been there, they probably would have tried to dissuade Jesus.

If you were going to pick a person to reach out to, this might not be the one by any human standards. You can say that she was an outcast in many ways. She was a Samaritan, a second-class person. She was a woman, considered unteachable by many rabbis. We will see that she had a shady past, to put it mildly. She had five previous husbands and now a live-in boyfriend. Finally, she comes alone at midday to a well outside of town. I'm afraid that many congregations might say, "That's not the type of member we're looking for." But Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. This was a woman who was really lost. She didn't know how she got there, and she didn't know how to get where she needed to be. Jesus would lead her to living water.

Jesus is going to make a simple request to break the ice. He will ask her for a drink, and she will start asking questions in her own mind. Most Jewish men would never make such a request. They would be considered ceremonially unclean if they received a drink from a Samaritan woman. Jesus did not look like one who would ignore the Law of Moses, so what was he thinking? This would be the first and certainly not the last time that Jesus would show that true uncleanness did not come from eating and drinking with "sinners" but rather by what is in your heart. She is surprised and asks a question, "How can you ask me for a drink?"

Jesus will respond to her question by offering her a gift, a gift from God. He will make a play on words. He asked her for a drink of water. He will offer her living water. Living water! Now that is something that really piques one's curiosity. You just can't ignore it. You have to ask, "What is living water? Where do you find it? How do you get it? Does it cost anything?" She knows that the best wells are fed by a spring. A well that has only standing water can become stagnant. It would not give life; it could end up taking life if it were poisoned. She was well aware of the Dead Sea that did not support any kind of life.

Living water is one of the many concepts that Jesus expands upon as he talks with this woman. As he talks, she is amazed by her ignorance and by Jesus' knowledge. He does not teach like others. He teaches with authority. She came for water; Jesus offers her living water. She refers to our father, meaning Jacob; Jesus points her to the Father, God the Father. She mentions a prophet; Jesus is the Prophet. She speaks of worship in Samaria and Judah; Jesus speaks of worship "in spirit and in truth." She hopes for a messiah; Jesus is the Messiah. She will be led to make that confession.

The idea of living water to quench our thirst forever is one that is repeated throughout the Scriptures. Isaiah says, "Come, all who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat." We hear it over and over again in the Revelation of Jesus Christ to St. John: "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst." "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes let him take the free gift of the water of life."

It is something that sounded very good to this woman. Jesus wants her to have it. But there is a barrier, a barrier that Jesus will now address. She still thinks that her sinful lifestyle is unknown to this man who is addressing her. She wasn't particularly proud of her past, but she wasn't going to open up to a total stranger either. Was it pride, or was it shame? It really didn't matter. Jesus would make it easy. He says, Go, call your husband and come back!"

She thinks that she can fool him by simply saying, "I have no husband." Jesus shows his omniscience by saying, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." Jesus confronts her with the reality of her sin. She is surely guilty of sins against the Sixth Commandment, but she is guilty of sins against all the Commandments including the First. She has many gods and idols.

She does what all of us do. She tries to change the subject. She tries to blame others. "Hey, why are there so many religions out there in the world anyway?" Jesus never gets sidetracked. He stays on the central message of sin and grace. She is confronted with her sin so that she can acknowledge it and repent. Then she can receive that living water that she so desperately craves. Jesus does not dredge up her past to shame her. Rather he is going to offer here something better. He is going to offer her a new life, a new identity. He is the living water that she so desperately craves.

We see that the woman will leave her water jar and return to town. She forgets the very thing that she had come for. She left it behind. That was no longer the consuming purpose in her life. She had found something more important. She now goes to the people of the town and says, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" Think about that for a second. Would you want your past exposed to you? Would you want others to know some of the things you did in years past or perhaps last year? Far more important than that was the knowledge that she could receive forgiveness for her past. The man who offered living water would offer to take her sins to the cross. She would leave behind her water jar, but more importantly, she would leave behind her sins.

Did you ever notice how many people left things behind when they followed their Lord? In our Old Testament lesson this morning, Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, would leave behind his country, his people, and his father's household. Peter, James, and John would leave their fishing business. Matthew and Zaccheus would leave their profession of tax collecting. Paul the Pharisee would leave his way of life.

Following Jesus demands a commitment. You cannot serve two masters. Jesus changes our life forever. He demands total obedience from us. He showed total obedience for us. He resisted all the temptations of Satan and stayed focused on his mission. He would lay down his life for your sins. He would be crucified, dead and buried. On the third day he would rise again from the dead. He is the living water for your soul! Leave everything behind and drink forever! AMEN.