

The Wounds of Mercy

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If you would turn back in your Bibles to John 4 where we read those first 30 verses, I want to go back and read some of them again beginning in verse 16. These are among the words that our Lord spoke to this woman. Verse 16 he says,

16 ... Go, call your husband, and come hither. 17 The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, You have well said, I have no husband: 18 For you had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. 19 The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.

These verses record some words of Christ to this woman that almost seem out of place and to some, they would seem to be out of character for him. I'm sure some think he was maybe unkind in that statement or critical or was dragging up something that maybe would have been better off to be left behind, but that is not the case. You see, she is ignorant of who he is just like every sinner he saves, just like everyone of us by nature, and she is in her natural state, though she doesn't know who he is, she's very willing to debate religion with him. She only sees him as a Jew or maybe as a prophet, but he was and is the Messiah. He is the Christ. He is God manifest in the flesh.

And you have to notice in these verses one thing in particular and that is she was not looking for God. She had her religion. She was able even in that religion to excuse her sin. She was just living her life which as all our lives are in our ourselves, nothing but a life of sin. And one thing she finds out here, one thing she learns is his omniscience as God. He knows all things. He knows who we are. He knew who she was. He knows all that we've done. He knows everything that is in our heart and our thoughts and our minds and our motives right now.

If you look back, we noticed earlier in John 2:24 where it says that, "Jesus did not commit himself unto some, because he knew all." They professed a kind of faith but he knew they were without faith. He knew their thoughts and their hearts and their motives, "And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." That is a frightening thing to me. The Lord as was the case with this woman, he knows exactly what we are, what we're thinking, what we're trusting, what we believe, what we understand, and so the facade of Phariseism is no good. It is no good.

As a matter of fact, in Hebrews 4, we have a reference to the Word. Now Christ is himself the incarnate Word, but what can be said of him as the Word is also true of his written word. He knows himself what we are and how we are, but he has also said, he has also written and told us just exactly the same thing. So it says, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." You don't know your heart, I don't know my heart, we don't know what we are and how we are except we believe what he says in his word that we are because we are what and how he says we are in his word.

He knows the thoughts and intents of the heart and therefore in his word he addresses that and then the apostle says, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." There is one God and we all will face that one God not based on what we think we are or based on who our mom or dad says that we are, or our husbands or our wives or our friends say that we are, but we're gonna stand before him based on what we really are which he knows. He knows us.

He knows us, and here is a woman would have been the same if it had been a man, but here is a woman, a sinner who stands before incarnate holiness. He's not just a good man, he's the God-man. He's infinitely, perfectly, and eternally holy. He's of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. And left to herself just like would be the case with all of us, if left to herself, she'll walk away, leave that well, go back to that city, go back to her life, and perish. Perish. She'll die in her sins. She'll go out to meet God not knowing who he is and how he is and not even knowing who she is or how she is, and it is obvious in this blindness that she sees no need of him. She's totally deceived by Satan and she is totally deceived by her own heart as to what state she is really in.

But the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners and nothing about any sinner ever takes him by surprise. As a matter of fact, I believe, I don't remember who it was but an old preacher said once that providence is the handmaid of salvation, and providence is simply God accomplishing in time all his purpose and all his will in all things but especially in the salvation of his people. Did you notice, I think it was verse 4 that it said, "He must needs go through Samaria"? That was not the fastest route. He of himself as God does not need anything but as that one who came as Jehovah's servant, whose purpose and will it was to save his people from their sins, he must be that surety and covenant head, that Savior of his people, he must needs go through Samaria, and men and women, the Lord's people throughout all the ages, they have thought that it was a twist of faith at the first, or a twist of luck or this or that or the other, or bad luck, or whatever it was, that brought them to a certain place but it was all the time God bringing them to be confronted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God who is working in them.

And though she doesn't know what her condition and state is, he does, and these words are to her, the wounds of mercy. That's what I call this message, "The Wounds of Mercy." Can you imagine how facing one that is to her a total stranger and he in just a

few words lays out her sinful life, her relationships, her failures, her sins, in just a few words and he reveals that he knows her? He says words that at the first hurt her, they pierce her, and he must do that in order to show her her true condition as a sinner. He must convince her of her sin.

There are lots of folks in this world that just walk around saying, "Well, I know I'm a sinner. Everybody's a sinner." But somebody who has found themselves to be a true sinner, that is one before God Almighty himself, one who is an eternity-bound sinner so as to confess themselves of themselves as being nothing else of themselves but sin, God does that. He sends his Gospel and it is to some people such a Gospel as to make them feel uncomfortable, it is a Gospel that does not build their self-esteem as the world would like it, it is a Gospel that breaks us down and causes us to bow before God in his holiness, and so many are offended by the Gospel. I spoke to a lady this week who came here for a while and her words to me were something like this, "The Lord led us to go somewhere else." The Lord led you away from the Gospel? Our own hearts lead us away to smoother words; to those who will brag on us; to those who will make much of us; recognize us; honor us; promote us. But not to leave the Gospel.

You see, even though she did not know it, she was absolutely lost. She was in herself condemned before God. She was headed, if left to herself, for eternal damnation. She was on that course but he must needs go through Samaria, and here she is now even his disciples, they have gone off into town to buy food so that there is no one left at this well except this woman and the Lord Jesus Christ, and my friend, you can mark this down too: that's gonna be the case with every sinner that God deals with. It's gonna be you and Christ. There will be no need to run and get a second opinion or ask momma or daddy or husband or wife or whoever it is whether or not you can believe this Gospel, whether or not Christ is everything, whether or not this is the truth or not. He's gonna convince you and he's gonna convict you of your sin, I mean, there's just no way around it, and the reason is because only a sinner needs a Savior. You don't go to a doctor if you don't need a doctor, do you? If you're not sick? You don't go and ask for help, you don't go to the bank and beg if you don't need money. You see, this is all coming out of need but we have to be first convinced of our need and nobody, not the most eloquent preacher, not the most learned person, not that person who has seemingly the most skill, they can never do that for you, I could not do that for you, but the Holy Spirit can, and if he ever saves you, that's exactly what it's gonna take.

It's gonna take a divine visitation and she, just like us, must be wounded by God before we can be healed by God. Do you understand anything about that? We see this is often the case in the natural realm in the cases of physical sickness. Sometimes we have to be wounded in order to be healed. Your wife's gonna have surgery next week, in order for that healing to take place, there first has to be a wounding, does there not? There has to be a sharp scalpel. There has to be a cut. There has to be an opening of the wound sometimes and that's the way it is in this business of conversion.

You see, a doctor oftentimes first confronts us with the bad news. "Oh, you've got cancer or you've got this or that and the other," and what does that news do to us? It just, it

causes us to just almost collapse. In other words, we're confronted with a case and a situation and a disease that makes all our other imaginary problems and such just pale away into insignificance and if you take that and multiply it a zillion times, that's the way it is when God brings us before himself by the power of his Spirit to show us that we're sinners. You see, we could be healthy all our lives and live a good life as we call it, and yet die in our sins, what will it have mattered?

He has to wound and Paul said, "If I just stood before you and I mixed a little mixture of law and grace, a little mixture of works and grace, a little salvation that's the cooperative effort between you and God, if I do that," he said, "nobody would be offended." But then the offense of the cross, the offensive message that identifies everyone that Christ dies for as sinners, as God-haters, the very natural mind being enmity against God, and yet here we are, we've told by our parents, we've been told by these religious preachers, we've been told by our own deceiving heart just what good people we are. I don't have anything for good people.

Paul said, "If Christ, if salvation would come by the works of the law, in some way by your doing or mine, Christ died in vain." And how painful it is when God strikes our heart with the reality of our desperate condition. You're not just in bad shape, you're dead in trespasses and sins. You've not got a hangnail, you've got a terminal disease. You can't take a band-aid and cure this problem or an aspirin and call somebody in the morning; apart from a miracle of God's grace, you're going to hell. That's just the way it is. You see, the Savior of sinners had more to say about the reality of hell and eternal separation from God than anybody else.

"Don't talk about hell, preacher. Don't talk all this stuff about judgment and sin. Are you trying to make me feel bad about myself?" If I did, it still wouldn't help you one bit because all you would do if I could make you feel better about yourself, you could find somebody to make you feel good about yourself and you'd still die in your sins because, "The soul that sins shall surely die."

There is a God to face and there is a death to die and there is an eternity to face. "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." You think this is a matter of take it or leave it, like it's a smorgasbord or something? You think it's a matter of a decision about whether or not you're gonna decide for Jesus or choose Jesus or accept Jesus like it's presented so oftentimes? He's talking about our obeying the Gospel.

This woman didn't even know the Gospel and she probably looked at the hypocrisy of such as the Pharisees and justified herself, "Well, I'm as good as those Pharisees are." She might have said if she was a harlot or something like that, "These religious people, they're the ones that come to me by night." But do you know what the problem is? And there's always a conflict, especially right now, there's a big conflict going on between the moral and religious part of a society and the very irreligious part of society, immorality, but the truth is both camps are going to spend eternity together in hell without Christ.

And just like a farmer who has to break up the ground in order to plant, the Spirit of God must do a violent work in us and bring us to the fear of the Lord. That's regard for God and understanding of God as to who he really is because – listen to this – the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The beginning, and that means everything before that and everything apart from that is nothing but blind, deadly stupidity. The fear of the Lord, a proper and true and genuine reverence for God and his word is the beginning of wisdom.

She had her natural prejudices. She said, "You Jews believe this," and she was about to hear the truth from the only Jew that could ever help her. She had without a doubt spiritual ignorance. Everything he says she misinterprets, just like men and women carry their Bibles but because they have no spiritual understanding, they get out of it lessons for life and examples and all that, but they don't know the Gospel. She could quote Scripture. If she lived in our day, I guarantee you she knew John 3:16, but here is the word of God that because she's dead spiritually, blind spiritually, she really does not know what he's talking about when he talks about living water, she thinks he's talking about a dipper-full from the well, and her religion, and she had it, was false.

Now I just think people in our day would think this a very unacceptable, politically incorrect kind of statement to make. Look at verse 22. He said to her, "You worship you know not what. Your Gospel is a false Gospel. Your God is not the true and living God. Your God is not the God of glory. Your Jesus is," as Paul says, "another Jesus. Your Gospel is another Gospel," as he said. "The spirit that directs you and leads you is another spirit." Isn't that scary? And we have a kind of satanic trinity of counterfeit, another Gospel, another Jesus, another spirit, but they're not the Christ. But if left to ourselves, we'll be so confident in what we think we believe and know and understand and how we are, we'll be with that crowd and stand right there in Matthew 7 before the Lord Jesus Christ and say, "Have we not prophesied in your name? Have we not cast out devils in your name? Have we not done many wonderful works?" And here what has to be the most severe, the most sad words that ever could be heard by a sinner, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Iniquity is basically inequity so that Christ is saying to them, "All these things you did, they were not equal to what I require." Ye that work iniquity.

"You worship you know not what." In Isaiah he talks about how people fashion, and he uses this basically as an example, although it is in many cases a reality where they take the wood or the stone or the gold, whatever it is, and they cast them out a god, bow down before it, and he said one is as dead as the other. But that's no different than our taking and in our minds and our thoughts or in somebody else's mind and thoughts, and coming up with a god who is not the God of this book. That's the one we have to do with. That's the one we're gonna face. I'm gonna face him. You're gonna face him.

And in order for us to be healed of this terrible disease of sin, we've first got to be wounded, we've got to be dealt with by God just like the Philippian jailer. When God sent that earthquake and that it wasn't the earthquake that brought about that conversion in him, but that was just a part of the means that God used to get his attention whereby his

Spirit would quicken this man to hear and believe what Paul and Silas were saying. I like to think God rattled his cage, as we say. That's the way it was when, I can't remember exactly who it was, but I think it was Joab maybe seeking to get Absalom's attention or someone like that, it says that he sent those foxes with their tails on fire through his corn, burned it down and when that happened, he got his attention. In order for God to save us, he's got to get our attention and I'm convinced of this: if it's his purpose to save us, he will get our attention. We just walk through this world with our hands in our pockets, kicking cans, as it were, walking down the street, whistling just like there was no problem, but when he shuts us up to this reality of what we are and our need, just like he did Saul of Tarsus going down that road to Damascus, intent to take and destroy and cast out these believers who've identified with Christ, thinking he was doing God a favor, but God stopped him and he un-horsed him and he bowed him down and in the bright light of his holiness, covered his eyes with scales, shut everything out to him except the very voice and word of Christ speaking to him, and when he got his right mind and he sought that one that God sent him to find in Damascus by the name of Ananias, who had more things to tell him, later on this is what Paul said, he said, "I was before a blasphemer. That's what I was."

Do you know when you find out what you were before in the after. You don't find it out before. I remember reading those comic books when I was a kid, on the back or inside cover they had those pictures of a muscleman by the name of Charles Atlas. If you were one of those 97 pound weaklings, you could take his course and there was a before and after. Only when you stand in Christ by his grace do you find out what you were before. Paul said, "I was before a blasphemer."

Our sins, as this woman just finds out, our sins are against God. They're against his law. They're against his face, his justice. They're against everything that is good. They're against the revelation of himself in creation. One old preacher says in quoting what Paul says about you, how he quickened who were dead, he said, "With quickening comes living sensations such as conviction of sin and guilt of conscience, the fear of God, the heart broken, the spirit of prayer, repentance unto life, in a word, all the first work of grace in the soul."

Someone says, "I don't want to go there. He doesn't ever have anything good to say about me." You know, you're not the first that said that. When the two kings, Ahab and Jehoshaphat, were trying to come to a conclusion and a direction on whether to go up to Ramoth-gilead and fight or not, Jehoshaphat said, "Well, let's get the, let's call the prophet of God." And Ahab said, "Oh no. I don't want to call him because he doesn't ever have anything good to say about me." Did you know no Gospel preacher can ever have anything good to say about you in yourself? If I tell the truth, if I say what God says in your person, in yourself, I can never say anything good about you, and what's worse than that, I could never say anything good about myself. He says, "There's none good, no not one. There's none that doeth good. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." But why would we want to, as we do in our blindness, why would we want to leave the one ground upon which he's promised himself to bless us? To save us? Why do we try to renounce sinner-hood when that's the only candidate there is for salvation?

He says this, "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand." Now that's a plain broad statement of divine sovereignty right there, "I kill and I make alive. I wound and I heal. That's the way it is. We'll have to say with Eli, "Whatever it is, it is the Lord. Let him do what seemeth him good." But this is the same way, same thing that's true in spiritual things. God in his sovereignty acts in mercy and grace to those people he purposed to save that he chose in Christ and gave to Christ, and he comes to them, he kills them that he might make them alive. He wounds them that he might heal them.

These words were hard, I expect, to this woman. This whole concept that a man standing here before you especially a Jew, he's the Christ? He's the Savior? But she had to know and there wasn't anybody that could deliver her out of his hand. That's the wonderful thing about it. Somebody says, "Well, God won't save you against your will. God won't do this against your decision or your free will." That's baloney. That's foolishness because that would be a Savior and that would be a salvation that did not recognize and truly save us from all the entirety of our condition. That would be like saying here's a blind man, he's about to step out in front of that 18 wheel truck, and I wish him well. I love him. I hope he makes it. I've provided a u-turn for him. That wouldn't be recognized in his condition, would it? No, if you save him, you're gonna have to go and to his surprise, really, take hold of him and snatch him out of the way of that truck. That's what God has to do to us. As a matter of fact, rather than being near and saving those who describe themselves as good people and Christian people and all that, he says that he has a mind to those who are of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. You see, Christ alone knows us and therefore alone is able to show us ourselves and what we are. He alone can show us the way of life.

She was an adulterer, a fornicator, but she was more than that, she was moreso a spiritual adulterer and fornicator. That's something that really strikes to the core too, doesn't it? But our Lord looked at those Pharisees, he said, "You're just like a grave full of dead men's bones. You're all painted up on the outside but on the inside you're nothing but a bunch of dead dry bones." And they looked at him and they said, "Well." You see, even his disciples were surprised that he's talking to a Samaritan woman in daylight by a well. That just didn't happen. And when you look down that people, that as we say, that class of people that we find our Lord meeting with, talking with, eating with, they said, "He's gone to the house of a man that's a sinner." And they issued what I call the blessed indictment against him. They said, "He's a friend of publicans and sinners." They rolled it off their lips with a touch of contempt but that's a wonderful thing.

You see, she was this, she had her false religion, she had her self-righteousness, she didn't mind responding back to the Lord of glory with a defense, and that's what we all are apart from his grace and his mercy. But you see, it's the bad news that makes for the good news and that is that Christ is merciful to sinners; that he saves sinners; that he died, as he says, for the ungodly; that he came to seek and to save that which was lost. The true Jesus is described by the angel when he says of Mary, "And she shall bring forth a son and thou

shalt call his name Jesus." Do you know what the name Jesus means? It means Jehovah's Savior or Jehovah, the Savior. It's bound up with his humanity but also with his Savior-hood.

"Thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins." If you're not a sinner, he didn't come to save you. I don't have any good news for you because his death is a death for sin. The price he pays is the wages of sin which is death. And Christ saves from sins but if we do not see and are not convicted and convinced of our sin, we will see no need of him and therefore will not seek mercy.

So how does he do it? Well, he does it through the preaching of the cross. Now I could go to the book of Proverbs and pick you out a bunch of good moral lessons but did you know that the cross is in the book of Proverbs if God will enable us to see it, and every other book? Paul said, "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." Some say, "Well, we just preach a person." Well, men will perish if you do. We preach Christ crucified. We preach the Lord Jesus Christ who is distinguished as the Savior of sinners, the successful Savior of sinners based on a work that he accomplished because if you look at the cross, that's the only place that we're ever really enabled to see what sin is.

Do you want to know what sin is? It is such that when the Lord of glory at the hand of the Father in harmony with the Triune Godhead, all the persons together, determined not to impute the sins of their people to them, and he stood as the surety then, being the one who guaranteed everything necessary to save them which was what, central to that? Coming into this world in human flesh and bearing the responsibility of their sins on that cross. He's not dying for his sins, he's not dying because he's a sinner, he's dying because he's the Savior of sinners, because the Lord in not imputing their sins to them, did on the other hand impute them to the Lord Jesus Christ. "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," Isaiah said. And he dies. He's been looked at by the Father, just read the one who's described as wisdom in the book of Proverb that was with him from the beginning, had the favor of the Father always, the eternal Son of God, but now here he is on the cross and the Father turns away and he says, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Because charged to his account and dying there under the hand of inflexible justice is the substitute, the substitute for sinners. But if the Lord ever opens our eyes to see the awfulness of sin, of our sin through the dying of our Lord Jesus Christ, he will at the same time cause us to see the glory and the grace and the love and the mercy of Christ in that same cross because there is sin but there is salvation from sin.

Well, our Lord says, "You know not what you worship," but we do, "and the hour comes and now is," what a wonderful ushering in that is, "there comes and now is when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth for the Father seeketh such to worship him." That's what Christ is doing there on that occasion, he's seeking her. If you're one of his children, he'll seek you. It may not be how you think, it certainly won't be the way you think, but he said, "Other sheep have I that are not of this fold, them also I must bring."

What are you doing on this roundabout delaying detour there in Sychar of all places? He's in search of a sinner. He's gonna heal her. He's gonna heal her from that dread disease of sin but he first has to wound her, but his words, his work in her is a wound of mercy. He calls her to thirst and also to drink of himself as living water. It's odd just a little bit, isn't it, that what the name of this well was? Jacob's well. The notorious sinner whose name meant conniver and supplanter and liar and everything else. The one character in this book that I really can identify with and God says he's the God of Jacob. And one day I sat here and sat there and read this chapter and I came to those words where it says in verse 6, "Now Jacob's well was there," and I thought, "Hallelujah, amen, he sure was!" And here's a sinner like Jacob who's brought to drink of that living water so as to never thirst again.

May God in mercy wound us that he might heal us of our great sin. May he kill us of every other hope. May he expose our unbelief, our self-righteousness, our false profession, all these things and give us hope in Christ. If he wounds us, it'll be a wound of mercy. If he wounds us, he won't damn us. If he kills us of all human strength, he'll make us alive in Christ. That's what I pray for most these days, is for the Holy Spirit to do that work that I cannot do, that these cannot do for yourselves, but he can.

Father, we pray this day that you would by your Spirit work in each heart to reveal to us the truth of what we are and our great need. Break our hearts. Give us that contrite spirit. Cause us to bow before the throne of your grace as beggars for mercy and heal us. Give us to drink of that soul-satisfying water, the Lord Jesus Christ, as all our salvation, peace with you, perfect righteousness and we will praise you, we'll say as this woman, "Is not this the Christ?" We'll tell others, "Come see a man that told me all that ever I did and was." This is the Christ and we pray in his name. Amen.