

#1925—November 16, 2008—“Woman at the Well”—2

[Gauger:] When it comes to sharing our faith verbally, most of us have plenty of excuses. I don't know what's on your list. Maybe it's something like mine. But the fact of the matter is, sharing about Jesus verbally is a form of worshiping Him. We'll talk about it next. Welcome to *Moody Presents*, the weekly half-hour teaching ministry of Dr. Michael Easley, president emeritus of the Moody Bible Institute. You've joined us for a study in John's gospel. We're in the middle of the fourth chapter, speaking today on the subject of the woman at the well but also this whole aspect of worship. Let's join Michael now for a message first heard at Immanuel Bible Church near Washington, DC.

[Easley:] In Romans 1:25 Paul says,

In Romans 1:25 Paul says, “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie.” What is Jesus saying? “Worship in spirit and truth.” “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.” To me, one of the funniest passages in all the Bible is Isaiah, where the guy takes a hunk of wood, cuts it in half, burns one to warm himself, and the other he makes into an idol and worships. I think it's the funniest story in the Bible. I mean, the one half is to warm his side, if you will, and the other it's “I'm going to worship it and bow down to it.” I mean, how ludicrous.

Anything you've buried in your backyard lately? You got any compost or any old dead bushes you've kind of hidden in the back? Would you pull that thing out and bow down to it and worship it? Isn't it kind of ludicrous? We burn the ashes from the charcoal grill. Make a little image of a charcoal thing and worship it. Would you? But that's what the prophet is saying. And Paul says that because we exchange God's truth for anything else it's a lie, and it's worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. It's a wonderful kin to the passage. God wants worshipers who come to the Father in the spiritual arena, in the truth the way God wants to worship.

Put another way, if we say we have to worship God in this way, we're saying, “My way is the way to worship God,” and that's false worship. So if you say, “Well, I don't feel like I worship unless ...” what you've just said is, “My way is the way to worship.” Right? Because we're worshiping in spirit and truth. Worship doesn't just happen here the twenty or thirty minutes before I get up to talk at you. Worship stopped the minute I stood up here, right? For some of you, that's the way you feel. That's okay—you can feel that way. I'll pray for you. You can feel that way. Worship is not an appointment at ten o'clock on Sunday at Braddock and Backlick. This is an extension of corporate worship. We come together because we hold the name of Jesus Christ high, and He is the One who is deserving and requires our worship. But this is not the only worship. Worship is an attitude and a posture of spiritual realm, and it's in truth the way God demands worship, not the way we want to worship Him.

Jesus Christ is going to come and reveal all these things to you, to me, and immediately to the woman at the well, verses 25ff. “The woman said to Him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am, I who speak to you am.’” The Jews looked for Messiah. The Samaritan looks for *Taheb*. Jesus says, “I'm the One who's come up on the scene.” Jesus is going to reveal Himself to this woman of Samaria.

Why not Nicodemus? Why does the Jewish Messiah reveal Himself to a Samaritan woman? Lots of reasons. To me most obvious: He is available to any person, any person of any background, of any ethnicity. He is not available only to the Jew.

What has Jesus done so far? At least we can say He's pointed out her sin. He's offered her a solution to her sin—salvation. He's used the metaphor of living water. And He said, "I'm the One." I wonder what Nicodemus' response would have been if He had said, "I'm the One." It may have been a very different discourse, but the Messiah is always deliberate.

Now, as we read the story, the disciples return. In verse 27, at this point they come, and they're amazed that He's been speaking with a woman, yet no one said to Him, "What are You doing" or "Why are You talking to her?"

"So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city." Stop for a moment there. The disciples come back. It breaks the conversation. She sees an opportunity to go tell some people about this. The disciples are amazed; they're astonished! He has broken social convention. Rabbis don't talk to women, and rabbis do not talk to Samaritan women. "You don't do this, Lord." But John is so wonderful. He says, "No one said anything to Him." He's the Master, after all.

The woman is so taken that she leaves her waterpot, verse 28, and she runs into town. Now, much is made of what the waterpot symbolically means. I won't go there. You can use your own sanctified imagination. I think it's simply that she's so excited and overtaken that it doesn't really matter. She's going to go into town and talk about what's happened, and that's exactly what she does, verse 28. She said to the men, verse 29, "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" They went out of the city, and were coming to Him."

Let's just think a little bit—sanctified imagination—of this woman's dubious past: five husbands, and living with a man in immortality. Let's just assume that a couple of those husbands are divorced and still alive. And let's just assume that that guy she's living with heard this report. Would you be a little curious about what He told her about her? I mean, would you ... If a woman came and says, "Look, there's a guy that knows everything me. Come and see Him," would that kind of worry you if you were one of those guys in her life? Just a little maybe?

Well, even if that's imagination, the whole town comes out. "He knows everything about me." It's hyperbole. It's an exaggeration, but "He knows some things about me that no one would know" is what she's saying. "He knows some things of my soul that no one knows. He told me about myself. Come and see. Could this be the prophet, the Messiah, the One we're waiting for?"

Now, step back again. Could Jesus Christ have sent a better witness into Samaria? What an unlikely person, but what a perfect person, right? A throwaway woman at the well. No, a woman like everyone who needs redemption, who needs justification, who needs to know Jesus Christ. Talk about an effective issue, for this gal to go into town and say, "You've got to come see!"

Now, the interruption, of course, brings the conversation back to the beginning of the story. They left Jesus by the well. They went to get food. Now they've come back—that's the interruption, verse 27. Pick up the story in verse 31. "Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat.' But He said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples were saying to one another, 'No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?'"

Now, don't think the disciples to be dull-witted here. I mean, it's not necessary to be hard on them. What is happening is, they've gone on a mission to find some food that they all can eat, they've come back, they've found Him breaking social custom, and now He says He's not hungry. So they would have alarm and concern. "Eat Rabbi—You need to eat." And then He says this cryptic thing: "I got food that you don't know about." What? Did somebody pack Him a

lunch that we missed? Peter, did you slip Him something before we left? What happened here? Jesus Christ is going to reveal to these men some profound and precious words.

Verse 34: “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, “There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest”? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.’” I think what’s happening here is that she’s gone into town, got them all excited, they’re coming out, He’s talking to the disciples, and about the time He says that He’s looking up and saying, “Look at the fields. They’re ready for harvest.” And the disciples crane their necks, and all these people are coming out of Sychar. Wow, look at all these people. Where they coming from?

Verse 36: “Already he who reaps is receiving wages”—that means he’s employed currently—“and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.” Jesus Christ has to be going back to Amos 9:13: “Behold, days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows seed.’” Harvest and planting and sowing are all *lingua franca*. You till, you sow, you wait, you harvest, you till, you sow—it was all *lingua franca*. What Amos is saying in the prophecy of God is that that time is going to be compressed so that the reapers are going to meet the sowers. It’s going to be such an abundant time of harvest that you will be planting seeds on the left and harvesting on the right—unheard of. “You look with a certain expectation of time that these events happen. I tell you that there’s a time coming when all that’s going to go away because there will be a harvest as a result of watering, reaping, sowing, tilling, harvesting that’ll all happen together in this economy”—the miracle of unceasing bounty and prosperity in Jesus Christ’s hands.

Well, many people believe that He is the Savior of the world. Verses 39ff.:

From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all the things that I have done.” So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. Many more believed because of His word; and 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.”

In verse 29 she said, “Come and see,” and they came and they saw. First they started believing because of the insight and the miracle, if you will, of what Jesus saw in the woman. But now they believe because of hearing Jesus Christ’s words—a very important point.

The book *The Silence of Adam* by Crabb, Hudson, and Andrews: “The single most important truth about people is the truth most easily ignored: that we bear the image of God. As image-bearers, we are called to tell his story with our lives, not to tell our stories with his resources.” There is a fine line between telling our story for our sake and telling our story for His sake. Now they are believing because of what they hear about Jesus Christ.

Well, there are so many lessons that I will not do justice. Maybe I will get you going. Lesson, first of all, number one: Jesus’ most important food is doing His Father’s work. Those words don’t seem to go together, but that’s the way Jesus describes it. Jesus’ most important food is doing His Father’s work. When it comes to food, probably in this room there are very few of us—there are some, but there are very few of us—who would deny ourselves food. I will hardly resist a meal when it’s put in front of me. I will hardly resist the biblical admonition to *buffet* my body

and make it my slave. There are very few foods I've met that I don't like, and when I don't like them I can eat them anyway. I mean, I just don't have any problem turning my appetites away. It's something that comes naturally for most of us. When I'm hungry, my belly craves. Scripture reminds me that my god can be my appetite.

So we think about the big picture of this hunger going on here. Jesus is hungry, He's thirsty, and He's tired. The disciples went to get food. When they bring in the food, He says, "I'm not hungry. I've got food that you don't know about."

Now, technically Jesus is the One who's done the work, but He's inviting the disciples to join Him in the work. To put it another way, if we were to have exquisite food, catered and home-cooked, what would you eat? And nobody was watching. Would you just camp out at the chocolates and stuff them in your pocket, in your pouch, in your purse, and in your mouth, and be happy as can be? Or would you be like me over at the salty area eating chips and hot sauce until you're content? What would you just pork out on if you could just do it without any fear of incrimination? We're all food cops when someone else is eating, but we're all remarkably consistent in our inconsistencies with food, except for the 2 percent of you who are really good at being legalistic, and God bless you. That's a joke. Don't get upset. Don't send me letters.

If Jesus Christ showed up at Immanuel Bible Church with a plate in His hand, what would He put on the plate? He says, "I've got food you don't know a thing about." He goes back to two passages in the Old Testament. He goes back to Deuteronomy, where it says that man lives on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord, and He quotes it two times in the temptation accounts: Luke 4:4; Matthew 4:4. "I've got food that you don't know about: everything from the Father's hand. The Word of God is My food, and I can't wait to do the work of God with My appetite, with My hunger."

Now, I don't mean to put this as an example, but it helps me a little to understand what Jesus means here. A few weeks ago I had spoken nine times in the course of two and one-half days. During that schedule and pace you don't get a lot of good meals. You don't eat well. You don't sleep well. You're in a different bed, different place, all that stuff. Sunday afternoon I'm sort of [funny sound effect]. I mean, I can't think straight, walk straight. I can't even decide if I'm hungry or not. I am so tired and exhausted Sunday afternoon that I just want to kind of go be fetal and suck my thumb. I mean, I am really a spent puppy. That afternoon this couple came to see me, and they wanted to talk. They were living together. They weren't married. And we had a conversation. Please hear me well, but there was food there. I could have talked to them all night, because they were at a place in their spiritual journey and they were so confused. And they're living together, and he's trying to justify it, and she's feeling guilty about it, and it was a remarkable conversation.

I backed up and said, "Let me ask you a question. Forget this sexual stuff for a minute. Where are you in your relationship with Jesus Christ?" They kind of looked at me, and the woman said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, tell me about your spiritual life. You know, yesterday afternoon we talked about the spiritual life and what that means to know Christ." And she says, "Do you mean, how often do we go to church?" Religion got in the way.

Now, I wish I could tell you that both came to Christ and it's all a happy ending. It's not. They're still living away from God. But there was a sense in which—and many of you know what I mean—you would have stayed there all night talking to them, because they were asking the right questions. They were hurting. They're confused. They're living away from God, and yet they're asking the right questions.

Jesus Christ—picture it here—says, “Look, guys, I’ve got food you don’t know of.” Have you ever been that hungry for God’s Word, that no other craving would pull you away from doing God’s work? Have you ever been that hungry? Some of you have, and God bless you. And some of us just keep filling our appetites with religious activities.

Secondly, Jesus has a mission in bringing in the harvest of worshipers. This is the first of more than twenty times in the gospel of John, verse 34, where He was sent. He says, “I was sent.” Remember in John 3:16 God gave. No, here He sent. And Jesus will talk about this many times.

Now, one of the things I love about Immanuel and the military community here are the men and women—mostly the men whom I interface with—who are on a mission. I mean, they’re on a mission. I’ve learned that when you have a meeting with military people, you have a briefing. And if you don’t, they don’t give you the time of day. And it had better be brief—that’s another thing I’ve learned. And it better be to the point. And I’ve interfaced and I’ve gone and done things with a number of you. You know, I appreciate that. I have learned a lot from that experience. You use *mission*, and *objective*, and *strategy*, and *strategic*, and all this goals-and-planning language. The corporate world does too.

I have friends and I love to go see them in their corporate setting, and a lot of times you’ll see their mission on the wall in every office. “This is our agency’s mission. This is our vision. These are our objectives.” That language comes into the church as well. “What’s the mission of the church?” I’m asked that question an awful lot at Immanuel. What’s our mission?

Well, let me give you Jesus Christ’s answer in verse 34. “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.” Jesus Christ says, “My sustenance, the thing that sustains me, is to do my Father’s work.” That’s the mission: to do the Father’s work, not my work. Not “Here’s my want list. Here’s the Lance candy machine. Come on, dispense to me, God.” No, no, it’s what You want! It’s Your work! No greater food than to know that God is using you.

Do you have a mission in your life? Beyond family, children, college funds, retirement, where you’re going to live, managing your investments, if you get the nod, if you don’t get the nod, whether you go back to work, whether you change careers, whether you have more children, whether you adopt children, whether you get married, whether you stay single, is there any mission in your soul beyond the dailiness of this life? Jesus Christ had a mission.

Thirdly, Jesus did not have a prejudiced bone in His incarnate body. He breached a major social custom by talking to this woman, one that you and I probably can’t quite get our arms around. This was a huge faux pas for Him to talk to a Samaritan woman. What a day we live in when so-called believers in Jesus Christ can hide under a racist agenda of any kind. It’s an easy target to talk about Aryan Nation-type groups, but it’s just as insidious in some churches across this country that bear the name Christ in their title. And Jesus here teaches us a lot. He’s talking to a woman. That broke social custom. He’s talking to a *Samaritan* woman. He’s talking to an *immoral* Samaritan woman. And He’s the One who tells her, “I AM.” Isn’t Jesus cool? Isn’t He just wonderfully awesome? Isn’t He amazing?

I’ve met families here from Afghanistan, from the Philippines, from Nigeria recently. I’ve met families from Chad. I’ve met families from many different Korean areas, Africa ... We have African-Americans. We have all kinds of wonderful mix here. And I hope, and I pray ... And it is not just words, hope and pray. I really literally pray that God will continue to use this church to be a multicultural complexion of our community where we are. I think we should be. When I look

at the choir and I see a spattering of not all whites, a spattering of a few other faces, I'm thrilled, and I wish there were more. I wish our elder council reflected more in the context in which we minister. As we find godly men who qualify not on a ratio-type way—forget that stuff—but godly men who love Jesus Christ and have a heart for their people group in a primarily white church, you know, that's wonderful. I have nothing against a homogeneous group—an African-American church or a Korean church. Those are fine and wonderful, and I don't think it's right or wrong. I think Immanuel is poised to embrace a broader ethnic group, and I hope you feel comfortable when you are not a white couple, a white individual. I hope we do that. I know we have prejudice; everybody does.

The challenge as a pastor is to exhort all of us, don't see the world through white glasses. Don't see the world through African-American glasses. Don't see the world through Korean glasses or Japanese glasses or Philippine glasses. Don't see the world through your lens only. See the world like Jesus did: ready for harvest. Look at them coming. Look at all those unclean, despicable Samaritans coming out to talk to Me. It's ripe for harvest. They need Jesus Christ. All of us need Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter what ... You know, we teach our children, "Red and yellow, black, and white, they are precious in His sight." Look at the language. "They are precious in His sight." He saw them. The Lord was moved with compassion when He saw the multitudes, like sheep without shepherds, right? He had compassion on people. We teach them "Red and yellow, black, and white," but do we believe it? Or we just teach it to our little children. "Don't be prejudiced. Grow up and be nice. Jesus loves everybody." And then we have this edge, this way of doing things. God help you. Beg God to break your heart for any prejudicial bone in your body.

Fourth and last, what does God want? From this passage I conclude two things. He wants worshipers. God's on a mission to get people to worship Him. How interesting that the God of the universe wants people to worship Him. In today's language, that's intolerable. "He wants me to worship Him? You've got to be kidding." That's what we've come to, isn't it? Jesus Christ tells us in this passage, verse 23, "Such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers."

The second thing I draw from this passage is that He wants you and me to be involved in His work. He compresses a lot of prophetic history in sowing and reaping and harvest in that passage. He pulls a lot of things together that we don't have time to look at. But what He does say is, "You are going to enjoy some of the benefits of other's people, work and I want you to get in the work." That's what He tells His disciples.

So here's the big story of this passage: Jesus Christ starts with thirst, His own and a woman's, an unquenchable thirst that all men and women have. Food becomes an issue, because you can't just live on water; you've got to have substance. Food becomes a discourse, and He says, "I've got food you don't know about." He offered living water; He offers food, which is the work of God.

In the spiritual realm you and I are sustained by a relationship with Christ that is a well coming up and flowing out of us, the Holy Spirit. And we are sustained by food, by His work. If you do His work, you'll never be hungry. You'll never search for a meaning in life. You won't wonder if you did the right thing with your career. If you serve Jesus Christ and you work in His labor, in His vineyard, in His crop, in His harvest, you will never lose. You will never lose. God seeks true worshipers, not false ones; in spirit, not in the horizontal realm; in truth, not in my system. He seeks true worshipers to come and help Him get more worshipers, because the harvest is ready. Will you come? Will you help?

[Gauger:] Dr. Michael Easley leading us in a study today of John's gospel, the fourth chapter. Of course, that series continues next week. Meanwhile, just know that you can hear it all again. Every *Moody Presents* message we post on our Web site, [moodypresents.mbn.org](http://moodypresents.mbn.org), where you'll also find MP3s, podcasting, printed transcripts, and much more. [Moodypresents.mbn.org](http://Moodypresents.mbn.org). Hey, if you like what you hear, why not tell a friend about *Moody Presents*, from the Moody Bible Institute?