

“YOUR DESIRES DETERMINE YOUR PRIORITIES”

John 4:1-42

This morning we are looking at the scripture passage where Jesus has an encounter with a Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob. Now there are many directions a preacher can take with this passage- one could preach on worship; or on reconciliation between Jews and Samaritans who had great hatred for one another; or on Jesus being the “living water”; one could preach on conversion; why, one could talk about divorce or a person living with someone to whom they are not married to or one could talk about forgiveness. There are a host of sermons that could be preached from these 42 verses of John 4. Today we are going to focus on Priorities, but before we do I want to highlight the priority of John’s message- if you have your Bibles, please open to John 20:31 where we find the primary purpose of this Gospel, for it says, “But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

And if you look at the first half of John's Gospel where our passage is found, you will notice that there are seven miracles of Jesus listed, although John is very much aware that Jesus has preformed many others as well (20:30).

There is a common thread that you will read in the first half of John and that is Jesus' evangelistic ministry, for it says in John 3:22, "After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside and he spent some time there with them and baptized." Jesus was bringing people to Himself and we read in our passage in John 4:1 that, "Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John," only proving that His popularity is on the rise.

So let's look at our passage and look to the window that focuses on, "Your Desires Determine Your Priorities."

First, **what the woman most wanted.** As we get in touch with Jesus method of evangelism, notice how he started with something he and the woman held in common and then how he focused on what she needed. They held in common their need for water and Jesus met her at this

beginning point. He then caught her attention when, after connecting with the topic of water, Jesus said in verse 10, "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." Jesus is telling her that He was not who He appeared to be and that He had something more valuable to give her than water, and it was free. Maybe she begins to think that this man is trying to trick her or cheat her, and besides, how could He be greater than the patriarch Jacob? Look down to verse 15- it is clear by her response, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never thirst or have to keep coming here to draw water" that she doesn't understand what in the world He is talking about. All she was concerned about was not having to come to this well to draw water. That being said, all she can think about is her desire for water and rest.

Look to verse 16- "Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.'" Jesus now takes the conversation in a totally new direction as He

tries to help her see she has a greater need than water and rest. Talk about getting someone's attention. Jesus is now going to go deeper with this woman and she is shocked that He knows all about her marital status. She says in verse 17-"I have no husband" and Jesus commends her for telling the truth but takes it one step further when He says in the second part of verse 17 and then 18, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" Now let me ask you, if you were a woman, and not to let us guys off the hook, if you were a guy, and a total stranger began to tell you about your past marital experiences and/or your current living arrangements, male or female, would you have stayed around and continued your conversation with a complete stranger? But she does, maybe because she realizes there is something special with this man for she says to Jesus in verse 19, "sir, I see that you are a prophet." OK- now she thinks the conversation could shift to a theological discussion since maybe He is a

prophet. Good move on her part to change the subject from sex to theology. But Jesus tells her in verse 20 that the real issue is not **where** people worship God in the past but **how** they will worship Him in the future, for Jesus tells her in verse 23, "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

Jesus was trying to tell her that there is more to life, more to reality than the physical-food and water, there is a spiritual reality and, by the way, worship is a spiritual act. You can see her trying to get on the same page as Jesus, in the spiritual sense, when she says in verse 25, "I know that Messiah is coming," but she still doesn't get it, yet. For it was only right before the disciples returned that Jesus tells her who He is, verse 26, "I am he [in other words, Messiah], the one who speaking to you" that she begins to realize that this is not your run-of-the-mill prophet but someone extra special. Now catch this, this woman, who lived on a non-spiritual and physical level, get's it as she gets in touch with the spiritual side of life.

So what does she do? Look at verse 28 for we read, "Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city." **Her change in desires changed her priorities** – she came for water but left her jar to do the out-of-the-ordinary for her. She came for what she wanted- water, and left doing what God wanted- being a missionary to her own people for she left her water jar, went back to the city and said to the people who despised- remember her marital issues and her current living arrangements, she said to the people in the city in verse 29, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" Her new desires changed her priorities. But there is another group we need to address.

Second, **what the disciples most wanted.** These guys are men after my own heart. The woman was most concerned about water and the disciples were most concerned about food. Verse 8 tells us, "His disciples had gone to the city to buy food." Notice when they return and they find Jesus, a man, who is a Rabbi, talking to a woman- which was a NO, NO back

in those days for a Rabbi was forbidden to greet a woman in public. As a matter of fact, a Rabbi might not even speak to his own wife or daughter or sister in public. And not only that, she was a woman with a bad reputation and no decent man would be seen in her company or even speak to her—that is, except Jesus. So the disciples sort of look past this woman who is speaking to Jesus, even though they were taken back and wanted to question Him, but they don't. For we read in verse 31 that they are more concerned with their, and His stomach and they encourage Jesus to eat. But Jesus is not interested in food and so Jesus moves His discussion with them from the physical to the spiritual. Jesus says in verse 32, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." Jesus wants to reshape their worldview to be more biblical. They were concerned with feeding the physical body and Jesus was concerned about feeding people spiritually and granting them eternal life. But there is still someone else who had a need. Let me continue.

Third, **what Jesus most wanted.** In verse 36 we read where Jesus refers to Himself as the Reaper or the Harvester. But it went beyond Jesus, for the disciples would also become reapers. Verse 37 speaks of one sowing and one reaping- both being important to bringing people to the Lord. And the purpose of the disciples' calling is reaping believers for Jesus. Jesus' priorities were harvest priorities and when you think about it, the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist had done the sowing, and now Jesus and His disciples were reaping. And His Father's desires fashioned and shaped Jesus' priorities.

Do you believe **our comfort determines our sacrifice?** It is true, that the value and importance we put on our comfort will determine our willingness to sacrifice. I mean look at Jesus ministry and life- He never put His comfort above His mission. He was willing to make sacrifices based on accomplishing His mission. And so for us, how we see our desires will ultimately determine our priorities.

But let me ask this question: do you ever think we, in the church, ever place our will or our priorities above God's? I know, I know we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done" but then we might go right out and say we want it my way or our way. That is why it is so important to seek God's will, which isn't always easy to do, but nonetheless, essential. Putting our desires, our wishes, what we want secondary to God's desires is crucial, not only individually but corporately as a church and it might mean changing our mindset and the way we do things.

Jesus was serious about reaching the lost. He wasn't in the business of maintaining the status-quo. This brings me to this crucial point- Maintenance verses Mission. If our church, if any church, is going to be serious about reaching out to those who do not know Christ, then we cannot put maintenance over mission. Too many churches today are in a maintenance, survival mode. Recently, as part of my work for Eastminster Presbytery, I, along with two others engaged in a Triennial Visit at a church.

And one of the Elders shared quite openly that their church was in a survival mode. And many times when you are in a survival mode all you are trying to do is maintain, as best you can. Now maintaining the institution and maintenance for the day-to-day operations and issues of the church is important. But when this becomes the primary goal rather than the way to reach the goal, then the church is out of balance. Mission involves going and being sent.

There are too many churches which are locked into **an Old Testament type of mission**. When you read the Old Testament you find that Israel was to be the light to all the nations and the people of the world were to "come" to Israel to find God and His presence amongst His people. But there is a dramatic change in the **New Testament type of mission**, because in the New Testament, God's people are to "GO"- God sent Jesus, the Messiah to the people, and God sends His people on a mission to seek out and to save the lost. That is why Jesus said, "As the Father sent me, so

I send you.” It is a balancing act, and maintenance is important but it is not the main goal- Mission is, and reaching a lost world for Christ.

I’ve said it before and I will say it again, America is the third largest mission field in the world and other countries are sending missionaries to us, when years ago we were the leader in sending our missionaries to other places. The mission field is right out there- in our community, in our neighborhoods, in this nation. Let me share with you these telling statistics:

In surveys given to church people **32% say “mission” is a word describing the work of the New Testament apostles, demonstrated today when Christians share the love of Jesus with one another.**

Folks, this is a worldview that emphasizes maintaining the comfortable institution over-and-against having a church that is a mission center. And this is why, are you ready for this... 60-80% of the churches in the United States have plateaued or are declining. Maintenance has taken the lead instead of mission. What did Jesus say in John 3:16? “For God so loved the

CHURCH that He gave His only Son?" No, "For God so loved the world."

And so what is the mission of the church? It is the world, not the church.

And that is why Jesus met the woman at the well where she was. He desired to deal with her spiritual side, even though He began with the physical, the issue of water, and through the encounter, she found the water of life, Jesus Christ.

So what are we called to do? To reach out, to prepare ourselves, prepare our church to be more effective in our purpose- to make disciples of all people. Friends, the world has changed, we are no longer, using the words of the *Wizard of Oz*, living in Kansas. We need to make the appropriate adjustments as a church and as individuals to reach out to a hurting world and not think that they will be lining up at our church's doorstep knocking down the doors trying to come in. What about our priorities? Are we chasing our tail repeatedly caught in a maintenance mode or are we focusing on God's mission to the world? God's desires must be

our desires. Take some time and pray about this. It just might reveal some priorities we don't like, and yet God is about changing worldviews. He desperately wants His desires to be our desires and His priorities our priorities. Looking through Godly lenses will help us never get out of balance. Amen.

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John 4:1-42

Introduction: The primary purpose of John's Gospel- John 20:31

The first half of John's Gospel- Jesus' evangelistic ministry

First, **what the _____ most wanted**

They held in common their need for _____ vs.10

Vs. 16- the conversation goes in a totally new direction

Jesus is telling her there is more to life than the physical, there is a spiritual reality

Vs. 28- **Her change in desires changed her priorities**

Second, **what the _____ most wanted**

The woman's concern was for _____; the disciples' concern was for _____

Jesus... moves the discussion from physical to spiritual vs. 32

Third, **what _____ most wanted** vs. 36-37

Jesus' priorities were _____ priorities

Do you believe our comfort determines our _____?

A crucial point- Maintenance vs. Mission

Churches locked into an Old Testament type of mission

The New Testament type of mission

America- the 3rd largest mission field in the world

____% say "mission" is a word describing the work of the New Testament apostles, demonstrated today when Christians share the love of Jesus with one another

What are we called to do?

What about our priorities?

Conclusion: God desperately wants His desires to be our desires and His priorities our priorities. Looking through Godly lenses will help us never get out of balance