

2 Corinthians Chapter 4 (B)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 April 2017

Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0:00] So, John chapter 4, beginning at verse 27, that's page 1067 in the Church Bible. Just then, his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman.

But no one asked, what do you want? Or, why are you talking with her? Then leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, come, see a man who told me everything I've ever done. Could this be the Messiah?

They came out of the town and made their way towards him. Meanwhile, his disciples urged him, Rabbi, eat something. But he said to them, I have food to eat that you know nothing about.

And his disciples said to each other, could someone have brought him food? My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

Don't you have a saying? It's still four months until harvest. I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest. Even now, the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life.

[1:17] So that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying, one sows and another reaps, is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.

Many of the Samaritans from the town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. He told me everything I've ever done. So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them.

And he stayed two days. And because of his words, many more became believers. They said to the woman, we no longer believe just because of what you said. Now we have heard for ourselves.

And we know that this man really is the saviour of the world. We thank God for his faithful, wonderful word. If you'd like to have that portion of God's word, John in chapter 4, open in your Bibles before you.

That will be a help as we look together at these events. I want you to cast your mind back. For some of you, quite a long way. Some of you not so far.

[2:24] To your school sports day. And particularly your sports day at school in primary school. When you get to secondary school, it gets a bit more serious.

And you have to do all these sort of athletic type things. But in the primary school, you get all sorts of fun games. And one of the popular ones when I was at primary school was the three-legged race.

And I'm sure you remember it very well. It's when you have one of your ankles strapped to the ankle of another child. And together you race and sprint to the finishing line against the other children who also have their legs tied together, one to another.

Whenever I took part in that race, I never won. And it was always the other boy who was holding me back. I was doing really well and running fast. But he kept slowing me down and dragging me down and tripping me up.

And I never seemed to win. I think that for many of us, our lives are something like a three-legged race. But it's not that there's another person who is holding us back.

[3:36] It is ourselves. Or rather, our old self. Our past self. What do I mean by that? Well, we find it hard to move forward to be the person that we believe God has saved us to be, to be the person that we have all the potential to be because of what has happened to us in our past.

It's a weight around our legs, a heavy weight which keeps us from moving forward, from running the race set before us, from being the people that the Lord Jesus Christ wants us to be.

And for each one of us, that weight, that past, is something very different. For some of us, we may even go so far back as our childhood, to our parents.

It may be that their failures, their attitudes, even perhaps their abuse, still hangs around us as a weight holding us back.

For others, it might be a specific event while we were young, a bereavement of a parent or someone very dear to us, a painful remembrance of bullying and oppression, maybe even some act of violence.

[4 : 53] It's a weight and it's still there. And once we got out into the open world and into adulthood, we can trace a pattern of actions that still haunt us, perhaps broken hearts as one relationship after another fails to provide the security we hoped it would.

The scars of our own sinful or selfish acts are still unhealed and visible, at least, to us. And so we can add large and small disabling events in our past.

Words even, actions, mistakes, missed opportunities. A world in which there is a procession of, if only I hadn't.

And I wish it could be different. The reality is that for all of us, we are shaped by our past. But how does God view us?

Does he view us and our past in the same way? Does he consider us disabled by the things that have happened to us? Do we believe that we are now unable to do his bidding?

[6 : 10] We are handicapped from fulfilling his purposes in our lives. Well, in John chapter 4, as we read, we have met a woman who has every reason to feel that she is crippled by her past.

And yet she is the one person, this baggage-laden woman, who was the instrument that Jesus chose to bring salvation to a whole community of people.

Later on, we read there in verse 39, many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him, that's Jesus, because of the woman's testimony. Now, we are approaching that week of mission.

It's only a fortnight away. And we may still be thinking, well, God cannot use me. I cannot be the one that God will use to invite unbelievers to that mission.

I cannot be the one who will witness and speak for Jesus. I cannot be used by him. There's many others, but for me, because of the way I am, the way I've been, what has happened, I'm out of the running.

[7 : 23] And so although we recognize, as we've seen in past weeks, that the commission of Jesus, the command of Jesus, go and make disciples of all nations, applies to every single believer, yet we feel ourselves somehow disqualified from fulfilling that command because of something that is in the past, but has a very real effect upon us today.

And so what I want us to do this morning, dear friends, is to be encouraged that whatever the past, or even the recent past, that Jesus desires to take you and use you for his honor, for his glory, and for the blessing of those around about you.

And so I want us to consider for a moment some of the handicaps that this woman carried as she meets with Jesus, some of the handicaps that in one sense would seem in natural eyes, natural thinking, to prevent her from being of any way a disciple and an instrument of Jesus's, and to see how we ourselves may learn from God's dealings with her.

There's three areas of her life which in the past have crippled her, seemingly. First of all, there's her natural disadvantages.

And the first natural disadvantage is that she is a woman. That's a problem in that day, isn't it? In the day of our Lord Jesus, it's clear that it was a problem, her being a woman, because we see in verse 27, just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman.

[9 : 11] But the reality is that the Lord Jesus on several occasions, and this is one of them, has direct conversation with a woman, something that was radical, something that was unacceptable in the culture of his day.

It meant that in many people's eyes, the eyes of men, she was second class, and she was beneath them. Now Christianity has, particularly recently, been accused of misogyny, that attitude that prejudices against women, men treating them as beneath themselves.

And if that is true, then it is not the Christianity of Jesus Christ, because here we see him treating her far from second class, but elevating her to a position of ministry and service, which is exceptional.

So she was a woman. That was against her in those days. Perhaps even for you, it's been difficult. But she was also, if I can put it this way, in a more difficult place, because she was a Samaritan.

Verse 7, a Samaritan woman. She was a person of mixed race. I don't mean black and white. I mean that as a Samaritan, she was a mixture of Jew and a Syrian.

[10:32] Some years earlier, many hundreds of years earlier, in fact, the people of Israel had been taken into captivity to Assyria, 500 years before Christ.

And many of them had intermarried with the Assyrians. And so they were no longer purely the children of Abraham. They had this mixed heritage. And so they were counted as being impure. We see that there when she is surprised at Jesus asking for a drink. Verse 9, How can you ask me for a drink? And John helps us to understand what's going on. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.

Or in the footnote, they don't drink out the same vessels or eat out the same dishes as Samaritans. A pure Jew would have nothing to do with a Samaritan. They were compromised. And they not only were mixed in race, so they weren't the true children of Abraham, they were also mixed up in their religion.

They had a mixture of beliefs which were partly Judaistic and partly something else. And so we read in verse 20 where she says to him, Our ancestors, that's the Samaritans, worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.

[11:45] But she did have some things, right? Within that religion, there was some truth. Verse 25, I know that Messiah called Christ is coming. So they had this same expectation and hope for the Messiah as the Jews had, but there was all sorts of confusion.

So there was her natural disadvantages, her upbringing, and her birth. Then we were, I put it this way, her nuptial disasters.

I'm looking for, you can see some following on of words. I couldn't think of anything else. So nuptial, you know that means marriage. And that comes out clearly, doesn't it, here? Okay. He asked, go call your husband.

I have no husband, she replied. And Jesus said to her, verse 17, you're right. When you say you have no husband, the fact is you had five husbands and the man you're with now is not your husband.

She is not a first century Elizabeth Taylor, okay? So I want to get that clear. She's not somebody who has that influence in that way or that background in that way.

[12:48] Probably more likely she is something of a victim a victim of the divorce laws of the day within Israel, within Judaism. That comes out earlier in Matthew 19 where we're told some Pharisees came to Jesus to test him.

They asked him, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason? Because that was the custom of the day that a man could divorce his wife for any reason he wanted to.

And Jesus actually, rather than forbidding divorce, we're not going to get into that now, because he isn't the place, he actually puts it in its right perspective. That marriage is something very, very important and divorce is really something to be avoided at all costs.

But, there are times when it is necessary. Now, here is a young woman, I believe, if we were to trace her story, probably as a teenager, she is married to her first husband, an arranged marriage as most marriages were.

once he had become bored with her or she didn't do something that he wanted her to do, then he simply wrote her a divorce and she was out on her ear. She had no home, she had no way of income, she had little choice to provide for herself apart from to marry another man.

[14:04] And sometime later, he probably did the same thing. And so, she is now caught up in a spiral of destruction, going from relationship to relationship to relationship.

Maybe hoping the next one will be the one who will love me and accept me and treat me better than the one before. Almost certainly by the time she's got to the position she's in, completely broken, completely destroyed.

She wanted to be loved but inevitably found that love hurts. Her nuptial disasters, she has a trail of broken relationships in her past and that is something very painful.

And it produces in her, what I've put thirdly, her negative demeanor, that is to say her low self-esteem because of what has happened to her in her past, because of what she's been through. Now she believes herself to be valueless as a person in the eyes of others. How do I know that? Well, because we can work that out from the importance John places about the time she goes to the well.

[15 : 14] Notice Jesus sat down by the well. Verse 6 tells us it was about noon. And you say, why does that matter that she goes to the well at noon? Well, simply this, no one in their right mind would go and draw water from the village well at midday.

That's the hottest part of the day. You always go and draw water from the well in the morning before it gets warm or in the evening. And drawing water is still in the Middle East in many villages the job of the woman folk.

That's what they have to do. They have to go and walk and find the water and they will go there early in the morning and that's when they will meet with the other women, the other wives and so on. It was a place where they would talk and catch up on the news of the day and probably the gossip of the day.

So for a woman by herself to be there in the middle of the day shows that she is a woman who is an outcast from the female community. She is someone who does not want to mix with and does not want to spend time with the other women probably because she is the main topic of their gossip and so she avoids that place except when she has to get water which she would have had to do. So here is a woman who has no self-esteem, who thinks herself worthless, rubbish, nothing, who has behind her a great trail of sadness, a past which still haunts her, affects her relationship, perhaps the reason she hasn't married this fifth, sixth man because she's just given up on marriage.

[16 : 50] I wonder if any of us can associate with this woman on one or more of these levels.

Perhaps we can associate with her with our parentage. The background in which we started our lives, it gave us an unfair disadvantage.

I don't want us to have to go into thoughts of what has happened there but we know that there was something about our parentage, perhaps their broken home, perhaps their bad choices, perhaps their attitudes to us and it's, we feel, crippled us.

Perhaps we were taught that we were brought up in a home where we were never taught about God or the truth about God. We were told a mishmash like this woman of philosophies and thoughts and so when we, as we grew, we had no real moral compass, we had no real understanding for faith or direction and so we wandered into adulthood with no real stability.

It may be, dear friends, that as we grew into adulthood, we made one or more bad choices in the area of relationships. We tried more than once to find the love of a lasting and committed partner but every time that we did something or other, either ourselves or them, meant that it broke, it was damaged, it didn't work out and we still are searching.

But I'm sure for all of us, to some degree or other, we carry the burden of shame for our past. There are times when we feel a little bit of self-loathing, we consider everyone better than ourselves, not in a humble way as Paul teaches us in the scriptures that we are but rather just in the sense that we feel useless and they seem to have it all together.

[18 : 46] That sinful act, that action, that behaviour, that habit, whatever it may be, that thing that still is a handicap to us, something that still if it's touched, and perhaps I'm doing that this morning and I apologise for that, is a running sore.

And we say, how can God possibly, possibly use me? How can I go on from here? Every time I want to go forward I feel this chain, I feel this dead weight pulling me back and down, I'm dragging along my past.

Let me assure you from this passage and from the rest of scripture, that whatever our past, whatever those things that have brought us pain, sorrow, that still bring us a sense maybe of shame, those things that we still struggle with because of what happened then, they do not disqualify you from living for Christ, a useful, faithful, glory-giving life.

And you say, why not? Why are you saying something which really all my life I've said to myself and people have said to me as well and the media says to me as well?

Well, let's look at this one. What happened to her? What overturned her life? What was it that happened that wiped away this crippling past? past? It's simple.

[20 : 20] It's straightforward. It leaps off the page. She met with Jesus. It's as simple as that. It wasn't that she went through a course of psychotreatment or psychology and I'm not poo-pooing those things necessarily, not because she read a self-help book, not because she sought a guru, not because she had medication, and I'm not poo-pooing any of those things, but it was because she met with Christ, or rather Christ met with her.

And I want to make the point very clear that Jesus went out of his way to meet with her. It says in the beginning he had to go through Samaria. He didn't, because if you were in the north of Judea and you wanted to get to Jerusalem, you would go around Samaria if you were a Jew. The last thing you would do is go through Samaria. He went there purposefully. And he went there purposefully at noon, and he went there purposely, and he sat at the well, and he sent his disciples into the town, all of these things, so that he could meet with this Samaritan woman. And in meeting with Jesus, and we again sadly don't have the time to go through all the things that he speaks to her, and how he ministers to her, how he teaches her, but it's clear that in meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ, there is a transformation that takes part in her life, that takes place in her life, and that her past is dealt with, and she becomes a new person. I don't mean to say that her past is somehow changed, and forgotten, and removed, and somehow Jesus has taken her in the TARDIS back in time, so all the wrongs can be righted. [21 : 52] And I don't mean that she ceases to be the person she was, shaped by the events of her life, that somehow she's had a memory wipe. But it does mean that she no longer was hindered and hampered and dragged down by her past.

The Apostle Paul describes what happened to him, and what it meant to him, when he knew and met with Christ, and Christ came into his life. In Philippians 3, you don't need to turn there, maybe you can look at it later, he talks about his past, a very different past to this woman, but it was still a hindrance to him, it was still a handicap to him, following Christ and living for Christ and serving Christ.

He says this, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I've lost all things.

I consider them garbage. And he goes on to say in verse 13, brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. In other words, I haven't arrived yet.

There's no place where any of us will ever arrive in this life where we will have everything sorted and all our problems solved that will not happen to glory. He says this, one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize, which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

[23 : 17] We've got clear evidence in the life of this woman that her meeting with Jesus transforms her, transforms her view of herself and transforms her in such a way that there's an immediate reaction.

And let me just say that for a moment, that if you are a Christian, if you're somebody who has put your faith in Jesus Christ, then something has happened of a transforming and recreating work of God.

It's not something that you could sort of slip into unnoticeably. It's something that really has had effect so that you are able to say, this is then, this is now.

It may have been something less dramatic than what happened to Paul on the Damascus road. It may have been, but there was something that happened, a change and a transformation, and you know, in spite of the difficulties and the struggles and the doubts and the failures that you have, that Christ is real and that your life is changed.

And let me urge you, if you think that you're a Christian, but you've never known that change, you've never known that meeting with Christ which transforms your worldview and transforms your life, then let me challenge you to think seriously whether truly you have come to Christ.

[24 : 38] Perhaps you've been brought up and believing in God and believing in Jesus. In one sense you've sort of just slid along in that sort of state of this sort of nominal belief, but there's nothing that's gone deep inside.

There's nothing that actually has changed your direction and heart and life so that now it's not just that you believe in Jesus, but you trust him and you're following him and he's captivated your life and your hearts.

Let me ask you to seriously, seriously seek God for that real, transforming, life-changing work. How do I know that she was changed?

How do we know that she was changed? Well, it seems to me that everything that was a burden to her before, the things that held her back before are taken away. And we have this lovely little remark there in verse 28, leaving her water jar.

Why does John tell us that? Well, the very purpose for her coming out in the noonday heat, away from everybody else, was bringing her water jar, was to gain the water. That was her burden, wasn't

it, of the day.

[25 : 38] Remember she says when Jesus offers her the everlasting water, she says, sir, give me this water so I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water. It's her duty.

It was one of the burdens of her life. She just leaves it. She forgets about it. She puts it to one side and she goes off. That hot and wearying job of carrying several liters of water in the midday sun is put aside.

That which was all her thinking, that which controlled her day, it's just left. When you become a Christian, some of the things that are so important to you beforehand become much less important afterwards.

That striving for the acceptance of people, that striving to find something that will make my life worth living, that hungering after, something that makes me whole, if I can put it that way.

We just forget that. We just leave that. It's not needed anymore. It's something new that's captivated our hearts. And what does she do? The woman went back to the town and said to the people, come and see a man who's told me everything.

[26 : 48] Could this be the Messiah? These are the people she went out of her way to avoid.

These are the people that she knew looked down on her. These are the ones who gossiped about her behind her back.

And they thought her, at least she thought that they thought of her as worthless and useless and a has-been. Now she goes and she gossips to them. about Jesus. She goes and finds them out.

She goes and shouts in the street. She goes and knocks on the door to her neighbors. Come and see this man who's told me everything. Could this be the Messiah? All inhibition is lost. All that sense of the shame that kept her skulking in the corners and in the shadows is gone.

And again, that confusion of religion, this untaught Samaritan with her mixed up views about God, is now God's prophet going before Jesus.

She's the Samaritan's answer to John the Baptist. Come and see. He's coming. He's arrived.

Doesn't mean all her problems were gone.

[27 : 54] Doesn't mean that she somehow has reinvented herself. Gone to a new town where no one knows her for a fresh start. And she spent three years in the Bible study of Jesus along with the disciples.

None of those things have happened to her. No. She has met with Jesus. It's as simple as that. It's as life transforming, life affirming, life fulfilling as that.

She's met with Jesus. She's become the chosen messenger and the means by which not just a few but many in her community come to a real and saving faith in Jesus.

Verse 41. Because of Jesus' words, many more became believers. They said to the woman, we no longer believe just because of what you said. Now we've heard for ourselves.

Dear friends, you and I are not the people who convert the unsaved. We are not the people who have all the answers for the lost. We are not the people who are able to change the lives of those whose hearts are broken by their past.

[29 : 05] We are simply those who say, come and meet Jesus. That's it. He's the one who's going to change you. He's the one who's going to heal. He's the one who's going to save. He's the one who's going to make life complete.

He's the one who's going to rescue and bring forgiveness for the past. And so often we feel ourselves disqualified because we don't have all the answers. We don't have the words to say.

Well, all she said is similar to this.

I've met a man. He's brilliant. Come and see. It's not rocket science, is it? It's not a great theological treatise about how the Samaritans had got it wrong and the Jews had got it right and the Messiah was coming.

It's none of those things. It's simply this. I have a testimony. And if you're a Christian this morning, you have a testimony that you have met with Jesus. And that's all that you need to be able to say to those who need to hear of him.

He's done something in my life. Come and see if he can do something in your life. He's brought me peace with my past.

[30 : 07] He's brought me forgiveness. One of the things that we are so afraid to do, dear friends, is that when people share with us and speak to us about the struggles that they have when they do share those things with us and we're able to empathise with them, perhaps because we've been

through them as well, one of the things that we simply need to do is this.

Wouldn't you like to meet somebody who can make a difference? I've met somebody who's made a difference. And it's Jesus. You don't have to go into all the great workings out.

You don't have to go into all the great excuses or understanding or reasoning. We simply have to say, you've got problems, but I know someone who can help. I know somebody who can really make a difference.

I know somebody who really cares about you because I know that what he's done in my life is real as well. You see, it's in experiencing the renewing grace of Jesus that we have been set free from the heavy burden of our past.

We've been set free so that we can run the race of faith set before us. No, it doesn't mean everything's going to be perfect.

[31 : 17] No, it doesn't mean that you're not going to shed a tear. No, it doesn't mean that you don't struggle with what's happened. No, it doesn't mean that life is easy. But it does mean that we're a new creation.

As we start at the very beginning of our service, so I'll read again 2 Corinthians 5, 17. If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation.

The old, listen, the old is gone. The new is come. Let's pray together. Lord our God, our Father in heaven, before whom every heart is an open book, every mind is a TV screen.

Nothing, Lord, can we hide from you. nothing about our feelings, our emotions, our thoughts.

Nothing about our doubts and our fears.

All our past is known and laid out before you. And Lord, we thank you that in knowing us so completely, we can therefore be certain that your acceptance of us is complete.

[32 : 42] for you, do not tell us to go and sort ourselves out, but you say, come to me, all you who are heavy laden and burdened, and I will give you rest.

We pray, O Lord, that for those of us who are not Christians, those of us who have, as it were, dabbled around the edge, but have never committed ourselves to you, those who have spoken about Jesus and thought about Jesus and sung about Jesus, but never have met with you in this way, this transforming way, this way which exposes our sin and leads us to repentance, to turn away from it, and to trust in you.

O Lord, come and meet with us where we are, in our noonday place, in our hidden away from other people place. Meet with us and do not leave us unchanged, but Lord, have mercy and bring us to yourself and give us that faith that we cannot create.

We pray, Lord, for those of us here who particularly feel crippled by the things of the past. Lord, we don't want to go there, we don't even want to think about them, we don't need to necessarily, but Lord, we want to bring them to you afresh and ask, O Lord, that you would not only forgive us for our past sins, we know that you do, but we ask, O Lord, that you would grant us peace with our past, not to keep fighting against it and wrestling with it and blaming ourselves for it or blaming others for it or blaming you for it, but in that wonderful way trusting you with it, just as we trust you with our future, with heaven, help us to trust you with the past.

Lord, where we still need your healing touch, heal, we pray. Where we need those words of comfort and encouragement, then speak, O Lord, we pray. But to all of us, we ask, please, Lord, let us no longer be disabled by the past.

[34 : 47] Help us no longer to be dragged down. Help us, Lord, to run the race you've set before us. Help us to be the witnesses, the prophets, the testifiers, Lord, that you have us to be in this place and where you have put us.

And use us, we pray, to reach others who are brokenhearted and who are weighed down with the sorrow and grief of their sins and their sins that have been committed against them.

And we pray again, O Lord, that these coming weeks of mission may be days in which many a captive is set free and many a blind person is given light and many in the prison are brought out into deliverance.

For we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

[36 : 03] For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.