

Jesus is the Wonderful Counsellor

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[0 : 0 0] Okay. So one of the reasons we read that passage in Isaiah is because that's actually going! to be the kind of the, how we're going to look at Christmas this year. You might remember! just that verse, it says that he will be called, it's really talking about Jesus, for this four names, wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

And so each week we're going to look at one of those titles and see how that's fulfilled in Jesus, in his life. So we're going to start with Jesus, the wonderful counselor. Jesus, the wonderful counselor. I'm going to pray and then we're going to look at the, just, well, the passage that we're going to look at it through is John 4. If you want to turn to John 4, it's on page 1066. I'm going to pray for us and then we'll think about it together. Almighty God, we thank you for your word, the Bible. We thank you that you speak to us through it and we pray for our hearts now, that you'd help us to listen, where there's distractions and concerns and things going on our mind that are perhaps clouding that ability to really let you minister to us. We pray that you just clear it and help us to just turn our hearts to you afresh and that you would minister to us powerfully through your word. Help us to receive the food that you have for us now.

We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen. So as I mentioned, that verse is Isaiah 9-6 and we've read it out, the four titles that are really descriptors of the child to be born, really the Christ of Christmas.

I'm going to unpack each one each week. Wonderful counselor. Jesus is wonderful counselor. Now, our modern kind of 21st century understanding of a counselor, if you hear that word, it's more akin to a therapist, isn't it? You pay up front to be listened to or you can get it on the NHS. You expect advice, you expect encouragement, maybe a new way to kind of process life and we can be very thankful of very gifted counselors, both in the church, out the church that God has used to bless people to help them think through different things that's going on. And lots of people, myself included, have benefited from sort of human counselors. But when we hear that Jesus is the wonderful counselor, it means much more than he's just kind of the best version of talking therapy that we could imagine.

Now, the word wonderful here, I think we kind of use the word wonderful like all the time. Maybe perhaps it's overused. No, because the word wonderful here is more like miraculous.

[3 : 0 8] It's like an act that is jaw-dropping that makes us full of wonder and awe that has kind of spiritual divine power. That's what wonderful means. And the word for counselor, it's often used for someone who would advise a king with like a military strategy. They would counsel him way before the king would go into battle about the best strategy. You put them together, the wonderful counselor, you get an entirely different picture. This is a counselor like Notha. One who speaks with jaw-dropping words that are so well thought through that they have a strategy to impact people in ways that are pre-planned, that know exactly the outcome. It's in that Jesus, the Christ of Christmas, this baby to be born, in coming, has a divine strategy with his words to counsel people so that they will never be the same again after hearing him. We all need counsel, don't we? And there's something about human counsel where the reason we, sometimes we're talking, you ever get that feeling where you feel nobody gets me?

And we want people to get us. We want to be heard, listened to, but we want the person that we're speaking to to really get us. We want to be heard, listened to, and with great gentleness, encouraged, perhaps warned, and we want to be changed. In our passage this morning, which we're going to read in a minute, we meet a woman who's isolated from her local community, and she's looking for happiness in all the wrong places, until she meets the wonderful counselor Jesus at the side of a well. A counselor might refer in the Old Testament to her kind of military counselor, a strategist, but Jesus doesn't come to her as a general with orders.

No, instead Jesus comes as a weary traveler. That's his strategy here, meeting the vulnerable woman where she's at. And the real issue we see is that the counsel that this woman has received in the past is not advice from a therapist, that's not who this woman has listened to, but she's listened to bad counsel that she's given to herself, that keeps her thirsty for satisfaction. Might that be a problem with us?

What if the advice, the counsel that maybe sometimes is the problem is we sometimes give ourselves the very thing, the very advice that keeps us dissatisfied and wanting more from life? Well, today the strategist offers a new plan. As we consider Jesus speaking with this woman, the invitation to us really is to consider how Jesus offers us the same listening ear, the same wonderful counsel to us through his words, with counsel that is powerful, that is full of wonder and awe, and that when he speaks to us, even here this morning, he has a divine pre-planned purpose, a strategy with what he wants to do to us through his word to each of us. And it's not counsel with an agenda or that costs or that will disappoint. It's not our own counsel, but it will always hit the mark with great precision and is exactly what we need. Let's look to the scriptures then and see how Jesus counsels this woman to a whole new life. This is God's word, John 4.

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptising more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptised, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Syca, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, will you give me a drink? His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, you're a Jew and I'm a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink? For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, if you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. Sir, the woman said, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself as did also his sons and his livestock?

[8 : 27] Jesus answered, everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. The woman said to him, sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water. He told her, go call your husband and come back. I have no husband, she replied. Jesus said to her, you're right when you say you have no husband. The fact is you have had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband. What you've just said is quite true. Sir, the woman said, I can see that you're a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is Jerusalem. Woman, Jesus replied, believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

You Samaritans worship what you do not know, we worship what we do know for salvations from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the father in the spirit and in truth for they are the kind of worshippers the father seeks. God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in the spirit and in truth. The woman said, I know that Messiah called Christ is coming. When he comes he will explain everything to us. Then Jesus declared, I, the one speaking to you, I am he. 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. This is God's word. Amen.

Jesus never passes up an opportunity to teach the truth. His counsel teaches.

See in verse 4 he has to go through Samaria where a town he needs to take a break. We see he's tired. Verse 6. He was from the journey and has to sit down by the well. He might be tired. He might be weary.

[11 : 06] But that doesn't stop him from the opportunity. So at that moment that the Samaritan woman comes to draw water at noon in the middle of the day and Jesus knows that this woman's life and situation, he knows them inside out and back to front, all the details. But notice he doesn't come to read her the riot act. Rather he starts with a question and meets this woman where she's at.

Coming out alone in that day in the hottest part of the day was not the done thing. It wouldn't be the time when it was, it would be the time she came out because she knew that the well would be empty. Women or whoever was coming to gather water would normally come early in the morning when it was cooler. This woman here, this Samaritan woman isolates herself from the normal routine of the local community.

She expects Jesus to ignore her but he asks her for a drink in verse 7. That is in itself, it's a surprise in two fronts. It's surprising that Jesus, a Jew, is talking first to a woman and secondly to a Samaritan woman at that for they didn't get those two groups, Jews and Samaritans, didn't get along and she's alone at the well. Who knew what people would say?

She calls him out on it, verse 9. You're a Jew and I'm a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink? Jesus responds and when he responds, what he's really doing is he's teaching her, his counsel is teaching her about himself. If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. The dialogue continues between them.

But we wonder, she wonders, what on earth is he talking about? He sat at a well with nothing to pull water up. She has that inclination, doesn't she, that he means something else, something deeper.

[13 : 18] We see his words, his counsel moves her from confusion to curiosity. Teaching without lecturing, giving her the opportunity to consider and think and assess, what does he mean? Sir, you've got nothing to draw up with. The well's deep. Where can you get this living water? You're greater than our father Jacob. She moves. She's now curious. Who is this man? What's he talking about? Jesus answers.

Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. The water from the well. But whoever drinks the water I will give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. It moves her. She is moved. This truth that he teaches moves her, but only so far she is at the very edge of the truth. The desire for eternal life is there, but she thinks it's a product. Much like the water at the bottom of the well that Jesus perhaps has some sort of magic juice hidden up his sleeve. Ta-da! When in fact the living water is not a product, but a person. And he stood right in front of her.

Jesus' counsel here, he's teaching her the truth about who he is and what he offers. It isn't about telling facts, but about exposing her heart. And she's moved. She's moved from being confused to being really curious. Who is this man that I've encountered in the heat of the day that I'm speaking to? And why is he speaking to me? And what's he talking about?

However, in the midst of all that's going on, the root of her actual thirst still needs addressing. Because she still needs to hear the counsellors. She still needs to be exposed.

Why is she coming in the middle of the day? When no one else comes to get water.

[15 : 34] If you're a note taker, move to our second point. The problem. Jesus' counsel rebukes. It reproves. You know, this passage here is full of kind of symbolic pictures.

One is the water jar. The water jar she carries, the heavy labour of pulling up water. It's really a mirror of where she's at spiritually.

The woman has never known the wonderful counsel that is personal and gentle. But she's only known the broken counsel which she's given herself.

She's never known the true living water, but instead only looked to find life by her own means, her own counsel. And in the same way that the water jar is empty, she's empty on the inside.

In the same way that she's having to put you graft heavy to get the water up to quench her thirst. Everything that she's doing, she's made her life her hard labour.

[16 : 44] Jesus draws out the real problem. Verse 16. Go call your husband and come back.

Sounds, sounds just, doesn't sound like anything, does it? Verse 17. He knows what the problem is.

I have no husband, she replied. Jesus said to you, you're right when you say you have no husband. The fact is you have had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband. What you've said is quite true. Now we don't know what happened to the five husbands before.

We don't know whether she left them, whether they left her, or if she's a widow five times. Or a combination, possibly, of all of those.

Either way, to have that level of relationships, or whatever the reason is, it's tragic, isn't it? That she could be either a widow five times, or she's had five men leave her, or relationships have broken down that she's left them.

[17 : 54] We just need to back up a little minute. There's a detail in here that is critical, crucial in understanding this story. Do some digging into the number of men in her life.

We have this Samaritan woman. When we add them up, she's on her sixth man. You see that? She's had five naps before, and she's on this one she's with. That's six. In John's Gospel, and actually the whole of the Bible, seven is the number that illustrates perfection.

Six is imperfection, incompleteness. If you read through John particularly, there's seven I Am statements. There's seven days in the creation week. On the lampstand, you know the Jewish menorah lampstand, there's seven lamps.

There's seven miracles in John. In Revelation, which is also written by John, he speaks to seven churches. There are seven seals, seven bowls, seven trumpets. Pentecost happens seven weeks after the resurrection.

Seven is the number of completeness, and is associated with the triune God because he's complete. She's on her sixth man. It's there as a real but symbolic pointer.

[19 : 04] Her relentless search for the right man will always be incomplete, will always be a futile search. Whatever the cause of her separation with each of the men, she is making a physical attempt to fill a spiritual void, an emptiness in her soul.

She's thirsty but looking for living water where it cannot be found, and she's exposed. I wonder what physical attempts we make to fill the spiritual void in us.

Where do we look? What is our sixth man? What's the thing that you think will make you to a complete seven? There are lots of things, isn't there?

There's things that we think, if I just had this reputation in my workplace, if I just had this respect in my community, if I just took one more step on the ladder of my career, if I had more control of my life, if my children were better behaved and more successful.

There's lots of things that we think that the more we have, in whatever it is, the more, whatever the number is that will complete us, the more of it, whatever seven it is that we're trying to get to.

[20 : 28] And when you're exposed, I wonder if you do what this Samaritan woman does. See what she does? She changes the subject and attempts to hide. You see that?

We're talking about one thing. See what she does? Where is it? Verse 19. She attempts to hide and she hides behind the practice of her religion.

Look at me. Verse 19. So the woman said, I can see that you're a prophet. And then she goes, our ancestors worshipped on this mountain.

But you Jews claim that we, that the place we must worship is in Jerusalem. She changes the subject to Jesus' identity and something to connect it to how she worships as a Samaritan and how that's different to the Jews.

But Jesus won't let her get away with it that easy. He's exposed her messy life. Now he exposes her religion.

[21 : 33] Woman, Jesus replied, Believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You see what she's trying to do?

She knows, by the very fact that she distances herself, tries to change the subject, she knows that there's lots going on in her life and Jesus has exposed her.

But what she thinks is, maybe I can make it up to this prophet. Maybe I can prove to him that actually, okay, okay, I get it, I've made a bit of a mess, but maybe I can prove to him that actually religiously I'm trying my best.

Has that thought ever gone through our heads? Maybe I've made a few mistakes, but maybe I can make up for it by like just doing a few more good turns.

Maybe if I pray a little bit more, maybe if I read my Bible a little bit more, maybe if I just do kind of help a little bit more out here, maybe I can make up for the things that I've done wrong.

[22 : 45] Maybe if I focus on that, I can kind of cover it up and say, yeah, well, you know, at least I've kind of doing all right over here. This is the counsel she gives to herself.

These are the strategies she has to cope with life. But the counsel she gives herself, it's failing on two fronts. And both of them are leaving her empty and thirsty.

And really, her life is really a mirror of humanity's relentless search to find completion, to find satisfaction and worth. But the tragedy, the tragedy is the consequences that come.

Out of shame, of her life, of what she's done with five men and now on her sixth, she's forced out of shame to avoid the woman, come to the well at noon when no one will see her.

Of a life of isolation from the community, the town that she belongs to. And what's heartbreaking, the sixth man she's with hasn't solved anything because she's still on her own in the middle of the day.

[24 : 04] She's still incomplete. It's like looking to a stagnant pond and hoping to find fresh water and drinking from it. It's making her ill.

And that's exactly what it's like for us spiritually. It does the same. Jesus masterfully counsels her heart.

You see, it's a rebuke, a reproof to her that's so gentle. He's said only a few words to her and she's confessed her life. She's moved from confusion to curiosity.

She moves from curiosity to confession. The only solution is now to move from confession to correction. And the solution, there must be a complete seven.

Jesus' counsel teaches. It reproves. rebukes. Now we see Jesus' counsel corrects. When the Samaritan woman looks to her own counsel, it's not wonderful or wise, but folly and dreadful.

[25 : 14] It's not a strategy for life, but for disaster. And the counsel offered is by the seventh, the seventh man. It takes a stunning turn. It's the heart of the gospel is Jesus is the seventh man.

Jesus is the one that she needs. He's the one, the only one that she can be completed. And it's Jesus that comes where, you know, man of the six, he's not there, but Jesus comes when she's hiding in shame, when she's physically and spiritually thirsty, incomplete with that desire to be accepted.

He comes to her in her isolation, in her shame and her thirst and her deficiency and he takes it. He takes her isolation and it's exactly what we see happen when he goes to the cross.

You see, at the cross, Jesus becomes isolated and physically thirsty. We see that at the cross. Isolated, completely alone, abandoned by his father, physically parched but only offered vinegar to drink.

He takes her broken strategies to fix herself, the foolishness. She is treated as foolish, he becomes foolish in the eyes of the world. He hears the broken counsel of his persecutors, does he not?

[26 : 37] They counsel, he receives counsel on the cross, save yourself if you're the son of God. But he ignores the broken counsel and stays on the wise path of obedience.

Why? To give this poor woman and us true life. He corrects her broken counsel. Two solutions for her two problems. The problem of thirst and the problem of religion.

He's living what she needs. He's the true bridegroom. The seventh man who meets all her needs. She can find true satisfaction complete only in him.

no longer spiritually thirsty. He corrects her thirst and then he corrects her worship. A time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the spirit and in truth.

For they're the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God's spirit is spirit and his fathers and his worshippers must worship in the spirit and in truth. not your mountain not the Jewish mountain either will matter.

[27 : 46] And what is he pointing to? He's pointing to the coming of the spirit of God. His spirit the spirit of Jesus. This is a point of forward to what will happen at Pentecost.

She will be able to worship him anyway by the living water that quenches her spiritual thirst. You see that? The living water that she'll receive that quenches her thirst is actually the means by which she can worship him.

The source that replenishes her thirst is also the power for true worship. In the one thing in the one man he corrects both. And it's not a secret.

It's not a secret. Verse 25 I know that Messiah is coming she says when he comes he'll explain everything to us Jesus declares I the one speaking to you I am he.

It's not a secret. Jesus is the perfect seventh Messiah the Christ the bridegroom who offers us a covenant commitment that cannot be broken we're joined to perfection no longer spiritually divorced or widowed but complete in him.

[28 : 59] Whatever our relentless cycle of six is Jesus takes it and remakes us completing him. The thirst for more is replaced by his presence of enough.

And so our lives are no longer defined by what we lack. do you do