

Speaker 1:

Some years ago, I had an amazing encounter, an amazing experience. My in-laws were coming to visit. This was when we lived in Florida. And of course we always loved when the in-laws came, unless they stayed longer than a week. Amen? But they were golfers and they were members of the Capital City Club. And I knew, well, I need to make sure they get to play a very nice course. So I was going to pull out all the stops. So I called a buddy of mine who served a church in Windermere, Florida, which is right next door to Arnold Palmers at the time, his playground, Bayhill Country Club. Anybody know that club? I've played it. Anyway, I called my buddy and I said, "Listen, can you get us on?" And he came through for me. I got on Bayhill, oh my gosh. And we played this course, and we had such a grand time.

I won't tell you what I scored. But after the round, of course, we were sitting on the porch of the pro shop, because my mother-in-law was in the pro shop buying things, buying shirts and shoes and all kinds of stuff from Bayhill. My father-in-law and I were just talking about the round in front of the pro shop, when all of a sudden we saw this golf cart whiz around, take a sharp turn, park right in front of us. And guess who walked out of that golf cart? Arnold Palmer, the king of golf. I couldn't believe it. And he ran up the stairs. And I thought he was just going to walk past me. But instead, you know what he did? He turned to me and said, "Hey there, welcome to Bayhill." And he stuck out his big mitt and he shook my hand hard: "Welcome to Bayhill. How'd you like the course? I think it's in great shape."

And for the first time in my life, I was speechless. I don't know what I said. All I know is at that moment I was looking at the king of golf, who was talking with me. He could have easily just ignored me. I'm just another adoring fan. But instead, he engaged me. He talked to me. And my in-laws said, "You should have seen your face." But more than that, can you imagine the face of the Samaritan woman and the joy she experienced when she realized she was talking to the king of kings, face-to-face? Jesus did not ignore her. Jesus does not ignore you, and Jesus does not ignore me.

But there's another thing I see in this text. Jesus did not reject this woman. He didn't reject her. Now, Jesus knew all about her. Jesus knew that she had had five husbands. Jesus knew that the man that she was living with at the time was not her husband. He knew all about it. But more than that, she knew better than anyone else. She knew that she wasn't the person that she wanted to be. She knew that all the escapades in her life and all the experiences that she thought did not fulfill her, it only disappointed her. Have you ever been there? If you're honest, have you ever been there? Have you ever had a season in your life where you think the things of the world are going to satisfy you and you try to cram them in that hole and it just won't fit? Maybe it's sex, maybe it's money, maybe it's power. Maybe it's ambition. Maybe it's some kind of thing you don't tell others about, but you cram it and you cram it and you cram it, and it just doesn't fit.

The woman felt that way. Jesus knows that about you. Jesus knows that about me. Jesus knew that about that woman, but he did not reject her. Instead, the text says he offered her living water that would make her whole. He offered her the kind of water where she would never be thirsty again. She would never crave anything again. Do you want that living water today? Because I'll tell you the truth, Jesus is here and he wants to offer it to you. He loves each of us beyond our wildest dreams, and he wants to offer us living water that cleanses us, that refreshes us, that renews us, that makes us whole. Jesus does not reject us. If we want it, we can have it.

Riley Short, I've talked about before. He's one of my mentors. I served as his associate and he had to suffer with me for four years, many years ago. Great guy, he's taught me a lot. But he remembers the time when he was serving in Florida many years ago, and he was called to Shands Hospital in Gainesville. And you know them. If you're in Shands, it's a serious matter. And so his parishioner was there. And so he traveled about two hours to Shands. But when he got there, the nurse told him he couldn't see his

parishioner. He just wasn't available. And she said, "You might be able to see him a little later, but I'll let you know. But over here's the waiting room."

So Riley, he entered the waiting room. And he was like, "What am I going to do for the next couple hours?" And there was a soap opera on the television, Days of Our Lives, or something. "I'm not going to watch that." He looked over at the coffee table and there was some old magazines, really old magazines, like World War II just ended. And there was an old man asleep in the corner. And there was a lady crocheting about 100 miles an hour over here. And then there was a little girl with a bathrobe and a hospital wristband on, who was trying to put together a puzzle. You could tell she was a patient there, and she was desperately trying to get attention, but no one was giving her attention. And so Riley said, "Well, I'll do it."

And so he walked up to the little girl and the girl said, "Hi, my name's Gloria, and I'm 10 years old."

And Riley said, "Well, hello, Gloria. Nice to meet you. My name is Riley, and I'm not about to tell you how old I am." They began to talk.

She said, "You know what? Guess what? Recently, I went to the circus."

And Riley, playing around, said, "Oh, what's the big deal about a circus?"

"Oh, it's really great. They got tigers and they got bears, and they got trapeze artists, and they got people who are walking a tightrope. And they have elephants."

And Riley said, "You know what? I think I'd like to be an elephant, because I think if I was an elephant, I could sit wherever I wanted. And I could walk wherever I wanted. And if someone did something to me, I could just take my trunk and swipe them away or spray them with water."

The little girl said, "Not me. Elephants smell."

Well, the woman who was crocheting was getting a little suspicious. Who is this strange man talking to this little girl? And so he decided to reassure them. And he said, "Gloria, I'm a preacher. Do you know what a preacher is?"

She said, "I sure do. I go to church too. I know Jesus was born in Bethlehem and Jesus died for my sins. And Jesus rose from the grave."

And Riley said, "You must be a United Methodist."

She said, "No, I'm a Baptist."

"Okay." And then Riley, changing this subject, looked at her and said, "Gloria, what's a girl like you doing in a place like this?"

And she took off her glasses and she was cross-eyed. And this was the third time she was in the hospital to try to correct it. And after she told Riley that, the nurse came in and said, "Well, sir, you can see your parishioner now."

Then Riley turned to Gloria and said, "Listen, it was so nice to meet you. It was great talking with you. And listen, I hope and pray that this surgery works this time." And then he left.

And as Riley walked down the hallway, outside the waiting room, little Gloria opened up the door and shouted out, "Preacher, preacher, don't forget me. Please don't forget me."

And Riley turned around, went to her and gave her a big hug and said, "Gloria, I'll never forget you." And he prayed with her. This is the plea of every human heart. We don't want to be forgotten. We don't want to be ignored. We don't want to be rejected. We want to be noticed. And I'm here to tell you today, Jesus loves you, each one of you. If there's nothing you get from the message today, Jesus loves

you so much. And He sees you, He doesn't reject you. It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter where you've been. It doesn't matter how guilty you feel.

There's something I came across many years ago that helps me. Jesus believes in me, therefore my situation is never hopeless. Jesus walks with me, therefore I am never alone. Jesus is on my side, therefore I cannot lose. Jesus, he didn't ignore this woman. Jesus, he didn't reject this woman. But maybe most of all, most important of all we see in this text, church, that Jesus changed this woman. There's a curious verse in this text. I don't know if you noticed it. To me, it's one of the most important parts of this text. In verse 28, did you notice it, it says this: "Then leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come see a man.'"

Now, why in the heck, why with all that's holy, would the writer of John put something so mundane in that text like a water jar? I'll tell you why. Because that water jar represents all the mundane things in our life we think are so important. That water jar represents all those minor things that we major in that is not worth the hell of beans. And when you encounter Jesus Christ, all those insignificant things, they just fade away. Why? Because all of us have a God-shaped void in.

All of us that only God can fill, that only Jesus can fill. So my question for all of us today is this. What is your water jar? What are you holding onto? What sins are you holding onto, what obsessions, what preoccupations? What worries are draining the energy right out of you? What is your water jar? It's time to leave it behind with Jesus Christ. But you see, this woman at the well, not only was she changed on the inside, but Jesus gave her a purpose. Did you notice when Jesus changed her, she left the water jar and she ran to tell everybody she could about this man? She had encountered Jesus Christ. And when you encounter Jesus Christ, you want to tell everybody about it.

And I tell you this, church, to me, that's the definition of the church of Jesus Christ. You know what the church is? We try to make it complicated. We try to sound highfalutin with theological definitions. But here's the church. The church is a group of people who've encountered Jesus Christ, who want to tell other people about it. That's the church. Oh, we do a lot of other things, but folks, that's the church of Jesus Christ. I mean, the gospels are filled with stories of people who encountered Jesus and were changed.

My favorite is Matthew chapter nine. Some of you remember the woman who was suffering a hemorrhage and she couldn't be healed. And so she went to all these healers, and nobody could heal her. And so she found out about Jesus Christ, a healer unlike any other. And she said, "I'm going to go see him." And you remember the story when she found Jesus? He was covered by a mob of people, but she was determined to find Jesus. And she said, "If I could just touch the hem of His garment, I can be healed." And so she clawed her way, she pushed away into the crowd and finally touched Jesus. And at that moment, she knew she had been healed, because she felt the power. And also at that very moment, Jesus said something very funny. He said to disciples around Him, "Who touched me?"

And Peter's like, "Are you kidding, Jesus? You're covered with people. Everybody's touching you." He said, "No, somebody really touched me. I felt the power."

And then the woman who was shy fessed up, and she said, "It was me. It was me."

And do you remember what Jesus said to her? "Go, your faith has healed you." When she finally reached out with her whole heart to Jesus, she was healed. That's how it works. If you're wondering how it works, that's how it works. If you need strength for living, all you have to do is reach out to Jesus and trust Him.

There's an old hymn that I love that I rely on over and over again. And I tell you, this old hymn, these words have gotten me through more difficulty in my life. The old hymn says this, "It's not in the trying,

but in the trusting. It's not in running, but in resting, It's not in wondering, but in praying that we find the strength of the Lord." When you stop trying and begin to trust, when you stop running and begin to rest, and when you stop wondering and begin to pray, you'll find the strength of the Lord. Jesus is here, right here, waiting for you to trust Him, waiting for you to experience His love. And if that's what you want today, just pray silently with me this prayer. Let's pray.

Lord, I'm tired and I've run out of answers and excuses. I want your living water. Come and cleanse me of my sins and refresh me with new life. Give me a new direction and purpose. I want to follow you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.