

# “A Vision For Gospel Renewal”

John 4:6-30, 39-42

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on September 11, 2016 by Pastor Barton Priebe

## INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Please open your Bibles to John 4.
- Around 400 years ago the Pilgrims came across the Atlantic Ocean to settle in the newly discovered Americas. The voyage took incredible courage as the Pilgrims travelled thousands of kilometers over uncharted seas. In order to achieve their new life in a new world, they made great personal sacrifices in comfort and wealth. Despite the difficulties, they built an entire town and established a town council. Their once future vision had become a present reality.
  - The story is told that in the third year, the town council voted to build a road eight kilometers into the wilderness. However, in the fourth year, the entire council was almost impeached for this decision. It was considered to be a waste of money and effort.
    - This is astounding when you consider that all the lands and resources of North America were at their fingertips. But they were content in their achievements and so lack vision to move forward.
- It was the late 1920's when pastor J.B. Rowell and others had a vision to see a church established in downtown Victoria. People sacrificed a great deal of their time and money and in 1929 their vision became a reality and Central Baptist Church was born.
  - Central went further and helped plant six other churches including Sooke Baptist and Saanich Baptist.
- This past April we had a consultation team come to assess our church. They rightly called us to celebrate our tremendous history. However, they went on to say that we have become too comfortable. We have plateaued in almost everyway. They called us to step out in faith and to be willing to take some risks to build new roads of ministry in the cause of Christ.
  - Over the past few months your board, staff, and leaders from all kinds of positions in the church have been praying and thinking about where we believe God wants us to go as a church. Today we begin to talk about it. We will spend most fall talking about it through sermons, focus groups, town hall meetings, and prayer meetings.
    - This morning we want to give you the big picture of our proposed vision. It centres around what we are calling, “gospel renewal.” So let's ask three questions today. First, what do we mean by gospel renewal? Second, what does gospel renewal look like? And third, how does gospel renewal spread?

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY GOSPEL RENEWAL?

- Let's begin then by talking about **(SHOW SLIDE)** what do we mean by gospel renewal?
  - We wanted to have one short sentence that captures our proposed vision. So here it is: we want Central to be **(SHOW SLIDE)** *renewing our community through the gospel.*
- To renew something assumes that it was once good but has been broken, or ruined, or damaged.
  - To renew it is to restore it to its original condition or even to make it better like. Think of an old heritage home that has fallen into disrepair but has been renovated to be even better than it originally was. That's renewal.
- This word “renewal” captures the entire story of the Bible. The Bible teaches that God originally created everything in the world to be good. But human sin brought ruin and brokenness to every part of our existence, including separation from God.
  - However, the story of the Bible is described as gospel, which means good news. What is the gospel? The gospel is that God is working to renew his fallen and broken creation through Jesus Christ.

- This renewal begins as God draws people back to himself through Jesus. When a person receives Jesus Christ their broken relationship with God is renewed. God then works to renew every part of a person's life so they become more and more like Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate human being.
  - One day God will renew his entire universe. He will rid it of all evil, sin, and death and everything will be the way it is supposed to be.
    - So become a Christian is to be part of God's great work of renewing his fallen creation through Jesus Christ. Since this is what God is all about, this is what we want to be all about.
- So we envision a movement of the gospel that is bringing renewal to "our community". And here is how we are defining "our community".
  - "Our community" is first of all ourselves. In this statement we are immediately saying that we are broken by sin and that we need the gospel to renew us. We need the gospel to renew how we relate to God, how we relate to our families, our singleness, our sexuality, our money, and every other area of life.
  - Secondly, "our community" is our city. As we are changed by the gospel we want to be agents of renewal wherever God has placed us. So all across the CRD we want to see Christians being agents of renewal in their neighbourhoods and workplaces – showing love to those around them, bringing integrity to their work, and speaking of Christ as they are able.
  - And then thirdly, "our community" includes those parts of the world where Central has influence through our missionaries or through agencies that we support.
- So we believe the gospel is the very power of God to renew everything it comes in contact with from personal lives, to families, to workplaces, to whole societies.
  - This is, in short, what we mean by renewing our community through the gospel.

## WHAT DOES GOSPEL RENEWAL LOOK LIKE?

- Now let's get more practical and ask our second question: **(SHOW SLIDE)** what does gospel renewal look like? What does it look like in real life? We will spend most of our time on this question.
  - Let's come to our passage. This one story captures what we are praying would occur at Central and in Victoria.
    - In John 4 Jesus seeks out this woman from Samaria. His purpose in doing so is to renew her broken life through the gospel. But it is not just her life. By the end of the story, we see her entire town experiencing the renewing power of the gospel.
- So as we look at this story, I am praying that we would understand what gospel renewal looks like. But more than that, I am praying that right here and now, each one of us would experience the renewing power of the gospel for ourselves.

## A SHOCKING CONVERSATION

- Let's dig in. This story begins with a shocking conversation. Jesus is tired and thirsty from his journey. He does not have anything to draw up water from the well and so he asks a woman to do this for him. We don't see how alarming this is but this woman sure does. Look at her shock in verse 9. **READ 9** - *The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)*
  - The first reason she is shocked is because in a patriarchal culture men did not speak to women and yet Jesus purposely crosses the gender barrier and engages this woman.
  - Second, this is shocking because Jews hated Samaritans. Samaritans were racially mixed. They were half Jew and half Gentile and so the Jews rejected them. The Samaritans made matters worse when they built their own temple claiming that it was God's true temple. So there is also a racial and religious barrier here. Jesus crosses these as well.
  - Third, there are moral and social barriers between Jesus and the woman. We will get into this later on, but notice in verse 6 it says Jesus came to the well at the sixth hour, which was noon. All the commentators will tell you that women normally came early in the morning to draw

water for the day's chores. Yet this woman comes alone and at noon. Why? Because, as we will see, she has had five husbands and is presently living in a common law relationship. In a traditional religious culture this was scandalous. She comes alone and at noon because she is a moral and social outcast.

- Jesus intentionally crosses the gender barrier, the racial barrier, the religious barrier, the social barrier, and the moral barrier. Why? Answer: he has come to tell her some good news that will renew her life that is so broken by sin.
- Notice that Jesus begins by making her an astonishing offer. Look at verse 10. **READ 10** - *Jesus answered her, "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."*
  - Here is the gospel or good news. It is described as a gift. God has a gift that he offers to all people regardless of gender, race, social status or moral status.
- Jesus describes God's free gift as "living water". Water is something human beings must have to live. It is painful when you are thirsty but it is absolute agony if you cannot get water. When you are really thirsty and you finally drink a big glass of cold water it is one of life's most satisfying experiences.
  - But clearly Jesus is not just talking about our need for actual water. He is saying: **(SHOW SLIDE)** Our souls, like our bodies, possess a thirst that must be quenched or we will die. He is saying that to be human is to thirst – not just physically but spiritually.
    - And **(SHOW SLIDE)** Jesus makes the astonishing claim that he alone can quench our soul's thirst. He can give us living water. In John's gospel living water refers to God himself coming to dwell within us through the Holy Spirit.
- This woman does not really understand what Jesus is saying. She thinks he is talking about an actual spring of water but then is confused because he says this spring of water will be inside of her, always bubbling up, so she never thirsts.
  - Maybe this Jesus is just some crazy guy who's been out in the sun too long. Or maybe he is a magician or some kind of miracle worker?
    - She has nothing to lose in receiving this free gift and so in verse 15 she asks for him to give her this water.

## DRINKING SALTWATER

- Now listen to Jesus' response and see if it strikes you as a bit odd. Look at verses 16-17. **READ 16-17** - *Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband."*
  - What? Jesus was talking about soul thirst and water and now suddenly he brings up her love life. Why is he changing the subject? And why is he getting so personal? The key to understanding this story is to see that he's not changing the subject but he is getting deeply personal.
    - Jesus is saying, *"My dear woman, your soul thirsts to be known and to be loved on a deep level. You've spent your life trying to quench that thirst with men. You believe if you can just find the right guy to marry you then your soul will be satisfied. But look at your life. It hasn't worked. You've been through five marriages. You've experienced endless breakups, loneliness, pain, and tears. You've become so jaded you've given up on marriage altogether and are just living with your current boyfriend. And yet, you are still trying to quench your soul's thirst in this man. Dear woman, is it not obvious that no man can quench your thirst to be known and loved?"*
- Again, Jesus is teaching us something profound about what it means to be human. We learn here that **(SHOW SLIDE)** trying to quench our soul's thirst on anything but God is like trying to quench our physical thirst on saltwater.
  - Drinking from the ocean will satisfy your thirst for a second or two. But saltwater will only dehydrate you, increase your thirst, swell your tongue, and ultimately kill you. Jesus is saying

that as human beings we keep thinking that the things of this world like pleasure, sex, money, family, hobbies, or success can satisfy our thirst.

- Jesus points to everything in this world and says, ***“Whoever drinks of this water will be thirsty again.”***

➤ One of the best modern expressions of this comes from David Foster Wallace. He is the award winning and best selling novelist. A few years before his death he gave a famous commencement speech at Kenyon College. He uses the image of worship instead of thirst but it is the same thing. He said this to the graduates:

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** *“Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God...to worship...is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive...”*
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** *“...If you worship money and things-if they are where you tap real meaning in life-then you will never have enough. Never feel you have enough. It’s the truth. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you...Worship power-you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart-you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out.”<sup>1</sup>*
  - What do you look to for happiness and meaning in your life? Whatever it is, Jesus says, ***“Go call it. Let’s see if it has delivered on its promise to satisfy your thirst. Go call your career achievements. Go call your sexual desires. Go call your wealth. Whoever drinks of this water will be thirsty again.”***

## THE GIFT OF GOD

- But this is where the good news becomes so good. Jesus offers this woman, and us, water that can satisfy. And right here Jesus begins to satisfy this woman’s thirst. Look again at this story. Imagine what is going through her head. She is amazed by the grace and kindness of Jesus in that he crossed the gender barrier, religious barrier, and social barrier to talk with her and get to know her. ***“Yet,”*** she thinks, ***“it’s sure a good thing he doesn’t know about my sexual and relational history or he wouldn’t show me such love.”***
- Then suddenly Jesus tells her to go get her husband. ***“Whoa! Who is this guy and why is he getting so personal?”*** She doesn’t want Jesus to know her history so she answers that she has no husband. That is not technically a lie because her current guy is a live-in boyfriend, not her husband. ***“Phew, dodged that one,”*** she thinks.
    - Jesus graciously commends her for speaking the truth but then reveals that he knows all about her train wreck of relationships.
  - She is taken aback, recognizing that Jesus is no ordinary man. ***“Who is this man that he knows me so completely?”*** She feels totally exposed. And so she quickly changes the topic. She brings up the big religious and theological controversy between Jews and Samaritans. Whose temple is the true temple? The Jewish temple in Jerusalem or the Samaritan temple on Mt Gerazim?
    - It is always more comfortable to talk about intellectual difficulties with Christianity and or hot topic issues than it is to face your own sin. Jesus answers her theological question. She breathes a sigh of relief that the conversation is over saying, ***“Oh well, I guess when God’s promised messiah comes he will reveal the truth to us.”*** And then Jesus says in verse 26. ***“I who speak to you am he.”***
      - The realization of everything sinks in. ***“This man knew exactly who I was when he approached me. He knows all I have done. And yet he has shown me such love. Despite all I have done he has offered me the free gift of God.”*** She has found in Jesus

<sup>1</sup> <http://bulletin.kenyon.edu/x4280.html>

what she longs for - one who knows the dark depths of her soul and yet loves her beyond imagination.

- She is experiencing the renewing power of the gospel.

- Pastor Matt Chandler tells a powerful story about taking a non-Christian friend of his named Kim to service where the preacher was talking about sex:
  - ***“The preacher took the stage, and disaster ensued. I don’t know how else to describe the sermon. There was very little Bible in it. He gave us a lot of statistics about STDs. There was a lot of, ‘You don’t want syphilis, do you?’ and, ‘It’s all fun and games until you’ve got herpes on your lip.’ And in the middle of all this moralistic fear mongering, his big illustration was to take out a single red rose. He smelled the rose dramatically on stage, caressed its petals, and talked about how beautiful this rose was and how it had been fresh cut that day. In fact, he said, it was such a beautiful rose that he wanted all of us to see and smell it. So he threw the rose out into the crowd, and he encouraged everyone to pass it around. We were sitting toward the back of the auditorium of a thousand, and it made its way to us, all the while he kept preaching. As he neared the end of his message, he asked for the rose back. And, of course, when he got it back in his hands, it was broken and drooping, and the petals were falling off. He held up this now-ugly rose for all to see, and his big finish was this: ‘Now who in the world would want this? Who would want this rose now? Would you be proud of this rose? Is this rose lovely?’ His words and his tone were merciless.***
    - ***About a week or two later, Kim didn’t show up for class... She had a dark past, and I wondered if she had fallen back into some of her old habits. Then I got a phone call from a woman who claimed to be Kim’s mom. Kim had been in an accident and had been in the hospital right across the street from the university. So I hung up the phone with her mom, and I walked over to her hospital room. She was all bandaged up, and her face was still swollen...In the middle of our conversation, seemingly out of nowhere, she asked me, ‘Do you think I’m a dirty rose?’ My heart sank inside of me, and I began to explain to her that the whole weight of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that Jesus wants the rose! It’s Jesus’s desire to save, redeem, and restore the dirty rose.”***<sup>2</sup>
- Oh let the good news renew your soul. Jesus knows you and Jesus loves you. The ultimate proof of this is the price he paid to offer you the free gift. Even with this woman you can see it. The only reason she was offered living water was because Jesus got tired and thirsty on a journey and asked her for a drink. His thirst led to her salvation.
  - And this is, of course, not the last time Jesus said, ***“I thirst.”*** On the cross, Jesus cried out, ***“I thirst.”*** It was a physical thirst but it was also a spiritual thirst. We know this because his soul was in agony.
- He also cried out, ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** For all eternity he had drank from the sweet spring of His Father’s love but on the cross he faced the white hot wrath of God’s judgment against sin. He was not punished for his sin, for he had none. He was cut off for our sin.
  - He experienced a cosmic thirst so that he could invite you to drink from the clear waterfall of God’s grace.
  - He was led into the burning hot desert of God forsakenness so you could plunge your thirsty soul into the refreshing pool of God’s grace.
  - He was consumed by the wrath of God so that you could escape the flames and have the Spirit of God himself dwell within you like a spring that never stops bubbling up sweet water.
    - Have you received Jesus’ free offer of eternal life? He offers it to everyone regardless of gender, race, social standing, religious background, or moral status.
- So just as this woman experienced the renewing power of the gospel, our vision begins with the idea that we, as individuals, would continually be experiencing the renewing power of the gospel in our lives.

---

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Jared Wilson, *Gospel Deeps*, Kindle Edition, Location 2788.

- Our entire vision is centred not on a method but on a message. Everything we do would centre around this good news and flow out from it.

## HOW GOSPEL RENEWAL SPREADS

- But our vision is not just about us. We want to see this city renewed through the gospel. We want to use what influence we have to spread it around the world.
  - In our last few minutes let's ask our third question: **(SHOW SLIDE)** How does gospel renewal spread?
- Look at the story again. This woman has begun to experience the renewing power of the gospel. We know this because, even though she came to draw water, verse 28 tells us that she was so excited she abandoned her water jar. She rushed back into town. Despite the fact that she was an outcast she excitedly told everyone about Jesus.
  - Look at verse 28. **READ 28** - *"So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the town and were coming to him.*
  - Now skip down to verse 40. **READ 40-42** - *So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."*
    - This is incredible. An entire Samaritan town is transformed. How did it happen? It was very grassroots. It was organic.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** First, gospel renewal spreads at a grassroots level as people step out and tell others what Jesus has done in their lives.
  - That's all she did. This took some bravery because she spoke about her sins and failures with people who rejected her. But she told them how Jesus knew all of this and yet loved her anyways offering her eternal life.
    - Listen, we all talk about what we are excited about whether it is our kids, our latest vacation, our new phone, or the big game last night. When Jesus is renewing your life, it is exciting.
      - Gospel renewal will spread across the Victoria as Christians are experiencing gospel renewal and sharing their stories.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** But secondly, gospel renewal spreads as we invite people to investigate Jesus for themselves.
  - Notice the Samaritans did not believe because she was so eloquent in her presentation of Jesus, or because she answered all their questions on the problem of evil or evolution.
    - No this woman hardly knew anything. She just told them what she knew and then invited them to investigate Jesus for themselves. She said, *"Come, see a man."* They then listened to Jesus and verse 41 says they believed because of Jesus' word.

## CONCLUSION

- So what we envision for Central is a place where we are continually being renewed through the gospel. As Jesus transforms us we want to step out, to risk a little, to be a bit brave and share naturally with others what he is doing in our lives. As that conversation progress we simply invite them to come, see a man.
  - Look into Jesus. Read the book of John. Come and attend a *Christianity Explored* course at Central. We pray that many in the city of Victoria would say, *"It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that [Jesus] is indeed the Savior of the world."*
    - Gospel renewal spreads as we share how Jesus is renewing us and invite people to come, see a man.