

“God at the Center,” Michael Gatlin, John 4: 1 – 29, December 20, 2015

Good morning. How are we doing this morning? Excellent. We are continuing a series of messages, Advent season. We are looking at God through the lens of an old C. S. Lewis quote. C.S. Lewis, at one point, referred to God as “the transcendental interferer.” Like, he’s that one who’s always getting involved into areas of our lives that, sometimes we’d rather he not get involved in. And, it’s an interesting thing, when you look at the Scriptures; you see that God is always putting himself at the center of things.

And, you see that over and over again in the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, we see this: We see, as the Jewish folks are wandering from their captivity in Egypt to the Promised Land for 40 years, God actually shows them how to set up their camp. And, right in the center of the camp, he instructs them to build this thing called the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant is in there. There’s this holy of holies area, where you go if you want to meet with God; it’s like, right at the center of their camp, that’s the place where you go meet with God. And, the way that they set up camp was everything was facing that; that was the center of their lives.

And then, in the prophetic books, we’re seeing the same thing. So, years later, the prophets, the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets, they’re saying the same thing: The only way to live a healthy life is to put God right at the center. And, the prophets are confronting the Israelites about the ways that they don’t put God right at the center. Whenever God’s people don’t put him right at the center, whenever they push him to the periphery, whenever they do that, what results is an unhealthy life, every step of the way. So, Christmas is all about the presence of God coming to our planet, coming to us, in a really tangible way. And, Jesus does the same thing; he puts himself right at the center.

And so, let me show you one way in the Scriptures where God puts himself at the center, where Jesus actually claims that he is God. So, there’s this passageway back in Exodus, when Moses meets God and sending Moses to his people in Egypt to confront them and to rescue his people from slavery. And, Moses says this to God, “Suppose I go to God and say to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask, ‘What’s his name?’ What am I supposed to tell them?” God says to Moses, “I Am Who I Am,” which is like, I have to side step this for a moment, because it won’t jump out of my brain. That’s the same thing Popeye said, right? I didn’t realize this when I was a kid; Popeye was claiming to be God. [Laughter] Popeye’s not God. Right? Okay, I’m back. Sometimes, there’s this collision of thoughts in your brain and you can’t get rid of them so you just have to say them. That’s what happened. Okay, I’m back. Squirrel, zoom!

So, this phrase, this name, “I Am Who I Am,” was the phrase that became the name of God and it was pronounced, ‘Yah-weh.’ And it conveys his eternalness. It conveys his self-existence. It conveys the changelessness of God that belongs to him alone, that nothing else is like that. So, when Jesus shows up, he uses the same phrase over and over again, saying the same thing about himself. And, that was the thing that got him crucified; he was saying, “I am God.” We see in John 6:35, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life.” And, he’s just saying this, throughout the gospel of John, Jesus keeps saying this. Shortly after feeding the 5,000, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life,” and he says, “I am the light of the world,” in chapter 8, prior to just healing a man born blind. In chapter 10, he says, “I am the door,” I am the way you get to God. He’s not just saying, “I am God,” but he’s saying, “I’m the way you get to him.” He says, “I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life.” He says this immediately right before healing Lazarus and raising him from the dead. “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” “I am the true vine,” chapter 15.

And, see, he does it, not only through these statements. And, in that day, the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, knew exactly what Jesus was saying. It confronted them in so many ways. But he did it not just through

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what he was saying like that; he took the different celebrations, the festivals, the feasts, the holidays that Israel had and he made those all about himself. So, you remember his very last Passover celebration, the feast right before the crucifixion, Jesus holds up the bread, the matzah and he says, “This is my body, broken for you.” He’s redefining Passover around himself. He’s saying, “I am the Passover lamb.” And then, the very moment in the temple when the Passover lamb is being slaughtered on what we celebrate as Good Friday, Jesus is dying on the cross at that very moment. He does it at Passover. He does it with one of my favorite ones, it’s called the Feast of Tabernacles and in the Feast of Tabernacles, one of the things they would do is they’d pray for rain. They’d pray for physical rain for their crops, because of the time of year it was, but they were also always praying for spiritual rain, for the presence of God to be with them like he had in the past. And, right in the middle, it was a seven day celebration, and right in the middle, Jesus stands up and he shouts, this, chapter 7, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Streams of living water will flow from within them.” And, by this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believe in him were later to receive. Jesus is saying that he is the source of living water; that he’s the one who can do that. And, he did the same thing with the temple; he did the same thing with the Sabbath. Jesus had this uncanny knack for putting himself right at the center, which is what the scriptures have always been about, putting God at the center, right at the center of everything. And, that is totally different from how you and I live. That is totally different from how most people on the planet have ever lived their lives.

There’s a book that came out a few years ago and they’ve just completed updated it with new research by Dr. Jane Twange, professor of psychology at San Diego State University. And, the book is called this: Generation Me. And, while she’s highlighting a specific generation, I honestly believe this applies to all of humanity. Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled, and More Miserable than Ever Before. And, in her research, what she’s done – and she’s done a ton of research – she looks at people born in the ‘80’s and ‘90’s and she identifies, through pages and pages of research, that these people are more tolerant, more confident, more open-minded, more ambitious – like all really good things – and, more cynical, more depressed, more lonely, and more anxious, as a result of just focusing on me and my needs and what I want. Remarkable research, but it’s not just true about that generation – your generation, I can’t say it’s mine anymore; I can’t say us – but, I think it’s true about all of humanity, like all of us. When we focus on ourselves, just like what God was teaching Israel in the Old Testament, I think it’s one of the most unhealthy things we can do.

So, I want to look at a story in John chapter 4 about how Jesus meets a woman – a woman he should never have stopped and talked to in his culture and in his day – he meets a woman and he puts himself right at the center of her life. And, we’ll find out that, once again, this Emmanuel, this God with us, is incredibly comforting and incredibly challenging every step of the way. So, if you have a Bible, open it to John chapter 4, John 4, most of the chapter. I’m going to cruise through this. You can access the Bible on your phone – there are some great Bible apps out there, I don’t know if you guys have discovered them yet. But, you can set them up ever morning to just remind you, “Read this section.” And then, together, you and me, we can take this whole next year and just read through the Bible together. It’ll be fun, more fun than human beings should be allowed to have. I actually sent that to Brenda in a card after our first date, “We had more fun – at least I did – than human beings should be allowed to have.” And, it worked! It’s a good quote, guys. Almost 30 years later... Okay, let’s try and get back on track somehow.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your presence here and your incredible love for us. Thank you for the way that even our whole calendar is centered around worshiping you and your birth, Jesus. Father, would you refocus our hearts and our minds; would you allow us to get to know you better, by looking at your Scripture today, by allowing your Scripture to speak to us. We just open ourselves up to you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

All right, John chapter 4. I’m going to start reading in verse 1: **v1** Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John-- **2** although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. **3** So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. **4** Now he had to go through Samaria. **5** So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had

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given to his son Joseph. **6** Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. **7** When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" **8** (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) **9** The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Let me just stop right there. This might seem like a little bit of a travelogue of Jesus in first century Palestine. And, sometimes, we can miss out on some really cool key things if we just like glance over some of these passages. So, Jesus is putting himself at the center of her life, but he's not going to do it like some narcissistic man on the prowl. Jesus is actually going to do it because it's the most loving thing he could possibly do, to put himself at the center of her life. So, let's look at how he does it. First of all, he puts himself at the center of her life with humility. John underlines that for us, that Jesus is truly a man. Verse 6, **6** Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

Do you get this? This is like God, the second person of the trinity – Father, Son, Holy Spirit – this is God, tired and thirsty. Like, that's remarkable. This is God himself and he's like worn out. He's tired from the noonday sun in Samaria. Lots of people throughout history have tried to dehumanize Jesus. If you look at medieval portraits of Jesus, he looks like otherworldly, not really connected. Even as you watch movies about Jesus, just up until the last few years, somehow he was moving through the dusty town without stirring up dust, you know, he was like not even touching the ground, someone floating. Maybe he had the hover-board. Somehow, he's getting through town not even getting dirty. But, here his, dirty, hot, sweaty – in every respect like us except for sin. And, I think that verse 7 has one of the most shocking statements in all of Scripture, "Will you give me a drink?" Will you give me a drink? This is the God who has no needs, asking for a drink; this is I am, eternally existent, self-sufficient, changeless one, asking for a drink. That's remarkable! That's remarkable.

Some people have said that God created humanity because he needed relationship. God did not create us because he needed our love; God's not lonely. He had perfect relationship, Trinitarian community. He created us out of an overflow of his love because he desired to give a gift of love beyond himself to creatures who could appreciate his love, enjoy his love, bask in his love, swim in his love. That's why he created us. So, even Jesus' request of this woman is a humble one of love. One of the best gifts that a stronger person can give a weaker person; one of the best gifts, if you're in a position of authority or power, one of the best things that you can do for somebody who is a step below you is to confess your own need. That's one of the best gifts that you can give. When you're strong and gifted and talented, it is always easy to be in the position of the giver and you communicate to everyone around you, you communicated to the rest of the world that you don't really ultimately need anyone else; you can do it all by yourself, you're strong, gifted, and talented. One of the strongest gifts you can give is a confession of need; when you say, "I need you," you are actually giving that person the gift of value and dignity. And, that's what Jesus is doing for this woman at the well. Real love is always mutual; it's not just giving, giving, giving. It's also lowering yourself so that you can receive. And, I have met so many people over the past 20 years of being a pastor and all my years before that who have said, "Well, I don't want to need anybody."

I asked one guy if I could take him out to lunch, really early on, someone who had significant resource. I said, "Could we just go out to lunch? I'd love to talk about managing money and that kind of stuff," and he said, "You're not going to buy me lunch, because I don't want to be beholding to you." That's what he said. Beholding. I had to go look it up. I don't want to hug you, dude, I just want to buy you lunch. But, he didn't want to be in a position of being in debt to me; he didn't want to need anything. I've met many people who have said, "Michael, I'm just too proud to take anything from anyone else," like that's a badge of honor. That's not a badge of honor; that's really broken.

We are human beings who need one another. None of us are independent from each other. You can't

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produce all the stuff you need in your life all by yourself. There's no one who is self-sufficient. Only God is self-sufficient. But, in our brokenness, we tend to believe that we are. Letting other people help you, teach you, minister to you, which communicates to them that they count, that they matter, that your world is not complete without them. Not only do you and I seriously need help, but this is one of the ways that we show love to one another, by letting them give to us and so God is extending love to this woman by asking for a drink. So, Jesus is putting himself at the center of her life with humility.

And then, the second thing he does is he puts himself at the center by breaking down barriers. Verse 4 says, "Now he had to go through Samaria." Let me just unpack that a little bit. He broke down barriers of race; he broke down barriers of ethnicity. Here's a little bit of background. The history of the Jews and Samaritans is a history of conflict and hostility. About 700 years before Jesus was born, the Assyrians invaded Samaria and they deported the Israelites that lived there and replaced those Israelites with inhabitants from around the Assyrian empire. And, they moved in, intermarried, and brought with them their own gods. But then, they slowly began worshiping the God of Israel. They slowly began worshiping Yahweh. In fact, eventually, all of their polytheism almost entirely disappeared and the worshipped Yahweh alone. But, there were still big differences. For example, their Bible only had the first 5 books, the Torah. They rejected, in Samaria, the Prophets and the Psalms. They developed this bitter hostility toward the Jews in the south. And, part of it, rightly so. When the Jews who lived in the south came back from their own exile in Babylon, the Samaritans offered to help them rebuild their temple and the Jews in the south refused their help; they treated them like enemies. And so, the Samaritans refused to worship at that temple; they built their own temple on a mountain nearby. About 125 years before Jesus was born, the Jews from the south come and totally burn that temple to the ground. The Jews in the south viewed the Samaritans as heretics or even worse, as completely unclean, as half-breeds. And so, in fact, Orthodox Jews would avoid Samaria like the plague. They'd cross the Jordan River, they'd go all the way south and then they'd go west back again across the Jordan River so they wouldn't have to walk along the Samaritan highway. They believed that they couldn't even take an object from the hand of a Samaritan, because it was unclean.

So, in verse 4, "Jesus had to go through Samaria," it wasn't that he had to go through Samaria because it was geographically the only way to get there. They had walked around this little plot of land for years, hundreds of years. Jesus had to go through there because it was a divine appointment. God is doing something there. I love that. Jesus had to go through there. so, Jesus didn't just come to earth for the Jews as their long-awaited Messiah; he came for the whole world, for all of humanity. And so, instead of going around Samaria, he breaks convention, he breaks barriers, ethnic barriers, and he goes right to the heart of Samaria. And, he does something no Jewish rabbi would ever do. He speaks to a woman and he asks her for a drink. He breaks barriers of gender. In Jesus' day, no single adult male would ever speak to a woman alone. In fact, if you were a rabbi, if you were like Jesus, you wouldn't even like look at a woman; you had to look away immediately. Most Orthodox men barely spoke to their wives. In fact, the rabbis said, at that time in the first century, here's a direct quote, "He who speaks much with women, even his wife, brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the law and in the end, will inherit hell." Wow! Seriously. We don't do that today.

One of the most wonderful things you can discover about Jesus is that there's not even a hint of sexism in anything that he says or does. At a time when women were put down, Jesus treated women simply as fellow human beings to be loved and valued. One of the great courses – we had talked up here a little bit ago about V.I. (Vineyard Institute) – one of the great courses of V.I. that Derek Morfew teaches is called "Luke and Acts." And, one of the things he does is he goes through and shows how sexism and racism Jesus confronts all the way throughout the gospel of Luke, increasingly expanding the borders of his welcome. And then, the disciples, in the book of Acts, do the exact same thing, taking it further. And, it's a fascinating study as you go through Luke and Acts and see that. So, at a time when women were put down at every turn, Jesus treated them simply and fairly as human beings. Let me ask you a question, those of you in the audience who are women: When you think about how Jesus sees you, do you say to yourself, "I believe that Jesus sees me as every bit as valuable as every other human being on the

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planet.”? It’s like, that’s how you can see yourselves, according to Jesus; every bit as valuable as any man. And then, for men, let me ask you a question: Do you relate to women the way that Jesus did? His behavior is so shocking, the way he honors her that she says, “You’re a Jew! I’m a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” It is so common in our culture, men, to just objectify women, to use women. Like, that’s really common. And, whether it’s sex trafficking that we’re all against or whether it’s pornography that I don’t know, half the men in the country use on a regular basis. It’s like, it doesn’t work; it’s not honoring; it’s not what we’re created for; it’s not what Jesus is doing. Listen.

As followers of Jesus, we can and should reach out in friendship to those who have been rejected. Period. That’s who we are. Our calling, as followers of Jesus is not to shut the door in the face of those who are looking for help. And, it’s definitely not to carpet bomb other countries until they glow in the dark, indiscriminately killing those who are innocent as well as guilty. That’s not what the followers of Jesus are about; that’s not even close to what we are called to do. And, we’re told in the gospel of Matthew 25, that when we welcome others, we are welcoming Jesus. That is who we are. Imagine the impact of hundreds, even thousands of followers of Jesus rejecting the barriers that get handed down to us generationally, ethnically, politically, and just welcoming people, offering genuine friendship to anyone that we encounter. What would it be like? What would it be like if the first thing you discussed with other people or with me after the service was not your point of disagreement, but it was our value as human beings, created in the image of God. That would take conversation to a whole new level. Man, the room got quiet fast. All right, so Jesus is the only one, if we go back to this passage, the only one who can quench our thirst. I love, as we go back to this passage that he can break down barriers that keep us from God. And, that’s the whole point. I’m going to go back to verse 10.

10 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." **11** "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?"

12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" **13** Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, **14** but those who drink 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." **15** 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."

The phrase ‘living water’ comes up in the Old Testament quite a few times. In Jesus’ day, it just simply meant running water that you could find swiftly flowing, in a stream or waterfall. One of the places that that pops up is Jeremiah 2:15 where the prophet says this, “My people have committed two sins. They have forsaken me, the spring of living water and they have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” God offers running water, flowing water that quenches our thirst, but instead, we opt for stagnant water and stagnant water, sitting in cracked pots, most of it has leaked out and the only thing left there is silt or mud in the bottom. Here’s the deal, making it really practical. Every single person on this planet is thirsty. Everyone in the room is thirsty; you’ll never meet someone who’s not thirsty. Not just physically thirsty, but deep spiritual thirst for real, interactive, experiential, personal, deepest-need-meeting relationship with God.

And, I wonder how many of us can honestly say that when we are restless, we turn to Jesus? That when we’re bored, we turn to Jesus? That when we’re fretting, when we’re anxious, when we’re dissatisfied, that Jesus is where we turn; that, when we’re upset; life doesn’t go our way; the roof is crashing in, that Jesus is the place that we turn? I wonder if we can honestly say that. Or, do other things come to mind? Broken, cracked cisterns that can’t hold water – do you get this? Jesus is the spring of living water. I wonder how many of us can say, it’s been my true, authentic experience that, when I’ve been completely bored and dissatisfied, that I’ve turned to Jesus and he quenched my thirst. That’s the life that he’s inviting us into. That’s what he’s inviting this woman at the well into.

It’s not enough to know that there’s water at the well if we never go to him thirsty. It doesn’t count. It’s not enough to hear about somebody else’s experiences; it’s not enough to see a really cool post on

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Facebook of somebody experiencing that if we come to the Holy Spirit ourselves for a drink. So, why don't we go to Jesus to have our thirst quenched? Well, there are a couple reasons.

For some of us, we have a substitute supply of water. Maybe, you keep going to the stagnant pool of relationship after relationship after relationship. Or, maybe you've gone to the stagnant pool of success or more degrees. Or, maybe there's the pool of acceptance or praise by someone whose opinion you really value – your parents or your spouse, your partner, or somebody else, a leader. Or, maybe you've gone over and over and over again to the stagnant pool of church. Church can be a stagnant pool where we just walk in; we sit in these luxurious green chairs, but we never actually go to the Holy Spirit and get a drink for ourselves. We're hoping that just sitting in this room will somehow make us the people that we want to be. Jesus is the thirst-quencher. He says, "I'll give you water so that you never thirst again. Indeed, the water I give will be a spring of water that will help quench other people's thirst and wells up into eternal life." So, some of us have substitute supplies of water.

Now, some of us just don't allow Jesus' words to confront us very deeply. We hear Christ at a superficial level. He's talking about living water; he's talking about gifts of the Holy Spirit; he's talking about God's presence in our lives. And, this woman can only think of physical water. She can only think of drawing water from a well. The key to having Jesus quench our thirst is to, number one, stop going to a substitute supply of water and then number two, to stop hearing his words at only a superficial level. He's inviting us into real, life-giving relationship, where we actually experience the presence of the Holy Spirit meeting real and deep needs in our lives; this is real relationship that he's talking about. And he goes on, verse 16. He fulfills our longing when we listen to his voice. **16** He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." **17** "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. **18** The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." **19** "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. **20** Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

One of the constant features that we see when Jesus encounters people in the Bible is that eventually he cuts to the chase and he goes after their real issues. So, for instance, in Matthew, a man comes to Jesus and he goes, "Jesus, help my brother and me divide up the inheritance." He's looking for estate planning stuff. And he says, "Jesus, I want you to be the judge between my brother and me." And Jesus cuts to the chase and says, "Be on your guard against greed." A man comes to Jesus for healing and Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven." This woman is having a conversation with Jesus about water and wells and Jesus turns the conversation to her personal life and how she's personally going to stagnant pools of relationship and always ending up thirsty.

Here's the deal: The closer that we get to Jesus, the more personal and the more disturbing, the more, as C.S. Lewis says, the more 'interfering' he gets with us. The closer you get to Jesus, the more personal he's going to get with you. And, it's hard stuff to hear, sometimes. You can't come to Jesus without him talking to you about things that are going to affect your life: your need to control things, your need to control people. Maybe it's your anger or your refusal to let go of anything that's ever happened to you, unforgiveness. Or, it could be your lust or your need to constantly prove yourself or your desire to always be the center of attention, to grab the limelight.

And, here's the deal: When Jesus gets uncomfortably close and personal with us, we do exactly what this woman does. We defend and we deflect. We say, "You Jews worship in Jerusalem, us Samaritans over on the mountain." What she's basically saying in today's language is, "Religion is such a confusing mess. Who can really tell what's right and what's wrong? One person says one thing, another says another; it's all a matter of perspective; therefore, I don't have to listen to you about my lifestyle. You see what she does? Do you hear yourself in that? Okay, maybe not you, but the person in the mirror? That's exactly what we do. Who knows what's true? We say, "My mother was a Catholic, my father was a Methodist. Therefore, Jesus, I don't really need to listen to you when you talk about my marriage." No, we keep

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ourselves from Jesus when we choose not to be vulnerable, when we choose not to let him speak to us.

Like, think about this. When was the last time you were caught with your hand in the cookie jar? Like, it happens to all of us. You're caught doing something you weren't supposed to do. Or, somebody confronts you about your anger toward your children. Or, somebody confronts you about the way you're treating somebody at work. What do we do? We defend and we deflect. "Well, it's not like you're any better." My hand's in the cookie jar, but it's not like you're any better. Like, isn't that what we do? We do that like all the time with one another. When was the last time that you got confronted and you said, "I'm going to let the truth come into me"? I'm going to take this in. it hurts like dickens, but I'm going to take it in; I'm going to let it confront me; and I'm going to be a different man as a result of this. I'm going to be better. That's what it takes. When was the last time that we got vulnerable with them? When was the last time that we said, "You're right; I will let the word of God close in on me through you"?

And then, last thing, Jesus is the place where we meet with God. Verse 21, isn't this stuff wonderful? See, the presence of God, challenging and comforting. Boom. Verse 21:

21 "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. **22** You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23** Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. **24** God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." **25** The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." **26** Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you--I am he."

That's like, mic drop. Boom. I'm that. You know, what Jesus is saying – let me just unpack this really briefly – what Jesus is saying is that God is not linked to a location. This is the first time in religious history that this has ever been said and it still rings true today. Every religion has directly linked God to a place, whether it's Mecca or a river, or people talk about spiritual vortexes or spiritually alive places, like Stonehenge or Boulder, Colorado. I think that was all because of Mork and Mindy. Even Christians talk, wrongly, about a holy place. We call this big room like the sanctuary and we have all these rules of things you can and can't do in the sanctuary. But, God's not linked to a location; he's not linked to an altar; he's not linked to a sacred city; he's not linked to a stone or a temple. And, Jesus is basically rejecting "Holy land theology." He rejects the notion of sacred space on earth. So many of our wars have been about protecting or getting back a sacred space, a sacred temple or mountain. Jesus is rejecting all of that.

And, what he does is he puts worship strictly on himself; he says, "I'm the place worship happens." What an amazingly radical message we would have in the world if we didn't believe in sacred places. If this place right here where we're sitting is no more sacred than the parking lot. But, that's exactly what he's doing, and then, the gospel of John, you find he goes even further. Every religion has been linked with a day of the week, whether it's the Sabbath or Friday for the Muslims or Sunday for followers of Jesus. One day is not holier than another day. Jesus is saying something huge and it opens up a whole different understanding of worship as a way to live life. It's revolutionary in the history of religion. What he's saying in the text is radical. People used to go to sacred spaces to meet with God. Now, Jesus is where we meet with God. Jesus is where we meet with God.

And then, a little bit further, Jesus takes it further. Let me show you another passage. John 14, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them. We will come to them and we will make our home with them." What Jesus is saying, what we see in the book of Acts, what the apostle Paul unpacks in his letters is that believers of God, believers in Jesus who love God and have received the Lord Jesus into their lives, they become the dwelling place of the Spirit. If you're a Christian believer, if you're a follower of Jesus and you've received the spirit of God into your life, then wherever you are becomes the sacred space. This space is no more sacred than your cubicle. This space is no more sacred than the hospital where you work. This space is no more sacred than your bedroom or your bathroom. Where you are becomes a sacred space, because the Spirit of God lives in you. That's why the apostle Paul says the

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same thing, he says to every believer, "You are a temple of the Holy Spirit; you are the house of God." And, not individually that you're a temple, but then he calls us living stones that together build the temple, so that, as the people of God, together we experience the presence of God. That's crazy. God is seeking and longing, Jesus says, for authentic, genuine worshipers who to connect with him in the deepest part of our being. And then, I love what this gal does next. Verse 28, last part I'm going to read. **27** 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?" **28** Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, **29** "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They came out of town and they made their way toward him.

See, when all of a sudden we begin to experience this spring of living water, we are wired in a way where we can't help but share it with other people. We can't wait to talk about it. She wants everyone to know the Christ whom she has met. He is offering his presence: it's comforting, it's challenging at the same time; it feels really good and it hurts so good. That's what's going on with her. She wants everybody in her whole village – she's the person who had been coming out in the middle of the day because she felt so ashamed of her personal life. Everybody goes out and gathers water early in the morning. This was in the height of the noonday sun. She was ashamed of her personal life and that's why she was there. She meets Jesus and she goes back and tells the whole town. That's awesome. That's exactly what he does for us. We meet him. We let him be at the center of our lives and it brings healing to the deepest part of our soul. And, the natural result is that we'll bend over backwards to help other people get there because it's been such a healing experience.

Listen. Let me just wrap this up with a bow. Here's the deal for us. For some of us, this deeply confronts us. And, some of what I've shared, like even practical application of this, you feel deeply confronted by it. You know, that's a really good thing. If all you ever do is read books or listen to people that you agree with everything they say, you're never going to get to grow. You grow by having your thoughts and our ways of looking at life challenged. And, that's like a really good thing. And, I believe that the Holy Spirit wants to challenge us way deeper than anything I could ever say.

So, I just invite you – we're going to pray here in just a second – open up your heart, open up your soul, open up your spirit, to how he might want to confront you. And, the list could be really long, but, one of the things I've learned in my relationship with God is he'll just pick one or two little things, well big things, and give us an opportunity to respond to those. So, even if you feel like there's a whole bunch of stuff you feel confronted by in the presence of God, it's like, just let him highlight one or two things and then begin to turn those things over to him. As you feel like he's confronting, it's really good to just say, "Lord, I just welcome that. This hurts and I don't know if I agree with that, but I want to experience your presence." I think all of us in the room need that.

And then, all of us in the room need the other piece of that. As this woman got closer to her, he confronted her, he got more disturbing, but then she experienced something she had never experienced before: a fresh drink of living water that she couldn't wait to give away. And so, stick with it long enough to get to that point where you actually feel the presence of Holy Spirit encouraging you and welcoming you and saying, "Welcome home. Welcome home."

And then, when you walk out of the room, those little postcards that we made for Christmas Eve, grab a handful. I don't want any of them left. Grab a handful and ask God who he might invite you to invite just to Christmas Eve. And, I'm going to talk about the presence of God and I'm going to invite people to respond to God's presence as we sing Christmas carols and hopefully we'll do my favorite one, Little Drummer Boy, and we're just going to talk about that and I'm praying that at least 100 people make a first time commitment to Jesus as we have those 4 services. So, would you guys do me the favor of sharing that with other people around town that you know that are looking for a place and looking for family, looking for people to spend that time with. And so, that's the stages, you let God confront you, let him get close, let him get personal, receive his comfort, and then be willing to give that away. Why don't

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you guys stand up?

So, Holy Spirit, thank you for your gracious, gracious love. Thank you that out of the overflow of your relationship, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, you created us so that you could love us. Thank you for that. And, God, we just confess that so often, we push your love away because we're afraid of having to change anything in our lives. Would you give us a grace to really respond to you right now, just to welcome you to the deepest part of our lives, to welcome you to put your finger on something you want to confront, something you want to bring healing to? Would you put your finger on the alternate sources of water that we go to that are just really sand and silt and mud and muck. Let us see them for what they are. Would you give us the grace to stay with you and press in to get the drink of real, living water, not just to get offended and walk away again. Holy Spirit, we invite your presence.

If you're on the ministry team, make your way up here. I think it's really good as God's putting his finger on stuff to actually get prayer from one another. In our culture, especially, we love to be independent, self-sufficient. And, a really deep, healthy life is never meant to be spiritually independent. And so, these folks up here would love to pray with you. And, I'd just take a few moments, as these guys are leading us in worship – they'll keep playing for a while – I just invite you to come up and get some prayer, allow God to press in and help you grow. Other than that, God bless you guys. Thanks so much for coming to the Vineyard today and I pray that your Christmas week is really full of God's peace – his Shalom in every part of your lives.