

The Battle is Around Jesus

Rich Nathan

April 5-6, 2003

John: The Jesus I Never Knew Series

John 4:1-38

- I. Jesus the Man (Jn. 4:4-8)

- II. Jesus the Barrier-Breaker (Jn. 4:4, 7-9)

- III. Jesus the Thirst-Quencher (Jn. 4:10-15)

- IV. Jesus the Prophet (Jn. 4:16-19)

- V. Jesus the True Temple (Jn. 4:20-24)

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- **Mention the Passover Seder on April 11th. Tickets are available in the lobby.**

The news regarding the war these past few days has concentrated on the battle for Baghdad. After months and months of planning and preparation, sending several hundred thousand troops to the border of Iraq, after trying to secure international cooperation at the UN, after the passing of resolution 1441, a call for Iraq's disarmament, after trying and failing to work out some kind of an agreement with the French, the Russians, the Germans, and the Chinese, we then had a war of words, threats, counter-threats, timelines, 48-hour deadlines. Finally, a few weeks ago, the President gave the green light for the invasion of Iraq.

Over the last few weeks the Southern oil fields have been secured, the coalition troops have pushed north past Basra, Najaf, and Kut, across the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. It was 60 miles to Baghdad, 50 miles to Baghdad, 20 miles to Baghdad, 5 miles, and the suburbs of Baghdad – securing the airport. The noose is tightening from the north, the south, the east and the west. The battle is now centered on the ultimate goal of this campaign, the capture of Baghdad and the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein Regime in Iraq.

Marlene and I just returned from spending a little over a week in Rome where we met with international leaders of the Vineyard movement from around the world—key

leaders from African and New Zealand, Australia, Central South America, North America, Western Europe, the UK, all gathered in Rome for a wonderful meeting in which there was just profound unity displayed across our movement. It felt really good to be part of the Vineyard family.

There was a discussion about the possibility of us meeting with the Pope before we went. Unfortunately, the Pope was really too ill to have our little group pay him a visit. But we did get to hear from the preacher to the Papal family. I didn't really know this, but a wonderful preacher named Father Contalamesa regularly preaches to the Pope. He preaches to the Pope and the Cardinals that are there in the Vatican along with the top officials of the Vatican during the Advent and Lenten seasons.

But Father Contalamesa broke away from his duties at the Vatican to share a word with our little Vineyard leadership team. He is this sprightly little Italian guy who spoke fluent English, along with 7-8 other languages. He was warm and engaging, and funny. But one of the statements he made from which I drew today's title is that the battle in the world is now around Jesus.

In former centuries people argued and disputed over how many fingers a person should use when crossing themselves. Should you use three fingers or two? In earlier centuries people argued about what the appropriate date was for celebrating Easter and Christmas. In the 16th century people argued about who the appropriate candidates were for baptism, babies or adults. And then there was an argument about how baptism ought to be administered. Should you be completely dunked or

sprinkled, or poured. And should you be dunked three times forward, or one time backward.

But you know if you listen to what's going on in the world, I don't hear anyone anywhere saying, "I wonder if I should cross myself with two fingers or three?" "I really wonder if I need to be dunked three times or one time?" Nobody outside the church has ever said to me, "You know what's really been bugging me? I've been wrestling with how many times a person ought to be dunked in order to have a proper baptism."

In the 20th century the church has argued over the timing of the rapture, whether it will take place before a tribulation in a secret snatching away, or after the tribulation. Charts, graphs, and pictures have been produced. Books have been written for and against different positions.

But it seems like just as everything is aiming for the heart of the matter in Iraq right now, things are really heating up for the ultimate battle, the battle for Baghdad, everywhere you look in the world, the world is closing in on Christ. The crucial question of the hour is who is Jesus Christ – what shall we do with him? This is the question that Hindus in India are beginning to wrestle with. This is the question confronting the Muslim world. This is the issue for Catholics, Protestants, Baptists, and Pentecostals. This is the issue facing the unchurched. Who is Jesus Christ – what shall we do with him?

John 4 is set against the backdrop of John 3. In John 3 we encounter Nicodemus, a religious, orthodox Jew. In John 4 we meet a Samaritan woman who is irreligious, unorthodox, and who is regarded by the Jews as a half-breed. John 3 takes place at night. John 4 takes place at high noon. In John 3 Nicodemus is powerful and in the very center of society. In John 4 we meet a woman who is so powerless that we don't even learn her name. And she's not in the center of society; she's on the margins. She lives in the shadows.

And yet for both Nicodemus, this named, powerful, religious Jew, who had the world by its tail, and for the unnamed woman of John 4 whose world had blown up, the issue was the same. For both of them they are closing in on this one central question: who is Jesus Christ and what will I do with him? Who is Christ going to be for me? Like for the forces coming to Baghdad from the east and the west, and the north and south, people are coming toward Christ from all different places. That's what John 3 and 4 are about. Folks encountering Jesus from the center and from the margins, from inside the church and from outside the church. The battle, friends, is now around Jesus. That's what I've called today's talk. Let's pray.

John 4:1-8 – The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. When the Lord learned of this, 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 Sychar, 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 the sixth hour. 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.)

I've called the series that I've been doing from the book of John, "The Jesus I Never Knew." I borrowed that title from Philip Yancy's wonderful book by that name. What I want to do throughout the series is provide us with a refreshing, sometimes radical, look again at Jesus Christ. It is so easy for us with our church traditions to domesticate God. To turn the Lion of Judah into a safe little house kitty. To fail to be shocked at how utterly revolutionary, how threatening, how unsettling Jesus Christ really is.

What we discover in the gospels, but particularly in the gospel of John, is how disturbing it was for people to meet Jesus. I'd like to recapture a little bit of that sense of disturbance as we go through the gospel of John.

The first thing we discover in this passage is the apostle John underlining for us that Jesus is truly a man. We read in v. 6, *Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.* There is Jesus, who we discovered in ch. 1 is fully God. There is God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, sitting down on a rock, hot and tired from the noonday sun in Samaria, which is in Northern Israel. And as one church father put it, Jesus is not sitting on a throne in heaven. But he is sitting on a rock on earth. He's truly a man.

Now the church throughout history has always wanted to distance Jesus from being truly a man. The medieval portraits of Jesus gave him this otherworldly look. He always had a glow around him. He was distant. If you've seen many of the movies about the life of Jesus, he almost seems to float above things. The picture of Jesus is more like the Buddha. He is always serene, always perfectly in control, always calm. But here he is dirty, hot, and sweaty. He is like us in every respect except sin. And we read, *When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me drink."*

This has got to be one of the truly shocking statements in all of scripture. God, who has no needs, asking for a drink of water. The next time we read this statement, he will be hanging on a cross.

You know, contrary to popular belief, God did not create us because he needed our love. God wasn't lonely. The Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, experienced perfect fellowship in eternity with each other. There was a perfect mutual giving and receiving of love. God didn't create people because there was a deficit in God that he was looking to people to fill. He created people out of an overflow of his love, because he desired to give a gift of love beyond himself to creatures who would be able to appreciate his love, enjoy his love, bask in his love, swim in his love.

And yet, here is the gift-giving God joining himself to his creation in such a close way that he is in need. Jesus is truly thirsty.

Now, Jesus' request of this woman is an act of great love. See, one of the best gifts a strong person can give to a weaker person is to confess their need of the weaker person. When you are strong and gifted and talented, it is easy to always be in the position of giver. You communicate to the rest of the world that you don't really, ultimately, need anyone else. Part of the great American myth is this myth of independence. I can do it myself. I don't really need your help.

We have an elderly relative who has lived for so long with this myth of independence that even though she is frail, physically weak, unable to drive well, she still will not allow anyone to help her out. And this has been the pattern of her whole life.

Do you know, friends that one of the most loving things you can do for someone else is to confess to them that you need them? Particularly if you are well off, particularly if you are strong, particularly if you are talented, particularly if you have life pretty well together. It is an incredible act of love when you communicate to someone else, who has less than you, "I need you." Because when you say to someone, "I need you," you are giving that person the gift of value and dignity. Real love is always mutual. It is not just giving, giving, giving. It's also lowering yourself so that you can receive.

How many of you find it difficult to receive? How many of you find it difficult to confess you have a need? How many of you are rarely prayed for because you are a leader, because you are supposed to have it all together, because you believe that you don't have any problems? Letting someone minister to you, letting someone teach you, communicates to them that they count, that they matter, that your world is

not complete without them. You know, one of the reasons I believe God permits pain to come into the lives of the strong, relational pain, family pain, physical pain, is so that as an act of love, we might allow others to minister to us and not be self-sufficient.

See, friends, one of the lessons I've had to learn over and over again as a Christian leader, as an American, as a man, as someone who has had the opportunity to be well-educated, is that what most folks really desire is not only to experience my gifts or my strengths, or my wisdom. What really communicates love to people is the confession of weakness and vulnerability and need. Have you learned that lesson? Do you think about Jesus this way?

And then we see Jesus the barrier breaker. In v. 4 we read, *Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, 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 the sixth hour. 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, "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.)*

The history of Jews and Samaritans was a history of conflict and hostility. About 700 years before Jesus was born, the Assyrians invaded Samaria and they deported the Israelites who lived there. They replaced those Israelites with inhabitants from

around the Assyrian Empire. The people who moved in brought their own gods with them, but they also began worshipping Yahweh, the God of Israel.

Over time their polytheism disappeared and so they worshipped Yahweh alone, just like the rest of the Jews did. But their Judaism was a peculiar kind of Judaism. The Samaritans, for example, had as their Bible only the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. They didn't accept the prophets or the Psalms. And they developed a bitter hostility towards the Jews who lived in the South. When the Jews, who lived in the South, came back from their own exile in Babylon, the Samaritans offered to help them build their temple. The Jews in the South refused their help and treated them like enemies. And so the Samaritans refused to worship at the Jewish temple and they built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim. About 125 years before Jesus was born, the Jews attacked the temple on Mt. Gerizim and burned it to the ground.

So between the Jews in the South and the Samaritans in the North, you had these attacks and counter-attacks. It wasn't too dissimilar to what you find in India today between the Muslims and the Hindus. Every so often a militant Muslim group will go into a Hindu area and slaughter a cow enraging the Hindus who treat cows as sacred. So by way of counter attack, the Hindus will invade a Muslim area and burn a mosque.

Jews in the first century viewed Samaritans as heretics. But worse than heretics, they viewed them as ceremonial unclean. The rabbis had a saying that Samaritan females were like menstruating women from the day of their birth. In fact, orthodox Jews, the Pharisees, would avoid Samaria all together when they traveled from the

North of Israel to the South. They would go into the east across the Jordan River, come all the way south, and then cross the Jordan River again so that they wouldn't have to walk along the Samaritan highway. And these orthodox Jews, the Pharisees, believed that they couldn't even take an object from the hand of a Samaritan, that taking an object would render them ceremonially unclean.

Who is Jesus Christ? He's not only a man, a man who confesses need and weakness; he's also the great barrier breaker. V. 4, *Now he had to go through Samaria.* This had to be not just a geographic necessity, it is a divine necessity. In accomplishing the mission of God to save the whole world and not just the Jews, Jesus had to break certain barriers. And so instead of circumventing Samaria, the way the Pharisees did, Jesus gets off the beaten trail, as it were. He goes a different way. He is unconventional. He goes right to the heart of Samaria. He does something very unusual. He speaks to a Samaritan woman. V. 7, *When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?"*

In Jesus' day a single male would never speak to a woman alone. In fact, a single male who was religious would look away from a woman. Some orthodox men barely spoke to their own wives. The rabbis said, "He who talks much with women (even his wife) brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the law and in the end will inherit hell." The rabbis considered the study of the law the greatest good in the world and yet they refused to teach the Torah, the Law, to women. One rabbi said, "If

any man teaches his daughter a knowledge of the law, it is as if he taught her to be a prostitute.” A very ancient rabbinic prayer found in Jewish prayer books up until the 19th century read, “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, who has not made me a Gentile, or a woman.”

But Jesus doesn't care about the conventions - what other people do, what other people think. He is a barrier breaker. One of the most wonderful things, women and men that you can discover about Jesus is that there is not a hint of sexism in anything that Jesus ever did or said. The first news of the incarnation went to a woman. The first miracle was performed for a woman. The first Samaritan convert here in John 4 was a woman. She is the first person that Jesus ever told clearly that he was the Messiah. The first Gentile convert was a woman. The first resurrection teaching was given to a woman. The first to witness the resurrection was a woman. The first witnesses to the resurrection were women.

Dorothy Sayers, who is a Christian writer and a dear friend of one of my favorite Christian authors, CS Lewis, summed up Jesus' attitudes towards women this way. She said, “Perhaps it is no wonder that women were the first at the cradle and last at the cross. They had never known a man like this man. There never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered nor coaxed or patronized, who never made sick jokes about them, who rebuked without querulousness, and praised without condescension, who took their questions and arguments seriously, who never mapped out this sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine, or jeered at them for being female, who had no axe to grind and no

uneasy male dignity to defend, who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious. There was no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole gospel that borrows pungency from female perversity. Nobody could possibly get from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything 'funny' or inferior about women's nature.

At a time where women were put down at every turn, Jesus treated women simply as fellow human beings to be loved and valued. Let me ask you a question: Christian sisters, when you think about how Jesus sees you, do you say, "He sees me as every bit as valuable as any man?" Men, let me ask you a question: Do you relate to women the way Jesus did? His behavior is so shocking that it blows this woman's mind. She says, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?"

It is profoundly disturbing to people when you act in a way contrary to their prejudices. When you take the risk of walking off the beaten path, you are a Jew and I am a Muslim, you are a conservative Republican and I'm a feminist, yet you want a relationship with me? The tragedy is that today there are literally millions of people who would be shocked if they discovered that you were a true Christian and that you still wanted to have a relationship with them. I can just hear it. "You are a Bible-believing Christian, one of those born-again, and yet you want to have a relationship with me, a gay man?" How many people in the world believe that 2000 years after Jesus broke down barriers, that barriers are the essence of what it means to be a Christian?

Last year I wrote a book called “Who is My Enemy: Welcoming People the Church Rejects.” It was all about barrier-breaking. How the conservative wing of the Christian church could reach out to feminists, New Agers, political liberals, postmoderns, and gays. I’ve been interviewed about this book on a number of radio stations. Almost always the first question that is asked of me is, “But isn’t it the Christian’s responsibility to protest homosexuality wherever and whenever he or she encounters it?” I’ve developed a stock answer to this question. I’ve said, “Well, there may be a very small percentage of Christians that are called to the political arena and who have to do political battle with the gay rights agenda. But 99% of Christians are not called to politics. They simply find themselves working alongside a gay man, or going to school with a lesbian, or having a gay person in their family. And the first thing that Jesus calls 99% of us to is not to do battle over homosexuality. The first thing we talk to someone about is not their particular variety of sin. My understanding of what it means to follow Jesus is that the first thing I am to offer someone else, no matter where they’re coming from, is friendship.”

You are a Christian and I am a gay man or woman and yet you want to be my friend? Imagine the impact of thousands of us as Christians rejecting the barriers handed down to us by the religious and offering friendship to anyone we encounter.

I’m not suggesting to you that we Christians change our sexual ethic that permits sex only between one man and one woman in the context of life-long covenant commitment, absolute fidelity. But what if we followed in the footsteps of our Lord, who always blew people’s minds because he offered friendship to those who

expected rejection all of the time? Friendship to prostitutes. Friendship to tax collectors. What would it be like if you offered friendship to people who were pro-abortion? What would it be like for you if the first thing you discussed was not your point of disagreement with another human being, but simply your concern for them as people? What if we offered true friendship to someone of a different race? Maybe Sunday morning at 11:00 a.m. would stop being the most segregated hour in America. I know where you're at and I love you anyway.

While we were in Rome, a Catholic priest, who is high up in the Vatican hierarchy offered to celebrate a mass for our little group of Vineyard leaders in St. Peter's Cathedral. Here's a Catholic priest who took the risk of inviting a Protestant group into St. Peter's cathedral to celebrate communion with us. He said, "During the mass, there is of course, the celebration of communion." Then looking at us evangelical Protestants, he said this; "I see my role as being that of a priest, not a policeman of the table." And then with a laugh he added, "He who has ears to hear let him hear." In other words, "If you want to come up and take the wafer here in St. Peter's Cathedral, the table is open to you."

Talk about barrier-breaking. Here you go, receive what is most precious to me in the holist place that I know even though you aren't Roman Catholic.

At a certain point in the service he was asked, "Is there a song you would like to sing?" He turned to our group and asked, "Why don't you sing one of your favorite songs?" And so this little Vineyard group filled St. Peter's Cathedral with a Vineyard

song and the priest began to weep. He said, "In 20 years of being in the Vatican I have never met truer Christians than you people. You truly seem to love each other and to love me."

Let me ask you a question. Do you go out of your way to break barriers? That's what it means to be a Christian – to be a barrier breaker. Do you take risks in relationships, going off the beaten path? Do you refuse to discuss another person's sin until you have first offered them friendship? Do you know Jesus Christ as the great barrier-breaker?

And then we read in v. 10, Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asked 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 the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. In deed, the water I give him will become in him 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."

Jesus is the great thirst-quencher. So many people encounter Jesus Christ, they hear about him in church, in Sunday School. They are like the troops that are 5-10 miles away from Baghdad. But instead of pressing forward, pressing in to know Jesus

Christ and to allow him to satisfy their thirst, they turn away. Jeremiah, the prophet, who lived 600 years before the time of Christ, said this in Jer. 2:13, *My people have committed two sins. They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug out their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.*

What God offers us is living water. In Jesus' day living water meant running water that you would find in a swiftly flowing stream or in a waterfall. God offers running water, flowing water, water that quenches our thirst. But instead, we opt for stagnant water, that's been sitting in a pot outside. And even then God says its not just sitting in a pot. But it is a cracked pot and almost all the water has leaked out so that it is just mud.

How many of you can honestly say about yourself when you are restless you turn to Jesus? When you are bored, you turn to Jesus? When you are fretting, when you are anxious, you turn to Jesus. When you are dissatisfied, you turn to Jesus? When you are upset, when life doesn't go your way, when the roof is crashing in, you turn to Jesus? How many of you can say, "Rich, it has been my genuine, true, authentic experience to have my thirst quenched by Jesus Christ."

Friends, this is where the rubber meets the road in the Christian life. It is not enough to believe that Jesus Christ has water available if you never go to him when you are thirsty. It is not enough to hear about someone else's experience with the Holy Spirit, if you yourself have never come to drink. Jesus says, "Look at the banner if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." That applies to you tonight.

I wonder how many of you today have a raging thirst inside of you because you are living out in your own life the reality of v. 13, *Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again*. You have gone to the stagnant pool of relationship after relationship with a man or woman. You've gone to the stagnant pool of success in business, the stagnant pool of acceptance and praise by someone whose opinion you value—your parents or mate or Christian leader. You've gone over and over again to a stagnant pool and you come to church today and you're still not satisfied. Jesus the thirst-quencher says to you, *Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life*.

The woman misses the point. V. 15. She says, *Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water*. Do you know why many of us don't really have our thirst quenched by Jesus Christ? It's not only because we have a substitute water supply. It's also because we don't allow Jesus' words to confront us deeply. We hear Christ at a superficial level. He's talking about spiritual water. He's talking about the gift of the Holy Spirit. And this woman can only think about physical water, drawing water from a well.

St. Francis of Assisi had a powerful encounter with God back in 1205. God spoke to him and said, "Francis, I want you to go and rebuild my house, which is falling into ruins." Francis spent three years raising money to help rebuild church buildings until the Lord spoke to him again and said, "Francis, I'm not asking you to build church buildings. I want you to build up my people."

What if you and I stopped blunting the power of the Word of God and simply allowed it to probe us as deeply as God intends it to probe us. What if, when we read passages like, "Lay up treasures in heaven, not on earth," instead of skating over the surface saying, "Oh, yes, I have a heart attitude of being free of my possessions," we really started to pay attention to our future heavenly reward. What if we really allowed God's Word to probe us so deeply that it became a consuming passion of ours to make sure that our heavenly bank account was full. What if we started to do things in secret? What if we started to pay attention to what God thought of us when we were in secret. What if we started to pray to God in secret? What if we started to give money away secretly?

I believe the key to having Jesus quench our thirst is to stop hearing the words of Jesus superficially.

Well, Jesus Christ is also a prophet. V. 16, *He told her, "Go call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is you've had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped God on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."*

When you get nearer and nearer to Jesus, when the battle really closes in on Christ, we discover that Christ is closing in on us. One of the constant features about Jesus' encounters with people in the Bible is that he always eventually cuts to the chase and uncovers the person's real issues. A man comes to Jesus and says, "Jesus, bid my brother to divide up the inheritance with me." "Jesus, I want to ask you an estate planning question. I want you to act as a judge between me and my brother." Jesus cuts to the chase and says, "Be on guard against greed."

Martha comes to Jesus and says, "Tell my sister Mary to help me with all the preparations." Jesus says, "Martha, Martha, you're anxious about so many things."

A man comes to Jesus for healing and Jesus says to him, "Your sins are forgiven."

Jesus is having a conversation with a woman about water and then he cuts to the chase and speaks to her about all the stagnant pools of water she's reached into her whole life. Man after man, whether she went through five husbands by way of divorce, or less likely by way of death, or by living immorally with a series of five different men, we don't know. What we do know is that the closer we get to Jesus, the more personal and disturbing he gets with us. You can't come to Jesus without having him talk with you about the thing that controls your life – your need to control things and people, your anger, your refusal to let go of anything that has ever happened to you, your unforgiveness, your lust, your need to constantly prove yourself, your desire to be accepted by everyone, the fact that you've always got to be liked, your desire to always be in the center of attention, to always grab the limelight.

And when Jesus gets uncomfortably personal with us, we do what this woman did. We deflect and debate. *“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is Jerusalem.”* Deflect and debate. Deflect and debate. You Jews say worship is to take place in Jerusalem. Lots of arguments can be marshaled in the Old Testament for that. We Samaritans worship on Mt. Gerizim. There are lots of arguments in the Old Testament that can be marshaled for Mt. Gerizim as the holy place.

Jesus, religion is such a confusing mess. Nobody seems to be able to agree. Nobody really knows the truth. One person says one thing; another says another. It’s all just a matter of perspective. Therefore, I really don’t need to listen when you speak to me about my immoral lifestyle.

Deflect and debate. Who knows what’s true? My mother was a Catholic. My father was a Methodist. It’s no wonder that I’m all confused. Therefore, Jesus, I don’t really need to listen to you when you talk to me about my marriage. After all, I am a Jew. I wasn’t raised as a Christian. I am a Muslim. Therefore Christianity is foreign to me. I’m a Hindu. Therefore, when Jesus draws uncomfortably near to me, I don’t really have to listen to him when he starts speaking to me about my sin.

We human beings are factories of rationalizations. I am and you are. When is the last time you were caught by another person in a sin? You were confronted about

your attitude, about something you did, about something you were responsible for and you simply said flat out, no excuses, no defenses, no debates, no rationalizations, “You are right. You are right. I will let the Word of Christ close in on me through you.” You know, we keep ourselves from Jesus because we keep ourselves from being vulnerable.

And finally, Jesus is our Temple. Vv. 21-24, *Jesus said, “Believe me woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.*

This is a totally radical statement. We expect Jesus to say, “Believe me woman, as a Jew the time is coming when you will stop worshipping God here on Mt. Gerizim and will worship him in the true place of worship, Jerusalem.” But Jesus says, *Neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem.* He rejects holy land theology. He rejects the notion of sacred space on earth.

How many of the contemporary battles around the world are all about protecting our sacred cite, our sacred land, our sacred mountain, our sacred temple? Over the last 10 days I’ve gotten a stomach full of sacred places as I visited Rome. It is one thing to visit somewhere and appreciate the historical significance of a particular place because here was the place that Peter was crucified upside down. Here was the place that Paul was beheaded. Here was the place that our Christian forbearers were martyred in the Coliseum or buried their dead in the catacombs. Unfortunately, we human beings can’t simply appreciate a place because of its historical significance. We always want to tie God to that place and say there is a special holiness about this particular space.

So early on in the church's history, Christians made pilgrimages to the catacombs outside of Rome and began to pray to the dead martyrs that were buried there. They began making pilgrimages to Vatican Hill and pilgrimages to the place where St. Paul was beheaded. During the middle ages, Christians soured relationships with Muslims to this very day by engaging in four crusades to recapture the Holy Land and get it back from the Muslims.

What an amazingly radical message we Christians would have if we said to the world, we do not believe in sacred places here on earth. We don't believe church buildings are any more holy than the parking lot around them. We don't believe cathedrals or Lourdes in France, or Rome in Italy, or Jerusalem herself has to be controlled or owned, or have any more blood shed so that we Christians can possess it. No sacred space except Jesus. This is so radical.

Listen, woman, Jesus said, the hour is coming and now is. Jesus is talking about the hour of his crucifixion, his resurrection, and his exaltation. He's saying we are just about at the moment of the final battle, the final battle between me and the forces of evil. And when that final battle is engaged in and Christ installs a new regime of my kingdom, no more sacred space except him – just his followers coming to me in groups of two or three in prisons in China, in groups of 15-20 in a circle in Africa, in groups of 100-150 in Russian Orthodox Cathedrals, in groups of 6000 in the Vineyard Church of Columbus, in groups of tens of thousands in stadiums, and

hundreds of thousands in South Korea, in living rooms and bedrooms, offices, and parks – Christ says, whenever one of my followers comes to me, that place is sacred.

That's the final battle. Let's pray.