

Where the Lord is Honored
Peter Hiatt @ The Sanctuary Downtown
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For the month of February, we've been preaching through John chapter 4. In John 4, Jesus and His disciples travel through a land in which they are not welcome ... the land of the Samaritans.

Samaritans did not like Jews, and Jews absolutely hated Samaritans; they rejected Samaritans.

Samaritans claimed to be descendants of the 10 lost tribes of Israel, particularly Ephraim and Mannaseh, the sons of Joseph. However, the Jewish Rabbis literally regarded them as "swine," Assyrians, or half-breeds at best.

The Jews were primarily descendants of Judah. And although the Jews disagreed, the Samaritans claimed primary descent from Joseph and the 10 lost tribes.

Well, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well. You can still see that well today. It's 300 yards from the tomb of Joseph.

In Genesis 37, we find that Joseph was placed in a "well" in this very region. (Conceivably, it could have been this very well.) The word for "well" in Hebrew is also translated "pit," "cistern," or "dungeon."

When Joseph is imprisoned in Egypt, he refers to that dungeon with the same word. His older brothers placed him there when he came bearing the word of their father. Judah came up with the idea to sell Joseph into slavery. Judah didn't want Joseph in the family picture.

So, Jesus sits by this well and talks to an outcast Samaritan woman. He talks about thirst, then promiscuity, then worship.

He finds her empty heart.

He offers her Living Water that will rise up in her, turning her empty well into a fountain.

He sees her, she sees him, and she tells the Samaritans.

Jesus points to the incredible harvest among the Samaritans, and the Samaritans exclaim, "Indeed he is the Savior of the WORLD!"

[verse 43]

After the two days, he departed for Galilee. (That is: he left Samaria and went home to Galilee. He grew up in Nazareth, close to Cana, and later he made Capernaum his hometown ... all in Galilee.) For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown. (His "Parties": hometown, or homeland) So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him.

What a weird little paragraph: Jesus goes to the place where he knows he will be dishonored, and "then," "so," "therefore," they **welcomed** him.

It's such a weird little paragraph that some scholars think that it's a mistake. Jesus goes to his own home **because** he will be dishonored, and so they welcome him. Bizarre.

Can you think of a situation in which a person is welcomed **and** dishonored?

Have you ever been to a used car lot?

Have you ever been welcomed by a salesman, and later felt dishonored by the same salesman?

Ever been to the grocery store with a 6-year-old? "Oh Daddy, Daddy ... I love you so much! You're the best daddy in the world! And oh, hey ... can I have gum?"

As a young dad, I loved to buy my kids stuff at the grocery store. For just a couple bucks, I could rock their world. And yet I had to discipline myself not to buy 'em stuff, because I knew they could become addicted to the stuff, and lose sight of me. I knew I could spoil them.

A spoiled child is a miserable child, for he has all his father's things, and has lost the ability to see his father's heart. He gets everything he sees, but loses the capacity to see that which he most desperately wants – his father's heart.

So, he welcomes his father and dishonors his father all at once.

God is an exceedingly wealthy Father ... I wonder if he ever is welcomed yet dishonored?

If we saw him as he truly is, I bet Jesus is an exceedingly attractive Bridegroom. I wonder if he ever is welcomed yet dishonored?

I bet beauty queens, supermodels, strippers, and prostitutes sometimes feel welcomed yet dishonored.

I remember a friend telling me about interviewing a beauty queen. She broke down crying as she told him, "I don't know if anyone loves me." They probably didn't know either, so even as they welcomed her beauty, they dishonored her heart.

I bet this Samaritan gal was pretty good-looking. She was on her 6th man. They had all welcomed her, and I doubt that any had truly seen her heart and honored her ... at least not until the 7th man – Jesus.

Remember when Jesus came to his Bride (Jerusalem) and his Father's House (the Temple)? Palm Sunday ... no one had ever been so welcomed. Great crowds chanting, "Hosanna in the highest!" No one has ever been so welcomed and so dishonored. By the end of the week: stripped naked and nailed to a tree, wearing everyone's shame.

I wonder if that's how Joseph felt? Welcomed by his brothers, then stripped of his robe and dishonored. ¹

Have you ever felt welcomed yet thoroughly dishonored? It must be a terrible feeling.

[verse 45]

So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. (In John 2:23, he did many "signs.") For they too had gone to the feast. So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. ² And at Capernaum, there was an official whose son was ill. When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

This man is a "Baliskos." It means "nobleman." He was likely an official in the court of King Herod ("King of the Jews"). Do you see the contrast?

Jesus goes from an outcast Samaritan woman in the far country to a royal official from his hometown in his own country. In Samaria, he isn't really welcomed, and yet he is thoroughly honored. They all cry out, "He is the Savior of the world!" The world ... All in the picture on the Father's desk.

In Galilee, he is welcomed, yet Jesus says he is dishonored. The official cries out, "Be the savior of ... my son. The boy in the picture on my desk. Save him, and save him from the fever."

You know, aspirin can save you from fever, and you can buy it for about 2 bucks at Walgreens. That's its VALUE ... and that's what "honor" means ... Value.

¹ "Familiarity breeds contempt," they say ... and a prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown. In his hometown, they think they own him. They dishonor. Yet in John 5:23, Jesus says, "The Father has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son." All will honor him when they see his judgment. In John 12, Jesus says, "Now is the judgment," and he speaks of the moment he's lifted on the cross.

² That was a great sign... 6 jars turned to wine on the 7th day – blood red wine to fuel the wedding banquet. A great sign ... but you must **read** signs, otherwise you'll welcome the sign (which is free wine) and utterly dishonor the meaning, which is Jesus ... the heart of God.

“Save my child from fever.” = That’s something.

“Save the world from condemnation and the pit!” = That’s something, and a wee bit more.

Now, Jesus cares for this sick child absolutely. I’m just pointing out that they see him rather differently in the far country as opposed to his hometown.

[verse 47]

When this man (nobleman) heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. So Jesus said to him, “Unless you (“You” is plural... so he speaks to all Galilee. “Unless you people...”) see signs and wonders you will not believe.” The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”

“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe.”

Jesus and John refer to miracles as “signs.” A sign is significant, because it signifies something else. A sign points to something else, or it’s pointless as a sign. Jesus said, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign.”

Adulterers seek the signs of love: a man’s power, a woman’s beauty... and miss **love** ... “*Khesed*” ... covenant love. Adulterers welcome a person, and dishonor their heart. Like spoiled children welcome their father’s gifts, but no longer see his heart.

As a young father, sometimes at the grocery store, I bought gum and hot wheels as signs of my love. And yet sometimes I didn’t buy gum and hot wheels, so that my kids wouldn’t lose sight of **me**. Sometimes I didn’t buy gum and hot wheels so they wouldn’t exchange faith in me for faith in gum and hot wheels.

For (check this out) if they lost sight of me:

They could no longer read the signs that pointed to me.

They could no longer read the signs OR enjoy the signs, for all the signs say, “I Love You.”

Their world would be all sign and no substance ... meaningless.

So the signs meant I Love You, and even the absence of signs was a sign that meant “I Love You.” It all meant I Love You. All creation is a sign meaning I Love You. Yet seeking signs, we lose the ability to read them.

So, we seek a man’s strength or a woman’s body, and lose our ability to hear the words “I Love You.” We seek gum and hot wheels, and lose the ability to hear our Father’s Word: “This gift means I Love You.”

We seek signs and lose the ability to read them.

[Bruce Almighty – Clip #1]

That's Bruce in "Bruce Almighty," and his girlfriend, "Grace." Bruce is in an adulterous relationship with Grace (using Grace, and so he can't really see Grace). His world is full of signs, but because he seeks them, he can't read them. And ironically, they all mean Grace.

He's trying to use God, and so he can't see the Heart of God. The heart of God is Grace. And the Harvest of the Earth is Faith in Grace.

There are different ways of saying it:

St. Paul writes, "Faith, Hope, and Love" abide ... remain ... they are eternal.

Hebrews 11:1 – *Faith is the substance of things hoped for.*

Colossians 1:27 – *Christ in You, the Hope of Glory.*

And John will teach us that Love is God's glory – "God is Love."

Faith, Hope, and Love ... that's worship. That's God's life in us: Body broken and Blood shed in us. Bread and Wine in us and through us. Revelation 14 – that is, the Harvest of the Earth.

At the well in Samaria, Jesus says, "Look, the fields are white unto harvest."

To a nobleman in his homeland, Jesus says, "Unless you all see signs and wonders, you will not believe." He says it like it literally hurts him.

[verse 49]

The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. (He had some faith.) As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." (The 7th hour ... it really is a sign.) The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." And he himself believed, and all his household. (He has more faith. His faith grew.) This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

That's several signs in Judea, and two great signs in Galilee. But there's no mention of Great Harvest. In fact, it seems they have trouble reading the signs. In fact, in Chapter 6, near Capernaum, his hometown, Jesus will feed thousands, and tell them, "This is a sign." A sign. Then he tells them, "It points to my body broken and my blood shed," and many leave. He even says to Peter, "So, Peter, do you want to leave too?"

See, the crowd loves the sign: Bread and Wine. But they hated the meaning: Body

broken and Blood shed. They welcomed the power of God, but dishonored his substance ... His heart. He is Love.

They hated the harvest and left the banquet, for they had no appetite for what was being served – Grace.

But in Samaria, they were thirsty for grace and hungry to do God's will. And that is quite a contrast, especially when you realize John records no signs in Samaria ... just a long history of rejection, and the Word that comes to an outcast woman sitting by a well.

And this is ironic, but Jesus seems to delight in the fact that she runs and tells everybody. Yet in Galilee, often when he'd do signs, he'd say "Tell no one." It was like he knew they could not read them.

Commending on these verses, D.A. Carson writes, it's "tragic: despised Samaritans turn to Christ, while ... the historic covenant community either actively oppose him or cannot progress beyond a fascination for miracles and politics."

You know, the Church is the Covenant Community, and it's "tragic that we can't seem to get beyond a fascination with miracles and politics." Yet, even his disciples couldn't get beyond fascination with miracles and politics. It was John who once asked Jesus if he could call down fire on an entire Samaritan village.

Ironically, it was John who ultimately did call down fire on the Samaritans. In Acts 8, he goes to Samaria and baptizes them with the Holy Spirit - the Holy Fire. See, after Jesus' death and resurrection, John could read the signs. He saw the *Logos*, the meaning. It was John who received "The Revelation."

We think The Revelation is about miracles and politics, and so we cannot read the signs. Revelation 1:1 – It is the "Revelation of Jesus," NOT the Revelation of 21st Century Politics and Miracles.

Jesus is the meaning of all things, the meaning of all signs. We are surrounded by signs, but can't read them. We can only read them by faith. We complain, "I'd have faith if I had a sign." Yet you can't read a sign without faith. And some signs (miraculous signs) may damage faith. Real faith is Grace.

Matthew and Mark comment that when Jesus goes to his homeland, "He could do no mighty work there, but he did heal a few sick people." Maybe healing fevers isn't really his mighty work. So what is his mighty work? Well, I think it's Faith... and Faith in Grace is Salvation – "The Harvest of the Earth."

It's like too many signs, or the wrong signs, can damage the Harvest.

In John 20:29, Jesus says to Thomas, "Have you believed because you've seen me? Blessed are those who haven't seen and yet believed."

Blessed.

WHY?

Perhaps because they are a rich harvest of Faith, Hope, and Love. Faith grows where we don't understand, and hope where we don't see. "In this hope we're saved ... and who hopes for what he sees?" (Romans 8:24)

So "seeing signs" can damage a bumper crop of Faith and Hope in Love. Jesus said, "These people won't believe without a 'sign'." Yet, these people can't truly believe with too many signs or the wrong sign.

"You people won't believe without a sign," said Jesus. And yet he also said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign." (Matthew 12 & 16) "Yet no sign shall be given it."

Well, Jesus performed lots of signs in that generation, and yet they could not read them for lack of Faith. "An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign, yet no sign shall be given it except the sign of Jonah." And what is the sign of Jonah?

Well, it's : A man who just spend 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the beast (also called the Pit), who now preaches to his former enemies. "In the same way," says Jesus (Matthew 12:40), the Son of Man will spend 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth – the Pit. And get this: He is the Word we preach ... the Word of Faith. And Faith is the "substance of things hoped for." Not sign ... **substance**.

Well, Joseph was thrown into a pit. Read the story. Up until then he seemed kind of spoiled. The brothers intended it for evil, but God intended it for good. They stripped him of his robe (the sign of his father's love), and placed him in a pit (near Sydnar and then in Egypt).

A Pit.

Genesis 39:21 – *But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast Love* (Khesed).

Not signs of Love ... the very presence of Love ... in the pit.

I think the Lord had always been with Joseph, he just couldn't truly see him until he went to the pit. And when he rose from the pit, he knew God's Love, had mercy on all Israel, and so saved his enemies – his brothers ... that's "*khesed*."

In John 4, one of his descendants sits by a well (a pit). It could very well be the very same well. She is one of the lost sheep of the House of Israel – a descendant of the lost brother, Joseph. And now, the Incarnation of “*khesed*” (Covenant Love) sits next to her. He sees her heart, and then she sees Him: God’s Heart.

They both have been so welcomed and so dishonored. He came to her well ... or perhaps **she** came to his. She sees him and believes the Word; then out of her well, that place of deepest thirst begins to bubble up, Living Water.

In a short time, Samaritans are streaming out of town to meet Jesus at the well. He lifts his eyes and says, “Look, the fields are white for harvest.” And as far as we know, he didn’t perform one sign.

I say this, ‘cause I suspect that some of you are concerned that you’ve never seen what you would call a sign... that you’ve never prayed and heard God answer with words in your head. You’re concerned –

That you’re confused, and you doubt, and your heart feels like a dry well;
That you feel like an outcast;
That you feel like a failure with a string of broken relationships...

And now you’re thirsty for righteousness (right relationships). You’re thirsty with Faith, Hope, and Love. You’re thirsty, or you wouldn’t be sitting here listening.

See? Faith grows in confusion.

Hope grows in the dark well.

And Love grows when it bleeds.

And get this: Faith, Hope, and Love are not signs of his presence. They **are** his presence... growing in you, bubbling up in you. And when you worship him from your well ...

Not because he works for you;
Not because of what he gives you;
Not because of his gifts, miracles, and signs;
But because of who he is ...

Well, you give God the gift that he desires.

You may not welcome this place, and yet in this place you honor your Father in heaven. You are the harvest of this earth. You are exactly what he wants ... the image of Jesus.

Suffering is not a sign of disfavor. Suffering is always an invitation to meet Jesus, and sing praises with him to his Father from the pit. The pit is temporal, but the song you learn there is eternal. There are certain songs that you can only learn in the pit. The pit is temporal, but the Faith, Hope, and Love that grow in that place **remain**.

In Samaria, at the well, there is a great harvest. In Capernaum, - like Jerusalem, among the Religious Jews – they seek signs. Most “religion” is seeking signs. Nice house, nice kids, smooth sailing, happy feelings, and some miracles. We get signs – in Capernaum – but we can’t read them. Yet God loves Capernaum ... even Jerusalem, too.

So, in Matthew 11:23, Jesus says, “*And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades (the pit) – for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would’ve remained until this day.*”

“Mighty works and signs” ... but I guess they could not read them. But maybe in the pit – like Joseph and the Samaritans – they can.

Like all the prophets, Jesus prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem. “In one generation, not one stone on top of another.” Isaiah prophesied “Therefore Sheol (the pit) has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure and the nobility of Jerusalem and its multitude go down.” (Isaiah 5:14)

In verse 29 of Psalm 22 – The song which Jesus began to sing on the cross – we read, “Before him shall bow all who go down to the dust.” I guess in that place – the belly of the earth [*missing from notes*] read the sign and the sign of Jonah.

They can see it there ... yet it’s far better to see it **here** and **now**. So praise God for your sufferings here and now.

Even before Jerusalem was destroyed, it had become a pit. Jerusalem is us.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus goes to Jerusalem, because we will welcome him and dishonor him. For we seek signs and miss God’s heart. Yet in that place, he will reveal God’s heart – the meaning of all things – which is himself Grace.

Because we seek signs and don’t see Grace, we will take Grace, abuse Grace, and nail him to the Ancient Tree. And that is the Sign of Jonah – Christ Crucified. The Mighty Work is that there is no Mighty Work. The Mighty Work is the Faithful Love of God for us. The Mighty Work is Body Broken and Blood Shed, descended into the pit of your heart.

“Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified.”
(1 Corinthians 1:22-23)

In Bruce Almighty, Bruce demands signs. So God gives Bruce his power, and lets him play God. Bruce obtains all the signs he wants (gains the world), yet Bruce doesn’t know what anything means (forfeits his life). Then with this idolatry of himself, he uses and abuses Grace... and then he truly sees Grace ... broken for him. That is, he sees the sign of Jonah. It judges him and sends hi to the pit, where he sees the Light.

[Bruce Almighty – Clip 2]

He sees the Light and hears the Word of God in the pit of despair. God reveals Grace and teaches Bruce to love, then raises Bruce from the pit with a blood transfusion. Instead of abusing Grace, Bruce entered into a covenant of Grace ... marriage. Because he received blood, he now gives blood. His world is full of signs, and now he can read them. They all mean Grace, and God is Grace.

[Bruce Almighty – Clip 3]

And there were no signs. Yet this is the Sign ... the Mighty Work.

Do you see it?

Do you hear it?

There are words that you can only hear in certain places.
There are songs you can only learn when you're thirsty.

I'm going to have Justin play a song. It may seem silly to you ... especially if you're a nobleman... but I doubt it will seem silly if you've spent some time in the pit.

Seven years ago, I was not in the pit. In fact, I was going on my dream vacation. We cashed in our frequent flyer miles and rented a little cottage on the island of St. Barts. I'm a Led Zeppelin, Lynard Skynyrd kind of guy; but Susan read in one of her women's magazines that Sade was great for romance. So, we listened to this song over and over in our cottage by the beach. I loved it, but never heard the words.

Seven years of feasting, and since then, seven years of fasting:
My father died, my kids went through some real crisis ... then my denomination, church, and career blew up in my face.

A while ago, I was really struggling with depression. I grabbed that old CD to listen to in my truck ... my empty well. I popped it in, and for the first time, I heard the words. Jesus had been singing to me all along, but it wasn't until I sat in the pit that I could hear the words.

So thank God for pits.

Because hearing the Word is literally everything.

Are you in the pit? Just close your eyes and listen. Don't move, just listen.

[Sade – By Your Side]

You think I'd leave your side baby?
You know me better than that.
Think I'd leave you down when you're down on your knees?
I wouldn't do that

Oh, I'll do you right when you're wrong
If only you could see into me...

*Oh, when you're cold, I'll be there
Hold you tight to me*

When you're on the outside, baby, and you can't get in
I will show you you're so much better than you know
When you're lost, and you're alone, and you can't get back again
I will find you, darling, and I'll bring you home

And if you want to cry, I am here to dry your eyes
in no time, you'll be fine

*Oh, when you're cold, I'll be there
Hold you tight to me
Oh, when you're low,
I'll be there by your side*

Now, come to the table, tear off a piece of bread, and dip it in the cup.

The pit will pass away, but the song you learn here is eternal.