

Personal Evangelism 101: Offer God's Mercy

Scripture: John 4:10–15

Code: B130530

Too many modern evangelistic methods offer the wrong thing. The point of the gospel is not to bring contentment, purpose, or a sense of completeness to your life. It's not about unlocking God's plan for your happiness or fulfillment. Those are often by-products of saving faith, but none of them is the primary focus of the gospel. Christ didn't die for the sake of our emotional stability.

He died to rescue sinners from eternal separation from Him—to be our substitute and pay a debt we could not pay. The offer of the gospel is that atonement is available through the mercy and grace of God, and that He has made a way for us to enjoy eternity with Him.

That was the offer Christ made to the Samaritan woman at the well in the fourth chapter of John's gospel. In verse 10 He exposed her spiritual need, encouraging her to ask Him for the “living water” only He could provide. Her incredulous response indicates she didn't fully understand what He was saying.

She said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?” (John 4:11-12)

There is a scornful sarcasm in her words. She's mocking the idea that Jesus could get anything at all from the well without a bucket, or that what He could supply would be any better than what came from the well their ancestor Jacob had dug.

But Christ is not dissuaded by her scorn.

Jesus answered and said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.” (John 4:13-14)

It's here that the analogy of water comes to its point. Christ isn't concerned with satisfying her temporary thirst. He's got far greater things in mind. He's talking about an endless supply of riches and blessing—eternal satisfaction that she can't imagine. It's a permanent, consistent, everlasting blessing, and all she needs to do is ask.

It's that offer of unearned grace and unbelievable mercy that is unique to the gospel. Every other religion prescribes a method for *earning* forgiveness and favor. But salvation is not our achievement and the gospel is not a do-it-yourself plan. Good behavior, ceremonies, and rituals cannot buy a right relationship with God. *Nothing we do* can merit the eternal blessings Christ offers. Rather, every sinner must be born again—and that too is something we do not bring about, as Jesus made clear to Nicodemus just one chapter earlier.

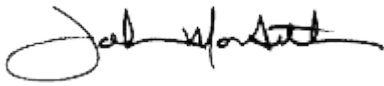
Instead, Christ says we simply must ask for the mercy He supplies (cf. Romans 10:13). Like the publican in Luke 18:13, all we can do is cry out in repentant faith, trusting Him to supply what we desperately need.

The inability of the sinner to accomplish his own salvation contradicts the self-sufficient attitude of our society. People are prone to want to play an active role in their salvation, often because they want the credit for the achievement.

That's why it's vital to understand that salvation is the work of God alone. Tragically, many people spend far too long trying to work out their own salvation, frustrated with their inability to manufacture spiritual growth on their own. For their sake, we need to be loud and clear that God hasn't given us a to-do list, but that He bids us to come and humbly ask Him to do what we cannot do for ourselves.

It's hard to gauge the attitude behind the Samaritan woman's response in verse 15: "The woman said to Him, 'Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw.'" She might not understand His offer. She might still be mocking the idea that He had anything to offer her at all. Or perhaps she is asking to receive the blessings He's describing, even if she's still not sure what they are.

What is clear from the verses that follow is that the Holy Spirit was already at work in her heart, bringing her closer to the point of repentance and faith. And that's where we'll pick it up next time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John MacArthur", with a stylized, cursive script.

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