

November 15, 2009  
John 4:4-26

Hampton Baptist  
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## "Open the Trunk"

Dr. Calvin Miller, noted preacher and author tells an experience of his childhood. In 1947, says Miller, two events happened that he never forgot. First, in 1947, he made a "flannel-graph Jesus" in Vacation Bible School at the Wesleyan Methodist Church near his home. Proudly, he carried home this prized possession and showed it off to all who would look.

That same summer his grandmother, who lived with his family, "lost her mind." As part of her mental illness, she began to take things she found lying around the house and stuffing them into a trunk that she kept in her room. When anyone came looking for something that was missing, the possessive grandmother would forcefully slam the trunk lid and yell, "Mine, mine, mine."

Unfortunately for Miller, his grandmother picked up his flannel-graph Jesus one day and tossed it into her trunk and refused to give it back. Claiming it as her own, she shared it with no one else. She stole his Jesus and declared, "Mine!"

In first century Palestine, the Jews had "picked up" what they believed to be the handle on God, and they had forcefully closed the trunk labeled history and legalism claiming that no one else could take possession. They yelled "Mine!" and tried to keep others away from what they cherished. Jesus came to open this trunk that contained their traditional and legalistic view of God and to show that God was accessible to all people.

In our text, the time was high noon and probably very hot. Jesus and his followers had been on a dusty road for a long time. The journey had burned off a few calories and so the disciples went to buy something to eat. They were in Samaria, which was unfriendly territory to the Jews. Time for a little geography lesson: verse three says that he left Judea and was on his way to Galilee. Judea, Galilee and Samaria were provinces, kind of like counties for us. The most direct route would be to go north straight through Samaria, but Jews leaving Judea never took that route. Instead they would always go out of their way and go around Samaria to avoid it. It would be like someone leaving Hampton and wanting to go to Williamsburg but avoiding Newport News. One could travel our Mercury Boulevard, drive across the James River Bridge through Smithfield and Surry and ride the ferry to get to Jamestown and drive down to Williamsburg, which of course, is way out of the way. You see, Jews and Samaritans hated each other so much, that Jews even avoided the *soil* on which Samaritans lived so they would not get corrupted.

Why was there so much hatred? The Samaritans were a mixed race as a result of inter-marriage of the poor Jews left in Babylon after the exile. Before Jesus was born, the Jews were taken from Judea and carried away to be placed into slavery to the Babylonians. After they were freed, some of the Jews were too poor to get back to their homeland. These poor Jews were helpless, and they married Babylonians and people from surrounding regions.

Notice in verse four, John wrote that Jesus *had* to go through Samaria. Wait a minute; normally the Jews went around Samaria. John was being intentional. Jesus *had* to go through Samaria to show his disciples that all people were the same. Jesus came to show all of us that our actions tell what's inside our heart.

We enter the story with a Jew sitting at Jacob's Well in Samaria and then up walks this Samaritan woman. The natural time for women to gather water was at evening time when it was cool. A lot of the women would come at the same time so that they could catch up on the latest news.

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I'm sure the ladies enjoyed their time together, because they were not treated fairly by the men in their society; instead they were treated as property. Yet this woman had come by herself to the well at the hottest time of the day hoping that no one else would be there. Her reputation probably had made her unpopular with the other ladies, and maybe they snubbed or ignored her.

As she approached the well, this Jewish man said, "Give me a drink." For us it seems like a natural request, because it was noon, and Jesus was probably thirsty. His request startled her. Here was a *man* speaking to her, and he was even Jewish. Jewish rabbis were forbidden to speak to women in public, yet here was this *Jewish* man making a request of this *Samaritan* woman.

Jews and Samaritans mixed about as well as oil and water. The Jews' hatred was so great that they were forbidden from sharing the same food vessels with Samaritans for fear of contamination. They could not use the same plate, bowl, cup, glass or any dish. Yet this Jew had no cup of his own, and he asked the Samaritan for a drink. Knowing all this, she asked him a question about the prejudice between the Samaritans and Jews.

Jesus did not answer her question of prejudice with words, but he did answer her with acceptance. As he talked with her, did you notice that he never mentioned the fact that she was a Samaritan? Jesus saw beyond the externals; he saw a person in need.

It did not matter about tradition. Jesus broke down the barriers with simple, kind, accepting conversation. It did not matter that she was of a different gender, a different nationality, a different race, a bad reputation, or that she worshiped differently. His acceptance of her showed her that *he* was different. Jewish tradition had prohibited fellowship with others who were different. Because they were only exposed to a certain way of understanding God, their perception of God was limited. Their reliance on the familiar prevented them from seeing whom God really was. Because they had been exposed to only one ideology, they were reluctant in their acceptance of others.

Molly Marshall is President of Central Baptist Theological Seminary; some of you may remember that years ago, she came to Hampton Baptist to teach a Winter Bible Study. At that time, she was a theology professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. As is the case with many professors, Molly was invited to serve as an interim pastor of a small, rural Kentucky church. She tells the story of the activity in Children's Church one day. It seems that the children had decided that while their parents were in BIG church, they would *play* church. One person said, "I want to play the piano." Another said, "I want to lead the music." Still others commented about the office that they would like to have as they played church. One boy said, "I want to be the preacher." A girl defiantly declared, "But you can't be the preacher; you're a *boy*. Only *girls* can be preachers."

This girl had been exposed to only one pastor who happened to have been a woman. Therefore, she thought that *all* pastors had to be women. She had slammed the trunk closed restricting the boy from being the preacher. Her limited understanding of God's identity prohibited her from realizing that God calls females *and* males into ministry.

Jesus came to break down the barriers of sex and tradition; all people are encouraged to utilize their God-given gifts for the glory of Christ. As printed atop our worship page, the apostle Paul told the church in Galatia that we are all one in Christ Jesus, no matter if we are Jew or non-Jew (meaning our nationality or race), slave or free (meaning our socio-economic status), male or female (meaning our gender).

All people are the same inside; every individual has feelings and hurts, desires and

dreams. All people are the same on the inside; we are just packaged differently. Our world is filled with a variety of people. There are different sizes, shapes, races, personalities, cultures, and economic statuses. All of us are different and unique in the sight of God.

Is someone a better person because their hair is a certain color? No, that's ridiculous. Is someone more worthy of our love because their eyes are a certain color? No, that's crazy. A person's *character* cannot be judged upon *color*. Just as it is shallow to say that one person is better than another based on eye or hair color, it is equally as shallow to say that one person is not as good as another person because their skin color is different. Frankly, it is sin to judge someone based on externals such as color.

How about us? Can we say that we accept others no matter their skin color, gender, nationality, culture, or economic status? Jesus did not care about the color of the Samaritan woman's skin; he was not bothered that she lived on the other side of the tracks, where the rough crowd lived; he was not even hesitant because she worshiped differently from him. All he saw was a person with a need. Can we do the same?

Verbally I hope that we can agree with the Declaration of Independence in believing that "all men (and women) are created equal." Yet although, we may certainly believe that, sometimes we may not behave accordingly.

Such was the case with Jean Thompson and Teddy Stoddard. It was the first day of September, and all the children sat there, and Jean Thompson said what many teachers say, "Boys and girls, I love you all the same." Maybe you have had a teacher say that too. But the statement is not always true, and that was the case with this particular teacher. She did not like Teddy Stoddard . . . and for good reasons. He was an unattractive boy who always sat in a slouched position. His eyes were always glazed and unfocused. He sat there with his mouth hanging open. He sat there . . . uninterested. His clothes were always musty and dirty. He never bathed enough, and his hair was unkempt. When he spoke, he always responded with one word, either "yeah" or "no."

When Jean Thompson marked his paper, she got a perverse delight in putting X's by the wrong answers. And when she put an "F" at the top of the page, she always did it with a flair. But she should have known better, because teachers have records, and she had records on Teddy Stoddard.

First Grade: Teddy is a good boy and shows promise in work and attitude but has a poor home situation. Second Grade: Teddy works hard and is obedient but he is too serious. His mother is terminally ill. Third Grade: Teddy is falling behind in his work. His mother died this year; his father shows no interest. The teacher had the records.

Christmas came and all the children brought their presents and the presents were wrapped in colorful paper, except for Teddy's, which was wrapped in brown paper and held together with masking tape. In crayon was written, "TO: Mrs. Thompson FROM: Teddy. When she tore open the paper, out dropped a rhinestone bracelet with most of the stones missing and a bottle of cheap perfume, almost all used up. The other children began to laugh and giggle, but the teacher had enough sense to snap on the bracelet and put some perfume on the other wrist, and to hold it up and to say, "Isn't it lovely?" And the other children taking the cue from their teacher agreed that it was lovely.

At the end of the day when everyone else had left, Teddy lingered behind and came over to the desk. He said, "Mrs. Thompson, all day today you smelled just . . . like . . . my . . . mother . . . and her bracelet looks good on you too. I'm really glad you like my presents."

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And when he left, she got down on her knees, and she begged God to forgive her. The next day, she was a new woman. She acted Christian--her heart had been broken by the things that break the heart of God. She began to be more accepting of the kids--particularly the slow kids, particularly the not-to-smart kids, particularly Teddy. She tutored; she helped; she encouraged; and by the end of the school year, he had caught up with many of the children.

After that year, Mrs. Thompson did not hear from Teddy for a long time. One day she got this note: "Dear Mrs. Thompson: I'm graduating second in my high school class, and I wanted you to be the first to know. Love, Teddy Stoddard."

Four years later, there was another note: "Dear Mrs. Thompson: I wanted you to know that I am graduating first in my class. The university has not been easy, but I liked it. Love, Teddy Stoddard."

And then another four years passed, "Dear Mrs. Thompson: As of today, I am Theodore J. Stoddard, M.D. How about that? I am going to be married in July, the 27th to be exact. I want you to come. I want you to sit where my mother would have sat. You're the only family I have left. Dad died last year." And she did as was requested of her.

The life of a small child was transformed when Jean Thompson showed acceptance toward him. Although initially slamming the trunk shut, thankfully Jean Thompson realized how important it was to open the trunk and let Jesus out.

Today's biblical text illustrated two people who were total opposites. Yet despite their inalienable differences, Jesus obliterated the barriers. Jesus accepted the Samaritan woman even though she was different. The living water that he gave her quenched her spiritual thirst and made her a new person. We have spoken of those who have kept Jesus locked up in a trunk, keeping him all to themselves when a world so desperately needs him, but Jesus does not have to stay there. If this all-inclusive love of God is to be experienced by others, it will happen because we have shared the love of Christ with the people who are the hardest for us to love.

I want to close with a quote from Stephen Shoemaker, "May God give us the grace never to sell ourselves short, the grace to risk something big for something good, and the grace to remember that the world is now too dangerous for anything but truth and too small for anything but love." What are we waiting for? Let's go open our trunks.