

If you are a guest with us, we are especially honored that you have joined us. I also want to say welcome to all of our campuses joining us across Dade County. I'm real excited today because we are moving in our journey through the gospel of John, into John, chapter four. So if you have your Bibles with you, I want to encourage you to go ahead and open them to John, chapter four, and again, if you are new with us, just so you will understand, we are going through the gospel of John, verse by verse, so we have gone through chapter one, chapter two, chapter three, and today we are tracking the pages on John, chapter four. At the same time we are kicking off a brand new series called "Parched". If you don't have a Bible with you, don't worry about it because all of the text will come up on the screen and you can sort of track along with us that way.

I want to begin today by reading a section of our text from John, chapter four, and I want us to listen in to the dialogue between a Samaritan woman and Jesus. Then we are going to come back and unpack this. But you listen as I read this. Verse seven: "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.' She was Samaritan by race. She was a woman by gender. Now, watch what she says. "How can you ask me for a drink, for Jews do not associate with Samaritans." Now, with that scene in mind, I want you to take a look at this video (of Martin Luther King's speech 'I have a dream.')

"I have a dream. My four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today, that we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up to freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. Let freedom ring, and when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands. I just want to do God's will, and He has allowed me to go up to the mountain. I've looked over it, and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know that I have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

I first heard that speech when I was eleven years old. Dr. King had just been assassinated and our sixth grade class was watching his funeral on live TV. Get it: During that funeral, the TV networks replayed that "I have a dream" speech, which I had never heard. But I have to tell you, even as an eleven year old, I was spellbound. Not just by the eloquence of the speech, but by the content of it; more so by the concept of it. Dr. King said, "I have a dream." Now mind you, having a dream and having a vision are the same thing. We talk a lot at Christ Fellowship about having vision. Vision, you've heard me say, is seeing the way things are and then being able to see the way they could be. Vision is being to see the way things are and they might be bad, but then being able to envision in your mind the way they could be; in fact, the way they ought to be.

You see, Dr. King saw the way things were. He saw a nation divided by racism and hatred. That's the way it was, but he envisioned a nation. In fact, he dreamed of a world where people of all races and all nations and all languages would live together in peace on a global scale. But mind you, Dr. King knew ultimately that only the King of Kings could bring that kind of peace on a global scale, which is why he often said: "My eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." You see, Dr. King knew that the

coming of Christ back to the earth will usher in social, racial, and national peace on a global scale. In fact, let's fast forward in time to Revelation, chapter five, verse six. The Bible says, "Then I saw a lamb looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne." Who is that? It is Jesus. "He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. That is God. "And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, and they sang - the whole world is going to sing together - a new song, saying you are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain; and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and they will reign on the earth." I love it. The coming of Christ back to the earth will usher in national, social, and racial peace on a global scale. Folks, don't miss this, because what the coming of Christ back to the earth will do on a global scale, the coming of Christ into our hearts will do the same thing on a personal scale. I'm talking about right now. So, here is my proposition today. Listen to this: When Christ comes into our heart, as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, when He does that, He will usher into our hearts a love for all people, and He will tear down any barriers and any differences that might divide us.

Now, you may be saying, "Rick, why did God make us so different from each other? Why are we so distinct from each other? And why do those differences divide some people. Well, we are going to find out today as we move on in our study of the gospel of John and open up the pages of John chapter four. I want to give you three thoughts as we unpack this narrative. By the way, this is going to come across today a little more like teaching than preaching, and this is really going to lay the ground work as we look at Jesus' conversation with this woman and her thirst for God as well. A lot of this is going to come across as ground work today. So, I need you to put your thinking caps on as we think through some of these things. Three thoughts: Here we go. Human differences can divide us. Human differences can divide us. Example in point - look at verse one. "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. So, he left Judea - that would be to the south - and went back once more to Galilee - that would be in the north. Watch verse 4. "Now he had to go through Samaria."

Stop right there, because Jesus going through Samaria would have been shocking to every Jew and to every Samaritan of His day. You say, "Why?" Just this: Put your thinking caps on. To begin with, Samaritans were considered half-breeds. They were half Jew and half Gentile. In other words, they were Jewish people who had inter-married with Gentiles. Now stay with me, because the racial tension between Jew and Gentile in Jesus' day was fierce. I mean, you multiply the racial tension of the 1960's by a hundred and you might get close to the tension between Jew and Gentile of Jesus' day. In fact, the racial tension was so fierce, folks, so fierce and so intense that Jewish people would not walk through Samaria. You've got to understand that Samaria was right between Judea to the south and Galilee to the north. But Jews despised the Samaritan race so much that they would not get Samaritan dust on their feet. So they would walk all the way around so not to go through where those Samaritans lived. That is how intense it was. No Jew would go through Samaria. I'll take that back. There was one.

Verse 4: "Now he - that is Jesus - had to go through Samaria." By the way, when it says Jesus had to go through Samaria, the idea there is that He was propelled to go through Samaria. He was driven to go through Samaria. You say, "Why was He so compelled to go through Samaria?" It is simple. There was a

woman in Samaria who was going to come to a well. She was thirsty for God, and Jesus was going all the way to Samaria to reach out to this one person. We are going to unpack all of that next week, so you've got to be back.

For now, back to verse five. "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, and it was about noon." I want you to stop right there and slip into the scene, because Jesus, being weary from this, about a twelve mile hike, a twelve mile walk from Judea up to Samaria. He comes to this well and He sits down by it. The disciples go into town and Jesus leans His head back against the well, folds His arms, and closes His eyes to catch a few winks. Folks, just as He was about to doze off, his sleep is interrupted by the sound of a woman's sandals, slapping the hard trails of Samaria. Jesus opens one eye just wide enough to see her trudging up the hill. Behind her come five kids, each one looking like a different daddy, because as we are going to see next week, she had been married five times. That means five different men; five different beds, and five different rejections. This girl knew the sound of slamming doors. At any rate, she comes to the well with a broken heart and a thirsty soul.

Look at verse six: "It was about noon when a Samaritan woman came to draw water." Stop right there, because this was going to be a double barrier between her and Jesus, because not only was she a Samaritan by race and He a Jew by race, but she was a woman and He was a man. Folks, you see, in that world, in that culture, we still that still some today, the leftovers of that around the Middle East. Women were considered second class citizens. For example, in the Jewish culture a woman had no rights whatsoever. Women had no legal rights. Men had all the rights. For example, a woman could not divorce her husband for any reason. It didn't matter what he did to her, she had no legal grounds for divorce. On the other hand a man could divorce his wife for any reason. In fact, I did a little research this week and I found out that Jewish law laid it down that a man could divorce his wife for putting too much salt on his food. He could divorce her for twirling in the street, whatever that means. This girl had been divorced from five men. Five men had rejected her. You know what happens when you get rejected five times? You start to feel like a reject. That is where she was.

Now mind you. Not only was all of that going on, men did not speak to women publicly because again, women were considered inferior. Men did not talk to women in public, which is why in verse 27, when the disciples come back, it says, "Just then his disciples returned and they were surprised to find Jesus talking with a woman." Men just didn't do that. So add it up: Not only had this girl ran into the wall of racism, but she had bumped her head on the ceiling of sexism. She had bumped her head on the ceiling of male chauvinism. So, all of this raises a larger question. That question is this: What triggers racism and sexism in the human heart? By the way, it is an issue of the heart. The answer is profound. Sin triggers this heart disease. Everybody, heads up. I want you to get this. I want you to understand that God did not write any of this into the original creation blueprint. When God created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, when God created this perfect world, He did not write sexism into that blueprint; nor did He write racism into that blueprint. That distorted state of mind came as a part of the sin package in chapter three. Sin had all kinds of effects on the human race, and one of them was separation. Sin separated man from God. We have spiritual problems. Sin separated man from himself. We have

emotional problems. Sin separated man from others. We have relational problems. We have social problems.

But here is what we need to know. Human differences can separate us, can divide us. But here is what you need to know. Human differences are actually an act of God. Let's pick up the narrative again in verse 7: "When the 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, for Jews do not associate with Samaritans?' Now folks, in spite of all of her pain and her emptiness, this girl stiff arms Jesus with the issue of race and gender. Now mind you, standing before her is the only one who has the power to stitch her broken heart back together, but the racial tension of that day was so thick that she felt compelled to bring it up. She said, "You Jews don't associate with us Samaritans; and beyond that, I'm a woman." Listen to how Jesus answered her. "Jesus answered her. 'The problem with you Samaritans'. Is that what He said? Jesus answered her: 'The problem with women' – is that what He said? 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." Jesus reaches right around her race, he reaches right around her gender and He goes right for her heart. And again, we are going to unpack all of that next week.

What I love, love, love about this scene is that Jesus did not put her down for her race. Jesus did not belittle her for being a woman, nor did He have an issue with her inter-marriage with other races. You say, "Why?" Our diversity reflects God's creativity. Let me say that again. Our diversity reflects God's creativity. In fact, listen to Matthew, chapter nineteen, verse four. Jesus says, "Haven't you read, he replied, that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female." Don't you love that? By the way, the word "made" there is a translation of the Greek word "poeba". I always tell you that your Bible was originally written in koina Greek, and then translated to English, French, Spanish, or whatever. That word "made" is a translation of the Greek poema. It's the word we get poem from. Poema means more than just made. Poema means to create. You know, when you make something you engage your hands, and your back, don't you. But if you create something, you engage your mind. You engage your heart. You engage your soul. It is a part of you that lives in that creation. God didn't just make us. God created us. By the way, the word poema also carries the idea to make something unique. In other words, He created us male and female. It means to create with distinctiveness. He made us male and female. In other words, God didn't make one human being and then zerox copies of us. He didn't make Adam and then all of us look exactly like Adam. Can you imagine what that world would look like. Everybody in here is Adam. If God had said "Adam, what do you want me to make?" Adam probably would have said, "God, make me a buddy. Make me a guy friend." God put Adam to sleep, and when he saw Eve he said he would call her woman. Do you know what woman means? It means, "Whoa! Man!

You see, God made us distinctive, each of us. He made us male and female. We are not just male and female. But He made some of us black, white, Hispanic, Oriental, Indian. Some with mixed race. I'm actually part Cherokee Indian from my mother's side. My mother was very Cherokee Indian, and Irish from my father's side. So I am a mixture of races. God also made us with blonde hair, black hair, brown hair, red hair, no hair for some of you. He gave us green eyes, brown eyes, blue eyes, hazel eyes. Every one of us in here is a distinctive mixture of color, nationality. He made some of us tall, not some of us

but some of you all. Some of us short; some of us medium. We are a mix of color, size, shape. Why did God make us so different? Did He do that to divide us? What if we fought over our eye color? Why did God make us so distinct? He made us distinct to add flare to the world, didn't He? He also made us distinct so that we would worship Him.

Our diversity should trigger worship. We ought to look at diversity and worship God. You see folks, here is what worship is. Worship is celebrating the attributes of God. That is what worship is. Worship is celebrating the attributes of His love, His mercy, His kindness, His grace, His forgiveness, His power, His wisdom, and let me tell you one of God's attributes. One of God's attributes is that He is creative. Let me tell you something. Racism strikes a blow at God's attribute of being creative. Sexism strikes a blow at God's attribute of being creative. Can I tell you something folks? Human diversity is a good thing. In fact, it is a God thing. Here is what you need to know. What God creates for good, Satan distorts to bad. For example: God created sex to be an amazing experience; to be a joy between a husband and a wife. Do you know what Satan does to that wonderful thing? He distorts it to pornography, to lust, to adultery. He makes it into something that people learn to hate. Satan will always take what God creates for good and turn it around and try to make it bad. Satan takes the wonder of human diversity that we are all different, every one of us, Satan takes that wonderful act of God's creativity that He didn't make us all Adam, that He made us all unique and gave us all personalities, Satan takes that wonderful attribute of God called creativity and distorts it into racism, into sexism, and tries to divide us.

Christ can unite what Satan seeks to divide. Listen to Galatians 3:28. The Bible says, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave or free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Christ becomes the common denominator among us that unites us as one and reminds us all that everybody in here is a human being created in the image of God. You have never come face to face with any human being that did not matter to God. Jesus Christ is the common denominator that reminds us that we are all human beings made in the image of God.

I'll never forget, when I was in my early teens during the sixties, there was a sports story that hit the headlines and made news for several weeks. The breaking story was about two football players, specifically two running backs of the Chicago Bears. One was Gale Sayers, running back for the Chicago Bears. He was black. The other was Brian Piccolo, running back for the Chicago Bears. He was white. They were the first black and white roommates in the NFL. At a time when racial tension was very high in America, these two men became dear friends. They loved each other like brothers. You say, what was it that brought them together? What was it that caused them to love each other like brothers? Well, one of the forces that caused them to love each other like brothers was a common denominator called cancer, a deadly disease that strikes both black and white, and Brian Piccolo got it. How many of you saw the movie "Brian's Song"? If you haven't, you ought to get it. It chronicles the friendship between Gale Sayers and Brian Piccolo, and if you watch that movie you will find that cancer kept Brian Piccolo off the field and in the hospital much of his football career. But check this out folks, during that entire time, Gale Sayers constantly flew to hospitals to be by his friend's side. In fact, right before Brian Piccolo passed away from cancer, Gale Sayers was honored at the pro-football writer's banquet. He was to receive the George S. Halas award, an award given each year to the most courageous football player. Gale Sayers stood to receive that award, among thunderous applause. Tears began to flow, and this is

what he said. He said this: “You flatter me by giving me this award for courage. But I tell you here and now that I accept it for Brian Piccolo. Brian Piccolo is the man of courage who should receive the George S. Halas award. I loved Brian Piccolo, and I would like you to love him too.” Two men, two different colors together, living in a country where that was viewed by some to be divisive. Yet they loved each other like brothers. What brought them together? It was that common denominator.

Let me tell you something. This is what I love. What the coming of cancer into the body of Brian Piccolo did for those two men, the coming of Jesus Christ into the hearts of people does the same thing for us. It reminds us that we are all human beings created in the image of God, and it gives us a love for each other as brothers and sisters. Christ Fellowship, I want to tell you. This is one of the things I love so much about you. It is one of the things that makes Christ Fellowship so distinctive. Do you realize folks, there is probably no other church, and I don’t mean in America, but there probably is no other church in the world like this church. We are a well kept secret. Dr. King said “I have a dream.” Do you know what I think? I think God has had a dream for a long time to have a church like this where as in Revelation, chapter five, it says, “They sang a new song, saying “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals, because you were slain and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe, and language, and people, and nation.” Christ Fellowship, that is our song. Do you realize you are Revelation chapter five right now? I believe in my heart that this is a church that God has dreamed of. There are over eighty different nationalities of people in this church, at all of our campuses.

I’ll never forget when I was writing my doctorate dissertation, and I used our church as a sample. I found out in taking the sample – back then we only had about twenty-five hundred people, but back then we had sixty-one different nationalities of people. I’ll never forget my advisors were advising me on this dissertation look at that and said, “We don’t know of another church like this. We’ve never heard of a church that has this kind of diversity, this kind of representation.” Folks, we are a mosaic of black and white and Hispanic and oriental and Indian and mixes. In fact, Christ Fellowship is a tapestry of colors, and races, and nationalities that God Almighty has woven together for such a time as this. Let me say that again. Christ Fellowship is a tapestry of colors, and races, and nationalities from all over the world that God Almighty has woven together for such a time as this.

I want to close by saying this. Our diversity is powerful, and it is powerful because we have leveraged this diversity to have a passion for all of the countries from which you came to this country. You know, we just launched Christ Fellowship, Santiago, Cuba. By the way, they are exploding over there. Do you realize that church is already starting other churches in Cuba? They are already doing what we do. They have your DNA right into them, and we are going to launch churches, Christ Fellowship, from countries from wherever you came from. We are going to try to tackle all of these countries, and folks, because of our diversity, I don’t know of another church where the people come from and have a love for all of these countries. Do you see how this empowers us uniquely to do what God has called us to do? I tell you what; I believe that there are other churches who are finding out about Christ Fellowship and they are starting to come here because they want to figure out how you are doing what you are doing. Folks, the common denominator is the Word of God in Jesus Christ. Here is what I want us to do. I want us to worship God for His creativity, and I want us to celebrate what He has done in Miami at Christ Fellowship, at such a time as this.