

“Collisions: When Your Past Collides with Jesus”

Dear Friends, greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus. Life, as I think (most of us) realize, is made up of a series of individual moments, some predictable and some not so much. For the most part, those moments come and go, and it (seems as if) nothing really happens. But what happens in that moment when your life collides with Jesus? What happens when (what's happened) in your life comes in contact with what happened in his?

Here's what I'm praying for this morning, that (for each of us), in whatever ways it needs to happen, that God's mercy and grace would collide with our guilt and shame.

Today we're in the second week of a series we're calling "Collisions." It's a bit of a different title. It's not what you naturally think about when you think about the Christian life or about Jesus. A collision brings to mind something that's a mess. It's broken, it's busted; it's crushed. And yet, in the Bible, things that are broken and busted and crushed are made whole in the life and the person of Jesus.

What you have in the gospels, (in those stories about Jesus' life), is the same thing you have in the church. It's a collection of stories about people whose lives have collided with Jesus and, who, as a result of colliding with Jesus, their lives are changed forever.

We're going through different examples. Last week (in John), chapter three, we looked at the collision between Jesus and a religious leader by the name of Nicodemus. It's an unusual collision, because you have this guy, Nicodemus, who has to choose between following Jesus or following his religion. He couldn't do both.

Jesus collides with religion. He collides with the traditions. He collides with the self-righteousness and the self-sufficiency that religion so (often times) offers. This week, we're in the next chapter.

If you want to follow along, turn in your Bibles, or your Bible app, to John chapter four. It's a different kind of collision, with a different kind of person. In fact, in some ways, and this is (one of the reasons) why I just love the stories, (in John three and four) you're seeing Jesus encounter with people who are on the extreme ends of the religious spectrum, of the social spectrum.

In John, chapter four, Jesus is traveling. He's getting ready to go to another city. In verse one, (it says), "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." (Verse four), "Now he had to go through Samaria."

That's an interesting phrase. It says "Jesus had to go through Samaria." What does it mean, that he "had to go through Samaria?" It's an interesting word, the word "had." (It's easy to miss it.)

It sounds like (if he wanted to get there), then he had to go through Samaria. He had to do it; (not hard to follow.) But if you do a little checking, you (find out) that he didn't have to go through Samaria. Most Jews didn't. They chose to go around it. There was a lot of hatred and prejudice between Jews and Samaritans. They did everything they could to avoid it. Most would choose not to go through it. What does it mean that Jesus "had to go" through Samaria?

Well, maybe it's that simple. Maybe Jesus had to go through there. Maybe there wasn't enough time to go around it. (He had no choice.) He had to do it. Maybe that's all it is.

Like when a kid comes back to school after a long weekend. His classmates ask him what he did over the weekend. He doesn't say, "I cleaned my room." He says, "I had to clean my room." (He had no choice.) He didn't want to, but he had to.

Like when a guy goes on a date and they end up in one of those stores where the girl could stay for hours, but the guy isn't too much into it. Not that that's ever happened to (any of us), but I've heard it happens.

That one little word makes all the difference. I didn't want to, but I had to. Maybe that's what's going on in the story? Jesus didn't want to go through Samaria, but he had to. Maybe that's what's happening?

If you keep reading, you soon realize that's probably not what was happening. What was happening is that Jesus didn't have to go through Samaria. He wasn't forced to go there, but he chose to go there. He (maybe even) went out of his way to go there. It's almost like he had an appointment that he had to keep. Like he looked on the calendar and saw that it was scheduled, so he had to be there.

Have you ever noticed that God has a calendar, just like we do, that there are certain things God is working to do (at the right time and the right place), just like us. That's one of my favorite things about (the ministry), getting a glimpse into how God works.

I still remember the time, early on, I was out knocking on doors. I was working my way through the directory, trying to meet people and get to know them. (This goes back to the time when people were actually home during the day.) Some of you remember.

I was out one afternoon and I had this list of four places I wanted to stop. I went to the first and no one was home, so I left a card. I went to the second; same thing; left another card. The third house, the wife was there, but the kids were sick, so that didn't work. I got to the fourth house and (everyone was home), but I had the wrong address. Tried to turn it into a positive, but it was a bit awkward.

So, I was on my way back to church, ready to go after it again (the next day) with a new list, but I happened to drive by this (one home) where I knew one of our members lived, so I stopped. It turned out that the husband was home, and he invited me in.

Not long into it, he shared that he had been laid off unexpectedly, that they were having trouble in their marriage, the kids didn't know, and he wasn't sure what to do. He and his wife hadn't talked about it much, but he knew they should.

We talked and we prayed, and he started crying. (I don't know how often he had cried.) In the middle of his cry, his wife comes home. Something had happened (at her work), so her boss said to take the rest of the day off. She walks in and he's crying.

Long story short, that led to a series of conversations and events that ultimately led to a coming together in their marriage and a recommitment of the promises they had made years before. It wasn't easy, but it eventually happened.

I went home that night, crying myself; thanking God for his calendar and for how he had worked (in that situation) to lead me to a place (on my calendar) I was not planning to go, but to a place where (on his) he was ready to work.

I read this story in chapter three, and I don't know how much Jesus knew about what each day was going to bring. I have to believe, because he was human, just like us, that he didn't know until it happened. What he knew was who he was (God's Son) and what he had been born to do (to save the world). So, when this situation comes up and he has this choice about going through Samaria, because of who he was and what he was born to do, he had to go.

You keep reading in the story and (it's around noon) and Jesus comes to this well. He sits down and rests. The disciples had gone into town to get some food.

Now, it would not be the normal time and place for someone to meet at the well. The women would usually come to the well early in the morning (when it was cool) or late in the evening (when it was cool), but not in the heat of the day.

But this woman (one woman) comes to the well by herself. And that (in itself) was unusual, because it was sort of a cultural thing that the women would come together, but she was alone. It's not hard to figure out why.

She had a tough past, a tough history, a bad reputation. It was likely that people avoided her because they were worried about their own reputation. She had probably grown tired of the judgments, the looks, the whispers behind her back, and the shame and rejection.

When she arrives, Jesus asks her for a drink. And she's surprised, because that didn't happen, either, (a Jewish man asking a Samaritan woman for a drink), and so she calls him on it. Verse nine, "The woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?'"

"Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'" (Now she's confused.) She doesn't understand what he is talking about. She's not tracking. Jesus is talking about living water, about spiritual things. She says you don't even have a bucket. (This metaphor is not happening.) So, what does Jesus do? He gets more personal and direct.

Verse sixteen: (Jesus says) "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 that you have had five

husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” If it wasn’t uncomfortable before, it is now. He’s very direct. He just says it.

We saw that last week (in the collision) with Nicodemus. It’s part of his being loving; it’s being truthful. Jesus doesn’t step away from the truth. He accepts it. Not mean (or hateful), just honest.

He lets her know that he sees her for who she is, and what’s happened. And she knows (when she hears it) that she needs to start drinking from another well, because the well of relationships is not working. It’s not quenching her thirst.

Now, just think about it. If Jesus has an appointment with some of you (like he did with her), and I think he might, I think he’d do the same thing. He’d tell it like it is. He’d be direct. (He’d be honest.) He’d want you to know that he already knows. Because when you collide with Jesus, you collide with the truth.

And so, maybe he’d just say it. He’d just (say to you), “Your short temper keeps everyone around you on edge, and the bitterness is growing.” (Maybe he’d just say that.)

Maybe he’d say, “Your drinking has got out of control, and it’s affecting a lot more people than just you.”

Maybe he’d just tell you, “Your porn problem is killing any chance of intimacy in your marriage.”

Maybe he would just say, “You’re allowing your heart to fall for a guy that’s causing your heart to fall away from God.”

Maybe he would say, “You’re going deeper into debt trying to be happy, but it’s never going to be enough to satisfy you.”

Maybe he’d say, “Your self-righteous spirit is causing the people at your work to stay away from me. You need to stop.”

Maybe he would just say it. “Your judgmental tone and harsh attitude is costing you a relationship with your grandkids.”

Maybe he would say, “Your secret sin is taking you to a place you do not want to go.”

Maybe he would say, “Your next promotion, that upgraded device, that new house; it’s not going to do anything to quench your thirst. You’re not going to find it in that well.”

He might say that. It gets uncomfortable, but he says it anyway. That’s not why he says it. He says it because he loves you. He really loves you. That’s why he says it.

There’s a lot going on in this story. (It’s not just water in a well.) You keep reading; the woman tries to change the subject. (Did you notice that?) She doesn’t like where this is going, sees the collision coming and says, “I think I’ll turn right and avoid it.”

Verse nineteen: “Sir” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” (This will get him.) I’ll talk about something religious, and (if nothing else) at least it will change the focus.

Do you think we ever do that, try to change the focus on Jesus? Jesus wants to get personal, it’s getting too close, (and we don’t want it), so we change the focus to put a little distance. I think it still happens.

This woman didn’t want to deal with the truth. She’s made some assumptions about Jesus, so she does everything she can to avoid him. Her whole life, she’s been made promises that didn’t happen. This is nothing different, so she doesn’t even want to deal with it.

And so she tries to draw some conclusions (verse twenty-five): “The woman said, ‘I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.’” I have to believe there was a quiet pause at that moment, Jesus just smiled. (Verse twenty six): “Then Jesus declared, ‘I who speak to you am he.’”

This is the only time in the gospels where Jesus so voluntarily and so openly just comes out and says it. “I’m the Son of God. I’m the Messiah, the one who was sent. You can trust me.”

And he says it to this Samaritan woman with a bad reputation, who never saw this collision coming. Who would have expected that? For (perhaps) the first time in her life, she’s free.

Jesus was on a collision course with her life, and I’m just wondering if that’s happening with any of you? If your life is on a collision course with Jesus, there are a few things you can expect when it happens.

Number one, (when that happens), Jesus is going to collide with whatever lies you have believed about yourself. The fact that this woman comes in the heat of the day (by herself) tells you something about how she saw herself.

I don't know her whole story. I don't know if it was husband number one or two or three, or one through three, who told her she wasn't worth much. (After a while, you start believing it.) If you get returned to the store that often, you start thinking that maybe there's a label on you that says that you're damaged goods or ruined or flawed.

The men in her life (I think) must have devalued her, made her feel like she didn't matter. That's not how Jesus saw her. It's not how Jesus sees you. When Jesus collides with your life, he's going to collide with whatever lies you've believed about yourself, and he won't let you believe them, because they're not true.

And second, when he collides with your life, he's going to collide with your past mistakes. (There's no way to avoid it.) It's going to happen. That's what happens in the story. He tells this woman he knows (all about) her past. She tries to hide it, but Jesus already knows. (He already knows.) You can't hide it. You think you can, but you can't, and you don't need to.

It's like what happens when you owe money to a collection agency. When they call, you don't pick up the phone. (You don't want to deal with it.) You know what they're going to say. You owe money to a person, you do everything you can to avoid that person. You go out of your way.

It's the same thing. Jesus calls, and you don't pick up, but he keeps on calling. You think he's calling to collect. He's actually calling to let you know it's already been paid. It's over. It's erased. That debt you owed? It's no longer there.

You can be free. You can let it go. You don't have to have shame and guilt as your constant companion. He can carry it for you. The whole time Jesus is saying, "Just give that to me. Give that to me. (I already know.) It might be a secret (from others), but I already know. You don't have to carry it."

And so let me close with this. I started by saying that it was my prayer this morning that, (for each of us), in whatever ways it needs to happen, that God's mercy and grace would collide with our guilt and shame. Here's what I hope you will do. (And be honest.)

If there's anything in your life that (isn't right) and that you're carrying, there's no better time (than today) to give it to Jesus. Whatever guilt and shame there might be, you don't have to carry it any longer.

We're only two weeks away from Palm Sunday. Three weeks away from Easter. In between those two events is Good Friday, and we all know what happened then.

Jesus didn't die for no reason. He died for a good reason, and that reason was you. Give it to Jesus; (whatever it is.) Confess what he already knows. It's time to start drinking from a new well.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for knowing us (as you do) and for being honest with us about who we are. We thank for going out of your way to meet us and accept us and love us as you do. Help us to be honest with ourselves and to give whatever burdens we are carrying to you. Give us a drink of that living water, from the well that is nothing less than who you are what you have done, that we might never be thirsty again. Amen.