

## John 4:19-24

**TEXT/INTRO:** Take your Bible and turn to the gospel of John, chapter 4, and we'll begin reading with v.19, John 4:19, and I'll read through to v.24. I know as you do that I'm jumping into the middle of an incident from one day in the life of the Lord Jesus. But as you should also know by now, I'm going to set this section in its Biblical context. Context is king. So, John 4:19,

<sup>19</sup> *The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.*

<sup>20</sup> *"**Our** fathers worshiped in this mountain, and **you people** say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."*

<sup>21</sup> *Jesus said to her, "**Woman**, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.*

<sup>22</sup> *"**You** worship what you do not know; **we** worship **what we know**, for **salvation is from the Jews**.*

<sup>23</sup> *"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers **will worship the Father in spirit and truth**; for **such people** the Father seeks to be His worshipers.*

<sup>24</sup> *"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*

*(Jn. 4:19-24 NAU)*

The title of my sermon this morning was going to be **A Biblical Church-growth Movement Strategy**. If I had tried to think of a more boring title, I don't know that I could have. That's the kind of sermon title that will put any congregation into a coma. And since most of you are sitting in your favorite chair in the comfort and privacy of your home, you're probably close to a catatonic state anyway. Just kidding.

Are you familiar with what would become known as the "church growth movement" that began in the '70's? If you aren't, let me tell you something about it.

A man by the name of Bill Hybels became the father of the church growth movement which was based on his chosen methodologies for growing a church. He decided in 1970 to plant a church on the outskirts of Chicago in the community of Willow Creek, thus he named his new

church, can anyone guess? That's right, "Willow Creek Community Church." His idea was to take as his model for growing his church plant the methods used by the secular business world he was familiar with in Chicago and what he had seen pay off for New York City's Wall Street ad men. He thought if anybody knows how to grow a business, those guys do. Hybels took his methodologies directly out of their playbook.

Hybels' business methodology taken from the secular world was pragmatism. Pragmatism means that we will go with whatever works, or, "the end justifies the means." So, if one finds a worldly way to grow one's church and it works, go for it. That was his first mistake.

But pragmatism by its definition puts man at the helm of the church. Hybels reasoned that going with what works has proven itself to pay off in big dividends for the world, why not the church. And for a while it paid off for Hybels and Willow Creek in huge dividends. They went from a handful of attendees to averaging 25,000 every Sunday in multiple services. But that brings us to Hybels second mistake.

Pragmatism turns a pastor into a CEO. And being a CEO instead of a God-called pastor gives that CEO more power than he ever dreamed he would have. And we know what that old English statesman Lord Aughton said about power. "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely." And you can see where this is heading.

Hundreds if not thousands of local pastors liked his method and adopted it for growing their congregations. But there was an innate problem or flaw to their pragmatic approach to church growth, it made man the head of the church rather than Jesus. The pastor became the CEO rather than the Bible preacher and overseer he is supposed to be. And when man is the head of the church, then that man usurps the power that is exclusively Christ's. Hybels under the tremendous power he found at his disposal, fell into the power trap and thought he could get away with anything and then fell into some kind of sexual immorality and was forced to resign his megachurch and his entire staff was asked to leave with him. And that, beloved, is how men grow churches.

<sup>19</sup> *The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. And why did she say that? Well, Jesus had just told her that He knew all about her life and her lifestyle. Remember? She had been married and*

divorced five times, and the man she was with now was her out-of-wedlock boyfriend. The only thing she knew to do now that the jig was up was to change the subject, "Okay, Mr. Prophet, okay, ya got me there. Let's talk about somethin' else. Yeah, I know. Let's talk theology." But that ploy never works with God.

And she goes on.

<sup>20</sup> "***Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.***" That's pretty funny. **Did you catch what she just said?** "*you people.*" That's a hoot. Who says that? Racists. I'll never forget saying that to the black men on my grounds crew back in the '70's when I worked at Park and Rec. One of them was insulted by it and I was clueless why he got so upset until I saw what he pointed out to me. I didn't realize that my racist roots were showing. As soon as he pointed it out, I remembered hearing other white people say it.

And the Samaritans and the Jews made no bones about it, they were racists when it came to the other group. They hated each other. It's no wonder the Samaritan woman was confused by this Jew who was asking her for a drink from her dipper. What self-respecting Jewish prophet would do that? It was like someone had put signs up over Jacob's Well that read "Samaritans Only!" in this line and "Jews Only!" in the other line. But Jesus was going to look past her racism and her sins and He was going to give this woman a drink from the water of life, if she were willing. <sup>10</sup> *Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."* (Jn. 4:10 NAU)

Another thing about this incident I find kind of humorous is Jesus was talking theology with an adulterous and promiscuous Samaritan woman. You couldn't get much lower than that. Or could you? Do you realize that this woman was more typical of those whom Jesus saves and builds His church with than the goody two-shoes, self-righteous who warm many a pew? Read 1 Corinthians chapter one some day soon.

#### 4

Do we ever get the notion that we Southern Baptist have gotten this whole worship thing right? We're not like those staunchy stiff-necked Presbyterians or Methodists. I'm glad we're not, but that's a topic for another sermon. That 's certainly how the Samaritans and the Jews figured it. But listen to this from the lips of the Lord Jesus.

<sup>21</sup> *Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.*

Jesus was saying, *Neither the Jews nor the Samaritans got it right.*

There is one way and one way only God is building His church. It is by He Himself bringing into His church His kind of people, sinners and the ungodly, those who have been granted to worship Him in spirit and truth. *for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.* And that comes only by coming to the Father through faith in Jesus. The church, after all, is the body of Christ. The decision on how to grow His church isn't up to us and never has been. God says no to pragmatism and the American model of growing the church.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

In case you're interested, here is a partial list of organizations that refer to themselves as churches that are built on a man-centered philosophy known as pragmatism and various other man-centered methods.

Elevation

Saddleback Church in California

Cornerstone Church in Texas

The Potter's House in Texas

Lakeview Church in Texas

World Changer's Church near Atlanta

Eagle Mountain Church in Texas