

In Spirit and in Truth

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Preacher: Andrew Bunnell

[0 : 00] All right, well, thank you, choir, adult choir, teen choir. They did an amazing job, didn't they? Love it when they get together and sing for us on Sundays. We are blessed to have my older brother, Andrew Bunnell, with us this morning.

He's got a long record in ministry. God's used him in mission work in Russia and Eastern Europe, and he pastored in London, England for about a decade.

And currently, he is the executive director of Biblical Ministries Worldwide in Lawrenceville, Georgia, and God is using him well there. That's fun.

Sorry about that, y'all. Anyway, God allowed this workout for us, for him to be with us this Sunday morning. So Andrew, he's a native Texan and got most recently his Ph.D. from University of Washington, but he's gotten a host of degrees, and God's used him all around this world.

So we're blessed to have him with us this morning. Andrew, come on up. It's wonderful to be here with you today.

[1 : 21] I don't know how to respond to everything my brother said, but I will say I drove from DFW to Henry out of Texas at midnight last night so I could see my nephews.

Okay? So let's... No, it's great to be here. I have to remark, I had no idea what a wonderful surprise it would be to be here today.

That was a very emotional, extraordinary letter. I just... I have no context, you know, certainly being not from Henrietta, but just the idea that 50 years ago, someone thought to do that and to happen to be here on a Sunday that that was...

that that was opened. What a remarkable thing and what a remarkable legacy. And to think that the church was 90 years old at that time and now 140 years.

It's... It's... What a legacy of ministry you have here. And I guess the savings account, I was thinking about that.

[2 : 36] 100 something to 650. That just bit by bit over time. That's... It's still there. You know, still going to be used for God's work. So this is a blessing to me.

And I'm going to be selfish in that and just say I really, really enjoyed hearing that. And thank you, choir. Thank you for everything this morning. I'll take just two minutes by way of introduction.

My wife, Sarah, and I have been married since the year 2000. We have a 17-year-old boy, Joey, a 14-year-old, Jackson, and a little girl named Lizzie, who is seven.

And pray for us about... By the age of three, she figured out she was in charge of the family. So that's a tough one. No, she's got all of everything.

So she's adorable. Hopefully you'll get to meet her someday. As well as the others, too. She's got her daddy around her little finger. So... I missed them this morning.

[3 : 39] They're back in Athens, Georgia area where we are members of Prince Avenue Baptist. And I'm going to be a part of this church there. For 10 years, we spent working in Russian Eastern Europe as well as the Middle East and did a lot of work in that part of the world.

And then we spent another 10 years in London, England. I pastored there the Southside Baptist Church, which is about six miles south of Big Bend.

If you put a dot on Big Bend and go straight six miles south, that's where our church was. And saw that church, which had not had a baptism since the 1940s, really come back to life.

It had dwindled down to four folks, four dear ladies who continued to pray that God would turn the church around. And he saw fit to do that. And we had a wonderful time in those years there.

And then was asked to consider the role in Georgia, the executive director there at Biblical Ministries Worldwide. And what we focus on, we work in 60 countries.

[4 : 42] And we focus on one very specific thing. It's called Healthy Churches Everywhere. So we want to equip and build up strong churches all over the world.

So we partner with a lot of other organizations and a lot of other groups, especially national groups on the ground, to help them build up their leaders and their churches to be strong.

And one of the ways we do that is specifically working in countries where it's not legal to be a public Christian. And you might find yourself in jail or worse, certainly in radical Islamic places where the church is very weak above ground, but perhaps has very deep roots below ground.

Certainly in places like China and other places where it's just not that simple. Like we can come to First Baptist Church this morning and worship. So many places around the world we don't have that privilege.

And so we really, in the words of a famous Dutch missionary named Brother Andrew, if you've ever heard of him, he started a group called Open Doors and wrote a famous book called God's Smuggler.

[5 : 48] In one of the verses that spoke to him when he started that ministry shortly after the Second World War to go into the Soviet Union and help the persecuted church there. He said, like in the book of Revelation where it says to strengthen what remains.

We don't know how long we have in this life and our time is short. And so part of our job as the body of Christ is to strengthen what remains.

And to that end, maybe just a little more why that letter was so special for me and the work I do this morning is 50 years later to hear that letter being read in a church that is filled with people this morning.

And that's sadly far too far too rare that that that we see a half century go by and a church still be standing and doing what it ought to be doing.

So you've been an encouragement to me without even realizing it. And so I hope to be a bit of a blessing to you. Pray for us. And I'll certainly be praying for you. And thank you for bringing my little brother here.

[6 : 52] He loves you very much. All right. John chapter four is the verse that I want to start with in specifically John chapter four in verse 24.

One of the more famous verses we see in John's gospel. John chapter four, verse 24. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.

I was born in Fort Worth, but I grew up in Mahea, Texas and Corsicana. And left there when I was about 14 years of age, our family moved.

And, but it's quite a journey from growing up the first few years of your life in a town like Mahea. Those of you who know, know.

To London, England. You couldn't be in a more different place. Unsophisticated to the home of the royal family.

[8 : 08] A cowboy town. To English saddle riding. Very, very different.

A town of six, seven thousand people to a city of 15, 16 million. How in the world do you connect to people culturally?

A church that was pretty much filled with the same kind of folks. To a church where we had backgrounds from people who had grown up speaking 32 different languages.

How can you connect the dots in a world like that? Well, it turns out it's easier than it sounds. First we get past the part where everybody loves Texas.

Because they think we're all cowboys. And not all of us are. Less and less these days, sadly. But most of us, if we were a few generations back, at least had a father or a grandfather or a great grandfather.

[9 : 19] Who was something like that. So we can connect on some level. So, okay, there's a little bit of Texas cool which translates. But outside of that, what do you have to connect the dots with people?

Well, it turns out we don't really have to connect dots. Because God is spirit. And if you want to worship God, you have to worship in spirit and truth.

And our entire human idea is to build up physical walls that break things apart.

When the gospel is about bringing people together in the spirit. And what I would tell the church in London week in and week out. Was that if you want to know God.

The first thing you have to do is be honest with yourself. And then honest with God. But you can't be honest with God until you've been honest with yourself.

[10 : 33] To look in the mirror and recognize what's looking back at you. To bear your soul and accept all that you are.

And at that point, God makes all the sense in the world. Because we really need a savior. Every last one of us.

And that's how you can get 32 nationalities to come together. Not because they like each other. Not because they share the similar backgrounds.

Not because they like the same food. One of the strangest things for us in London was. You know, we think about.

You probably understand that the English and French don't get along. You know, always making jokes. English and French. Well, we were way past that. We had people from Ghana and Nigeria.

[11 : 34] West Africa. Turns out Ghanaians and Nigerians don't like each other at all. At all. And it's not a joke. But they had to be in church together.

It turns out that no matter how much we are like one another. We'll still find things to fight over. How many lines do we build in this state alone?

You know, I'm in Georgia. You know, and they talk a lot about how important football is in Georgia. And, you know, of course now there's all this SEC movement and things going on. And they'll talk, well, you know, Georgia high school football.

And I'm like, you have no idea what every small town invests in this state in its high school football. And then we flip right out of that and we wake up on Saturday morning and we draw a whole new set of battle lines.

And fight over, you know, six, seven different schools all over this state. And then, you know, and then God bless us. There's a few folks who like the Texans. But then we, you know, cry over the Cowboys the next day. You know, it's day after day after day.

[12 : 47] And that's just sports. Which really doesn't matter that much in the big scheme of life and eternity. We will fight, we will scrap, we will claw.

And then when you add a language barrier and a cultural barrier and a way of thinking barrier and political barriers. How does anybody get to know Jesus? Well, it turns out that heaven is filled with people from every tribe, every nation, every tongue.

So there's something that's going to draw us together. John chapter 4 is an example of that. I want you to back up to the very beginning. And look at it with me. Because Jesus is on a journey.

He's on a journey. And he's gotten himself in a bit of trouble. Now you know John chapter 3 probably very well. John 3.16 is the most famous verse in all the Bible.

That God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. That whoever believes in him will not perish but will have eternal life. And then at the very end of John chapter 3.

[13 : 58] Another very famous verse. That whoever believes in the son has eternal life. And whoever does not obey the son shall not see life. But the wrath of God remains on him. This commentary.

You hear John speaking. You hear John the Baptist speaking. And you hear Jesus speaking to Nicodemus. All in the verses just before John 4. Then you get to John 4.

And Jesus is in hot water. He's in trouble with the Pharisees. One thing I've learned about religion all over the world.

Is there's always in a religious mindset. A grave danger of being a Pharisee. And that applies to every one of us. There's a famous Christian author who wrote a book.

And in that book. He describes two kinds of Christians. And we're all one of them. And he uses the idea. The parable of the prodigal son. And he says all of us are either older brothers or younger brothers.

[15 : 00] I'm an older brother. As an older brother. Has the tendency in the church to lean towards Phariseeism. Hypocrisy.

Keeping the rules as a way to get the father's love. Younger brother feels distant from the father. And goes on a wild journey of wild living.

Again to try to get something that is missing to fill a void. And then comes back to the father. Just asking to be a slave.

If he can just get a meal. His father welcomes him with open arms. The older brother gets very angry. And says I've been here keeping the rules. Because he thinks the rules are what gets him to the father.

To impress the father. And the father is pointing out. I just wanted you at the party. I just wanted you at home with the family. I just wanted you here happy.

[16 : 01] So Jesus. Believe it or not. Is in trouble with the Pharisees. The older brothers. Because they have found out he's doing something he's not supposed to do.

He's baptizing. He's immersing people to a new life. And this is happening. His disciples are doing this. And it's more than John the Baptist who they were already quite upset about.

So now we've got this second upstart who's breaking everything apart. What are we going to do with this? Jesus. So Jesus. His time was not yet come to go to the cross.

And so discretion is the better part of valor at times isn't it? And he departs. And I don't know if any of you have ever been to the Holy Land. But if you ever take a tour there.

If you've been on a tour there. The shortest distance from Judea where Jerusalem is. And that whole region to the Galilee which is up in the north.

[17 : 04] And you go over these mountains. And you can go around the mountains. But the shortest track. The most direct path. Is right through Samaria.

So he has to go through Samaria. The problem is in Samaria. He has to go through an ethnic group of people. Who did not like the Jews.

Jesus was a Jew. His disciples were Jews. And the Jews didn't like the Samaritans. Mutual conflict. They didn't get along.

They go through Samaria. And they come to this moment where it's time to stop. They're hungry. Seems to be about midday.

Our best guess. It's time to get a bit of food. And a woman comes to draw water. You've heard of the woman at the well. She comes to draw water.

[18 : 05] And in that place. This story begins to unfold. The disciples have gone into town to procure some things.

I don't even think they had a Whataburger. Or a Dairy Queen. We just got a Whataburger in Athens, Georgia. It's like an outpost of Texas. It's wonderful. Georgians don't know what hit them.

Found out that hamburgers are made with mustard. They didn't know that. It's good. Just ate there yesterday. They're going to get food.

They're bringing the food back out. In the meantime, this woman comes to the well. And Jesus says this. If you'll listen to me.

I will give you an extraordinary amount of religious wisdom and advice that will totally change your life. If you were to die today, do you know if heaven would be your home?

[19 : 11] In fact, he says no such thing. He says the most mundane, unremarkable statement.

He says, may I have something to drink? May I have a glass of water? He addresses her.

He says to this woman, give me a drink. John chapter 4 verse 7. And in that one brief moment, he breaks an entire set of rules.

It's unremarkable, but it's actually life-changing if you can grasp that one moment. Because it unpacks everything else that happens. And by the way, everything else that happens is one of the greatest sermons that Jesus ever preached.

It's the living water. It's springs of water that just open up life eternal. It's a woman saying, you've taught me everything about myself.

[20 : 23] You've discovered and completely unpacked everything that's holding me back. And every hard moment in my life. And you've just exposed all of that. And given me freedom. And I'm going to go back into the city.

Where I have a reputation and a difficulty. And I'm going to go and I'm going to tell everyone how great this man is. And an entire city is going to come out to meet you.

All of that is going to come out of this one moment. Really? If you just ask somebody for a drink of water? All of that will happen?

Not necessarily, but if you ask the right person, it just might. Here's what he did. The Samaritan woman was the lowest person in standing to Jesus Christ that was available to him to converse with.

Jews and Samaritans don't get along. They looked down their nose at Samaritans. Women were basically seen in that day and age, in that time, as essentially property.

[21 : 34] And he addresses her in a voice that puts her on an equal standing with him.

By asking for a drink of water from her hand, he's saying, Not only do I not see you as less than me, but I see you as someone fit to give me something that I need.

I don't think you're dirty. I don't think you're unhygienic. I don't think you're less than me. I am willing to take something for my nourishment from your hand.

I am a Jewish man. You're a Samaritan woman. May I have something to drink? It's not supposed to be like that.

And we know it's that way because of her reaction. How could you do this? You're a Jewish man.

[22 : 42] I'm a Samaritan woman. We don't have dealings. We don't talk to one another. We don't get along. You don't think much of me.

Jesus is all about turning worlds upside down. But before he can turn worlds upside down, he has to turn my world upside down.

He has to turn your world upside down. And if you'll let him, he will. This text, we could preach eight sermons on it and still not scratch the surface.

But in that moment, Jesus changes everything. I don't know where you sit today. I don't know what crisis is unfolding in your heart or in your life.

I don't know what doubts or fears that you have in this room this morning. I know I have some because I'm a human being. I know I'm struggling with some things.

[23 : 56] I'm sure many of you are. And I'm here to tell you today that Jesus will change things if you will let him open up what's inside and speak truth into it.

Here's what it looks like. Here's what it looks like in practice. In September 11th, 2001, the World Trade Center was hit.

The Pentagon was hit and a plane went down in Pennsylvania. Those of us who remember that day remember exactly where we are and what we were doing. It was the JFK assassination moment of another generation will never be forgotten.

A few months after that, I was living in Russia with my wife and we were there working with Russian Baptist churches and I was coaching basketball in an international school and on a mission project with our church.

And we were living there studying Russian at the school. My wife was studying piano. She's a classically trained pianist. We were starting to live our life.

[25 : 15] Had just been married a short time. I got a call at 10 o'clock at night from Moscow from an American single woman missionary. I was working with the, some folks working with the International Mission Board and they had called me because we had common work.

Somebody had given them my number and said, look, there are some people from Afghanistan who have fled the Taliban, the first Taliban, the Al-Qaeda Taliban time in Afghanistan.

They're Red Cross refugees. They're living in Moscow. We've given them copies of God's word. Now they're being moved to a new lodging in St. Petersburg. Would you help them?

I didn't want to. I was scared. I'd never worked with folks like that before. And she could hear my reluctance and she began to cry.

And she said, you're the seventh Christian mission worker in St. Petersburg I've called tonight and they just keep passing me to somebody else.

[26 : 23] Would you just meet with them? So, I guess I have to. Yes, I have to. So I did.

Six months later or so, baptized them. Eight years later, one of those two men was ordained as a Baptist minister and went back to Afghanistan undercover.

The other man moved to the United States. John Cornyn helped him get here. Started an outreach to Afghans from Virginia. The other one who went back to Afghanistan started three churches over 12 years working with the Afghan government and NATO.

alone there. Today, he's in Syracuse, New York reaching people from Afghanistan who are now in the United States.

You have to face your bias. You have to face your heartache. You have to face your prejudice and you have to let God change you and see what he will do because the real message of John 4, the woman at the well and John 4, 24 is the same message of John 3, 16.

God bless you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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