

## **Wasted? The radical values of Jesus**

### **“A Waste of Time?”**

Passages: James 1:22–27

John 4:27–42

Today, we begin a new series of sermons entitled, “Wasted? The upside-down values of Jesus.” It’s a series which compares and contrasts our modern, Western-based value-system with the value-system that Jesus lived by. The basic goal will be to see whether or not our core values (the values we live by every day) have been shaped by Jesus or by the world. So often, the things that we think are a waste of our time, our energy or our money are exactly the things that Jesus treasures, whereas the things that we treasure are often a waste in Jesus eyes!

The need for this kind of discernment is critical in being a disciple of Jesus. Indeed, it’s actually a way of measuring how much we really love Jesus! You see, it’s very easy to **say** that we love Jesus. But, Jesus went much farther! He said, **“If you love, me, you will obey my commands”!** Love and obedience go hand in hand. Of course, the only way we will willingly obey Jesus is when we share His value-system.

There’s a strong parallel, here, with what God said to Israel through the OT prophet Amos. Israel was living in a way that was contrary to the ways of God. They no longer shared His values! And so, God rebuked Israel, saying, **“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”** In other words, how can a people call themselves believers/followers of God when they no longer share His value-system? I wonder if Jesus isn’t asking the same question of His church today!? Are we really walking with Jesus? Do we share His value-system? Do we accept the things that He says are of value and reject those things which are not? Indeed, **what is the value-system of Jesus?**

Over the next 7 weeks, we will examine seven snapshots of the life of Jesus according to the Gospel of John. In each of these snapshots, we will see one aspect of Jesus’ value-system at work

in the things he says and does. Then, we will scrutinize our lives and ask ourselves if anything in us needs to change?

**Let's pray.**

It was not until Jesus came to earth that human beings finally saw God's value system fully revealed. You see, Jesus perfectly revealed God's value-system to us because he is **perfect God**. But He also perfectly revealed God's value-system because He is **perfect man**. When people saw Jesus, they saw humanity as it was always meant to be. And so, the value-system that Jesus lived by and displayed to the world was the value-system of perfect humanity...the value-system that God originally intended for us all to live by!

Turn with me to **John 4**.

Here's a very familiar story to us—the story of the woman at the well. Now, we usually look at this story from the perspective of the Samaritan woman. Here she is, a woman shunned by her own people and forced to collect her water in the heat of the day. And yet, as Jesus speaks to her and accepts her as she is, not only does she accept His grace and believe that He is the Messiah; she quickly goes off and tells the entire village about Him! She is thoroughly converted!

Today, however, I want us to read the story from the perspective of the disciples! Think about it-- **Where are they** when Jesus is having this deep and meaningful conversation with the Samaritan woman? **Where are they** when this woman comes to faith? They have gone into the town to find food! **By their very absence**, they have told us what is most important to them; they have revealed their core values! Are Samaritans important to the disciples? Not really! The fact that they were in Samaria seems to be more of a nuisance to them than anything! Rather, the central priority in their lives seems to be themselves! They were more concerned with insuring their own comfort than they were for the possibilities of outreach in this Samaritan community! In short, being in Samaria was just a big waste of their time!

But there's even more to be revealed! Listen again to **verse 27**. As the disciples return from their search to fill their stomachs, another aspect of their value-system becomes clear.

***27 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"***

Now, ask yourself: Were **women**, in general, of any importance to the disciples? Not really! That's why they are so surprised to find Jesus talking to one! And was **this Samaritan woman** (and her particularly difficult situation) of any importance to the disciples? No! In fact, they weren't even curious to know what Jesus was saying to her! ("***But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"***")

You get the impression that the disciples...the very men who said they wanted to follow Jesus and emulate his lifestyle... were totally at odds with Jesus' value system: While Jesus is going through Samaria, he deliberately chooses to meet and spend time with the people of this hated race. The disciples, on the other hand, seem bothered by it—they are impatient to get out of there and back to Israel! While Jesus deliberately takes time to sit by a well and talk with this socially-rejected woman, the disciples show no desire whatsoever to engage with him over the matter!

**In the end, it is obvious that the disciples had written off the whole excursion into Samaria as a waste of time!** That's because they had a completely different value system to that of Jesus! This fact comes out most poignantly in **verses 31-34**.

***31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."*** (Notice the focus on food!) ***32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."***  
***33 Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" 34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."***

While these all-male, all-Jewish disciples are putting their focus on food and concentrating all their energies on getting back to Israel, Jesus' focus continues to be on reaching out to two of the most hated and disrespected people groups of the day: (1) Samaritans and (2) divorced women!

- The Samaritans were seen by the Jews as an inferior people, often referred to as ‘impure half-breeds’ and idolaters for not worshipping God correctly, in Jerusalem.
- Divorced women were often rejected by society for being the guilty party that caused the divorce. (“If only she had been more open to his advances, or a better cook, or a better servant to his needs, etc!”) A divorced woman was often seen as deficient; classified by the men as “used goods”! Like the woman in today’s story, a divorced woman was easily condemned in society (by men and women alike) and forced to a life in loneliness.

And this is exactly where we see Jesus’ value-system most greatly on display! Flowing from the perfection of His deity and His humanity, Jesus has eyes for these who are outcast and downtrodden; people who have been alienated by the self-righteous and the self-focused; people who may have never heard or felt the truth of God’s love! After all, this was the value-system of His Father...to care for orphans and widows in their distress!

But perhaps the most important point in all of this is the fact that **Jesus never even suggested that He was wasting His time with them!** To the contrary, what he did, he did deliberately! Indeed, this, said Jesus, was His food!

***<sup>34</sup> "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.***

Now, take a look at **verses 35 to 38**— As a summary of the tension between Jesus’ value-system and that of His disciples, Jesus offers this final punch-line!

***<sup>35</sup> Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. <sup>36</sup> Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. <sup>37</sup> Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. <sup>38</sup> I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."***

Clearly, Jesus sees Himself as the Lord of the Harvest! It is Jesus who has sent His disciples into this particular harvest field in hated Samaria! It is Jesus who has sent them to reap what they have not sown! For the fact is that God, the master Sower, has

already been there ahead of them. God has already done the heavy-lifting in preparing this hated people for the harvest. And here's the point—all the disciples need to do is **relax into what God is doing!** That is, they must **stop** judging the situation according to their own 'fallen' value systems and prejudices. They must **stop** feeling superior to divorced women and Samaritans. They must **stop** thinking that they are **wasting their time!** Instead, they must **ask God to open their eyes to His value-system...to show them that this is the best use of time imaginable!** And as they do, they will increasingly see what Jesus sees, value what He values and love what He loves! Only then will they joyfully join in the harvest and reap what they have not sown, confident of what God is doing ahead of them.

**Is there an application here for us?** Let's be frank—We are far more like the disciples than we care to admit! Sadly, we have a value system that quickly says that certain people are more worthy of the Gospel than others! Like the disciples, we prefer to stay in our comfort zones, surrounded by our own kind of people. We too easily judge the 'other'... the person who is not like us...and wonder why Jesus would ever reach out to them. We easily say to ourselves, "Going there or doing that is just a waste of our time!"

We should feel a great deal of shame for our attitude! After all, when it comes to helping or reaching out to others, do we really know what God is doing behind the scenes or what our small efforts might eventually produce? When you spend time with a widow or make an effort to reach out to an orphan, can it ever be a waste of time? Can your loving gesture to a single mum with four kids, or your embrace of support and friendship with a divorcee ever be a waste of time?

Indeed, let's go even further! When you come join other men in fellowship at a men's breakfast or a combined service...being there, not because you may get something out of it but because you can give yourself to others, is that ever a waste of time? And when you lend a helping hand at our missions market, can that ever be a waste of time? After all, what is our purpose as human beings on this earth if it's not to reach out to others, and to form communities of welcome and love for all?

Yes, at times we'd rather be elsewhere...but it is important to fight that

inner voice that says you are just wasting your time or that your tiny contribution doesn't matter! Instead, with Jesus, say **"My food is to do the will of my Father in heaven!"**

And the saddest part about it all is that the most of us have such twisted value-systems that we believe think that watching television is actually a more useful way of spending our time than joining a small group or going out to visit the sick or elderly shut ins! **Do you realise that Australians watch over three hours of TV per day!** Just think of how much useful Kingdom work could be done in those hours!! It really boils down to a rethink of our value-system!

I mean, **if we really did love Jesus and truly share His value-system, we would listen and obey the commands of the Lord of the harvest!** We would leave behind our self-indulgences and feeling of discomfort and step into unknown territories...places into which the Father has gone before us, sowing His seeds of grace and preparing the field for harvest. Indeed, we'd be fools not to follow Him!

What might this mean for Penshurst Anglican Church? As I understand it, it will mean being increasingly willing to step into more areas of multi-ethnic ministry... reaching out to people of different languages and cultures...even engaging with the people that some in our own church culture may hate or fear; like

Muslims, or drug-addicts, or homosexuals, or prostitutes, or the poor. Jesus is the Lord of the harvest! So, can you imagine us being called into those harvest fields, where our ingrained value-system will be challenged and all our prejudices and preconceived ideas will need to be abandoned in order that the value-system of Jesus might prevail??? I guarantee, it won't be easy!

But, if you ever catch yourself in the middle of this difficult journey saying, "This is just a waste of time!", take a moment to go back to this story of the woman at the well! Remember how an entire village turned to Jesus on that one day. Why? Because Jesus displayed a value-system which truly embraced the 'outsider' in the love of His Father! In the end, **following His example is never a waste of time!**

Let's pray.