

November 5, 2023 by Steve Brandon



My Trip to Nepal

John 4

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As most all of you know, I have spent much of the last three weeks in Nepal. For those of you who don't know where Nepal is. It is north of India and south of China. Literally, half way around the world. It was my 9th time that I have traveled to Nepal. My trip had three phases.

During my first phase, I spent my time with Bob Clinton and Phil Smith from First Love International. Bob oversees the missions efforts in Nepal. Phil is the new president of First Love International. Our time together was quite a whirlwind as we traveled around to the various children's home that Bob has begun in Nepal. It was super-encouraging to see how these abandoned children are being loved and cared for. Many of them are living for Christ and beginning to make their impact for Christ upon Nepal.

The second phase of my ministry was spent with ND Lama. I met ND at Southern Seminary when I was doing my doctoral studies. He was in my cohort. ND has been involved with planting several churches. He also has been instrumental in beginning 5 schools. The one he oversees now has more than 200 students K-10. It is encouraging to think about the number of students that he is impacting for Christ at his school.

The third phase of my ministry was with Alan Ginn of Word Partners. We spent our time in training pastors. We worked our way through 1 and 2 Samuel, seeing the rise and fall of king Saul and King David.

These three phases of ministry really complemented each other. My time with Bob Clinton was focused on orphans and children's homes, encouraging the staff and children. My time with ND Lama was focused on strengthening schools, seeing the challenge of a private Christian School in a Hindu land. My time with Alan Ginn was focused on pastors, helping to equip them in how to understand God's word, that they might preach it with God's heart.

This morning I have many stories to share. I hope to use John 4 to guide our thoughts as this passage is a good reflection of what is taking place in Nepal. So, I invite you to open in your Bibles to John 4. I'm going to be quite loose with the text this morning, I just want to allow it to direct some topics of conversation this morning. Let's begin with the first three verses.

John 4:1-3

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee.

Here we see,

1. An Increasing Ministry (verses 1-3)

In the first three chapters of John, we see John the Baptist arriving on the scene. His ministry was near the Jordan River, where he was preaching repentance and baptizing all who would come and confess their sins. But he knew his place. He knew that he was the fore-runner to Jesus, who would not merely forgive sins, but actually take them away.

There was a day in his ministry when John [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This was John's role, to point to Jesus. Though John was drawing many people, he knew that his role was decreasing. He said of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

This increase is what we see in verses 1-3. John was baptizing many people, but at the beginning of John chapter 4, we see the ministry of Jesus taking over the size of John's ministry. This fact was noticed by the Pharisees. So Jesus left Judea to head north to Galilee, so as to distance himself from the persecution that was coming upon him.

This is exactly what we see in Nepal. In 1950, Nepal was a closed nation, with no believers. By 1960, the first believers came into the nation. These were Nepalis who had come to faith in Christ while in India, but had returned home to tell their countrymen of Jesus. The church has experienced steady growth in Nepal for the past 60 years.

Today there are more than 400,000 believers in Nepal. Though official stats hold that about 1.4% of the population of Nepal are Christians, I was told by some in Nepal that this should be higher. Though that might seem small, from 0% 70 years ago, this is infinite growth! And the number of Christians in Nepal is continually increasing.

I got to see this first hand. I can't tell you the number of conversations I had with guys who had planted several churches. Let me tell you the story of one man I met. His name is Beki. He is focused on training church planters. His organization has a year-long training program, 3 months of which is in person in Kathmandu. They train men in the Scripture and in some practical ways to help them gather and organize and run new churches in Nepal. The requirement of finishing the training is to plant a church. Beki told me that 95% of his graduates are successful in planting a church. Many go on to plant 2, 3, 4, 5 churches. Some of these churches have planted churches.

In all Beki told me that he has been involved in training more than 200 men in planting churches, which accounts for some 500 churches that have begun through their ministry. Mind you, these "pastors" aren't full-time pastors in the ministry. Instead, they are laborers and goat farmers and tea shop owners with very little education. And they are planting churches. And these churches are multiplying.

In Nepal, there is "An Increasing Ministry." This is unlike the United States. In our country, the church is in decline. We have fewer and fewer and fewer people in the United States who are following Jesus. In America, churches are closing faster than they are starting. Not so in Nepal. There, the church is on the rise.

I had many conversations with those in Nepal, telling them how blessed they are to experience such a work of God. They may be poor in this world, with little financial opportunity, but they are rich toward God in witnessing the continual growth of the church. A 2013 report by Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary found that Nepal's church was the fastest growing in the world, with an annual growth rate of 10.9% since 1970.^[1] I was blessed to experience some of it.

Let's move on in John 4. In verses 4-8, we encounter Jesus, who had

2. A Need for Water (verses 4-8)

John 4:4-8

And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

This passage shows the humanity of Jesus. He and his disciples were heading north to Galilee. Jesus was wearied from this journey and in need of water. His disciples had traveled on ahead to get some food, but Jesus sat by the well. When a Samaritan woman came out to draw water, Jesus requested a drink from her.

The story reminds me of what took place in a town called, "Banghata." In 2017 there had been some heavy winds and floods in that town. A man named Prakash was told about the village and he visited it. There had been heavy winds and flooding in this village. He went there to help. He found an elderly widow whose mud house had been heavily damaged. He repaired the roof and walls and brought food for her and her grandchildren who were staying with her. This eventually led to him starting a kids club in the village. Many children have attended.

Later that year, Bob Clinton went to the village and met some of those who lived there. He met a little girl (Sajina) with club feet at that time. Prakash arranged to bring her and her mother to Banepa for treatment. In addition to her club feet, her knees and hips are also not normal, so the treatment is still ongoing.

Because of these deeds of mercy, many villagers have heard about Jesus. Before Prakash visited the village, there weren't any Christians in the village. And there are some who have come to faith in the village. Now a church building has been erected, they gather for worship every Saturday (the day of worship in Nepal). The church is a great picture of how the church is being built in Nepal. When people are in need, Christians often rally to the cause and serve others by doing what they can to help.

A constant verse that I have heard in Nepal from the believers is 1 John 4:19, "We love because he first loved us." And as the Nepali staff of First Love have practiced, "Faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6), they have seen many come to faith.

About 6 weeks before I was in Banghata, Bob Clinton was with the budding church on a Saturday. He was preaching from Matthew 25 about how Christians show their love to God by helping those in need. To those facing the final judgment, Jesus says, "I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35).

After the service, an old man named Tika Ram approached Bob to tell him of the problem the church had with their water. They have a solar system set up to help pump water into their village, but it was broken. Tika Ram told Bob, "Please, if you have it in your heart, we are dying without water." What was Bob to do? He had just preached on how Christians give water to the thirsty. So, he looked into it and worked with the village people and gave a few thousand dollars to the cause, and they were able to get the water system working again. The village of Banghata needed water, and Bob helped them.

This is just like Jesus who had "A Need for Water." Before giving Jesus the water that he needed, the woman at the well asked him a question,

John 4:9

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

Here we see

3. A Broken Society (verse 9)

The social tension was so great in Jesus' day that he couldn't even speak with this woman. She was a woman. She was a Samaritan woman. John explains in verse 9 that "the Jews had no dealings with Samaritans." The Samaritans were seen as traitors to the Jewish race. When Assyria had come and conquered Israel in 722 BC, the Jews in the land intermarried with the Assyrian people, and lost their purity as a Jewish race. Thus, they were despised.

So also in Nepal are there despised people. In Nepal there is the caste system, where those of the high caste do not even speak with the lower cast. Never would they touch them as it would make them unclean. But when Christians come and readily receive and serve and help those of a lower cast, people take notice of how Christianity is different than their Hinduism. We believe that all people are made in the image of God, and worthy of respect and honor and love and acceptance.

I can't help but to tell you the story here of Prakash and his great heart for those in need – the elderly. Nepal, the elderly are often despised and cast away. I have a picture here of Prakash giving a bath to an old man in need of a bath. This is very typical of his heart. He told me once of an old man he was caring for, who was needing to use the bathroom. Prakash rushed him to his own house. And to use Prakash's words, "He soiled himself on the way to the bathroom." The mess ended up all over the hallway on the way to the bathroom. But Prakash cleaned up the man and the mess without complaint. The man was certainly embarrassed, but Prakash showed love to him.

That's how the Christians in Nepal are impacting their society, by showing love, even to the least of the society. This is what we see with Jesus. He is willing to cross the social stigmas of the broken society. Jesus spoke with this woman. After asking her for water, Jesus offered her some,

4. Living Water (verses 10-19)

John 4:10-14

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The land of Israel is very hot. They need their water. So also the land of Nepal. Much of it, on the southern front is hot. They need their water. The village of Banghata needed their water. But those who live in Banghata need more than water. They need the living water that Jesus can give.

So, on the Saturday when I visited Banghata, Bob took the ready-made object lesson to the village. During the worship service that we had, Bob shared their story, of how Tika Ram had said, "We are dying without water." He shared how the water was restored. But he also shared of the greater need: the need for living water, for which you will never thirst again. When the woman heard about his water,

John 4:15

The woman said to [Jesus], "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

However, you don't get this living water without first acknowledging your sin and your need for the life-giving water that Jesus provides. This is the point of verses 16-19.

John 4:16-19

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet."

Jesus exposed the sin of this woman. She was an adulterous woman. This is probably the reason that she came to draw the water alone. In Jesus' day the daily gathering of the water was a social event, where the women would gather and talk and help one another. But this woman was alone, because of her sin. But that made her a perfect candidate for the gospel.

This is what Bob shared at that church service in Banghata. He explained how we drink water, but will be thirsty again. But if we drink of the water that Jesus gives, we will never thirst again. Bob went through the simple gospel message. that we are all sinners. our sin deserves death. that we are in need of a Savior, to give us life! He offered the living water to those who were in the service.

A good handful came forward to pray with Bob, asking for this living water that is found in Jesus, including Tika Ram. We need to pray for the living water to have its effect in Banghata. Lest you think that the offer of living water is only for those in Nepal. It's for you!

Back to John. In verse 20, we see the woman abruptly change the subject away from her sin to worship.

John 4:20

Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.

The abrupt change in topic may have come from her desire to worship the Lord rightly. The Samaritans had set up their shrine on Mount Gerizin, in the land of Samaria. They Jews had their place of worship in Jerusalem. "Who is right?" she asked. Then Jesus spoke to her

about

5. True Worship (verses 20-24)

John 4:21

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

Jesus said that worship isn't about a place. Rather, it is about a person. It doesn't matter where you worship. It matters who you worship. True worshipers worship God "in Spirit and in truth." If there is any phrase needed for those in Nepal to hear, it is verse 24.

John 4:24

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

In Nepal, there are altars all over the place to worship the many Hindu gods. There are Bhuddist stupas and flags and candles to light. There are cows on the street, who are revered. Everyone seems to worship their own way in Nepal. They worship at this shrine or at that shrine. They offer up their food sacrifices and incense upon the altars. But Jesus says here that true worship isn't about food sacrifices and incense. Instead, it's about the worship of the true God with a genuine spirit of worship. Then in verses 25-26, we Jesus reveal himself as

6. The Messiah (verses 25-26)

John 4:25-26

The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

These are some of the most dramatic verses in all of the Bible. This woman knows enough about the thrust of the Old Testament, that it speaks about the coming Messiah. She brings it up, "Messiah is coming" (verse 25) and Jesus says, "I am he!" "I am the Messiah!" The first time that Jesus reveals his true identity, it is to this insignificant, sinful, Samaritan woman. God is working in Nepal in the same way. He is revealing himself to simple, insignificant people all the time.

On my journey home in Sri Lanka, I made a mad dash through the airport to make my connecting flight to Abu Dhabi. Some of you may have seen the video. I thought that I had missed the flight, as we were two hour late in coming in, and the layover was an hour and 50 minutes. But as I came down the jet bridge, someone was calling my name, he said, "Come." And we ran through the airport! We passed through security. I was seated on my next flight in less than four minutes. Perhaps the Lord allowed me to get to the flight because of the young man sitting to my left.

As I struck up conversation over the course of the flight, I learned that he was about 20 years old, traveling to Melbourne Australia to study accounting. It's his opportunity to escape the poverty of Nepal. This was his first time on a big plane. This was his first time out of the country of Nepal.

I asked him what he wanted to see in Australia. He said, "The sea!" He has never been at a body of water where you couldn't see the other side. He was looking forward to it. Then, he asked me about Nepal and where I visited. I told him where I had been: Kathmandu, Chitiwan, Bardiya, Hetauda. He told me that he was from Butwal, where I had been before on another trip.

Then he asked me what I did for a living. I said, "I am a pastor of a church." To my response, he was visibly shaken, as if he had seen a ghost. He said, "I follow Jesus. He is my god." Then he showed me on the background of his phone was a picture of Jesus in a flowing white robe.

When I asked him about why Jesus is his god, he said, "I like him. He is beautiful. I like his teaching. Many Hindus follow many gods. My god is Jesus." I asked him if he goes to a church. He said, "No. I just worship Jesus by myself." I asked him if he knows any other Christians. He said, "No." I asked him if he knows of a church where he lives. He said "No." I asked if he ever read the Bible to learn about Jesus He said, "No." He said, "I think that there are many versions of the Bible. I don't know which one to read." I told him about the app, YouVersion. He was familiar with the app. I told him that he could read the Nepali version of the Bible on that app. Perhaps this all explains his initial response to me.

I don't know if he knows anyone in his social circle who is a genuine believer in Jesus. So, in the most simple of terms, and in the most non-threatening way that I knew how, I explained the gospel to him. I said, "Jesus is not one god among many. Jesus is the only true God. Jesus is the only way to God. Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father, except through me' (John 14:6). Jesus is the only way to God, because he died on the cross for our sins. He died in our place for the sins that we committed. We need to trust in the sacrifice of Jesus to be forgiven. We don't worship Jesus to be good or get something for us. Rather, I said, "He loved us." 'God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him might not perish, but have eternal life' (John 3:16). Because of his love for us, we love others. 'We love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19)." I said something to that effect.

Over the course of our conversation, I pressed him upon the importance of a church, where he can learn about Jesus, and be involved in a church, where there are other followers of Jesus. I got his email and promised him that I would email him with a church recommendation where he could go to learn more about Jesus and be loved by a community of believers.

I told him the story of Beki (remember him?), who had never heard the name of Jesus until he was 21. But some Nepali missionaries came to live next door to him. They told him about Jesus He would argue against them. But their response of love toward him was a big persuasion to

believe in Jesus. Beki's life was changed when he trusted in Jesus. He went to Bible college and now trains other to plant churches.

I told Sahil (that's his name), that studying in Australia could be a transforming opportunity for his life. He will be away from home and away from the Hindu culture. He will have an opportunity to meet with a church to encourage and help him in his following of Jesus. So, pray for Sahil, he has a great opportunity to have his life changed in Australia, not just with an education, but with a church that might direct him for eternity.

Getting back to John 4, we see this woman leaving Jesus to tell others of Jesus.

John 4:27-29

Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" 4:30 They went out of the town and were coming to him. I'm calling this

7. Eager to Speak (verses 27-30)

Notice that this woman didn't have any sort of evangelistic training. Nor did she know much. But what she knew, she spoke,

John 4:29

Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?

I saw this eagerness to speak about Jesus in Nepal. While in Bardiya at the Children's Home, I was asked if I wanted to play football (soccer). I said, "Sure." And so, I walked with some of the older boys to a very nice field. It had a fence all around, so the cows and other animals that roam about can't destroy the field. The level of play of these young men was very good. I felt my age. Anyway, the teams were mostly the teens from the Children's Home against the Hindu neighbors.

As we were warming up, one of the guys from the Children's Home said to me, "Before we begin, we can introduce you to everyone. Then you can tell them about yourself, and preach the gospel to them." Of course, I was glad to do so. So, we approached the guys from the other team. And in about three minutes (through a translator), I explained, how I had come from the opposite side of the world, to visit those who live in the Children's Home, because God has a heart for orphans. God cares for those who are hurting. We all hurt because of our sin. Jesus can heal our hurts. Jesus can forgive our sins, if we trust in him. I have trusted in him. That's why I came to Nepal. I came because I love the people God loves. I love others in Nepal because God loved me first. These boys from the Children's Home follow Jesus. You can too. You can know his love.

This is how the church in Nepal has grown so quickly, because many in the country are "Eager to Speak." Their boldness was a challenge to me. It should be a challenge to all of us. And these were young people who led me to speak to the others about Jesus. Teenagers! Are you "Eager to Speak?" Let's get back to the gospel of John. I'm calling verses 31-34,

8. True Food (verses 31-34)

In these verses, Jesus speaks about the life-giving power of the ministry to others.

John 4:31-34

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

I have been gone for 2½ weeks. It seems like 2½ months! as much has happened during these days. I have only been able to tell you a little bit about my experiences in Nepal. I'm tired. Because of Jet-lag, I woke up this morning about 3:30am. It's going to take me a day or two longer to adjust my body. But I come back full. I come back satisfied in pouring out myself for others. I come back encouraged in seeing the work of God in Nepal.

A question that I was often asked is this, "Will you come back?" I always responded the same way. I said, "Pray. Pray for God to make it clear when I can return." I love being home. Life is much easier in being home, rather than traveling. The fatigue is great. I went to bed every night wiped out. But God's work is always food for the soul. That's what Jesus said to his disciples who didn't understand.

John 4:34

My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

What is true of Jesus is also true of you. When you are in the center of God's will for your life, it's like food for your soul. Jesus gives the living water, from which you will drink and never thirst again (verse 14). Jesus also gives the true food. Serve the Lord and you will find deep satisfaction in your soul.

Now, for each of us, this is different. For Jesus, it was speaking with this woman. For me these past three weeks, it was traveling to encourage others on the opposite side of the world. Usually, for me it comes in sharing my life with you, shepherding you with God's word. For you, it will look different. Perhaps it is serving here at church. Perhaps it is in sharing your lives with those outside the church who need Jesus. Perhaps it is found in visiting the jail. Perhaps it is found in giving financially to the Lord's work. Perhaps it is found in coaching your child's soccer team. Perhaps it is found in serving in a local ministry. And I trust that it involves several of these things.

But listen church family, I would encourage all of you to know that this food is that Jesus speaks about. Finally, my ninth (and last) point.

9. Great Harvest (verses 35-38)

John 4:35-38

Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Jesus speaks of the reality of the kingdom in his day. The harvest was great. These disciples would soon go out and change the world. But it was a time of great harvest. And the harvest is great in Nepal right now. It may not be so great here in America at the moment. We still need to labor. We still need to press on.

John 4:39-42

Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 5, 2023 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Nepal.