

Today we continue in our study of "Jesus Encounters" in the gospel of John. In Chapter 4 we find Jesus encountering a Samaritan women at the well of Jacob. As we did with Nicodemus, may we learn methods of effective encounter from the Master, our Lord Jesus.

### **SETTING UP THE ENCOUNTER**

**John 4:3-6** *So [Jesus] left Judea and went away again into Galilee. And He had to pass through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.*

Here the story is set up. Jesus had been in Jerusalem in the south of Palestine for a Passover feast, where He had spoken with Nicodemus. But now He travels to Cana of Galilee in the north, where He was to perform His second Galilean miracle in healing a nobleman's son. (4:46ff). We learn from Josephus, the historian of his day, that there were three possible routes for this journey north: (1) far to the west along the Mediterranean, (2) far to the east on the other side of the Jordan river, or (3) through Samaria, which lay between Judea and Galilee. Even though this third choice was the shortest and easiest, most Jews chose to take one of the longer routes, to avoid contact with the Samaritans, who were half-breeds both racially and spiritually.

In 722 B.C. The Assyrians conquered the Samaritans, took them captive and intermarried. When the Samaritans returned to their land they retained much of the idolatry of the Assyrians. In another invasion, the southern Jews of Judea had been enslaved by the Babylonians, but they, for the most part, had retained their national identity both physically and spiritually during their 70 year captivity. When they returned to their homeland (under Ezra and Zerubbabel) they shunned the northern Samaritans for their national and spiritual impurity. And the feeling was mutual.

That Jesus "had to pass through Samaria" was a choice. It was a choice to show His disciples that He wanted to break down walls of division and it was a choice to follow His Father's will, to encounter and evangelize the Samaritan woman at the well. He had to go this way because it was God's will for His Son. The road north through Samaria comes to a fork in the road right at the place where Jacob had dug a well, later giving it to his favorite son, Joseph. Jewish time would make the encounter with the Samaritan women in the heat of the day, at noon. Although the gospel of John emphasizes Jesus' divinity, we here see His humanity in His being both weary and thirsty.

### **THE ENCOUNTER INITIATED**

**John 4:7-9** *There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "how is it that you, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)*

Jesus' disciples went to buy food. Obviously hunger necessitated dealing with Samaritans in commerce. And this gave opportunity for a "one on one" with Jesus – clearly God's plan. And when we find our ourselves in "one on one" situations, we must realize that this might well be a "divine appointment" set up by the Almighty Himself.

It might seem strange to us, or even rude, that Jesus would say "Give me a drink." But this was a humble and gracious communication, not a condescending one. He was showing a willingness to relate to one that few others would. He initiated the encounter. And we must be willing to initiate our encounters. Sometimes it just takes the courage to say "hello."

We see here the willingness of our Lord to cross a number of cultural boundaries. #1 – a man, especially a rabbi, which Jesus was, would never speak to a woman. It was forbidden. #2 – for one of some renown and position such as Jesus, to speak with one shunned by most for her impure ways was also forbidden. It would be the "clean" associating with the "unclean." And #3 – for a Jew

to be conversing with a Samaritan – well that was unspeakable. But this was Jesus, who loved all of mankind. This was Jesus who knew no cultural boundaries of propriety, but saw only the needy soul. And this is Jesus teaching us through example that we must be willing and wanting to love and relate to all of God's children, however different they may be from us. We are all the same in one important respect – we all need Jesus!

## TURNING THE ENCOUNTER TO THE SPIRITUAL

**John 4:10-14** *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." She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?"*

*Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."*

If we are to take our encounters past the realm of the ordinary – "Hi, how are you," "Fine", "Have a nice day" – we must be willing to direct the encounter to a spiritual level at some point. Seldom will we have the spiritual "dropped into our lap." "Can you help me discover Jesus?" is not a question we are asked often, if ever. Usually such level of discussion must be initiated and directed by us, the follower of Jesus. Yes, here is where courage of the Spirit must prevail. Here is where we must venture into the realm of dependency upon the Spirit and not our own wisdom. Here is where we must have our "spiritual antennae" at high alert. The enemy will whisper "you'll be embarrassed" or "they will reject you" but we must know that we are offering the most precious gift in the universe.

Just as Jesus used "born again" as the "hook" to interest Nicodemus, so here Jesus uses "living water" as the "hook" to interest the Samaritan woman. We might share something wonderful God has done recently in our life, or offer an invitation to an upcoming spiritual event, or "drop" a mention of trusting God in a recent difficult situation. Here we must be alert and let the Spirit lead us to the best way to turn the conversation to the spiritual. If there is a hint of interest, pursue. If not, don't press, but try a different approach.

## TURNING THE ENCOUNTER TO THE NEED

**John 4:15-19** *The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw." He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly." The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet."*

Some see it as strange that the woman finally shows interest in the spiritual water Jesus is offering, and then He turns the conversation to her personal life, and specifically her sin. But I am convinced that this is the genius and example of Jesus that we are to follow. This doesn't mean that we are to find a deep dark secret and expose it. But we are to learn that one cannot truly receive what Jesus has to offer unless they realize their deep need, and acknowledge their sinful state.

The commentator William Hendrickson says it this way in his commentary on the gospel of John:

*"There is a close connection between the woman's request (asking for living water) and Jesus' command (asking her to bring her husband). Does the woman desire living water? Then there must be a thirst for this water. This thirst will not be truly awakened unless there be a sense of guilt, a consciousness of sin."* William Hendrickson

So many who share God's gospel miss this critical point (including well-known evangelist/pastors). Yes we must share of God's love for us and His offer of forgiveness and new life (living water). But the gospel must also include God's provision for our sin. Until we truly see the need of our sinful soul, we can never begin to see the depth of God's love. Or to put it in theological terms, there

cannot be revival until there is repentance. You must encounter your true self before you can encounter God. Remember that Jesus came saying “Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

As you speak with another, you can usually sense some struggle they are having or some deficiency they are feeling about themselves. This can be a natural (supernatural) leading into how Jesus has come to pay the debt for all our failings and rebellions. God’s love is all the more tantalizing when one realizes that it includes forgiving our sins and giving strength to handle all of our struggles.

The woman is drawn to Jesus not only for His ability to know of her shady circumstance, but for His willingness to talk to her in spite of it. We must show sincere love for the sinner without condoning the sin. Those you speak with may not say, “I perceive you are a prophet” but they might well say or think, “this person really cares about me.”

## **CHANGING THE SUBJECT & BRINGING IT BACK**

**John 4:20-24** *“Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, and hour is coming when neither in 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 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. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

Notice that the woman takes the conversation in a different direction – talking about which mountain is the correct mountain of worship. You will find that often a conversation that has gone spiritual (usually because of your input) is pulled away to something different. They might begin talking about a bad church experience, or that they believe in evolution, not creation, or that they struggle with some aspect of Christianity. We might tend to think that this shows he/she is not interested and so give up the pursuit. But this is not what Jesus did. He went with her new direction and then pulled the conversation back to a relationship with God.

I would encourage you to go down the diversion trails to a point, but always bring the conversation back to a relationship with God, through Jesus. Jesus did this by telling the woman that “those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

## **GETTING TO THE BOTTOM LINE**

**John 4:25-26** *The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ). When that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”*

Bottom line of all truths is that Jesus is the God-man, and all must face Him as such. If we can get our conversations to that point then there is a decision to be made – to accept or reject. Not all conversations or encounters will get to that level, but it should be our goal to get there. What will you do with Jesus? is the essence of what we want to ask. “Who is Jesus to you?” is often a good way to get there.

**John 4:27-30** *At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, “What do You seek?” or, “Why do You speak with her?” So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men, “Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?” They went out of the city, and were coming to Him.*

The encounter with the woman at the well is over – but the impact of it continues. She plays the conversation over and over in her mind. And she shares it with others. Others are affected and seek Jesus. And some of them are won to Him. Remember and believe God’s promise in Isaiah 55:11.

**Isaiah 55:11** *So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty*

*without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*

Never think that your simple words of faith are useless. They will be used by God for exactly what He desires and often multiplied far beyond what you could ever imagine.

Later in the year, when Jesus returned to Jerusalem for the fall festival of Tabernacles (or Booths) he spoke words to the crowds similar to what he had spoken to the Samaritan woman:

**John 7:37-39** *Now ... Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' " But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

I may not be able to GIVE living water, but I can surely OFFER the living water of Jesus.

I may not be able to PROPHECY another's secret sins, but I can REVEAL the sin that all share.

I may not be able to EVANGELIZE as Jesus did, but I can be His witness through my unique personality and by the Spirit of boldness that He will give me, if I am alert and willing.

**INITIATE THE ENCOUNTER**

**TURN THE ENCOUNTER TO THE SPIRITUAL**

**GO WITH SUBJECT CHANGES, BUT BRING BACK**

**GET TO THE BOTTOM LINE OF JESUS**