

Message #15

Kurt Hedlund

John

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## JESUS' EXAMPLE OF OUTREACH

JOHN 4:27-42

I.

Twenty years ago I was sitting in a dentist chair in Bridgeport, Connecticut, waiting for my six month cleaning when a new, young dental hygienist came into the room. She had read my paperwork, which included a reference to my occupation, and the first words that came out of her mouth were: "So how exactly could I be saved." It turns out that her step father had recently become a Christian and was talking with her about her need to get connected with Jesus. So she was seriously thinking about the issue.

I went through the gospel message with her. She was not quite ready yet to believe it. I don't know that I have ever had a clearer, easier opportunity to tell a person about Jesus. Most of the time it is a bit more challenging to most of us to figure out the best way and the best time to tell people about the gospel.

In the passage before us today Jesus is involved in evangelism. The way that He goes about it provides us with lessons about how we can be more effective in reaching out to people around us about the true God.

We have been studying the Gospel of John in recent weeks. We have seen that it was written a couple of decades after the other three Gospels were written. So the Apostle John does not repeat most of the material that appears in the other three biographies of Jesus. He also gives us the specific purpose that he had in writing the book. (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 20:30) In #20 vv. 30 & 31 he writes, "**Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; (JOHN 20:31) but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**"

The Apostle John organizes his book around seven sign miracles which Jesus performed. In #2 Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast in Galilee. That is the first sign miracle. After that, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover feast where he alienated the religious establishment by tossing money changers and animal merchants out of the temple. He then had a personal interview with a chief rabbi by the name of Nicodemus, who had seen Jesus perform healing miracles.

Then Jesus and His disciples went out near the Jordan River (SYCHAR MAP 4) to do the kind of baptizing that John the Baptist had been doing. On the last two Sundays we have seen how Jesus after that took a detour to get to Sychar in Samaria to talk to a woman at the well about the true God. He identifies Himself as the Messiah, while His disciples are away in town getting food.

II.

So now in v. 27 of #4, p. 889 in the black Bibles, we find that JESUS OVERCOMES OBSTACLES TO SHARE THE GOSPEL. (II. JESUS OVERCOMES OBSTACLES...) The Apostle John writes in v. 27, "**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?'**"

We have seen in our last two messages from #4 that Jesus overcame a number of obstacles in order to have this conversation with this woman. First, there was a geographical obstacle. It seems likely that Jesus made a significant detour to get to this well in Samaria. Second, there was a gender obstacle. Men and women in this culture just did not talk to strangers of the opposite sex in public settings. Third, there was an ethnic obstacle. The Samaritans and Jews had different ethnic heritages, and they often clashed with each other. Fourth, there was a moral obstacle. Jesus was presenting Himself as a Jewish rabbi, and he was talking to a woman who had been married five times and was living with another guy now. Fifth, there was a religious obstacle. The Samaritans did accept the first five books of the Bible, but they rejected the rest of the Old Testament, which brought opposition from the Jews. One of the primary issues was the proper center for worship, the temple in Jerusalem or Mt. Gerezim near this well in Samaria.

Jesus had sent His disciples into the nearby village of Sychar before He had the conversation with this woman at the well. Now when they return, the obstacle that stands out to them is that Jesus is speaking to a woman. They marvel at this. Their religious training in earlier years would have made it clear that Jewish rabbis just did not do such things.

A passage in the Talmud, which probably reflects the thinking among most Jews at this time (TALMUD QUOTATION), went like this: "**A man shall not talk with a woman in the street, not even with his own wife, and especially not with another woman on account of what men may say.**" (Talmud, SBk, II, p. 438) The disciples saw Jesus as not just any man. They saw him as a rabbi, and perhaps even the Messiah of Israel. They marveled that he would be speaking to a strange woman.

Jesus broke away from this tradition. He later would have women travel along with His band of disciples. This was totally different from anything that any other legitimate rabbi did. Many religious leaders saw it as scandalous. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The disciples did know enough to keep quiet about their concern. But I am suspicious that part of the reason that He sent them into town without Him was so that He could have this conversation alone with this woman. He knew that their presence might have kept this conversation from happening, or at least happening in the way that it needed to happen.

Two summers ago when I visited my mother in Wisconsin, we went to see my aunt in a nursing home. I am not sure that she is born again. So I explained one of my favorite passages from 1 John #5 with her. Unfortunately, my mother kept interrupting the conversation. She made it difficult to have a quality conversation with my aunt about the heart of the gospel.

The basic point is that there are needy people around us, and in the world at large, who need to hear the gospel. We need to be willing to overcome obstacles in order to share it with them.

III.

Then in vv. 28-30 we find that JESUS SPREADS THE GOSPEL THROUGH UNUSUAL PEOPLE. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. JESUS SPREADS THE GOSPEL...) In the first part of v. 28 we read, "**So the woman left her water jar and went away into town...**" Back in v. 5 we learned that the town was Sychar.

It appears that Jesus did not yet get His drink of water for which He originally asked. Also the woman left her water jar by the well. The impression we get is that she was excited about the possibility that she had just met the Messiah.

The Samaritan religion did have a belief in a Messiah, based on Moses' comments in Deuteronomy #18, about a coming prophet who had similarities to Moses. Because Jesus said things about her marital background that He could not know on any human basis, the Samaritan woman was excited about the possibility that Jesus could be the real deal. So she wanted to tell the people in her town. One observer remarks, "**She came with a water pot and left carrying the well.**"

According to the rest of v. 28 and v. 29, "**...and [she] said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?'**" Jesus' description of the woman's moral history had a profound effect upon her. Normally we would expect a person like this not to dwell on that. Probably her moral status was a primary reason why she came to the well alone in the middle of the day. But something bigger is at work in the encounter with this Jewish man. For that she feels obligated to tell others.

In her presentation to people in the community she presents a tactful and tentative proposition: Can this be the Christ? She doesn't assert that He is, but she invites further investigation. Something big is at work here. Come check it out.

Back in #1 Jesus Himself had a similar response to the disciples of John the Baptist. They asked where He was staying. In v. 39 He said, "Come and see." A few verses later Philip tells his friend Nathaniel that he thinks that he has found the Messiah. Nathaniel expresses doubts. In v. 46 Philip tells his friend, "Come and see." Perhaps that is not a bad strategy to use with unbelievers in our sphere of influence. Come and hear this speaker. Come and check out this Bible study. Come and visit my church. Come and see this Christian movie. Come and read the Gospel According to John.

Verse 30: **"They went out of the town and were coming to him."** The Samaritan woman piqued the curiosity of the people of this town enough to motivate them to check out Jesus. Keep in mind that she did not have any evangelism training. She did not have any training in the doctrine of Jesus. She just told people what she knew, and the results were great.

The tense of the verb in v. 30 suggests that people kept on coming. There was not just one group that came together. The implication is that people were streaming out of the village to check out this Jesus.

The point is that Jesus spreads the gospel through unusual people. If I was planning an evangelism crusade to reach Sychar, I would not have put in charge of the thing a woman who was married five times and living with a guy. But God uses unusual people. You can't plan some of these things. We just need to be available for the opportunities and spread the gospel as we can.

Emily Benham was one of those unusual people. She was the daughter of Flip Benham, the national director of Operation Rescue. In March of 1995 Operation Rescue moved their Dallas office next door to an abortion center. One of the volunteers at the abortion center was Norma McCorvey. Norma was the Jane Doe of the famous Roe v. Wade decision of 1973 that outlawed state laws prohibiting abortion. The Benhams were friendly to Norma McCorvey. Norma took a special liking to seven year old Emily. Emily's parents let Norma be alone with her on a few occasions.

On one of those occasions Emily invited Norma to church. Norma found it hard to say "no" to her little friend. So she went to church with the Benham family and was positively affected by what she saw and heard. She kept coming. She became a follower of Jesus. (NORMA MCCORVEY) Emily's dad had the opportunity to baptize Norma. Norma had second thoughts about abortion. She revealed that her lawyer had made up much of the story about the circumstances of her abortion in order to have a stronger legal case. Norma talked about her new faith in Jesus. Little Emily had a big impact.

We never know whom we will influence or whom God will use. We just need to be on the lookout for opportunities and overcome obstacles to share the good news.

IV.

Then in vv. 31-38 we find that JESUS EXPLAINS THAT EVANGELISM IS ABOUT A COMMITMENT TO DO GOD'S WILL. (IV. EVANGELISM IS ABOUT A....) Verse 31 tells us, "**Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat.'**" The perspective of the disciples was that they had been sent on a mission to get food. They have accomplished their mission. Perhaps they had held off eating until their mission was accomplished. They saw that he was hungry. So let's eat.

Verses 32-33: "**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?'**" This is the reaction to the teaching of Jesus that we have seen from a number of people in this Gospel. Jesus speaks on a spiritual level, and even the disciples cannot see beyond a literal meaning.

Verse 32: "**Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.'**" This is a summary of the mission of Jesus, which will be repeated several times in John's Gospel. He has come to do His Father's will.

Some of the readers of this Gospel would be drawn back to the story of the temptation of Jesus. After He was baptized, He fasted in the wilderness for forty days. Then he was tempted by the Devil. In one of the temptations the Evil One called upon Him to turn stones into bread. Jesus replied, "**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**" (Matthew 4:4)

Jesus was quoting from Deuteronomy #8. There Moses was telling his fellow Hebrews an important lesson about following God. (DEUTERONOMY 8:3) After explaining the reason why they had wandered in the wilderness for forty years, he said, "**And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.**" Priority should be placed upon doing and promoting God's word. A commitment to doing God's will should have a priority over eating.

One reason that we Christians are not more effective at outreach is that we have a tendency to be more concerned about doing our will, about following our own agenda. We are tempted to have a primary concern about our own security and significance, about our own happiness and fulfillment. Jesus says that our top commitment should be doing God's will. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Back in our text in v. 35 Jesus says, **"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."** The exact source of this saying is unknown. The suspicion is that this was a proverbial statement that simply meant that there were four months between the time that crops were planted and crops were harvested. Harvest was not anticipated until the appropriate amount of time had passed.

Jesus seems to be saying that His disciples should always be ready. Harvest may come sooner than would be normally expected. In fact, the fields now are white for harvest. At harvest time cotton may look white when it is ready to be harvested. But grain crops generally appear a golden brown when they are ripe. Here we have just been told that people were streaming out from Sychar to check out Jesus. Especially in the warm season, people had a tendency to wear white to be cooler in the heat. I suspect that Jesus was pointing to the people who were heading toward Him who were wearing white.

In v. 36 Jesus continues, **"Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together."** Here comes the harvest. The Samaritans are ready to hear about Jesus. The disciples should forget about food for the moment and take advantage of the opportunity to connect these people with the true God. This is a real opportunity for rejoicing.

Jesus adds in v. 37, **"For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.'"** Jesus would seem to be the primary reaper. But the disciples have the opportunity to participate in this harvest. The reference to the sower is less clear. It could be the Old Testament prophets, going back to Moses. I suspect that Jesus especially had John the Baptist and his disciples in mind. Back in #3 v. 23 we were told that he was baptizing by Aenon, which most authorities think was on the east side of Samaria. Probably some of the Samaritans had been exposed to his ministry.

The basic point is that this outreach deal is a team effort. Often those who first expose people to the truth about connection with the true God don't see any immediate result. But that introduction is important. Later it may lead to a harvest.

In v. 38 Jesus adds, **"I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."** Now you disciples have the opportunity to participate in a harvest. So you should be on the lookout for such opportunities. That means having a focus and commitment to doing God's will. Life is not primarily about you and your personal fulfillment.

The author of this little parable is unknown, but the story goes like this: **"On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was once a crude little lifesaving station. The building was just a**

hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost.

"Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station, so it became famous. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding area, wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and crews trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

"Some of the members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt a more comfortable place should be provided... So they replaced the emergency cots and beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place... it was used as sort of a club.

"Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The lifesaving motifs still prevailed in this club's decorations, and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where initiations were held.

"About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in loads of cold, wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick, and some of them had black skin and some had yellow skin.

"The beautiful new club was considerably messed up. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where the victims of shipwrecks could be cleaned up before coming inside.

"At the next meeting there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities as being unpleasant and a hinderance to the normal social life of the club.

"Some members insisted upon lifesaving as their primary purpose and pointed out they were still called a lifesaving station. But they were finally voted down and told if they wanted to save the lives of various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast. They did.

**"As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club, and yet another lifesaving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that coast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore.**

**"Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown."** May that description never fit us. May we be characterized by a commitment to do God's will.

V.

Then in vv. 39-42 JESUS SHOWS THAT GOD'S WORD PRODUCES RESULTS. (PROJECTOR ON--- V. JESUS SHOWS THAT GOD'S WORD...) According to v. 39, **"Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me all that I ever did.'"**

Jesus overcame numerous obstacles to tell this woman how to connect with the true God. To get her attention, He told her about details of her life that He could not have naturally known. In a similar way, Jesus performed healing miracles which got the attention of Nicodemus. He was slow to believe. The Samaritan woman not only believed, but her story got immediate results from the people of her community.

Verse 40: **"So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days."** The Samaritans asked to have more time with this Jewish rabbi. Jesus did not get this kind of reception from His fellow Jews. There is a hint here about the future direction of His ministry.

Verses 41-42: **"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.'"** There is no evidence that Jesus did any other kind of miracle in this Samaritan town. His words were sufficient to produce belief.

In the end the Samaritans conclude that Jesus is the Savior of the world. What they understood by that is somewhat uncertain. The term was used by Greeks and Romans of some of their gods, of the Roman emperor at certain times and of some heroes. At least the Samaritans understood Jesus to be the fulfillment of that Old Testament prophecy of Moses about a coming great prophet. They also had a greater appreciation of Jesus than most of His fellow Jews did.

We see Jesus here living out a pattern that He will later command His followers to observe. In Acts #1 v. 8 (ACTS 1:8), shortly before His ascension into heaven, Jesus declared to His followers, **"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem**



**and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."** We have seen Jesus make a public appearance in Jerusalem. The Apostle John then says specifically that Jesus and disciples went into the Judean countryside. Now we see Jesus in Samaria. From there He will head further north into Galilee. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Jesus did not stay long in Samaria. His primary mission was still to explain the gospel to His fellow Jews.

The key point to observe here is that many more people among the Samaritans believed because of His word. That is our primary responsibility in outreach. We are responsible to share God's word. We can be confident that it often will produce results.

George Peters was born in 1907 in southern Russia. He was the youngest of twelve children. In 1919, when he was twelve years old, the Communist Revolution took place. There was a massacre in his village, in which his father, his sister and several other relatives were killed. George was later pressured to join the Communist Party Youth League. He was offered a college scholarship if he would join. He refused.

His mother decided that it would be better for her family to get out of Russia. She applied for a permit to leave the country and move to western Europe. Eventually she got that permit and left Russia with her family. She then applied for the necessary permits to go to Mexico. In 1925 the family moved to Mexico. George got a job working on a large plantation.

Somehow a newspaper reporter came across George and wrote up the story about how he and his family had left Russia and gone to Mexico. That story appeared in a newspaper which was read by a Christian farmer in Oklahoma. With only the most basic address to go by, he sent a Bible to George in Mexico.

George was working out in the boonies in Mexico as a cowboy. He got a notice from the post office that he had a parcel waiting for him in town. But town was 20 miles away. He did not have access to any mode of transportation other than his own feet. So one day he took off early for the post office. When he arrived at the post office, he eagerly opened the package and discovered that it was a Bible. His initial reaction was disgust. He was about to toss it into the garbage, when he noticed the price tag of \$16.95. That impressed him a little bit to discover that a farmer in Oklahoma in the US had spent that much for someone he did not know to have a Bible. So he took it home and read it. The message of the gospel got to him, and he became a follower of Jesus.

The rest of his family had moved to Canada. He was able to join them there shortly after this. He went to a Bible institute to learn more about his precious Bible. He then went to the University of Saskatchewan. Eventually he got a PhD from Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. He developed a missions curriculum for a couple of different seminaries. He wrote a number of books on missions strategy. Eventually he became my missions professor at Dallas Seminary. It was his simple exposure to the Bible that produced significant results. Giving out the Bible, as the Gideons do, is another method that produces results. For the Word of God has the power to change lives.

So the lessons that we should take away from our passage are these: We need to overcome obstacles to share the gospel. We need to expect that God will use unusual people, perhaps even us, to spread the gospel. We should remember that evangelism is primarily about making and keeping a commitment to do God's will. We should also expect that exposure to the Word of God, to the Bible, will change the lives of many.