

BARRIERS TO PERSONAL EVANGELISM

JESUS OVERCOMES ETHNIC AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: **John 4:3-26**. From Roy H. Enoch (06-05-1994).
- B. John's gospel is a sampling of Christ's life with a purpose (Jn. 20:30-31).
 - 1. John pictures Jesus as perfect deity (Jn. 1:1-3).
 - 2. He also pictures Him as the "word made flesh" (Jn. 1:14).
 - 3. He is the perfect Savior who instructs us how to reach men with the story of the gospel.
 - 4. Our Lord's encounter with the woman of Samaria is a beautiful and instructive demonstration of how fleshly tendencies of bigotry, aloofness and impatience must give way to heavenly patience, compassion and love.
- C. It may not be accidental that Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus (Ch. 3) is followed so closely with His conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (Ch. 4).

There are vivid contrasts:

 - 1. Nicodemus sought Jesus; she chanced upon Him.
 - 2. He came to Jesus at night; she met Him at midday.
 - 3. He was a Jew; she was a Samaritan.
 - 4. He was a man; she was a woman.
 - 5. He was prominent and of good reputation; she was a "nobody."
 - 6. He was educated; she probably was not.
 - 7. He was morally upright; she was living in open sin.
 - 8. He knew that Jesus was a teacher from God; she thought He was just a helpless traveler.
 - 9. He addressed Jesus with respect; she was flippant and without discernment.
 - 10. He held to a religion that respected the authority of God's word; her religion was the tradition of her fathers.
 - 11. They needed exactly the same thing: the redemption that only the X could give.
- C. This story is rich with points of practical significance on how to overcome barriers in personal evangelism.
 - 1. If there was ever an unlikely "prospect" this woman was one.
 - 2. Let us look at this story to see how Jesus broke down some of the barriers of some of these differences that we have mentioned, to lead her to salvation.

I. THE STORY IS INTRODUCED BY A DESCRIPTION OF THE SETTING.

- A. He had been in Judea and was going back to Galilee needing "to go through Samaria" (Jn. 4:4).
 - 1. There were other roads, and most Jews crossed Jordan and went east of the Jordan avoiding Samaria.
 - 2. His need to go through Samaria may have been to have this opportunity to teach (Jn. 4:34).
 - 3. Often those who need the gospel the most are least likely to come to those who can teach them.
- B. For her it was a chance meeting, but it may have been intentional for Jesus who knew that she needed to meet Him.
 - 1. It is Christ-like to show concern and compassion on those who are different and difficult for us to reach when circumstances force us to be in contact with them.
 - 2. It is even more Christ-like to seek out such people.

II. THE HUMANITY OF JESUS IS EMPHASIZED IN THIS STORY.

- A. It is too easy for us to assume that since Jesus was divine, He did not have human difficulties to cope with.
 - 1. We often excuse our lack of focus on God's will and the needs of others by saying that we are only human.

2. But verse 6 says that he was weary from the journey.
 3. He was also thirsty from the walk.
 4. He was waiting for the apostles to get food.
- B. But these real human needs did not blind Him to the spiritual needs of others.
1. In spite of His own human needs, He could still see the spiritual needs of others and spiritual opportunities.
 2. We must not let our human needs blind us to the circumstances of others.
 3. Physical needs must yield to spiritual urgencies (Jn. 4:32-34).

III. **THERE IS A GRACIOUS AGGRESSIVENESS IN THE WAY JESUS STARTED THE CONVERSATION.**

- A. He did not wait for her to approach Him.
1. He did not have a canned sales pitch.
 2. He did not have a one line opener to toss at everyone He met.
- B. He begins by asking her for a favor.
1. It was simple, a real need and disarming.
 2. It is more likely to establish friendship when we ask for a reasonable kindness.
 3. But He asked in view of giving rather than receiving.
- C. Water was what was in the well.
1. Water was what was on her mind.
 2. Water was what He needed.
 3. It was used to lead to a spiritual conversation.

IV. **JESUS OVERCAME SERIOUS ETHNIC BARRIERS (John 4:9).**

- A. In 721BC the Assyrians had invaded the northern kingdom of Israel and the nation fell with the capture of the city of Samaria, its capital.
1. Most of the population was removed and settled in other conquered nations.
 2. The area of Israel was resettled with people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath and Sepharva (2Kgs. 17:24).
 3. The Israelites who were left in the land intermarried with those of these nations who were also settled in the land.
- B. The mixed race that resulted also mixed its religion.
1. The religion of the northern ten tribes was the calf-worship that Jereboam initiated.
 2. They only accepted a corrupted form of the books of Moses.
 3. The other nations brought their idolatry and it was blended.
- C. In the times of Ezra and Nehemiah the Samaritans were refused a part in building the Temple of God.
1. A rival temple was built on Mount Gerizim.
 2. This was the mountain near Jacob's well that the woman referred to in verse 21.
 3. In 129BC the Jewish forces destroyed the temple, but the Samaritans still considered that mountain a holy place.
 4. This partly explains why in the time of Jesus, the Jews were even more prejudiced against the Samaritans than the other Gentiles.
- D. This is the reason the woman said that the Jews "have no dealings w/the Samaritans."
1. They certainly would not share vessels such as drinking from her pitcher.
 2. It was similar to the attitude of whites in the South who had separate drinking fountains for the blacks.
- E. Jesus' example here shows that we must learn to lay aside the racial and ethnic prejudices.
1. Peter described this lesson from Jesus to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile (Ac 10:28,34,35).

2. We must also learn to love the souls of all men.
3. In the race riots in Los Angeles, several brethren held a forum on race relations. TV stations sent crews, because the situation could become volatile. It was wonderful when a black speaker began his comments this way:

"I was born in 1952...into a black family in a black neighborhood. I grew up in a black culture. About all I knew about whites was that they were the "blue-eyed devils." But in 1988 I was born again. When I was born again, I was not born black or white; I was born a Christian. As a Christian, race is not the issue."
4. This is the lesson that Jesus teaches about ethnic or racial barriers.

V. WITH GREAT PATIENCE, JESUS HELPS THE WOMAN WORK THROUGH HER IGNORANCE AND FLIPPANCY TO BRING HER TO THE TRUTH SHE WAS SEEKING.

- A. John 4:9,10.
 1. Jesus answers by offering an even greater blessing than the water that she could give him.
 - a. A secular mind is one of the most difficult barriers to spiritual perception.
 - b. He is not blaming her for not knowing but laying a groundwork for her later understanding.
 2. She seems to think that the well was the only source of water (Jn. 4:11).
 3. She also claims Jacob as her father also (Jn. 4:12).
- B. Jesus offers "living water" that will "become in him a fountain of water springing up in him into eternal life."
 1. She wants the water so that she will not have thirst or have to come and draw again.
 2. Jesus does not try to explain the spiritual nature of the "water" but establishes His ability to teach by revealing her life secrets.
 3. "Go, call your husband and come here" (Jn. 4:17-19; esp. v16).
- C. When He shows a knowledge of her life, she asked Him about the place of worship (Jn. 4:20). He points out that the place of worship will no longer be important, but the way we worship and the attitude.
- D. Three times He uses the term, "the Father" and focus on "true worshipers."
 1. He does not compromise the need to worship properly, or indicate that her worship was all right (Jn. 4:22).
 - a. Those who are ashamed today to claim that the teachings of Christ is the only true worship, and that others are wrong, are ashamed of Christ Himself.
 2. Unless we accept the truth about how to worship, our attitude will not really matter, nor will truth matter if we have the wrong attitude.
- E. She finally reveals a longing for the Messiah and learning all things. Jesus assures her that she is speaking to Him now (Jn. 4:25,26).

CONCLUSION.

- A. We have been studying how Jesus taught a most unlikely prospect.
 1. She was of another ethnic culture.
 2. She was of another religious heritage.
 3. She was leading an immoral life.
 4. She did not seem to want to talk religion.
 5. She did not understand the fundamental principles of authority and right doctrine.
- B. Yet He led her gently, but firmly to the realization that He was the Messiah that she was looking for.