

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

We are apt to picture John the Baptist delivering fiery, convicting messages of righteousness, but picture Jesus quietly teaching small groups of disciples. That picture, however, is unbalanced. Jesus' message was identical to John's: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matt. 3:2, 4:17). Once Jesus began His ministry, the crowds of people streaming to John to be baptized diminished because so many were streaming to Jesus to be baptized. Jesus' preaching ministry was all about repentance and baptizing the repentant (4:1-2). His ministry was very similar to John's.

In Jesus' day, most Jews hated Samaritans (and vice versa). The Samaritans were a mixed race, part Jew and part Gentile, a product of the Assyrian captivity of the 10 northern tribes of Israel some 700 years earlier. Because the Jews forbade the Samaritans to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, they established their own temple and religious services on Mount Gerizim.

Jesus, not one to follow culture's lead, took time for a woman who was hated by other Jews, had suffered the rejection of divorce five times (and who was very possibly despised among her own people because of it), and was now living in an immoral relationship. What a lesson we can learn from Jesus' love from this story of "the Bad Samaritan!" The church should reach out to foreigners and have no bigotry. The church should oppose divorce but love divorced people, and hate immorality but love immoral people.

We can also learn something about sharing the gospel from observing Jesus in this story. He first caught the Samaritan woman's attention by His love. She was shocked that He, a Jew, would even speak to her. Who would be shocked if you spoke to them?

Second, He used her current circumstance to create a bridge to a spiritual conversation. She was interested in drawing some water. Jesus was also interested in a drink, and asked for water from her. Yet He knew that He possessed some "water" that she needed, and He told her. That got the ball rolling.

She probably considered Him to be a little crazy at that point, and just to humor Him, asked for some of the living water that He was offering so that she would no longer be thirsty or have to draw water from a well. But her patronizing attitude quickly changed when He mentioned her five former husbands and her live-in boyfriend. This is the third point for us to remember: Before people will repent, they must be brought under conviction for their sin.

Once under conviction, the woman quickly turned religious and tried to divert the conversation away from herself to a contemporary theological difference between Jews and Samaritans about the proper place to worship. Jesus briefly addressed the issue and used it to bring the conversation back to what was important, revealing Himself as the Messiah. She left her water pot and hurried back into the city to tell others about Him. Missionary Jesus had crossed a culture, and a foreign revival had begun.

Notice that, during the old covenant, Jesus was offering someone "living water," and a "well of water springing up to eternal life" (4:14), water which may well represent the Holy Spirit according to 7:38-39. That makes me wonder once again if the new birth was available under the old covenant.

When Jesus told the nobleman to go his way because his son lived, the Bible says that he "believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off" (4:50). If we examine the story closely, we see more evidence of his faith. He probably could have returned that same day to Capernaum, because it was only about one o'clock in the afternoon, and Capernaum was only about sixteen miles from Cana. But he rested in his faith. There was no need to rush home to see how his son was doing. He believed, so he took his time and arrived home the next day.

If we're trusting God, we also don't need to be in a hurry or check to see "if" God's promise is coming to pass. Faith is a rest. Are you resting today?