

THE RADICAL RABBI: "A RADICAL OUTREACH"

(John 4:1-42)

7.26.20

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had the chance to sit down with somebody famous - maybe well-known in their field, or famous for a moment in time, or whatever? I once had a chance to talk for about an hour with a guy named Stephen Meyer. If that name sounds familiar, he is one of the most knowledgeable guys out there in the field of intelligent design - the idea that evidence of design in nature reflects an origin from an intelligent being versus the undirected, random outcomes promoted by natural evolution. His expertise has, among other things, made him a participant in the worldview video series, "The Truth Project," produced by Focus On The Family. One of the best, most rewarding and enjoyable conversations of my entire life.

Oprah Winfrey has mentioned that her first celebrity interview ever was Robin Williams. The late Johnny Carson made a career out of the interviews he conducted on "The Tonight Show." Diane Sawyer, Barbara Walters, Larry King - the list goes on and on. One of the first interviews I remember watching as a kid was Walter Cronkite interviewing President Kennedy on September 2, 1963 - less than three months before his assassination. I used to love watching the show "Inside The Actor's Studio" with the late James Lipton, where he would spend an hour, sometimes longer, interviewing famous actors, actresses, writers and directors discussing various aspects of their craft before an audience of student actors, writers and directors enrolled in the masters program at The Actors Studio Drama School of Pace University in NYC.

Well, we're just a few weeks into our look at "The Radical Rabbi," Jesus of Nazareth - and today will already mark our second one-on-one interview of Jesus. The first was with a man named Nicodemus - a Pharisee and a member of the ruling Sanhedrin. Our second one today will feature an interview with somebody about as polar opposite as possible from Nicodemus. Now this is a rather long story so I'm going to do my best to tell it in kind of a summary, storytelling way. The verses will be onscreen; I just might get a little creative with the wording. So, as we begin, let's begin with a **word of prayer**.

TEXT AND ANALYSIS (John 4:1-42)

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that He was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John - although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but His disciples. So He left Judea and went back once more to Galilee - John 4:1-3.

Now remember that the Sanhedrin had already checked out John the Baptist, and they likely came away from that encounter with the view that he was at some measure a troublemaker who had little if no respect for the religious traditions of the nation; hadn't he, upon seeing them in the crowds that were coming to hear him, denounced them as a "brood of vipers?" Hadn't he confronted them in front of the crowd for being content to view themselves as special in God's eyes because of their lineage from Abraham? And he had also been found to not observe the cleanliness laws regarding washing before eating in contradiction of the laws of Moses. But now it appeared that somebody was becoming bigger in terms of attracting crowds and attention - Jesus of Nazareth. If He was making more "noise" than John, He needed to be watched even more carefully. And of course, who

could forget this young country rabbi throwing out the merchants and moneychangers from the Temple? Who did He think He was? So, because He knew He was getting more and more attention - much of it hostile - from the Jewish leadership, Jesus decided His best course of action at this time was to return to His home territory of Galilee.

Now He had to go through Samaria - John 4:4.

When I was a kid, the summer between grades 4-5, I went to our church's Vacation Bible School, just like I did every year. Every year they had a contest to see who could memorize the most Bible verses during the week so, on the first day, everybody got a list containing all the verses to try and learn. Now remember that, back in the day, the KJV was the only show in town, so all our memory verses were naturally in that version. And, in that version, that verse made absolutely no sense because it reads like this: ***"And He must needs go through Samaria" - John 4:4 (KJV). OK;*** now I was no English scholar (I'm not now, either), but it wasn't just the English that was weird. It was the fact that this verse was included on a list with Matthew 11:28, John 3:16, Romans 6:23, Revelation 3:20 - classic verses that even then were easy to grasp in terms of their importance. And in the middle of all those other core, foundational verses was: "He must needs go through Samaria." This has got to be a mistake!

But, as I grew older, so did my understanding, and thus my appreciation, of these words. First of course, the "He" is referring to Christ. He is on a journey taking Him from Point A - Judea - to Point B - Galilee. Seems simple enough - unless you were dyed-in-the-wool, screaming loud and proud Jewish. If that was the case, there simply would never be a must, a need, big enough, urgent enough, or whatever enough to make you place so much as a toe in Samaria.

Why? It goes back a little over 700 years. Following the reign of Solomon, Israel had suffered through a civil war that wound up dividing them into two kingdoms: Ten northern tribes became the kingdom of Israel, with the capitol city of Samaria, and the two remaining tribes - Judah and Benjamin - became the southern kingdom of Judah, with their capitol city remaining as Jerusalem. Now while Judah had some godly kings - Jehoshaphat, Josiah and, in particular, Hezekiah - the northern kingdom was virtually completely, even fiercely in rebellion against God, fully adopting the false and pagan religions of their neighboring nations. As a result, God deployed the empire of Assyria to destroy the northern kingdom, which happened in 722 BC. A great majority of the people living there were exiled to Assyria; as a result, Assyrians flooded into their newly conquered territory. Over the course of time, these new Assyrian settlers intermarried with the Jews who remained - creating a people who came to be known as the "Samaritans." Ever since that time, Jews had despised Samaritans intensely, for what they viewed as four (4) very justifiable reasons:

- 1) Just the fact of their existence reminded Jews of a very painful chapter in their history;
- 2) Jews viewed Samaritans as perpetually ritually defiled because of their mixed Gentile (Assyrian) blood;
- 3) Samaritans had their own version of the scriptures - essentially the first five books of our OT and nothing more; and
- 4) Samaritans had erected their own temple, their own "worship center," thus rejecting the Jewish place of worship at the temple in Jerusalem. Though that temple had been destroyed by a Jewish high priest about 120 years before Christ's time, their mutual hostility had continued unchanged up to this moment.

As a result, Jewish hatred of Samaritans had become so entrenched in their culture that they

viewed even setting foot in Samaritan territory as ritually defiling them, much the same as they viewed being defiled for setting foot in a Gentile home.

But Jesus saw Samaria differently - there's a shock! First of all, it was simply the most direct route of travel from Judea to Galilee. But Jesus also saw ministry; as a result, He "must" - a sense of urgency - go through Samaria. And there were "needs" - the salvation that He came into the world to proclaim and provide. Therefore, He absolutely needed, to the point of "must," go through this area. All of this, according to the Greek, "compelled" Him to take His journey through Samaria. Remember the words of John 3:16: ***For God so loved the world - John 3:16a.*** And Jesus understood that His Father had given Him to the world, the entire world - to everybody. Nothing could change that most fundamental stance.

So He came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as He was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon - John 4:5-6.

The village of Sychar is just under halfway between Jerusalem and the Sea of Galilee. It is thought that centuries before, Jacob had allocated this particular piece of land to his son Joseph (as told in Genesis 48:22).

Notice that John is unafraid to remind his audience that, while Jesus is the Son of God, during His life on earth He was completely, fully human - connecting His earthly life back to His gospel's introductory comments: ***"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us - John 1:14a.*** Being fully human, Jesus experienced common human situations, such as being physically tired from the journey He was taking. John certainly didn't have to include that information; it is barely pertinent to the story that is to follow. But what a wonderful connection that gives Him to all of us. Everything that we experience, even the mundane little things like being tired or thirsty, Jesus experienced. When we pray to Him, we're praying to Somebody who understands us because He has been us - amazing! And adding to that, John tells us that the moment he is about to share is occurring at noon, suggesting the greatest heat of the day is fast approaching.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give Me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to Him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) - John 4:7- 9.

OK; we know that Jesus is by Himself; the disciples are away getting food. And right away, as this woman draws near, Jesus goes radical - not by His standards, just by everybody else's. How is He radical? Let us count the ways:

- 1) He is a Jew, yet He talks to a Samaritan. fact, it is so different from the established cultural norms that she even comments on that.
- 2) He is a man, and she is a woman. Often there was little if any public acknowledgement of any woman not a man's wife while in public. Jesus is not only acknowledging her, but engaging with her, connecting with her. He is building a relationship with her. Absolutely unheard of!
- 3) Culturally, this woman seems to be a social outcast in this particular village. Customarily women went as a group to draw their water first thing in the morning, when the day was still cool. This woman is coming to the well as the day gets hotter and more uncomfortable. And it appears that she came there alone. That would have been even more reason for a man to avoid her, to risk being associated with one such as

her. Jesus couldn't care less.

- 4) In Jewish eyes, Jesus would have been making Himself ritually defiled - unclean - by drinking from a Samaritan's water pot. For Christ, there is a deeper defilement to be concerned with - the defilement of sin in this woman's life.

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and Who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water" - John 4:10-15.

Jesus very quickly gets her to look beyond the physical dimensions of the moment, of His simple request for a drink:

- 1) He mentions that there is a gift of God that is somehow available to her, and
- 2) He mentions that He is the key for her to receive this gift called "living water."

Like Nicodemus before her when confronted with simple, everyday words that seemed to have a deeper meaning ("*How can someone be born when they are old?*" Nicodemus asked. "*Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!*" - John 3:4), she is confused by what she is hearing. Just looking at Jesus, she can see He is empty-handed, yet He is talking about a water that somehow He possesses and yet is willing, even excited, to share with her. You can almost see her looking at Jesus as He talks about "living water." She stares at the nearby well; that well is over 100 feet deep today and is thought to have been even deeper back then. What is this guy talking about? So, she asks Him, if somehow, He considers Himself greater than their very distant ancestor Jacob. How else could He explain access to this "living water" of His?

Now this is a great example of the scriptural poverty resulting in spiritual poverty that Samaritans had caused themselves. The idea of "living water" is actually a picture from OT books the Samaritans' religious traditions would have rejected:

- 1) From David, a thousand years before this conversation: *How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. They feast on the abundance of Your house; You give them drink from Your river of delights. For with You is the fountain of life - David, Psalm 36:7-9a.*
- 2) From Jeremiah, some 600+ years before this moment: *"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water" - God speaking, Jeremiah 2:13.*

Then Christ tries to open her understanding a little bit. He is not talking about the water found in this well; no matter how much you drink, eventually you find yourself thirsty again. No; Jesus is offering something so much more - and so much better. His water will quench another thirst, the thirst of a spirit parched by sin, with waters of salvation and new life that will continue to satisfy her forever.

But this Samaritan woman, like Nicodemus before her, is still not grasping Christ's meaning. All she can think is, "Wow, if this 'living water' means that I'll never be thirsty again, and never ever

have to be hauling these stupid water pots to this stupid well, then I'm all in. So how do I get this 'living water' anyway?" Obviously, Christ needs to reveal a bit more of Himself to her. Knowing the "Who" behind this "living water" will steer her in the right direction. And, in the process, Christ will get very, very scary personal with her.

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true"- John 4:16-18.

You can almost see this woman's eyes open wide with wonder. This Jewish man suddenly has become so much more. And it's not so much that she's had five, count them, five husbands, or that the guy she's living with now is not her husband. It's the fact that this stranger, this man she has never met before in her life, knows this stuff - knows all this stuff. All of a sudden, you almost feel like she's wondering, "OK; is there anything about me this guy doesn't know?"

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe Me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you - I am he" - John 4:19-26.

In the Greek, the woman is telling Jesus that she is literally experiencing in that moment her being in the presence of a prophet. From her experience, she is understanding this "prophet" is somebody who seems to have special insight. And now, that she seems to be in the company of a religious figure, she brings up a religious topic: "Where is the right place to worship - the Samaritan worship site on Mount Gerizim or, as Jews claim, in Jerusalem?"

Jesus' reply points to the new worship experience, the new portal to God, that will have nothing to do with sites or buildings. It will have to do with approaching God directly - through the guy standing right in front of her, talking with her.

He also points out to her that their scriptural shortsightedness has left them unable to know God's plan of salvation, or to even fully grasp who it is they claim to be worshipping. As Jesus points out, the salvation she is in such need of comes from the Jews, as does a fuller understanding of who God is. Again, a scripture they would have rejected would tell them that: ***God is renowned in Judah; in Israel His name is great - Asaph, Psalm 76:1.*** And with the advent of Jesus, true worship was now being introduced and realized by the presence of God through the person and ministry of Christ. As He tries to explain, true worship is not about a "where" but by "whom" they worship and how they worship. True worship is in fact empowered by the Holy Spirit - the spirit of truth - and happens only in accordance with the truth of God as revealed by His Spirit. That is possible only through Jesus Christ. The fact is, as He concludes, God is a spirit, meaning that His presence or approach is not confined in terms of place or space or building. God is available anywhere.

Finally, as the conversation ends, the woman brings up the concept of the "messiah" by telling Jesus that she understood and believed that somebody called the "Messiah" was eventually going to be coming to earth. Unlike the notions that many Jews held about the Messiah - a physical kingdom and political conqueror to restore Israel to its ancient physical greatness - the Samaritans were not burdened with those viewpoints. And Jesus then reveals Himself to be the Messiah that she has heard is one day to arrive.

Just then His disciples returned and were surprised to find Him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are You talking with her?" Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him - John 4:27-30.

I love her reaction. The very thing she had come to the well to do - fill her water jar - was completely forgotten. In its place was the impression left by the man she had talked to - a man unlike anybody she had ever met before. She obviously was impacted far deeper than a simple first impression. In fact, the impression was so deep that she simply had to share it with others.

And remember back to the beginning of this story, when we mentioned that this woman's coming to the well all by herself in the heat of the day suggested that she may have been a social outcast. None of that mattered anymore, either. Whatever hard feelings existed between her and the townspeople was forgotten as well. Jesus was bigger and more urgent than anything else in her entire life.

Meanwhile His disciples urged Him, "Rabbi, eat something." But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Then His disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought Him food?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work. Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor" – John 4:31-38. Now it's not that Jesus isn't hungry. It's that there is something of such a higher priority than food for Him and, as He explains, a far greater urgency. His words to them still resonate today: "Hey guys! Look around you! The fields are ready to be harvested. What are you waiting for? What could possibly be more important than that?"

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to Him, they urged Him to stay with them, and He stayed two days. And because of His words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world" - John 4:39-42.

Look at what started from just two strangers having a simple conversation. A whole village was impacted with the gospel to the point that many in that place became believers. Once her words inspired them to check out Jesus for themselves, their own experience then led them to seek more to find more. And I suspect that one of the changes that occurred was that the

woman at the well was an outcast no more. What do you think?

APPLICATION

So what is there for us in this story? Quite a bit. Let's look at three (3) specific application pieces now.

First, look at the power of a simple conversation - but not based on anything to do with us. It is much more often simply making ourselves available and willing to be used by the Master. Remember what Jesus said to His disciples: ***"[D]o not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 10:19b-20.*** Do you know who first heard those words of promise? Moses - at the burning bush. He was all worried about what he would be saying to somebody as high and mighty as Egypt's pharaoh. And God settled him down with these exact words. Now if God would share those with Moses, and Christ with His disciples, I am quite sure that He will follow through on that same promise to us -
whenever it is needed.

Second, especially in this day and age, we need to get over the idea of differences between people - and I mean all differences, especially racial. And there is a great reason for that: The Bible never says word one about race. Languages, tribes, absolutely. Race? Not a whisper. The idea of race is actually a consequence of sin, where it certainly accomplished more for Satan to focus us on our differences rather than on our similarities. And it's worked, too; race has caused some of the most deeply festering wounds in the history of mankind. [EXAMPLES - our own Civil War, "Untermensch" ("subhuman") in Hitler's Germany, Yugoslavia.] Ever since the Tower of Babel, we have lived as different people groups - different languages, different cultures, different customs, and different physical appearance. But we are remarkably the same; a study done at Stanford University (2013) found that all humans are 99.9% identical. It actually takes very few generations to begin to acquire so-called "racial characteristics" that we see around the world. As the Advancement of Science Convention reported (via the Cincinnati Enquirer): "Race is a social construct derived mainly from perceptions conditioned by events of recorded history, and it has no basic biological reality." In the Journal of Counseling and Development, researchers argued that the term "race" is basically so meaningless that it should be discarded. To prove their point, they noted that so-called "racial" characteristics that people think are major differences (skin color, eye shape, etc.) "account for only 0.012 percent of human biological variation." And the key of how to view "race" is actually given us by Paul in the book of Acts, when he is debated some scholars in Athens. The KJV brings out God's viewpoint on all topics when Paul says this: ***"God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood (kindred) all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" - Paul, Acts 17:24- 26 (KJV).*** In other words, there is only one race: THE HUMAN RACE - of which every man, woman and child on the planet is a member. That makes us all, ultimately, one family. That's huge: That means that I'm not reaching out to another race or another ethnic group or whatever. In the name of Jesus Christ, I am reaching out to my brothers and sisters. Now we all know how we feel about the unsaved circumstances of our family members - the

concern, the prayers, the passion. Folks, that's exactly how God wants us to feel about everybody! Jesus never distinguished our "target audience"; He simply said: ***"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation"*** - *Jesus Christ, Mark 16:15*. Go to all, preach to every. The only way ***God so loved the world*** - *John 3:16a* works is if there are no bounds to either His love or His intentions for salvation. There isn't.

Third, this story highlights the idea of "priorities." Christ was so focused on God's plan of salvation and of His role in that plan that nothing was satisfying and fulfilling to Him than having somebody experience what He came to earth to do. Food can wait; fellowship will happen in its time. But salvation? Nothing is more important than that. It does present an interesting question. Many of us have experienced many of the thrills that human beings can enjoy. Any of us who are married know the many thrills of being in that relationship, some of which go beyond words. Any of us who are parents have experienced that joy of birth, and that ongoing joy of growth as our kids become the people God put them here to become. An unbelievable process. But for all the unspeakable joys we have had chance to know simply as human beings, is there any joy or excitement greater for us than reaching out with the "good news" of salvation to somebody who needs it? Is there anything more amazing than being witness to somebody leaving the clutches of hell for the joys of heaven? You see, for Jesus, that joy made providing those experiences a priority over all else. "Hungry? Yeah, but I'll figure it out when I can. Tired? Yeah, actually quite a bit, but there is something more important I need to do - what I came to the planet to do. I'll take care of those things later. This needs to be taken care of now."

CONCLUSION

Just one question as we close: When we look out at the world, when we watch the news and see all the conflict, the social upheaval, the divisiveness, the outright hate, the falsehoods, just all of it - what do we see? People types to be ignored? Political opponents to be defeated? Or people desperately in need of Jesus Christ? Do we match their desperation with Christ's urgency? That's what we need to beg God to do for us - give us His eyes, His heart, and His urgency.

We have allowed things of this world to divide us and define us far too long. This world is not what we're here for. This world's opinions and definitions and conclusions and sides is not what we're here for. Do you believe that Jesus Christ can change the world? Do you believe that Jesus Christ can absolutely give somebody's life, anybody's life, a completely new direction? Has that been your experience with Him? Then let's share it with this part of the world in which He has placed us. Don't walk around "Samaria." See the need that must send you directly into "Samaria" - whatever that "Samaria" looks like. When Jesus Christ is introduced, He promises that "Samaria" will become different. Do we truly believe that? Let's pray!