

THE POWER TO GIVE LIFE

John 4:1-15, 25-26

In Genesis 2:9 we find these words: “Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” We know the story of what happened when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and they had to leave and were prohibited from going into the garden so that they would not have access to the tree of life in their sinful condition. Ever since that happened, mankind desperately clings to life and looks for every remedy to find something that will preserve, extend, and improve the quality of life. Of all the money that is spent in the world today, a very large portion of it goes toward national defense, local protection, and health care. All of these are driven by our obsession with wanting to live. If we could just find that tree of life, then we would be liberated from our obsessive compulsive behavior and be free to use the resources we have to do so many great things.

If you knew where this tree of life was and could teach people how to get to it, then you would have the power to give life. In Revelation 22:1-2 we see “Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

One of the recurring themes people have discovered regarding a general strategy for spreading the good news of God’s salvation and the Kingdom of God is captured in the phrase “as you go.” The idea is that as we come into contact with people in the normal ebb and flow of daily activities that we should impact their lives with the love, the power, the grace, the peace and joy that we have discovered in our own salvation. In this chapter, John shows us how this strategy works out in one-on-one interactions with an individual, how it can result in a teachable moment with friends, how a whole community can be impacted, and how it provides an opportunity for miracles to happen.

Go – 4:1-5

¹Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ²(although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), ³He left Judea and went away again into Galilee. ⁴And He had to pass through Samaria. ⁵So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; John 4:1-5 (NASB95)

Sometimes part of the routine of everyday living is going from one place to another. There are all kinds of reasons for travel. John provided some insight into the reason Jesus and His disciples made the journey from Judea to Galilee. The earthly ministry of Jesus was conducted with a sense of appropriate timing. The notoriety of Jesus’ ministry in Judea could possibly bring on an early confrontation with the Jewish leaders. Jesus was aware of this and in an effort to allow things to cool off somewhat after the arrest and imprisonment of John the Baptist, Jesus withdrew to Galilee. (Note that the death of John the Baptist was somewhat later than this – see the mention of this in Matthew 14:10-21.)

Though we are admonished to be “instant in season and out of season” we still need to be aware of the correct timing to gain maximum impact from our ministry. Many times, we cannot minister to people until relationships have been established. At other times we must pray for the Holy Spirit to bring conviction before we speak or do anything. Jesus knew there would be a confrontation with the Pharisees, but now was not the time for such an encounter.

Going through Samaria was the most direct route from Judea to Galilee. It was not the

route of choice for many Jews because the Jews despised the Samaritans. In going from Judea to Galilee most Jews would have avoided taking the most direct route since that would have taken them through Samaria. They would have walked many miles and crossed the Jordan River twice because of the prevailing prejudice against the Samaritans. This hatred was rooted in the rivalry between the northern and southern tribes of Israel. This rivalry became worse when the nation actually split into two separate governments. It became even worse when the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom. Many of the Israelites were taken into exile (B.C. 721) and non-Israelites were moved into the area in B.C. 677. These “imports” intermarried with the Israelites that were left behind and the result was the Samaritan people. Even though this had happened more than 600 years before, the resentment and prejudice were still there. Such petty issues pale into insignificance when one considers the importance of the mission of the Kingdom of God.

Again, the routine of life surfaced in the story. The group had walked a considerable distance and it was time to take a break. Jesus needed rest for his physical body and He took appropriate means to provide for that rest. We should avoid neglecting our “earthly tent” and thus bring on sickness and disability that would hinder our ministry.

Engage – 4:6-9

⁶ 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. ⁷ There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give Me a drink.” ⁸ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. ⁹ 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.) John 4:6-9 (NASB95)

Jesus did not allow the prejudices of the society to prevent Him from ministering to people. Jesus chose to go through Samaria. He chose to wait at Jacob's well. He chose to send the disciples into town to buy food. He did all this because He wanted the person that we know as “the woman at the well” to come to know Him. Even today, Jesus takes the initiative in making Himself known to people.

One effective way to get people to open up to our ministry is to allow them to do something for us. If we accept help from a person, that very act increases the person’s self esteem and makes them more open to receive something from us. A lesson in dealing with people: If you want someone to have a good sense of their self worth, then let them do something for you. Every normal person wants to be useful because it gives a sense of value to the individual. If you will accept help from me, then that acceptance is interpreted by me as an acceptance of me.

Put yourself in the Deep South some 60 years ago. Your car will not run and you need a ride to a service station 10 miles down the road. If a black man drove up and offered a ride, some white southern males would have likely refused the ride simply because they would “not take help from a black man.” Why? It would be an acknowledgment of his worth as a person.

There is a corollary to this lesson in dealing with people. If you want a person to have a poor sense of their self worth, then you do everything for them and make them completely dependent on others. This is exactly what the so-called welfare programs have done to so many people of our nation. We give them money instead of letting them earn it.

Those who are victims of prejudice are most sensitive to it. If we will only step outside of seeing other through the lens of stereotypical behavior, then we create openings to minister to people who otherwise might feel alienated from society.

Sometimes we have to plan ahead for ministry. Jesus had used His thirst as a means to

introduce this woman to the Living Water. Jesus started with the present situation and the understanding the woman had and used that as a launching pad to introduce spiritual truth. This woman could understand physical water and physical thirst, but she had probably not spent much time thinking about spiritual thirst and what it takes to quench it. She had not thought about it directly, but had spent most of her adult life in a search for something to satisfy a spiritual longing she had.

Many things hinder communication between people. We see several hindrances in operation here. The obvious prejudice of the difference in race came out immediately as this woman referred to Jesus as a Jew. We have fallen into the trap of stereotyping people by their race. We assume certain behaviors and traits and these assumptions influence how we deal with people. The second barrier is the gender differences. We assume that women behave in one way and men behave in another way. In the society in which Jesus lived, the communication between men and women was very inhibited and women were considered to be of lesser value and importance than men.

Another hindrance to communication is what I would call “being on different wavelengths.” In this situation, Jesus was trying to communicate spiritual truth and the woman was operating and thinking in physical terms. Much of the teaching of Jesus was involved in using physical examples to explain spiritual truths. If a person concentrates only on the physical and cannot or will not make the transition to the spiritual, then communication is not possible.

Clarify – 4:10-15, 25-26

¹⁰ 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.” ¹¹ She said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?” ¹² “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?” ¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; ¹⁴ 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.” ¹⁵ The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw.” ²⁵ 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.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am *He*.” John 4:10-15, 25-26 (NASB95)

Notice how Jesus used the situation at hand as a means to introduce the principles of the Kingdom of God. He may have been thirsty; however, His real motive was to bring the Good News of salvation to this woman and eventually to the others in the nearby town. Jesus avoided answering the question that the woman raised regarding why He asked her for a drink and went to His message that He had water that was better than what she could get from Jacob's well. In speaking about living water, Jesus was building a communication bridge between the physical and the spiritual. She knew what physical thirst was but she probably had not thought much about spiritual thirst which everyone seeks to satisfy. Much of our lives is spent in seeking for something to quench the spiritual thirst in our lives. We know that something is missing but we aren't sure just what it is. The Living Water to which Jesus referred is the only thing that can satisfy the longing of our soul. Jesus is Himself that Living Water.

Though the woman knew little of what Jesus was talking about, she sensed that if He could do what He said, then He would be greater than all the patriarchs.

The physical is temporary and incomplete; however, that which Jesus provides for us is eternal and totally sufficient. Since He provides Himself (He is all and in all), then He, the Source of all provision, produces an abundance of life-giving sustenance in us. Jesus used this same figure of speech in John 7:37-39. In this later passage the Living Water is clearly identified as the Holy Spirit which would be sent to fill the followers of Christ. The Spirit is in us who are

born again and He becomes the source of satisfaction for everything in life.

There are some people in our churches who are still searching for happiness in various things that the world has to offer. The problem is that many have a relationship with the church that is similar to the way the woman of Sychar viewed Jacob's well. They go regularly to get filled up again or, as some like to say, to get their batteries recharged. In a lot of cases the "charge" drains down by Wednesday or the tank runs dry before they get to the parking lot after the last "amen" is said to dismiss the Sunday morning crowd. The remedy for this situation is thought by some to be that we need to attend more often and have additional Bible studies during the week or extend the preaching an additional 15 minutes. Those actions and activities can be good things but they do not address the basic need.

We cannot afford to miss what Jesus said regarding there being a "well of water in us" that should be flowing out to others. You do not need to fill your tank on Sunday morning if you are already overflowing with what the Holy Spirit is producing in your life.

The reason we come together as a church body is so that the overflow can be expressed in worship and praise. The teaching we receive should be directed toward helping us understand who we are in Christ, what God has in store for those who love Him and how to direct the overflow in such a way to advance the Kingdom of God and bring glory to the name of Jesus.

A reasonable person would recognize the benefits of such a relationship though they may not fully understand all the implications. However, many people's first thoughts are that God's salvation will address their physical needs. The benefits of God's salvation are so great that hardly anyone would reject them. So why do so few complete the transaction? There are barriers that get in our way.

One common barrier is lack of understanding. As stated earlier, the woman could understand physical water and physical thirst, but she had probably not spent much time thinking about spiritual thirst and what it takes to quench it.

When people are confronted with the reality of the divinity of Jesus (as this woman was in her realization that Jesus was a truly special Person), they will attempt to initiate some religious controversy as a means of avoiding having to face their guilt. Issues of where to worship, whether or not to have music (what kind or genre of music) and such things are not important. The issue is Who is God and what is His nature. Jesus came to reveal God to us. True worship of God involves communing with God on a spirit-to-Spirit basis. To do that, we must be born again of the Spirit. This is the new birth and the new life for which Jesus came. The woman knew that the Messiah was to come. What she needed to know was that she was having an encounter with Him. We need to be ever alert to the fact that we can encounter God in every situation in life if we are open to Him.

The obvious application for us in today's world is that wherever we go, we will encounter people who need the Lord Jesus. Some people think that we need to deliberately go and do such encounters while others would emphasize that we need to deliberately make such encounters as we go about our normal routine of life. Since we spend most of our time in our "normal routine of living" rather than doing a "mission trip," then we should find more opportunities for sharing the good news if we simply do this as we go. We can make the most of such encounters by using the physical examples of what is going on to bring out corresponding spiritual truths. We can ask questions to clarify their understanding of spiritual matters and always keep in mind that the person may not be familiar with "religious" terms that we cavalierly toss about with our Christian friends. As always, with any kind of encounter with other people we need to exercise patience, sensitivity and persistence.