

MAY 16, 1993

ENCOUNTERING CHRIST

The games people play are really interesting. The young and the not-so-young get involved in game playing. I hear of situations where a person will be invited to a party or a dinner and the reason there was a party was to have the person meet another person. This happens to single people (recently widowed, divorced or never married) because someone is trying to help one or both of the individuals "find" each other. It may be that one or both are aware of the "arranged" nature of the party. I guess there is nothing wrong with such games. We plan and facilitate others things so that they will happen in a certain way, why not relationships? If you want a certain outcome, then planning is usually required.

Would it surprise you to know that God gets involved in such planned and "contrived" meetings? I'm not referring to the "boy-meets-girl" type of introduction, but to the encounters in which we meet God. I believe that God takes the initiative and arranges things so that we will have encounters with Him and get to know Him. I have seen it in my own life and in the lives of others. In a larger sense, the incarnation of God in the Man we call Jesus was an arranged event for people to be introduced to God. In fact, the Bible itself is primarily focused on revealing who Jesus is. In the Gospel of John we find an account of a situation in which Jesus arranged to meet a woman so that an entire town in Samaria could come to know Him.

Jesus and His disciples had been ministering in Judea and many of the religious leaders were disturbed. In an effort to let things cool off somewhat, they left Judea and went into Galilee. To go from Judea to Galilee most Jews would have avoided going 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. The Samaritans were racially mixed Jews whose origin went back to the time of the Babylonian captivity. Some of those Jews that were left in Judah intermarried with the non-Jews during that time. Even though this had happened more than 400 year ago the resentment and prejudice was still there. 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.

JOHN 4:7-8 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 50 years ago. Your car breaks down and you need a ride to a service station 10 miles down the road. If a black man drove up and offered a ride, the average white southern male would be likely to refuse the ride simple because he would "not take help from a black man." The reason? It would be an acknowledgement 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 the poor people of our nation. We **give** instead of letting them **earn** it.

JOHN 4:9-15 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 behavior and traits and this assumption influences 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.

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 other 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.

The woman asked for some of the "water" that Jesus had and He used that as an opportunity to address the issue in her life that related to her own attempts to find meaning in life. This woman was searching for happiness or satisfaction in relationships. She had been married four or five times and the man with whom she now lived was not her husband. When Jesus told her about that, she was truly amazed and realized that Jesus was indeed a truly special Person - she thought a prophet. To avoid facing her own guilt, she tried to steer the conversation to religious controversy.

JOHN 4:20-22 People had rather argue about religion than face the serious questions of God's claims on our lives. That is as true today as it was 2000 years ago. Where to worship, whether or not to have music, and such things are not the real issues.

JOHN 4:23-26 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.