

MESSAGE MINDER

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He left Judea and went away again into Galilee. And he had to pass through Samaria.

John 4:3-4



Going to the Marginalized

By Jonathan Stone

The story of the woman at the well in the fourth chapter of John is rich with many implications. It is a story of redemption from bad choices and sin. It is a story of God breaking into the mundane activities of life. It is a story of God breaking down cultural barriers on several levels. It is a story of a woman sent and used by God to evangelize her community. Indeed, there are many things to draw from what unfolded at the well that day. However, what sometimes gets overlooked is that this is a story of a divine appointment.

In verse three we are told that Jesus left Judea and journeyed towards Galilee. As the crow flies this journey was a relatively straight shot due north that would take one right through Samaria. So, when we read in verse four that "...He had to pass through Samaria" it is natural for us to assume that the verse is simply observing that geographically speaking the journey from Judea to Galilee would take one

through Samaria. However, in Jesus' day Jews did not travel between Judea and Galilee as the crow flies. They would instead go a great distance out of their way and cross the Jordan river into Perea. They would move up the east bank of the Jordan and cross back over near the Sea of Galilee, and in so doing add days to their trip. Evidently Jesus took this customary trip several times Himself. We see Him moving through Perea and across the Sea of Galilee in various places in the New Testament. But on this day Jesus "had to" go through Samaria. Jesus was on a divine appointment.

So, why would the Jews go through so much trouble and unnecessarily add so much time to their trip? Because it allowed them to avoid the Samaritans. Hundreds of years before Jesus walked the earth the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians. The majority of the Jews were either deported or

killed, and the Assyrians repopulated the capital city of Samaria with captives from foreign lands. Those foreigners intermarried with the few remaining Jews in the area and formed a mixed race of people who became known as the Samaritans. The Jews in Jesus' time hated the Samaritans and considered them to be unclean because they were no longer "pure" Jews.

Jesus was led by God on a divine appointment that few people of His day would have considered taking. Some pertinent questions for us are these: Where is our Samaria? Who are our Samaritans? The answer to those questions is likely to be very different for each of us. Prayerfully consider what type of people might be considered "unclean" in your mind. Does God want you to seem them as He sees them? Are you willing to go to them? Might God have an appointment for you there?

So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come. Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Hebrews 13:13-16

Family Exercises

- 1.) Have a discussion with your children about the needs of various people within your community. Ask your children what you could do as a family to try to address those needs.
- 2.) Help your children think about social relationships. What type of students are marginalized at school? As a former middle school teacher I have seen first hand how cruel social dynamics in middle school can be for certain students. Ask your children if they have witnessed similar cruelty. What can be done?
- 3.) Even young children can understand the idea of certain people not having enough means to meet even basic needs. Ask them if they would be willing to reach out by volunteering some time in a local benevolence ministry. See if they are aware of anyone in their classroom that has needs and brainstorm about how you can respond as a family. Speak with your child's teacher about possibilities.

Questions

The Samaritans were marginalized in Jesus' time. We could dismiss the Jews' attitude as mere racism, but it was more complicated than that. Indeed, the Samaritans' theology really was poor, filled with many false ideas. One could argue that they deserved to be ostracized on the basis of their beliefs. Yet, Jesus did not hesitate to reach out to them. Consider the following questions:

- 1.) Which social subgroups might be most similar to modern day Samaritans within our culture?
- 2.) Thinking culturally (not geographically), what type of people are your personal Samaritans? Where is your Samaria?
- 3.) Is God happy with your attitude towards such people? If not, how might you seek to change it?
- 4.) How might you seek to stand for the truth while reaching out to people who have false ideas about God, sin, spirituality, etc.?
- 5.) What are you afraid might happen if you try to reach out to these persons?

The Lord builds up Jerusalem; He gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Psalm 147:2-3

