

Gospel of John Chapter 4 - John Karmelich

Let me open with my lesson title and hopefully you'll grasp how it's relevant. My title for Chapter 4 is: "Why try to hit a home run when a single will do"? For my non-baseball readers, it's a reference to the idea of not trying to do a "game changer," when all we have to got to do is contribute to the situation. It is my theological question of the week. This chapter shows us Jesus "hitting singles" to draw people to Him. Think about the fact that we never see Jesus say, "I'm God, pray for mercy, before I turn you into a pile of salt"! Instead, we see Jesus and His disciples doing stuff to draw people closer to Him. To me it's proof that God loves all people. He's willing to "go out of His way" to draw people to Him without violating our free will. The point of this lesson is we are called to "hit singles" to draw people closer to God again, without violating their free wills! (In other words, we don't bash their heads with a Bible)!

For us Christian veterans, this chapter includes the famous story of the "woman at the well," plus a few other things. I'd love all of us to notice is how Jesus goes out of His way to draw people closer to Him. The fascinating thing about this story is that the main characters were Samaritans. Those were a "half-breed" Jewish and non-Jewish mix who the "full" Jewish people despised and considered enemies. The point is as we go through this chapter, we'll learn a few things about being a better witness for Jesus, as that's what each of us are called to do in life! OK then, let's begin:

The last chapter ended with John the Baptist testifying that Jesus is God and that Jesus is growing more famous while JTB's role is decreasing. Chapter 4 opens with JTB's disciples and Jesus' disciples doing baptizing in different locations. Remember, the church wasn't born yet, so baptizing in effect, is to get people's minds on God, since He's "in the neighborhood." Jesus basically said to His disciples, "Follow John's lead until I instruct you what to do next"! Apparently, that didn't take long. Soon after that Jesus ordered His disciples to return to the Sea of Galilee area. The fastest route there required them to travel through Samaria, yet Jesus didn't say "let's go around" so off they went. We'll get to the "why" issue in the next paragraph.

When Jesus got to a famous deep well in Samaria (that existed for over 1,000 years, back to the days of "Genesis") When they got there Jesus told His disciples to go to the nearest town to buy food. The text says Jesus required rest, as well He was fully human. What the disciples didn't know was that this was an occasion to be a witness to Samaritans about who Jesus was! This whole episode is good proof that He came not just to save Jewish people, but anyone willing to accept the fact He is God!

After the disciples left, the famous Samaritan woman came to the well by herself at noon. Most women then traveled first thing in the morning to get water. What we should notice are things we can use to be a witness to people. Jesus asked for a drink and we know He asked (not demanded) given her response. While she was drawing out the water, Jesus said, "If you knew who was talking to you, you'd realize I can give you better water than what's in that well"! That got the conversation going! Jesus then recited her life story about how she was married five times and now's living with a man who isn't her husband! In the story there's no "it's too late for you so off to hell you go," but at the same time Jesus condemned the fact that she was living with someone she wasn't married to. It got her attention as, obviously from her perspective, this stranger was a "prophet" who knew her life's story!

Obviously, when we get an opportunity to talk about Jesus, we can't recite their life story. However it's possible to hit a "single" by saying something like "life is short and we don't know how long each of us will live," and turn the conversation to life beyond the moment. That's what Jesus did here. Then Jesus

announced that He is the Messiah, and she understood enough about Judaism (the Samaritans believed in the first five books of Moses) to state that she believed a Messiah would come one day!

After all that, she figured this was a good time to ask a great "debate question" between their religions: Whether one should worship God in Jerusalem, or on the mountain that was the worship center for the Samaritans. That's the moment Jesus explained who He was, and that Jerusalem was the correct answer to that question. However, Jesus said the important thing is God is to be worshipped in spirit and truth, a reference to the fact He demands obedience even after we accept Him as the Messiah.

At that moment the disciples returned. If they came earlier, they'd have interrupted the conversation. If they came back later, they wouldn't have met her. The bottom line is, the moment she left her water pot to go back and went back to her village (something an eye-witness like the disciple John caught!), so it was possible to spread the word about Jesus. I would bet a woman with that reputation would have lots of people watching her out of the corner of their eyes. I doubt many women there felt comfortable with her around. Anyway, she got lots of people to come check Jesus out. Therefore Jesus used the "perfect person" (with lots of faults) to spread the word about Him. When the men from her town were coming to Jesus, He told His disciples the fields are "white for the harvest". It refers to wheat at harvest time as well as the men approaching Jesus in white robes. The text says Jesus spent two days with them. It's the longest recorded time period that Jesus spent with anyone other than his disciples.

The point for you and me is simply to pray for boldness to take risks to talk to people about Jesus, and I am positive God will make it "fruitful" when we hit "singles" for Him. As I said, we can't predict like future Jesus can, but we can "see the obvious" and be willing to ask if people if they're willing to let us talk to them!

That story ends and the text says two days later, He left the Samaritan area to return to where He grew up by the Sea of Galilee. The text says Jesus didn't go to his hometown and states that a prophet has no honor in his hometown. (That's a reason why I never try to convert my family members, but I pray for each of them daily)! Anyway, He went back to the place where He turned water to wine. There a man approached Jesus told Him that his son was dying. Jesus said, "Your son will live." I know it's a double reference to the resurrection, but the text makes a point that his son got better literally at the same time Jesus made that statement.

OK back to us. Most of us veteran Christians do know stories (usually by missionaries in places where the Gospel isn't preached) of great miracles occurring. For most of us, it's just a matter of being willing to be used by Jesus. I find that if we're willing to commit our lives and our time to Him, He gives us an opportunity to be a witness. Remember, we don't get "notches on our Bible" for every person we lead to Jesus. Our job as Christians is to be witnesses for Him. Who actually gets saved is His business, not ours. Our job is to "try to get singles" to lead people closer to Him. Yes sometimes moments come for us to "go for the home run," but again, most of the time it's simply a matter of being witnesses for Him, and usually just trying to get a "single" by sharing the Gospel or doing things that lead people closer to Him is what He desires of us.

If you liked this little study, I wrote a more detailed account about twenty years ago! To read the other one, click on one of the two links on this page. Thanks again for reading this. John