

The Woman at the Well

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When we think about Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19-20 to go make disciples of all the nations, we recognize that it presents us with a good news/bad news situation. The bad news is that as fellow disciples of Jesus, we too are expected to lead others to our Master. It's a commandment that applies to us just as much as any other commandment in Scripture, and if we choose to ignore it, we will be judged accordingly. Conversely, the good news is that if we are commanded to teach the lost, then every last one of us is capable of fulfilling that commandment.

Sadly, for many of us, our lives do not reflect that capacity. We are not regularly involved in expanding the borders of the kingdom. Many Christians in this position like to make excuses. They talk about how they're really better at edifying those who are already Christians (although in real life, they don't do much of that either), they talk about how they don't know what to say, and so on. All of this makes for a self-fulfilling prophecy. The bottom line is that they aren't good at evangelism because they don't want to be good at it. Like the one-talent servant, they'd rather bury what they have and do nothing instead. Of course, that also puts them in line to receive the one-talent servant's reward.

Needless to say, this is a perilous course of action to pursue. If we ourselves don't feel capable of evangelism, we're far better served to regard it not as a gift that we don't have, but as a skill we haven't mastered yet, and in reality, evangelism is a skill. It's something that every Christian can perfect with training and practice.

Only we ourselves can supply the practice, but the Scripture provides us with the training we need. The Bible contains the secrets that each one of us needs to master in order to seek the lost. In particular, we all have much to learn from the master Teacher, Jesus. This morning, let's see what we can learn from His work with the woman at the well.

Opening Techniques.

We may begin this learning process by looking at the opening techniques that Jesus used. The first of these is to **START WHERE WE ARE**. We see how Jesus does this in John 4:4-6. Jesus didn't come to this well outside the village of Sychar because He was specifically looking for the woman at the well. Instead, He just happened to be making one of those treks from Galilee to Judea and back again that are so common in John's account. The fact that He had this woman to talk to was as coincidental as anything about the ministry of Jesus can be.

Similarly, if we want to be successful in reaching out to the lost, we have to take our opportunities as we find them. A lot of the time, we want evangelism to be very set-piece and predictable, so that doors will open just when we're expecting them and just in the manner we want them to appear. That's just not the way it works, brethren. Usually, the initial opportunity isn't going to be something we anticipated. We're never going to be as good as Jesus was at handling opportunities that arise on the fly, but if we want to be like Him, we're going to have to work with the unexpected.

Second, Jesus shows us how important it is to **REACH OUT**. This is clearly illustrated in John 4:7-9. On the surface, there doesn't seem to be much going on here. However, in even making this simple request, Jesus is breaking two taboos. First, in Jewish culture 2000 years ago, there was much less interaction between the sexes than we're used to, and Jesus was stepping outside that. Second, Jesus was a Jew, and the woman was a Samaritan. The Samaritans were a half-Jew, half-Gentile people who were descended from settlers the Assyrians had imported 700 years ago after they carried the northern kingdom of Israel off into captivity. The Jews regarded the Samaritans as unclean half-breeds. However, Jesus overcame this racial prejudice in order to start a conversation with a woman He knew He could save.

Just like Jesus, we need to be willing to leave behind our comfort zones to bring the gospel to others. Just like the people of Jesus' day did, we have internal rules about whom we're going to choose to strike up a conversation with, and we may even consider ourselves introverts who don't like to talk to new people at all. None of those things should keep us from doing the Lord's work. God expects us to sow the seed in every heart we can, even if it means talking to a stranger we'd never have spoken to otherwise. That's what will yield the greatest harvest of souls for Christ.

Third, we have to **CHANGE THE CONVERSATION**. Look at Jesus' topic switch in John 4:10-12. When the woman expresses her surprise that a Jew asked her for a drink, Jesus responds by saying that she should be asking Him for a drink of living water, even though He clearly has no means of drawing water from the well. She wants to know what in the world He's talking about. Even though she doesn't realize it, now they're talking about salvation.

We also need to learn how to turn a conversation toward spiritual matters. This doesn't mean that we have to be looking for a way to slip the five steps of salvation into small talk about the weather. In fact, we should usually start much more generally than that. However, anything that we can say about God, especially something that puts Him or our understanding of Him in an intriguing light, is a conversational gambit we should look to use.

Jesus follows up His change of subject by finding a way to **PIQUE INTEREST**. We see the woman's interest levels rising in John 4:13-15. This shows just how well Jesus understood His subject. She was a woman who probably

made several trips to the well every day, and was no doubt sick of making the hike there and back carrying a heavy clay water jar. When Jesus mentioned never being thirsty again, He knows she will be interested. She responds in a predictable way, by asking Him for this living water, and when He teaches her, He's fulfilling her request.

Like Jesus did, we should make a point of figuring out our prospect's wants and needs, and then presenting the gospel in a way that shows how it meets those wants and needs. We don't realize it, brethren, but in the God we serve and the lives we lead, we have something that many people in the world ache for. When Lauren and I went to see "Eclipse" a few weeks ago, we saw a trailer for a movie called "Eat Pray Love", which is based on a true story about a woman who abandons her life for a year to travel the world and find inner peace. When I was watching the trailer, I thought to myself, "I know who I am, and I'm perfectly at peace, and I don't even have to leave the city limits of Joliet to manage it." Everything that anyone needs to be fulfilled, in fact, is right between the two covers of the Bible. That's not even to mention all of the more concrete lessons we learn as disciples, about everything from having good marriages to raising happy, well adjusted children. True Christianity has so much to offer. All we have to do is pay attention to what our friends are talking about, and show them how God can meet the specific needs that they have.

Further Developments.

We see how Jesus takes this successful opening through further developments through the rest of the chapter. He shows us that next, we have to **PROVE OUR IDENTITY**. Consider the content of John 4:16-19. This seems like an abrupt change of topic from her request for living water, but really, it's not. Jesus isn't going to quench her physical thirst. He's going to quench her spiritual thirst, the thirst that has led her through marriage after marriage, looking for something that she can't even define. In order for Him to do that, He has to prove to her that He's different, that He's able to provide something that so many others have failed to give. He does this by using His supernatural abilities to tell her the marital history He could not possibly otherwise have known. He proves to her that He's from God.

Like Jesus, we must establish that we are from God. Omniscience would help with that, but we don't have it, and really, we don't even need it. We can show who we are by our familiarity with the word, by sitting down with them and a Bible and showing them from the text what the answers to their needs are. Similarly, we can show them the word in our lives, by treating them in a way that leaves no doubt we are the disciples we claim to be. Regardless, there has to be something we do differently that sets us apart from others, that shows that they should listen to us instead of anyone else.

As part of this, we should **LISTEN AND RESPOND**. Jesus typifies this attitude in John 4:20-24. Once the woman realizes that Jesus is a prophet, she's got her own spiritual questions she wants to ask Him about. Jesus doesn't brush those questions aside. Instead, He gives her the information she's looking for in a way that gently nudges her in the direction He wants her to go. He's not following a script. He's adapting to the needs of His prospect.

Likewise, if we want to succeed in saving the lost, we also have to develop the knack of listening and responding. Most people are not going to come to us saying, "I'm an empty vessel. Fill me." Instead, they're going to have their own religious backgrounds and experiences, and once they see that we're from God, they're going to ask us questions that come from who they are. This tells us two things. First, we need to work on improving our Scriptural knowledge, so that we can handle whatever oddball question someone throws at us. Second, we have to be willing to admit when we don't know, and be willing to go off and find the answers and come back to our friends with the truth. Once again, throughout this, we should let the Bible work for us by using it to continue to point them to their Savior.

At this point, we can hope to successfully **IMPLANT FAITH**. Jesus does this in John 4:25-26. Now that He's told the woman about these coming momentous changes in the spiritual landscape, she reaches the conclusion that He might be the Messiah, and she asks Him about it. He acknowledges that He is, and she believes.

In our work, once someone sees that we can fill their spiritual needs and answer their spiritual questions, and once they're happy with the answers we give, that's when we can begin to talk about what they need to do to be saved. This conversation shouldn't feel forced and awkward. It should be the logical conclusion of everything we've discussed before. When we've built this groundwork and reached this point, it's when we can be most assured of saving souls.

Finally, though, just as Jesus did, once we bring someone to the Lord, we should **EXPLOIT THE OPPORTUNITY**. We see what happens as a result of the woman at the well's conversion in John 4:28-29, 39. Once the woman realizes who Jesus is, she ditches her waterpot, rushes home, and excitedly tells everyone that the Messiah is waiting by Jacob's well. Many people listen, come to hear Jesus for two days, and then believe in Him also. The conversion of the woman led not just to her salvation, but to the salvation of many others.

Likewise, once we persuade someone to repent, it will often lead to further opportunities among their families and friends. Those new converts might not know much, but they are eager to share what they do know with others. We need to be willing to take advantage of those new contacts, and the testimony of the one they already know will give our words added weight. If we work hard and seek God's blessing, we can often turn one conversion into a whole string. The more vision we have about spreading the gospel, the more souls we can lead to the Lord.