

Article of the Month – July 2014

Missionary Aspects in the Gospels – John (3)

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What happened during Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman? *First* Jesus overcame the *cultural* and the *gender* barrier (Samaritan/Jew; man/woman).¹ *Then* He created an opening by arousing the woman's curiosity.² Carefully she brings up the issue of His identity 'Are you greater than our father Jacob...?'³ – a question He answers only later by skillfully using the revelation the woman already had of when the Messiah is coming.⁴ The *next barrier* Jesus tackles is the *social dilemma* of the woman when He said to her 'go, call your husband'.⁵ He saw her honesty in that she did not try to hide the ugly facts. The woman, ashamed now, quickly hides behind the *next barrier*, a *religious one*.⁶ Jesus draws her out from there as well, *not* 'respecting her religious feelings' and by plainly stating that 'we Jews are right and you Samaritans are wrong because salvation comes from the Jews'.⁷ So much for inter-faith dialogue...

Yet, He speaks about a near future where both forms of worship, Jewish *and* Samaritan, will be abolished and a new form introduced.⁸ This statement is a distinct Messianic Self-revelation.⁹ Summing it up, Jesus opened the conversation, crossed the barriers of culture and gender, social status and religion, and finally revealed His identity after He noticed true openness.¹⁰

An interesting interlude then develops. The woman, suddenly insecure with many more men appearing on the scene,¹¹ goes back to town on her first evangelistic outreach, leading her townspeople to Christ.¹² When the disciples came back they were surprised that Jesus was violating the old and accepted cultural barriers and astonished that He did not want to eat; they did not even dare to ask the 'what & why' questions.¹³ They had not yet learned to think in terms of missions and evangelistic outreach to lost souls, and therefore Jesus taught them lessons about ripe harvests, sowers and reapers – a reality that became visible almost at once.¹⁴ In this paragraph we see how Jesus' E-2 evangelism was turned – as should be – into E-1: the woman now evangelized her own community. Also, the villagers built their faith on Jesus *directly*, and not on Him *via the evangelist*.

¹ John 4:7,9

² 4:10

³ 4:12

⁴ 4:26,25; in verse 26 Jesus says in fact I AM

⁵ 4:16-18

⁶ 4:19,20

⁷ 4:21,22

⁸ 4:21 'neither', 23,24

⁹ 4:25,26

¹⁰ This is a model of E-2 evangelism, cross-cultural gospel communication to people of a related but slightly different culture, language and/or religious belief. Van 't Slot, *World Evangelisation – That All May Hear*, (2000/2005/2012:59,60

¹¹ 4:27,28

¹² 4:39-42

¹³ 4:27,31-34

¹⁴ 4:35-42

The Samaritans, whose spiritual hunger was evident, urged Him to stay – which He did for two more days, resulting in a greater spiritual harvest. The people understood that He was the Savior of the world. What a contrast this story presents with that of the people in the Gerasene village who asked Jesus to leave¹⁵ which He did, after which there is no recorded evidence *they* ever came to know Him as their Savior.

In the last chapter it seems that world missions dangled on a thin thread. Peter's initiative and that of six other disciples to go fishing had a more definite character than the English text shows. Greek text, grammar and syntax suggest a definite end to their former commitment.¹⁶ After his betrayal, Peter felt unworthy to continue in the ministry. By violating the command to become a fisher of men¹⁷ he practically resigned. Hence Jesus' question 'do you love Me more than these?' referring to the fish business as opposed to Kingdom business. Had the others lost their vision too?

Jesus then executes a five-step plan to bring His renegade band of apostles back. His *first* step was that they caught nothing, a divinely engineered reminder of an earlier time.¹⁸ *This* time a big catch followed too.¹⁹ The *third* step was a fire of burning coals at the shore that reminded Peter of his denial when he warmed himself at another fire.²⁰ The *fourth* step was the most painful one, when Jesus asked Peter three times about his love for Him.²¹ *Finally*, referring to Peter's later spiritual maturity whereby he would give his life for Christ,²² Jesus promised him an ultimate success at the end of his life, that softened the pain of his failure. With Peter reinstated in ministry ('feed My lambs, feed My sheep') the others returned also. World missions were saved.

¹⁵ Luke 8:37

¹⁶ Wuest, Great Truths to live by from the Greek New Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich. 1952:115-131

¹⁷ Luke 15:10

¹⁸ 5:5

¹⁹ 5:6,7; John 21:6

²⁰ 21:9; 18:18

²¹ 21:15-17

²² 21:18,19