

Unexpected Encounters John 4:1-42

We live in a crowded world! And whether our home is in a busy city or a small rural town, it is inevitable that we will, most every day, find ourselves shoulder to shoulder with other people. Some of them we know. But others are strangers.

How do you react when you encounter those people? Our response is predictable when we know them and are friendly with them. But how do we respond when we are crowded together with people that we don't know.

My wife is quiet and shy. And she is often uncomfortable when she finds herself shoulder to shoulder with a stranger.

But not so with me. I am comfortable striking up a conversation with most anyone. In most cases, I actually enjoy those opportunities and often initiate the conversations.

In today's study, we find that the Lord Jesus had ventured into one of those encounters with a person, a woman that He had never met before. And He initiated a conversation with her.

And as we read about this encounter, we see immediately that their conversation is not in keeping with their local customs, that Jesus, being a Jew, would not have ordinarily struck up a conversation with this woman, because both their cultures and their religious beliefs prohibited personal relationships and involvements with each other.

But Jesus, being who He was, and is, was not encumbered by such prohibitions, and He immediately began speaking with her.

Let's pause and read about this encounter. It is a long read, but necessary in order for us to gain a good understanding of the circumstance of their meeting. Follow along with me beginning in verse 1 of chapter 4 of the Book of John. There we read,

¹ Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that He was making and baptizing more disciples than John ²(although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³ he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴ And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town

of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."

¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

²⁷ Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all that I

ever did. Can this be the Christ?" ³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." ³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. ³⁶ Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." (John 4:1-42)

A question as we consider these words of scripture . . . do you believe in coincidences? Or as some might call the circumstances they encounter, "fate", "fate". By this I mean, do you believe that most all of the occurrences of life are simply a product of some natural, random order of events that "just happen" to each of us.

Or do you believe that the experiences of our day are perhaps part of a plan, an organized plan, that there is an orchestration taking place beneath the surface of reality, a plan in which a master designer is arranging and coordinating those circumstances that are taking place?

The sad fact of life is that most all of us, Christian and non-Christian alike believe to some degree or another that everything has somehow been set in motion and that daily life simply becomes a series of random events that take place purely and simply because things, and people and times are the way they are.

As believers in Christ, we are encouraged, yea, even compelled from the scriptures to take the other view, the view that God is our master designer, our

master organizer, and that He is continually and tirelessly putting together the events of our lives to guide and direct our paths towards His own purposeful ends.

One of my favorite scripture passages that clearly bespeaks that truth is given in the Book of Acts chapter 17. Listen, there beginning in verse 26 He tells us that,
²⁶ From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' (Acts 17:26-28)

As professing Christians, we may quickly say that we believe these words to be true. And we may even truly hold them as a "philosophical belief". But the question is, when the day is done, will you and I have lived as if these words were really true?

How do we act when we meet new people? Do we treat them as if we believe that there is some greater purpose behind our having met them? Or do we simply size them up, decide whether or not we like them and then move on to the next thing?

If every circumstance of life simply stood on its own, independent of all the other circumstances, then random treatment or mistreatment of a person or an event might have very little consequence. But however, if the events and the people are all somehow connected together in a greater plan and greater purpose, then, our actions and our reactions take on a more serious importance.

Jesus and His disciples were not supposed to spend much time in Samaria. His ministry was first and foremost to the "lost sheep of Israel". And besides that, the Samaritans were an especially vile sort of people. And the Jews had a special disdain for them.

It was to some extent the racial prejudice of their day, and with good reason, at least in the minds of the Jews. The Samaritans were half-breeds in most senses, part Jewish, part alien, part keeper of the Hebrew faith, part heathen. And they were truly vile, both in their lifestyle and in the way they had corrupted the

Hebrew religion. So the Jews tried to keep their distance. They didn't eat, drink or even talk with the Samaritans.

In our scripture study for today, Jesus and His disciples needed to get from Judea in the South, to Galilee in the north, but Samaria lay directly between the two. And the best route to Galilee would be to go right through Samaria. And so they did.

Now, whether it was by random coincidence or by divine appointment, Jesus and His disciples decided to stop in one of the small towns in Samaria. And while the disciples went to purchase some food, Jesus sat down and waited by the town well. And while He was waiting there, another of those supposed "coincidences" of life took place. A Samaritan woman came to draw water.

Now, the scriptures here imply that it would have been perfectly normal and acceptable for Jesus to simply ignore this woman. As a Jew, Jesus would not have been condemned by anyone as "racially prejudiced", or even as being unkind. Even the woman was surprised when Jesus spoke to her.

But listen! Racial prejudice and all of the other forms of despising of people are very personal matters of the heart. They are emotions that reside quietly and deeply within each of our souls, only to rise to the surface on specific occasions to dictate our actions or reactions.

Each one of us has some form of those emotions. Each one of us has our own personal feelings about such things, especially when we consider the rapid increase of all the many illegal immigrants that have been able to come into our country over these very recent years.

And besides them, there are so many, many "homeless" men and women who live on our streets, and they intimidate us with their panhandling.

A question . . . have you taken time to examine your own heart on these matters?

Just like those Jews were with the Samaritans, most of us have built up our own form of disdain for others. And that disdain rises up to the surface when we come face to face with an opportunity.

Jesus came face to face with an opportunity when that Samaritan woman came to draw water. Why didn't He simply follow the customs of His day? Why didn't He simply ignore the woman and be done with it?

Let me offer you these two thoughts as an answer. First, in John 6 Jesus said,

³⁷All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. (John 6:37-38)

God intentionally sends people our way and we are not to ignore them or drive them away, with our attitude, with our misconduct and with our prejudices.

And note especially also Jesus' words in John 6:38,

³⁸For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. (John 6:38)

Where do our feelings of dislike, despising and hatred come from? They come from memories and past experiences hidden deeply within our hearts. And we react to people and to situations based on all those hidden feelings.

But here in these words, Jesus chose a different reaction. Listen again!

³⁸For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. (John 6:38)

Jesus had selflessly set aside all of the personal feelings and desires that He might have in His own heart so that He could do the specific and purposeful will of God the Father.

In other words, nothing that this woman or any other person could ever do would be offensive to Jesus. He had given up every agenda and every purpose of His own, and He had resolutely committed Himself to do only the purposes of God the Father.

Oh dear friends, that makes all the difference in the world. Offenses are taken by us when someone offends one of our particular beliefs or keeps us from doing something that we want to do.

But not so with Jesus! He had set aside all of His own personal desires so that He could do the will of His Father.

His face was resolutely chiseled in one direction and one direction only, to do His Father's will. Jesus' only desire for this woman was that she receive that which God the Father wanted her to receive.

All of the personal feelings, beliefs and thoughts that Jesus might have otherwise had were abandoned in favor of God the Father's desires.

. . . The other reason that Jesus reacted rightly towards this woman at the well, was the reason that I spoke about in an earlier study. Jesus had been given the Holy Spirit "without limits". And being filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit, what else but the "Fruits of the Spirit" could come forth from Jesus . . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control.

And also, being filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit without limits, Jesus had all of the "Gifts of the Spirit", faith, hope and love, evangelism, preaching, teaching, prophecy, hospitality, service and all the other gifts.

So then, how else could Jesus have reacted when this woman came near? All Jesus had to do was react in obedience unto His Father and all the rest of the steps would fall into place. And Jesus did exactly that. He obeyed!

And when He obeyed, all of the gifts and the fruits of the Holy Spirit came flooding forth from Him. And because Jesus did what He was sent to do and because He said the things that He said, that woman and several others from that town were eternally blessed.

Jesus set aside human feelings and emotions and He ministered. He knew that it was not the Father's will that any should perish, so He gladly offered the living water of life to this stranger. Let's listen again to His words in John 4.

¹³Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14)

The Lord Jesus has made the salvation of our souls a simple and sure transaction. But from our side of the ledger, it often can be more complicated. There are issues and beliefs and past histories that can become barriers and roadblocks, keeping us separated from the salvation He offers. And before salvation can

truly take place, we have to deal with those issues and beliefs and past histories. And yes, at the heart of most all of it is sin, "sin".

But it is at this point that God's Holy Spirit does His most important work. This is when He draws us towards the Lord Jesus. And it often involves a series of steps. He takes one step towards us and He draws us to take a step towards Him. And eventually He is able to reach down into our heart and remove the wrongful thinking, the memories, the past sin that separates us from Him.

It was the same with this woman. The encounter, the conversation and her reaction to Jesus was a step by step process, one step at a time.

As we have said of other occasions, God is always the "first cause" of all that takes place. And here, Jesus was the "First cause" by initiating the conversation. He took the first step. And the woman responded and took a step towards Jesus.

And then eventually Jesus went right to the heart of her need. This woman was steeped in immorality. She had had five husbands and the one she had now was not her own.

Conversion and salvation will turn a person's soul to truth. And the truth is that we have to repent of the sins that control us, turn from those sins and commit our lives to the purposes of God.

This woman obviously turned. The evidence of her conversion is in the manner that she responded. She immediately went to the rest of the town and began telling the others there about this man Jesus. And because of her "evangelism", many others came to their own personal belief in Christ.

Let me ask the question, "What about you? What about me?"

Consider for a moment those "chance meetings" that take place in your and my life each day. What would those encounters gain if we would simply do what Jesus did?

Remember, Jesus was first of all equipped to do and to say the things needed to be said. He had the fullness of the Holy Spirit in Him. And He had also taken the step to give up all of His own personal interests. In doing those two things Jesus

was freed up to will and to act in the exact way that He needed to in every circumstance.

Folks, we can live our lives acting and reacting as if everything that happens to us is a chance occurrence, a coincidence. Or we can instead begin to see beyond the natural realm into the realm of God, and to see that none of those encounters are by chance.

Every day God is at work arranging and rearranging your and my day to give us opportunities to encounter others for Christ. For us to be able to see those daily encounters as God-ordained opportunities, all we have to do is divest ourselves of our own self-interests and to resolutely commit ourselves to doing only the "will of Him who sent us".

What kind of water do you offer to strangers? Do you offer the water of this world with all of its dregs and impurities? Or do you do as Jesus did and offer them living water? Verse 13,

¹³Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water (the water of this world) will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14)

Pray with me.