

How Should We Respond John 4:7-13

There are people in each of our circle of friends who seem to have a natural bent towards knowing things about other people. And they seem also to have a natural need to share the things that they know.

A question that we will consider in our study today is, what should we do with that kind of information as we hear it, especially if it is about people we know, our friends, our relatives or sometimes strangers. What is the first response that will enter our minds.

As Christians, we are especially blessed in that we enjoy the moment by moment presence of God's Holy Spirit. And having God's Holy Spirit dwelling within us, He brings about guidance and help that the average unbeliever doesn't experience.

Thinking back on those days in my own life before I received the Lord Jesus as my Savior, I can recall how as I would hear about some of my friends getting involved in behaviors that were obviously wrong, my thoughts would most often go to the conclusion that their behavior was their business and that they had a right to do whatever they pleased. And that was OK with me.

Yes, with close friends, I might have given them a half-hearted warning that they might later regret the things they were doing. But beyond that, I didn't think much about it.

But then came the day that I became a believer in Christ. And folks, from those first moments, everything changed. I not only began to recognize the wrong behaviors in my own life, I also began to recognize those wrong behaviors within my friends and family members. And because I cared for those dear ones, I wanted them to change and to give up the wrong things they were doing.

And yes, even the behaviors of strangers became blatantly obvious to me. The Holy Spirit's presence within me made the rightness and wrongness of people's behaviors so clear to me.

And that new understanding became a guide for me, both in my own behavior and also in my being of help to other people.

And no, my response to those new thoughts and the guidance that God wanted to give to me were not always consistent. I still had all the remnants of my old sin nature still rising up within me to try to influence my responses. And yes, too often I have given in to those old influences.

For our study today, our Lord has presented us with one of those circumstances that He wants us to study and to consider what a right response on our part should be. Because yes, we will have some of the same elements of this situation confront us in one or more of our own situations of life, and what will we do with our responses.

Here in today's scripture passage, Jesus encountered a woman who had obviously lived a rough life, a woman who had been involved in several relationships, none of which had worked out for her, married five times and now living unwed with another man.

And some bible scholars have concluded that because she had come to the well for water in the middle of the day and not in the early morning, she was an outcast from the "more righteous" members of her community.

But we must not miss within her conversation with Jesus that though she is a Samaritan, she still seemed to know quite a lot about the Hebrew religion, perhaps even believing some of its important tenets, even believing that someday a Messiah would come and save her.

Had Jesus not been who He was, he would have had all the ordinary reasons for thinking badly of the woman, even condemning her for her behavior. But He did not. He did not!

Jesus had the same options and choices that you and I would have in our responses to this woman. You'll recall that He too had been filled with the Holy Spirit and besides being the Son of God, He also had all the unction that the Holy Spirit gives to a person's decision making.

And all of this presents you and me with the question, "what are we, what are you and I to do when we encounter someone like this Samaritan woman?" "What will be our response?"

Let's read a portion of this encounter here in John chapter 4 and we'll talk more about it.

³ He (the Lord Jesus) 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." (John 4:3-26)

And for our study here today, may I give us these other words of scripture that we mentioned in an earlier study, here given in the Book of Acts chapter 17. They will help us to remember that this encounter with the Lord Jesus, and all the other encounters we might have with people are never simply random occurrences, happenstances. Listen, this is Acts chapter 17,

²⁶From 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. ²⁷God 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)

Again, the question that we are considering as we observe this encounter between the Lord Jesus and this woman at this well is, "What are we, what are you and I supposed to do as we encounter people and their circumstances each day? And what are we to do with the information that we learn about them?"

If we truly believe the words that we just read given here in Acts 17, that God determines the times set for us and the exact places where we should live, then we also must know that there are no random occurrences and no coincidences in this life. We know instead that God is tirelessly at work, arranging our encounters.

What then does that say to us, to you and me? "What is God's purpose and what are we supposed to do within those circumstances that He intentionally sets before us?"

Every day, as we drive out of our driveways, a whole world of encounters opens up to us, our neighbors, our co-workers, strangers on the streets and in the stores. "What should we do with all those folks?"

We know that we can simply ignore them if we want to. And we often do. We can just simply turn our heads and walk on . . . but is that the right thing to do?

Like Jesus did with the woman at the well, should we not seek to know and to do the will of God the Father as it relates to those strangers?

Friends and family members are not as easy to avoid or ignore. They usually have some prior call on our relationship, on our emotions and even on our finances.

It's enjoyable when our encounters are sweet ones. We get to show our best side and we get to see their best side.

But even when one of our loved ones is experiencing trouble, our encounter can still be sweet. And perhaps that's the reason that God would bring us together in the first place, so that we can be of help to them.

Unfortunately there are also times when our encounters with our friends and family members are not sweet encounters. Tension can often be present in intimate relationships.

But again folks, whatever the circumstance and whoever the people involved, you and I have to come to the recognition that none of it is by mere coincidence.

Let me say that again! Whatever the circumstance and whoever the people involved, you and I have to come to the agreement with God that none of it is by mere coincidence.

Beneath the surface reality that we live in, God is busily at work with His own plan and His own purpose. Whether it involves friends, or family members, or co-workers, or even strangers, each one of them and each one of us is a part of God's plan and purpose.

Folks, that is where the daily "stuff" of our religion takes place, in those unannounced, "unprepared for" events that come our way.

It's our nature to think that God has something big and grandiose in store for us, some special occasion that He is preparing us for, and that might be true. But when our life is "all said and done", the real heart, the real core of God's activity and purpose in our lives will have been in some of those simple and ordinary encounters.

I have often mentioned that my wife and I worked for many years in a ministry to young people. Our young folks, mostly teenagers, lived in dormitories, attended

our school each day and carried out work and family life activities in the evenings.

Many of them were with us for several years, only going to their family homes on an occasional weekend and during holidays.

As a result, we were able to be with them and experience their behavioral responses on a regular basis. And those behaviors were sometimes good, but sometimes they were not so good.

Most all of the young people came to us from broken homes and broken relationships. And more often than not, as they went about their daily activities, their attitudes and behaviors reflected many of the effects of the broken relationships they brought with them from home. And as their substitute families, we knew that we had to work with and through all their many problematic attitudes and behaviors.

And we did. And for the most part, many, many of them benefited, giving them a lifelong happiness they might not have had otherwise.

And it was the nature of our ministry to those young people for us staff members to develop lifelong relationships with some of them. And we did.

My family and I joined that ministry in 1979, coming to know and to love so many, many of those young men and women, even following along with them as they grew up and started families of their own. And still even now working with and walking with them through their now adult problems and attitudes and behaviors.

And I must confess that it is hard to hear back from some of them that they too have experienced brokenness in their now families, with their own husbands and wives and children.

And hearing from them about their problems, them asking me what I think that they ought to do to recover and redeem their now broken families, my mind asks the question that we are asking here today. "What are we to do with the circumstance that we have in front of us?"

God's glory and our good both reside within the manner in which you and I conduct ourselves during those encounters of our day. His glory and our good will be decided by our responses.

And yes, there are a lot of ways that you and I can respond to the person or to the situation that we have suddenly been presented with. But for today's consideration, may we confine our thoughts to just two possible responses. We can respond with "judgmental condemnation", or we can respond with "Godly intercession".

"Judgmental condemnation" or "Godly intercession"!

And it's in these moments that God wants you and me to make choices, right choices. And though His Spirit abides within our hearts and our minds, He seems most often to allow those choices to be left within our own hands.

And folks please know that God is not naïve. He formed us. He knows that we were born with a sin nature. He knows that the path our minds will most often choose to take is the first path, the path of "judgmental condemnation". We see a person, a circumstance, their actions and their reactions and we immediately form an opinion within our minds.

And again, it's not at all wrong to be able to see and to recognize that the things that are taking place are wrong and sinful. The problem is not in our seeing or recognizing wrongful behavior. And it's not even in our ability to perceive a person's faults. The true problem lies in our response to that person or that circumstance, our "response".

You and I have belief systems, ideas and agendas that we have built up on just about every subject under the sun. And when suddenly we are confronted with a circumstance or a person that violates one of those ideas or beliefs, then our minds immediately demand a conclusion.

Again, the problem is not in seeing and recognizing the rightness or wrongness of a matter.

It's the next step, the conclusion that God is most concerned about. "What do we do with the information that we have in front of us." Does the information that we have in front of us simply serve as "evidence" to prove the guilt of the

person or people involved? And does that proof lead us to a further step of condemnation? And does the condemnation cause us to demand the severest of penalties? And do we want to “stay on top of the situation” until those penalties are carried out to their fullest extent?

When God cautions you and me to be especially careful about “judging” other people, this is what He is talking about. It’s when you and I become judge, jury and executioner that God becomes offended. He tells us clearly in Matthew 7,

¹“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (Matthew 7:1-2)

Why is our “judgmental condemnation” so wrong? And why does our “judgmental condemnation” offend God. The answer is simple. When we assume the role of judge, jury and executioner, we usurp the very authority of God. We rob God of His authority, His position, His plan and His purpose in another person’s life . . . and in our own life as well.

God has a plan and a purpose for each of our lives and it is a good and loving plan. He tells us in Jeremiah chapter 29,

¹¹For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)

And when we dare to tread into God’s domain of discipline and punishment of one of His children, we are treading upon dangerous ground.

God is not naïve. He is not unaware of the things that are taking place in another person’s life. And He is especially aware when a person is doing something wrong.

And He is not only aware of the problem, He has a specific remedy for their wrongful behaviors. And if you or I step into the fray and try to exact out our own form of punishment or revenge, then we circumvent God’s plan and His order for the situation.

And again, God’s plan is for our good and the good of those other people.

But if the problem demands a stronger response on the part of God, He is prepared to do that also. But He warns you and me away from any actions of our own. Listen to these words of warning in Galatians chapter 6! There He tells us,

⁷Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. ⁸For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. (Galatians 6:7-8)

And in Romans 12 God tells us to,

Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. ¹⁷Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. (Romans 12:16-19)

God has His position and His authority and it is appropriate to His plan. You and I must not rob Him of His opportunities with those other people. We must give Him the freedom to do as He pleases.

God's greatest desire is that we would choose the other path of response, the path of "Godly intercession". The loving path of "Godly intercession"!

When you and I see sin erupting in other's lives it should provoke in us the immediate need to bring that person and their circumstance before the merciful and gracious throne of God, pleading on their behalf.

Jesus now sits at the right hand of God the Father and He continually makes intercession for each of us. And you and I must commit ourselves to doing the same.

So the question, "What are we supposed to do with the information and the people that we have in front of us each day?" The answer is, "We must immediately and continuously intercede for them." "We must become their advocate before the throne of God, pleading for mercy and grace for those dear ones."

Only God has the privilege of “judgmental condemnation”. We do not! Our only privilege is to make “Godly intercession.”

One last thought before we close. Godly intercession is first and always prayer and supplication. But it can also be followed by a more “hands on” involvement. That kind of “hands on” involvement can be seen in Matthew chapter 25. There Jesus tells us that there are things that we can do to intercede and help others. We can feed those who are hungry. We can give drink to those who thirst. We can clothe those without clothing, visit those who are sick or in prison.

Again, Godly intercession is first and always prayer and supplication. But it can also be followed by a more “hands on” involvement.

Which will you choose as you go through the rest of this day, and tomorrow and the coming weeks, “judgmental condemnation” or “Godly intercession”?

In 1 Timothy 2, God tells us,

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone. (1 Timothy 2:1)

Pray with me!