

The One

God is intensely interested in and committed to the one. While man values the multitude, God finds extreme value in the one.

John's disciples were disturbed and confused. He had been the rising star; multitudes were coming to him to hear the message of repentance and baptism. Then came Jesus. From their perspective, He just appeared on the scene and instantly caught the attention of the crowds. John's ministry was dwindling. His followers said to him, "*Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified – behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!*" Understanding the situation, John replied, "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*"

Jesus was a hit everywhere. He had no problem with 'church growth'. Thousands of people turned out to hear him speak, to see or receive miraculous healings or to eat bread and fish. If it were our day, He would write books, speak at conferences, appear on TBN or be invited to the White House. Christianity today celebrates celebrity. Jesus, however, knew that such fame was fruitless. You NEED to touch the one. Oh, that's not to say that public preaching and teaching is fruitless – quite the opposite. However, while people esteem celebrity and play to the crowd, God values far more the individual, the one. Broadcasting the message, if you would, is ultimately only as effective as the Holy Spirit's work on each person's heart individually. If you're an evangelist, you know this already.

Anyway, as a consequence of the crowds and the Pharisees, Christ headed out of Judea toward Galilee. "*But He needed to go through Samaria.*" Now, Samaria, as most of you know, was kind of off-limits to the devout Jew. In fact, many would actually circumvent Samaria on their way north or south incurring a much longer journey. You see, to travel through this land of 'half-breeds' would defile them or so they thought. But, Jesus NEEDED to go through it – why? - to minister to one poor woman who was 'unlucky at love' at least four or five times. Go figure...a Samaritan was really low on the totem pole to the religious Jew; beyond that, a Samaritan woman was even lower; and a Samaritan woman who'd had multiple lovers was basically untouchable, off the chart so to speak.

But Jesus trekked through the morning and into the heat of the day till He was tired. Arriving at the village of Sychar, He rested by a site known as Jacob's well. There, He encountered this woman and very contrary to custom, He asked her for a drink. You have to understand how socially up tight the religious elite were in those days to appreciate her amazement.

Now, as surprised as she was, there are many, many people today that are even less anticipatory of the Lord's interest or care for them individually. This is because, as ministers, our hearts are often more in tune with the oft-misguided disciples of Jesus than Jesus Himself. We esteem prestige, notoriety. As a consequence, our religious system today is sidetracked. Whole denominations are caught up in the glorification of prosperity, of

ministerial clubs and celebrity, of feel-good entertainment, of doctrinal 'purity', of mass-market appeals to open-mindedness...on and on it goes. Even those that started well are now emulating the world's values. Consequently, there's just no time for 'the one'.

If you and I along with the rest of the church as a whole are to be ready for His appearing, we must get away from this numbers game attitude, this religious carnival ride and re-embrace the heart of God – His intense love for each individual. Remember the parable of the one lost coin or the one lost lamb? Therein, Jesus spoke of how deeply our Father cares to 'find' the ONE who is lost – not the multitude, the ONE. And He added that, "*...there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*" (Luke 15)

To love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind is the greatest commandment, and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself. Note the singular – neighbor - each one, because each one is fantastically precious. Though Christ taught the multitude, He ministered otherwise to individuals. In fact, considering all the healings He performed, there is only one instance in the NT of Jesus doing this miracle for more than one person at a time. This clearly points to His priority.

One of the reasons we see the world around us devolving into greater and greater iniquity is because we as believers have allowed ourselves to be 'corralled into churchianity'. I submit that as long as we are clustered and corralled by this contemporary concept, we fail to truly influence the world around us. In fact, quite the opposite occurs and the enemy of Christ is

delighted. Churchianity is the glorification of the man made trappings and man-valued religiousities that have hi-jacked many parts of the body of Christ.

Corporate worship and teaching is not the issue. Rather, the mindset that makes it the ultimate goal is. Self-willed individualism is certainly not the target, but love for and ministry to the individual is.

Pastors and pewsters, Jesus NEEDED to go through Samaria to minister to one dear woman and it led to a powerful impact upon a whole community. (See John 4) As counter-intuitive as it seems, the world is more impacted by loving, sincere ministry to God's sheep one by one by one. It's His plan and Jesus demonstrated it. And you can be amazed by the results – Edward Kimball taught a Bible class. One day, a young man named Dwight visited his class. It was clear Dwight didn't know the Bible. One Saturday as Ed was preparing his Sunday school lesson, the Lord put a burden on his heart to visit the shoe store where Dwight worked and share the gospel with that young man. That day a Boston shoe clerk surrendered his life to Jesus. The clerk, Dwight L. Moody, eventually became a powerfully effective evangelist. Like Jesus, Ed NEEDED to go through Samaria...well, OK, Boston. In the same way, we today NEED to search our own 'Samaria' to find, feed and otherwise minister to the one -- one by one by one by one.