

INTRODUCTION

Our culture is crazy about sports. During a period in October, we have the World Series, NBA games, college and pro football all happening at the same time. That's not to mention PGA golf or NASCAR and all the other sports. Although baseball has lost its popularity, it still lays stake to American's pastime.

I loved baseball growing up and I can still name all the players at all the positions for the New York Yankees in 1962 when they won the World Series. Yogi Berra was an all-star-catcher for 16 seasons and won ten World Series. He later was a baseball manager. But many people remember him not for his skills on the diamond, but for his quirky comments he made. They are called yogiisms, and here are my top ten favorites:

1. "It's like déjà vu all over again."
2. "Always go to other people's funerals, otherwise they won't come to yours."
3. "The future ain't what it used to be."
4. "It gets late early out here."
5. "Even Napoleon had his Watergate"
6. "He hits from both sides of the plate. He's amphibious."
7. "I just take it with a grin of salt."
8. "I usually take a two-hour nap from one to four."
9. "Why don't you pair 'em up in groups of three."
10. "I never said most of the things I said."

We have adopted a lot of language of baseball in our common vernacular. When someone makes a low offer for something we say, "They aren't even in the ballpark." Or we may estimate the cost of something and say, "the ballpark figure is..." When someone gives a great speech, we say they "knocked it out of the park." When there is a big change in technology or methodology we say "it's a brand-new ballgame." When someone gets a big promotion we say they have made it to the "big league." And by the same token when someone is working in a dead-end job we may say they are "bush league."

When you want to do a complete presentation, you say that you want to "cover all the bases." And when someone is wrong we say that they are "way off base." When they are completely correct we say that they are batting 1,000. When someone makes a surprising statement we say that they threw us a curveball. Or when they do something unexpected we say that it came out of left field. When someone is a tough negotiator we say that they want to play hardball.

But probably the most familiar phrase is "Three Strikes." Most states, including Texas have a Three Strikes Law meaning that if a criminal is convicted of three felonies the prison sentence is enhanced. We even have a Three Strikes Bail Bond company in Tyler. But of course, the term comes from baseball. And when you stand to sing "Take me out to the Ballgame" during the 7th Inning stretch, the phrase that people always sing the loudest is, "And it's one, two, three strikes you're out at the old ball game!"

The good news we're going to learn today is that with Jesus, it's three strikes and you're NOT out. We're back in the Gospel According to John after a brief break for our emphasis on orphan care and Missions. We left off the series with Jesus in Jerusalem after having a personal encounter with Nicodemus. In John 4 Jesus has another personal encounter. Nicodemus was a religious Jewish man, and the woman we'll meet today was exactly the opposite.

John 4:1-19. When Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard he was making and baptizing more disciples than John (though Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were), he left Judea and went again to Galilee.

He had to travel through Samaria; so he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar near the property that Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, worn out from his journey, sat down at the well. It was about noon. A woman of Samaria came to draw water.

"Give me a drink," Jesus said to her, because his disciples had gone into town to buy food. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" she asked him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.

Jesus answered, "If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would ask him, and he would give you living water."

"Sir," said the woman, "you don't even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this 'living water'? You aren't greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and livestock."

Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life."

"Sir," the woman said to him, "give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and come here to draw water."

"Go call your husband," he told her, "and come back here."

"I don't have a husband," she answered.

"You have correctly said, 'I don't have a husband,'" Jesus said. "For you've had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."

"Sir," the woman replied, "I see that you are a prophet."

There have been many artistic interpretations of this encounter. One of my favorites is by the French artist Pierre Mignard who painted this scene in 1681. Even a color-blind guy like me can appreciate the brilliant colors worn by Jesus and the Samaritan Woman. It was a deep well, so you can see the detail of the long rope tied to the water pot. In the left you see the Samaritan

town and the disciples returning loaded down with food. If you're ever in Raleigh, North Carolina, you can see this painting at the North Carolina Museum of Art.

I don't want to keep referring to her as the Samaritan woman, so for this message I'm going to give her a name. I'll call her Samantha – which means "listener." What Samantha heard Jesus say would change her life. Samantha had at least three strikes against her. But with Jesus, it's three strikes and you're NOT out. Let's talk about the strikes she had against her.

STRIKE ONE: Jesus ignored the social barrier.

As Samantha approached the well to draw water, Jesus started a conversation with her. He asked her if she would give Him some water to drink. She was shocked. According to the social code of the day, it was improper for a man to speak to a strange woman. During the first century, women were considered to be inferior to men. We see this from so many teachings from the Jewish Talmud. It said, "He who talks to a woman in public brings evil upon himself." It said, "One is not to so much as greet a woman." "Let not a man speak to a woman in the street, no not with his own wife."

According to the Talmud, the first prayer a Jewish man would pray each morning was, "Blessed are you God who did not make me a Gentile, a woman, or a slave." The Talmud also said that a woman shouldn't study the laws of God. It said that "it would be better for the law to burn than to be given to a woman."

On the Temple Mount, there was a barrier beyond which only men could proceed. Women couldn't own property, and their testimony in court was invalid.

But Jesus ignored this social barrier and initiated a conversation with her. Jesus came to liberate all people, including women. We see that women played an important role in the New Testament. Jesus was close friends with Mary and Martha. Women were the last to leave the crucifixion scene and the first to arrive at the empty tomb. In the book of Acts, women like Priscilla and Lydia play prominent roles in the spread of the Gospel.

It was in this social culture of inequality that Paul declared that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. He wrote, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

This sinful practice of considering women as second-class citizens continued well into the 20th Century. It wasn't until the 19th Amendment was passed in 1920 that women in all U.S. states had the right to vote.

When you consider how women are treated in some Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, that's what the world would still be like if Jesus hadn't come to set women free.

Dr. Alvin Schmidt is a respected sociologist and has written a book entitled *How Christianity Changed the World*. He wrote, "The extremely low status that the Greek, Roman, and Jewish

woman had for centuries was radically affected by the appearance of Jesus Christ. His actions and teachings raised the status of women to new heights. By word and deed, he went against the ancient, taken-for-granted beliefs and practices that defined women as socially, intellectually and spiritually inferior." (p. 102)

Strike one: She was a woman. But Jesus didn't call her out.

STRIKE TWO: Jesus removed the racial barrier.

When Jesus spoke to Samantha she was surprised. She asked him, "How is that you a Jew would speak to me, a Samaritan woman? For Jews do not associate with Samaritans." There was a deep racial divide between Jews and Samaritans. To put it bluntly, Jews hated the Samaritans, and Samaritans hated the Jews.

Seven hundred years before Jesus walked on this territory, the mighty Assyrian Empire had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. They deported many of the Jews to Assyria. And they imported thousands of their citizens to populate the land. These Assyrians married some of the remaining Jews and this half-breed race were known as the Samaritans – because the city of Samaria was the capital. The Jews of Judea hated these Samaritans more than any other Gentiles. It's interesting that today, this area is called the West Bank, and Jews and Palestinians still don't get along.

But Jesus refused to promote this racial bigotry. When he looked at Samantha, He didn't see a hated Samaritan woman. He saw a person who needed eternal life. He was able to see her broken heart.

Thank God that God's grace is for every race. God doesn't look a person based upon their face, their race, or their place. God looks on the heart. When Samuel was sent by God to select a new king, he was impressed by the appearance of David's oldest brother. He was a tall good-looking guy. But we read in 1 Samuel 16: But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

Sadly, our country has a terrible track record when it comes to racial bigotry. It still exists today. We tend to look at people and the first thing we want to notice about them is whether they are black, white, Hispanic, Asian, or some other category.

I grew up in Alabama and I can remember seeing signs for drinking fountains and restrooms for white people and for colored people. When I was in the eighth grade I got a job working on Saturdays at the Florala Feed and Seed store. I still love the smell of livestock feed and fertilizer. I would load bags of feed and fertilizer onto the pick-up trucks that the farmers drove. I made a whopping \$4 for working twelve hours on Saturday.

The owner of the store was Vester Gamble. He was a deacon in our church and my Sunday School teacher. I'll never forget one Saturday afternoon when I heard a commotion toward the

back of the store and I looked up just in time to see Mr. Gamble grab a black man by the overalls and hit him with an uppercut to the chin. His blow knocked the black man out. I ran up with excitement. I said, "What did he do? Did he try to rob the cash register?"

I'll never forget looking at the face of Mr. Gamble, red with anger. He said, "No. I caught him coming out of the whites only bathroom."

It was one of those moments in my life when I saw what he did and heard what he said that I knew immediately that racial prejudice and the teaching of the Gospel could not coexist. I wanted to say, "You mean you knocked this guy out just because he used the wrong bathroom? And yet you can teach a Sunday School class? What's wrong with this picture?" But I didn't say anything. But from that time on, I lost all respect of Mr. Gamble.

It wasn't because I was so morally superior in any way. We all are guilty of racism. It was because I really did believe that song that says, "Jesus loves the little children. All the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world." And He loves all shades of melatonin in adults as well. And so should we.

Strike one: She was a woman. Strike two: She was a Samaritan.

STRIKE THREE: Jesus overlooked the moral barrier.

Samantha had a sin problem. You've heard of the good Samaritan. This could be called the story of the transformation of the bad Samaritan.

I love the way that Jesus gently pointed out that He knew the condition of her heart. After Jesus offered to give her living water, Samantha said "Yes, I want some of this living water." Jesus said, "Go call your husband and then both of you can come back here."

Samantha replied, "Hmm. I don't have a husband." Jesus said, "You are correct. But you have had five husbands. And you are now living with a man who isn't your husband." She said, "I can tell you are a prophet."

The fact that Samantha was there alone is evidence that she was a moral outcast in her village. The well was located about a half mile from Sychar and we learn from writings of the day that women generally collected water in groups. There was safety in numbers and this was a time of socialization. But Samantha was there by herself.

She probably had to deal with a great deal of shame. The Jews considered all Samaritans to be unclean. But Samantha was even spurned as a sinner by the Samaritans themselves. She was an outcast among the outcasts!

It could have been that when people saw her, they whispered ABOUT her. But when Jesus met her He spoke life TO her. Jesus was called a friend of sinners. He hung out with sinners which irritated the self-righteous Jews.

The Bible says, "While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' On hearing this, Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.'" (Matthew 9:10-12)

I believe Jesus said that with his tongue in cheek. He knew that we are ALL morally sick and need a doctor to heal us of our sin sickness. But the Pharisees were blinded by their false sense of goodness.

Strike one: She was a woman, but Jesus still offered her living water. Strike two: She was a Samaritan, but Jesus offered her eternal life. Strike three: She was living in sin.

So what is the take away truth for us? Jesus knows about your failures, and He still seeks you to offer you eternal life.

The Bible says, Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward Him." (John 4:28-30)

It's obvious that John didn't record all of their conversation, but Samantha heard enough to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. She said that He knew everything she ever did.

This encounter with the woman wasn't an accident. Did you notice that the Bible points out in verse four that Jesus HAD to go through Samaria? That was unusual. When the Jews traveled from Jerusalem to Galilee, they would travel down to Jericho near the Jordan River and then follow the river north to avoid Samaria. But Jesus deliberately traveled to Samaria because He was seeking to save a lost, lonely woman. The Bible tells us that the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

CONCLUSION

Jesus is still seeking out people to save them. Like Samantha, Jesus knows about every failure in your life. Yet He still loves you and offers you the gift of eternal life.

Jesus had an amazing knack for comparing the spiritual with the physical. He told Nicodemus that he had to be born again. He compared salvation with birth. And Jesus took the opportunity near a well to talk about living water. He promised this woman that she could know God in a way which would satisfy her deepest longings. In the next message, we'll talk more about the living water and loving worship.

That woman came seeking a drink and she left with a river of living water flowing out of her soul. She was transformed from a sad picture of sin into a beautiful trophy of grace. She became an evangelist leading other people in the village to meet the Messiah.

To borrow some baseball lingo, this woman wasn't close to being in the ballpark of the Kingdom of God. She was socially, racially, and morally way off base. But Jesus knocked it out of the park by telling her about living water. And for Samantha, it was a whole new ball game. Do you need to start over? Jesus is offering you the free gift of eternal life. You can never be too bad that Jesus can't save you. And you can't be too good that you don't need a Savior.

Because with Jesus, it's one, two, three strikes you're SAVED when you know the Lord.

OUTLINE

STRIKE ONE: Jesus ignored the social barrier.

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." *Galatians 3:28 CSB*

STRIKE TWO: Jesus removed the racial barrier.

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TAKE AWAY TRUTH: Jesus knows about your failures, and He still seeks you to offer you eternal life.

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas*
