

The Lens of Concern Affects Conduct John 4:27-43

Scripture Reading: John 4:1-26

Introduction

At any given time, the thing that concerns us the most; what we focus on or what we desire, tends to affect our behavior and, conversely, our behavior often reveals that which concerns us most

Do you agree with that statement?

As the late Rod Serling might have said as he introduced one of his tales on the Twilight Zone: “Submitted for your approval...”

Consider how much the conversation and behavior of people change when they become parents or grandparents for the first time

Instantly, everything revolves around that little baby

The same thing is true when a boy meets a girl or vice versa

Suddenly, it seems that everything they think, do, and say seems to concern their new love interest

In both cases the change in conduct comes about because of a change of concern or a shift in priorities

And because priorities are such powerful motivators we need to be vigilant to make certain our priorities are correct

That’s true for us as individuals but it’s also true of us collectively as a church

Because what we value or what we desire has a direct effect on what we do

Getting rid of the pews

Let’s do a little thought experiment

In just a moment I am going to make a statement and I want you to make note of the first thoughts that go through your mind

Keep them to yourself – just make note of the first thought that comes to your mind

Ready?

“The elders have come to the conclusion that the Lord is telling us that we can be more successful in reaching our community if we remove the pews from the sanctuary and replace them with chairs”

What was your first thought?

Was it to look to see what size wrench you would need to be able to start removing the pews?

Or was it to look around for a rope and a high place to tie it to deal with the elders?

Case study

In my research for this message I read about a church who was meeting with a consultant as they tried to figure out how they might increase their impact on their community

After assessing the church the consultant told the members that the only way he could see the church being relevant to the people they were trying to reach would be to tear down their historic building and build a more culturally-sensitive worship center in its place

To say they were astonished would be an gross understatement and they questioned loudly how the consultant could ever make such a suggestion

He asked them if they thought that reaching the people in the area was what God wanted and of course they agreed it was

So he asked them if they thought God wanted them to do that in the most effective way possible

Again they said, “Yes. But not if it means tearing down the sanctuary.”

When our priorities come into conflict with God’s priorities we have a problem

Even though we should know better, believers can still be tempted to place their wants above God’s wants

Thankfully we can train ourselves to look through a biblical lens and bring our concerns into alignment with God's concerns
But in order to do so we must be intentional about seeking and understanding God's will and committed to doing it
And that means subordinating our desires to God's whenever they conflict

Just a few minutes ago, Rosie read the first 26 verses of John 4 which give us the background for our passage

We will be focusing our attention on what happens after verse 26 because it's there that we see the clash of concerns

We will be looking at the concerns of the woman at the well, the concerns of the disciples, and the concerns of Jesus and the conduct that resulted from those concerns as revealed in the narrative of this account

Since your Bibles should already be open to John 4 please follow along as I read **verses 27-43**

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?" 28So 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?" 30They went out of the town and were coming to him.

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

39Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." 40So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. 41And many more believed because of his word. 42They 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."

43After the two days he departed for Galilee.

The first thing I want us to consider from these verses is that there are two kinds of concerns present and they are divided into the **temporal** and the **eternal**

I. Temporal versus Eternal

I don't know about you but when I read accounts like this in God's Word I have to remind myself that they relate real events that involved real people who had the same basic wants and needs that we do today

Try to imagine yourself as a part of this scene

Verse 6 tells us that it was "about the sixth hour" which means it was around noon

The mid-eastern sun is directly overhead; Jesus and the disciples have probably been walking since dawn and now in the heat of the day they come to Jacob's well in this Samaritan city

What concerns do you think you would have if you were a present during the events of this account?

Jesus and the disciples

Let's look at Jesus and his disciples first

Verse 6 tells us that Jesus was "wearied" from the journey

And it's not too difficult to imagine that would be the case and Jesus' first concern was to sit down by the well and take a rest

It's also not too much of a stretch to imagine you would be thirsty

And Jesus was thirsty and one of his concerns was getting a drink of water which we see in **verse 7** when he asked the Samaritan woman to give him a drink

Jesus was likely also hungry and we see that was true of the disciples as they left Jesus sitting beside the well and headed on into the city to buy some lunch

I love the fact that in such an offhand way John shows so clearly the humanity of Jesus

That Jesus suffered the same limitations as we do – he got tired, he got thirsty, he grew hungry – and like us he had to have concern for his physical needs

Jesus and his disciples were tired, hungry, and thirsty so they took steps to alleviate those concerns

The Samaritan woman

Next let's look at the Samaritan woman

As Jesus is reclining beside the well she arrives to draw water to fill the jar she carried with her

Drawing water on a daily basis was a normal event in those days but there were a few things that made her trip to the well unusual

First, she was there to fetch water at noon when typically that chore was done in the early morning hours before it got too hot

All the other women in the village would have arrived at the well and filled their jars hours earlier with the usual chatter and catching up with one another that one would expect

Meeting at the well was more than a chore; it was a daily social gathering for women of that day

It seems the woman wanted to get the water she needed while avoiding having contact with anyone else

In her conversation with Jesus we learn that she has had five husbands and is currently living with a man who is not her husband

Perhaps her moral failings had made her enough of a social outcast that the other women had driven her away from the well

Perhaps she just felt guilt and shame and wanted to avoid the looks of reproach that would have likely been cast her way and the snide comments that would have been whispered about her

She was likely at least a little dismayed to see Jesus sitting by the well when she arrived and shocked when he actually spoke to her asking her for a drink

With his request her concern shifted to one of social propriety as she questioned why a Jewish man would condescend to ask for anything from a Samaritan woman

And when Jesus told her he could provide her with “living water” she focused on the practical matter of Jesus lacking a way to draw water from the deep well at all – after all he was just sitting there and had asked her to draw water for him

It seems clear that what John writes here is only the highlights of the conversation that Jesus and the woman had

But something in Jesus’ demeanor or his countenance led the woman to the realization that Jesus was speaking to her about spiritual matters

So her concern turned to the differences in worship between the Jews and the Samaritans and she asked Jesus for an answer to them

And then in **verse 25** she expressed her hope and longing for the Messiah who would make all things clear and Jesus revealed his full identity as the awaited Messiah

Up to this point the concerns that have been revealed have been mainly for physical needs but in the case of the woman we have seen that she also had societal, relational, and spiritual concerns that she was dealing with

And the conduct we see in reaction to those concerns is only what we would expect to see – in all cases we would most likely act in exactly the same way

When we’re tired we look for rest, when we’re thirsty we seek a drink, when we’re hungry we get something to eat, when we’re embarrassed we hide, we focus on taking care of practical matters, and so forth

Those are normal reactions to normal concerns

Priorities

But from verse 27 on things get interesting as we see some important principles demonstrated

The **disciples** return from buying the food and they are surprised to see Jesus talking with the woman but they don’t say anything

Imagining the scene you can see them approaching and the conversation slowly winding down due to the perplexity of the situation

But none of them asked the woman why she was there or asked Jesus why he was talking with her

And we are left to wonder whether it was a lack of courage or interest that prevented them from asking

It seems that perhaps it was just a lower priority for them than eating was because we see that right after the woman left they began urging Jesus to eat something

But we also see that the woman’s conversation with Jesus has radically changed her worldview

Her concerns are different and her conduct is different

We already saw how her recognition of her sinfulness led her to inquire about places of worship which shows that she had an interest in worshipping the right way – which indicates a sincere desire to be made right with God

Jesus gave her a whole new outlook as he revealed to her that he was the Messiah she was waiting for and that reconciliation to God was available in him

And now we see that she forgot all about her original purpose for going to the well as she hurried back to town leaving her water jug behind

And she put aside her shame and fear of humiliation as she openly told everyone of her encounter with Jesus

Still, knowing that her testimony would likely be suspect, she cleverly invited them to come while piquing their interest by telling them that Jesus had told her information he should not have known and then asking them to come and see so as to tell her whether Jesus was the Christ

She had come to the well in the heat of the day to take care of her immediate concerns but she left with a new concern for her fellow townspeople

Her encounter with Jesus changed and corrected her vision and her concern shifted from the temporal to the eternal

She came to the well only to get what she wanted but she left doing what God wanted

In Cana, Jesus had turned water into wine and now in this Samaritan city we see him turn a search for water into witness

But the disciples were stuck on hungry and their most pressing interest was having lunch

So Jesus had to begin reshaping their worldview for them and in [verse 32](#) he told them –

“I have food to eat that you do not know about.”

Their priority at the moment was on food so he used a food metaphor to begin to bring them around to the bigger picture of his mission

Of course, this only served to confuse them further as we see them ask one another if it was possible someone else had brought Jesus something to eat while they were gone

So Jesus had to come right out and tell them in [verse 34](#) that his “food” was to do what his Father had sent him to do

This is typical of the life of Jesus as he lived in complete and immediate submission to the will of the Father

In fact, as he was nearing the end of his life we read in [John 17:4](#) that his only claim was that he had accomplished the work which his Father had given him to do

Jesus was probably just as hungry as his disciples were but he had different priorities and he was focused more on the harvest of souls for the kingdom of God than he was on satisfying his stomach

And as he saw the Samaritans coming out of the city toward them he directed his disciples’ eyes to the reality of the harvest for eternal life that was before them

They had the opportunity to reap a harvest that they hadn’t sown – who could think about lunch given that reality?

And Jesus was so concerned with the eternal souls of those Samaritans that when they asked him to stay and share more with them he delayed his trip to Galilee for two days teaching and leading even more to understand who he was and what his mission was before he continued on

We see repeatedly in the gospels that the disciples could be kind of slow to catch on to what Jesus was doing

But what about us?

We need to consider what concerns us and what our main priority is because it has a direct effect on our conduct

II. Maintenance versus Mission

For most churches the question comes down to one of **maintenance versus mission** with maintenance being anything that focuses on perpetuating or even preserving the institution of the church

Maintenance

Every church needs maintenance and keeping our things in good order is simply exercising proper stewardship of what God has given to us

There will always be things to be fixed, bills to be paid, grass to be mowed, and things that could use sprucing up around a church facility

That's just the way things are in this fallen world and we have to pay attention or the place will fall down

However, the maintenance label can also be applied to those activities of the church that simply maintain the status quo

Those things that a church does that only or even mainly serve the concerns of the members

Things that only serve to preserve the institution or please the members but don't contribute to the mission of Christ

And when maintenance becomes a higher priority than fulfilling God's mission, the church is out of balance

Mission

We have spent a lot of time talking about the mission of the church in this age being to make disciples of all people and how that begins with evangelism and then continues with teaching them the things of God

Notice that there is nothing in the biblical definition of our mission that concerns making things comfortable for us

But many churches are more focused on creating and maintaining a comfortable institution for those who are inside the church than they are on reaching the lost outside the church

Christians in this country have fallen into the pattern of thinking that "mission" or being a "missionary" means going to a foreign place and ministering in a foreign language

But a mission field is wherever there are people who don't yet know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior

And when we take Scripture at face value and recognize that most people in the world are unsaved and then look at the population numbers of the nations, we see that we live in the third largest mission field on the planet

And we know that we have many to reach right here in our own backyard

A few years ago we undertook an effort to personally invite every household in the village to Brick Church for our Back to Church Sunday event and based on my personal experience of knocking on doors and talking with people it was clear to me that the vast majority of the people of Walworth do not have a relationship with Christ

Our mission isn't limited to the uttermost parts of the world but actually begins with our Jerusalem, our Judea, and our Samaria

Balance

Maintenance and mission are both necessary functions of the life of a church and neither can be eliminated

And what is needed is a clear understanding of maintenance and mission and a balance between the two

Looking back at our passage we see that the Samaritan woman was engaged in fetching water for her household

Did she need water?

I think we can say without a doubt that she did – it was necessary for the maintenance of her home

Did Jesus and his disciples need to eat, to rest, and to drink after their long walk?

Certainly, they needed to maintain their physical bodies, minds, and spirits just the same as people today do

Maintenance is a necessary part of our lives; we have things all around us and within us that need to be cared for

But when a church's planning, its budget, its expenditures, and its activities begin to tilt toward preserving the church as an institution and pleasing the concerns of its members rather than toward the mission we have been given we have a problem

Because those things should pale in comparison to the importance of spreading the gospel and making disciples

Just as they did for Jesus as the woman approached the well

Remember, Jesus was tired and his disciples left him by the well as they continued on into the city to find food

But even as he sat there, tired, hungry, and thirsty his priorities shifted as he saw the opportunity to witness to the woman who approached him

Her salvation became the most important concern Jesus had at that moment and all those other concerns were pushed to the background while he attended to her need

Years ago Kathy and I were camping with our girls who were very small and we decided to take a nature walk around the park

Thanks to my stellar map-reading skills that I learned while in the Boy Scouts we wound up walking some three to four times further than we had planned

You should have heard the moaning and groaning that went on as the girls became tired of walking

"My feet hurt!"

"Carry me!"

"How much farther?"

"I can't walk anymore!"

And then we came within sight of a playground and all the concerns of fatigue and sore feet were forgotten as they literally ran to the playground to play

They forgot all about being tired until we had to leave the playground and walk the remaining quarter mile or so back to our campsite that is

My girls were no less tired when the playground came into view than they were just a minute before but their priorities shifted and their concern changed from finding the comfort of camp to having fun on the swings

Jesus was no less tired, hungry and thirsty but his priorities changed as he demonstrated his concern for the woman was greater than his concern for himself and his comfort

We aren't told what happened after the events that John recorded here for us

But I have to believe the woman filled her jar with water and carried it home at some point

I have to believe that Jesus and his disciples eventually ate the food that the disciples had purchased

I believe they all laid down at some point that evening for a good night's rest

In other words, I believe they took care of their maintenance concerns once the mission was addressed

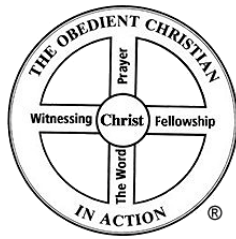
Jesus didn't deny that maintenance was important and necessary but he knew it must be subordinate to the mission

It's all a matter of balancing concerns and priorities and making sure to keep the first things first

Conclusion

Navigator wheel

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The Navigators organization has a logo of a four-spoked wheel that illustrates the need for balance in the Christian life and I believe it also works in regard to the life of a church

Since a church is nothing more than a collection of believers I guess that makes sense

You will notice that the wheel has Jesus at the hub which indicates he is the center of it all

But then you notice the four words written on the four spokes of the wheel

The vertical spokes have to do with our relationship with God and they say "The Word" and "Prayer"

The horizontal spokes have to do with our human relationships and they say "Witnessing" and "Fellowship"

I thought long and hard about changing the spokes to turn it into a more fitting illustration for the sermon but in the end I decided that the Navigators had done a really good job in designing their wheel

For our purposes, though, we could write the words "Mission" and "Maintenance" above their witnessing and fellowship spokes

The whole point of the illustration though is that of balance because if we make any of the spokes longer meaning that we emphasize one of the activities another has to be de-emphasized then we will be out of balance and our "wheel" won't run smoothly

I often share with Kathy what I am preaching about and bounce ideas off of her and she makes a really good sounding-board

I think she enjoys me bouncing sermon points off of her more than she did stamping the concepts back when I was designing tooling but she was always good at listening even though she didn't know anything about what I was doing and usually just the activity of saying my thoughts out loud to another person showed me the answer

But I digress...

Anyway, we were talking about this idea of balance in the life of a Christian and in the life of a church and it occurred to me that this isn't a matter of equality – it's not a 50/50 proposition

In other words, we don't have to spend exactly half our time reading God's Word and praying or we're out of balance or spend equal time witnessing and fellowshiping

That wouldn't be balance

Balance is the two "opposing" rungs acting in harmony with one another to keep functioning smoothly as individual believers and as the church in the way that God designed us in order to complete our mission of making disciples and that may well mean spending more time and money on one aspect or the other to make that happen

And this may require some adjustment as we pray asking God to show us where we have allowed our concerns to have priority over his concerns

It's said that Abraham Lincoln was asked during the Civil War whether he thought God was on the side of the Union

He is reported to have replied, "My concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right."

I would hope that our chief concern would also be that we would always be on God's side and that his priorities would be our priorities

Let's pray