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To Whom I Send You

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Series: The Mind of Christ

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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The ambassador was a man of dignity and poise. He knew just what to say in virtually every situation. His speeches were works of art. His command of the English language put him in a class by himself. Kings and dictators alike enjoyed his company. He was at ease with men of high standing and great achievement. He was considered at the top of his career ladder.

You can imagine the anticipation, then, when the president sent him a personal telegram inviting him to the White House to discuss reassignment. Flooding his mind on the airplane trip to Washington were vivid imaginations of Cabinet appointments, a U.N. ambassadorship, or even the possibility of a vice-presidential nomination. Where could he go from here? Only up, he surmised, only up.

Though he was basically a calm man, as he entered the Oval Office there was an excitement in his spirit that he seldom experienced. The president entered the room. They both sat down. "Raymond," the president began, "You have done a masterful job at every assignment you have been given. Your country is proud of you." The ambassador displayed a bit of false humility as he responded. Basically, he agreed, but he knew it was poor politics to admit to your own greatness. "Thank you, Mr. President," he answered modestly, "I just do my best".

"I have a new assignment for you," the nation's leader went on, without so much as a hesitation. "Are you ready for it?" "Indeed I am," the ambassador gushed, "indeed I am". With that, the president took out a map and pointed to a tiny little African nation, which had been struggling for independence for years, had suffered through countless dictators, and whose borders touched three of the most unsettled nations in the world. Bloodshed, famine, and unrest were the characteristics of the entire region.

"I want you to be our new ambassador to Gwageni," the president quietly went on. "It is a new, emerging nation, and we need stable representation there." The ambassador felt faint.

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He was comfortable in palaces and boardrooms, in receptions and banquets, but in Gwageni? He was above that. That was an assignment for a fledgling politician trying to earn his wings. It was a put-down for such a man of nobility and prestige as he deemed himself to be.

His face flushed, his words came slowly. “But, Mr. President, have I done something wrong?” he asked. “Is this some kind of punishment?” The commander-in-chief of the world’s most powerful nation grew solemn. The lines on his face tightened as he answered. “No, my friend, this is not punishment. A true ambassador goes wherever he is sent. And the better he is, the more difficult his assignments will get. Your ambassadorship is not a reward, it is a challenge. And this is your next challenge.”

The ambassador, incidentally, resigned. He never envisioned such humiliation when he signed on to the diplomatic corps 20 years before. To him, the more faithful he was, the more he would be rewarded with tasks that were accompanied by honor. The last thing he wanted to do was to associate with people of low estate.

Too bad, he missed the most important assignment of his career. Had he accepted and had he done well, the president had in mind a great promotion. This was his big test and he failed.

Our Commander-in-Chief sometimes does the same thing. Sometimes He sees us getting prideful about the environment in which He has placed us, and He sees us setting up limitations to our ministries. He sees our churches becoming country clubs, our ministries becoming socially acceptable, our friendships becoming limited to those we feel comfortable with economically, socially, and ethnically. In other words, in our success, we are getting proud, and beginning to limit God. “Wherever He leads, I’ll go,” we sing, but what we really mean is: “Lead me to the ones who are higher than I...” We want to do God’s will unless it involves the down and out, or the diseased, or the unclean, today’s lepers, if you will.

Though we are often ignorant of our hypocrisy and prejudices, God isn’t. And so, in love, He reassigns us. The job goes sour, and we end up in a little town far, far from the corporate eye. The ministry takes a different turn, and suddenly we find ourselves shoulder to shoulder with segments of society we’ve always avoided. Circumstances change and force us into fellowship with people we would like to forget exist. And, like our friend, the

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ambassador, we are prone to resign and retire. “Are you angry, God?” we ask. “Why else would you so humiliate us?” “No,” He would reply, “This is your most important assignment of all. As My ambassador, Beloved, *you go to whom I send you*, the more difficult the assignment, the more important it is.”

Never once did Jesus argue with the Father over an assignment. And if ever there was an agenda of humiliation, it was the Master’s. Here was the King of kings, the omnipotent, omniscient, Creator-God developing a ministry. How exciting. He has just consented to be baptized by his cousin, John. He begins His recruiting process for leadership training by letting His Father call out a group of rejects with no credentials at all, humanly speaking. His first miracle, His entrance into the world of the supernatural, is an insignificant incident at a wedding feast at the request of His mother. It’s got to get better. I mean here is God, wasting His time with nobodies, doing things that great men don’t do. Or do they?

We now follow the Master into the streets of the townships round about and if we look carefully, we get a glimpse of the kind of ministry He was going to have. It was not at all what we expected. A trio of encounters in the early chapters of John give us a backdrop for Christ’s ministry, and for ours. The great Ambassador-God, who had come to earth to save man, was being assigned to the dregs, to the castoffs, to the hypocrites and to the nobodies. The opening chapters give us a preview of what it’s like to be on duty in a foreign land for the King. It’s not what most of us imagine.

The first encounter immediately follows His experience in the temple and at the Passover following. You know the story so well you may miss the point. It goes like this:

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.

He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.

“How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s

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womb to be born!”

Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’

The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things?
(John 3:1-10 NIV)

Jesus’ first temptation to pride in the ministry following the Passover, interestingly enough, came from a Pharisee. The Pharisees would become Christ’s most obvious thorn in the flesh. These were the religious leaders who ought to have welcomed the son of God with open arms. They had a problem, however. His transforming message interfered with their traditions. Unless it could compute intellectually, they couldn’t handle it. They were impressed with Jesus’ miracles, but set out immediately to attribute them to Satan, or else His presence would require them to humble themselves and serve Him, admitting in the process that there was a kind of spiritual power they did not possess. It was an uncomfortable situation for them. The Pharisees go back perhaps three centuries before Christ came to earth. Josephus, himself a Pharisee, wrote that they were “extremely influential... and all prayers and sacred rites of divine worship were performed according to their exposition.”

So these were the men who wrote the book on religious behavior. While theologians disagree as to the degree to which they had polluted the truth, using only the words of Jesus Himself, we know that they were steeped in intellectual pride and devoid of spiritual power, and their hypocrisy was the epitome of everything that was wrong with Judaism at that point. The Master’s most scathing rebukes in the New Testament were not aimed at harlots or murderers, but at the Pharisees. They were hiding under the umbrella of truth, using God as a facade to hide their greed and insensitivity.

Nicodemus thus represented everything that Jesus came to overthrow. Had you or I been God, and had we been planning our

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itinerary, we certainly would have begun with a city-wide crusade outside Jerusalem. The last thing we'd have done was open our ministry with a one-on-one confrontation with the equivalent of a denominational leader of a Christian group who was not a Christian. That's the equivalent equation. Remember, Jesus didn't set his agenda. The Father did. The Father said, "to whom I send you, you will go." Jesus responded, "Yes, Lord, I always do those things that please the Father."¹

So Jesus saw the evening intrusion of this religious pagan as a divine interruption. He saw every intrusion into His schedule that way. Oh, that we could learn to see life's interruptions from God's perspective. Here He was, spending quality time with His newfound disciples, and the doorbell rings. They look out the window to see who's there. (You've never done that, I'm sure.) "It's a Pharisee," someone whispers. The whispers are followed by groans.

Jesus could well have seen Nick as a spy from the CIA, even then. But it really didn't matter who sent him. In Jesus' eyes, the Father sent him or he wouldn't be there. Oh, that we might get excited about every person who calls on the phone, and every person who crosses our path, seeing each one individually as a divinely-arranged encounter to utilize our credentials as ambassadors. Nicodemus began by flattering Jesus. It would only have taken an ounce of pride to keep the Master from confronting this man with the truth. We might likely have said, "Aw, shucks, Nick, I'm honored that you like my teaching."

Not Jesus. In total dependence upon His Father for the outcome, He told this man the truth. The truth was that he was lost and on his way to an eternal hell where the fire is never quenched and the worm never dies. Yes, this man, a religious leader, who was honored in the Sanhedrin and esteemed in the community, was not a believer. Not yet. Seminary degrees, religious titles, denominational positions do not impress God. This man knew the Scriptures. He knew all *about* the God of the Scriptures. But He did not *know* the God of the Scriptures personally. And so Jesus began His tour of duty on the mission field by clearly expressing the plan of salvation. "Except a man be born again, he cannot..."² Do you believe that? Do you believe that every man, woman, boy, or girl, on planet earth is lost and bound

¹ John 8:29 paraphrase

² John 3:3 (KJV)

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for eternity apart from God, unless he or she repents and is born again? You can rise to the top of most religious organizations without that conviction. But you cannot enter the kingdom of God. Jesus' ministry continued with this experience:

The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John,

although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.

When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

Now he had to go through Samaria.

So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"

(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." (John 4:1-10 NIV)

If there was anyone on the opposite end of the respect list from the Pharisees, it was a Samaritan woman. What Nicodemus may have reported, if anything, to the other Pharisees about Jesus, we don't know. We do know, however, from chapter four, verse one that dissension was developing and tension was developing among the Jewish leaders. So Jesus left Judea and returned to Galilee, Jesus *had* to go through Samaria". Not because it was the only way to go. Most Jews refused to go that way because of the bitter enmity that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. Jesus *had* to go through Samaria because His Father told him to go through Samaria, and "He always did those things that pleased the Father." This was not the safest route. It was certainly not the popular route. But the Father's plans for us are not often the popular plans, and are often not the safest, from man's perspective. Jesus *had* to go that way because, like Elijah on his trip to Zarephath, to be in God's will, there was no

other way to go.

Some 700 years before, when the Jews were defeated by the Assyrians, the sect called the Samaritans came into being. Tensions between the two peoples had never subsided since that time. About 400 years before Christ was born, the conflict moved from the political to the religious arena with the erection of the Samaritan temple at Mount Gerizim. In 128 BC, the Jews, under John Hyrcanus, actually marched into Samaria and destroyed their temple. Meanwhile, the Samaritans were considered outcasts in Israel and were confined to the outer courts of the temple in Jerusalem, treated like lowly Gentiles for the most part. It was thus not at all strange that in 6 A.D., a group of Samaritans, filled with hatred, desecrated the Jewish temple by spreading human bones within the temple porches and sanctuary during the Passover. The Samaritans believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but they held that Mt Gerizim was the only holy place of sacrifice (hence, the woman's initial response to Jesus), and they counted only the Pentateuch as divinely inspired. Thus, the writings that told of Messiah coming from the lineage of David were not part of their faith.

So Jesus' next evangelistic encounter was with a hated Samaritan, a Samaritan woman at that. Until Jesus came, women were treated with great disrespect, so a Samaritan woman would have no respect in Jewish society at all. That didn't bother the Master. In fact, it qualified her for the kingdom. Remember, God was going to call out the foolish, the weak, the nothings of this world to confound the wise.

He humbled Himself to go through Samaria. He humbled Himself to speak to this woman. He humbled Himself to offer her living water. He was pouring His life into the scum of the earth. There was no longer to be any scum of the earth. They were to become kings and princes in the kingdom which is to come. They who had nothing to offer would be more likely to understand that they had a need. But not only was this woman a Samaritan, she was an immoral Samaritan. She was living in sin, and her life had been a portrait of Scriptural violations. She needed counseling. Notice how Jesus dealt with her marriage problems and her relationship dilemma. He offered her the water of life.

The only way to lead people into Christian behavior is to lead them to Christ. Unless a man or woman understands their lost

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condition, they cannot receive God's Spirit and have the power to overcome their problems. This is a portrait of heavy-duty Christian counseling—first salvation then, the issues.

What an unlikely candidate for salvation she was, from man's perspective. We would never have so much as talked to her. She was an untouchable. She was a loser. The disciples, according to John 4:27 were shocked to see him speaking to her. Had they been around, they would have rushed Him past her and on to more important things. They did not yet understand the true meaning of humility. Humility doesn't see human distinctions. It doesn't limit its ministry to those who are acceptable, moral, and non-controversial.

If Jesus were here today, I am convinced that He would spend the bulk of His time with those we won't even talk to. I believe He would devote His energy to reaching those we walk around. I think Jesus would be found in the hospitals, the nursing homes, and the funeral homes. I think He would spend time with the street people, the handicapped, the unemployed, the unacceptable. I think based on what He did while He walked this earth He would devote the bulk of His time to finding people who were hurting and crying and desperate. I think He would pour His life out for the very people we avoid.

Not only did Jesus not avoid this Samaritan woman, He did not condescend to her, either. That's another lesson we need to learn. Not just to whom we should go, but how we should go—*humbly*.

In the world's eyes, they may be nothing; but in God's eyes, they are so important *His Son died for them*. Unless we see them as God sees them, we will never demonstrate the kind of agape love that will draw them to Him.

The postscript to this story is that a revival broke out as a result of this woman's testimony, this woman we would have avoided.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."
(John 4:39 NIV)

That isn't all. The next verse reads:

So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days.

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And because of his words many more became believers.

(John 4:40,41 NIV)

He stayed where? He stayed in Samaria, in their homes. How humiliating. How wonderful. God was beginning to demonstrate on planet earth the eradication of man-made barriers and the implementation of the love of God to man.

On the Master went into Galilee. This verse is classic,

(Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.)
(John 4:44 NIV)

Rejected in Judea, the Master made His way to Galilee. Understand that principle. Sometimes, those closest to you will have to be won by someone besides you. Sometimes familiarity is not a blessing. Jesus understood that. We need to, as well. It does not mean we are not to seek to evangelize those closest to us—not at all. It does mean that on occasion, we must humble ourselves and step aside and let others minister to those who cannot see Christ in us because they have known us so well. Here was the Creator-God going from one place to another to find those most receptive to His message of love. Talk about humility. There, of course, in Galilee, He was received.

When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him.

(John 4:45a NIV)

Part of His welcoming committee was a royal official whose son was in Capernaum terribly sick. You are familiar with the story. It is found in John 4:46-54. Probably one of Herod's officers, this man demonstrated great faith as Jesus told the man to go home without Him, that his son had indeed been healed. The man obeyed, and ultimately became a believer, along with his whole family. Here indeed was another unlikely prospect, a man the disciples probably did not even want Jesus to talk to. Yet here was a man with a need. The man now goes home and becomes an evangelist in his own world. That is the gospel. Somehow we have forgotten to minister to whomever God sends us to. Invariably, it will not be those we would have chosen. God is so much wiser than we are.

Most of us are afraid to let God choose our mission field. Most of us are afraid to let God choose the people we will give our hearts and our lives to. Had Jesus had our mentality, chances are these first three miraculous encounters, each of which led to a revival in their own way, would have been avoided. He encountered a

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Pharisee, a Samaritan harlot, and a Herodian government official, no way. We'd have stayed in more comfortable territory.

And we do, don't we? We think that by coming to church, fellowshiping with other Christians, and giving money to those who are somehow "called" to do the dirty work, we are doing the will of God. We are choosing whom we will get involved with. We make a big deal out of sharing Christ with someone in our office, but would never think of stopping to demonstrate God's love to the beggar on the street, or the man standing by the side of the road with a sign saying he wants a job.

How few really ever catch a glimpse of the mentality of the gospel. It is to take the good news to the hurting, because they know they are hurting. Why do we have to be begged to go to the nursing homes and share God's love? Because the people there are not pleasant to look at and be around, that's why. Jesus would be there. Why are we not more involved with helping the handicapped? Because they are difficult for us to relate to, so we run the other way. Jesus would be there. Why do we avoid the sick? The bereaved? The outcasts? We do not want to get involved, do we? Jesus would. He would humble Himself and go to whomever the Father sent Him to; and the Father would send Him to those who had the greatest need.

At some point in time, the church in our generations has got to move outside itself once more, if it is going to fulfill the great commission. It is going to have to get its hands dirty again. It is going to have to not only be willing to love the unlovable and the unlikely, it is going to have to be so filled with the love of God that it cannot help but love them. Until then, we will go on playing theological games and building theological superstructures that eliminate the very people from our midst that Jesus would be inviting to come in.

Would we even invite Him in? I'm not sure. He might be too untraditional, too radical, too common for us. He might be too dirty from rubbing elbows with the people we don't want to touch. Unless we learn to humble ourselves, we may well miss the blessing of understanding that the people He has for us to minister to just might not be the same people we're spending our time and energy trying to reach. And it may account for why there are not more coming to Christ in our generation. We may be avoiding Samaria. And we *must* go through Samaria to get to

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the Father's will.

Wherever He sends, that is where we must go. To whomever He sends us, that is to whom we must give our lives. Chances are, they may not be the people we would normally get involved with. Praise God. Each time we encounter someone we don't want to get involved with, dare we pray and ask God at that moment is this the one to whom I have been sent? Dare we? Dare we not?

Until we humble ourselves as Jesus did, we'll never know.

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