

CHRIST AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

John 4:1-42

Christ's growing popularity aroused the jealousy and increased the opposition of the envious Pharisees. Disliking both John the Baptist and Christ, they tried to create a rivalry between them. Since no such rivalry existed, Christ deemed it advisable and expedient for Him to leave Judea and to go into Galilee.

For nearly six centuries the Jews had held the Samaritans in contempt and refused to have anything to do with them. Hating the Samaritans, who were half Jew and half Gentile, more than they did full-blooded Gentiles, the Jews detoured around Samaria to avoid any contact with them.

Christ was not enslaved by any such prejudice. He set forth on the shortest and most direct route to Galilee, which was through Samaria. Why does the Bible say "He must needs go through Samaria"? It was necessary for Him to do so to carry on His work. He had a task to perform there. He must break down the barriers between the Jews and the rest of the world. There were sin-sick and needy souls in that country to whom He could minister.

I. The Place.

On his journey through Samaria Christ came to Jacob's well, which was about a ten minute's walk from ancient Sychar and the present town of Nablus. Through the centuries this well had slaked the thirst of thousands. By this well, which is one of the undisputed places associated with the life of our Lord, there took place one of the most interesting and memorable events recorded in the Scriptures.

It was about noon when Christ and His disciples arrived at Jacob's well. They were hot, tired, hungry, and thirsty. Having a body like theirs and ours, Christ knew the same weariness, hunger, and thirst that we know. Weary after traveling over the dusty roads on foot all morning long, Christ sat down on the parapet of the well to rest, while the disciples went into Sychar to buy food for the noonday meal. It was their intention for all to eat and drink together when they returned with the food. Even though He was tired, the Saviour was completely relaxed as He sat there and waited.

II. The Person.

Ere long the reverie of the Saviour was disturbed by the approach of a degraded and sinful woman from Sychar who had come to the well to draw water. Reaching up with her hand, she took the earthen waterpot from her head and sat it down on the parapet of the well, doubtless embarrassed because Christ Jesus was sitting there. This woman had come to the well at noon because she thought that she would be the only one there at that hour. To her surprise, there was One waiting for her Who knew all about her and her great need, One Who could save her and transform her, and put peace in her soul and hope in her heart.

Clad in the cheap and soiled apparel of her class, this woman, with a stained and shameful past, had a look of disappointment, disillusionment, and sadness on her face. Her only so-called friends were those who had been party of her ruin and participants in her life as an outcast. She was no longer hoping for anything new, or better, or different. She had come to the well at that unusual hour because she did not want to come in contact with the other women who despised her on account of her sinful life. She wanted to avoid the slights, sneers, and taunts which would have assailed her had she come in the early morning or in the cool of the evening. Embarrassed and disgusted that Christ was sitting there, with a bold and unsympathetic gaze she stared at Him.

In spite of her dense ignorance, racial prejudice, and terrible wickedness, the Saviour was exceedingly anxious to save this Samaritan woman. However, before the Saviour could meet her real need, there were numerous difficulties which had to be overcome.

III. The Procedure.

With remarkable wisdom and unusual tact, Christ asked her to help Him by giving Him a drink. In dealing with people whom He was trying to help, Christ frequently asked them to help Him. One of the ways to get close to another person is to render him a favor, but a still better way is to seek and to receive a kindness at his hand. In His initial effort to gain her confidence our Lord asked a favor of her saying, "Give me to drink." This request awakened her surprise, broke down her prejudice, and appealed to her sympathy. Half in astonishment and half in sarcasm, the woman said, "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?" In other words, she was saying, "You Jews feel that you are better than the Samaritans. You will not have anything to do with us. Why, then, do you ask me for a drink?"

Christ declined to say why He had disregarded the racial prejudice of His people, and completely ignored her remark. To His people she was a hated Samaritan, but to Him she was a needy soul. It was as if He were saying, "Woman, I have asked you for a drink of water; but if you only knew who I am, and what I can do for you, you would ask of Me, and I would give you living water."

In the course of their conversation, Christ told the woman that those who drank water from Jacob's well would thirst again, which fact she had learned already by experience, but that there was something far better than the water from the well by which He sat. He told her that the water which He gave possessed the quality of satisfying completely all who drank it. His free offer revealed the possibility of her need being met. In fact, Christ never holds out before anyone the prospect of any good without the possibility of its realization. By suggesting that the thirst of her soul might be satisfied thus, He aroused her desire for the living water about which He spoke.

The woman said, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." Aware that a knowledge of one's sinful condition must precede salvation, our Lord probed into her sinful life for the purpose of teaching her the necessity of repentance by saying, "Call thy husband, and come hither." Christ sought to convince her that she could not drink of the living water until she had repented of and forsaken her sin. When He began to talk to her about her sin, she tried to change the subject, but He refused to be side-tracked and drawn into a religious argument. However, He did make it plain that spiritual worship is not a question of physical location or bodily position, but rather of heart condition. When people are brought face to face with their sins, they immediately say, "Let's talk about something else!" The Samaritan woman was no exception to this rule.

When the disciples returned with the food, they were astonished to find their Lord engaged in conversation with this solitary, Samaritan woman, but they did not say anything to Him about why He was doing so. Neither did they inquire as to what she wanted. The amazement of the disciples was understandable in the light of the social standards of their day. Christ refused to turn His back on a sinful and lost woman, who was bound for eternal destruction, simply to conform to the social standards of that day. In fact, He had come into the world for the specific purpose of saving sinners, and here was one such person who might not have another opportunity to be saved. Upon her acceptance of Christ as her personal Saviour, He saved her soul and transformed her life. The longing of her heart was satisfied completely.

In her joyous excitement the woman hastened back to Sychar to tell her friends and townspeople what Christ had done for her. She wanted them to have the same kind of joy that

she possessed. When souls are forgiven and come to know and love Christ, they want others to know Him too. That accounts for their telling others about Christ and inviting them to come to Him, in order that they may have the joyous experience of being saved also.

When the disciples returned with food, they asked Christ to eat, but He declined to do so. When they had left Him, He was weary, hungry, and thirsty. In the meantime He had been refreshed without eating any food. It is always a strange thing how a great task can lift a man above and beyond bodily needs. Christ informed His disciples that He had food about which they knew nothing. In their simplicity they wondered if someone had brought Him food to eat. Then He told them: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." By this He meant the work of God.

The great keynote of the life of Christ was His submission to the will of God. He was the only person Who ever was or ever will be perfectly obedient to the will of God. He always did that which God wanted Him to do. Forty-four times the Gospel of John tells us about Christ saying that He was sent by God. Again and again He spoke of the work which had been given to Him to do. He was under orders from the Father. Obedience was the very essence and moving power of His life. It is His great desire that all Christians should be obedient also.

To do the will of God is the only way to real peace. To do the will of God is the only way to happiness. There can never be any real happiness when Christians set their human ignorance over against the divine wisdom. To do the will of God is the only way to power. When Christians go their own ways, they have nothing to call on except their own strength, and therefore failure is inevitable. When they go in God's way, they go in God's power, and therefore victory is certain. To do His will provides us with the refreshment which we need.

To His disciples Christ stated that the thing that strengthened, fortified, and exhilarated Him was "to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." In other words, the doing of God's will, and the finishing of God's work, constituted His meat and His drink. Thus our Lord expressed His glorious purpose in life. He told His disciples His object in living. No other ever came into this world for such a heavenly, heroic and sublime a purpose. The doing of God's will and the finishing of God's work were the things that satisfied Christ's hunger and quenched His thirst.

Can you honestly say what Christ said, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work"? What is your meat and drink? What is the thing that satisfies you most? In what do you find the greatest delight? Is it in self-indulgence and self-will, or is it in self-denial and surrender to the will of God? These are the alternatives.

Each of us has been placed on this earth to conform to God's will in the performance of some specific task. That we are here is evidence that God has a purpose for each of us. That we have special abilities and opportunities is evidence of the nature of that purpose, and it explains its character. Our tasks, for which our various talents of body, mind, and spirit have fitted us, have come to us through the will of God. Let us follow the will of our Saviour Who was submissive to the authority of God, confident in the purpose of God, and satisfied with the will of God! There is no joy in life like living according to the will of God. Full satisfaction is to be found only in obedience to the will of God. The happiest days of my life have been those when I knew that I was in God's will and doing what He wanted me to do. Many Christians can bear the same testimony.

In response to the testimony of the Samaritan woman, many of the people started toward the well to see and to hear Christ for themselves. As they streamed along in their white robes across the fields, Christ said: "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for

they are white already to harvest." The white-robed crowd was the harvest which He was eager to reap. Here the sower and the harvester could rejoice at the same time. Christ told His disciples that they would reap a crop which had not been produced by their labor. Furthermore, He told them that the day would come when they would sow and others would reap. It was as if He said: "Some day you will labor and you will see nothing from it. Some day you will sow and you will pass from the scene before the harvest is reaped. Never fear! Never be discouraged! The sowing will not be in vain; the seed will not be wasted! Others will see the harvest which it will not be given to you to see." This statement of the Saviour is the reminder of an opportunity. The harvest waits to be reaped. It is also the reminder of a challenge. No word spoken for Christ will ever be in vain. No undertaking for Christ will ever fail. If we do not live to see the result of our labors for the Lord, others will see the finished product. So, there is no reason for despair in the Christian life.

The Samaritans were introduced to Christ by this woman whom He had saved. The Word of God must be transmitted by one person to another. The gospel of Christ cannot be delivered to those who have never heard it unless there is someone to deliver it. "Christ has no hands but our hands, etc." It is our precious privilege and tremendous responsibility to introduce people to Christ. The Samaritan woman could say to others, "Look what Christ has done for me and to me." When the Samaritans were introduced to Christ, they asked Him to remain with them in order that they might get to know Him better. In response to their urgent request, Christ tarried for a couple of days. During that time many others listened attentively to Christ and to those who were witnessing for Him and they, too, accepted Him as their Saviour. He completely satisfied their thirst for light, for life, and for love. Christ still stands ready to save any and all who will trust Him as a personal Saviour. Only Christ can save and satisfy your soul. Therefore, receive Him now.