

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

John 4:1-42

Christ's growing popularity increased the envious opposition of the Pharisees. In consequence of a fresh outbreak of hatred on their part, our Lord found it advisable and expedient for Him to leave Judea and go to Galilee. Ordinarily the Jews, in making a journey from Judea to Galilee, would make a long detour around Samaria, rather than defile themselves by any contact with the despised Samaritans while passing through their country. For nearly six hundred years the Jews and the Samaritans had hated each other. The enmity between them was mutual. To the Israelites the Samaritans were an outcast people. They were of mixed blood--half Jew and half Gentile. They actually hated them worse than they did the Gentiles. They held them in such contempt that they made a long and circuitous detour around Samaria.

Christ Jesus was never enslaved by any such narrowness, prejudice or bigotry. His superiority to the day in which He lived appears in the circumstance of His setting forth on the more direct route through Samaria to Galilee. His very presence in that country was evidence of His break with the narrowness of Jewish opinions. He went through Samaria because He knew there were sin-sick and needy souls in that country to whom He could minister. He had an important work to do there.

In the course of His journey through Samaria, He came to Jacob's well near Sychar. By this famous well, which is one of the undisputed places associated with the life of our Lord, there took place one of the most beautiful, interesting and memorable events recorded in the Bible. It was about noon when Christ and His disciples arrived at the well. They were hot, tired, hungry and thirsty. Weary from the journey, Christ sat down on the parapet of the well, while His disciples went into the village to buy food. It was their intention for all to eat and drink together when they returned with the food.

Even though thoroughly tired, the Saviour completely relaxed as He sat there on the old well-curb. Ere long the reverie of the Master was disturbed by the coming of a Samaritan woman to the well for the purpose of drawing water. That was a very unusual incident. The women were the carriers of water, but it was their custom to draw the water in the early morning or in the cool of the evening. It was very unusual for a woman to go to the well at noontide. The fact that this woman came to the well in the heat of the day indicates that there was an unhappy relationship between her and the other women. She came at that unusual hour to avoid the slights, sneers and taunts that would have assailed her had she come in the morning or in the evening. She did not want to come in contact with the other women who despised her on account of her sinful life. Realizing that others did not want her company, she came at the hour when she thought she would be alone at the well.

Weary and depressed in spirit, this poor woman advanced toward the well with a look of disillusionment and sadness on her face. Expectation had faded from her face, and she was no longer hoping for better days. With a bold and unsympathetic gaze she stared at Christ, somewhat embarrassed and disgusted that He was sitting there.

There were many difficulties which had to be overcome before the Saviour could reach her soul and meet her real need. They were strangers. They belonged to opposite sexes. She was a notorious sinner. But, in spite of her dense ignorance, racial prejudice and terrible wickedness, the Lord Jesus was exceedingly anxious to save her.

With remarkable wisdom and unusual tact, Christ made a request of her which appealed to her sympathy. He asked her to help Him by giving Him a drink. Nothing has the effect upon another like taking the place of a suppliant. 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. Fully aware of this, the Lord Jesus asked the woman to give Him a drink. His request awakened her surprise and broke down her prejudice. That this Man, whom she

recognized as a Jew, should address her was enough to awaken her surprise.

In view of the fact that the Jews refused to have any dealings with the Samaritans, an absolute boycott existing between them, it is rather surprising that He spoke thus to her. 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 reply to her query, the Master declined to enter a discussion as to the merits of that ancient dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans, or to say why He had disregarded the prejudice of His race. Instead of that, He told her of a real and present opportunity. It was as if He had said, "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 the conversation which ensued, Christ told her 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 beside which He sat. He told her that the water which He gave possessed the quality of satisfying completely all who drank it. Suggesting that the thirst of her soul might be satisfied thus, He aroused her desire for the living water about which He spoke.

Becoming interested in obtaining this living water, 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 sin for the purpose of teaching her the necessity of repentance. Immediately she perceived that she was face to face with One Who really knew her. It was His problem to show her that she could not drink of the living water until she had repented of her sin and forsaken it.

Thinking that Jesus was a mind reader, she called Him a prophet. When He began to talk to her about her sin, she tried to change the subject. That is just the way with people. When they are brought face to face with their sins, they immediately say, "Let's talk about something else!" Thinking that she should justify herself in some fashion, the woman hastened to leave the impression that her problem was not moral, but intellectual. She tried to make Christ think that her manner of life was not due to her weakness or wickedness, but because she was confused. She suggested that she had not been able to decide where she ought to worship, here at Gerizim or yonder at Jerusalem. Pointing to the mount where the Samaritans had their temple, she said, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." In other words, she remarked to Jesus, "The theologians and the doctors disagree. I should like to know what you think on the subject." He noted that she wanted to talk about the religion of her fathers. Many today are relying upon the religion of their fathers and mothers, but it availeth them nothing. If you should ask some people the question, "Are you a Christian?" you need not be surprised to get an answer something like this, "My mother was a good Christian, and my father was a deacon in the church." That will not save your soul, because salvation is a matter of your personal relationship to the Lord.

Christ refused to be side-tracked or to be drawn into a religious argument. He merely made it plain that spiritual worship is not a question of bodily position or physical location but rather of heart condition. In reference to her query about the place of worship, the Master taught that the worship of God is spiritual. "They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit." The worship of God must also be scriptural. "They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." It is noteworthy that this verse does not say "in spirit and in sense", "in spirit and in sincerity", or "in spirit and in sentiment." It says "in spirit and in truth." We cannot substitute sense for truth, sincerity for truth or sentiment for truth. It is folly to talk of spiritual worship which sets aside the truth of God declared in His Word. Spiritual worship is scriptural, and scriptural worship is spiritual. Christ made it plain to this woman that the true approach to God is not by Mount Gerizim, nor Mount Zion, but by repentance and faith, and

a heart cleansed from sin through the power of the blood.

Stirred in heart and perplexed in mind the woman said, "I know that Messias cometh which is called Christ: when He is come, He will tell us all things." In other words, she said, "He will answer all of these perplexing questions and settle all of these controversial problems and all of us will worship Him." When she thus expressed the longing of her heart to see the Messiah, Christ immediately revealed Himself to her, saying, "I that speak unto thee am He."

When the disciples returned from seeking food, they were astonished to find their Lord engaged in conversation with this solitary, Samaritan woman, but they did not ask Him why He was doing so. Neither did they inquire as to what she wanted. It was very unusual for any rabbi to be engaged in conversation in public with a woman, but more especially with a Samaritan. The amazement of the disciples was understandable in the light of the social standards of their day. Nevertheless, the Master talked naturally, seriously and lengthily with her without a thought of doing anything sensational or out of the ordinary. He 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.

Having declared Himself to be the Messiah for whom both Jews and Samaritans were looking, the woman accepted Him as her personal Saviour, whereupon her soul was saved and her life was transformed. In her joyous excitement she hastened back to her townspeople and gave them a glowing testimony of what Christ had done for her. She shared her new-found joy with all who would listen to her. She fearlessly and faithfully urged them to accept Him as their Saviour, and assured them that, if they would do so, He would give them salvation and complete satisfaction. As a result of her loving and enthusiastic testimony, many of the Samaritans believed on Christ and were gloriously saved.

A goodly number of the Samaritans believed sufficiently in the woman's testimony that they went to Jacob's well to see and to hear the One Who had done so much for her. After hearing the Saviour in person, they besought Him to remain in their midst a while longer. In response to their urgent request, He tarried for a couple of days. During that time many others listened attentively to Him and received Him as their Saviour. He completely satisfied their thirst for light, life and love. He still stands ready to save all who will trust Him as a personal Saviour. Only Christ can save and satisfy your soul.

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live.'
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him."