

JOHN 4

JESUS, THE SOUL-WINNER

Jesus' nine months' tour in Judea was too successful to please the Pharisees, and so He decided to transfer the scene of His ministry to Galilee. There were two roads to that region from Jerusalem – one along the Jordan Valley, and the other through Samaria. Jesus selected the latter route for reasons which dated from the council-chamber of eternity.

It was the month of January. In the land of Israel, the weather was bright and warm; the thickets were vocal with sweet-voiced birds; the brooks murmured along their beds; the pasture-lands were bright with flowers; and all the land was astir with the sounds of industrious toil. After a morning's walk – around noon – the Savior and His little band of followers reached the neck of a narrow valley that lay between the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim. In that spot, the opening of an ancient well lent a ready resting-place for the Master while His disciples went forward to the town of Sychar, lying further up the valley, in order to purchase food. Jesus sat there, deeply musing upon the beauties of the scenery and the historic associations of the place, and fellowshiping with His Father. Few persons came to the well at that hour; but later in the day, it would be thronged with women bringing their pitchers to obtain a supply of water for their homes. But presently, the solitude was broken by a Samaritan woman, who seemed to be trying to come at an hour when she would be unobserved. To this woman, and on that spot, our Lord spoke words which are immortal. That well was a pulpit from which He addresses all who wearily seek after life, joy, and blessedness, and He bids them to come to Himself!

We notice, first of all, that Christ makes a request appealing to sympathy. He asked the woman to give Him a drink. Not only would the mention of His thirst touch the heart of a woman, but the fact that a Jew would ask for water from a Samaritan (whom they typically hated and despised) would indicate that He felt sympathy for her. In asking a favor, the Petitioner places Himself upon a level with the person He addresses. He was willing to speak to a poor woman who was a social outcast, and belonged to a despised group of people. And the very fact that He would even make a request of her made her willing to listen further to what He had to say. He won His way into her heart by His first word.

Christ also makes a claim appealing to curiosity. If curiosity had been aroused already by His request, it is now fanned into a flame by the statement which falls from His lips: "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." The woman immediately begins to ask herself

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Christ converses with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well – verses 1-26
- ❖ The effects of His conversation with her – verses 27-42
- ❖ He heals a nobleman's son – verses 43-54

who this Person can be. Does He claim to be greater than Jacob who gave the well? What are the claims of Christ? What does He say of Himself? Does He declare that He is more than a mere man – even the Divine Son of God? If people are to be saved, they must be brought to seriously consider these very questions.

The Savior then makes a promise, appealing to a conscious need: “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.” Satisfaction was exactly what this poor woman was longing for! She had searched for it all her life; and in her search, she had been restrained by no laws of either God or man. Nevertheless, she was still thirsting; and her thirst would never be satisfied until she found her personal Lord and Savior in Christ. There is a thirst – a sense of lack – in every heart, which our Lord promises to satisfy. To truly know Him and trust Him is to have “a well of water” within the heart, “springing up unto eternal life.” All that Jesus meant and promised, this poor woman could not have understood; but in her eager reply, we hear the inarticulate cry of every human heart: “Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come all the way hither to draw!”

Jesus now gives a command which appeals to the conscience: “Go, call thy husband, and come hither.” Why this command? Because no matter how fully we may admit the claims of Christ, or how truly we may understand His promises, we can never find real satisfaction and peace until we make right that one thing in life that is wrong. Jesus put His finger on the sore spot in this woman’s life, and she immediately shrinks back. Her answer is half-true. The Man Who was unknown to her has given a command which touches the dark secret of her soul; and not unnaturally, she replies, “I have no husband.”

Now Jesus makes a disclosure which appeals to the religious instinct in the woman’s heart (verses 17-20). He lays bare the whole story of her life; and in doing so, He reveals such Divine insight that she immediately calls Him “a prophet” and asks Him a question relating to the true place of worship – whether it was Samaria or Jerusalem. This woman thinks of religion, however, as a matter of formality and ceremony. She has never found any satisfaction in its observances.

Our Lord now makes a revelation appealing to hope. He tells the woman that her trouble has not been in reference to the place of worship, but as to the fact that she has never truly worshiped at all. “God is a Spirit,” He explains; and therefore, true worship is not a question of location, but of faith and love. It is not a matter of rituals and ceremonies, but of spiritual reality; its essence is found in a true knowledge of God, and in fellowship with Him as a loving Father. Jerusalem had indeed been the Divinely-appointed place of worship, but the time had now come when there are to be no local restrictions to worship. True worshipers of God will not be concerned with places and symbols, for they will worship “in spirit and truth.” But there is a need for some Mediator to give this fuller knowledge of God, and to bring guilty souls into fellowship with Him;



and this fact is suggested by the next words of the woman: "I know that Messiah cometh ... he will declare unto us all things." Some hope of such a Savior had been kept alive in her heart, in spite of all her ignorance and sin.

The woman is now ready for the supreme word that Jesus spoke to her, and this was a declaration that appealed to faith: "I that speak unto thee am he!" Did the woman believe?

Her action is more eloquent than speech! Six times, Jesus has addressed her; and each time, she has made a reply. But when His seventh word declares Him to be the Messiah, she makes no verbal answer; but we read that she "left her waterpot, and went away into the city, and saith to the people, Come, see a man, who told me all things that ever I did: can this be the Christ?" We do not know just how perfect her faith may have been; but we do know that when a man or woman becomes so interested in the Savior that their daily tasks are temporarily forgotten, and their one desire becomes that of telling others about Jesus – we may safely conclude that their faith is real and vital.

As we read how this new disciple went away on her surprising and successful mission, and as we see the Samaritans coming forth to welcome the Messiah, this narrative reaches its climax of interest and inspiration. In reply to the disciples who had now returned and offered Him food to eat, Jesus declares that His deeper satisfaction lies in revealing Himself to fainting souls – as He had just done to the woman at the well.

Jesus now sees the Samaritans streaming forth to meet Him because of the witness that they had heard from the woman, and He declares that opportunities for fruitful testimony are always at hand for His followers. There is never reason for delay; the fields "are white already," and ready to harvest. The Samaritans received the Savior gladly into their city and their hearts. They demanded no miracle, and they trusted Him simply because of His Word. And herein we catch a prophetic vision of the multitudes from all nations of the earth, who are glad to welcome the Messiah, and to find life in Him Whom they declare to be "the Saviour of the world."

The conditions which met Jesus as He returned to Galilee are summarized by quoting a proverb which he himself repeated on two subsequent occasions: "A prophet hath no honor in his own country." For 30 years, Jesus had lived among these Galileans; but they had not recognized Him as a Prophet, and they had no dream of His Divine mission. He had received no honor in His own country, but now He had been to Jerusalem and had become the center of interest. Many had declared themselves ready to receive Him as the Messiah for whom they looked – that is, a political leader and a worker of miracles. Upon His return to Galilee, His fame preceded him: "The Galileans received him, having seen all the things that he did in Jerusalem." But they believed in Him now only because of His reputation and His works.

This kind of imperfect “faith,” however, does have the potential to grow and develop into perfect trust. On the other hand, it may also give place to doubt and hate. In the 6th chapter of this Gospel, we will see an example of the latter; but here in verses 43-54, we have a charming instance of the former. The picture of the nobleman of Capernaum illustrates the gradual development of true belief in the Savior; and the details of his situation are drawn just as clearly as in the case of the woman of Samaria, or of the man who was born blind in chapter 9.

At first, the nobleman’s faith regarded Jesus as merely a worker of miracles. He came to Jesus as He was in Cana, and he came because of dire need. He believed that Jesus could heal his son, who was “at the point of death.” He requested Jesus to come down with him to Capernaum and effect the cure, but he received what seemed like a severe rebuke: “Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe.” These words were intended to show the man that Christ claimed to be much more than a performer of wonders; He wished men to know and trust and commit themselves to Him. But the petitioner only displayed more faith and intensity in his repeated request: “Sir, come down ere my child die!” Jesus now applied a severe test, yet one which was designed to instruct the man and develop his faith still further: “Go thy way,” He said; “thy son liveth.” It was difficult for the nobleman to leave the Prophet Whom he had hoped to bring to his home. It was not easy for him to believe that his son had been cured so instantly. The command of the Lord indicated that He possessed more power than the man had supposed, and that He could heal at a distance and out of the unseen! But the nobleman’s faith rose to meet this new demand; for without delay, He left the Lord and started for his home. And as he went, he met his rejoicing servants, who were rushing to tell him that his child had not only begun to improve, but had also been cured – at the very hour when the Lord gave the promise of hope!

The inspired historian concludes this portion of the narrative by reminding us that this is the second of two miracles that were both done at Cana of Galilee. But what a strange contrast is suggested by the circumstances of these two miracles! One is the home of gladness and marriage-festivities; and the other is the darkened home of anxiety, pain, and the shadow of death! However, both miracles contain a testimony to the Divine Person of Christ. They both result in a deepening faith, and they both illustrate the joy and blessedness that result from trusting in Him. The first of these two miracles brought to a joyous close the private ministry of our Lord before He offered Himself to the Jews as their predicted Messiah. But this second miracle in Cana ends the opening scenes of His public ministry; and it reminds us that even during the coming days of suspicion and hatred and opposition, there are still persons – like this nobleman of Capernaum – who trust Him and love Him!

Lord, we repent of times when we have longed to fill the needs of our soul with things of the world, instead of finding true satisfaction in the water of life. Amen.