

## THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA

“Jesus saith unto her. Give Me to drink... Jesus saith unto her. I that speak unto thee am He.” John 4:7, 26.

John very significantly set side by side our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria. The persons were very different. The one was a learned rabbi of reputation, influence and large theological knowledge of the then fashionable kind. The other was an alien woman, poor, for she had to do this menial task of water drawing in the heat of the day, and of questionable character. “For thou hast five husbands. and who thou now hast is not thy husband. in that saidst thou truly.”

The diversity of persons necessitates great differences in the form of our Lord's address to each, but the resemblances are as striking as the divergences. In both we have the Lord's method of gradually unveiling the Truth to a susceptible soul, beginning with symbol and a hint, gradually enlarging the hint and translating the symbol, and finally unveiling Himself as the Giver and the Gift.

There is another resemblance, in both the characteristic gift in that of the Spirit of life and perhaps, in both the symbol is the same. For we read of one of “water and the Spirit” and in the other of “the fountain within, springing into everlasting life.” However that may be, the process of teaching is all but identical in substance in both cases, though in form so various.

Now the words of our passage which we have before us are the Lord's first and His last words in this conversation to the Samaritan woman. And what a gulf lies between. They are linked together by the intervening sayings, and constitute with these a great ladder, of which the foot is fast on the Earth, and the top fixed in Heaven. On the one hand, He owns the lowest necessities, on the other, He makes the highest claims. Let us consider this remarkable juxtaposition, and

try to gather the lessons from the Samaritan woman at the well.

The first thing she brings out, is the mystery of the dependent Christ. “Give Me to drink... and I am He.” Try to see for a moment this situation with the woman's eyes. She comes down from her little village, up amongst the cliffs on the hillside, across the narrow, hot valley, beneath the sweltering sunshine reflected from the rounding mountains, and she finds, in the midst of the lush vegetation round the ancient well, a solitary, weary Jew, travel-worn, evidently exhausted, for His disciples had gone away to buy food, and He was too wearied to go with them. Looking into the well, but having no dipper or vessel by which to get any of its cool treasure (“a cup of cold water in My Name”). A cool drink is like good news from a far country.

We lose a great deal of Christ's request if we suppose that it was merely a way of getting into conversation with this woman, a “breaking of the ice.” It was a great deal more than that. It was the utterance of a felt and painful necessity, which He Himself could not supply without a breach of what He conceived to be His filial dependence.

He could have brought water out of the well. He did not need to depend upon the pitcher that the disciples had perhaps unthinkingly carried away with them when they went to buy bread. He did not have to ask the woman to give, but He chose to do so.

We lose much if we do not see in this incident far more than the woman saw, but we lose still more if we do not see what she did see. All the words which the Lord spoke to her are no mere way of introducing a conversation or spiritual themes, but He asked for a draught which He needed, and which He had no other way of getting.

So, then, here stands our Lord's true compassion in two of the distinguishing characteristics of our weak humanity, subjection

to physical necessities, and dependence on gracious help. We find Him weary, hungry, thirsty, sometimes slumbering. And all these instances are documents and **proofs for us that He was a true man like ourselves.** And that, like ourselves, He depended on "The woman that ministered to Him," for the supply of His necessities, and so He knows the limitations of our social and helpless humanity.

But then a wearied and thirsty man is nothing of importance. But here is a man who "humbled Himself" to be weary and to thirst. The keynote of this Gospel, the one thought which unlocks all its treasures, and to the elucidation of which, in all its aspects, the whole book is devoted is, "The Word was made flesh." That is what this Samaritan woman teaches us. Only when you let in the light of the last words spoken to this woman, "I that speak unto thee am He," do we understand the pathos, the sublimity, the depth and blessedness of meaning which lie in the first ones spoken to her, "Give Me to drink."

When we see that He bowed Himself, and willingly stretched out His hands for the fetters, we come to understand the significance of these traces of His manhood. The woman says, with wonder, "How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of Me?" and that was wonderful. But, as He hints to her, if she had known more clearly who this Person before her really was, that seemed to be a Jew, a deeper wonder would have crept over her spirit. **The wonder is that the eternal Word should need the water of the well, and should ask it of a poor human creature.**

And why all this humiliation? He could, as I have said, have wrought a miracle. He that fed thousands, He that had turned water into wine at the rustic marriage-feast, would have no difficulty in quenching His own thirst if He had chosen to use His miraculous power therefore. **But He here shows us that the true filial spirit will rather die than cast off its dependence on the Father,** and the same motive which led Him to reject the temptation in the wilderness, and to answer with sublime confidence, "Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every Word that pro-

ceedeth out from the mouth of God." forbids Him here to use other means of securing the draught that He so needed, that the appeal to the compassion of an alien, and the swift compassion of a woman's heart.

And then let us remember that the motive of this willing acceptance of the limitations and weaknesses of humanity is, in the deepest analysis, simply His love to us, as the Medieval hymn has it, "Seeing me, Thou satest weary."

In that lonely Traveller, worn, exhausted, thirsty, craving for a draught of water from a stranger's hand, is set forth, "The glory of the Father, full of GRACE and Truth." A strange manifestation of Divine glory this. But if we understand that the glory of God is the lustrous light of His self-revealing love, maybe we shall understand how, from that faint, craving voice, "Give Me to drink," that glory sounds forth more than in the thunders that rolled about the rocky peak of Sinai. What sounds out louder, "Thou shalt not," or "Give Me to drink?"

Strange to think, that the voice from those lips dry with thirst, which was low and weak, was the voice that spoke to the sea, "Peace, be still," and there was a calm; that said to demons, "Come out of him," and they evacuated their fortress; that cast its command into the grave of Lazarus, and he came forth; and which one day all that are in the grave shall hear, and hearing shall obey, "Give Me to drink... I that speak unto thee am He."

And then we see secondly, the self-revealing Christ with this woman. The process by which Christ gradually unveils His full character to this woman, to unspiritual and unsusceptible as she appeared at first sight to be, is interesting and instructive. Noting the singular divergence between the two sayings which we are using as our text, it is interesting to notice how the one gradually merges into the other.

First of all, Jesus Christ, as it were, opens a finger of His hand to let the woman have a glimpse of the gift lying there, that that may kindle a desire. And hints at some

depth in His person and nature all undreamed of by her yet, and which would be the occasion of greater wonder, and of a reversal of their parts, if she knew it.

Then in answer to her, half-understanding that He meant more than met the ear, and yet opposing the plain physical difficulties that were in the way, in that He had, "Nothing to draw with and the well is deep." and asking whether He were greater than our father Jacob, who also had given, and given not only a draught, but the well, our Lord enlarges her vision of the blessedness of the gift, though He says but little more of its nature, except in so far as that may be gathered from the fact that the water that He will give will be a permanent source of satisfaction, forbidding the pangs of unquenched desire ever again to be felt as pangs, and from the other fact that it will be an inward possession, leaping up with a fountain's energy and a life within itself, towards, and into everlasting life.

Next He strongly assails conscience and demands a change of mind, and reveals Himself as the Reader of the secrets of the heart. Then He discloses the great Truths of spiritual worship. And then finally, as a prince in disguise might do, He flings aside the mantle of which He had let a fold or two to be blown back in the previous conversation, and stands confessed, "I that speak unto thee am He." That is to say, the kindling of desire, the proofer of the all satisfying gift, the quickening of conscience, the revelation of a Father to be worshiped in Spirit and in Truth, and the final full disclosure of His person and His office as the Giver of the gift which shall slake all the thirst of mankind. These are the stages of His self-revelation.

Then note, not only the process, but the substance of the revelation of Himself. The woman had a far more spiritual and lofty conception of the office of Messiah than the Jews had, a Samaritan. It is not the first time that heretics have reached a loftier ideal of some parts of the Truth than the orthodox attain. To the Jews the Messiah was a conquering king, who would help them to ride on the necks of their enemies, and pay back

their persecutions and oppressions. To this Samaritan woman, speaking, I suppose, the conception of her race, "The Messiah was the One who was TO TELL US ALL THINGS."

Jesus Christ accepts the position, endorses her anticipations, and in effect presents Himself before her and before us as the Fountain of all certitude and all knowledge in regard to spiritual matters. For all we need to know, or all that we can know, with regard to God and man and their mutual relations for all that we can or need to know in regard to manhood, its ideal, its obligations, its possibilities, its destinies, for all that we need to know of men in their relation to one another, we have to turn to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who "will tell us all things."

He is the Fountain of light. He is the foundation of certitude, and they who seek, no hypothesis and possibilities and conjectures and dreams, but the solid substance of a reliable knowledge, **must grasp Him, and esteem the Words of His mouth, and the deeds of His life more than their necessary food.**

He meets the woman's conceptions as He had met those of Nicodemus. To him He had unveiled Himself as the Son of God, and the Son of man who came down from Heaven, and is in Heaven, and ascends to Heaven. TO THE WOMAN, HE REVEALS HIMSELF AS THE MESSIAH, WHO WILL TELL US ALL TRUTH. And so both as the Giver of the gift which shall communicate and sustain and refresh the better life.

But we can't help but keep dwelling for a moment longer upon the remarkable, beautiful, gracious, and significant designation which our Lord employs here, "I THAT SPEAK UNTO THEE." The word in the original, translated by our version, "speak" is even more sweet, because it's more familiar, and conveys the idea of unrestrained frank intercourse. We could render it, "I who am talking with thee." And that our Lord desired to emphasize to the woman's heart the notion of His familiar intercourse with her, Messiah though He were, seems to me confirmed by the fact that He uses the same expres-

sion, with additional GRACE and tenderness about it, when He says, with such depth of meaning, to the blind man whom He had healed, "Thou hast both seen Him," with the eyes to which He gave sight and object of sight, "and it is He that 'talketh' with thee."

The familiar Christ, who will come and speak to us face to face and heart to heart, "As a man speaketh with his friend," is the **Christ who will tell us all things, and whom we may wholly trust.**

Notice, also, how this revelation has for its condition the docile acceptance of the earlier and imperfect teachings. If the woman had not yielded herself to our Lord's earlier Words, and, though with very dim insight, yet with a heart that sought to be taught, followed Him as He stepped from round to round of the ascending ladder, as He had never stood on the top and seen this great vision. If you see nothing more in Jesus Christ than a man like yourself, compassed with our infirmities, and yet sweet and gracious and good and pure, be true to what you know, and put it into practice, and be ready to accept all the light that dawns.

They that begin down at the bottom with hearing, "Give Me to drink," may stand at the top, and hear the Lord speak to them His unveiled Truth, and His full glory. "To him that hath shall be given." "If any man will do His will, He shall know of the teaching."

Lastly revealed through this woman is the universal Christ. The woman wondered that, being a Jew, He spoke to her. And as we have seen our Lord's first Words are simply the expression of a real physical necessity. But it is none the less what the woman felt it to be, a strange overleaping of barriers that towered very high, **a Samaritan, a woman, a sinner, is the recipient of the first clear confession from Jesus Christ of His Messiahship and dignity.** She was right in her instinct that something lay behind His sweeping aside of the barriers and coming so close to her with His request.

These two, the prejudices of race and the contempt for woman, two of the crying

evils of the old world, were overpassed by our Lord as if He never saw them. They were too high for man's puny limbs. They made no obstacle to the march of His Divine compassion. And therein lies a symbol, if you like, but none the less a prophesy that will be fulfilled, of the **universal adaptation and destination of the Gospel, and its independence of all distinctions of race and sex, condition, moral character.** In Jesus Christ, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, neither bond nor free, ye all are one in Christ."

If He had been but a Jew, it was wonderful that He should talk to a Samaritan woman. But there is nothing in the character and life of Jesus Christ, as recorded in Scripture, more remarkable and more plain than the entire absence of any racial peculiarities, or of characteristics owing to His position in space or time. So unlike His nation was, He that the very "elite" of His nation snarled at, Him who said, "Thou art a Samaritan." So unlike them was He that one feels that a character so palpitantly human to its core, and so impossible to explain from its surroundings, is inexplicable, but on the New Testament theory that He is not a Jew, or man only, but the Son of man, the Divine embodiment of the ideal of humanity, whose dwelling was on Earth, but His origin and home in the bosom of God.

**Therefore, Jesus Christ is the world's Christ, your Christ, my Christ, every man's Christ, the Tree of life that stands in the midst of the garden, that all men may draw near to it and gather of its fruit.**

Have you answered His offer of this gift which the Samaritan woman did? "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not," neither go all the way to the world's broken cistern to draw, and He will put into your hearts that indwelling fountain of life, so that you may say, like this woman's townspeople did, "Now I have heard Him myself, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

**Have you met this Samaritan woman and let her quench your thirst?**