

COMMENTARY ON JOHN

LESSON NUMBER 43

John 4:7 *“There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give Me to drink. ⁸ (For His disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) ⁹ Then saith the woman of Samaria unto Him, How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. ¹⁰ Jesus answered and said unto her, 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.”*John 4:7-10)

A WOMAN OF SAMARIA

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel is the foundation of *“the record that God gave of His Son”* (1 John 5:10-11). That *“record”* is most profound, though apparently simple in statement: *“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”* (1 John 5:11). The record is not that we can have eternal life, but that *“God hath given us eternal life.”* Other versions read, *“this is the testimony,”* ^{NKJV} *“the witness,”* ^{NASB} *“gave us,”* ^{NRSV} *“life age-during,”* ^{YLT} and *“this is that testimony (that evidence).”* ^{AMPLIFIED}

This is the record, witness, or testimony, that is given to those who are in Christ Jesus. It is the Divine analysis and summary of what they have been given. They have not been given a routine, not a mere outline of how they are to live, and not a mere status that has no evidence. If you are in Christ Jesus, what you have been given is *“eternal life”* – and it is important that you know it. Therefore John wrote, *“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God”* (1 John 5:13). Jesus Himself defined eternal life, and John, through the Holy Spirit, confirmed that definition (1 John 5:20). In prayer to God, Jesus said, *“And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent”* (John 17:3). This includes having access to God, being able to receive from God, having the privilege of coming to Him, and being directed by Him. It involves knowing what is appropriate and what is not appropriate. The result of such knowledge is confidence (Heb 10:35), assurance (Heb 6:11), and boldness (Heb 10:19) – things that are essential to resisting the devil, overcoming the world (1 John 5:4), and growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18). **What we have in this text is confirmation of the willingness of Jesus, the appointed Custodian of eternal life, to freely give it to all who know and desire it.**

THERE COMES A WOMAN OF SAMARIA

John 4:7 *“There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give Me to drink. ⁸ (For His disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.).”*

THE MANNER OF JESUS’ LIFE. Several times Jesus revealed His manner of life. So far as men are concerned, this is the standard. When it came to speaking He said, *“For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and*

what I should speak" (John 12:49). When it came to doing, or working, He said, *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise"* (John 5:19). Jesus actually consistently did what we are commanded to do: *"yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God"* (Rom 6:13), and *"present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service"* (Rom 12:1).

This being true, Jesus was where His Father wanted Him to be, at the time He was to be there, to meet someone God intended Him to meet. He is, in fact, going to gather some firstfruits right here – in Samaria – which was not the ordinary place where He could be found. However, there are *"other sheep"* here (John 10:16), and it is time for some of them to hear the call of God. This occasion is not a happenstance, or an example of randomness.

If we could see behind the scenes. We would see a ladder set up on earth, with holy angels ascending and descending (Gen 28:12), working and making a context in which the Son of God would work, fulfilling the will of His Father.

THERE COMETH A WOMAN OF SAMARIA. Chronologically, this is the first mention of "Samaria" or "Samaritans" following in the birth of Jesus – or since the writing of Micah the prophet (Mic 1:6) – nearly eight hundred years prior to this event. The area of Samaria had been corrupted during the reign of Jeroboam, and had not been mentioned favorably for hundreds of years. Even during Jesus' ministry, when He first sent out His disciples, He commanded them, *"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not"* (Matt 10:5). Some may mistakenly have thought that the Samaritans had been written off. But this was emphatically not the case. It was with them, as it was with Israel later – *"some"* of them were rejected, but not the whole of them (Rom 11:17). To the disciples prior to the death of Christ, Samaria was forbidden like Asia and Bithynia were to Paul and those with him (Acts 16:6-7). It was not a permanent arrangement, but one governed by Divine purpose.

Remember, Jesus is wearied from His journey, and He is resting on Jacob's well. What will the Father do to refresh Him? Who will speak to Him, or come to Him? Will it be some dignitary with power and authority? Will it be a person of wealth who can supply a rich feast for Jesus and the returning disciples? No! It is a woman – and not the best woman at that. In a sense she was a depiction of fallen humanity. She had nothing to commend herself to God, yet she was in great need.

GIVE ME TO DRINK. Other versions read, *"Give Me a drink,"* ^{NASB} *"Will you give Me a drink?"* ^{NIV} *"Give me some water,"* ^{BBE} *"Please give me a drink."* ^{NLT} Jesus had left Judea, the preferred part of the promised land, where Jerusalem was located, because the Pharisees had heard He *"made and baptized more disciples than John"* (John 4:1). Now He is in a lesser region, where the Lord is hardly known at all, and religious confusion reigns supreme. Yet here, in this inferior place, He will be able to do what He was fundamentally sent to do.

It ought to be noted that Jesus, who made *"all things"* (John 1:3), *"humbled Himself"* in order that, among other things, He might experience thirst. About three years later, when He is hanging on a cross, suspended between heaven and earth, He will again be thirsty, and will cry out, *"I thirst,"* fulfilling the Scriptures (John 19:28; Psa 22:15; 69:21). Who is able to measure the degree to which Jesus humbled, or lowered, Himself to experience such need? Among other things, this confirms the depths to which mankind sank when sin entered into the world. The moral and spiritual decline was rapid and extensive. A massive gulf formed between God and man that pulled humanity into unimaginable depths of sin. It was a condition that could not be resolved by a creative word – like the one that dispelled the primeval darkness that covered the face of the deep (Gen 1:2-3). This entire circumstance reveals the condition of the world, and what it took to

complete a Divine rescue.

HIS DISCIPLES WERE GONE AWAY. Although the text did not say so, Jesus had left Judea **with His disciples**, who, as always, remained with Him. He was weary with the journey, and His disciples apparently were also. They had gone into the city to *“buy meat,”* or some food. While this was a common experience with which men could easily identify, that is not what the Holy Spirit accents. He will not stress the common, but the uncommon. While the disciples were away buying food, Jesus was preparing to distribute some food – nourishment and refreshment for the soul. He was not too weary to do that! Heeding His own word, He will seek first the *“Kingdom of God”* (Matt 6:33). He will address the greater need, and do the greater work.

WHY DID YOU ASK A DRINK FROM ME?

“⁹ Then saith the woman of Samaria unto Him, How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.”

HOW IS IT? Other versions read, *“How can you ask me for a drink?”*^{NIV} *“How can a Jewish man like you ask . . . me for a drink of water?”*^{GWN} *“The woman was surprised that a Jew would ask a despised Samaritan for anything,”*^{LIVING} and *“How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me . . . for a drink?”*^{AMPLIFIED}

This woman had learned to live with the rejection of the Jews. That was just part of living at that time. For the Jews, because of the depravity of king Jeroboam, the captivity of Israel, and the importing of foreigners into the holy land, they simply had broken off relations with the people living in Samaria. This was a generally accepted posture, as confirmed by Jesus first commission to the twelve in which He told them not to go to any city of the Samaritans (Lk 10:5). The attitude of the Samaritans was also not amiable. On one occasion, when Jesus was going to pass through Samaria en route to Galilee, the Samaritans *“did not receive Him, because His face was as though he would go to Jerusalem”* (Luke 9:53). Yet, something is going to happen here that will be against prevailing perceptions and manners. God will intrude into the affairs of men. He will *“draw”* someone that no one would expect to be drawn. This is another reason for the need to be familiar with, and sensitive to the Lord of glory. It is sheer folly to imagine that an insensitive and imperceptive church will be used by God.

Divine rejection revealed to be Limited. However, even in the rejection of a people, the Lord had revealed something of Himself. One of His revealed traits is that He is, *“a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me”* (Ex 20:5; 34:7). During the time of Christ, and immediately following His exaltation, the door of salvation was opened to the Samaritans. They were ready to be reaped (John 4:35-43; Acts 8:5-6).

There is also the matter of fields being *“white unto harvest”* (John 4:35). It seems to me that one of the besetting errors of the modern church is trying to reap grain that is not yet *“white unto harvest,”* or ripe. When led by the Spirit (Acts 13:2), and *“sent”* by the Lord (Rom 10:15; 1 Cor 3:5), this is something that heaven will not allow (Acts 16:6-7).

“A WOMAN OF SAMARIA.” Other versions read, *“a Samaritan woman like me,”*^{GWN} *“a despised Samaritan,”*^{LIVING} *“a Samaritan [and a] woman.”*^{AMPLIFIED} Although Samaria was a part of the promised land, Israel’s unfaithfulness finally led to their expulsion from the land. In its repopulation, a spiritually corrupted people ended up living in this territory. They were distinctly different from the Jews, viewing both the Scriptures and the worship of God differently. There was no mingling of the Jews with this people, and the woman Jesus now confronts knows it. By asking her for a drink, Jesus has violated everything she knew about associations of Jews with Samaritans – especially a Samaritan woman. Therefore she asks

for an explanation. Actually, behind the scenes God was drawing this woman to His Son – something, a short time later, Jesus would declare God did (John 6:44,65).

THE JEWS HAVE NO DEALINGS. The attitude of the Jews toward the Samaritans was more than mere prejudice. The Samaritans were the people that were the result of an admixture of a remnant of Israelites with heathens from *"Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim,"* who were *"placed . . . in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof"* (2 Kgs 17:24). The result is recorded as follows: *"Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt . . . So they feared the LORD, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence. Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the LORD, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel"* (2 Kgs 17:29-34). It is understood that the Samaritans accepted the writings of Moses, but not of the Prophets. They also did not use Jerusalem as their primary place of worship (John 4:10).

Josephus relates (Ant. 11:8, 2-4) that Sanballat built a temple for the Samaritans on this mountain, and instituted a priesthood, as rivals to those of the Jews at Jerusalem. EASTON BIBLE DICTIONARY – The mountain is Gerizim.

When Alexander took Palestine he gave Sanballat (the Persian governor under Darius) permission to build a temple on Mount Gerizim; and Manasseh, brother of Jaddua the high priest at Jerusalem, was made high priest at Shechem, about 420 B.C. This temple was destroyed by the Jews, 129 B.C. The ruins are still shown. The Samaritans worship here yet, without temple or altar. SMITH'S BIBLE DICTIONARY

IF YOU KNEW

"¹⁰ Jesus answered and said unto her, 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."

IF YOU KNEW. Other versions read, *"If you had knowledge of,"* BBE *"If you recognized,"* CEB and *"If thou hadst known."* YLT

This woman had deficient knowledge, and it was a hindrance to her. She had not been properly taught, even though, as she will later make known, she did have some knowledge of a coming Messiah, who would *"tell us all things"* (John 4:25). That knowledge, however, was not sufficient for her to actually identify the Christ. **God, who reveals the true identity of Jesus, does not work through a distorted message.** He revealed the Christ to Simeon (Lk 2:28-29), to John the Baptist (John 1:33), and to Peter (Matt 16:16-18). Nathanael knew who He was (John 1:45). There were those who, when they heard Jesus speak, said *"This is the Christ"* (John 7:41). Martha knew who He was (John 11:27). What was the difference between those people and this Samaritan woman? They had been taught properly from Moses and the Prophets, and this woman had not. Her people ignored the Prophets.

THE GIFT OF GOD. Other versions read, *"what God gives freely,"* BBE *"God's gift,"* CEB *"what God's gift is,"* GWN *"what God is offering,"* NJB *"the gift God has for you,"* NLT *"what a wonderful gift God has for you,"* LIVING *"God's free gift,"* WEYMOUTH *"what God has to give,"* WILLIAMS *"what God wants to give you,"* CEV *"what God gives,"* GNB *"what God can give,"* PHILLIPS *"the generosity of God,"* MESSAGE and *"recognized God's gift."* AMPLIFIED

What is *"the Gift of God?"* Several versions greatly distort this text, as though it referred

to something God was ready to give upon request. But that is not its meaning at all, as the words that follow attest. The gift had already been given, and Jesus is speaking of the recognition of it, not the desire for it. When Paul wrote of God's *"unspeakable gift,"* it was Jesus Himself that was meant (2 Cor 9:15). *"Unspeakable"* means indescribable, or not expounded in full. Jesus is the great Theme of Scripture, yet He Himself is much larger than that exposition, for in Him dwells *"the fulness of the Godhead bodily"* (Col 2:9). That fulness does not dwell in God's grace, or even in eternal life. Those are all aspects of God, and not God Himself.

Here again, although this woman knew about a coming Messiah, she did not know enough to recognize Him when He was sitting right in front of her, and speaking with her. I cannot help but make a passing comment here. We have a similar situation that has developed in the church-world. Some things are known about Jesus, but not enough for the people to recognize His presence, blessing, or guidance. That is precisely why they go elsewhere to find a resolution to their problems. This is a dilemma of epochal proportions, and yet you are hard pressed to find someone who is concerned about it.

WHO IT IS. That is, who the *"Gift of God"* is, who was presently speaking with her.

YOU WOULD HAVE ASKED HIM. The *"Him"* of reference is *"the Gift of God."* If she had recognized Christ, she would have asked Him for what He was sent to give. She would have known that the deep thirst that she had could be assuaged by *"the Gift of God."* Her sin could be fully addressed by Him. Her hope could be satisfied through Him. All that was needed was for her to *"ask Him"* – but she did not know that. All of the teaching she had was now a disadvantage to her! The Samaritan approach taught the people that a Messiah was coming that would tell them *"all things,"* but did not speak to her of the reason for Him coming, or the glorious abundance that He would give.

There remains an entire society of professing Christians who simply do not know what to ask for. They know to pray when they or someone they know is sick. They know to pray when there is danger – like the sailors on Jonah's boat knew to pray. If they do not have enough to eat, they know to pray. But they do not know what to ask for. They are almost completely unaware of something within the scope of God's will, that they can ask for – **and will receive** (1 John 5:14).

HE WOULD HAVE GIVEN THEE LIVING WATER. And what would Jesus have given this poor woman, if she knew enough to ask? He would have given her *"living water"* – *"water of life,"* ^{GENEVA} *"water that gives life,"* ^{CEV} *"life-giving water."* ^{GNB} Some of the versions are wrong in presenting this as water that gives life. That is not what is meant. *"Living water"* is water from a spring, as compared with the water of a river. It is water that is always fresh, and is therefore invigorating and life-sustaining. Jesus will describe it in this way later (vs 13-14). It is also described in this manner in John 7:38-39.

O, how this is needed – *"living water:"* fresh, cool, invigorating, and life-sustaining. There is too much *"dry and moldy bread"* in today's religion (Josh 9:5,12) – too much lifeless and vain tradition (1 Pet 1:18). I am telling you, the existence of such things is owing to the same hindrance found in this woman of Samaria. The people do not know *"the Gift of God."* They are not familiar with Jesus Christ or what He actually came to do and give. This situation can only be resolved by proper preaching, for God has ordained that through the [seeming] foolishness of preaching, people **will** be saved (1 Cor 1:21).