

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Some journeys Jesus made: Jesus in Samaria - John 4:12-42

Introduction

Good morning. Today we look at the third journey of the Lord Jesus in our present series on 'Some journeys Jesus made'. This is the journey into Samaria which is detailed for us in John 4. We will see that Samaria was hostile territory for Jews. This hostility goes back many hundreds of years to when the ten tribes, known as Israel, were transported into other countries by the Assyrian nation and replaced by other foreign peoples. For the full details of this transportation of nations read 2 Kings 17. Although Samaria was peopled by descendants of other nations yet we find the Lord Jesus making a very specific journey as He sought to bring blessing to those outside the national boundary of Judah.

"Samaritan" was the name given to the new and mixed inhabitants whom Esarhaddon (677 BC) the king of Assyria, brought from Babylon and other places and settled them in the cities of Samaria, instead of the original inhabitants whom Sargon (721 BC) had removed into captivity, see 2 Kings 17:24. These strangers amalgamated with the Jews still remaining in the land, and gradually mingled their idolatry with the Jewish religion. After the return from the Captivity, the Jews in Jerusalem refused to allow them to take part with them in rebuilding the temple, and hence sprang up an open enmity between them. They erected a rival temple on Mount Gerizim, which was, however, destroyed by a Jewish king (130 BC). They then built another at Shechem. The bitter enmity between the Jews and Samaritans continued in the time of our Lord Jesus: the Jews had "*no dealings with the Samaritans*" (John 4:9). Our Lord was in contempt called "a Samaritan", John 8:48.

Background (John 4:1-4)

Let us read the opening verses of our chapter which provide the setting for the journey that the Lord Jesus intended to make. "*Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. But He needed to go through Samaria*" (John 4:1-4)

In these opening verses we are introduced to an issue which potentially may have caused a controversy between our Lord Jesus Christ and His servant John the Baptist. It would have been a distraction to the Lord's work and the simplest course of action was to move on. The Lord leaves Judea to go to Galilee, but the journey was to take a particular route, through the country of Samaria. Jews and Samaritans were not on friendly terms especially from the Jewish point of view. The words of John 4:4 bring our attention to the fact that the Lord "**needed**" to go through Samaria. There was a purpose as we shall see in the following verses.

The Lord and the Samaritan Woman (John 4:5-26)

In John 4:5-26 we have the account of why the Lord Jesus "needed" to go through Samaria. Almost half way between Judea and Galilee the Lord breaks His journey near a city called Sychar. We can notice several details about the Lord Jesus

A tired Saviour

Let us read John 4:5-6, "*So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.*" Near this place the patriarch Jacob had owned some land (see Joshua 24:32). Not only was Joseph, the son of Jacob, buried near there but it was also a place of refreshment for weary travellers because of the well. In John 4:6 we find the Lord Jesus wearied with His journey and He sits on the well to rest. Later in the chapter we are told that the disciples had gone to purchase food in the city (John 4:8). "Being wearied" is one of the indications in the Gospels that the Lord Jesus was truly a person like you and I, even though at the same time He is the sinless Son of God.

A thirsty Saviour

Let us read John 4:7-9, *“A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Give Me a drink.’ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.”*

At that moment the person whom the Lord Jesus had intended to meet arrived at the well to draw out water. It is the Lord Jesus who starts the conversation. From a cultural point of view a man would not normally speak to a woman especially one unaccompanied by a male relative and on her own. Additionally, the Lord is requesting a drink of water and therefore in a sense asking for help to quench His thirst. In Mark 9:41 we are reminded that a cup of water given in the Lord’s name to one of His people will be rewarded. How much more a drink given to the Lord himself! From the woman’s reply we see that the Lord Jesus was breaking all conventions and it was compounded because He was a Jew and she was a Samaritan. This conversation was immediately plunged into a confrontational situation. How very like today’s situation in the Middle East; nothing has changed between Jew and Arab! However, the Lord Jesus would show that there is a way of peace, true then and still true today. The woman was very conscious of the animosity between Jews and Samaritans.

A giving Saviour

Let us read John 4:10-15, *“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.’ The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?’ Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.’ The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.”*

The Lord now embarks upon a theological discussion with the woman about *“living water”*, a term which we know refers to the Holy Spirit, the One who is considered as a gift to those who believe and accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. We find the Lord Jesus referring to *“living water”* in John 7:38 and John 7:39 confirms our understanding that the Lord Jesus was speaking of the person of the Holy Spirit. The Lord had moved from natural water to that which is spiritual. However, the woman is still concerned with the natural, the here and now of her pressing needs. But she has not forgotten what the Lord Jesus had said about the living water. But where does the living water come from, the well? The woman had observed that the Lord had nothing to enable Him to draw from this well. Then she proceeds with a challenge, *“Are you greater than our father Jacob?”* (John 4:12). There might be no foundation for that claim but nevertheless it is a challenge. With amazing grace the Lord begins the journey of spiritual development by moving the conversation from the well which only contained natural water, even though a vital resource in that hot country, to Himself.

We should notice that as the Lord moves the conversation away from natural water with the challenge *“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”* There is a change in the woman’s attitude. This man at the well is not simply a Jew, an adversary, but possibly a man who deserves respect and the woman was interested in *“living water.”* In John 4:11 the woman calls Him *“Sir”*. The question that now comes to her mind is, *‘How can He draw out this new kind of water as He has nothing to draw from this deep well?’* The Lord has to put her right in connection with Jacob’s well. The living water is not from this well but directly from Himself. The woman may not have fully understood, and still thought only on natural things, because if she were the possessor of *“living water”* the daily toil of coming to this well might indeed be a thing of the past.

At this point the conversation takes a dramatic turn away from the living water back to the woman herself. Was the Lord Jesus seeking to re-establish the normal social conventions?

A perceptive Saviour

Let us read John 4:16-19, *“Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come here.’ The woman answered and said, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.’ The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.”*

The Lord moves to an area of her life which may have been well known to other Samaritans where she lived but not to this stranger and a Jew! Here was a woman who had been married five times and now with a sixth man and at this point had no longer seen the necessity to bother with marriage. This convinces the woman that this man with whom

she is having a conversation and knows details of her life which He should not have known, is no ordinary person. This person must be a prophet, a Jewish prophet!

Where to worship?

It is the woman who changes the conversation in John 4:20, *"Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."* From the woman's comment it is obvious that the subject of worship is also a controversy. Where should we worship? The Old Testament scriptures are clear that God had established Jerusalem as the gathering centre for worship to Himself. The rebellious nation of Israel (the ten tribes) and the subsequent Samaritans, a conglomeration of resettled people, had alternative places in which to worship, not just one but a number gods!

Whom to worship?

The initial part of the Lord's reply had to do with the then future situation and the fact that the place would become unimportant. It was all going to be about the person of the Father. John 4:21 states, *"Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.'"*

True worship

In the next few verses the Lord puts right any mistaken teaching about worship, where at that point in time salvation could be found and what was coming, the dramatic change that was about to happen. *"You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"* (John 4:22-24)

Those outside the boundaries of the Jewish nation were largely in ignorance as to worship. At the same time, the current situation dictated that salvation could only be found in the God that the Jewish people professed to worship. Here again the Lord refers to the coming hour when there was to be a dramatic change. Now the Lord speaks of *"true worshippers"* as opposed to ignorant and false worshippers which the Lord encountered in large numbers. This worship would be entirely of a spiritual nature and not connected with a physical place. In God's wisdom, the temple was eventually destroyed as a place of worship in AD 70 by the Romans. Any centres of worship in Samaria have also long disappeared. After the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in believers then the truth of the Lord's statement, *"those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"* (John 4:24) became a reality.

The Messiah

What impact was this revelation having on the Samaritan woman? John 4:25-26 state, *"The woman said to Him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things.' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am He.'"*

This is probably the moment when the woman moves away from natural things to the spiritual and is on a similar wavelength to the Lord Jesus as she speaks about the Messiah. This gives us an insight to the woman. There is a depth to her which until now had been hidden. The "I know" is a revelation as to her spiritual condition. The woman was not just outwardly religious but had an understanding which may well have been greater than many in the nation of Judah. The woman refers to the Messiah who was obviously crucial to helping resolve all things. What the woman may not have expected was the revelation, from the man who sat on the well wearied with His journey, that He was that very Messiah!

The Lord and the Disciples (John 4:27-38)

The interruption

It is at this point in the conversation that we have an interruption. John 4:27 states, *"And at this point His disciples came, and they marvelled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, 'What do You seek?' or, 'Why are You talking with her?'"* The reaction of the disciples is consistent with the then prejudices between these two nations. Yet even with the distrust it did not prevent or hinder commercial interests as John 4:8 earlier stated, they had gone to purchase food.

A new Evangelist

With this break in the conversation by the arrival of the disciples the woman takes the opportunity to go and spread the good news about the Messiah. This news completely displaces the reason for going to the well. John 4:28-30

state, *“The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, ‘Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’ Then they went out of the city and came to Him.”*

These verses show that it was not only the woman who was waiting for the Christ (Messiah) but many more in this city of Sychar. The effect is amazing the people go out of the city to see for themselves. Although this is a wonderful situation it is also sad that in the land of Judah there was not the same knowledge of, and looking for, the Messiah.

What food?

While the woman is away, the disciples now become the subjects of the Lord’s practical teaching. *“In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, eat.’ But He said to them, ‘I have food to eat of which you do not know.’ Therefore the disciples said to one another, ‘Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?’ Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. Do you not say, “There are still four months and then comes the harvest”? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: “One sows and another reaps.” I sent you to reap that for which you have not laboured; others have laboured, and you have entered into their labours”*” John 4:31-39.

It is interesting that, like the woman, the disciples are very concerned with the natural initially urging the Lord to take refreshment. But the Lord responds on a spiritual level that doing God’s will is the food and refreshment that is more important and satisfying. The Lord then directs them to look at the surrounding area and see the spiritual need, the harvest that needs to be gathered in. In lifting up their eyes they may well have observed the people of the city coming out to meet the Lord Jesus, led by the woman with the good news.

There is also the practical lesson that the sower of God’s word may not be the harvester. The one who reaps the harvest may benefit from those who in previous days have faithfully sown the Gospel seed. However, in the end God will see to it that both are able to rejoice over the fruits of the harvest (see 1 Corinthians 3:6).

The Lord and the Samaritans (John 4:39-42)

Drawing to the close of this amazing journey of the Lord Jesus *“when He must need go through Samaria”*, we need to read the closing verses, *“And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’ So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His own word. Then they said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.’”* (John 4:39-42)

The woman’s testimony was that *“He told me all that I ever did”* (John 4:29). That reminds us that we need to repent as sinners: *“repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Acts 20:21). That repentance must be followed by faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Both are necessary. The Samaritans believed, they exercised faith towards the Lord. It is interesting to see that some believed because they heard the good news from the woman, but others needed a “face to face” contact to hear for themselves. I liken this hearing for themselves to those who want to be able to read the Scriptures and have the word of God directly make an impact on their souls. It is like those of Berea who searched the Scriptures after listening to Paul preach but needed to search out the truth for themselves (see Acts 17:11). This emphasises the need for the Gospel to go out through the evangelist preaching and the distribution of God’s word in order to place into the hands of people the Scriptures. The impact of the word is to impress on the hearts of people that Jesus Christ is *“the Saviour of the world”* (John 4:42)

Conclusion

As Christians, we sometimes find ourselves in circumstances which are not planned and appear to be a coincidence. However, it may be that in the Lord’s leading He has determined that **‘we must go through “our” Samaria’** because He has a work for us to do in those fields which are white unto harvest.

Thank you for listening and the Lord bless you today.

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