

JOHN CHAPTER 4

It is written concerning our Master that “we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). The Lord Jesus Christ then, was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and felt the temptations of the flesh common to us all. He bore the frailty and weakness of a human constitution, being a son of Adam as we. Yet being also the Son of the Highest, he was able to overcome that nature, to the doing of his Father’s Will in all things. He had the strength and capacity to render perfect obedience in all ways, turning every circumstance into an opportunity to magnify his Father in heaven. Indeed, in the chapter before us we have a case in point: here the Master transforms a circumstance generated by his own bodily requirements, into a means of declaring salvation to a Samaritan woman. Labouring under the infirmities of the flesh, he used his own needs as a basis for preaching the word of life to one who had ears to hear.

In John Chapter 4, the Spirit records how the Master was wearied with his journey, and coming to a city of Samaria, he sat down upon a well to rest. A perfectly normal response for a son of Adam, tired by the arduous journey from Judea to Galilee. He took opportunity to rest, whilst his disciples went away to buy food from the city. A woman drew near to where he was - a Samaritan woman who came to the well to draw water. Being thirsty and the well being deep (he having nothing to draw water with, v 11), he asked the woman to give him some water and thus ease his tiredness: “Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink”. She responded with surprise, for it was most unusual for a Jew to ask favours of her, being a Samaritan: “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” (Jno 4:9).

The Samaritans were a mixed race, originating from the intermarriage of the remnant who dwelt in the land following the destruction of Israel by Hoshea, the king of Assyria (2Kings 17:6), with foreigners brought from Babylon and elsewhere to dwell there (2 Kings 17:24). They were taught “how they should fear Yahweh” (2Kings 17:28) by a priest who was brought back from captivity for that purpose, yet they would not depart from their idolatry: “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” (2Kings 17:29). They were therefore of mixed religion, embracing elements of the Truth, yet mingled with the ways of the heathen – very much like the general state of Christendom today. The Samaritans, not being permitted to join the work of rebuilding the Temple by Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 4:3), instead built their own rival temple upon mount Gerizim, something which perpetuated an enmity between themselves and the Jews. There was therefore no dealings between the two nations, the Jews particularly not accepting any favours or hospitality from Samaritans. The woman was therefore justly surprised that the Master should ask water from her.

The Master however, took hold of this circumstance and turned attention away from his personal needs, to what he could provide for the Samaritan woman. He was coming to her not just as a Jew – any Jew – but as the Son of the Highest – and she was unaware of it. “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” (Jno 4:10). She was ignorant both of

the identity of the traveller who conversed with her, and also the availability of “the gift of God”.

In the Old Testament, the “gift of God” is the blessing of being able to peaceably partake of food and drink obtained through one’s own labour: “I know that there is no good in them (ie the days of a man’s life - CAM) but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, *it is the gift of God*” (Eccl 3:12-13). And again, Ecclesiastes 5:19: “every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; *this is the gift of God*”. The woman of Samaria had approached with her waterpot to take up drink, and partake of the natural gift of God in so doing. She was to enjoy the blessing of that which came from her own labours, in peace. Yet the Master directed her attention to a much higher plane – the true gift of God is not merely the partaking of physical refreshment, but is to partake of the waters that the Son of the Highest can provide – not obtained by one’s own labours, but as a gift, freely granted to those who believe.

The woman evidently did not understand the higher sense of Messiah’s words, for she took him to be speaking of the literal water still. She replied, “Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?” The Master was indeed greater than Jacob, and his response showed that the waters of which he spoke were also greater than those provided by Jacob’s labours in digging out the well. “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Jno 4:11-14).

But what is this “living water” of which Messiah spoke? It is something that can perpetually quench the thirst of men, and rather than being a variable source drying up at times, it becomes a resource of nourishment within the partaker himself: “It shall be *in him* a well of water”. And it is something that is able to provide everlasting life. To understand the sense of the Master’s words, we need to go beyond the literal, to examine the way in which Scripture uses the language he employs in this place.

Upon his discourse upon the mount, the Master spoke of those who thirst being filled: “Blessed are they which do *hunger and thirst* after righteousness: for *they shall be filled*” (Mat 5:5). Here then, is a spiritual thirsting; a thirsting after righteousness. Dwelling in a spiritually dry and barren wilderness, there is a group of men and women who find no satisfaction with the things of the world. They seek first the kingdom of Yahweh and His Righteousness (Mat 6:33), craving for that righteousness to be seen in the earth. Their meat and their drink is to partake of the Righteousness of Deity as provided in the spirit-word. This is their daily Manna, and is that which sustains them during a wilderness pilgrimage to the Kingdom of their Father. Without a constant partaking of the word, they would starve, and be as spiritually malnourished as the churches around them, which know not that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, for the increase of goods, and the deceitfulness of sin, have led them to imagine they are blessed above all people (Rev 3:17). But beholding the reality of things, the few who follow Messiah recognise that there is nothing lasting in the present order of things, for all is to pass away, they only remaining who are filled with the words of everlasting life (1Jno 2:16,17).

The water of which the Master spoke itself becomes a well within those who partake of it: “The water that I shall give him shall be *in him* a well of water springing up into everlasting life”. Having received the Word of Life, a believer thus becomes equipped to impart that word to others. In other words, he becomes a source, or fountainhead of knowledge to which others can also repair to learn things Divine. So the Proverb has it: “The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life” (Prov 10:11). “Understanding is a well-spring of life” (Prov 16:22), and a man who has understanding is therefore a well of life himself, the words of his mouth being able to impart wisdom to those willing to receive them. There are few such wells in these degenerate times of the Gentiles - and such as there are must be diligently sought for - but they are there, and those who are desirous to grow in understanding can do no better than to draw waters in abundance from such sources (Prov 20:5).

But the ultimate source of all such living waters is Yahweh himself. “With thee is the fountain of life” declared the Psalmist (Ps 36:9), and from Him comes that which is able to grant eternal life to those who drink richly from it. He has given richly in the form of His Son, and the fountain which streams forth from him. The undying flowing of this symbolical water is to be a feature of the Age to Come, when those who hunger and thirst for righteousness truly shall be filled:

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Rev 7:16,17).

“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely” (Rev 21:6) will be proclaimed by Messiah in that day, as in the kingdom age the waters of life shall be freely available for all to be nourished thereby. All shall be called upon to “draw water out of the wells of salvation” with joy and gladness (Is 12:3), as the present age of arid barrenness shall give way to the breaking of a new day of blessedness at the rising of the sun of righteousness.

This is the hope we look towards; this is the hope that was granted to the Samaritan woman who discoursed with the Master. Leaving her waterpot behind (Jno 4:28), she no longer had any regard for the natural water, but went her way into the city to pour forth the living waters to others. She became a waterpot in her own right, for receiving the waters of life from Messiah, she was equipped to testify of him to others, and so nourish them with the words of life. Many of those in the city believed in Messiah because of her testimony (v 39), and came to hear for themselves. So it was, that from a simple conversation initiated by the Master’s own physical need for refreshment, a great harvest (v 35,36) was had to the glory of God, and the foundations were laid for the later preaching of the Apostles in that place.

IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

The Lord spoke to the woman of the need to worship the Father in the proper way:

“... the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father *in spirit and in truth*: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him *in spirit and in truth*” (Jno. 4:23-24).

An analysis of the word “spirit” indicates that it refers to the moral, emotional and intellectual aspects of a person. We must worship the Father with a willing spirit – but also “in truth”. There is no use in our being willing to worship in spirit, if it is not also in Truth. This is the way of the churches, and the Ecumenical movement: to join together in worship irrespective of what doctrines are believed and taught. The Bible way, however, is different; we need to worship in Truth, and as Messiah said in his prayer to his Father, “Thy Word is Truth” (Jno. 17:17).

The sentence structure comes from Joshua 24, and the resolve of Joshua to put away every vestige of idolatry. So we read his words to the people:

“Now therefore fear Yahweh, and serve him *in sincerity and in truth*: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt, and serve ye Yahweh” (Josh. 24:14)

The Master taught that we should worship “in spirit and in truth”, and Joshua taught the people to worship “in sincerity and in truth”. The context of Joshua 24 is that the people were to remove from their midst the idols that remained amongst them. Only then could they worship “in truth,” and indeed, it was only then that they could be seen as “sincere” in the sight of Yahweh.

The phrase is used again by the Apostle Paul, in a way not dissimilar to Joshua’s circumstances:

“... purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth ...” (1 Cor. 5:7-8).

Just as Joshua called upon the people to remove idolatry from their midst, even so we are exhorted to remove “the leaven of malice and wickedness” from our worship. We are to “lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:1-2).

As we come to behold the example of our suffering saviour, as emblemised in the bread and the wine, we see One who was sincere and truthful in all his ways. We come to him therefore, to partake of the spiritual refreshment that can come from no other source. May we indeed come to appreciate the gravity of what was done for us, and truly seek to worship our Father in spirit and in truth

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