

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Thirty-Fourth Week -- Wednesday

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA

"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. 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" (John 4:5-8).

We know that Shechem, which had now become the chief city of the Samaritans, was a flourishing town so early as the time of Jacob, who encamped for some time in the neighborhood on his prosperous return from Padan-Aram. On the site of his encampment he left a well that was thenceforth called "Jacob's well." The well stands at the beginning of a round vale which is supposedly the "parcel of ground" that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver and which he bequeathed to his son Joseph. The well is not now used by the inhabitants of Shechem but is generally visited by travelers; and there is no reason to entertain any doubt that this is the very well by which our Lord, "being faint and wearied with the journey," rested while the disciples were sent on to the town to purchase some victuals, probably bread and fruit. Jesus could not have been so weary but that He might have gone on with them to the city if He had seen fit. But the relations which subsisted between Jews and Samaritans, precluding Him from access to any house there, rendered it better that such food as was needed should be brought to the site where the well furnished water for their drink.

While our Lord tarried, seated beside the well, a woman of the neighboring town came to draw water. As this was one of the wells too deep for the water to be easily reached and no bucket was attached for general use, Jesus, although thirsty, had not yet tasted of the water. He therefore asked the woman to give Him a drink. Perceiving that He was a Jew, the woman, instead of hastening like the Rebekahs and Rachels of old to draw water for the stranger, expressed her astonishment at being asked a kindness by a Jew. She was, perhaps, not indisposed to render it, but she knew it was a principle among the stricter Jews (such as the Pharisees) that an Israelite ought not to borrow from a Samaritan, or accept any kindness from him, or to eat of his bread or drink of his water unpurchased.

Embracing the occasion which this reply offered to plant in this poor woman's soul the seed of Divine truth, and, as was his custom, adapting his teaching to her condition and degree of

culture, he used a natural and a very expressive image to awaken in her yet unspiritual mind an interest in Divine things: "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" (v. 10). Living water is water *flowing* from a perennial spring as contrasted with dead or still water. This was highly prized, not only from the supply being unfailing but from being regarded as the purest and most wholesome water. It is therefore no wonder that this declaration arrested the woman's attention and gained her respect. "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?" If He had possessed anything to draw with, He would not have needed to ask her for water. *She* had something to draw with, and why not use it for Him?

There is much reason to suppose that the Jews and Samaritans naturally regarded the vessels which each other had used as polluted and rendered unclean. We still see this in the East. Nothing is more common than to see one who has given you a drink dash to pieces the vessel that has touched your lips, and that not with any intention of insult or offense, but as an inevitable necessity from its having been polluted. There was probably something of this kind in operation here; and it may be that the woman's backwardness arose from her unwillingness to sacrifice her pitcher.

She was, however, unwilling to drop the subject that so much interested her. But in answer to her inquiries, our Lord quickened her longings for the living water by telling her that whoever drank of that water which He had asked of her would thirst again, but whoever drank of that living water which He could give would thirst no more. Then the poor woman, of whose daily labor no small part was to travel a dry and dusty road heavily laden with her water vessel, cried out with rapturous eagerness, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst nor come here to draw!" But having brought the woman to a state of intense longing for that which He alone could give, He broke off the subject without any further explanation and proceeded to lead her to look within. He told her to call her husband. She replied that she had none. He said that was true, for she already had had five husbands and the man with whom at present she lived was not her husband. (That she had five husbands seems to imply that the same degrading facility of divorce existed among the Samaritans as among the Jews; for it is more probable that she had been divorced by all or some of these five than that they had all died.)

Astonished at the knowledge which this Jewish stranger possessed of her secret history, the woman recognized Him as a prophet. The advantage of conversing with a prophet being so rare, she proceeded with some eagerness to question Him on those religious subjects which were of special interest to her people. The foremost subject was naturally the comparative claims of Jerusalem and Gerizim, which indeed might be obviously suggested by the fact that Gerizim itself towered up close by the spot where they stood. So looking or pointing to it, she said, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." She must have been greatly surprised to hear this question treated with indifference by a Jew who spoke of a time coming--yea, already come--when it should be of no consequence *where* men worshiped the Father as long as they worshiped Him

"in spirit and in truth." But in regard to the real question the woman had in view, Jesus decided in favor of the Jews.

It is true the Samaritans had a simple worship and had not encumbered the law of Moses with useless traditions. But still they were inferior to the Jews in real religious knowledge. They had debarred themselves from the light, progressively waxing stronger, which the prophets had given. They refused to acknowledge the Divine authority of the books of prophecy and kept themselves shut up in the older revelations to Moses as embodied in the Pentateuch, which formed all of Scripture that they received or acknowledged as Divine. Here was their weakness. Jesus assigns to the Jews the superiority doubtless on the ground that they remained under the influence of a continuous and unbroken chain of revelation that led on to the "salvation" which the Messiah was to bring.

The woman so far understood this as to see that He referred to the Messiah. Therefore, to express this understanding of his meaning she expressed her persuasion that the Messiah was coming and would set all things right when He came. How greatly was she astonished when, with quiet emphasis, He told her, "I who speak to you am He." She did not question this for an instant but immediately left the water-pot and hurried back empty-handed to the city to tell these glad tidings. The news was received with great interest, and many hastened out to Jesus at the well beseeching Him to go into the city and tarry for awhile with them. To this earnest desire for instruction and enlightenment our Lord responded by remaining there two days. After that He departed, leaving behind Him on many minds the conviction that "this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."