

'Seven Steps From Sychar to Immortality' Ch. 4

by Charles Alexander

The sermon explores the Lord's journey to Samaria, the encounter with the Woman of Sychar, and the significance of regeneration and the Spirit in the New Covenant.

Scripture: John 4:4-48, 1 Corinthians 1:22

Topics: "Divine Providence", "Spiritual Regeneration"

Description

Charles Alexander preaches about the journey of Jesus from Judea to Galilee through Samaria, emphasizing the divine timing and purpose behind each step, as foretold in the prophecies. The encounter with the Woman of Sychar highlights the model conversion and effectual calling of grace, revealing the depth of spiritual thirst and the necessity of regeneration through faith and repentance. The sermon delves into the theological significance of Christ as the true Well of Life, the abolition of temple worship, and the universal nature of true worship in spirit and truth, transcending physical locations. It concludes with the illustration of the nobleman's faith in believing without seeing, showcasing the power of Christ's spoken word.

Transcript

"All the acts of the Word are word and doctrine".

This rule must ever be kept in mind as the four gospels are studied and especially so in the case of John's Gospel.

The Lord moves from Judea and departs into Galilee and "must needs" pass through Samaria.

The cause of this journey was the reputation He was acquiring in Judea of making more disciples there than His forerunner, John the Baptist. This drew upon Him undue attention by the Pharisees and there must be no premature crisis in his ministry. His hour was not yet come. The forerunner was still engaged in his transitional task of handing on the torch of the Old Covenant to the mediator of the New Covenant. Christ must move therefore from Jerusalem and Judea, and make His way to Galilee where, according to the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2, He must first be exercised. There He was immune to interference by the Jerusalem authorities. His visits to the capital city were thereafter only occasional until the climax of His ministry was due. The triumphal entry into the city to cries of Hosanna! And in the style and trappings of the remarkable prophecy of Zechariah 9, should then be the prelude to His betrayal and atoning death.

All His times were fixed in the decrees of God. In all His acts the Son of God moved in the prophecies and followed in the footprints of the divine foreordination. He who by His Spirit had dictated the prophecies to the prophets must needs fulfil his own Word.

The parenthetical statement in verse 2 - "Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples..." has already been explained. It was no part of His ministry to exercise in the typical form of water the full reality of that which baptism only shadowed forth - the establishment of the New Covenant kingdom of God in the heart, by the inward baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire. There were those who were ready enough in Paul's day to claim a special relationship to Christ as distinct from other Christians (1 Cor. 1:12-11). Paul himself, after the example of Christ, refrained from baptizing personally (except in the few instances quoted by him) lest offence be given and division created. "Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel".

Let us hold our principles regarding baptism with all firmness, but let us perceive from the example of Christ and of His servant Paul, that there is no sacramental virtue in outward forms. The realities are the Word preached and the Spirit's operation of repentance and faith in the heart of the sinner. The rest is but the sign and the outward witness.

V. 4. "AND HE MUST NEEDS GO THROUGH SAMARIA"

The necessity was twofold - natural and spiritual. There was no way from Judea to Galilee except through Samaria unless by circuitous route on the further side of Jordan. The Jews did not willingly traverse the hated territory of the mongrel race and religion of Samaria.

But the Lord's journey was governed by higher considerations than convenience. There is a divine and prophetic "MUST" here. The gospel Word which began to be proclaimed in Jerusalem after the Lord's ascension (Acts 2) must thereafter be proclaimed beyond the boundaries of Judea: to Samaria first and then to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). The Lord's journey through Samaria and, above all, His rescue of the Woman of Sychar, was intended to shadow forth that grace of God shortly to be poured out upon all mankind. Always He moves in the prophetic Word.

V.5 Sychar is Sychem or Shechem. There was no place actually called Sychar. By the alteration of a letter John gives a high significance to the locality, for Sychar means "the place of lies". Judas ISCARIOT was likewise "the man, of lies" for his surname which, as can be seen plainly, contains the root letters of Sychar, was not a mere notation of some township to which he belonged - (Iscaiot is not the name of any known town or village anyway) - it was his acquired title when he turned away from the truth. His offence was not just his own, but that of the nation he represented, who were given over to the lie, as Judas was, because "they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved". It was the unbelieving nation which paid the Lord His contemptuous hire of thirty shekels of silver, and discharged Him from office as the Shepherd and Prophet of His people (see Zechariah 11: 12-14).

Sychar (Shechem) is a historic spot, rich in prophetic significance. It was overshadowed by those mountains of Ebal and Gerizim on which the tribes assembled to proclaim the blessings and curses of the Law (Deut. 11: 29 and Joshua 8; 30-35). It was there that the covenant was renewed in the last days of Joshua (Joshua 24).

Abraham's first altar was built at Shechem (Genesis 12: 6-7). There Jacob settled with his family after his return from Padan-Aram, building his altar and purchasing the famous "parcel of ground" later given to

Joseph whose descendants of the tribe of Ephraim settled there and where the bones of Joseph, carefully carried all the way from Egypt through all the 40-year wanderings of Israel were reverently interred (Joshua 24:32).

So holy a place, now defiled by heathen and Samaritan superstition, was the spot to which Christ now directed His steps. It was for this that "He must needs pass through Samaria" - not to reinforce and sanctify a superstition, but to rescue from defilement and error the soul of a woman who represented in herself the accumulated guilt of her people, and to state a truth concerning "holy places" most far-reaching in its implications.

Sychar, therefore, was the place of lies, though it had been dignified by Israel's vital history.

The "Woman of Sychar" needed to be rescued not only from the disgusting defilement of her immoral life, but from her superstitious veneration of those "holy places" which figured so prominently in her false religion. "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain"... "Our father Jacob gave us this well and drank thereof for himself and his cattle".

A MODEL CONVERSION

It should be duly noted as we proceed that this conversion of the Woman of Sychar is one of the clearest of all cases in the Bible of the "effectual calling" of the election of grace.. The place, time, subject, circumstances, all combine to show this was a "model" or pattern conversion, deliberately "set" by divine providence and foreordination. This woman stood for more than herself. She represented the entire Samaritan nation in her condition, her superstition, and above all, in her marital complications - her five husbands, and her sixth who was not her husband. She stood for more - she represented the gentile tribes to the uttermost parts of the Earth; for the Samaritans were essentially a non-Jewish nation who had merely incorporated Jewish elements into their superstition.

The conversion of this woman was not brought about by any "appeal for decision" or any of the methods so beloved by many forms of evangelism today. The impact of divine truth upon her soul in a moment unexpected and unsought, overwhelmed her in a tremendous moment of conviction and apprehension. She was "discovered" by truth rather than that she discovered truth. A converting light was poured upon her spirit like as upon Paul on the Damascus road, and she was born again and believed as the divine wind "blew where it listed". That such an example should follow immediately upon chapter 3, with its basic doctrine of regeneration, is highly significant. The fact that it was brought about at the end of a process however short in time, of doctrinal declaration concerning the "living water", her false living, her vain religious notions, the preaching of the spiritual nature of God and of worship, the announcement of the New Covenant with its abolition of temple and Mosaic ordinances, should give food for thought likewise to all those who talk of a "regeneration without means", without prior enlightenment and information concerning the gospel.

Regeneration apart from Biblical enlightenment is a thing unknown in Holy Scripture. Let the modern "Reformed" movement examine, in the light of this most illuminating fourth chapter of John, the confused state of the doctrine of regeneration amongst many good people and teachers. Regeneration cannot be separated from the operation of faith and repentance in the soul. The idea of a man being a regenerate man without repentance, faith or worship could only have arisen out of a theology of ignorance or fear. The Bible knows nothing of it and it was unknown to the 16th century Reformers.

Verse 6. The Lord significantly sits on the mouth of Jacob's well, for He was that Well of Life, the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, which that ancient well prefigured. It was "about the sixth hour", high noon, the middle of the day, the dividing point of the long day of man upon the earth. The Word of God was reaching its zenith, its highest glory and its long anticipated ministry of the healing of fallen man's offence, and the removal of his curse.

But He was "wearied with his journey". Our God knows all our infirmities by partaking of them. He who made the worlds, the unwearying journey of the sun, and the procession of the seasons, was wearied and parched with the heat of that blazing sun He had created, Truly "He knoweth our frame; he remembers that we are but dust". Wearing our humanity and being burdened with its He "sat thus on the well".

Verse 7. There appears this "woman of Samaria" to draw water. And why should she come at high noon, so considerable a walk from the city with her heavy pitcher (and much heavier it would be on the return journey)? Were there not other and more convenient wells to supply that prime necessity of human life? Indeed there were, but this was Jacob's well and in the poverty of her soul, knowing nothing yet of that divine and pure fountain of living water, she came at much inconvenience to Jacob's well, her entire religion being centred in the superstition that merit was to be obtained, not on a moral basis, but on the respect thus paid to antiquity.

Yet there was a prophetic element in this journey to the well, for Jacob's well does indeed stand for that gospel provision which Almighty God had foreordained should arise in the family of the great patriarch to whom belonged the birthright and the privilege of being the progenitor of Him who was the firstborn, the Only Begotten, the Eternal Son, the conqueror of death and the grave.

And there, on the mouth of the well, He sat, whom the well had for over a thousand years prefigured - type became antitype. The shadow passed into the substance. The Old Covenant melted into the New. Christ, the Fulfiller of all promise made to the fathers, the hope and expectation of fallen humanity, was come. Behold Him, sitting upon the well - wearied with the journey!

SEVEN STEPS TO IMMORTALITY

The encounter begins. The Lord speaks first the first of Seven Sayings which brought the woman to repentance and faith - "GIVE ME TO DRINK".

John is careful at this stage to tell us that Jesus was alone. His disciples were gone into the city to buy food and could not help Him in His thirst. The narrative of the conversation, therefore, must have been related to John by the woman herself, as that of John 3 was related by Nicodemus.

He who was later to cry from the Cross - "I thirst", now says to the woman - "Give me to drink", He bears the burden of man's sin. He who is the Son of Man, the true Man, the representative of the human race, the Second Adam, suffers all the pangs of human thirst, Man's primal necessity, lifegiving and life preserving water, the figure of that which is the life of the soul, is felt by Him. His thirst is mankind's thirst. On their behalf He cries - "Give me to drink" - and comes forth to supply the need, who is Himself the only well, the true fountain of living water.

The woman marvels. The Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. Resentful of the lying claim of Samaria to be equal with the Jew in the favour and promise of God, resentful of Samaritan possession of such shrines as Jacob's well which properly belonged to Jewry, they hated and despised; this "people of lies".

"How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?"

This affords the opportunity to the Lord to speak again, this time of Himself as the true well of life.

"If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water".

Strange words in the ears of this poor woman. What a mystery is the divine to the merely carnal and human. What opening of the eyes, ears and heart is necessary before the soul in its sinfulness can begin to comprehend the glorious truth.

A LESSON FOR PREACHERS

How necessary indeed, to life eternal, that the soul should know these two vital things - what is the gift of God, and who it is who brings it. Let all preachers of the Word of God take heed. Let them look to it that their ministry is erected on these two divine pillars, and let them labour tirelessly and perpetually to expound from the whole range of the Word of God, that "gift" of divine grace which alone can make alive and satisfy the need of the soul. Let them tell who that Person is who is the only giver of life and declare what is His high dignity and rank in creation, His place in the Mystery of the Godhead, His authority, His excellence, His obedience, His commission to act for man toward God and be the Mediator and the Ransom between God and the soul.

They will find scope enough in the two following chapters of John (5 and 6) to learn from the Lord's own words, who and what He is, and what is His charge, commission and service in the recovery of man and the restoration of all things lost by the Fall.

They will find that there is an extension of these things in Holy Scripture, passing all measure; a lifetime of earnest study and faithful exposition will be insufficient to do more than merely introduce this vast subject which it must be left to eternity fully to comprehend.

Yet some preachers are short of subject matter for the preaching of Christ and any rag of a sermon sweated out at the last minute after a week wasted in frivolous talk, indulgence in food, sleep and light reading, enervating the mind and dulling the faculties - anything will do for the service of the pulpit. A few hastily gathered thoughts, garnished with episodes and anecdotes conveniently provided by cheap literature on the library shelf, will eke out the time, and bail out the preacher for another week of slothfulness.

It is thus that the ministry has failed in our time and easy schemes of Bible "knowledge" purveyed in cleverly constructed Bibles, or ready-made theologies, have taken the place of those lucubrations, those burnings of midnight oil, upon which the wise men of Jewry used to say a special blessing of God rested. And we have thereby a fresh reason for the visit paid by Nicodemus, at night to interview the Lord, against that convenient theory that he came in the dark only because he was afraid of the Jews! Perhaps Nicodemus was much wiser and more faithful than his traducers, and his midnight excursion might be copied by many a preacher who, though he may riot fear the Jews, has no stomach for being out of bed and at his books at times when the rest of the world is asleep. Thank you Nicodemus! Great is the truth thou dost exemplify, and verily thou shalt prevail!

THE WELL IS DEEP

The narrative proceeds. The woman is mystified. She knows not that she has just heard a saying of immense spiritual power and significance. She uses words which have been aptly borrowed to describe many a theologian and expositor who vainly tries to prove himself to be what he is not: "Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep".

But there is nothing quite so subtle in this artless woman's mind, though she gives voice to a prophetic truth of profound subtlety. Here is one who does not need to draw water for He is Himself the fountain of life; and truly this well is deep - fathomless as eternity, deep as the life of God.

Greater than Jacob art thou? Greater than our great patriarch who gave us the well?

Yes indeed, woman, for this is He who, in the first instance, gave Jacob the well, who wrestled with that holy and afflicted man at the ford and gave him his new name, ISRAEL. This is He who was with Jacob and spoke to him in those days when the sun smote him by day and the moon by night, who was with the church in the Old Testament in all her long and troubled pilgrimage, who in all her afflictions was Himself afflicted, and who now suffers thirst on thy behalf, O woman, as He brings to thee water, one drink of which and thou shalt never again thirst. This fount of life which I AM, will be in thee a well of water perpetually springing up in thy heart unto everlasting life.

So is Christ in all the energy of regenerating grace and power. Let chapter 4 of John be joined to chapter 3. Let the doctrine of regeneration come into full play. Let the water of John 3, verse 5, so often confused with baptismal water just as this woman confused the living water of divine grace with the muddy water of Jacob's well - let that water of regeneration and of the Spirit speak in our theologies and show to us that regeneration is not a passive and static thing, but a vital desire, a vehement thirst for that water of life which ever satisfies, ever flows, yet for which we continue to desire and pant after - "As the hart panteth for the waterbrooks, so longeth my soul after thee O God: My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? (Psalm 42:1-2).

Blessed thirst indeed, ever satisfied, yet never full; the more it flows the deeper the channel it cuts and the more the soul longs after Christ.

For they who love God cannot love Him by measure; Their love is but hunger to love Him still better.

Grand and glorious this mystery, O woman. Thou art on the verge of the greatest of all discoveries, and thou art enacting a theology of regeneration which far transcends the apprehension of the greatest of theologians. How could it ever be that our day should be reserved for a philosophy of regeneration (claiming to be "reformed" though the Reformers were ignorant of it) which postulates that regeneration is something apart from, justification by faith, and that one can exist without the other and one can have Christ -without knowing Him, or believing in Him or enjoying Him, or thirsting for Him as in a dry and thirsty land where no water is? If there be such a thing as Antinomianism, this is surely it.

NEITHER COME HITHER TO DRAW

The woman, still in her blindness, but with her desires awakened, her interest aroused, makes her first direct request -

"Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw".

So near, dear heart, yet not near enough. Still thou dost utter words which thou knowest not, rich in prophetic depth (for the Spirit of Him who converses with thee, is upon thy poor lips and thou speakest for all of us, all the time, words of the New Covenant of Grace, for which all the world waited till this hour of thy deliverance).

Thou speakest truth! Thou shalt not be denied, for never again wilt thou come to this Old Covenant well to draw water. Now there flows for thee from the depth of thy Creator's love, that holy river of life which like Ezekiel's river from beneath the threshold of the mystic temple, flows ever deeper and wider till its broad stream irrigates all this scene of death and despair and brings life wherever it goes. The day of Moses and the earthly Jacob is drawing to its close. The divine mediator is here, and that for which Jacob wrestled is about to be realised. The glory of the New Covenant, the everlasting Mercy of God revealed in Christ, already sends the first streaks of its coming day across the dark horizon of thy life, and soon the Sun of righteousness will rise upon thee with healing in his wings.

The Lord does not correct the woman, for she has spoken truth which she knows not, but which will soon be made plain to her. Meantime the process of enlightenment proceeds, Her soul must be smitten within her, as she discovers that every guilty secret is known to the One who thus sits on the mouth of the well.

"Go, call thy husband, and some hither".

O thou who healest the soul, how merciless is thy mercy, and how cruel thy love! Like the faithful surgeon thou must probe and reveal in order to heal and deliver. She has no husband. In this she speaks truly, but who is the man with whom she lives? And what about the five husbands she already has lived with and who presumably are still alive?

PRELUDE TO REGENERATION

Let conscience now speak and do its work. We leave her for a moment to her shame, while we consider again the process of her regeneration. Yes, the process. She is not yet born again, but she is convicted of her sin. According to some theologies which call themselves "Reformed", she is already born again, but still unforgiven and still unrepentant. Believe that who can, yet this is the alternative left us by the theory that it is necessary to be born again first, in order to repent and believe, with a time element postulated, an interval of time wherein the soul, though regenerate, is not washed from its sin. Born again of the Spirit of God, yet remaining for however long or short a space, unholy, unrepentant and unbelieving! This could be a theology in which Satan himself might rejoice, and in which he would have no desire to interfere. It is certainly no part of our Reformed heritage and appears to arise not from Scriptural conclusions but from a philosophy of defence, jealously to guard the, territory against the incursion of one, Arminius.

Let us beware of encouraging the notion that the soul is passive and inactive in regeneration and even unfeeling and unaware. The birth of a soul is surely through the birthpangs of conviction, despair, desire, hope, fear, and the bitter waters of penitence. Faith and repentance are not additives to regeneration - they are part of it.

Let the soul therefore be plied with arguments, hopes, encouragements, warnings, instructions, even as Christ plied this woman's soul with the same and let the practical, rather than the theoretical theology, prevail in preaching. Let the fountain flow and let the barriers be removed which would forbid the free access of sinners to the Saviour.

FIVE HUSBANDS

From this woman, now with the gaping wound of her sin and shame fully exposed, we turn to the prophetic Word which supplies the full meaning of what is taking place. Jacob's well fades from view. No longer the burning noonday sun and the Saviour, wearied with the journey, sitting on the well. Fade all that human scene, while the past history of Jacob's well is revived. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob pass by, and their succeeding generations appear and disappear, till the time of a great and grievous calamity. The ten tribes which were separated from the House of David have polluted the land with their idolatry and sin, till there is no remedy, and Samaria is besieged by the Assyrian, falls to the heathen, its people destroyed and the remnant carried far away into perpetual captivity. The land is void, without an inhabitant, and the Assyrian conqueror brings in strangers to occupy, He gathers them from FIVE CITIES and these are the FIVE HUSBANDS of Samaria to which the woman's marital condition corresponds:

"And the King of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath and from Sepharvaim and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof". 2 Kings 17:24

This was the origin of the Samaritans. To placate "the God of the land" they incorporated with their own false gods, the worship of the God of Israel, under the tuition of an Israelitish priest specially brought over from the captivity by the King of Assyria. So this mongrel people acquired a mongrel religion of mingled heathen gods and the God of Israel. Truly they had had five husbands and He whom they now professed was not their husband. (See 2 Kings 17: 25-41).

Once again we see our Lord Christ moving through the prophecies on His prescribed and predestinated course, and the principal characters in this divine drama of redemption act not for themselves alone but for the Church, and for us her children, that the mystery of redemption might be unfolded piece by piece till the whole is revealed.

In the hidden wisdom of the Eternal God, all is comprehended and arranged, yet without interference with the essential moral liberty of the creature, so that by His vast and majestic control all things contribute at last to the display of the divine glory and the working out of the plan of redemption.

"Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out. For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him and it shall be recompensed to him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen". (Romans 11:33-36)

TRUE PREDESTINATION

His is a predestination which works, not outside all things, but, in and through all things, without disturbance of moral values, preserving intact the personality and integrity of the creature, in profound and consummate order, yet irresistibly drawing all things and events to a finality which perfectly achieves the divine counsels and fulfils the glorious task to which deity has set itself.

The woman speaks again, all her defences shattered, and the conviction dawning upon her that she stands in the presence of One in whom is the very Word of God. She will shortly know that He is, in fact, the Word of God incarnate.

Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.

Now she cannot rest. Her awakened spirit reaches out after the light. The whole issue fought out between Jew and Samaritan is raised. Who is right? Are both wrong?

Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

Well done, O woman, thou art on the verge of that great discovery which many in the Christian Church to this day have not clearly perceived.

Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye (Samaritans) worship ye know not what. We (Jews) know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

ABOLITION OF TEMPLE AND JEWISH ORDER

The Old Covenant, with its national centre, its temple and priesthood and sacrifices, its racial exclusivism, is about to be abolished. What then will happen to this woman's religion? What will happen to the Jew and his pride, his exclusive claim to the, prophets and the promises and his boasted prerogative above all the nations of the world?

The Lord is still at the commencement of His ministry. He has not yet reached the point where a mistaken and deplorable Dispensationalism has rent the work of Christ to preserve the Jew at the expense of the Church of the firstborn, by telling that Christ "offered" an earthly kingdom to the Jew, but the Jew would not have it; therefore Christ embarked upon an emergency plan to postpone the kingdom for 2,000 years until the time was ripe to force it upon the Jews without risk of a second refusal by making it "unconditional".

This caricature of the work of Christ bears its own refutation; Christ has already, in the early stages of His ministry, informed Nicodemus, and now informs this woman, that the Jews were wholly mistaken in supposing that Jerusalem was destined to be, the centre of worship and the seat of the divine rule over the earth. The kingdom He came to establish would be founded upon the abolition of that carnal conception. His kingdom consists not of a racial or national elite, elevated to global prerogative and privilege, but of the repentant, believing few, secretly born of the Spirit, regardless of history, nationality, or geography, for "God so loved THE WORLD, that WHOSOEVER" Now to the woman - "Neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem". Jew and Samaritan were equally mistaken.

The hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

That is, not in outward ceremonies and sacrifices which are only shadows of the truth, not with the apparatus of an earthly temple with its contingents of sacrificing priests and its brigades of serving Levites, but in the invisible realm of "Spirit and truth". And who would exchange these heavenly realities and liberties for the religious bondage of "dead works"?

Some contend that in some incredible Millennium both will obtain that is, spiritual worship will subsist side by side with bloody sacrifices and sin offerings of bulls and goats, with sprinkling priests, and golden bells, with Christ come down from heaven, vacating that eternal throne to which He has been exalted, to preside on earth over the very sacrifices which He died once and for all to abolish for ever.

Our readers will pardon our oft-reverting to this belief for it cannot be ignored. The system to which it belongs has done more to destroy knowledge of the Word of God and the effectual exposition thereof,

than anything else we know and it is the major evangelical error of our time, for it denies the New Testament and puts the prophets into cold storage until Jewish times return.

Christ anticipates this error by His powerful negative - "Neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem...."

God is a Spirit and they that worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth.

The Lord fixes the time of this REFORMATION - it was impending and imminent at the time He was speaking.

The hour cometh and now is.

Let that stand. The shadows have past, and with them the temple and its ordinances. The new Jerusalem, the Jerusalem which is from above (Galatians: 4:26), the heavenly Mount Zion (Hebrews 12:22) has taken the place of the earthly, and there is no word of Christ here or elsewhere to say that the earthly will ever be recalled to supplant or reinforce the spiritual; rather, Paul tells us that to mix the two is to make Christ the minister of sin. (Galatians 2:17).

The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.

Indeed, thou enlightened soul, trembling now on the brink of thy first confession of faith, tremblingly thou putteth forth thy hand to grasp the truth. Thou hast heard that Christ must come. Thou thinkest that He is here but not yet must thou say so till He has fully revealed Himself. He will, in truth, tell you all things, for He is the Word of God and through Him all divine mysteries will be unfolded and made available, and all thy shadows dispelled. In Him is all truth and He is thy Saviour, who now speaks to thee for the seventh and last time:

I that speak unto thee am He.

Blessed and happy soul! Thou didst come to Jacob's well that day to satisfy thy thirst. Thou hast discovered a deeper thirst than ever thou knowest before. Thy false religion shattered, thy sinful soul brought to the light of conviction and truth, thou lookest now upon thy Lord, and in joy of that sight and in elevation of soul now that thy burden is removed, thou wilt leave thy water pot empty at the well, forgetting all earthly things as thou goest to the city to tell the men of the place -

Come; see a man which told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?

Her departure coincided with the arrival of the twelve disciples, returned from their errand to the city. Though astonished that they should find Him in conversation with a Samaritan woman, they did not challenge her or question Him, but held their peace. They spread out their viands and begged Him to eat, but higher things occupied His soul -

I have meat to eat that ye know not of My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work.

In this woman He sees the accomplishment of all He came to do; the fruit of His sufferings and the fulfillment of that joy which was ever set before Him. And it is true that when the souls of men have been elevated in measure by the glory of their task in the gospel, and the contemplation granted to them of the mystery of Christ and of His Kingdom, the necessities of this present life have become insignificant, and divine things so real that even prison bars and heavy crosses have seemed little enough to endure for the

sake of Him whom their soul loves. Samuel Rutherford, enraptured by that view of Christ which made any cross carried for Him a thing of sweetness and unutterable beatitude, wrote to his friends in such exalted measure that it was said by one who had read his letters, "Hold off the Bible, and the world never saw such a book".

THEOLOGY TODAY

Much of theology today does not lead to Christ. It is only when doctrine flowers into divinity that it is valid. It might be correct and unfaulted, but if the lecture room does not resound at times with Hallelujahs, the young gentlemen there in training for the pulpit had better be anywhere than in that hothouse which dries up the soul and yields no perfume of adoration. True theology is that of David, which turns itself into psalms of ecstasy and declares,

"My heart is indicting a good matter. I speak of the things which I have made, touching the king. My tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men, grace is poured into thy lips.. (Psalm 45)

When theology and preaching are a labour they cannot succeed. When they are more to us than our necessary food; when our theology is a discovery of the unsearchable riches of Christ, then nothing is a burden but all is a beatitude.

Mr. Handel would not come for his food when called, and his servant found the great Master bowed in tears over his desk. He was composing the music to "He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief".

So should our sermons and our theology be as the box of ointment described by Solomon long ere it was broken at Bethany -

"While the king sitteth at his table my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof". (Song of Solomon 1:12)

FOUR MONTHS TO HARVEST

The Lord gathers the disciples around him and speaks to them in parables. It was yet four months to harvest. The grain was scarcely above the ground. Another four months must go by before the joyful day of reaping. But the gospel harvest was already anticipated with eagerness by the heavenly Reaper. "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, they are white already to harvest". In the poor Samaritan woman He foresaw the great gospel harvest which after His death and resurrection would begin to be reaped in a day which would extend to an age and bring in its sheaves from earth's utmost bounds. He surveys the bare fields but sees the whitening grain four months before it grew. From all eternity He anticipates the fruition of His task, and "for the joy set before Him, endures the cross, despising the shame".

In that joy of harvest He bids His servants share, and tells them their wages were secure. Here they would reap in joy and in heaven's glories they would mingle with delight. Nor would there be any difference observed between the faithful labourers whether it was their task to sow or to reap -

"I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour. Other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours".

The "other men" were the men of the Old Covenant: prophets, priests and kings, who wrote and preached and sang and prepared the way for the coming of the King. They did not live to see the full glory of the Son of Man, but their reward will be the same; and happy are they who display that faithfulness in reaping, as they who went before showed in planting.

Grace continues to step over all the boundaries of time. Many of the Samaritans believed in Christ because of the saying of the woman, and came to see and hear for themselves. At their importunity Christ consents to remain among them for two more days, so that many more believe on Him for His own spoken Word and make their grand confession -

Now we believe, not because of thy saying (O woman); for we have heard him ourselves and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Those days must have been happy days the Saviour spent in Samaria, though strange and perplexing to the disciples. The latter were being taught in advance the lesson that the gospel must cross all boundaries and reap its harvest to the utmost part of mankind - a lesson which they were slow to learn.

The Lord returns to Galilee and is well received, because many of the people had been at Jerusalem at the feast and had seen the miracles which the Lord performed there. A nobleman comes from Capernaum while Christ is at Cana, beseeching Him to return with him and heal his son who is at the point of death. The man's faith is tested. Why should the Lord go with him? Will he not believe unless he sees signs and wonders?

The poor man can but cry in his human distress, "Sir, come down ere my child die". The Lord cannot resist that plea. Our prayers enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. "God will hear their cry and will save them". He who delights to hear and answer prayer, has won the man over to faith. "Though I do not come with thee to Capernaum, believe, O man, that I am able here and now to heal and to save".

"Go thy way, thy son liveth".

The believing man goes as he was bidden, in faith that the deed has been done, and finds it even so, when he arrives next day at his home. The fever left the child at the precise hour of the Lord's spoken word and the man believed and all his house. And that hour was "the seventh hour", as John, the apostle of divine perfection, is careful to record.

Blessed indeed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.

The faith of the nobleman, without visible sign to support him, was approved, but the description of the state of the covenant nation stands - "Except ye (plural) see signs and wonders ye will not believe".

"An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas".

"The Jews seek after a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jew a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to us who are saved, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God".

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-alexander/seven-steps-from-sychar-to-immortality-ch-4/>

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