

Samaria — Galilee — Judea

John 4, 5.

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Article 39 of 47 **Short Meditations**

(Cavenagh, 1866.)

How simple and important are those words found in this scripture, "Wilt thou be made whole?" (John 5: 6.)

But their value will not be rightly prized, if we do not look carefully at the occasion that drew them forth.

The Lord was in Jerusalem. He was in the great centre and representative of human religiousness, and surrounded at that moment by its various provisions. It was the Sabbath. It was a Feast time in the city of solemnities. The ordinance, or angelic ministry of Bethesda was before Him, and multitudes lying around it. The Temple was at hand, and the Pharisees were all abroad.

In the midst of all these, speaking as they did the same language, and calling on man to be religious, the Lord plants Himself. But it is as a new thing, another thing than all that was there already, that He now appears. He does not notice the Feast, or the Sabbath, or the Temple. The ordinance He sets aside, and the Pharisees He provokes. His words went to cancel all, and bring in something entirely of another kind. "Wilt thou be made whole?" The man may at once free himself of all rivalry and resistance; he may cease to look around for human aid; he need wait no longer, nor doubt as to the long-desired blessing. It was there for him in Jesus without rivalry, without help from man, without delay, without doubt, without ordinance or angel. The only question was, Would he take the blessing from Jesus? would he be debtor to Him? would he stand by and see the salvation of God? would he let God, in grace, work for him?

What words indeed they were, in the midst of such a scene! what affecting, weighty words! They were a call from religiousness and its provisions and dependences, to faith and the provisions and sovereignty of grace.

This was in Judea. But there is Samaria and Galilee as well as Judea, and we must look at each of them.

These regions, morally, are very different. Samaria was the *defiled*, Galilee the *rational*, Judea the *religious*. These are the characteristic differences between them, as we see them in these chapters.

Samaria was the defiled, the outcast, the place without the camp, as we may say. It was a type of the world of sinners. It had no character to lose. But being such a place, it was just the place which the Son from the bosom came to visit, and in which He could exercise Himself.

Galilee was the rational, the proud, and the intellectual. The Lord's experience at Nazareth had already shown him the character of that country. It was a place where pride had prevailed over convictions, and where He had been refused, (however He might commend His authority to them,) because He was the Carpenter's Son. He had proved there, that a prophet had no honour in his own country. (Luke 4) He, therefore, rather tries another city in Galilee on this occasion, and He goes to Cana. But Cana is not Samaria to Him. There was *pretension* there. The Galileans receive Him because they had seen His miracles. They accredit Him for themselves, ere they accept Him. And nowhere is

the pride of pretension more detected than in the intellectual world.

Judea was the religious. If Galilee were the intellectual world, *Judea* was the religious world. Though of a different kind, neither will do for the Son from the bosom. He had not come among men to vindicate or adopt them as religious, nor to educate and cultivate them as intellectual. His business was with *defiled* man, with man as a sinner, and pretension on man's part in any form will not do for Him.

There is amazing comfort for the soul, in seeing how the Lord was differently affected in these different regions.

In Samaria He sat on the well with one of the defiled nation; and afterwards abode for two days in the midst of a number of them. *Conscience* was stirred there, and He is therefore among them without reserve. There is no weight on His spirit. He was in His due place, the place which gave Him opportunity to act as from Himself, and to let it be learnt what He was, and for what He had come into this world. He found a *home* in Samaria, for He found stirred consciences, or contrite, humbled hearts there. (Isaiah 57: 15.)

Towards Galilee He looked out with a weight upon His spirit. (John 4: 44) Galilee was not that natural scene for the Divine Stranger to serve in, that Samaria was. He did not come here, as I said before, to educate and cultivate intellectual man. And therefore while we see Him taking His place at the Well of Sychar with all ease, and then dwelling for two days among the Samaritans as at home, here in Galilee He finds no home, and enters it with reserve. He ministers grace and power there, but it is without refreshment of spirit. He has no meat there which His disciples know not of. Samaria had provided that. *Judea* He has to test; rather, indeed, to cancel. *Judea* was the religious, as Galilee was the rational; Galilee had its pretensions, *Judea* its preoccupations; and to *Judea* the Lord has to propose Himself as the end of the law, the substance of its shadows, the object of all its ordinances, and the One that was to take the place of all that was there. He takes His stand at the side of Bethesda, and simply says to the impotent man, "Wilt thou be made whole?" He would be accepted as the end of all ordinances, the life and power of all the institutions of the city of solemnities. He is personally doing what the Apostle doctrinally is doing in the Epistle to the Hebrews, substituting Himself in the place of all the provisions of the Mosaic or Levitical dispensation. He entered Samaria freely, Galilee with reserve; but in *Judea*, He found no place at all. The Sabbath, the Pool, the Temple, the Feasts were there before Him, and He is challenged as an intruder, and has to withdraw.

All this turns to our comfort. We learn from it what Jesus is, and we find Him out to our comfort. It is when our *necessities* welcome Him, as in Samaria, that He gives us His presence; it is when our *pretensions* are made, whether they be intellectual or religious, that we, either wholly or in part, lose Him. The Lord at the well of Sychar and at the pool of Bethesda shows Himself differently.

And let me add, that as we *begin*, so we must *go on* with the Lord, as *sinner*s, as Samaritans, with exercised consciences. If we let go conscience and take up intellect, if we part with a broken heart, and take up religiousness, if we leave Samaria for either Galilee or *Judea*, communion with Jesus will fail. For Jesus left *home*, when He left *Samaria*, and found no other in either Galilee or *Judea*.

Surely, then, we see these regions to be morally diverse, and the blessed Lord to be related to each of them in diverse ways. *Conscience* was stirred in Samaria, and no miracle asked for; and there Jesus was at home. *Mind* rather than conscience was exercised in Galilee, and miracles were the ground of faith; and there Jesus did a deed of grace and power, but did not dwell. *Religion* shut Him out from *Judea*.

Does not all this tell us about Jesus to our comfort? Wretched, self-ruined; corrupted child of

nature, the Son of God will approach, but *pretension* in no form will do for Him. It may be intellectual pretension that discusses Him and weighs Him in its own balances — it may be religious pretension, which still trusts its doings in spite of the offers of His grace; but neither will do for Him who came into a scene of ruins, just because it was ruins, foul, black, leprous, uncleansable ruins. Let the sinner be the sinner, Jesus will approach him, for He came to seek and to save him — but let man pretend or assume, Jesus must be reserved.

It is a sweet meditation to go along these priceless chapters, and make these discoveries of the Son of God. We may *study* Him, profoundly study Him, when we have Him *thus* before us; for it is heart and conscience, and not the mind merely, that will then sit at the lesson.

With all this, however, I must put one other thing forth — "the mode the Lord took with the defiled Samaritan, thus to get for Himself a *home* there." As He came both to *seek* and to *save*, this scene shows Him to us both *seeking* and *saving*.

She was a child of nature, ruined, polluted nature. Her heart knew nothing beyond the ordinary enjoyments and occupations of every-day life.

The Lord begins by *inviting her confidence*. And this He does in the skilfulness of love, seeking a favour at her hand.

He *acquires* the confidence He sought. She feels at ease in His presence.

He then *uses* the confidence He had gained, for her good. He awakens the curiosity of the one He had gained. He uses such a form of words, as lets her feel, that it is no ordinary person she has encountered. She takes up the word "Sir," showing that her soul had been arrested and fixed. And having thus gained both her confidence and her attention to Himself as no common person, He uses His advantages still for her, but with faithfulness to her present condition. He *addresses Himself to her conscience*; and after a very short delay, He gets it, exposing her to herself, for her confusion and amazement.

Thus He has acquired her *confidence*, her *attention*, and her *conscience*. But there is much more. She struggles, and would fain hide again — as Adam of old. A question about worship shall do for her what the trees of the garden did for him. But He follows *her into her covert*, and answers her inquiry in such a form of words, as seems only to fix the attention of her soul more deeply upon Him, and awakens her wonder more earnestly, so that she would almost identify Him with the promised Messiah.

He, then, stands revealed to her. This, however, is for her *satisfaction*; as before she had stood revealed to herself, by His words, for her *confusion*.

She leaves Him, and the disciples return; but they learn from Him, that their provisions were now unneeded. He had sent away a poor sinner happy, and *this was meat and drink and rest to Him*.

What secrets are disclosed in these things of Samaria, Galilee, and Judea, and what methods of grace in these dealings with the woman!

As to her, the Lord *seeks*, and then *saves*. He sought the confidence of a sinner — then fixed her soul's attention on Himself — then exposed her to herself, and finally, revealed Himself to her in light and joy and liberty — and when the whole process is over, He takes more joy in the issue of it, than she did herself!

This is the Jesus we have to do with, and whom it is our privilege, as it is our duty, to study.

He can find a home, among us on this earth, only in the poor sinner that with broken heart deals

with Him — and such a home as this He must get for Himself by the inworking power of His Spirit. We find a sample of all this here. The prophet, I may say, had sketched or anticipated this, in Isaiah 57: 15-19. But all this tells us of the Saviour we have found. His different experience in Samaria, Galilee, and Judea, tells us that He gets a home only in the midst of broken-hearted sinners; and His dealing with the woman shows us how He gets that home for Himself.