

**The Gospel of John (25);
“Jesus and the Woman of Samaria” (3)**

Introduction:

Let us rejoin our Lord Jesus as He was engaged in conversation with this woman of Samaria, while they sat at Jacob’s well. Today we will consider further the promises that Jesus gave to this woman, promises realized to her if she but knew and embraced in faith who He was. Her life, which had been characterized by disillusionment, disappointment, and degradation, nevertheless, could begin anew. Before her was the possibility of a new life filled with joy, peace, and righteousness--blessings that she had never known, but apparently had sought, but in the wrong ways, in the wrong places, with the wrong people. Jesus could enable her to never “thirst again”, but to have within her “a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” And so, where the conversation began with Jesus asking her for water from Jacob’s well, progressed to this woman requesting “living water” from Him. He who asks of her is also He who gives to her, and that freely and abundantly. And if He did so for her, who believed, He will do so for you and me who believe.

We have read the entire account several times, but to begin today let us read just the first 15 verses of John 4—**John 4:1-15**.

Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John ²(though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), ³He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. ⁴But He needed to go through Samaria.

⁵So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give Me a drink.” ⁸For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

⁹Then 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.

¹⁰Jesus 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.”

¹¹The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? ¹²Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?”

¹³Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴but 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.”

¹⁵The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.”

In our study of this passage we are in its second section, which tells of the initial meeting of Jesus and this woman. We will continue from where we left off, and so we will begin with verse 15 in this section we have called:

II. Jesus met and engaged a Samaritan woman in conversation (4:7-26)

We read in **verse 15** that this woman requested “this water” from Jesus so that she would not thirst “nor come here to draw.” It is difficult to assess her true desires at this point from her few words. But that

has not prevented many from attempting to do so down through history. Here is a summary of opinions of various commentators through the centuries.

Some think, as Musculus, Calvin, Bucer, Brentius, Gualter, Lightfoot, Poole, and Dyke, that the request was made in a sarcastic and sneering spirit, as though she would say, “truly this water would be a fine thing, if I could get it! Give me, if you have it to give.”

Some think, as Augustine, Cyril, Bullinger, Rollock, Hildersam, Jansenius, and Nifanius, that the request was only the lazy, indolent wish of one who was weary of this world’s labour, and yet could see nothing but the things of this world in our Lord’s sayings; like the request of the Jews, “Ever more give us this bread” (John 6:34). It is as though she would say, “Anything to save me the trouble of coming to draw water would be a boon. If you can do that for me, do it.” As Bengel says, “She wished to have the living fountain at her own house.”

Some think, as Chrysostom, Theophylact, Euthymius, that the request was really the prayer of an anxious soul, aroused to some faint spiritual desires by the mention of eternal life. “Hast thou eternal life to bestow? Give it to me.”¹

These varied opinions of what this woman was thinking and what she desired when she spoke to Jesus confirms the fact that we are incapable of seeing into the inner most working of a soul and assess motivations and desires. Only the Lord can see into the heart and know precisely what someone is thinking and what is motivating his speech.

I wish people in Washington D.C. and across our nation would understand this truth. We have heard authoritative pronouncements by many of what is in a man’s heart and what is the nature of his true motives. I am afraid such pronouncements reflect more the condition of the pronouncer’s heart than the true condition of the one under scrutiny. Do you recall how the brother of young David accused him wrongly because he assumed he could “see” clearly the condition of his heart? David’s father, Jesse, had sent young David to the battlefield to deliver some goods to his brothers and to learn of their condition. When David arrived, he learned of the humiliation of the army of Israel due to the refusal and failure of anyone to meet the challenge of Goliath, the champion of the army of the Philistines. David was indignant. We read in 1 Samuel 17 this account:

²⁶Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?”

²⁷And the people answered him in this manner, saying, “So shall it be done for the man who kills him.”

²⁸*Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab’s anger was aroused against David, and he said, “Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle.”*

²⁹And David said, “What have I done now? Is there not a cause?” (1 Sam. 17:26-29)

Eliab was wrong in his assessment and assertion of the motivation of his youngest brother, David. When we claim that we know the heart of a man or woman just from a casual observation or hearing of words, we are acting unjustly and irresponsibly. It often reveals our own hardness of heart when we attribute false motives to another, judging him for what we presume to be the fault of his heart. As Christians we are not to fall into the way of “thinking” that seems to characterize so many in today’s world. Yes, we are to assess and judge the actions and attitudes of people, but the heart is hidden from us. But sadly we now have a different climate in our culture. There are those who refuse to give the benefit of the doubt to another, but rather, they doubt the benefit of everything and everyone to which they are opposed.

¹ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 218.

True Christian love, however, “thinks no evil”, and “hopes all things.” Love gives the benefit of the doubt, in that it “believes all things” (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

Only the Living Word of God is a “discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). We are warned, “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts” (1 Cor. 4:5). Of course when it says we are to judge “nothing”, it is referring to assessing and pronouncing judgment upon those things that we are incapable of knowing clearly and fully, such as the motivations of the heart.

I would think that by this point in this woman’s conversation with the Lord that she was considering something more than just physical water. Jesus had said to her that the gift He could bestow upon her would include the gift of everlasting life. There must have been on her part at this time a degree of interest and desire for spiritual reality, even though it may have been with mixed physical and worldly concerns. And so it is that often times when the Lord begins to draw people to salvation in Him, they initially come with mixed desires and motivations. **J. C. Ryle** spoke of this in the context of this Samaritan woman. After citing the assessments of this woman’s heart mentioned by those many men above, Ryle wrote these words:

I venture to think that none of these three views is quite correct. The true motive of the request was probably a vague feeling of desire that the woman herself could hardly have defined. It is useless to analyze and scrutinize too closely the first languid and imperfect desires that arise in souls when the work of the Spirit begins His work of conversion. It is folly to say that the first movings of the heart towards God must be free from all imperfect motives and all mixture of infirmity. The woman’s motives in saying, “Give me this water,” were probably mixed and indefinite. Material water was not out of her thoughts, and yet she had probably some desires after everlasting life. Enough for us to know that she asked and received, she sought and found. Our great aim must be to persuade sinners to apply to Jesus, and say to Him, “Give me to drink.” If we forbid them to ask anything until they can prove that they ask in a perfect spirit, we should do no good at all. It would be as foolish to scrutinize the grammatical construction of an infant’s cries, as to analyze the precise motives of a soul’s first breathings after God. If it breathes at all and says, “Give,” we ought to be thankful.”²

We next read of Jesus’ response to her request in **verses 16-18**.

¹⁶*Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.”*

¹⁷*The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.”*

Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.”

Our Lord made known to her the blessing of free and full spiritual life that He could give her. But even though she made this request, she was not yet ready to receive. She had a sin problem that had to be exposed and brought to the forefront of her thinking. She would need to know that if she received what Jesus offered her, that it would be due solely to the mercy and grace of God. She was not deserving of the least of God’s blessings. Her sinful life had discredited her from deserving favorable treatment if assessed to be worthy of God’s blessing. She was a sinner and justly under God’s condemnation. But that would not disqualify her from salvation, if she but acknowledged her sin and turned from it in repentance and believed on Jesus Christ as her Savior from sin.

Jesus was kind to her in the manner that he confronted her with her sin, but His kindness did not temper His directness. He made it clear to her that she was an adulteress and fornicator. He would have her own up to her sin, to her spiritual guilt and poverty. Essentially what Jesus did was preach the law of God to her.

Now commonly there is an order that we bring the message of salvation to a sinner. We first proclaim to them *the law of God*, by which the Lord brings to the soul *the conviction of sin*. We then proclaim *the*

² Ibid.

gospel of Jesus Christ, which is *the divine remedy for sin*. Most of the time this is the order set forth in the Bible. First the law is proclaimed, and then the gospel. First there was the Old Testament, which chiefly sets forth the law of God, and then, second, there is the New Testament, which sets forth the gospel of Jesus Christ. But to this woman Jesus reversed the more common order. Jesus first preached the gospel, and then He set before her the law of God. But make no mistake, both are essential in bringing people to salvation.

I have always appreciated the words of **Charles Spurgeon** on this matter. He wrote of the need to make sinners know that they are sinners, who are deservedly doomed in their sin, before they may see the glory of the gospel, the good news of salvation freely given to guilty sinners. He wrote:

The withholding of the doctrine of the total depravity (the utter sinfulness) of man has wrought serious mischief to many who have listened to a certain kind of preaching. These people do not get a true healing because they do not know the disease under which they are suffering; they are never truly clothed because nothing is done towards stripping them. In many ministries, there is not enough of probing the heart and arousing the conscience by the revelation of man's alienation from God, and by the declaration of the selfishness and the wickedness of such a state. Men need to be told that, except divine grace shall bring them out of their enmity to God, they must eternally perish; and they must be reminded of the sovereignty of God, that He is not obliged to bring them out of this state, that He would be right and just if He left them in such a condition, that they have no merit to plead before Him, and no claims upon Him, but that if they are to be saved, it must be by grace, and by grace alone. The preacher's work is to throw sinners down in utter helplessness, that they may be compelled to look up to Him who alone can help them.³

Spurgeon wrote in another place instructing the would-be soul winner about the need to discern the conviction of sin as an evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing a soul to salvation.

As this God-begotten spiritual life in men is a mystery, we shall speak to more practical effect if we dwell upon the signs following and accompanying it, for these are the things we must aim at. First, regeneration (the new birth) will be shown in conviction of sin. This we believe to be an indispensable mark of the Spirit's work; the new life as it enters the heart causes intense inward pain as one of its first effects. Though nowadays we hear of persons being healed before they have been wounded, and brought into a certainty of justification without ever having lamented their condemnation, we are very dubious as to the value of such healings and justifyings. This style of things is not according to the truth. God never clothes men until He has first stripped them, nor does He quicken them by the gospel till first they are slain by the law. When you meet with persons in whom there is no trace of conviction of sin, you may be quite sure that they have not been wrought upon by the Holy Spirit; for "when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." When the Spirit of the Lord breathes on us, He withers all the glory of man, which is but as the flower of grass, and then He reveals a higher and abiding glory.⁴

But then Spurgeon gave a word of caution.

Do not be astonished if you find this conviction of sin to be very acute and alarming; but, on the other hand, do not condemn those in whom it is less intense, for so long as sin is mourned over, confessed, forsaken, and abhorred, you have an evident fruit of the Spirit. Much of the horror and unbelief which goes with conviction is not of the Spirit of God, but comes of Satan or corrupt nature; yet there must be true and deep conviction of sin, and this the preacher must labour to produce, for where this is not felt the new birth has not taken place.⁵...

³ Charles Spurgeon, **The Soulwinner** (Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 24.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 32.

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 32f.

He further wrote,

You and I must continue to drive at men's hearts till they are broken; and then we must keep on preaching Christ crucified till their hearts are bound up; and when this is accomplished, we must continue to proclaim the gospel till their whole nature is brought into subjection to the gospel of Christ.⁶

And so, here we see that the Lord Jesus brought this woman to see her sin. He basically drew her attention to the law of God. He made it clear to her that her life had been characterized by a disregard and repeated transgression of God's law, particularly the **7th commandment** of the Ten Commandments, which reads, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exo. 20:14). The Lord Jesus preached the gospel to this woman, but He also preached to her the law of God, in order to bring to her soul the conviction of sin.

The Lutheran commentator, **Richard Lenski** (1864–1936), gave a good account of our Lord preaching both the law and gospel to this Samaritan woman.

The entire conversation on Jesus' part is misunderstood when it is not observed that up to this point Jesus is using the gospel and that from now on He employs the law. This means that Jesus knew that the woman could not yet believe and He did not expect her to believe so soon. The law must first crush the heart in contrition, then faith can enter in, and not till then. So both law and gospel must be preached, and Jesus preaches both; the two appear here most plainly marked. Either may be offered first, or both may be intertwined, though each always remains distinct, likewise the proper effects of each. Here Jesus uses the gospel first. It is a mistake to imagine that in doing this He failed and then tried something else. Not one word of the gospel was lost upon this woman; its effect presently comes with a rush when the law begins to take hold upon her heart and to show her sins and her tremendous need of the gospel.⁷

And yet it is a sad thing, that due to the error of dispensationalism often the law of God is never proclaimed from the pulpit. It is argued, "We are not under law, but under grace", and therefore they do not preach the law of God. Yes, the Word of God declares, "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). But what that means is that we do not relate to God under the covenant of the works of the law, but rather under the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Thank God that is so! But this verse does not teach that we are not to proclaim the law of God. Paul declared that "through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). If you take away the law of God from the hearing of people, they will not be brought to see the full weight of their guilt before God due to their sin. And to the degree that the clarity and authority of God's law is not proclaimed, the preciousness of the grace of God in the gospel will not be understood or desired by sinners.

We read in **verse 19**, "*The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.*" The woman was admitting indirectly that Jesus was right in His description of her life. Furthermore, the woman was right, Jesus was a prophet. She probably did not know how right she was! Jesus was indeed a prophet, even "the prophet" that Moses had prophesied would come (Cf. Acts 3:22). The woman made no apology, offered no qualifiers or excuses. Her sin did lead her to confess something about Jesus. She knew that He knew all there was concerning her. She owned her sin.

The next statement of the woman seems to the casual reader to be out of place, or at least inappropriate. It would at first consideration seem that the woman was deflecting our Lord's words to her regarding her sin. We read in **verse 20**, "*Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.*" Some say this should be understood in this way, "Jesus was directing her to consider her sin, but she sought to divert the conversation to another topic, that being the right way to worship God." This was the view of **Leon Morris**:

⁶ Ibid, p. 28.

⁷ R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel** (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), p. 313.

The woman may have been genuinely interested in the topic she now raises... But it seems more probable that she is simply trying to change the subject. She wants to steer the conversation away from the unpleasant subject of her sin. So she introduces a distraction. She points to the different ideas held by Jews and Samaritans about the place God has chosen in which men may worship Him.⁸

Donald Carson disagreed with this position, but suggested something similar.

The sudden change of subject has prompted many interpreters to suggest that the woman raises a disputed point of theology as a means to distract Jesus from the sin-question she finds so embarrassing. It is always easier to talk theology than to deal with truth that is personally distressing. But this interpretation may be guilty of too greatly 'psychologizing' the text. A simpler supposition is that the woman's discovery that Jesus is some kind of Jewish prophecy prompts her to raise the outstanding point of theological contention between Jews and Samaritans, as much to demonstrate her religious awareness as to set the stranger a testing challenge. 'There are some people who cannot engage in a religious conversation with a person of a different persuasion without bringing up the points on which they differ' (Bruce, p. 108).⁹

However, to suggest she diverted the Lord's attention from her sin does not seem to be a reasonable conclusion. Here is one who took issue with this take on her words:

What now follows (v. 20) has again been misunderstood. In fact, the previous wrong conceptions culminate at this point and create confusion. Thus it is said that a gap occurs at this point, and that John skipped what lies between. Again, that the woman with quick wit here turns the conversation away from these delicate and painful personal matters to a question that Jews and Samaritans argued; that she makes a tricky dialectical evasion. But then Jesus would never have answered as He did, carefully and to the point, the very question the woman raises. He would have rebuked her and have driven in more deeply the hook of the law she would thus be evading.¹⁰

But most commentators appear to take the woman's question in this way. In other words, after determining that Jesus was indeed a prophet, she would pose the question that would have been foremost on the mind of a Samaritan: "How do you understand the great difference between the way the Jews and Samaritans believe God should be worshipped?"

But it seems to me that this introduces a serious break and change in the matter at hand. Jesus just confronted this woman with her great sin and her need to obtain God's forgiveness of her sins. Therefore, I believe that the point is this: She was not attempting to change the subject; rather, after Jesus proved Himself to her as a prophet of God who had supernaturally recounted her life's sins, *she was now inquiring of Jesus where she should go to worship God and thereby receive the cleansing of her sin that Jesus had just openly set before her.* The Jews said Jerusalem was where you needed to worship God in order to be forgiven of your sin. The Samaritans said that the temple on Mt. Gerizim was the place that they could meet with God and receive His forgiveness for sin. Consider these comments:

The woman recognizes that the exposure of her sin means that she is confronted by a prophet (cf. 9:17); and, since it is the work of a prophet to point also to the place of forgiveness, she asks Him to make known to her the proper place of worship. The distinction between the true and false worship of God had already formed the theme of the classical passage in the Old Testament concerning the Samaritans (2 Kings 17:28 sqq.); and it was also the subject of contemporary controversy between Samaritans and Jews. According to the Samaritans, Mt. Gerizim had been the scene of the sacrifice of Isaac and of Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek; and in their version of the Pentateuch it, and not Mt.

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 267.

⁹ Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 221f.

¹⁰ Lenski, p. 318.

Ebal, was the site of the first Hebrew sacrifice after the people had passed over Jordan into the Holy Land (Deut. 27:4, cf. Deut. 11:29, 27:12). To the Jews, however, the sacred Samaritan mountain was no more than the seat of sectarian worship founded by the renegade Manasseh, who had been expelled from Jerusalem for marrying the daughter of Sanballat (Neh. 13:28) and who had assisted his father-in-law to establish a separate sanctuary on Mt. Gerizim. Josephus described the Samaritans as perishing in their separate worship (*ANT.* 13:74-79, 256); Rabbi Eliezer (A.D. 90) held that they were men who from motives of fear had externally adopted Judaism whilst remaining heathen at heart, and who were consequently to be treated as non-Israelites; Rabbi Ishmael ben Jose (A.D. 180), commenting on Genesis 35:4, supposed the images were still hidden under the mountain, and therefore pronounced Gerizim to be an idolatrous sanctuary.¹¹

To understand the woman's statement about the place of true worship, let us affirm that a significant aspect of offering true worship to God was obtaining cleansing from sin by God which would be obtained at the temple of God. We see this in the dedication of Solomon's temple recorded in **2 Chronicles 6:36-39**.

³⁶“When they (Your people) sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to a land far or near; ³⁷yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity, saying, ‘We have sinned, we have done wrong, and have committed wickedness’; ³⁸and when they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, where they have been carried captive, and pray toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen, and toward the temple which I have built for Your name: ³⁹then hear from heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, **and forgive Your people who have sinned against You.**

But the woman's concern was a real one. Could she, a Samaritan woman, hope to be received by the priesthood at the temple in Jerusalem, if she were to travel there to worship God, to receive the forgiveness of her sins? Would not the temple on Mt. Gerizim be more suitable?

Actually, when Solomon dedicated the temple, he did ask God to hear and answer the petitions of Gentiles who sought to worship the true God in the temple at Jerusalem. Again we read in 2 Chronicles 6 Solomon's prayer to God:

³²“Moreover, concerning a *foreigner*, who is not of Your people Israel, but has come from a far country for the sake of Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm, when they come and pray in this temple; ³³then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, that all peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this temple which I have built is called by Your name. (2 Chron. 6:32, 33)

And though during the days of our Lord's earthly ministry the temple in Jerusalem had an outer court dedicated to non-Jews--the court of the Gentiles--the Gentiles had been effectively denied full participation in the worship of God. When Jesus first cleansed the temple of money changers as John recorded in chapter 2, they had taken control of the court of the Gentiles. Jesus cast those moneychangers out of the temple court. And you will recall, it was on that occasion that the writer of the Gospel declared,

¹⁸So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?”

¹⁹Jesus answered and said to them, “***Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.***”

²⁰Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”

¹¹ Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, **The Fourth Gospel** (Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), p. 243.

²¹***But He was speaking of the temple of His body.*** (John 2:13-22)

And later in the book of Acts we read of the uprising when some had falsely accused Paul of having brought Trophimus, a Gentile, into the temple.

²⁶Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.

²⁷Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, ²⁸crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” ²⁹(For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) (Acts 22:26-29)

Now this event occurred long after Jesus and this woman discussed the matter of the legitimate temple, but it does reflect the zealously guarded entrance that the Jews maintained against Gentile worshippers in these days. Is it any wonder that this woman of Samaria asked Jesus in effect, “Must I go to the temple in Jerusalem for the cleansing of my sin, or will the temple that we Samaritans acknowledge suffice?”

The woman really asks Jesus, who are right, her ancestors of the Jews (emphatic *ὑμεῖς*). This she does in connection with her unqualified admission of sin and guilt. The matter is of the gravest personal concern to her for this reason and for this alone. She admits that she needs cleansing. Where is she to obtain it? Where her people say, “in this mountain,” Gerizim, looming up not far from the well; or where the Jews say, in the Temple at Jerusalem? Will not Jesus send her to the latter place, to bring her sin offering and to obtain absolution? Zerubbabel had refused the Samaritans permission to join in building the Temple at Jerusalem, and Nehemiah had driven out a son of Joiada, who had married a daughter of Sanballat (a Moabite of Horobaim and a constant opponent of Nehemiah) (Neh. 13:28). This man with others instituted the worship on Gerizim in Samaria, built a temple there, and established the high priesthood.¹²

We had asserted earlier that the Jews had destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim in 129 BC. But the Samaritans continued to worship there among the temple ruins in the days of Jesus’ ministry. But we can see what a legitimate question this woman posed to Jesus. “Where do I need to go to be cleansed of my sin by God?”

Can we imagine the joyous reaction of this woman when Jesus said to her these words:

²¹***Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²²You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”***

First, Jesus addressed her as “**woman**.” This seems abrupt and perhaps rude to our English-speaking ears. But it was not a derogatory address; it was just the opposite.

¹² Lenski, p. 318.

By addressing her as “woman” (γύναι), Jesus is not speaking derogatorily to her but, just as he spoke to his mother, is using it respectfully and possibly affectionately even if with a sense of distancing. What he is about to offer her suggests she is the recipient of his affection.¹³

Then Jesus gave her a command: “**believe Me.**” He was a prophet. She knew that He was. He was going to speak a truth to her that few ever “heard” or ever understood, even though it was set forth throughout the Holy Scriptures. She should believe His word to her.

Jesus said, “***the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.***” The Lord Jesus declared in these few words that a major change in God’s dealings with mankind was to take place. God the Father would be worshipped by His people irrespective of any place on earth. But further, He was declaring that God the Father would receive **her** worship without consideration of a physical location.

In this declaration Jesus dismissed any notion that there would be such a thing as a “holy place” at which God will accept the worship of His people more readily than at any other place. There is no such thing as a holy place where you can meet God more closely than any other place (except wherever two or more disciples of Jesus Christ are gathered). Mecca is no holy place. But neither is the earthly Jerusalem a holy city or the temple mount a holy place. In fact the Word of God declares that earthly Jerusalem is spiritually Sodom and Egypt (Rev. 11:8). Paul declared that the physical city of Jerusalem is the city of legalists who teach contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the city of the descendants of “Hagar.” The Jerusalem above, in other words spiritual Jerusalem, is the true holy city, the abode of all those redeemed through Jesus Christ (Cf. Gal. 4:24f).

Now the Lord did not overtly state it here in this verse, but certainly it is implicit in our Lord’s words: ***He is the true temple*** and anyone anywhere can offer true worship to God the Father through Him and the Father would receive it. John’s Gospel had already declared this truth earlier in chapter 2.

Before the coming of Jesus Christ, God had prescribed the place and the manner in which His people were to worship God. For example, God had told **Abraham** where and how to worship Him. In Genesis 22:5 God said,

“Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go **to the land of Moriah**, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

Later Abraham told the young men who had traveled there with him, “Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you” (22:5). There were many occasions when the people of God took it upon themselves to worship God regardless of the location, because God had not restricted His worship to a particular location.

But with the coming of **the Law of Moses**, God gave clear and different instruction as to where and how He was to be worshipped. God at first prescribed a temporary and portable tent or **tabernacle** in which He would dwell among His people and would be able to come into His presence and worship Him. But of course who it was that came into His presence was very restricted and the manner in which they came was prescribed in detail very clearly.

This temporary and moveable tabernacle gave way to the permanent **temple in Jerusalem**. Over and over again Moses had revealed that God would lead His people into the Promised Land where He would show them the place where He would place His name and there be worshipped by His people (cf. Deut. 16:2, 6, 11, 15, 16). That temple was destroyed in 586 BC but then later rebuilt at the same location in Jerusalem (516 BC). The temple, however, foreshadowed and proclaimed the manner in which God would be worshipped, when God would send the Messiah into the world to save His people and restore them to a relationship with Himself. With the coming of the Lord Jesus the place and manner which God prescribed how He would be worshipped changed forever. True worshippers would no longer be required to worship

¹³ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 243.

God in a particular physical location or in the outward visible manner that He had required formerly of His people. Jesus told this woman,

“Woman, believe Me, *the hour is coming* when you will neither on this mountain, *nor in Jerusalem*, worship the Father. ²²You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³But *the hour is coming, and now is*, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

“*The hour is coming*” looks forward to the Passion of our Lord Jesus. The removal of the physical temple as the central place of true worship of God would be replaced by the temple of Jesus’ body, when He died on the cross to make atonement for sinners and rise again to be enthroned as King over the Kingdom of God. He would pour out the Holy Spirit upon His people on the Day of Pentecost. From the cross onward, and particularly with the giving of the Holy Spirit to His people, true worshippers would be able to worship God the Father through Jesus Christ, who is the true temple, the true sacrifice, and the true High Priest of His people.

By the way, here we see that the worship of God’s people should be principally offered to **God the Father**. We are Trinitarian. We believe in our Triune God. Christians are monotheists; we believe in one God. This one God is eternally the Blessed Holy Trinity-- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our **1689 Baptist Confession of Faith** states the matter clearly with great precision. Of our God it records,

In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided: the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him. (Article 2, paragraph 3)

Although each of the Persons of the Blessed Holy Trinity are together the subject and object of our worship, our primary focus of worship is directed toward God the Father. This is what our Lord Jesus said,

The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship **the Father** in spirit and truth; for **the Father** is seeking such to worship Him.

This is a foundational and very important matter. A proper acknowledgment and practice of this truth will preserve the Lord’s people from much error. I remember hearing a sermon long ago on cassette tape by **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones** in which he touched on this matter. He was emphasizing the importance of balance and order in the Christian life and how a biblical belief and practice of Trinitarian worship will preserve this balance. He said that some emphasize the Second Person of the Godhead to the neglect of the Father and the Holy Spirit. They will be in danger of becoming too informal and casual in their worship and manner of living the Christian life. “Jesus is my buddy and He walks with me and talks with me, even in my sin.” They will see the immanence of God, Jesus is Emmanuel, being interpreted as “God with us”, but their conception of the transcendence and holiness of God can become weak. Others emphasize the Holy Spirit to the exclusion of the Father and the Son. They will tend toward subjectivism and experientialism in their worship and practice. They will tend toward little doctrinal knowledge or reverence in their worship. There is also the danger of emphasizing God the Father to the exclusion of the Son and the Holy Spirit. God will tend to be viewed only as holy, transcendent, and perhaps unapproachable. The worshipper will not easily feel forgiven or accepted or close to His God. But the way to preserve truth and balance is to direct worship to God the Father, through the merit and work of His Son Jesus Christ, by means of the power and presence of the blessed Holy Spirit.

And this is what our Lord has affirmed here when He said,

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.

When Jesus said that true worshippers must worship the Father in “spirit”, there are differing opinions as to whether or not He was speaking directly of the Holy Spirit. But even if he was referring to “spirit” in terms of sincerity of devotion, to worship in spirit necessitates knowledge of the person and power of the Holy Spirit. When He said that true worshippers must worship the Father in “truth”, He was not speaking directly of Himself, the Truth. But to worship in truth necessitates knowledge of the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

After declaring to the woman that the true worship of God the Father would no longer take place in a particular location, Jesus affirmed that historically, the true worship of God had been offered by the Jews. Jesus made it quite clear that the Samaritans had been in error in their thinking that they had been worshipping God rightly. They had been worshipping God in error and ignorance. Jesus said to her, *“You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.”* God has prescribed in His Word how He is to be worshipped. He does not accept “creative” worship, so-called. He has set forth in His Word how to worship Him and what worship He will receive from His people. We may worship God the Father through Jesus Christ His Son, wherever and whenever we gather to worship Him in spirit and truth. But we will need to speak of this matter at a later time.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think,
according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church
by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:20f)
