

THE WELL IN SAMARIA

Rev. Donald L. Rose

Lesson: John 4

Thirty-two miles north of Jerusalem is a well that Jacob dug, the well where one day the Lord talked with a woman of Samaria. Near this well is a city with a beautiful situation, a valley between two mountains. If you go there today you can see exactly in the center of the opening of this valley between the two mountains, a grave. It is the tomb of Joseph. Joseph had died in Egypt, but was carried in a coffin to the promised land and was buried in this place.

That place meant a lot to certain people. As the woman said, "Our father Jacob...gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle" (*John 4: 12*). The higher of the two mountains was to the Samaritans the most important place on earth. This was Mount Gerizim. Moses never went into this land, but he told the people that when they went in they should read out loud the Lord's blessings from Mount Gerizim. He said that certain men should "stand upon Mount Gerizim to bless the people" (*Deuteronomy 27: 11*).

And when they went into the land, Joshua carried this out. (*Joshua 8: 33*.) And when, at Gerizim, Joseph himself "read all the words of the law...there was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers..." (*Joshua 8: 34, 35*).

Gideon's son Jotham, when he told the parable or story of the trees that were seeking a king, did so at this place. He read:

"Listen to me, you men of Shechem, that God may listen to you! The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them. And they said to the olive trees, 'Reign over us!'" (*Judges 9: 7, 8*).

It was a place connected with beloved stories. Even Abraham when he first came into the land of Canaan made his first camp at Shechem. (*Arcana Coelestia 1-41*.)

But this place became a place of bitter rivalry. Imagine people who had been unfriendly towards each other for years and years. People sometimes do have long-standing bad feelings that may date back to something that happened in the distant past. So it was with the Samaritans. As the woman said, "The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (Verse 9). At the time in Jewish history when the city and temple of Jerusalem were destroyed and the people

carried off to Babylon, a mixed race of people lingered in the land of Canaan and set up worship on Mount Gerizim. (They even built a temple there, which was later destroyed.) That is why the woman said, “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and you say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship” (*John 4: 20*).

And so two places (only thirty miles apart) were the homes of people who had a number of things in common. For example, both people, the Jews and the Samaritans, believed that the books of Moses were sacred. But between these people, there was strong ill feeling. There was the feeling of hatred.

When the Lord came to that place one day, it is said that He was “wearied with His journey” (Verse 6). It is the only place where it is said that Jesus was wearied or tired. Yes, He was physically tired, for the journey probably began before dawn, and now it was noon, called the “sixth hour” (Verse 6). The number six often stands for hard labor. “Six days you shall labor...” (*Exodus 20: 9*).

There was another kind of weariness. The Lord had come from His first ministry in Judea. There He had cast the money-changers out of the temple. There, people did not receive Him, at least not openly. Nicodemus, who came to Him, did so in the night so that he would not be seen.

Would He not be wearied of a people who had so many evils themselves, but who felt so high and mighty above the Samaritans? They looked down on the Samaritans with contempt and regarded them as of no worth or value. What kind of people were the Samaritans? Normal people with far more goodness in them than the people of Judea would ever believe.

Calling a person a “Samaritan” was a way some showed they did not like that person (see *John 8: 48*.) How they must have disliked the story the Lord told them about three men. The story, or parable, was about a man who needed help. The priest did not help him. The Levite did not help him. But along came a man who did help him, and he was a Samaritan. Ever since then there has been the expression of a “good Samaritan” (*Luke 17: 16*).

Another sign of the good qualities of the Samaritans is in the story of the ten lepers who were healed. Only one turned to give thanks—and that one was a Samaritan. (*Luke 17: 16*.)

And so the Lord came to the land of the Samaritans and sat by a wall. What He said to the woman who then approached was a question that would bring out the good will in her. “Give Me to drink.” It reminds one of the story of Elijah who said to a hungry woman that she should give him something to eat

and drink, thus bringing out her generous qualities. (I Kings 17: 10.) All the time Elijah was the one who could give and would give food.

The good quality of a person is more important than what the person knows or believes. “In the spiritual world into which every man comes after death, it is not asked what your belief has been or what your doctrine has been, but what your life has been” (DP 101).

This woman did not know she was talking to the Lord Himself. “If you knew,” the Lord said, “you would not have asked...” (*John* 4: 10). “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that said to you, Give Me to drink, you would have asked of Him.” Many of the Samaritans simply did not know enough. And it turns out that finally many of them came to believe in the Lord (*John* 4: 39-42.) They said, “We have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (*John* 4:42).

What a lesson this was for the disciples, to see Samaritans receiving the Lord. And this lifted them above childish feelings of superiority. They were to lift their eyes to an important harvest, telling people about the Lord. He said to them, “Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest” (Verse 35).

Doesn't the Lord seek to lift each one of us above our small reasons of dislike between ourselves? Does He not lift us to the thought that all people are the children of God? Can we not say as we look at a person of different race or different country or different customs, “This is my brother, I see that he worships the Lord and is a good man?” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2385:e).