

JESUS CHRIST AND THE SAMARITANS

There is much that can be learned from the interactions of Jesus Christ with the Samaritans, and His famous parable concerning one of them.

Samaritans were (and indeed, still are to this day) apparent descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh who survived the deportation of the ten tribes, but intermarried with pagan settlers brought in by the conquering Assyrians, having a bastardized version of the Jewish faith that originated with Jeroboam, the first king of the ten tribes, and which holds Mount Gerizim as the holy place, as opposed to Jerusalem, as we see reflected in the conversation of the Samaritan woman at the well as she interacted with the Lord:

The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.” (John 4:19-20)

The Jews viewed the Samaritans with disdain, as half-pagans that had forsaken the true ways of God and intermingled with the Gentiles. We see the Lord make a distinction between the Samaritans and the Jews, and also between the Samaritans and the Gentiles, showing them to occupy a place between the two, as a kind of mixture of the holy and the profane:

These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. ⁶ But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Matthew 10:5-6)

So we see that Samaria did not qualify as Israel at this point, from the mouth of Jesus Christ Himself. We also see that relations between the Jews and the Samaritans was so bad that the woman at the well was shocked when Jesus opened a dialogue with her:

Then 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. (John 4:9)

We also see that the Samaritans were so frowned upon, that Jesus Himself was accused of being one!

Then the Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” (John 8:47)

This may have also had much to do with the lie of the land, as He was from Galilee, north of Samaria, and had to pass through Samaria on His way between Galilee and Judea. Be this as it may, we see that one could be accused of being a Samaritan in the same way one might be accused of having a demon, seeing as both accusations came forth together! Furthermore, this also constituted a denial of Christ’s messianic credentials, as to be a Samaritan would be to come from an impure bloodline, and certainly not from the true line of David.

With these basic facts established, let us examine the gospel passages concerning these people, to see what can be gleaned from the same.

THOSE WHO DID NOT RECEIVE CHRIST

In the gospel of Luke, we come across a very interesting sequence of events, concerning a Samaritan village that He intended to stay at on his way to Jerusalem:

Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, ⁵² and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. ⁵³ But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?”⁵⁵ But He turned and rebuked them,^[f] and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.” ⁵⁶ For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.”^[g] And they went to another village. (Luke 9:51-56)

This passage is very closely tied to the self righteousness that can be exhibited by the people of God, who look upon outsiders as lesser beings, worthy of condemnation. For this village committed the sin which is above all other sins in the minds of traditional church thought – the sin of *not receiving Christ*. The behavior of James and John in this instance is that of so many throughout the church age – calling the condemnation of “fire from heaven” upon those sinners, and considering them as worthy of being utterly burned up in divine judgment.

With all of the above in mind, the response of Jesus is also full of significance as to God’s view of this attitude. And the rebuke is a mighty one. “*You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.*” For a spiritual people to not understand the Spirit they are called to walk in, is for them to be blind to the very nature of the God they claim to serve! A God who comes to save, not destroy, and a God who comes to give life, not death. In this, we see yet again the vanity and ignorance inherent in the traditional view of hellfire, a mythical place which, should it actually exist as believed by so many, would have consequently meant that James and John were indeed acting according to the spirit they were of! But no, the voice of the Lord echoes down through the centuries, and into the ages to come:

“...the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.”

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Let us now examine the parable that is so very famous that the term ‘Good Samaritan’ remains in modern terminology to describe someone who behaves righteously and lovingly towards those in need.

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶ **He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?”**

²⁷ **So he answered and said, “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’”**

²⁸ **And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.”**

²⁹ **But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”**

³⁰ Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. ³³ But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ ³⁶ So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?”

³⁷ And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10:25-37)

Now, the “certain man” who fell victim to the thieves, was clearly a Jew, as one journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho. As with the Samaritan village, we see the religious hypocrisy of the priest and the Levite, who hurry by the stricken man, yet no doubt continued to consider themselves righteous and holy as they performed their ceremonial religious duties before God. We also see one of those half-blood Samaritans behaving more lovingly and in a more godly manner than those who were part of the true household of God. Though this same good Samaritan might well be expected to have worshipped at Mount Gerizim after these events, he was the one who “loved His neighbor as Himself”, and thus fulfilled the second greatest commandment, which is so tied to the greatest:

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? (1 John 4:20)

Jesus was demonstrating in this parable the preeminence of love above all things, and again showing forth the true nature of God. Yet we see that the lawyer who asked the original question that received the parable in response, would not even deign to describe the man as a Samaritan in response to the Lord’s question, but rather would only say “*He who showed mercy upon him...*”

However, there is more to this parable than the lesson of imitating the Samaritan in kindness. It is also stating that, even as the Samaritan treated the injured Jew as a neighbor, so the Samaritans were to be regarded as neighbors of the Jews, and loved by the Jews as the Jews loved themselves! What a deeply radical revelation to those who regarded the Samaritans in such a dim light, or indeed for any religious people who think there is someone beneath them, an outsider who is not worthy of the same love as God’s household!

THE SAMARITAN LEPER

In our next passage, also from Luke, we find an account of one of Jesus’s many miraculous healings:

Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. ¹² Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were

lepers, who stood afar off. ¹³ And they lifted up their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

¹⁴ So when He saw them, He said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵ And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, ¹⁶ and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ So Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?”

¹⁸ Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ And He said to him, “Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.” (Luke 17:11-19)

Now, the scripture does not specifically say that the thankful leper was the only Samaritan of the ten, but the reaction of Jesus implies this possibility, and the strong probability that he was at the very least part of a small minority within the ten. This event is another example of the dangers of entitlement among the people of God. For how often we seek the blessing of God! And how often He blesses, even in the way we sought! And yet, how rarely does the level of gratitude reflect the previous level of beseeching! Here again, we see the foreigner and outcast behaving a manner that puts to shame those who claim to be the household of God. Indeed, the Lord describes Him as “giving glory to God,” which stands in contrast to those who were no doubt just glorying in the healing itself as they made their way to the priests.

Truly, any great miracle or blessing should serve to draw us to God and seek the face of His Christ, and this episode shows the contrast between this reaction and that of seeking the miracle for the sake of the miracle, or seeking the healing only to be healed, and not so that He who works all miracles and healings might be glorified and revealed in greater measure.

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

So we come to the Samaritan woman at the well, and the unusually long conversation recorded between them, detailing Christ speaking seven times, with six responses of the woman in between.

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

⁹ Then 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.

¹⁰ Jesus 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.”

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

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

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

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,’ ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.”

¹⁹ The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.”

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. ²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ But 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. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

²⁵ The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will tell us all things.”

²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

²⁷ And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, “What do You seek?” or, “Why are You talking with her?”

²⁸ The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men,

²⁹ “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”

³⁰ Then they went out of the city and came to Him.....³⁹ And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all that I ever did.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of His own word.

⁴² Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ,^[a] the Savior of the world.” (John 4:7-30, 39-42)

What great statements this lowly Samaritan woman was privy to! What honor was given her, to hear mysteries, long hidden from the foundation of the world, told to her in person by the Messiah!

There is much of note in this passage, but I would focus on the contrast between the natural and the spiritual that is drawn in two different parts of the conversation. Firstly, we see the woman speaking about natural water, even as Christ speaks to her of spiritual water. His revelation of these streams of living water provokes a similar puzzlement as that of Nicodemus when told of being born from above, as a spiritual concept still above the head of the listener. Beyond that, we see a contrast in how the water is obtained. The natural water is in a deep well, and indeed an *old well*, having been dug by Jacob himself. To obtain this water, one must labor to let down the vessels to bring the water up to the surface, and it must have been a sweaty, exhausting process. But the living water is a gift of God – not something man can labor for, and it is a *fountain that springs up*. What a wonderful picture, both of the drudgery and toil of the old natural man, and the living joy of the new, spiritual man!

A similar contrast of natural and spiritual is drawn further on in the conversation, when the woman, having established that Jesus is a prophet, asks for His verdict upon the location of worship. She is again focused on the natural realm, and the natural abilities and limitations of man – *what location should go to, in order to please God?* The Messiah then heralds the new

era, where spiritual men will worship God, not in one earthly location over another, but in spirit and truth – and indeed, saying that they *must* worship Him thus, for *God is Spirit*.

This wonderful conversation causes the woman to evangelize her own village, who press the Lord to stay on with them, and subsequently receive such revelation, that they are able to testify that He is indeed “the Christ, the Savior of the world.” What kindness, what generosity, is again shown towards a people outside of the Jewish household of faith, to receive such revelation, and to indeed be recorded in the scriptures for those who read of them in the centuries to come! On the day this Samaritan woman labored up to the well, something she must have done countless times, how could she have known that she was about to converse with the divine presence Himself, and have her words recorded together with those of the Messiah to all future generations!

CONCLUSION

All of the above appearances of the Samaritans in the gospels have the common thread of showing God’s kindness and love towards those outside of His declared household, and presenting to His followers the danger of self righteousness and a “holier-than-thou” spirit. We see in these passages examples of forgiveness (towards the inhospitable village), mercy and goodness (of the neighborly Samaritan), gratitude (of the leper), and great revelation (to the woman and her village). Indeed, we eventually also see in Acts how Samaria was grouped with Judea itself in the Lord’s command:

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

...and how the Samaritans were evangelized even before the encounter between Peter and Cornelius, and the subsequent revelation of God’s grace towards the Gentiles:

So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. (Acts 8:25)

As with all things, these serve as examples of the high and perfectly loving nature of God towards all men, and that even as the Good Samaritan bound up the wounds of the afflicted man and brought him to a place of healing and refuge, so the Lord does with us:

...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (2 Peter 2:24-25)

Amen!