

After recording the wonderful ministry that flowed out with Nicodemus, then from John the Baptist, John turned to another personal interview the Lord had with another unique individual. This person could hardly be more different from the others. A foreigner, a Samaritan, an unnamed mature woman and one with a poor moral reputation. In fact her life was a shambles, leaving the wreckage of five marriages while she was currently living with a man without the benefit of marriage. (But Jesus didn't call for stoning her.)

Note John here refers to Jesus as "the Lord." In other instances in the Gospels He is addressed by others as "Lord" but seldom referred to simply as "the Lord" by the author of the narrative (five times in Luke, nine times in John, once in Acts, and not at all in the first two gospels). "Lord" is a title of dignity and authority but was used of Jesus only occasionally, almost incidentally, by his disciples rather than His more familiar name "Jesus."

After His return from the wilderness temptation (not mentioned by John) Jesus had called the Twelve and they had begun baptizing. John the Baptist and his calling for repentance represented a threat to the Pharisees' position in Judea. Apparently they had been monitoring John's activities. They had discovered Jesus had baptized more souls than John. When the Lord had realized they were aware of His activities He had left Judea moving back north to his home territory. But He intentionally took the more direct, but less used, route passing through Samaria. There was someone there He wanted to meet.

Samaria was then a territory in the Roman Empire between Judea and Galilee. With Galilee it was under the jurisdiction of Herod. A thousand years before this there had been one Israeli kingdom under King David. That 1000 year history occupies the better part of the Old Testament. The Book of Kings especially relates to the Kingdom of Israel which later became Samaria. Note also that some of the prophets wrote particularly to Israel, some to Judah. After the initial kingdom was divided the two parts became intense rivals. God, while openly the God of Judah, also sovereignly looked after that part known as Israel, or Ephraim, which ultimately had become Samaria. They had a form of godliness but had not repented of the terrible sin of idolatry that had led to their division. Idolatry in the form of two golden calves had been introduced at the northern and southern extremes of Israel. We can learn much of their belief system incidentally from the Lord's interview with the woman at the well. They obviously had some knowledge and respect for God, which extended to an expectation of the coming promised Messiah.

The Lord had graciously timed His passage through the city to assure meeting this one soul when she came to get water. The locale is significant for the city, Sychar, was ancient Shechem. After his return from Haran, Jacob had bought a plot of land by the well, this despite God's calling to be an alien in the land. He had later taken possession of the city by force and bequeathed it to Joseph and was included in the land Joshua allotted to Ephraim, Joseph's

son. See Genesis 33:19; 48:22; Joshua 24:32.

The midday heat was not the normal time to go out of the town to draw water. Was she an outcast? The Lord, a true human being, was tired and hungry. He was resting while awaiting the return of His disciples with lunch. But tired or not, in this appropriately public place, isolated from others at that moment, He could visit with her and personally probe her heart. He had patiently drawn out her inner thoughts before revealing to her who He really was. How gentle He was while leading her thoughts into spiritual things. Profound things. (Don't assume a person to be incapable of receiving spiritual ministry just because of their apparent social economic status or moral condition.). In wisdom He did not let Himself be drawn into a distracting dispute over what separated Jews and Samaritans. He authoritatively declared to her "God is Spirit" not just "a spirit." He was not to be worshiped on certain mountains or locales or in temple buildings or with icons or the like. (He knew even the temple in Jerusalem would soon be destroyed.) His statement rebuked the idolatry of her people in the past. Later, He uttered one of the few recorded direct statements He ever made personally revealing Who He really is. "I who speak to you am He." What grace. If any have a doubt of Who He is He answers it here.

She was not devious, her serious responses and comments reflected what her people had been taught down through the centuries since they had been separated from the Judah. They had maintained a strong independence from Judea and both groups cultivated a dislike and distaste for one another. But the Lord set the record straight when the woman described the competing beliefs of the Samaritans and the Jews. With the full authority of the Prophet she had acknowledged Him to be, He declared, "Salvation is of the Jews." That is, the promised Messiah was definitely to be a Jew. They could not legitimately expect otherwise. He couldn't tell her yet, but soon the Samaritans would not need to convert to Judaism to receive Him. In Acts 8 we read of the first Christian missionaries going out from Jerusalem to Samaria, even before they went to the Gentiles. Was she still there when they came? Whether or not she was, she was a redeemed woman before Jesus left and went on to Galilee. (At just what point in the conversation she became a believer is not so evident. When do you think it was?) Their conversation was interrupted by the return of the Disciples. She then left her water pot to call others. And Jesus pointed out to the disciples there was something more important than a meal. The fields were white (ripe) ready to harvest. He spoke of the crowd of town's people (in common white clothing) coming out of the city to hear Him. He stayed with them two days and many received Him, "for now we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." What a blessing for them all.

By Ronald Canner, May 11, 2011