

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS  
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,  
And many Explanatory Notes.

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JOHN IV. 27-30.

27 And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said. What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?

28 The woman then left her water-pot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men,

29 Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?

30 Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.

THESE verses continue the well-known story of the Samaritan woman's conversion. Short as the passage may appear, it contains points of deep interest and importance.

The mere worldling, who cares nothing about experimental religion, may see nothing particular in these verses. To all who desire to know something of the experience of a converted person, they will be found full of food for thought.

We see, firstly, in this passage, *how marvellous in the eyes of man are Christ's dealings with souls*. We are told that the disciples " marvelled that He talked with the woman." That their Master should take the trouble to talk to a woman at all, and to a Samaritan woman, and to a strange woman at a well, when He was wearied with His journey,—all this was wonderful to the eleven disciples. It was a sort of thing which they did not expect. It was contrary to their idea of what a religious teacher should do. It startled them and filled them with surprise.

The feeling displayed by the disciples on this occasion does not stand alone in the Bible. When our Lord allowed publicans and sinners to draw near to Him and be in His company, the Pharisees marvelled: they exclaimed, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." (Luke xv. 2.) When Saul came back from Damascus, a converted man and a new creature, the Christians at Jerusalem were astonished: "they believed not that he was a disciple." (Acts ix. 26.) When Peter was delivered from Herod's prison by an angel, and brought to the door of the house where disciples were praying for his deliverance, they were so taken by surprise that they could not believe it was Peter: "when they saw him they were astonished." (Acts xii. 16.)

But why should we stop short in Bible instances? The true Christian has only to look around him in this world in order to see abundant illustrations of the truth before us. How much astonishment every fresh conversion occasions! What surprise is expressed at the change in the heart, life, tastes, and habits of the converted person! What wonder is felt at the power, the mercy, the patience,

the compassion of Christ! It is now as it was eighteen hundred years ago. The dealings of Christ are still a marvel both to the Church and to the world.

If there was more real faith on the earth, there would be less surprise felt at the conversion of souls. If Christians believed more, they would expect more, and if they understood Christ better, they would be less startled and astonished when He calls and saves the chief of sinners. We should consider nothing impossible, and regard no sinner as beyond the reach of the grace of God. The astonishment expressed at conversions is a proof of the weak faith and ignorance of these latter days: the thing that ought to fill us with surprise is the obstinate unbelief of the ungodly, and their determined perseverance in the way to ruin. This was the mind of Christ. It is written that He thanked the Father for conversions: but He marvelled at unbelief. (Matt. xi. 25; Mark vi. 6.)

We see, secondly, in this passage, *how absorbing is the influence of grace, when it first comes into a believer's heart.* We are told that after our Lord had told the woman He was the Messiah, "She left her water-pot and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did." She had left her home for the express purpose of drawing water. She had carried a large vessel to the well, intending to bring it back filled. But she found at the well a new heart, and new objects of interest. She became a new creature. Old things passed away: all things became new. At once everything else was forgotten for the time: she could think of nothing but the truths she had heard, and the Saviour she had found. In the fulness of her heart she "left her water-pot," and hastened away to express her feelings to others.

We see here the expulsive power of the grace of the Holy Ghost. Grace once introduced into the heart drives out old tastes and interests. A converted person no longer cares for what he once cared for. A new tenant is in the house: a new pilot is at the helm. The whole world looks different. All things have become new. It was so with Matthew the publican: the moment that grace came into his heart he left the receipt of custom. (Matt. ix. 9.) —It was so with Peter, James, and John, and Andrew: as soon as they were converted they forsook their nets and fishing boats. (Mark i. 19.)—It was so with Saul the Pharisee: as soon as he became a Christian he gave up all his brilliant prospects as a Jew, in order to preach the faith he had once despised. (Acts ix. 20.)—The conduct of the Samaritan woman was precisely of the same kind: for the time present the salvation she had found completely filled her mind. That she never returned for her water-pot would be more than we have a right to say. But under the first impressions of new spiritual life, she went away and "left her water-pot" behind.

Conduct like that here described is doubtless uncommon in the present day. Rarely do we see a person so entirely taken up with spiritual matters, that atten-

tion to this world's affairs is made a secondary matter, or postponed. And why is it so? Simply because true conversions to God are uncommon. Few really feel their sins, and flee to Christ by faith. Few really pass from death to life, and become new creatures. Yet these few are the real Christians of the world: these are the people whose religion, like the Samaritan woman's, tells on others. Happy are they who know something by experience of this woman's feelings, and can say with Paul, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ!" Happy are they who have given up everything for Christ's sake, or at any rate have altered the relative importance of all things in their minds! "If thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light." (Philipp. iii. 8; Matt. vi. 22.)

We see, lastly, in this passage, *how zealous a truly converted person is to do good to others*. We are told that the Samaritan woman "went into the city, and said to the men, Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" In the day of her conversion she became a missionary. She felt so deeply the amazing benefit she had received from Christ, that she could not hold her peace about Him. Just as Andrew told his brother Peter about Jesus, and Philip told Nathanael that he had found Messiah, and Saul, when converted, straightway preached Christ, so, in the same way, the Samaritan woman said, "Come and see" Christ. She used no abstruse arguments: she attempted no deep reasoning about our Lord's claim to be the Messiah. She only said, "Come and see." Out of the abundance of her heart her mouth spoke.

That which the Samaritan woman here did, all true Christians ought to do likewise. The Church needs it: the state of the world demands it. Common sense points out that it is right. Every one who has received the grace of God, and tasted that Christ is gracious, ought to find words to testify of Christ to others. Where is our faith, if we believe that souls around us are perishing, and that Christ alone can save them, and yet hold our peace? Where is our charity, if we can see others going down to hell and yet say nothing to them about Christ and salvation?—We may well doubt our own love to Christ if our hearts are never moved to speak of Him. We may well doubt the safety of our own souls if we feel no concern about the souls of others.

What are we ourselves? This is the question, after all, which demands our notice. Do we feel the supreme importance of spiritual things, and the comparative nothingness of the things of the world? Do we ever talk to others about God, and Christ, and eternity, and the soul, and heaven, and hell? If not, what is the value of our faith? Where is the reality of our Christianity? Let us take heed lest we awake too late, and find that we are lost for ever; a wonder to angels and

devils, and, above all, a wonder to ourselves, because of our own obstinate blindness and folly.

#### NOTES. JOHN iv. 27-30.

27.—[*Upon this.*] The true idea contained in this expression seems to be, “At this point, at this critical juncture in the conversation between our Lord and the woman.”—What the woman would have said next after our Lord’s marvellous discovery of Himself, we are left to conjecture. But just as our Lord said, “I am the Messiah,” the disciples returned from buying food, and their appearance stopped the conversation. The woman’s heart was probably too full, and her mind too much excited to say more in the presence of witnesses, and especially of strangers. Therefore no more was said, and she withdrew. The soul, in the beginning of a work of grace shrinks from discovering its workings before strangers.

[*Marvelled . . . talked with the woman.*] I am inclined to think that these words would have been more correctly rendered, “Talked with a woman.” There is no article in the original Greek. The wonder of the disciples was excited, not so much by our Lord talking to this woman, as by His talking to a woman at all. It is clear from Rabbinical writings, that there was a common opinion among the Jews that both in understanding and religion women were an inferior order of beings to men. This ignorant prejudice had most likely leavened the minds of the disciples, and is probably referred to in this place. Of the woman’s moral character it is not clear that the disciples could know anything at all.

Rupertus thinks that our Lord, by conversing openly with a Samaritan woman, wished to show His disciples by an example, that the wall between Jews and other people was to be broken down by the Gospel, just as He taught Peter the same lesson after His ascension, by the vision of the sheet full of clean and unclean beasts. (Acts x. 11-15.) He thinks that the wonder of the disciples arose from the same Jewish prejudice against intercourse with uncircumcised Gentiles which appeared so strongly in after times.

Lightfoot, Schottgen, and Tholuck quote proverbial sayings from Rabbinical writers, showing the Jewish feeling about women. The following are instances. “He who instructs his daughter in the law plays the fool.” “Do not multiply discourses with a woman.” “Let no one talk with a woman in the street, no not with his own wife.”—Whitby also says, from Buxtorf, that the Rabbins say that “talking with a woman is one of the six things which make a disciple impure.”

[*No man said, What seekest...why talkest, etc.*] We are left to conjecture whether both these questions apply to our Lord, or whether the first applied to the woman: “What seekest thou of Him?” and the second to our Lord: “Why talkest thou with her?” The point is of no particular importance. To me, however, it appears that both questions apply to Christ. “No man said, ‘What art thou seeking from her? Why art thou talking with her?’”

Grotius suggests that the disciples supposed our Lord might have been seeking meat or drink from the Samaritan woman, and meant, “Why seekest Thou any meat or drink from her?”

I venture to doubt whether both questions had not better have been translated alike: “What art thou seeking from her? What art thou talking about with her?” The Greek word is the same which our translators have rendered “what” in the first question, and “why” in the second.

The expression, “No man said,” seems to imply that no man ventured to ask any question what was our Lord’s reason for talking with the woman. It is not very clear why the sentence is introduced. The object probably is, as Cyril and Chrysostom remark, to show us the deep rever-

ence and respect with which the disciples regarded our Lord and all His actions, even at this early period of his ministry. It also shows us that they sometimes thought things about Him to which they dared not give expression, and saw deeds of His which they could not understand, but were content silently to wonder at them. There is a lesson for us in their conduct. When we cannot understand the reason of our Lord's dealings with souls, let us hold our peace, and try to believe that there are reasons which we shall know one day. A good servant in a great house must do his own duty, and ask no questions. A young student of medicine must take many things on trust.

28.—[*The woman...left...water-pot.*] The Greek word here rendered “water-pot” is the same that is used in the account of the miracle at Cana in Galilee. (John ii. 6.) It does not mean a small drinking vessel, but a large jar, such as a woman in Eastern countries would carry on her head. We can therefore well understand that if the woman wished to return in haste to the city she would leave her waterpot. So large a vessel could not be carried quickly, whether empty or full.

The mind of the woman in leaving her water-pot seems to me clear and unmistakable. She was entirely absorbed in the things which she had heard from our Lord's mouth. She was anxious to tell them without delay to her friends and neighbours. She therefore postponed her business of drawing water, for which she had left her house, as a matter of secondary importance, and hurried off to tell others what she had been told. The sentence is deeply instructive.

Lightfoot thinks, besides this, that the woman left her water-pot out of kindness to our Lord, “that Jesus and His disciples might have wherewithal to drink.”

[*Went her way...city.*] The Greek word rendered “went her way,” means simply, “departed” or “went.” The city must of course mean “Sychar.”

[*Saith to the men.*] We must not suppose that the woman spoke to the men only, and not to her own sex. But it is probable that the “men of the place would be the first persons she would see, and that the women would not be in the streets, but at home. Moreover it is not unlikely that the expression is meant to show us the woman's zeal and anxiety to spread the good tidings. She did not hesitate to speak to men, though she well knew that anything a woman might say about religion was not likely to command attention.

Cyril, on this verse, remarks the power of Christ's grace. He began by bidding the woman go and “call her husband.” The end of the conversation which ensued was her going and calling all the men of the city to come and see Christ.

29.—[*Come, see a man.*] The missionary spirit of the woman, in this verse, deserves special notice. Having found Christ herself, she invites others to come and be acquainted with Him. Origen calls her “the apostle of the Samaritans.”

Let it be noted that her words are simple in the extreme. She enters into no argument. She only asks the men to “come and see.” This, after all, is often the best way of dealing with souls. A bold invitation to come and make trial of the Gospel often produces more effect than the most elaborate arguments in support of its doctrines. Most men do not want their reason convinced so much as their will bent, and their conscience aroused. A simple-minded, hearty, unlearned young disciple will often touch hearts that would hear an abstruse argument without being moved.—This fact is most encouraging to all believers who try to do good. All cannot argue: but all believers may say, “Come and see Christ. If you would only look at Him and see Him, you would soon believe.”

Barradius remarks what a practical illustration the woman affords of one of the concluding sentences of Revelation: “Let him that heareth say, Come.” (Rev. xxii. 17.) The Samaritan woman having heard, said, “Come,” and the result was that many souls came and took the water of life freely.

Cyril remarks the difference between the woman's conduct and that of the servant who buried his talent in the ground. She received the talent of the good tidings of the Gospel, and at once put it out at interest.

Chrysostom remarks the wisdom of the woman. "She did not say, Come, *believe*; but Come, *see*: a gentler expression than the other, and one which more attracted them."

[*Told me all things...ever I did.*] These words must be taken with some qualifications. Of course they cannot mean that our Lord had literally told the woman "all things that ever she did in her life." This would have been physically impossible in the space of a single afternoon.—The probable meaning is, "He has told me all the principal sins that I have committed. He has shown a perfect knowledge of the chief events of my life. He has shown such thorough acquaintance with my history, that I doubt not He could have told me anything I ever did."

Some allowance must probably be made for the warm and excited feelings of the woman when she spoke these words. She used hyperbolic and extravagant language, under the influence of these feelings, which she would probably not have used in a calm state of mind, and which we must therefore not judge too strictly. Moreover, as Poole remarks, it admits of doubt whether our Lord may not have spoken of other things in the conversation, which St. John has not been inspired to record.

Let it be noted, that the Samaritan woman, in saying that "our Lord had told her all things she had ever done," very probably referred to the common opinion about Messiah's omniscience. The Rabbinical writers, according to Lightfoot, specially applied to Messiah the words of Isaiah: "He shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by the sight of his eyes." (Isa. xi. 3.) Her words, therefore, were a well-known argument, that our Lord must be the Christ, and her object in using them would be thoroughly understood.

[*Is not this the Christ?*] The Greek words so rendered would be translated with equal correctness, "Is this the Christ? Can this be the Christ?" A similar form of interrogative sentence is found in thirteen other places in the New Testament. In twelve of them the interrogative is used without "not:" viz., Matt. vii. 16; xxvi. 22, 25; Mark iv. 21; xiv. 9; Luke vi. 39; John vii. 31; viii. 22; xviii. 35; Acts x. 47; 2 Cor. i. 17; James iii. 11 —In only one place is the interrogative used with "not: "Matt. xii. 23. I am inclined, on the whole, to think that "not "would have been better omitted in the sentence before us. Euthymius takes this view.

The value of questions, if we want to do good to souls, is well illustrated in this verse. A question often sets working a mind which would be utterly unmoved by an affirmation. It drives the mind to exertion, and by a gentle compulsion arouses it to think. Men are far less able to go to sleep under religious teaching, when they are invited to answer a question. The number of questions in the New Testament is a striking and instructive fact. Had the woman said, "This is the Christ!" she might have excited prejudice and dislike. By asking, "Is this the Christ?" she got the men to inquire and judge for themselves.

30.—[*Then they went out of the city.*] This sentence is full of encouragement to all who try to do good to souls. The words of one single woman were the means of arousing a whole city to go forth and inquire about Christ. We must never despise the smallest and meanest efforts. We never know to what the least beginnings may grow. The grain of mustard seed at Sychar was the word of a feeble woman: "Come and see."

Specially we ought to observe the encouragement the verse affords to the efforts of women. A woman may be the means, under God, of founding a Church. The first person baptized by Paul in Europe was not a man, but a woman: Lydia, the seller of purple. Let women never suppose that men only can do good. Women also, in their way, can evangelize as really and truly as men. Every believing woman who has a tongue can speak to others about Christ.—The Samari-

tan woman was far less learned than Nicodemus. But she was far bolder, and so did far more good.

[*And came unto Him.*] Perhaps the sentence would be more literally rendered, “were coming,” or “began to come to Him.” It was while they were coming that the conversation which immediately follows, between Christ and His disciples, took place, and perhaps it was the sight of the crowd coming which made our Lord say some of the things that He did.

Calvin remarks on this part of the woman’s history, that some may think her blameable, in that “while she is still ignorant and imperfectly taught, she goes beyond the limits of her faith. I reply that she would have acted inconsiderately if she had assumed the office of a teacher; but when she desires nothing more than to excite her fellow-citizens to hear Christ speaking, we will not say that she forgot herself, or proceeded further than she had right to do. She merely does the office of a trumpet or a bell, to invite others to come to Christ.”

The concluding verse shows us most forcibly that ministers and teachers of religion ought never to be above taking pains and trouble with a single soul. A conversation with one person was the means of leading a whole city to come and hear Christ, and resulted in the salvation of many souls.

Cornelius à Lapide, at this point of his commentary, gravely informs us that the name of the Samaritan woman was Photina; that after her conversion she preached the Gospel at Carthage, and that she suffered martyrdom there on the 20th of March, on which day the Romish Martyrology makes special mention of her name! He also tells us that her head is kept as a relic at Rome, in the Basilica of St. Paul, and that it was actually shown to him there!—It is well to know what ridiculous and lying legends the Church of Rome palms upon Roman Catholics as truths, while she withholds from them the Bible!