

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN  
4:7-26

7. 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 meat.) 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 the Jews have no dealings with the 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 of 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, 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 he 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 men ought to worship. 21. Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when ye will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father. 22. Ye worship what ye 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 in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship him. 24. God *is* a Spirit, and those who worship him must worship *him* 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*.

7.--[A woman...water.] The scarcity of water in the hot climates of the East makes drawing water from the nearest well an important part of the daily business of an Eastern household. We learn from other parts of Scripture that it was a work ordinarily done by women. (Gen. xxiv.11; 1 Sam. ix.11.) A well became naturally a common meeting-place for the inhabitants of a neighborhood, and especially for the young people. (Judges v.11.) The insinuation, however, of some writers, as Schottgen, that the Samaritan woman's motives in coming to the well were possibly immoral,

seems destitute of any foundation. Bad as her moral character evidently was, we have no right to heap upon her more blame than is warranted by facts.

Augustine regards this woman as a type of the Gentile Church, "not now justified, but even now at the point to be justified." I doubt whether we were meant by the Holy Ghost to take this view. There is great danger in adopting such allegorical interpretations. They insensibly draw away the mind from the plain lessons of Scripture.

Musculus remarks what a wonderful instance it is of sovereign grace that our Lord should turn away from learned Scribes, Pharisees, and Priests to converse with and convert such a person as this woman, to all appearance so utterly unworthy of notice. He also observes how singularly our least movements are overruled by God's providence. Like Rebecca and Rachel, the woman came to the well knowing nothing of the importance of that day's visit to her soul.

[*Jesus said to her, Give me a drink.*] In this simple request of our Lord, there are four things deserving notice. (a) It was a gracious act of spiritual aggression on a sinner. He did not wait for the woman to speak to Him, but was the first to begin conversation. (b) It was an act of marvelous condescension. He by whom all things were made, the Creator of fountains, brooks, and rivers, is not ashamed to ask a draught of water from the hand of one of His sinful creatures. (c) It was an act full of wisdom and prudence. He does not at once force religion on the attention of the woman and rebuke her for her sins. He begins with a subject apparently indifferent, and yet one of which the woman's mind was doubtless full. He asks her for water. (d) It was an act full of the nicest tact, and exhibiting perfect knowledge of the human mind. He asks a favor and puts Himself under an obligation. No line of proceeding, it is well known to all wise people, would be more likely to conciliate the woman's feelings towards Him, and to make her willing to hear His teaching. Simple as the request was, it contains principles which deserve the closest attention of all who desire to do good to ignorant and thoughtless sinners.

The idea of Euthymius, that our Lord *pretended* thirst in order to introduce conversation, is unworthy of notice. Cyril thinks that our Lord intended to make a practical protest against the exclusiveness of the Jews by asking drink of a Samaritan woman, and to show her that He disapproved the custom of His nation.

[*For his disciples...buy food.*] This verse is an instance of our Lord's general rule not to work a miracle in order to supply His own needs. He who could feed five thousand with a few loaves and fishes when He willed, was content to buy food like any other man. It is an instance of His lowly-mindedness. The Creator of all things, though rich, for our sakes became poor. It ought to teach Christians that they are not meant to be so spiritual as to neglect the management of money and a reasonable use of it for the supply of their needs. God could feed His children, as He fed Elijah, by a daily miracle. But He knows it is better for our souls, and

more likely to call grace into exercise, not to feed them so but to make them think and use means. There is no real spirituality in being careless about money. Jesus Himself allowed His disciples to "buy."

The word rendered "meat" means nothing more than "food or nourishment," and must not be confined to "flesh." Out of the sixteen places where it is used in the New Testament, there is not one where it necessarily signifies "flesh." The meat offering of the Old Testament consisted of nothing but flour, oil, and incense. (Lev. ii.1,2.) The meaning of the word "meat," in the English language, has evidently changed since the last revision of the English Bible.

The whole verse is an instance of one of those short, parenthetical, explanatory comments which are common in St. John's Gospel. Its object is to explain the circumstance of our Lord being alone at the well, and the fact that He did not ask a disciple to give Him water.

9.--[*Then the woman...How is it...Samaritan woman?*] This question implies that the woman was surprised at our Lord speaking to her. It was an unexpected act of condescension on His part, and as such arrested her attention. Thus one point, at any rate, was gained. It is a great matter if we can only get a careless sinner to give us a quiet hearing. We shall soon see how our Lord improved the opportunity.

How the woman knew our Lord to be a Jew is matter of conjecture. Some think that she knew it by the dialect that He spoke. Some think that she knew it by the fringe upon His dress, which He probably wore in conformity to the Mosaic law (Num. xv.38,39), and which the Samaritans very likely neglected. One thing is very clear. There was nothing in our Lord's personal appearance, when He was a man upon earth, to distinguish Him from any other Jewish traveler who might have been found sitting at a well. There was nothing eccentric or peculiar about His dress. He looked like other men.

I venture the opinion that in the woman's question stress should be laid on the word "woman." She was not only surprised that a Jewish man asked drink of a Samaritan, but also that he asked it of a woman.

[*The Jews...dealings...Samaritans.*] This sentence is generally thought, with much reason, to be the explanatory comment of St. John and not the words of the Samaritan woman. It certainly seems more natural to take it so. The sentence should then be read as a parenthesis. Calvin thinks it is the woman's words, but his reasons are not convincing.

The enmity between the Jews and Samaritans, here referred to, no doubt originated in the separation of the ten tribes under Jeroboam and the establishment of the kingdom of Israel. It was exceedingly increased after the ten tribes were carried into captivity by the Assyrians, by the fact that the Samaritans became mingled with foreigners whom the king of Assyria sent to Samaria from Babylon and other places, and so lost their right to be called pure Jews. (2 Kings xvii.1, etc.) It was further aggravated by

the opposition which the inhabitants of Samaria made to the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the return from the captivity of Babylon in the days of Ezra. (Ezra iv.10, etc.) In the days of our Lord, the Jews seem to have gone to the extreme of regarding the Samaritans as entirely foreigners and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. When they told our Lord that He was "a Samaritan and had a devil," they meant the expression to convey the bitterest scorn and reproach. (John viii.48.) It is clear, however, from the conversation in this chapter, that the Samaritans, however mistaken on many points, were not ignorant heathens. They regarded themselves as descended from Jacob. They had a kind of Old Testament religion. They expected the coming Messiah.

The bitter and exclusive spirit of the Jews towards all other nations, referred to in this verse, is curiously confirmed by the language used about the Jews by heathen writers at Rome. Exclusiveness was noted as one among their peculiarities. The immense difficulty with which even the apostles got over this exclusive feeling and went forth to preach to the Gentiles is noticeable both in the Acts and the Epistles. (Acts x.28; xi.2; Gal. ii.12; 1 Thess. ii.16.)

The utter absence of real charity and love among men in the days when our Lord was upon earth ought not to be overlooked. Well would it be if men had never quarreled about religion after He left the world! Quarrels among the crew of a sinking ship are not more hideous, unseemly, and irrational than the majority of quarrels among professors of religion. A historian might truly apply St. John's words to many a period in Church history and say, "The Romanists have no dealings with the Protestants," or "the Lutherans have no dealings with the Calvinists," or "the Calvinists have no dealings with the Arminians," or "the Episcopalians have no dealings with the Presbyterians," or "the Baptists have no dealings with those who baptize infants," or "the Plymouth Brethren have no dealings with anybody who does not join their company." These things ought not so to be. They are the scandal of Christianity, the joy of the devil, and the greatest stumbling-block to the spread of the Gospel.

The Greek words translated "have no dealings," mean literally "use not anything together with the Samaritans." Pearce says, "The Jews would not eat or drink with the Samaritans, would not drink out of the same cup or eat of the same dish with them." This fact throws much light on the woman's surprise at our Lord's request, "Give me a drink."

10.--[*Jesus answered, etc.*] In this verse our Lord proceeds to use the opportunity which the woman's question affords Him. He passes over, for the present, her expression of surprise at a Jew speaking to a Samaritan. He begins by exciting her curiosity and raising her expectations by speaking of something within her reach which He calls "living water." The first step to take with a careless sinner, after his attention has been arrested, is to produce on his mind the impression that we can tell him of something to his advantage within his reach. There is a certain vagueness in our Lord's words which exhibits his consummate wisdom. A systematic statement of doctrinal truth would have been thrown away at this stage of

the woman's feelings. The general and figurative language which our Lord employed was exactly calculated to arouse her imagination and to lead her on to further inquiry.

[*The gift of God.*] This expression is variously explained. Some think, as Augustine, Rupertus, Jansenius, Whitby, and Alford, that it means "the Holy Spirit," that peculiar gift which it was the Messiah's special office to impart to men in greater abundance than it had before been imparted. (Acts ii.38; x.45.)

Some think, as Brentius, Bucer, Musculus, Calovius, Grotius, and Barradius, that it means "the gracious opportunity which God is graciously giving to thee." If you did but know what a door of life is close to you, you would joyfully use it.

Some think, as Euthymius, Toletus, Bullinger, Gualter, Hooker, Beza, Rollock, Lightfoot, Glassius, Dyke, Hildersam, and Gill, that it means "Christ Himself," God's gracious gift to a sinful world. If you did but know that God has actually given His only-begotten Son, according to promise, and that He has come into the world, and that it is He who is speaking to you, you would at once ask of Him living water.

Some think that it means "God's gifts, and especially His gift of grace," which is now being proclaimed and made manifest to the world by the appearing on earth of His Son. (See Rom. v.15.) This seems to be the view of Cyril, Lámpe, Theophylact, Zwingle, and Calvin.

Of these four views, the last seems to me, on the whole, the most probable and satisfactory. The first sounds strange and unlike the usual teaching of Scripture. "If you knew the Holy Spirit, you would have asked," is an expression we can hardly expect at this period of our Lord's ministry, when the mission of the Comforter had not yet been explained. The second view seems hardly more natural than the first. The third view is undoubtedly recommended by the fact that Christ is frequently spoken of as God's great gift to the world. If the woman had really known anything aright about Messiah, and had known that He was before her, she would have asked of Him living water. Nevertheless, it is a strong objection to this view that it makes our Lord apparently say the same thing twice over. "If you knew Christ, and that it is Christ who speaks."

The last view makes the first clause *general*--"If you knew the grace of God," and the second *particular*--"If you also knew that the Savior Himself is with you." Thus both clauses receive a meaning.

[*Living water.*] The meaning of this expression, like "the gift of God," is variously explained. Some, as Calovius and Chemnitius, seem to think it means the doctrine of God's mercy, pardon, cleansing, and justification. Others, as Chrysostom, Augustine, Cyril, Theophylact, Calvin, Beza, Gualter, Musculus, and Ferus, think it means the Holy Spirit, renewing, and sanctification.

I doubt whether either view is quite correct. I am inclined, with Bullinger and Rollock, to regard the expression as a general figurative description of everything which it is Christ's office to bestow on the soul of man--pardon, peace, mercy, grace, justification, and sanctification. As water is cleansing, purifying, cooling, refreshing, thirst-satisfying to man's body, so are Christ's gifts to the soul. I think everything that a sinful soul needs is purposely included under the general words "living water." It comprises not only the justifying "blood which cleanses from all sin," but the sanctifying grace of the Spirit by which we "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness--not only the inward peace which is the result of pardon, but the sense of inward comfort which is the companion of renewal of heart.

The idea of "water," we should remember, is specially brought forward in some of the Old Testament promises of good things to come. (See Isa. xii.3; xlv.3; Ezek. xlvii.1, etc; Zech. xiii.1; xiv.8.) A sprinkling of clean water was particularly mentioned as one of the things Messiah was to give. (Isa. lii.15; Ezek. xxxvi.25.) To an intelligent reader of the Old Testament, the mention of "living water" would at once raise up the idea of Messiah's times.

The word "living," applied here to water, must not be pressed too far. It does not necessarily mean anything more than fresh, running waters. Thus it is said that Isaac's servants found a well of living waters. (Gen. xxvi.19. See also Num. xix.17; Cant. iv.15.) There was undoubtedly a deep meaning in our Lord's words, and a tacit reference to the verse in Jeremiah, where God speaks of Himself as "the fountain of living waters." (Jer. ii.13.) Nevertheless, the first idea that the words would convey to the woman's mind would probably be no more than this, that He who sat before her had better, fresher, and more valuable water than that of the well. The fact is that our Lord purposely used a figurative, general expression in order to lead the woman's mind gently on. If He had said, "He would have given thee grace and mercy," she would have been unprepared for such purely doctrinal language, and it would have called forth prejudice and dislike.

There is a vast quantity of deep truth contained in this verse. It is rich in first principles, linked together in a most instructive chain. (1) Christ has living water to give to men. (2) If men would only ask, Christ would give at once. (3) Men do not ask because they are ignorant. The verse condemns all who die unpardoned. They have not because they ask not; they ask not because they are blind to their condition. To remove this blindness and ignorance must be the first object we should aim at in dealing with a thoughtless, unconverted man.

The notion of Ambrose, Cyprian, and Rupertus, that "living water" here means baptism, is too monstrous to require refutation. It is only a sample of the preposterous view of some of the Fathers and their followers about the sacraments.

Bengel remarks on this verse our Lord's readiness to draw lessons of

spiritual instruction from every object near Him. To the Jews desiring bread, He spoke of the bread of life. (John vi.33.) To the people at Jerusalem at break of day, He speaks of the light of the world, referring probably to the rising sun. (John viii.2,12.) To the woman coming to draw water, He speaks of living water.

11.--[*The woman said to him.*] The words of the woman, in this and the following verse, imply surprise, curiosity, and perhaps a slight sneer. At any rate they show that her attention was arrested. A strange Jew at a well suddenly speaks to her about "living water." What could He mean? Was he in earnest or not? With a woman's curiosity she desires to know.

[*Sir.*] The Greek word so rendered is generally translated "Lord." This leads some, as Chrysostom, to think that the woman's heart was so far impressed now that she purposely used a term of respect and reverence. We must not, however, lay too much stress on the word. It is certainly translated "Sir" in other places where inferiors speak to superiors. (Matt. xiii.27; xxi.30; xxvii.63; John iv.49; v.7; xii. 21; xx.15; Rev. vii.14.) Yet it is difficult to see what other word the woman could have used in addressing a strange man, without rudeness and discourtesy.

[*Nothing to draw with.*] The Greek expression here is simply a substantive meaning "an instrument for drawing water." What it was we are left to conjecture. Schleusner suggests from Nonnus that it must mean a cup fastened to a rope.

[*The well is deep.*] These words, according to the universal testimony of travelers at this day, are still literally true. The well is at least thirty yards deep, and to a person not provided with a rope, as the woman doubtless saw was our Lord's case, the water would be inaccessible.

[*Where then...that living water.*] The Greek word here rendered "that" is simply the article commonly translated "the." It is like "that prophet." (John i.21.)

The ignorance of the woman in thinking of nothing but material water naturally strikes us. Yet it is nothing more than we see in many other instances in the Gospels. Nicodemus could not see any but a carnal meaning in the new birth; the disciples could not understand our Lord's having "meat to eat," unless it was literal meat; the Jews thought the "bread from heaven" was literal bread. (John iii.4; iv.33; vi.34.) The natural heart of man always tries to put a carnal and material sense on spiritual expressions. Hence have arisen the greatest errors about the sacraments.

12.--[*Are you greater.*] This question exhibits the woman's curiosity to know who the stranger before her could be. Who are you that speaks of living water? It also savors of a sneer and incredulity. Do you mean to say that you can give me better and more abundant supplies of water than a well which the patriarch Jacob found sufficient for himself and all his numerous company? Do you pretend to know of a better well? Are you, a poor weary traveler in appearance, so great a person that you do possess a

better well than Jacob possessed?

[*Our father Jacob...well.*] Let it be noted that the woman carefully claimed relationship with Jacob and called him "our father," though, after all the intermixture of the Samaritans with heathen nations, the relationship was not very easy of proof. But it is common to find people shutting their eyes to difficulties when they want to prove a connection or relationship. The advocates of an extreme view of apostolical succession seldom condescend to notice difficulties when they assert that episcopally ordained ministers can trace their order up to the apostles.

When it says that "Jacob gave" the well, there is probably a reference to the grant which Jacob made to his son Joseph of the district near the well. From Joseph came the tribe of Ephraim to which, no doubt, the Samaritan woman claimed to belong. (Gen. xlviii.22.)

[*Drink...himself...livestock.*] These words were doubtless said to show the goodness and abundance of the water. Did the stranger at the well really mean to say that he could really give any better water?

Bucer, on this verse, remarks how the Samaritans prided themselves on their relationship to Jacob and the possession of his well while they made no effort to imitate his goodness, and points out the tendency of superstition to the same thing in every age. "True piety," he says, "does not consist in having Jacob's well and Jacob's land, but Jacob's spirit; not in keeping the bones of the saints but in imitating their lives."

13.--[*Jesus answered, etc.*] In this and the following verse our Lord proceeds to raise the desires of the woman by exalting the value of the living water of which He had spoken. He still refrains from distinct statements of doctrinal truth; He still adheres to the figurative expression "water." And yet He makes an advance and leads on the woman gently and almost imperceptibly to glorious spiritual things. Now, for the first time, He begins to speak of "everlasting life."

[*Whosoever drinks...thirst again.*] It will be noted that our Lord does not answer the woman's questions directly. He keeps steadily to the one point He desires to fasten on her mind: viz., the infinite excellence of a certain "living water" which He had to give. And first He reminds her of what she knew well by laborious experience: the water of Jacob's well might be good and plentiful, but still he who drank of it was only satisfied for a few hours. He soon thirsted again.

We cannot doubt that there was a deep latent thought in our Lord's words in this sentence. He would have us know that the waters of Jacob's well are typical of all temporal and material good things: they cannot satisfy the soul. They have no power to fill the heart of an immortal creature like man. He who only drinks of them is sure to thirst again.

Some have thought that there is a tacit reference in these words to the woman's insatiable love of sin.

The similarity ought to be noticed between our Lord's line of argument in this verse and the line He adopts in recommending to the Jews the bread of life in the sixth chapter. He showed the Jews the superiority of the bread of life over the manna by the words, "Your father did eat manna and are dead." (John vi.49.) Just so in this place, He shows the inferiority of the water of Jacob's well to the living water by saying, "He that drinks of this water shall thirst again." The two passages deserve a careful comparison.

14.--[*Whosoever drinks...never thirst.*] These words contain a precious promise and declare a glorious truth of the Gospel. The benefits of Christ's gifts are promised to everyone who is willing to receive them, whosoever and whatsoever he may be. He may have been as bad as the Samaritan woman, but the promise is for him as well as for her: "whosoever drinks shall never thirst." The declaration "shall never thirst" does not mean "shall never feel any spiritual want at all." It simply asserts the abiding and enduring nature of the benefits which Christ gives. He that drinks of the living water which Christ gives shall never entirely and completely lose the cleansing, purifying, and soul refreshing effects which it produces.

Our English translation of this sentence hardly gives the full sense of the Greek. Literally rendered it would be, "Shall never thirst unto eternity." The same expression is used frequently in St. John's Gospel. See John vi. 51-58; viii.51; x.28; xi.26; xiv.16.

[*The water I shall give...everlasting life.*] To see the full meaning of this figurative sentence, it must be paraphrased. The meaning seems to be something of this kind: "The gift of grace, mercy, and peace which I am ready to give shall be in the heart of him who receives it an everflowing source of comfort, satisfaction, and spiritual refreshment; continuing and flowing on, not only through this life but unto life eternal. He that receives my gift of living water has a fountain opened in his soul of spiritual satisfaction, which shall neither be dried up in this life or the life to come, but shall flow on to all eternity."

Let it be noted that the whole verse is a strong argument in favor of the doctrine of the perpetuity of grace and the consequent perseverance in the faith of believers. It is difficult to understand how the Arminian doctrine of the possibility of believers completely falling away and being lost can be reconciled with any natural interpretation of this verse.

Zwingle thinks, with much probability, that the words "a fountain in him," point to the benefits which grace once received makes a man impart to others, as well as enjoy himself. (See John vii.38.)

Rollock remarks on this verse: "Let me say in a word what I feel. You will find nothing either in heaven or in earth, with which you will be satisfied and feel supplied, except Jesus Christ alone, with all that fullness of the godhead which dwells in Him bodily."

Poole says: "He who receives the Holy Spirit and the grace thereof, though he will be daily saying Give, give, and continually desiring further supplies of grace, yet he shall never wholly want, never want any good thing that shall be needful for him. The seed of God shall abide in him, and His water shall be in him a spring supplying him until he comes to heaven."

15.--[*The woman said, etc.*] In this verse, I think, we see the first sparks of good in the woman's soul. Our Lord's words aroused a desire in her heart for this living water of which He had spoken. She does what our Lord said she ought to have done at first. She "asks" Him to give her the water.

[*Give me this water...not thirst...draw.*] The motives of the woman in making this request are variously explained.

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 we could get it! Give it to 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 labor, and yet could see nothing but the things of this world in our Lord's sayings; like the request of the Jews, "Evermore give us this bread." (John vi.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 this living fountain at her own house."

Some think, as Chrysostom, Theophylact, and 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."

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 Spirit begins His work of conversion. It is folly to say that the first movings of a 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 to 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.

16.--[*Jesus said...call your husband...here.*] This verse begins an entirely new stage in the history of the woman's conversion. From this point on we hear no more of "living water." Figurative language is dropped entirely. Our Lord's words become direct, personal, and plain. The woman had asked at last for "living water." At once our Lord proceeds to give it to her.

Our Lord's reasons for bidding the woman to call her husband have been variously interpreted. Some think that He only meant her to understand that He had spoken long enough to her, a solitary woman, and that before He proceeded further she must call her husband to be a witness of the conversation and to partake of the benefits He was going to confer. This seems the view of Chrysostom and Theophylact. Others think, with far more probability in my judgment, that our Lord's main object in naming the woman's husband was to produce in her mind conviction of sin, and to show her His own divine knowledge of all things. He knew that she had no husband, and He purposely named him in order to touch her conscience. He always knew the thoughts of those to whom He spoke, and He knew, in the present case, what the effect of His words would be. It would bring to light the woman's besetting sin. It is as though He said, "You do ask Me for living water. You do at last express a desire for that great spiritual gift which I am able to bestow. Well then, I begin by bidding you to know yourself and your sinfulness. I will show you that I know your spiritual disease and can lay my finger on the most dangerous ailment of your soul. Go, call your husband, and come here."

Let it be noted that the first draught of living water which our Lord gave to the Samaritan woman was conviction of sin. That fact is a lesson for all who desire to benefit ignorant and careless sinners. The first thing to be taught to such persons, when once we have gotten their attention, is their own sinfulness and their consequent need of a Savior. No one values the physician until he feels his disease.

Augustine thinks that when our Lord said "Call thy husband," He meant, "Cause thine understanding to be forthcoming. Thine understanding is not with thee. I am speaking after the spirit, and thou hearest after the flesh!" I can see no wisdom in this fanciful idea.

17.--[*The woman answered...no husband.*] These words were an honest and truthful confession, as far as they went. Whether the woman wished it to be supposed that she was a widow, it would perhaps be hardly fair to inquire. Theophylact and Euthymius suggest that she did wish to deceive our Lord. The way in which our Lord received her declaration makes it probable that she did not profess to be a widow, and very likely her dress showed that she was not. In this point of view, the honesty of her confession is noteworthy. There is always more hope of one who honestly and bluntly confesses sin than of a smooth-tongued hypocrite.

[*Jesus said...well said...no husband.*] Our Lord's commendation of the woman's honest confession deserves notice. It teaches us that we should make the best of an ignorant sinner's words. An unskillful physician of souls would probably have rebuked the woman sharply for his wickedness, if her words led him to suspect it. Our Lord, on the contrary, says, "Thou hast well said."

18.--[*Five husbands.*] Many foolish and unseemly things have been written about this sentence which it is not worthwhile to bring forward. Of course it is utterly improbable that the woman had lost five husbands by death and had been five times a widow. The more likely explanation is that she had been divorced and put away by several husbands in succession. Divorces were notoriously common among the Jews, and in all probability among the Samaritans, for very trivial causes. In the case, however, of the woman before us, the second clause of the verse makes it likely that she had been justly divorced for adultery.

Augustine regards these five husbands as significant of "the five senses of the body," which are as five husbands by which the soul of the natural man is ruled! I cannot think that our Lord meant anything of the kind. Euthymius mentions another allegorical view, making the woman to typify human nature, and the five husbands five different dispensations and him with whom she now lived the Mosaic Law! This seems to me simply absurd. Origen says much the same. It is well to know what patristic interpretation is!

[*He whom...not your husband.*] These words show plainly that the Samaritan woman was living in adultery up to the very day when our Lord spoke to her.

Our Lord's perfect knowledge of the woman's past and present life is very noteworthy. It ought to remind us how perfectly He is acquainted with every transaction of our own lives. From Him no secrets are hid.

[*In that you spoke truly.*] There is a kindness very worthy of notice in these words. Wicked and abandoned as this Samaritan woman was, our Lord deals gently and kindly with her, and twice in one breath commends her confession: "You have well said. In that you spoke truly." Kindness of manner like this will always be found a most important point in dealing with the ungodly. Scolding and sharp rebuke, however well-deserved, have a tendency to harden and shut up hearts and to make people bolt their doors. Kindness, on the contrary, wins, softens, conciliates, and disarms prejudice. An unskillful soul-physician would probably have ended his sentence by saying, "You are a wicked woman, and if you do not repent, you will be lost." All this would have been true no doubt. But how different our Lord's grave and gentle remark: "You spoke truly!"

19.--[*The woman said...I perceive...prophet.*] I think we see in this verse a great change in the Samaritan woman's mind. She evidently confesses the entire truth of what our Lord had just said and turns to Him as an anxious inquirer about her soul. It is as though she said, "I perceive at last that you are indeed no common person. You have told me what you could not

have known if you were not a prophet sent from God. You have exposed sins which I cannot deny and aroused spiritual concern which I would now fain have relieved. Now give me instruction."

Let it be noted that the thing which first struck the Samaritan woman and made her call Jesus "a prophet" was the same that struck Nathanael, viz., our Lord's perfect knowledge. To call our Lord "a prophet" at first sight may seem not much. But it must be remembered that even after His resurrection, the two disciples going to Emmaus only described Jesus as a "prophet mighty in deed and word." (Luke xxiv.19.) A clear knowledge of the divine nature of Messiah seems to have been one of the points on which almost the whole Jewish nation was ignorant. Even the learned Scribes could not explain how Messiah was to be David's Lord and also David's Son. (Mark xii.37.)

20.--[*Our fathers worshiped, etc.*] To see the full drift of this verse, we must carefully remember the state of the Samaritan woman's mind at this moment. I think that she spoke under spiritual anxiety. She was alarmed by having her sins suddenly exposed. She found herself for the first time in the presence of a prophet. She felt for the first time the necessity of religion. But at once the old question between the Jews and Samaritans arose before her mind. How was she to know what was truth? What was she to believe? Her own people said that the Samaritan mode of worshiping God was correct. The Jews said that Jerusalem was the only place where men ought to worship. Between these two conflicting opinions, what was she to do?

The natural ignorance of almost all unconverted people, when first aroused to thought about religion, appears strikingly in the woman's words. Man's first idea is to attach great importance to the outward mode of worshiping God. The first refuge of an awakened conscience is strict adherence to some outward form and zeal for the external part of religion.

The woman's readiness to quote "the fathers" and their customs is an instructive instance of man's readiness to make custom and tradition his only rule of faith. "Our fathers did so" is one of the natural man's favorite arguments. Calvin's comments on the expression "fathers" in this verse are very useful. He remarks, among other things, "None should be reckoned Fathers but those who are manifestly the sons of God."

When the woman spoke of "this mountain," she doubtless meant the hill on which the rival temple of Samaria was built, to the bitter annoyance of the Jerusalem Jews. It is said that this temple was first built in the days of Nehemiah by Sanballat, and that his son-in-law, the son of Joiada, whom Nehemiah "chased from him" was its first high priest. (Neh. xiii.29.) Some have gone so far as to maintain that the hill Gerizim at Samaria was the hill on which Abraham offered up Isaac, and that the words of the woman refer to this. The more common opinion is that Mount Moriah at Jerusalem was the place.

When the woman says "Ye say," she doubtless includes the whole Jewish

nation, of whom she regards our Lord as a representative.

Musculus, Baxter, Scott, and Barnes think that the woman, in this verse, desired to turn away the conversation from her own sins to a subject of public controversy, and in this way to change the subject. I am not, however, satisfied that this view is correct. I prefer the view of Brentius, which I have already set forth, that she was truly impressed by our Lord's exposure of her wickedness and made a serious inquiry about the things needful to salvation. She was aroused to seriousness and asked what was true religion. Her own nation said one thing, the Jews said another. What was truth? In short, her words were only another form of the jailer's question, "What shall I do to be saved?"

21.--[*Jesus said...believe me.*] The calmness, gravity, and solemnity of these opening words are very noteworthy. "I tell you a great truth, which I ask you to credit and believe."

Jansenius thinks that our Lord uses the expression "believe Me," because the truth He was about to impart was so new and strange that the woman would be apt to think it incredible.

Stier remarks that this is the only time our Lord ever uses this expression, "Believe Me," in the Gospels.

[*The hour comes.*] The hour, or time here spoken of, means the time of the Gospel, the hour of the Christian dispensation.

[*Ye shall neither...mountain...Jerusalem...worship, etc.*] Our Lord here declares that under the Gospel there was to be no more distinction of places, like Jerusalem. The old dispensation under which men were bound to go up to Jerusalem three times a year, to attend the feasts and worship in the temple, was about to pass away. All questions about the superior sanctity of Samaria or Jerusalem would soon be at an end. A Church was about to be founded whose members would find access to the Father everywhere, and would need no temple service and no priests or sacrifices or altars in order to approach God. It was, therefore, mere waste of time to be disputing about the comparative claims of either Samaria or Jerusalem. Under the Gospel all places would soon be alike.

It seems far from improbable that our Lord referred in this verse to the prophecy of Malachi: "In every place incense shall be offered to my name." (Mal. i.11.)

The utter passing away of the whole Jewish system seems clearly pointed at in this verse. To bring into the Christian Church holy places, sanctuaries, altars, priests, sacrifices, gorgeous vestments, and the like is to dig up that which has been long buried, and to turn to candles for light under the noon-day sun. The favorite theory of the Irvingites, that we ought (as far as possible) in our public worship copy the Jewish temple services and ceremonial, seems incapable of reconciliation with this verse.

Calvin says, "By calling God the Father in this verse, Christ seems indirectly to contrast Him with the 'father' whom the woman had mentioned, and to convey this instruction that God will be a common Father to all, so that He will be generally worshiped without distinction of place or nation."

22.--[*Ye worship...not know.*] In this verse our Lord unhesitatingly condemns the religious system of the Samaritans, as compared with that of the Jews. The Samaritans could show no Scriptural authority, no revelation of God, commanding and sanctioning their worship. Whatever it was, it was purely an invention of man which God had never formally authorized or accredited. They had no warrant for believing that it was accepted. They had no right to feel sure that their prayers, praises, and offerings were received. In short, all was uncertainty. They were practically worshiping an "unknown God."

Mede remarks that the Samaritan woman overlooked the *object* of worship in her question about the *place*. "You inquire concerning the place of worshiping. But a far more important question is at issue between us, viz., the Being to be worshiped, respecting whom you are ignorant."

[*We know what we worship.*] In contrast to the Samaritan religious system, our Lord declares that the Jews at any rate could show divine warrant and scriptural authority for all they did in their religion. They could render a reason of their hope. They knew whom they approached in their religious services.

[*Salvation is of the Jews.*] Our Lord here declares that God's promises of a Savior and Redeemer specially belong to the Jerusalem Jews. They were the descendants of the tribe of Ephraim, from which it was nowhere said that Messiah should spring. And in truth the Samaritans were of such mixed origin that they had no right to be called Israelites at all.

I believe with Olshausen that "salvation" in this verse was really intended to mean "the Savior" Himself. The use of the article in the Greek is striking. It is literally "the salvation." Does not the saying to Zacchæus point the same way? "This day is salvation come to this house." (Luke xix.9.)

The expression "we" in this verse is very interesting. It is a wonderful instance of our Lord's condescension and one that stands almost alone. He was pleased to speak of Himself, just in the light that He appeared to the woman, as one of the Jewish nation. "I and all other Jews know what we worship."

The folly of supposing that ignorance is to be praised and commended in religion as the mother of devotion is strongly condemned in this verse. Christ would have Christians "know what they worship."

The testimony borne to the general truth of the religious system of the Jews in this place is very striking. Corrupt and wicked as Scribes and

Pharisees were, Jesus declares that the Jewish religion was true and Scriptural. It is a mournful proof that a Church may retain a sound creed and yet be on the high road to destruction.

Hildersam has a long note which is well worth reading on the words "salvation is of the Jews." Considering the times in which he lived, it shows singularly clear views of God's continual purposes concerning the Jewish nation. He sees in the words the great truth that all God's revelations to man in every age have been made through the Jews.

23.--[*Hour is coming, and now is.*] These words mean that the times of the Gospel approach, and indeed have already begun. "They have begun by the preaching of the kingdom of God. They will be fully brought in by my death and ascension, and the establishment of the New Testament Church."

[*True worshipers...and truth.*] Our Lord here declares who alone would be considered true worshipers in the coming dispensation of the Gospel. They would not be merely those who worshiped in this place or in that place. They would not be exclusively Jews or exclusively Gentiles or exclusively Samaritans. The external part of the worship would be of no value compared to the internal state of the worshipers. They only would be counted true worshipers who worshiped in spirit and in truth.

The words "in spirit and in truth" are variously interpreted, and much has been written about them. I believe the simplest explanation to be this: The word "spirit" must not be taken to mean the Holy Spirit, but the intellectual or mental part of man, in contradistinction to the material or carnal part of man. This distinction is clearly marked in 1 Cor. vii.34: "Holy in body and in spirit." "Worship in spirit" is heart-worship in contradistinction to all formal, material, carnal worship consisting only of ceremonies, offerings, sacrifices, and the like. When a Jew offered a formal meat-offering with his heart far away, it was worship after the flesh. When David offered in prayer a broken and a contrite heart, it was worship in spirit. "Worship in truth" means worship through the one true way of access to God, without the medium of the sacrifices or priesthood which were ordained till Christ died on the cross. When the veil was rent and the way into the holiest made manifest by Christ's death, then, and not till then, men "worshiped in truth." Before Christ they worshiped through types and shadows and figures and emblems. After Christ they worshiped in truth. Spirit is opposed to "flesh," truth to "shadow." "Spirit," in short, is heart-service contrasted with lip worship and formal devotion. "Truth" is the full light of the Christian dispensation contrasted with the twilight of the law of Moses.

The view I have endeavored to give is substantially that of Chrysostom and Euthymius.

Caryl, quoted by Ford, says, "In *spirit* regard the inward power, in *truth* the outward form. The first strikes at hypocrisy, the second at idolatry."

[*The Father seeks...Him.*] This is a remarkable sentence. I believe it to

mean that "the hour is come in which the Father has ordained from eternity that He will gather out of the world a company of true and spiritual worshipers. He is even now seeking out and gathering in such worshipers." The expression "seeks" is peculiar. There is something like it in the sentence, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost." (Luke xix.10.) It seems to show the exceeding compassion of the Father and His infinite willingness to save souls. He does not merely "wait" for men to come to Him. He "seeks" for them. It also shows the wide opening of God the Father's mercy under the Gospel. He no longer confines His grace to the Jews. He now seeks and desires to gather in everywhere true worshipers out of every nation.

The clause appears to me specially intended to encourage the Samaritan woman. Let her not trouble herself with difficulties about the comparative claims of the Samaritan and Jewish systems. Was she willing to be a spiritual worshiper? That was the one question which deserved her attention.

Trapp observes, "How should this fire up our hearts to spiritual worship! That God seeks for such worshipers!"

24.--[*God is a Spirit.*] Our Lord here declares to the Samaritan woman the true nature of God. Let her cease to think that God was such a one as man, and that He could not be found or approached or addressed like a mere earthly Monarch, except at one particular place. Let her learn to have higher, nobler, and more exalted views of the Being with whom sinners have to do. Let her know this day that God was a Spirit.

The declaration before us is one of the most lofty and definite sayings about God's nature which is to be found in the whole Bible. That such a declaration should have been made to such a person as the Samaritan woman is a wonderful instance of Christ's condescension! To define precisely the full meaning of the expression is past man's understanding. The leading idea most probably is that "God is an immaterial being, that He dwells not in temples made with hands, and that He is not, therefore, (like ourselves) absent from one place when He is present at another." These things are all true, but how little we can realize them!

Cornelius à Lapide gives an excellent summary of the opinions of heathen philosophers on the nature of God, in his commentary on this verse.

[*Those who worship...spirit and truth.*] Our Lord draws this broad conclusion from the statement of God's nature which He has just made. If "God is a Spirit," it behooves those who would worship Him acceptably to worship in spirit and in truth. It is unreasonable to suppose that He can like any worship which does not come from the heart, or can be so well pleased with worship which is offered through types and ceremonies, as with worship offered through the true way which He has provided and is now revealing.

The importance of the great principle laid down in this and the preceding

verse can never be overrated. Any religious teaching which tends to depreciate heart-worship and to turn Christianity into a mere formal service, or which tends to bring back Jewish shadows, ceremonies, and services and to introduce them into Christian worship, is on the face of these remarkable verses most unscriptural and deserving of reprobation.

Of course we must not admit the idea that in this and the preceding verse Jesus meant to pour contempt on the ceremonial law, which God Himself had given. But He plainly teaches that it was an imperfect dispensation, given because of man's ignorance and infirmity, as we give pictures to children in teaching them. It was, in fact, a schoolmaster to Christ. (Gal. iii.24.) To want men to return to it is as absurd as to bid grownup people begin learning the alphabet by pictures in an infant school. On the other hand, as Beza remarks, we must not run into the extreme of despising all ordinances, sacraments, and outward ceremonies in religion. These things have their use and value, however much they may be abused.

25.--[*The woman said...Messiah...called Christ.*] This verse is an interesting one. It shows the woman at last brought to the very state of mind in which she would be prepared to welcome a revelation of Christ. She had been told of "living water," and had expressed a desire for it. She had been told her own sin, and had been unable to deny it. She had been told the uselessness of resting on any formal membership of the Samaritan Church and the necessity of spiritual and heart-worship of God. And now what can she say? It is all true, she feels; she cannot gainsay it. But what can she do? To whom is she to go? Whose teaching can she follow? All she can do is to say that she knows Messiah is one day coming, and that He will make all things clear and plain. It is evident that she wishes for Him. She is uncomfortable and sees no relief for her newly-raised perplexities, unless Messiah should appear.

The mention of Messiah in this verse makes it clear that the Samaritans were not altogether ignorant of the Old Testament, and that there was an expectation of a Redeemer of some kind among them, as well as among the Jews. The existence of a general expectation of this sort throughout the East, at the time when our Lord appeared on earth, is a fact to which even heathen writers have testified.

When the woman says, "He will tell us all things," we must probably not inquire too closely into what she meant. It is very likely that she had only a vague feeling that Messiah would remove all doubts and show all things needful to salvation.

Chrysostom remarks on this verse, "The woman was made dizzy by Christ's discourse and fainted at the sublimity of what He said, and in her trouble said, I know that Messiah comes."

Wordsworth observes that the Samaritan woman had a clearer knowledge of Messiah's office than the Jews generally showed. She looked for Him as a Teacher. They looked for Him as a conquering King.

Beza and A. Clark think that the words, "who is called Christ," in this verse are St. John's parenthetical explanation of the word Messiah. It is certainly rather unlikely that the woman would have used them in addressing a Jew. Yet most commentators think that they were her words.

26.--[*Jesus said, I who speak to you am He.*] These words are the fullest declaration that our Lord ever made of His own Messiahship which the Gospel writers have recorded. That such a full declaration should be made to such a person as the Samaritan woman is one of the most wonderful instances of our Lord's grace and condescension related in the New Testament! At last the woman obtained an answer to one of her first questions, "Are you greater than our father Jacob?" When the answer came, it completely converted her soul.

Rollock remarks on this verse how ready and willing Christ is to reveal Himself to a sinner's soul. The very moment that this woman expressed any desire for Messiah, He at once revealed Himself to her: "I am He."

Quesnel observes, "It is a great mistake to suppose that the knowledge of the mysteries of religion ought not to be imparted to women by the reading of Scripture, considering this instance of the great confidence Christ reposed in this woman by His manifestation of Himself. The abuse of the Scriptures and the sin of heresies did not proceed from the simplicity of women, but from the conceited learning of men."

In leaving the whole passage, there are several striking points which ought never to be forgotten. (a) Our Lord's *mercy* is remarkable. That such a one as He should deal so graciously with such a sinner is a striking fact. (b) Our Lord's *wisdom* is remarkable. How wise was every step of His way in dealing with this sinful soul! (c) Our Lord's *patience* is remarkable. How He bore with the woman's ignorance, and what trouble He took to lead her to knowledge! (d) Our Lord's *power* is remarkable. What a complete victory He won at last! How almighty must that grace be which could soften and convert such a carnal and wicked heart!

We must never despise any soul after reading this passage. None can be worse than this woman. But Christ did not despise her.

We must never despair of any soul after reading this passage. If this woman was converted, anyone may be converted.

Finally, we must never condemn the use of all wise and reasonable means in dealing with souls. There is a "wisdom which is profitable to direct" in approaching ignorant and ungodly people, which must be diligently sought.