

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 15

CHRIST IN SAMARIA

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Transcript

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John 4:31-42

We begin with the usual Analysis of the passage which is to be before us. In it we see:— 1. The Disciples' Solicitude, verse 31. 2. The Disciples' Ignorance, verse 32. 3. The Disciples Instructed, verses 34-38. 4. The Samaritan Converts, verse 39. 5. The Samaritan's Request, verse 40. 6. The Samaritan Converts added unto, verse 41. 7. The Samaritan's Confession, verse 42. Verses 31-38 form a parenthesis and tell us something of what transpired during the interval that followed the woman's leaving the well and the Samaritans coming to Christ because of her testimony to Him. They record a conversation which took place between the Lord and His disciples. The disciples, it will be remembered, had "gone away unto the city to buy meat," and had returned from their quest, to find their Master engaged in conversation with a woman of Samaria. They had marvelled at this, but none had interrogated Him on the matter. As they had heard the Savior pronounce the ineffable "I am" title (verse 26), a Divine restraint had fallen upon them. But now the interview between the Lord Jesus and the Samaritan harlot was over. Grace had won a glorious victory. A sinner had been brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light, and in consequence, had gone forth to tell others the good news which meant so much to her own heart. Once more the Savior was left alone with His disciples. They had returned in time to hear His closing words with the woman', and had seen the summary effect they had on her. They had witnessed that which should have corrected and enlarged their cramped vision. They had been shown that whatever justification there might have been in the past for the Jews to have "no dealings with the Samaritans," this no longer held good. The Son of God had come to earth, "full of grace and truth," and the glad tidings concerning Him must be proclaimed to all people. This was a hard lesson for these Jewish disciples, but with infinite patience the Lord bore with their spiritual dullness. In what follows we have a passage of great practical importance, which contains some weighty truths upon service. "In the meanwhile His disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat" (John 4:31). A little earlier in the day the disciples had left their Master sitting on the well, wearied from the long journey. Accordingly, they had procured some food, and had returned to Him with it. But He evidenced no desire for it. Instead of finding Christ weary and faint, they discovered Him to

be full of renewed energy. He had received refreshment which they knew not of. This they could not understand, and so they begged Him to eat of that which they had brought Him. Their request was a kindly one. Their appeal to Him was well meant. But it was merely the amiability of the flesh. The 'milk of human kindness' must not be mistaken for the fruit of the Spirit. Sentimentality is not spirituality. "But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of" (John 4:32). This was scarcely a rebuke: it was more a word of instruction for their enlightenment. Their minds were upon material things; the Lord speaks of that which is spiritual. "Meat" was used as a figurative expression for that which satisfied. Christ's heart had been fed. His spirit had been invigorated. What it was that had refreshed Him we learn from His next utterance. It was something the disciples "knew not of." Not yet had they discovered that the one who gives out of the things of God is also a receiver. In dispensing spiritual blessing to others, one is blest himself. Peace and joy are a part of the reward which comes to him who does the will of God. The obedient servant has "meat to eat" that those not engaged in service know nothing about. These, and other principles of service, were what the Lord would now press upon His disciples. "Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat?" (John 4:33). This confirmed what Christ had just said: disciples of His they might be, but as yet they were very ignorant about spiritual things. Their minds evidently dwelt more upon material things, than the things of God. They knew very little about the relation of Christ to the Father: their thoughts turned at once to the question as to whether or not any man had "brought him ought to eat." Even good men are sometimes very ignorant; yea, the best of men are, until taught of God. "How dull and thick brained are the best, 'till God rend the veil, and enlighten both the organ and the object" (John Trapp, 1650, A.D.). But let us not smile at the dullness of those disciples; instead, see in them an exhibition of our own spiritual stupidity, and need of being taught of God. "Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34). What did Christ mean? In what sense is doing the will of God "meat" to one who performs it? What is the Father's "work?" And how was Christ "finishing" it? The answer to those questions must be sought in the setting of our verse, noting its connection with what has gone before and what follows. We must first ascertain the leading subject of the passage of which this verse forms a part. As we proceed with our examination of the passage it will become more and more evident that its leading subject is service. The Lord was giving needed instruction to His disciples, and preparing them for their future work. He sets before them a concise yet remarkably complete outline of the fundamental principles which underlie all acceptable service for God. The all-important and basic principle is that of absolute obedience to the will of God. The servant must do the will of his master. This the perfect Servant Himself exemplified. Note how He refers to God. He does not say here, "My meat is to do the will of the Father," but "the will of Him that sent me." That shows it is service which is in view. Now what was "the will" of the One who had sent Christ into the world? Was it not to deliver certain captives from the hands of the Devil and bring them from death unto life? If there is any doubt at all on the point John 6:38 and 39 at once removes it—"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." This at once helps us to define the Father's "work"—"and finish his work, which must not be confounded with the work that was peculiarly the Son's: though closely related, they were quite distinct. The "will" of the Father was that all those He had "given" to the Son should be saved; His "work" had been in appointing them unto salvation. "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9). Appointment unto salvation (see also 2 Thessalonians 2:13) is peculiarly the work of the Father; the actual saving of those appointed is the work of the Son, and in the saving of God's elect the Son finishes the "work" of the Father. An individual example of this had just been furnished in the case of the Samaritan woman, and others were about to follow in the "many" who should believe on Him because of her testimony (verse 39),

and the "many more" who would believe because of His own word (verse 41). How all this casts its own clear light on John 5:4 of this fourth chapter, and explains to us the force of the "must" here The Lord had not journeyed to Samaria to gratify His own desire, for "he pleased not himself." In infinite grace the Son of God had condescended to lay aside (temporarily) His glory and stooped to the place of a Servant; and in service, as in everything else, He is our great Exemplar. He shows us how to serve, and the first great principle which comes out here is that joy of heart, satisfaction of soul, sustenance of spirit—"meat"—is to be found in doing the will, performing the pleasure, of the One who sends forth. Here, then, the perfect Servant tells us what true service is—the simple and faithful performance of that which has been marked out for us by God. Our "meat"—the sustenance of the laborers heart, the joy of his soul—is not to be sought in results (the "increase") but in doing the will of Him that sent us forth. That was Christ's meat, and it must be ours, too. This was the first lesson, the Lord here teaches His disciples about Service. And it is the first thing which each of us who are His servants now, need to take to heart. "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35). It is very evident that it is the subject of Service which is still before us, and the principle enunciated in this verse is easily perceived. However, let us first endeavor to arrive at the local force of these words, and their particular significance to the disciples, before we reduce them to a principle of application to ourselves. "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest." There is no need to conclude that the disciples had been discussing among themselves the condition of the fields through which they had walked on their way to the city to buy meat; though they may have done so. Rather does it seem to us that the Lord continued to instruct His disciples in figurative language. There seems no doubt that the Savior had in mind the spiritual state of the Samaritans and the estimate formed of them by His disciples. Possibly the Samaritans who had listened to the striking testimony of the woman now saved were on their way toward the well, though yet some considerable distance away, and pointing to them the Savior said to the disciples, "Lift up your eyes" and behold their state. "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." This was plainly a rebuke. The disciples regarded Samaria as a most unlikely field to work in; at best much sowing would be required, and then a long wait, before any ripened grain could be expected. They never dreamed of telling them that the Messiah was just outside their gates! Must they not have hung their heads in shame when they discovered how much more faithful and zealous had been this woman than they? Here, then, is a further reason why Christ "must needs go through Samaria"—to teach His disciples a much needed missionary lesson. What, now, is the application to us of the principle contained in this verse? Surely it is this: we must not judge by appearances. Ofttimes we regard certain ones as hopeless cases, and are tempted to think it would be useless to speak to them about Christ. Yet we never know what seeds of Truth may have been lodged in their hearts by the labors of other sowers. We never know what influences may be working: ofttimes those who seem to us the most unlikely cases, when put to the test are the most ready to hear of the Savior. We cannot tell how many months there are to harvest! "And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together" (John 4:36). If the previous verse contained a rebuke, here was a word to encourage. "He that reapeth receiveth wages" seems to mean, This is a work in which it is indeed a privilege to be engaged, for the laborer receives a glorious reward, inasmuch as he "gathereth fruit unto life eternal." The reward is an eternal one, for not only do those saved through the labors of the reaper receive eternal life, but because of this the joy of both will be eternal too. "That both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together." The sower may have labored hard toward the salvation of souls, and yet never be permitted to witness in this life the success which God gave to his efforts. The reaper, however, does

witness the ingathering; nevertheless, both sower and reaper shall rejoice together in the everlasting salvation of those garnered through their joint efforts. "And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth" (John 4:37). There is a timely warning here. To "reap" is not everything, blessed as the experience is: to "sow" is equally important. The bountiful crop garnered at Sychar was, under God, the result of the labors of earlier sowers. These Samaritans were already informed about the appearing of the Messiah, and for this knowledge they were indebted to the faithful ministry of earlier servants of God. That one sows and another reaps had been exemplified in the case of the converted adulteress. Christ had met the need which the testimony of the prophets had awakened within her. How gracious of the Lord to recognize and own the labors of those earlier sowers! Apparently their work had counted for little. They had sown the seed, yet seemingly the ground on which it had fallen was very unpromising. But now, under the beneficent influence of the Sun of righteousness came the harvest, and the Lord is not slack to remind His disciples of their indebtedness to the labors of those who had gone before. Doubtless, Philip would recall these words of Christ in a coming day (see Acts 8). And what comfort is there here for the sower today! His labors may seem to go for nothing, but if he is diligent in sowing the proper "seed," let him know that sooner or later all faithful service is rewarded. He may not "reap," but "another" will—"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). "I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors" (John 4:38). There is no doubt a historical reference here which points us back to what is recorded in Matthew 10, from which we learn that the Lord had sent forth the twelve apostles to "preach," and to "heal the sick" (verses 7, 8.). This was in Judea, and the success of their labors is indicated in John 4:1, 2—they had made and baptized many disciples. One can imagine the elation of the disciples over their success, and it was to repress their vanity that Christ here says to them, "I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors." He reminds them that they had prospered because others had labored before them. It was a word encouraging to the sower, sobering to the reaper. We may observe, in passing, that when the Lord sends us forth to "reap," He directs us to fields which have already been sown. It should also be noted that the toil of the sower is more arduous than that of the reaper: when Christ says, "Other men labored, and ye (the reapers) are entered into their (the sowers') labors" He used a word which signified "to toil to the point of exhaustion," indeed it is the same word which is used of the Savior at the beginning of this chapter, when we read, "Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey." Luther was wont to say, "The ministry is not an idle man's occupation." Alas that so often it degenerates into such. Sowing and reaping are two distinct departments of Gospel ministry, and spiritual discernment (wisdom from God) is requisite to see which is the more needed in a given place. "To have commenced sowing at Sychar would have indicated a want of discernment as to the condition of souls in that city. To have concluded from their success at Sychar, that all Samaria was ready to receive the Lord, would have been manifestly erroneous, as the treatment He met with in one of the villages of Samaria at a later period in His life clearly demonstrates. This, surely, can speak to us, where sowing and reaping may go on almost side by side. The work in one place is no criterion of what that in another place should be; nor does it follow, that the laborer, highly blessed in one locality, has only to move to another, to find that field also quite ready for his reaping-hook" (C. E. Stuart). "And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did" (John 4:39). At first glance it looks as though this verse introduces a change of subject, yet really it is not so. This verse, as also the two following, enunciates and illustrates other principles of service. In the first place, we are shown how that God is pleased to use feeble messengers to accomplish mighty ends. Frequently He employs weak instruments to make manifest His own mighty power. In this, as in everything else, the Lord's thoughts and

ways are very different from ours. He employed a shepherd lad to vanquish the mighty Goliath. He endowed a Hebrew slave with more wisdom than all the magicians of Babylon possessed. He made the words of Naaman's servants to have greater effect upon their august master than did those of the renowned Elisha. In making selection for the mother of the Savior, He chose not a princess, but a peasant woman. In appointing the heralds of the Cross, fishermen were the ones called. And so a mighty work of grace was started there in Sychar by a converted harlot. "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" "And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did." The full force of this can only be appreciated as we go back to what is told us in verses 28 and 29. She did not say. 'Of what use can I be for Christ?—I who have lost character with men, and have sunken into the lowest depths of degradation!' No; she did not stop to reason, but with a conscience that had been searched in the presence of the Light and its burden of guilt removed, with a heart full of wonderment and gratitude to the One who had saved her, she immediately went forth to serve and glorify Him. She told what she knew; she testified of what she had found, but in connection with a Person. It was of Him she spoke; it was to Him she pointed. "He told me," she declared, thus directing others to that One who had dealt so blessedly with her. But she did not stop there. She did not rest satisfied with simply telling her fellow-townsmen of what she had heard, nor Whom she had met. She desired others to meet with Him for themselves. "Come" she said; Come to Him for yourselves. And God honored those simple and earnest words: "Many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for (because of) the saying of the woman." Thus are we shown the great aim in service, namely, to bring souls into the presence of Christ Himself. "So when the Samaritans came unto him, they besought him to abide with them; and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his Word; and they said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Savior of the world" (John 4:40-42, A. R. V.). We have quoted from the A. B. V. because we believe it is the more correct here. The A. V. makes these Samaritans say, "For we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world." The majority of the Greek MSS. do not contain the words "the Christ" in verse 42. These Samaritans had learned from the lips of the woman who He was, "the Christ;" now they had discovered for themselves what He was—the One who met their deepest need, "The Savior." The above scripture places Samaria in striking contrast from the unbelief and rejection of the Judeans and those dwelling in Jerusalem, where so many of His mighty works had been done, and where it might be expected multitudes would have received Him. Here in Samaria was a people who seemed most unpromising; no record is given of Christ performing a single miracle there; and yet many of these despised Samaritans received Him. And is it not much the same today? Those whom we would think were most disposed to be interested in the things of God are usually the most indifferent; while those whom we are apt to regard as outside, if not beyond, the reach of God's grace, are the very ones that are brought to recognize their deep need, and become, ultimately, the most devoted among the followers of the Lamb. Let us now seek to gather up into a terse summary the leading lessons of the verses which have been before us. The whole passage has to do with service, and the fundamental principles of service are here enunciated and illustrated. First, we learn the essential requirement of service, as illustrated in the example of the Samaritan woman—a personal acquaintance with the Savior, and a heart overflowing for Him. Second, we are taught the spirit in which all service should be carried on—the faithful performance of the task allotted us; finding our satisfaction not in results, but in the knowledge that the will of God has been done by us. Third, we are shown the urgency of service—the fields already white unto harvest. Fourth, we have encouragement for service—the fact that we are gathering "fruit unto life eternal." Fifth, we learn about the interdependence of the servants—"one soweth and another reapeth:" there is mutual dependence one on the other: a holy partnership between

those who work in the different departments of spiritual agriculture. Sixth, we have a warning for servants: they who are used to doing the reaping must not be puffed up by their success, but must remember that they are entering into the labors of those who have gone before. Finally; we are taught here the aim ever to be kept in view, and that is to bring souls into the presence of Christ, that they may become independent of us, having learned to draw directly from Him. We would call attention to the following points brought out in these verses. First, the worldwide missionary need signified in the Lord's words in verse 35. Second, to the distinctive characteristic of this Age as seen in the absence of any public miracles. There is no hint of Christ performing any miracles here in Samaria: nor is He doing so publicly in the world today. Third, to the means employed as indicated in verses 39 and 41, where we are told that it was the woman's testimony, and the Word which caused many of the Samaritans to "believe." Thus it is throughout this Age. It is the personal testimony of believers and the preaching of the Word, which are the Divinely appointed means for the propagation of Christianity. Fourth, we may note the striking prominence of the Gentiles in this typical picture: "Many of the Samaritans... believed on Him." While there is a remnant of Israel "according to the election of grace" (typified in the few disciples who were with Christ), nevertheless, it is the Gentile element which predominates in the saved of this Age. Fifth, mark that Christ is owned here not as "The Son of man," nor as "The Son of David," but as "The Savior of the world." This title does not mean that Christ is the Savior of the human race, but is a general term, used in contradistinction from Israel, including all believing Gentiles scattered throughout the earth. Thus, once more, we discover that with marvelous skill the Holy Spirit has caused this historical narrative which traces the actions of the Savior in Samaria, and which records the instructions He there gave to His disciples, to embody a perfect outline which sets forth the leading features of this present Era of Grace, during which God is taking out of the Gentiles a people for His name. This should cause us to search more diligently for the hidden beauties and harmonies of Scripture. Below are the questions for the next lesson:— 1. How does verse 43 bring out the perfections of Christ? 2. How does "the Galileans received Him" (verse 45) confirm, "no honor in His own country" (Galilee) of verse 44? 3. Why are we told Christ was in Cana when He healed the nobleman's son? verse 46. 4. Why are we told the nobleman belonged to Capernaum? verse 46. 5. In what way does verse 48 apply to us today? 6. What does the word "yesterday" in verse 52 tell us about the nobleman?

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