

## “PASSING THROUGH SAMARIA”

(The item directly below is a discourse by F. F. Cook as reported in the 1914 Convention Report, starting on page 89.)

Each life has its limitations. The rich, the poor, the high and the low all are limited to their various spheres of activity; each one going through experiences and meeting conditions that they would have otherwise if in their power. So it is with the Christian. Who of God’s children have not things coming into their lives that they would not have different if they had the power to make the change? How about these compulsions in life? Has God made any provision for them in His plan? What are we doing about them?

I want to call your attention to John 4:4—“and He must needs go through Samaria.” This little verse calls our attention to one of the compulsions in Jesus’ life. To get the message of this little verse it is necessary for us to know both the context and the surroundings.

Jesus had been preaching for some time in Judea. The opposition of the Scribes and Pharisees had become more and more intense. They were seeking to entrap Him. They were watching His every act, noting His words, that they might find some excuse leading to His arrest. Jesus knowing what was in their hearts, and realizing that they were not in a condition to receive His message longer at this time, decided to remain no longer in Judea, but to go north into Galilee. Galilee was His home country. Here He would have opportunity for a change, and perhaps a little relaxation. To go to Galilee He must go through Samaria. To appreciate what this meant, it is necessary for us to bear in mind who the Samaritans were. The general belief as to their origin is that they were a mongrel race, springing from a mixture of Jews and Babylonians, arising during the captivity. The usual thought is that this mixture came because of the poor among the Jews being left behind and later, colonists from Babylon coming over mingled with this remnant of the Jews, thus forming the Samaritan race.

But the 17th chapter of second Kings gives what seems to be the true origin: that while some of the poorer Jews were left in Judea, the Scriptural record indicates this was not the case in the region of Samaria. The colonists from Babylon that were sent over into this region by the Babylonian government were harassed by wild beasts, especially lions, as recorded in this 17th chapter of second Kings, and they believed that these beasts were sent upon them by the Jews’ God, and concluded that they would not be free from this molestation until they were able to appease the God of the Jews in some way. They therefore sent over to their king, asking that he send to them someone to teach them about the Jews’ God. The king of Babylon sent over a priest, and they accepted his teachings to such an extent as to believe in the first five books of Moses, and no doubt thought that they had fully accepted the teachings, and were worshipers of the true God.

In this condition, Ezra and Nehemiah found them in the days of the return from captivity. While Nehemiah was conducting the building of the wall, they asked the privilege of assisting in the work, that they might have a share in the temple as a place to worship. This offer Nehemiah rightfully refused. They were not Jews. Nehemiah had no right to accept them, for God was dealing only with Jews; the only people of all the nations of earth that He knew at that time. The Samaritans were rejected, and here began the trouble that continued a bitter feud throughout the years, and had perhaps reached its height in the days of our Saviour. The Jews looked upon the Samaritan with hatred and disdain. Their contempt for them was so bitter that they would not allow them to testify in a Jewish court, or to enter a Jewish synagogue. They counted them outside all hope of salvation. If a Jew was engaged in controversy with any antagonist, and having exhausted his vocabulary of epithets, to call his enemy a Samaritan meant that he had reached the climax of calling names. So the Scriptures declare, "The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans." The Samaritans returned this feeling, and treatment in kind. For a Jew to pass through their territory meant to be subject to all kinds of personal indignities. They treated the Jews with utmost contempt, and the record is that at one time some of the more daring of the men of Samaria succeeded in getting into Jerusalem and dragging into the sacred precincts of the temple the bodies of some dead men as an expression of their contempt for the Jews' place of worship. It was through this country and among these people that Jesus was to pass in going to Galilee.

Why must Jesus thus pass through? Had God prearranged in His plan and purposes for the life of Jesus that on a certain day He should pass through Samaria? This might seem a reasonable conclusion. In fact, we are inclined to believe the conclusion that most of the Christian world would arrive at if they should give consideration to this question. In accordance with this, in my library I have the comments of a commentator of ability, who explains why Jesus went through Samaria at this time in this way: There was a woman in Samaria to whom God wanted the Gospel preached, that through her the Gospel of the Kingdom might be preached to the rest of the Samaritans. God wanted this woman's heart touched and to be saved, that she might be the means of saving others.

This would seem a probable explanation if God had not revealed to us in His Word some things in connection with His plan and purposes that caused us to believe that He did not arrange that Jesus should go through Samaria that day in order to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to this woman. The fact is revealed to us that the Gospel of the Kingdom was not yet due to be preached to any people outside of the Jewish nation. It was three and a half years after Jesus' ascension before the Gospel was preached to any of the Gentiles and Phillip was the first to preach the Gospel in Samaria, according to the sacred record, which was at least seven years after Jesus talked to the Samaritan woman.

Whatever, therefore, may have been the reason for Jesus going through Samaria, we may be quite sure it was not for the purpose of preaching the Gospel to the Samaritans.

In considering this question as to why Jesus went through Samaria, there are some things we may be sure of. In the first place, we know that Jesus was consecrated to do the Father's will. He declared that for this purpose He had come to the world, to do the will of Him that sent him. He came to offer His life as a sacrifice, and was faithful for 3½ years in carrying out the covenant of sacrifice which He entered into. This consecration to do the Father's will meant that wherever he was, each and every day of His life, whether in Judea, Galilee or Samaria, He would be doing the Father's will. The day He passed through Samaria, if He had not been there He would have been some place else, performing some of His wonderful works or bringing to us some great lesson from His life. We also know that it would be just like Jesus, since He was to go into Galilee, not to go around Samaria, but to pass through it, so far as being influenced by any wrong feeling for or prejudice against the Samaritans.

Jesus went through Samaria as did no other Jew. He had no suspicion or superstition concerning these people that were considered enemies. His great heart of love comprehended these as well as others. He could have gone around Samaria by crossing over the Jordan River, going up on the eastern side, through Berea, then crossing over the Jordan again, into Galilee. This was the usual Jewish route in order to avoid Samaria, but Jesus passed through Samaria, and because of this we have a rich legacy out of a page of the history of His life. We have that wonderful conversation with the woman at the well; one of those personal, private interviews recorded in the life of Jesus, which are so full of teaching and helpful lessons for us. This interview with the Samaritan woman reveals to us the love, the gentleness and the skill of the Savior in approaching one who by religious teaching, race, history and life was antagonistic to Him. This conversation has always been an abundant storehouse of instruction for the personal worker who would bring the message of the Lord Jesus Christ to an alien or an opposer. In this conversation He reveals to us the important truth that it is far better to approach one that is antagonistic by asking a favor rather than granting a favor. We note the Savior's approach, and the skillful way in which He followed it up. How He first aroused the woman's curiosity as indicated in her question: "Why do you a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan?" She knew the very moment she saw Him that He was a Jew. She knew it by His dress and His speech. Her curiosity, her interest was aroused. This gave Jesus opportunity in replying to express to her the wonderful Truth concerning Him who came to be the water of life to men.

Following this came the extended conversation, a brief report of which we have, indicating that he had probed to the very depths of the woman's heart, causing her to realize that she was standing in the presence of One more than an ordinary man. She at once thought of the religious question that was always coming up, as to who are right, we Samaritans, or you Jews, for the Jews say that Jerusalem is the place to worship, but we say here in this mountain. Now, she thought, perhaps I have found the one who can

answer this question for me. You recall Jesus' answer. Loyal to the truth and only the truth, yet gently, lovingly and in such a way as not to lose the interest of His hearer, He plainly told her that salvation was of the Jew. But, said He, "the hour cometh when he shall neither in this mountain nor yet in Jerusalem, worship the Father, but the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him."

The woman's heart was so touched, her interest so aroused, that she left her water pot, going back to friends and relatives to bring to them the good news of the One she had met, who knew all that she ever did. The result was, Jesus spent two days in Samaria, outside of Jewish territory, talking to other people than "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," to whom God had sent Him. Then, Jesus having passed through, came into Galilee, leaving behind this sojourn in Samaria with all that it brings to us, not because God had arranged or foreordained that He should thus spend a little time in Samaria, but because with the Father's Spirit He passed through this hostile country, revealing to us the Father's Spirit in Him, and the revelation being all the more clear because of the adverse conditions that were about Him.

So we, too, as we follow in His steps, are passing through Samarias. Every one of us have our Samarias, and many of them, too, for all of us are passing through adverse conditions and through hostile territory. To some, the home becomes a real Samaria because of the antagonism that may be found there. There are some of the loved ones who have heard the story of God's wonderful love as revealed in His plan told over and over again, and yet they do not receive it; they do not understand. Therefore, God's child in this home finds day by day that he is sojourning with those who do not appreciate, who do not have the same place or way of worship. It is a real Samaria.

Then, some have Samarias through physical weakness or sickness that hinders and hampers them from doing that which they would like to do. Or it may be they are caused to linger by the bedside of some loved one upon whom some wasting disease has fastened and there seems to be no hope of recovery, no escape. Others again have their Samarias because of a wrong condition existing between them and some other one of the Lord's children. There has been a failure, in the test of brotherly love. There is a wrong feeling, a wrong condition of heart, and although this child of God may not be to blame for this condition, the Samaria experience is there. It is one of the things that they "needs must pass through."

What are we doing with these Samarias? The answer to this question indicates what we are doing in regard to the Father's purposes and plans for our lives. God has a plan for each one of our lives. He had a plan for the Savior's life. We know what that plan was. His plan was that His Son should come and offer His life as a willing sacrifice, that He should do the Father's will faithfully, carrying out His covenant of sacrifice unto death,

that He might give His life a ransom for the life of the world. So God has a plan for each of our lives. We know what that plan is. It is to walk in the steps of His Son, to offer up our lives as a willing sacrifice, to do the Father's will as it is revealed to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to be faithful, even unto death. This is the Father's plan for each of us, and as we look back over our lives, who of us cannot recognize the Father's leading, in that we have been led to live a different life, to go a different way, because the Father has been working in us. Not what we have passed through, but what we have done with the things, through which we have passed is what determines and indicates how we have been dead.

The tendency sometimes is for us to get our eyes off on to things and away from our hearts. God has made clear to us in His word that the issue of our lives, the secret of it, is not in the things that are about us, but the spirit, the life that is within us. That "out of the heart is the issue of life," and if we keep it with all diligence it matters not what may come to us in this life, it will all come out for good if we meet it in the Father's way, in the Father's spirit.

Some time ago a sister came to us at the close of a little meeting in which we had been having a heart to heart talk with some of God's children on that wonderful promise God hath given us in Romans 8:28. We had been considering how God made true this promise; how it is that all things work together for good to those who love Him. This sister said she wanted to make a confession. She had been for some months thinking that she was having more than her share of trials—that God was permitting her to pass through more difficult experiences than any others of His children. Now, she said, "I realize that I have been thinking so much about the experiences I was passing through that I had failed to note that others were having just as severe trials and yet I was blind to them. While I did not realize it, yet I now see, I was really complaining against God because He was allowing me to have so many trials. The trouble has been, I was getting my attention away from my heart and was not keeping it with all diligence, and was thinking too much about what I was going through, and sympathizing with myself because I was bearing more than anybody else. I have made up my mind," she said, "I am going home, and I am going to meet these conditions in the right spirit by the Father's help, so that however long they may continue or whatever may come to me, I am going to meet all in such a way that it will come out right and work out to my good, to His praise." She was passing through a Samaria, and if she kept the pledge with which she left the meeting, there is no question but that she would pass through her Samaria and come right out into Galilee.

Jesus passing through Samaria left a blessing on the way and a wonderful one for us today, not simply because He passed through Samaria, but because of the way He passed through and came to Galilee.

And so the Galilees come to each of us now and again. Galilee—strange, beautiful, wonderful Galilee—was the place where Jesus would find someone to sympathize with Him, to appreciate and understand Him somewhat. God has so arranged by the wonders of His provisions that now and again comes seasons and times of refreshment that are real Galilees in our lives. There is the home condition that we thought would never change, and almost suddenly, to the loved ones a change has come. Almost before we realize it they have given their hearts to the Lord, and the whole home is changed from a Samaria to a Galilee. There is that estranged condition that has existed between ourselves and some other one of the Lord's children. We had thought because of fruitless efforts that reconciliation would never be brought about, but the change has come. The misunderstanding unexpectedly has been righted, and now all is bright, all is changed. We are out into the Galilee experience of reconciliation and love.

One of the Bible classes not long ago found itself perplexed with the problem of a meeting place. The only home suitable for their meetings and in which they were then holding their meetings was soon to be broken up, and there was no other family in the class that could offer a place for their meetings. During this time of perplexity a sister who had at one time entertained the class was now living under conditions that made it impossible for her to entertain them, and desiring to make a change, decided that she would return to her former method of living by renting a house that would be suitable for a meeting place for the class, and thus have the privilege of entertaining them again in her home. Acting upon this impulse she at once looked up a suitable house, mentioned the fact to two or three of the sisters, soon had all arrangements completed and was ready to move into her new home with her two sons. About this time the unexpected happened. Two more families made a change in their living arrangements so that they, too, could entertain the class with their meetings. Thus the perplexity of this class was changed from not having any meeting place to that of making a choice of three places. Naturally some of the friends preferred one, some another, and the sister that had obligated herself to rent a home more expensive than she otherwise would have done, having the class in mind, heard that some were favoring the other meeting places that were open to them, rather than to meet at her home. Her feelings were hurt. She thought they did not show a proper appreciation of the sacrifice she had made. The more she thought of it the worse she felt. She finally got into such a state of mind that she commenced to miss some of the meetings of the class. The members of the class heard of this condition, and before they knew it they were in the midst of a good deal of turmoil and confusion. Their first trouble through which they had been called to pass as a class was upon them.

After some two or three weeks the disaffected sister began to realize that she was getting into a bad condition of mind and heart. I had the privilege of having a little talk with her at this time, and discovered that she was indeed in the midst of a Samaria experience. She thought she had figured out a way by which she would be able to get out of it. She said that she had made up her mind that she was going to the next business meeting of the

class and was going to plainly tell them that her house was no longer open to them, that they need no longer have the trouble deciding between three homes, but only two, because her home was no longer open for the meetings. The sister was led into reasoning that she would thus render a favor to the class to the extent that she would at least reduce the perplexity by one third, but at the same time she was getting some self satisfaction out of the thought that they could not come to her house now if they wanted to. I suggested to the sister that that was not what she wanted to tell them, but proposed to her that she ought to say to them something like this: "You no doubt know, all of you, by this time, that I have rented a house and a larger and more expensive one than I otherwise would have done, because I had in mind furnishing a meeting place for you. I presume you have all found it out, but I realize that I did not bring the matter before you. I entered into this arrangement all of my own accord. Therefore, you did not make any promises or enter into any arrangements which I made. I see I made a mistake in this. I presume you also know that I have been somewhat hurt because I learned that some of you did not want to come to my house because you preferred another place where you have the privilege of going. But I have come this evening to tell you that there is a far more important thing to me than where the class may meet or whether you meet in my home at all or not. The far more important thing is my feeling toward you and my relations to God as expressed through you. The state of my mind and heart is the important thing, and I have come to assure you that whether you meet at my house or not, or wherever you may meet, I have determined to be right with you and thus right with my Heavenly Father. If you still desire to come to my home you may do so, but I want to assure you that if you desire to go to another of the homes, and decide it would be a better place for the majority of the friends, it will be alright with me." She had met the condition in the right way, in the right spirit. She came out triumphantly, right out into Galilee. And so the Samaria experiences come to us, but not one of them but what we can pass through, and come out triumphantly on the other side if we will. God has assured us that there are no experiences which will come to us in this life, no condition so hostile, no obstacles so great to be overcome, but what we can pass through it victoriously, for He has assured us that He will not suffer us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear.

But what if the Samaria experiences should continue, if the lane should have no turn and the things through which we are passing now still continue and should continue until the very end? God has assured us that He will never leave us or forsake us, and if we have His Spirit we will be enabled to overcome the trials day by day, even to the end.

Then along with this comes the thought that there is a Galilee coming that surely will not fail us. Strange, beautiful, sun-lit Galilee, of the days of our Savior, with all its wonderful climate and its various products, teeming with life, luxuriant in all the bounties of the land; can be used by us as a picture of the Galilee to which we all journey—the home land, our Father's house; the Galilee that lies beyond, and just a little way off.

This whole life is a Samaria experience. God has so told us. The world knows us not. The conditions are adverse, but just the kind of a country through which the dear Father wants us to pass, bringing to us just the right experiences, the right training, so that as we pass through it with His Spirit, it will all come out right, and we will be ready to cross into the eternal Galilee where all will be right forever and forever. As we still tarry a little while in the Samaria of this world, there comes to us one other thought, because our Savior passed through Samaria; it was in Samaria, and only in Samaria that the Savior said "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." Wonderful message, finding fulfilment in us in the bounties provided for us by the Father's hand to strengthen us and refresh us as we pass through the Samaria of this world. The meat that the world knows not of, feeding upon His Word, receiving larger measures of His Spirit, communion with Him in prayer, feeding our spiritual natures upon the bounties so wonderfully provided. Who of us can ever fail in any Samaria through which we may pass? Who of us can ever falter or ever murmur or complain since God is so wondrously providing, never leaving us or forsaking us, and ever the thought that our Galilee is just a little way ahead, where we shall enter, fitted and prepared to enjoy the blessings the Father has provided, all because we have passed through triumphantly all our Samarias, and have come at last, ready for the abundant entrance, to be forever with our Lord.