

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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JOHN 4 v 4

"And He must needs go through Samaria"

An incident in the life of Christ. If He were an ordinary person, who would take particular notice of this? A weary man, journeying from one place to another, and He sits down on the well. But there are two noticeable things in this incident in the life of Christ. First, the Person, the very Son of God incarnate, whose every step in the wilderness had importance, had an end. Ah if we knew Him well, if we believed in Him more than we do, all His steps, all His words, all His actions, would have more attraction than they have for us. It is because we know Him so little that we pass by, as more or less unimportant, things which He did, and which He said. Much has been written about the life of Christ, but if the Spirit of Christ should condescend to take of the things which are His, we should see more than we ever have seen, and understand more than we have ever understood, of the importance of all His movements. The Son of God incarnate - His appearance on the earth was of infinite importance. Born of the virgin Mary, taking the body the Father prepared - immortal, because spotless, because impeccable - incapable of sin. What an august Person sat on the well. No mean object had He in coming. No ordinary thing was done when God made Him to be sin. No common mission was given to Him when His Father sent Him into the world. No general commandment was laid on Him when His Father gave Him commandment to die. No ordinary gift was given to Him, when the Spirit was given to Him without measure. And this is the Person of whom we read in the text - "He must needs go through Samaria."

And the second observable thing in this is that Samaria was a city into which no Jew would voluntarily go and have dealings. The Samaritans have no dealings with the Jews, the Jews no dealings with the Samaritans. More than 700 years previously the wickedness of the nation of the Jews provoked God to carry them away into captivity, and the king of Syria who carried them away into captivity, peopled the

cities with various peoples from different countries, and although the Samaritans did then, and do still, claim to be pure Jew, it remains a truth, it was always a truth, that they were not Jews. And so it was an astonishing thing, yet literally not unnatural, because Jerusalem, whither Christ was going, was just through Samaria. Geographically, it was the direct way to go from whence Christ was going, through Samaria. But that would not account for this; it would not account for this. The "needs be" was different from this. We, travelling, might say, well, it is the nearest way we will go, and ordinarily we should say it. He has another reason; He must needs go for another reason than that. "He must needs go through Samaria" because there was a vessel of mercy for Him to meet with, a sinner whom He would call, on whom He had fixed His love, to whom He would make known sin, and then grace. If Christ does not make known to you your sins, He will never make known to you His grace. That is the order. Take the dying thief. Grace was shown to him, but first of all he said to his fellow in crime, and his fellow in suffering punishment - "We indeed justly", and everyone to whom God shows his sins has just that same confession to make. I suffer justly in my conscience. That is God's order. So He came to this woman and told her of her sins, her immoral life. So convinced her of that, that she was astonished and said, surely He is a prophet. A stranger telling me of my life, my present immorality, and all that has passed - He is a prophet. He must needs go for this woman.

In speaking of this Scripture, leaving just that outside, the external of it, for the moment, I will speak of necessity in God's movements from two points of view.

First, there is the "needs be" for all that God does in Himself, that is in His purposes. This is a vast subject. All that Jehovah does in heaven and in earth, in hell, of punishment, has a necessity in His nature, and in His decrees. His sovereign will required it. Do you believe that? It makes God's dealings very solemn in the eyes of everyone who believes that. Creation was according to purpose. His providence is according to purpose. Zechariah saw two mountains of brass, and coming out from between them were four chariots, four horses, and when they had gone forth, God said these have quieted My spirit; these have done My bidding; these go forth to accomplish My

purposes, and accomplishing My purposes, they have quieted My spirit. (Zechariah 6) This is a divine subject. I would view it and set it before you, as enabled, in two or three particulars. There is a needs be for the incarnation of the Son of God. Sin is in the world, has ruined the world, has defaced God's image in which He made man, and so God must be avenged. In sovereign mercy to His elect, He deferred that just anger. He reveals it, that by grace His people might grieve over their sins. If anger is not to take effect on every sinner deserving it, it must take effect on one Person who shall stand in their room and stead. "God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap". If he sows to the flesh he will of the flesh reap corruption, and we should reap everlasting death, and condemnation, and punishment, but for one necessity which is first of all in God, namely the incarnation of His dearly beloved Son. There is a needs be for this. It was necessary that sin should be put away; necessary that justice, divine justice, should be honoured. Necessary that the law which was broken should be magnified and made honourable. Necessary that the perfections of Deity should be harmonised in the justification, sanctification, and happiness of men. What a vast thing is this. Think of it. It is more than we are able to grasp. We may believe it - if God gives faith we shall believe it - but it is an amazing subject, the necessity for the incarnation of the only begotten Son of God. "Without shedding of blood is no remission", and whenever that is written on a sinner's heart, then he sees, in the light of the Spirit, the needs be of the shedding of the blood of God, and when this is made known by the Holy Spirit to any sinner, O it awakens in him the deepest gratitude. Wonder, in his heart, fills him, that God should have condescended to give, and not spare, His Own Son. "He that spared not His Own Son but delivered Him up for us all". If sin could have been pardoned any other way, think of - if I may use such a word- think of the waste of God's energy, of Christ's suffering. O, it is impossible really to conceive that sin could have been put away in any other way than that in which God did put it away, by the sacrifice of Himself. He must needs come to the virgin and take that body which was there formed by the Holy Spirit. The children being "partakers of flesh and blood" the needs be that He should partake of the same is evident. "He also Himself likewise took part of the same"; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death" (Hebrews 2 v 14). If any

sinful creature man is to enter heaven, his sin must be put away by the God-Man, the Man Christ Jesus. If the law is not to curse every sinner through eternity, the curse must fall on another in his stead. If God's frown is, so to speak, to be turned into a smile, that frown must fall on His Own Son crucified. And this, if we are led to see it in the light of the Spirit's teaching, will exalt unspeakably in our judgement and affections the love of the Father and the obedience of the Son. And I would commend it to your consideration that there was a needs be. It was not a waste of love; it was not an expenditure that could have been spared. It was a necessity in the case, that God, in His attributes should be satisfied.

There was a needs be in the next place for the gift to the Son of God incarnate, of the Holy Ghost without measure. It is precious to faith to meditate upon the vital truth of the concern of each Person in the Trinity in connection with the incarnation of the Son of God. The Father condescended to send Him, and prepared Him a body which was miraculously conceived in Mary of the Holy Ghost. Thus from the very first act of His Son's obedience to come into this world the Holy Ghost bore testimony to His Person, and therefore it was said unto Mary "that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God". It is a great truth and worthy of all the meditation, and consideration, and prayer concerning it, that you may be ever able to give it, that God was manifest in the flesh. Therefore, we might reverently say, as it behoved Christ to suffer, as the Scripture declares, so it behoved the Holy Ghost ever to bear witness to the Son of God's Divine obedience to the Father in His life, sufferings, death, and resurrection in His perfect Manhood here. He was indeed "the second man, the Lord from heaven", to whom the Blessed Holy Spirit bore perpetual witness by dwelling in Him "without measure." As the Scripture says: "He that speaketh the words of God - the Son into whose hand the Father "hath given all things" - God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him". (John 3, v 34/35). The Lord Jesus Christ was, in every view, the embodiment, so to speak, of Divine Love "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2 v 9), and love is the fulfilling of the law. By this immeasurable gift to Him of the Holy Spirit, therefore, He was carried through the work of redemption - He, the Lamb of God suffering, the Holy Spirit succouring Him, and ever witnessing to the

Father's pleasure in His perfect obedience, even unto death. As the Lord said more than once, "The Father hath not left Me alone, for I do always those things that please Him", therefore He was fully Spirit, and I am disposed to say that it has a most intimate bearing upon salvation, and also upon the experience of every saint of God. Jesus went about doing good, and Peter gives us a reason, this - "God was with Him". And the prophet Isaiah says this of the Son of Man, that the Spirit of God was upon Him and in Him as the Spirit of wisdom, and of knowledge, and He was made quick of understanding; that the Spirit of might and of power was given to Him. All this relates to the Lord Jesus. Himself tells us by the same prophet Isaiah - "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek" and so on. Now do not turn away in your minds and say, this is of no importance and has nothing to do with us. If you are going to heaven, the importance of it, and the relation of it to you, will be apparent in eternity, if not here, in your own mind. O, it is vital that the Holy Spirit given to the Lord Jesus should enable Him, the Man Christ Jesus, to do all that He had to do, and so ever witness that He was, though unspeakably humbled in the flesh, the Very Son of God indeed. And if our eyes were opened I believe we should see in many of the Psalms which we may now read as the experience of the writer, or writers, the Lord Jesus. His confession was very striking, and solemn, and awful where He says - O God Thou knowest my guiltiness. Where He said that his sins were more in number than the hairs of his head. Where again he complained of sinking into deep mire where there is no standing. Where also in another place he says, was there ever sorrow like my sorrow. The sufferings of the Man Jesus were real sufferings and they were substitutionary sufferings. He prayed whole nights, He feared God, He had confidence in God, He relied on His Father for help. He looked to His Father's promise for assistance; and all those things were necessary; there was a needs be for them, for you, for me, if we belong to God. And if we do, the Spirit of Christ who was in Him fully will dwell, for His sake, in our hearts in the measure of grace sovereignly appointed for us.

It was necessary in the next place that He should die; necessary that He should die, and the necessity here is two-fold. First He must needs die if His people are to live. He died the guilty death of His

people. Nothing less will do. If the Substitute did not die for you, you must die for yourself. If He did not satisfy justice for you, the punishment of an endless hell must fall on you; very solemn, and this was the necessity for salvation. And the second point was this; it was necessary because His Father commanded Him to die. "Therefore doth My Father love Me because I lay down My life. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father". Hence His death is called death unto obedience. He said in the days of His flesh, Destroy this temple and I will raise it up again the third day. The temple must be destroyed, the temple of His body, and that was needful therefore; from that point of view it was needful that Jesus should die. He must needs go through this wilderness; He must needs be tempted, He must needs suffer, He must needs have His judgement taken away in His humiliation. He must needs be condemned, He must needs die. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory". Could men be saved and Jesus not die? No. Ought He not? The "ought" did not reside in any sin that He had done - He was without sin; He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth - but the "ought" resides in the purpose of God and in that Scripture - "He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". Here then is the comfort of the sinner - whose salvation is more important to him than all the world - that Jesus died; that He suffered the Just for the unjust, that they for whom He suffered might live unto God, being healed by His stripes. This then is a needs be which it behoves us very carefully to look at, and, as enabled, to believe in, for whosoever believeth in Him shall not come into condemnation, but have everlasting life.

Now in the next place, the necessity lies in sinners. Here is a woman to be saved. How shall she be saved? She is loved of God, but who shall tell her? She is redeemed, but who shall make it known to her that she is redeemed? It was necessary then that He should go through Samaria. "He must needs go through Samaria". He searches out His sheep; they are His sheep and He searches them out. He goes and looks after them, and, as it were, looks them up, and lays His hand on them. We sing sometimes, and some of us do sing it, we trust, with the heart

Jesus sought me when a stranger

And here we begin with God's way with a man whom He will save. "He shall convince of sin". It is a vain expectation that any person may entertain that he can be saved by grace and not know what he is saved from. He is saved from sin, and he must know that. But how shall he know it if he is not convinced of sin? If you do not know what sin is in yourself, you cannot know what grace is in yourself. If you are not convinced of breaking the law, you can never be convinced that Jesus fulfilled the law for you. So here is that great point, a sound conviction of sin. It may not be remarkably deep, but it will be sound, a wound given by the Holy Spirit. A sight of God will give you a sight of yourself, and as that sight may be clear, so will the sight of your sins be clear. Then Jesus comes. It was necessary for Him, it is still needful for Him, to come to a sinner. And what does He bring when He comes? He brings salvation. Said Zechariah to the church of God - Lo thy King cometh, lowly, riding upon an ass, upon the foal of an ass. And what for? To bring salvation; bring good tidings, good news from a far country. What would be good news to you this morning? Let conscience answer. Would this be good news, that the Lord Jesus suffered for you? that He bore the wrath of God for you? That God, His Father, forsook Him, that you might have the everlasting presence of God? That the curse took effect on Christ, that blessing divine might fill your soul? That is good news to sinners, sensible sinners. It brings them to feel a good hope through grace. One of the sweetest buddings that ever a sinner is conscious of is the budding of a good hope through grace, that the anger of God will not fall on him, but that the love of God will one day be made known to him, shed abroad in His heart by the Holy Spirit. We see in the Scripture the wonders of this needs be in various cases, and they are illustrations of what every child of God desires to know respecting this great matter. See the needs be in the case of Job. When his three friends had finished all their words of misunderstanding, and of condemnation, then there was a needs be for another to be raised up to speak for God, and that was Elihu. "O" - Job had said - "O that there was a Daysman betwixt us that He might lay His hand upon us both." But the three friends did not supply that need. There came a fourth, Elihu, raised up by God, and this is what every Spirit-taught sinner needs, and desires, a Mediator. Very important is that word of Paul to Timothy - "There is

One God". "One God". Some of us have stood before that One God and no Mediator between us. O, the terrors - they will never be forgotten by those who have felt them - the terrors of the Almighty, the pain of death, the sorrows of hell compassing him. Now when the Mediator appeared then relief came; wonderful relief, sweet relief, comfortable hope, views of God that were tolerable, for the views of God out of Christ are intolerable, but the views of God in the Mediator are tolerable, comfortable. They draw the sinner to God, they enable him to pray, they move, they teach him to pray; he calls upon His blessed Name. O, said the Lord Jesus, to the woman of Samaria - "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water". And this is what men, seeing the Mediator, desire, living water, a living religion, living comfort, brought by the atonement of Jesus. So a Mediator is a needs be. Can you pray without Him? No. Can you draw near to God and love Him without a Mediator? No. Can you cast the anchor of hope into God, absolutely considered? No. There must be a Mediator, Jesus, into whom, as into an atonement made by Him, you cast the anchor of a living hope; no other way. Can you wrestle with God for blessings, can you cast the burden of deserved trouble on God, without a Mediator? Can you bring your temporal wants, as well as your spiritual conflicts, to God without a Mediator? Can you expect to be delivered out of trouble which you have brought on yourself without a Mediator? Can you expect to be saved in the hour of death from sinking into hell, without Jesus? There is a needs be for Him, a great need for Him.

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O Thou by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way!
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod;
Lord, teach us how to pray. (1002)

And so the Mediator is a necessary Person.

Then forgiveness is a necessity. Forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness is needful, and needed, by all who are convinced of sin. The remission of sins, the removal of guilt, the taking away of all disability to stand before God, of all unfitness for heaven, the gift

of that which will make heaven a congenial place; and how can all this come? Jesus is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. That is the great thing. "What shall we do?" said the 3000 people on the day of Pentecost, "What shall we do?" O, said the divinely helped preacher, Peter, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"; you shall receive remission of sin, and that is how sin is forgiven; no other way. A fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. Why sinner, you have no real ground for believing you will get to heaven, apart from the atonement of the Lord Jesus, and everyone taught of the Spirit comes to that

Nothing but Thy blood, O Jesus!
Can relieve us from our smart;
Nothing else from guilt release us;
Nothing else can melt the heart. (746)

Forgiveness is a necessity. Peace with God, the smile of God, the blessing of God which maketh rich, and with which He addeth no sorrow; all must come through the blood of the everlasting Covenant.

Justification is necessary for heaven. Nothing that defileth or maketh a lie, that is unjust, can enter into that holy, happy place. If therefore we be not justified, we are condemned. There is a middle way in experience between one and the other, but there is no middle way as to the effect. Either, we are condemned as under the law, or we are justified as saved and atoned for by Jesus Christ. You may not apprehend it - and yet be a child of God - for yourself, but the truth you will come to one day, and say as it is written and promised - "Surely shall one say in the Lord have I righteousness and strength". What a word for a man to say to Almighty God. What a word for a sinful man really, honestly, and acceptably to say to God. I have righteousness in Thyself. That comes by faith, faith which is the life of God lying deep in the heart. O seeker, seek this, and you will find it, and when you have found it you will say, never did any preacher utter half the blessedness of it. Justification, peace with God, transplanted out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Taken away from death, put into life. Taken from hell, put into heaven. Taken away from the awful frown of Jehovah,

and put under the sweet smile of the Saviour. This is needful.

It is needful that we should be guided by the Lord. If we are not to make dreadful mistakes, and step out of time into an eternity of punishment, we need to be guided. Who shall guide us? The Holy Spirit. "He" says Christ "shall guide you into all truth". "He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you". He will open your eyes to see My Person. He will quicken your souls to love Me. He will lead you into the gospel. All these things you may put under this word - "He must needs go".

Now look at it this way for a moment, ere I sit down. Did you ever find the Lord Jesus paying you a visit?

Dost mind the place, the spot of land
Where Jesus did thee meet?

A room in which you were weeping, and pouring out your heart before God, and He came and blessed you? Jacob had that privilege - "And He blessed him there". Jacob was in trouble and Jesus came and blessed him. David was in danger from the lion, and the bear, and Jesus went and gave him strength to slay both of them. There is wonder in this, that certain places, circumstances threatening death, into them the Lord Jesus has had to come. It was needful; you could not get through without Him. But He came; when He saw your strength gone, and there was none shut up or any left, then He came. It is said very commonly - our necessity is God's opportunity - and He does take advantage of our necessities, our straight places, and conditions, and deaths, and so we can say, there was a needs be. Was there a needs be on a certain day when you had to decide something, and you knew not how, and there came into your mind a decision? I remember a day, considerably more than 60 years ago, when, designing to go in a certain direction, when I was about half way in that direction, a sudden impulse came on my mind to turn to the left instead of continuing to the right, and on that change of purpose every step of my life depended. Everything that I had known, and done, since that event just hung on that movement. You may find something of the same in your own cases. There has been just a moment when something has occurred to you, the importance of which you had no idea, until later on you can see, and perhaps still do see,

how God wrought for you at that time. "He must needs go through Samaria". He must needs go through that street in Brighton and, 49 years ago today - it just comes into my memory - 49 years ago today, the second Lord's Day in June, when at 10 o'clock in the morning, as I heard the clock strike, I said, One hour more, and the people expect me in the pulpit. I had never been in the place before and I stood still, and just said this, for I was in deep distress, Lord I cannot go like this, and I will not. And then He spoke, He spoke peace to me. There was a needs be. A stranger in this town, an absolute stranger to the place, and God spoke to me. Now you may have something in your own cases, and you can say of these things, there was a needs be that I should be in trouble, and then God came to me. There was a needs be that I should have self-despair, then He gave me gospel hope. O the greatness of God in the necessities which are first in Himself and then in His people to bring out His mercies, and His love, and His kindness, and His goodness. "He must needs go through Samaria". I hope the day is coming when some of you seekers will say, It was needful for me to be in that trouble, and God came to me in it. Needful that I should be emptied that He might fill me out of His fullness. Needful that I should be weak, that His strength might be made perfect in my weakness. May the Lord bless you, and bless each soul here, according to His great mercy, and His Name shall have all the praise.

AMEN.