

THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JESUS AND THE SAMARITANS

Golden Text — We have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ the Saviour of the world.

THE LESSON AS A WHOLE

Approach to the Lesson
While we are going through the Gospel of St. John chapter by chapter, it will be well to have a comprehensive view of the whole. The number of times that John refers to our Lord as "the light" in chapter one (vs. 4, 5, 7, 8, 9), and the fact that our Lord calls Himself "the light of the world" in 8:12 and 9:5, would justify us in regarding "Christ the Light" as the theme of this Gospel. With this in mind we may outline the progress of the Book as follows:

1. The Light breaks upon the darkness (1:1-51)
 2. The Light in conflict with the darkness (2:1 to 12:50)
 3. The Light dispelling the darkness (13:1 to 17:26)
 4. The Light triumphant over the darkness (18:1 to 21:25)
- The first of these divisions opens with the prologue (1:1-18), where the Light is introduced as (1) eternal, (2) incarnate. Following the prologue we see the Light introduced by several witnesses.
- The second division traces the struggle of our Lord with the blindness of the Jewish leaders, a struggle which in-

creases in intensity rising to a mighty crescendo as the day of the Cross approaches.

In the third division we see our Lord in the company of His apostles, dispelling the gloom of their souls in the incidents and converse of the upper room, culminating in the wonderful high priestly prayer of Chapter 17.

The fourth division sees our Lord plunged into the darkness of Calvary, but coming forth in resurrection power and giving "many infallible proofs" to His disciples. The Gospel ends with an epilogue (chap. 21), in which Peter is restored to apostleship by the risen Lord and the evangelist declares that His account is (1) true, but (2) fractional (21:24, 25).

Today's lesson is in division two, but here the Lord has a brief respite from controversy, as He passes through Samaria, and there has gracious dealings, first with the sinful woman of Sychar, and then with the townspeople. It was a happy interlude, and one suspects that the Samaritan awakening recorded in Acts 8 was not unrelated to this visit.

Verse by Verse
John 4:27 — "His disciples . . . marvelled that he talked with the woman." Read with the A.S.V., "They marvelled that he was speaking with a woman," for what rabbi would stoop to converse with a woman thus met "by

chance?"

Verse 28 — "The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way . . ." While leaving her waterpot was an act of excited forgetfulness, it was still a symbolic act. Who has the spring of living water within him needs no waterpot.

Verse 29 — "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did." In the one statement of verse 18 Jesus had laid bare the whole sordid story. It was a case of Hebrews 4:13.

Verse 30 — "Then they . . . came unto him." The woman's testimony brought her fellow townspeople flocking — some unconvinced perhaps, but with open questioning minds.

Verse 31 — "His disciples prayed him . . . Master, eat." To the disciples, who had returned from the village, with provisions, eating was the one business of the hour.

Verse 32 — "I have meat to eat that ye know not of."

Man is more than body, and as there are deeper hungers, so there are deeper satisfactions. If the thought of Christ receiving meat from the "woman" entered their minds they would not express it. "Any man" (v. 33) was all they dared to say.

Verse 34 — "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." Here is the expression of complete consecration. Notice His "meat" was not preaching, teaching, or even soul-winning as such but "the will of God," whatever that might be.

Verse 35 — "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." The first reference is, of course, to the harvest of grain. Since harvest was in April and May this event would be in January. But Jesus points out the greater harvest, now ripe — men ready for the word of the Gospel. Did He see the Samaritans approaching? (v. 40)

Verse 36 — ". . . both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together."

Westcott suggests the transfer of "already" from verse 35 to the beginning of verse 36. There is present reward for the soul-winner and an enduring one. The sowing seems to refer to the prophets of the Old Testament, the reaping to the witnesses of the New Testament.

Verse 37 — "An herein is that saying true, One soweth and another reapeth." We indeed reap the harvest of the toil of those who have gone before.

Verse 38 — ". . . other men laboured and ye are entered into their labours." Again the reference seems to be to the preparatory work of the Old Testament prophets, upon which the work of the Gospel was built.

Verse 39 — "Many of the Samaritans . . . believed on him for the saying of the woman." Some were led to faith through the personal testimony of the woman. The power of a faithful witness is indeed great.

Verse 40 — "They besought

him that he would tarry with them." A Saviour who could so transform one of the town sinners was not one to be lightly turned away. Compare this with Matthew 8:34.

Verse 41 — "And many more believed because of his own word." The testimony of the woman predisposed some to hear the word of Christ Himself, and they were convinced by what they heard from His own lips.

Verse 42 — "Now we believe . . . for we have heard him ourselves . . . the Christ, the Saviour of the world." Perhaps they did not want to appear too credulous, especially on the word of such a character as this woman. At any rate, they sought a first-hand faith.

Jesus was just as hungry as the disciples when they left Him sitting on Jacob's well while they went into the village of Sychar to buy provision for a meal. But when they returned, He had little appetite for food. Instead of receiving them and their provision eagerly, he seemed to be looking off into the far distances, and when they tried to recall Him to the matter which was urgent to them, He replied, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." Another occupation had dissipated His desire for food.

This is not an unusual situation. Gontran de Poncins and Lewis Galantiere in their book "Kaboons," declare that they have seen half a dozen Eskimos devour fifty pounds of meat at one meal. They love to eat. Yet these same men have been known to stand almost motionless, bent over a seal hole for many hours, even into days, forgetful of hunger in their intense eagerness to spear a great seal.

It was a different sort of occupation which banished natural appetite from our Lord that day. "My meat," He declared, "is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." Perhaps you have heard it said of some preachers that they would rather preach than eat. But notice that it was not preaching or teaching or even soul-winning in itself, that was Jesus' higher meat. It was the will of God, which of course included all these. And we must remember that that all-absorbing will of God meant for our Lord Gethsemane and Calvary.

There is tragedy in that statement, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." The Lord Jesus stood alone in this absorbing and consuming zeal for the will of God. Does He still stand alone in this? Or are there some of us who, in some measure at least have joined Him in this holy passion. Is the will of God to us more than our necessary food?

In line with this difference between our Lord and His disciples is this other: they had eyes for a material harvest four months away, while the Saviour had eyes for a spiritual harvest, even now waiting for reapers. And still many who call Him Lord are all occupied with the returns from their investments' this year, next year, ten years from now, while harvests of souls, white now in their readiness, threaten to be blackened for lack of reaping. Japan, India, Africa, call loudly, "Now!" Tomorrow may be too late.

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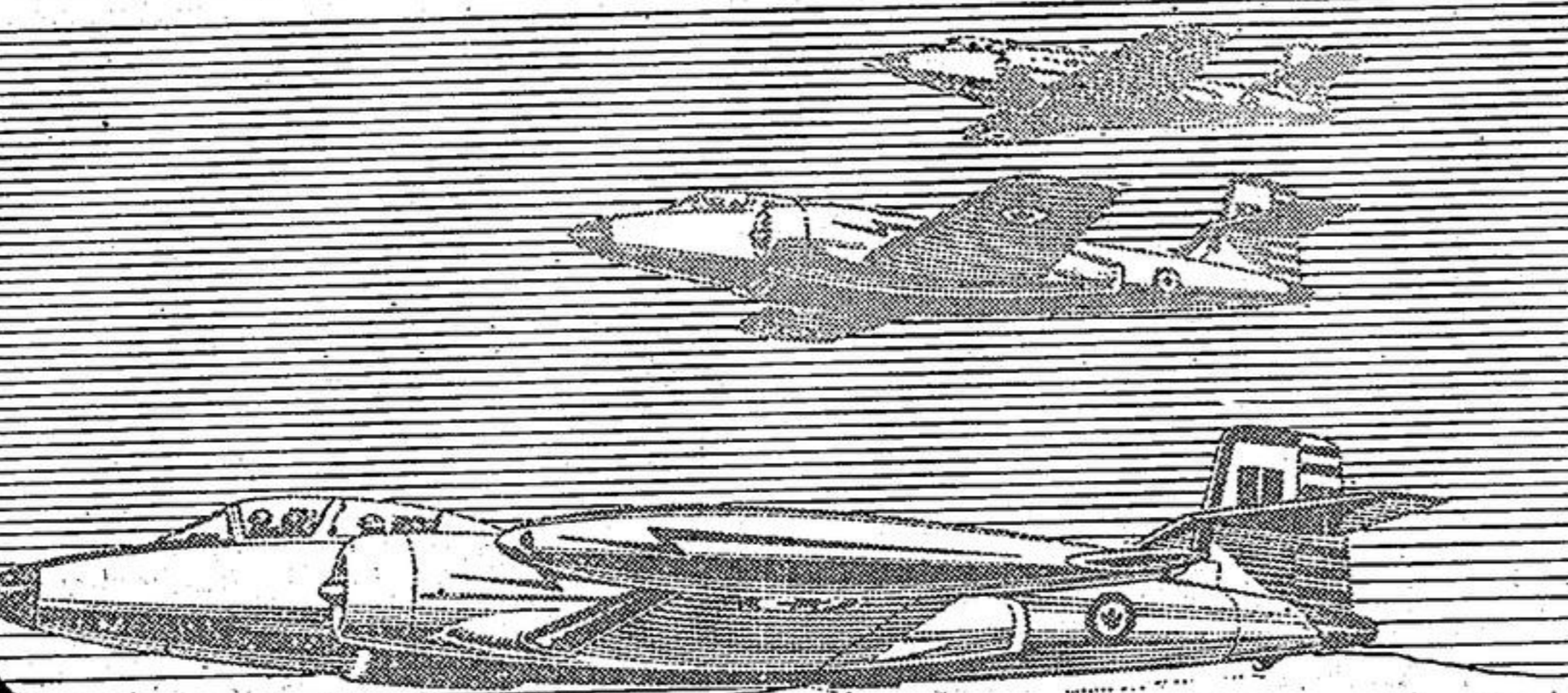
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