

Jesus, the WATER OF LIFE John 4:7-15, 7: 37-39

Adapted from, Meeting God When You Are Thirsty. by Glenn Durham @ SermonCentral.com

Let's celebrate the reopening of our public schools by rehearsing a few lines from Coleridge's famous poem, The Rhyme Of The Ancient Mariner. This is the story of a whaling ship lost among ice flows in the Southern Sea until an albatross – a very lucky sign – appears to lead them to safety. But, for reasons unknown, the Ancient Mariner shoots and kills the bird, thus dooming the ship to wander trackless seas until all on board except himself had died.

Day after day, day after day, We stuck, nor breath nor motion; As idle as a painted ship Upon a painted ocean.

*Water, water, everywhere, And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere, Nor any drop to drink.*

Have you ever been really, really, thirsty? 75% of the earth's surface is covered with water, but only 1% is fresh, unfrozen, suitable for drinking. Roughly 70% percent of your body is water. Your body uses water to regulate temperature, flush waste, and process food. All of your organs use water in their function. The average adult could live 30 days without food, but only 5 days without water. Because it contains 3% of dissolved salts, drinking seawater actually dehydrates the body more as it tries to remove the salt. Therefore, in the midst of a vast ocean, "*water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink.*"

We do not often think about water, because here it is plentiful and clean. In Bedford as in most American communities, we can drink straight from our kitchen taps. But the majority of the rural population in third world countries, especially women and children still spend hours each day collecting water – often dirty and infested water - from distant sources. They do so because water is absolutely necessary to all aspects of human life.

The region where most of the Biblical stories take place is a very arid, parched and barren land. Because of the scarcity of good water, thirst was a universal experience and knowing where to find the next source of drinking water was a life and death matter. This is why the Bible often uses the metaphor of thirst to describe other needs. Here's one from Proverbs: "*Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.*" (25:25)

How appropriate, then, for Jesus to use this idea of thirsting for water to explain Life, because we have other thirsts which also beg – demand – to be satisfied. But, just as with drinking saltwater, seeking to satiate these thirsts from "polluted" sources will kill you.

True to his purpose for writing, John's story of the woman at the well is the record of another of Jesus' evangelistic encounters. **Following His example, Christianity is**

meant to be a missionary faith. Those who have met Jesus should themselves become sharers of this living water he wants to give to all who thirst. Reading on a bit further in her story, you can learn the result of Jesus' conversation with the woman: "*Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony....*"^(4:39). Her experience with Jesus transformed her into an instant evangelist. As promised, the living water He had offered her, began springing up in her soul and immediately she wanted to share it with others.

Following Jesus' method of "**offering living water to dry and thirsty souls,**" should also be our strategy for faithful and effective witnessing. So, to better fetch this water of life for yours or another's soul, let's learn four key principles for satisfying our spiritual thirst.

First, We Must Meet Jesus To Have Our Thirst Defined (John 4: 13-15)

Perhaps, you remember the clever advertising slogan: "**Wow, I could have had a ____.**" With this tag line, Campbell Soup Company is making the claim that your thirst has been blunted by inferior refreshments. So before you grab another less than satisfying drink, you should realize how much healthier and thirst quenching would be a V8-juice.

I am not suggesting a new, trendy bumper sticker: "*Wow, I could have had Jesus.*" What I am saying is that in helping her realize her real thirst was precisely where Jesus began his witness with this woman. She does have a very real and physical thirst for water; that is why she is at the well. But an even greater desire squeezes her heart dry – she thirsts for a changed life, a life of meaning and satisfaction.

As her story opens, it's about the sixth hour – high noon – when Jesus arrives at the Well of Jacob. Having now walked through the coolest morning hours, Jesus is understandably tired and very thirsty. Resting there by the well as His disciples go into the nearby town to find food, Jesus sees a woman coming out of town to draw water.

Walking alone during the heat of the day to another water source further from her home – outside of town – this woman has a much deeper thirst than just for water. In fact to meet and quench this woman's real thirst was perhaps the reason why Jesus had felt compelled to walk through Samaria in the first place; Jesus was always looking for those who were truly thirsty for a better life.

Notice how the apostle John contrasts her story with that of Nicodemus which immediately preceded it.

- Nicodemus was a devoutly religious Jew; she was an immoral Samaritan.
- He was a learned theologian; she was an uneducated peasant.
- He was wealthy; she was poor.

- He was a man and a member of the social elite; she was a woman and the dregs of Samaritan society.

Each stroke of the brush adds to the picture of her deeper thirst that she had tried (unsuccessfully) to satisfy through immoral relationships.

Both Nicodemus and this woman were thirsting for something more in life and each time Jesus began by drawing them into a realization of the real thing for which their souls were craving. Nicodemus will not find the salvation he so desires by studiously following the law. She will not find happiness with a string of men; nor will she escape hurt by avoiding other people; both had a deep spiritual thirst that only God could satisfy. So, as with Nicodemus, Jesus gently points out that her thirst quenching efforts have been misdirected: *"Drink from this well and you will be thirsty again."*

American country singer Johnny Lee wrote:

"I was looking for love in all the wrong places...looking for love in too many faces ... Hopin' to find a friend and a lover, God bless the day I discover, Another heart, lookin' for love."

Lee is wrong – you will not quench your thirst by finding another, *"heart looking for love."* This woman's problem is vertical, not the many horizontal relationships she has attempted in her effort to escape loneliness and pain. So Jesus begins by helping her see her real thirst was a desire to know God; but He does not stop there.

Second: We Must Also Meet Jesus To Have Our Thirst Accentuated (John 4:10)

When they first meet, Jesus appears to be the thirsty one who needs her help. But He quickly reverses their roles. Now He claims to have the water she really wants; He calls it **"living water,"** but Jesus has given the term a double meaning. In normal conversation, living water referred to moving water (as opposed to that in a well or cistern). A flowing stream, river, or fountain, was considered to provide better, safer, more healthy "living water." Since she knew there were no streams anywhere nearby, Jesus' offer has piqued her curiosity and got her attention at least for the moment. But Jesus was offering something much greater than the location of some hidden spring, He was offering the thirst quenching Spirit of God to live within her. The Bible often uses water as the symbol of the soul's desire for that which only God can supply.

The prophet Isaiah equated water with salvation: *"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."* (Isa 12:3).

He also used water to represent God's giving of the Holy Spirit: *"For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants."* (Isaiah 44:3)

Both Ezekiel's and John's visions of Heaven, see *"the river of the water of life,"* flowing out from under the throne of God bringing salvation to all the nations. (Ezk 47, Rev 22),

There is a saying: "*You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.*" Which is true, Jesus wasn't forcing his blessings on this woman. He offers that for which she deeply thirsts, but He does not make her drink it. However, there is another part to this saying: "*You can lead a horse to water, you can't make it drink...but you can give it a salt tablet.*" So, Jesus adds a pinch of salt to increase her thirst for the things of God: "*I have living water*"

If you have never tasted Jesus' living water, note well His words. You thirst and seek satisfaction, but you will not find it apart from God. The restlessness and incompleteness which infects every aspect of life is your soul's thirsting for God. If you knew the gift of God, if you knew the complete satisfaction and utter happiness available for your soul, you would ask of Jesus and He would give you living water.

Here also is something for you who seek to witness to dry and thirsty souls. Jesus does not begin with condemnation, as we too often have done. He does not quote chapter and verse, as we may have thought beneficial. He starts with her needs and relates them to God through Biblical truths. He appeals to her imagination and her desires. He defines, then accentuates, her thirst. How different and delightful is Jesus' careful and compassionate call to dry and thirsty souls!

Third, Only As We Meet Jesus Can Our Thirst be Satisfied (John 4.13-14a)

Jesus hinted to this woman that her real concern ought to be spiritual. She does not understand. But He remains patient and comes to point again: "*This water that you draw from the well will satisfy only temporary thirsts; I am speaking to you of a different longing. One that can be fully satisfied, forever.*"

There are many temporary things that the heart and flesh desire, yet those who obtain them remain dissatisfied. Whether you seek the comfort of riches or rank; whether you labor hard in learning, or to acquire power; whether amusement or advancement is your passion; all are utterly unable to fill your soul. Andrew Carnegie, the richest man of his day was once asked how much wealth would finally make him happy; he replied, *just a little bit more than I currently have.*

It is as if our souls were in the shape of a sieve. You may pour in the water of worldly delights day and night, but none will be held. Pour in pasta, though, and the sieve is quickly filled. Jesus offers something materially different than the water of the world. He offers good things which stick to your soul.

Singer, Songwriter Peggy Lee recorded a song with this chorus:

"Is that all there is? is that all there is? If that's all there is my friends, then let's keep dancing; Let's break out the booze and have a ball, If that's all there is"

A sad song of despair. We can clog the holes in the sieves of our souls with the dirt of the world and so feel a bit more full. But the results will always be temporary. *Whoever drinks of this water will be thirsty again.* Only Jesus fills the holes of our souls by filling us with living water.

Forth: When We finally Meet Jesus Our Thirst Will Be Transformed (John 4.14b)

Those who go hiking know that as a water source, wells are questionable, creeks and rivers are not much better. The very best water for quenching your thirst is that which springs forth, icy cold from the roots of a mountain. If you have ever tasted fresh teeth-hurting-cold spring water, you know all those bottled water ads are being less than truthful.

In pioneer days, to have a spring of fresh water on your property was a treasure indeed and a gift to the whole community. To have clean, cold, water bubbling right up out of the ground near your home not only refreshed your thirst, it preserved your food, it even cooled your body on a hot tiresome day; and there was always more flowing out to share with all who passed by. This is what Jesus offered the woman: a spiritual "*spring of water gushing up to eternal life,*" not just for herself but for all whom she met thereafter.

Those who know Jesus become themselves springs of eternal life. Yes, there will be times of discouragement and trouble, even backsliding. We all have such in a fallen world. But there will always be this irrepressible life bubbling forth from those who have come to know God through Jesus. The fruit of the Spirit will seep out – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. The change of character resulting from the blessing of God will flow forth – peacemaking, humility, mercy, purity of heart, doing good even to those who had persecuted you.

This is exactly what happened with the woman at the well. So excited was she to share this living water, that she left her jug at the well and went to fetch her neighbors – even those who had spurned her – so that they too might come and be refreshed. The conclusion of the story sees the entire Samaritan town inviting Jesus to stay; which he does for two days, *and many more believed because of His word* (4:41).

A true Christian has more than an intellectual assent to the facts of the gospel, something more significant than just belief in God, they also have God's indwelling Holy Spirit, a spiritual fountain of living water bubbling up from within that cannot be capped or contained.

But this story about God's offer of living water we crave would not be complete without noticing one more thing. Wrapped around this whole conversation at the Well of Jacob,

is Jesus' own personal thirst. It seems a bit strange that God comes to give us living water, yet He also grows dry and dusty, tired and thirsty. Nor would this be the only time. In His final moments on the cross, Jesus cries out: "*I thirst.*" (John 19:28)

We know why we thirst for God. In my sin I have turned my soul from the fountain of living water to seek whatever refreshment I can find in the dry desert of the self. But for what does God thirst? He thirsts for His wandering children to find their way back home to the life and refreshment He would abundantly give. From the prophet Jeremiah, we hear of God's thirst for His thirsting children.

For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water and dug out cisterns for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water. (Jeremiah 2:13)

In the world of water, farthest from a refreshing mountain spring or a river of living water, or even a well of still water, is a cistern, which is literally a deep hole dug in the ground in the hopes of catching whatever rain water might fall from the sky. Cistern water at its best would be stagnant when used or – if the cistern is cracked – no water at all. There were plenty of such dry cisterns dotting the Promised Land, which is why one was conveniently nearby for Joseph's brothers to toss him into. If we don't have God's living water bubbling up inside, all we have at best is a dry or leaking cistern of a life.

But why must Jesus thirst? The reason is the same for His growing weary under the heat of the noonday sun after a long walk. Because Jesus loves you and me enough to seek us out, just as he sought out the woman at the well, in whatever dry and weary land where we may live. You only have to ask and He will give you living water.

Let's pray about that.