

## **Jesus and Spiritual Thirst**

Do you remember the last time you were really thirsty, and how good it felt to have a glass of cold water? We have had a series of really hot days lately. If you have spent any length of time outdoors during the past few days, you know how much a drink is needed from time to time.

Think what it must have been like for the disciples travelling around with Jesus in the summer. The high temperatures every day in Israel in June and July are in the mid to upper 80s and can go into the 90s. The sun shines for 13 hours a day. There is virtually no rain. You can carry water with you, but it won't stay cold. It is no wonder then that Jesus said, "Whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

We take water for granted. Turn on the faucet, and there it is. No searching for a well or a stream. No need to draw water in buckets and carry it home. It's just always there. And if you don't like the water that comes from the tap in the house, you can go to the supermarket and load up with plastic bottles filled with "spring water" that you can bring home and chill in the refrigerator. For us today, getting a drink of cold water is no big deal. Our thirst can be quickly quenched.

But how about spiritual thirst? We have not had a service in the church for the last 15 Sundays. We have been experiencing something of a spiritual drought in our lives lately. We read our Bible and pray at home, but we have had no corporate worship with other people. Watching clergy talk on camera over the internet isn't at all the same as being with others to worship God. And so, I don't know about you, but I came here today really looking for a little spiritual refreshment.

Jesus used the metaphor of thirst to speak about the overwhelming need that we have for the presence of God in our lives. In Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, he told the crowd, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Matthew 5:6) Do we thirst for righteousness?

I know you remember the story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus had left Judea, having been in Jerusalem for the Passover, and he was headed back north to Galilee. Taking a direct path to Galilee meant that he had to pass through Samaria. Now there was enmity between the Samaritans and the Jews. This went back all the way to the death of Solomon, when Israel split into two rival kingdoms. The antagonism between the two was worsened when the Assyrians, after conquering the northern kingdom, repopulated that country with non-Jews from other parts of its empire. Samaria became a non-Jewish nation.

Jesus and the disciples came to a town in Samaria called Sychar. It was near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from travelling, sat down beside the well. It was around noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well. Now the other women from the town would have been there early in the morning to get water for the day for their homes. Why did this woman wait until noon? Did she want to avoid meeting the other women there?

Jesus was alone when she came. The disciples had gone into town to buy food. Jesus asked her for a drink. The Samaritan woman recognized that Jesus was a Jew, probably by his prayer shawl. She said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" She wasn't inclined to give a drink to this Jew.

Jesus said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he

would have given you living water.” Now “living water” was a term used to refer to flowing water, from a stream or a river, as opposed to still water from a well or a cistern. However, Jesus had here shifted the topic of conversation; he was referring to the spirit. The woman didn’t catch on to what he was saying.

She said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” Hostility is there in her reply.

Jesus’s answer was placating. He said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” Jesus offered to meet the woman’s spiritual thirst, which must have been great considering the immoral lifestyle she was living, which would explain her desire to avoid the other women in the town. However, she still didn’t understand; she thought Jesus was talking about water.

She said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.” Although she has missed Jesus’s point (she is still thinking of well water), her tone has changed. She is more open to his overture. How can Jesus make her realize her spiritual need, and his ability to meet that need?

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” She answered, “I have no husband.” Now Jesus begins to poke through her defenses and tells her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

I suspect that at this point in their meeting there was a long silence, with Jesus gazing intently at her, and she with her eyes averted to the ground. He had stripped away her façade, but she was still inclined to resist his

offer, so she returned to her original defense that he is a Jew, and she a Samaritan.

She said, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” Again, she was saying, “You and I are from different places. What have you to do with me?”

Jesus spoke firmly, but lovingly, to her. “Woman,” he said, “believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

What a gracious statement! Salvation is from the Jews, but the Father is seeking those who will worship him in spirit and in truth. It doesn’t matter whether you are from Mt. Zion or from this mountain. The Father is seeking those who will sincerely come to him. Jesus’s original offer was still outstanding: I will satisfy your spiritual thirst if you will let me.

The woman was still stand-offish. She said, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” She was still not buying what Jesus had to offer. Jesus answered her, “I who speak to you am he.”

At this point the disciples came back from town. They were dumbstruck that Jesus was talking with a woman. They didn’t know what to say, but the silence must have been very awkward. The woman, suddenly intimidated, left her water jar and went back into town. On her way, the words of Jesus must have been coming again and again to her mind as she went. “What did he mean by ‘living water’? What did he mean by

‘never being thirsty again’? What did he mean by worshipping in ‘spirit and in truth’? He knew about me, although I had never met him before. How did he know the truth about me? Could he be the Messiah?”

When she got back to town, her emotions poured out. She said, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” The people in the town hurried out to see Jesus.

What happened after that we don’t know. Did the woman ever drink of the living water Jesus offered her to satisfy her spiritual thirst? I would like to think that she did, as did others from the town.

Jesus knows everything we’ve ever done. He sees through our facades. He sees the heart. He sees the hurt. He sees the need. He offers living water to quench our spiritual thirst.

There is a hymn in our hymnal, number 424, written by Horatius Bonar, a Scottish minister and hymn writer, the second verse of which sums up well what we have been thinking about.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
“Behold, I freely give  
The living water, thirsty one,  
Stoop down and drink and live.”  
  
I came to Jesus and I drank  
Of that life-giving stream;  
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,  
And now I live in him.

Did you come to church this morning spiritually thirsty? If so, I hope that the Lord has satisfied your spiritual thirst.

As Jesus was teaching in the Temple in Jerusalem during the Feast of Booths, he said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.” He also said, “Whoever **believes** in me, ... ‘Out of **his** heart will flow rivers

of living water.”” (John 7:37-38) When we are spiritually thirsty, we can come to the Lord, and he will satisfy our thirst. Moreover, he will fill us so completely that we will overflow with God’s spirit, with living water, like a river overflows during flood season. As David wrote in the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm, “My cup overflows.”

Jesus wants his disciples to make the same offer of living water in him, to those who are dying of thirst. When we are following the Lord, our cups overflow. We are to give to dry and thirsty souls a drink of that living water that comes from him. It comes from him, not from us, and it is an ever-flowing fount. Help to quench the spiritual thirst of someone who is thirsty. Give him or her a gift of the spirit out of the abundance that Jesus bestows on us. Jesus said that the one who does that will not lose his reward.