

36. The Book of Psalms 23:2b

The Great Shepherd-Part 4

a message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

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This morning I want to draw your attention once again to Psalm 23.

Psalm 23:1–2 (NKJV)

¹ The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.

Sheep like every other living thing need water to survive. Sheep are made up of 70% water and need to maintain that percentage of water to maintain normal body metabolism and life functions.

If sheep go without water for any length of time—bodily desiccation sets in (dehydration of the tissues) which can result in serious damage to their physical well-being and overall health. When sheep get thirsty, they become restless and start out in search of water—wherever they can find it.

If not led by the shepherd to good water sources containing clean, pure water—they will often, if left to themselves, end up drinking from polluted water sources like potholes, ruts and indentations in the road—or wherever water has collected.

This can lead to them picking up internal parasites, liver flukes or other diseases. Again, it was only the shepherd who could lead the sheep to pure, clean sources of water that could not only refresh them but also keep them healthy.

But also, don't miss that David makes a point to say that a shepherd needs to not only lead his sheep to *pure* water—but to "still waters."

What you might not know about sheep is that—they're so dumb that if the shepherd were to lead them beside a rushing river to drink, the first sheep would wade into it and be swept away—and the others would follow until the whole flock was swept away!

They can't be left alone for very long before they would get themselves into trouble—they need to be watched over by their shepherd! So, God has designed our physical body to need water for our overall health and survival and when our body gets thirsty—it lets us know it! (Mention thirst I got during hot August double practices ending with wind-sprints).

So, none of us can mistake the body's cry for water when it's thirsty—but what many don't realize is that God has created our soul (the inner man) to need *spiritual* water for survival as well. The problem is that many people who have a thirst deep down inside them are many times unsure of where to look for satisfaction—or even, for that matter, what they're looking for!

Their souls are '*desiccated*', which has caused them to become restless and in search for fulfillment and satisfaction.

Unfortunately if they don't allow the Good and Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, to lead them to the only 'water source' that is pure and life-giving (Jesus Himself and His Word)—they wind up drinking from the dirty, polluted, demonic 'potholes' of the world (the 'wisdom of the world') in an attempt to satisfy their thirst within. We see this illustrated in John 4 and the woman by the well.

John 4:3–18 (NKJV)

³ He [Jesus] left Judea and departed again to Galilee. ⁴ But He needed to go through Samaria. ⁵ So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶ Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from *His* journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour [12-noon]. ⁷ A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." ⁸ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. ⁹ Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. ¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? ¹² Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?" ¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." ¹⁵ The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

What this woman (like so many today) didn't realize was that her soul was thirsting for God but she didn't understand that and for years was trying to satisfy that inner thirst with human relationships (others try to satisfy it with material things, alcohol, drugs, sex or something else this world has to offer).

That's why Jesus told her what she needed was
'Living Water' or in other words
—a saving relationship with Him!

This was something God told the entire nation of Israel seven-hundred years earlier when He indicted His people in Jeremiah chapter 2 for their apostasy—He said,

"Have you ever seen anything like this in all the world? Where a people forsake their God? Yet My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and have carved out for themselves cisterns—broken cisterns which can hold no water!"

Let me give you a little more about the cultural background on this subject. As we have said, to the Jewish mind *living water* meant *running water*. It was always more desirable to build your house near a pure water source—like a stream, a river or a spring.

If you couldn't find '*living water*' (fresh, flowing water) you'd be forced to either dig a well or carve out a cistern. Sometimes it took a year or more (depending on the size) to carve one of these cisterns out of the limestone.

Imagine spending a year or two carving your cistern (all done by hand) and finally the day comes when it's finished. You then carve the channels that will channel the rainwater into the opening of your cistern and when you're all done—you wait for it to rain.

Think of your excitement when the rain starts to fall and you see the water running into the opening of your cistern—and you go to bed and dream about taking your first drink from it!

Unfortunately, when you wake up the next morning and go out to your cistern to get yourself a drink—you find it empty! Then the sickening reality dawns on you that you’ve carved your cistern over a fine crack in the limestone—it’s a broken cistern that can hold no water!

So, what do you do—was all that work for nothing? No, all your time and effort wasn’t for nothing—they had a way to ‘salvage’ their new cistern and put it to good use. You see, they would open it up, carve steps down into it and shelves into the sides of the broken cistern and use it for a tomb to bury their dead.

Your cistern couldn’t sustain life
(provide life-giving water to you and your family)
—all it could do was hold death.

Of course, God wasn’t speaking here in Jeremiah 2 about literal ‘fountains’ and ‘cisterns’—He was using these things as *metaphors* for spiritual life that results when a ‘person drinks in God’s truth.’ But also, God is using it as a metaphor for the spiritual death that results when a person rejects God’s living water (His truth and ultimately His Son) and instead embraces the devil’s lies.

A *broken cistern* in this context refers to any belief system a person ‘carves out’ for themselves that they believe holds ‘life.’ These include systems like—humanism, Marxism, Communism, naturalism, hedonism, materialism, spiritism—for Israel it was paganism (Baal, Molech worship, etc.)

Any belief system apart from God that a person believes holds the meaning and the answers to their life.

People look to these things to explain life and to give meaning to their lives—which they then try to ‘drink’ from by putting their faith in these broken and demonic ideologies and philosophies. But as God pointed out, these things are like broken cisterns which can hold no water (life) only death—because they only contain ‘dead’ and demonic ideologies and belief systems.

So not only will they not bring you life—they will rob you of real life—the eternal life (the living water) God wants to give you through His Son, Jesus Christ. If a person doesn’t repent of these broken ideologies and belief systems and receive Jesus before they die—these ‘broken cisterns’ will launch them into a Christ-less eternity and will become their eternal ‘tombs’ in hell.

Yet unbelievers still reject the life giving ‘living water’ that God is offering to them in favor of drinking from the polluted wells and demonic potholes of this world—

It sadly reminds me of something Phillip Keller wrote in his book, “A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23” he said, “I watched one day of another shepherd’s flock that was being led down to a magnificent mountain stream to drink. The snow fed waters were flowing pure and clean and were crystal clear between lovely banks of trees. But on the way several stubborn ewes and their lambs stopped instead to drink from small, dirty, muddy pools beside the trail. The water was filthy and polluted not only with the churned up mud from the passing sheep but even with the manure and urine of previous flocks that had passed that way. Still these stubborn sheep were quite sure it was the best drink obtainable. The water itself was filthy and unfit for them. Much more it was obviously contaminated with nematodes and liver fluke eggs that would eventually riddle them with internal parasites and disease of destructive impact.

People often try this pursuit or that with the casual comment, *So, what? I can’t see that it’s going to do any harm!* Little do they realize that often there is a delayed reaction and that considerable time may elapse before the full impact of their misjudgment strikes home. Then suddenly they are in deep trouble and wonder why?”

Alright, let me review briefly—as we pointed out to start this message, water is absolutely essential for life. After the ‘*air-drive*’ the ‘*water-drive*’ is the strongest bodily drive that God has given us for survival.

In the old days, before water reclamation was invented and treatment plants were built, one of the prerequisites for establishing a community was that there had to be a water source nearby because it was understood that—to maintain a town people needed fresh water. And of course, running water was always more preferable to standing water.

A stream or a river was always a better option to a pond or a lake because standing water becomes stagnant and becomes a breeding area for mosquitoes and other parasites—not to mention the little ‘*wiggle tails*’ swimming around in it—I mean who wants to drink that? So, it was always more preferable to build your house or town by a running supply of water—or what the Bible calls, “*living water*.”

I’d like to look at this a little subject from a different perspective so turn to John 7.

The focus of John 7 is Jesus attending the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem—which was both an *agricultural* and a *memorial* feast.

It’s an agricultural holiday because it takes place at the time of the great fall harvest when God had blessed His people with an abundance of crops—which is why it’s also called the *Feast of Ingathering*, a harvest festival and time of thanksgiving for all that God had provided.

This ceremony was intended not only to thank God for what He had provided in this current harvest, but to invoke the blessing of God upon their future harvests that He might continue to provide the life-giving water they needed to survive.

Now later (a few centuries before the time of Christ), another ceremony was added each day to the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles—it was called the *Water-Libation Ceremony*.

Each morning of the feast, at the time of the morning sacrifice, the High Priest took a golden pitcher and led a procession of priests down to the Pool of Siloam. The pitcher was then filled with water and was carried in procession back to the Temple Mount.

As the procession came to the Watergate, three trumpet blasts were made to mark the joy of the occasion and the people recited Isaiah 12:3, “*With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*”

At the Temple, while onlookers watched, the priests would march once around the brazen altar with the water pitcher while the Temple choir sang the Hallel Psalms (113–118). The water was then poured out on the altar as an offering to God.

But the Feast of Tabernacles was also a memorial feast in that it was a reminder of the water that God had provided in the wilderness through their 40-year journey to the Promised Land.

The seventh day of the feast was a great day of celebration known as “*The Great Hosannah*” and climaxed the feast. The previous six days the High Priest had marched around the altar once each day before pouring the golden pitcher of water upon it taken from the Pool of Siloam.

But on the seventh day, the *great day* of the feast, he marched around the altar seven times before pouring out the water on the altar.

I believe at the very moment that the High Priest was pouring the water on the altar—at the very moment the feast reached its climax, Jesus cried out saying—

John 7:37–38 (NKJV)

³⁷ ...“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”

Jesus was talking about the deep spiritual thirst in the heart of every person to know God because the Bible says that God created every person with a ‘God-shaped’ void in their heart/soul—an emptiness that can only be filled and satisfied by the presence of God Himself.

Jesus was recognizing this need and presenting the gospel in the simplest terms possible.

He was saying, *“Look, if you’re thirsting to know God deep in your soul. If in your soul you have this longing and emptiness that you can’t seem to fill with anything this world has to offer—then come to Me and drink, and out of your inner most being will flow rivers of living water!”*

You see, as the people were thinking about life-giving water (past and future)—Jesus used it as an opportunity to offer them eternal life-giving *Living Water*. No doubt drawing upon the words God spoke through Jeremiah the prophet many centuries earlier, Jesus was saying to the people:

“I AM, the fountain (source) of living water. As water is essential for physical life, I am essential for your spiritual and eternal life. Just as the physical body without water will die, so the soul without the Living Water of God will perish eternally.”

Now look, sometimes even Christians can feel ‘thirsty’ in their souls.

The answer is not to go back to the old “watering holes”—it’s not to go back to the polluted wells of the world like the children of Israel wanted to go back to Egypt. The answer is to dig deeper in your walk with Jesus, sink your roots deeper into the truths of the Word of God—think of Psalm 1.

Sometimes God allows us to become *dry* as a prelude to a fresh outpouring of His Spirit upon our lives—*“I will pour My Spirit on him who is thirsty like water on the dry ground...”* (Isaiah 44:3)

The Lord is speaking about REVIVAL!

One author shared this—

“In the late 1800’s there was a great evangelist known as Gypsy Smith who traveled around the world twice preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ on every continent and in many different cities—and wherever he preached revival broke out.

One day a delegation of people from a certain community came to him and said—*“Rev. Smith, we desperately want to see revival in our area, what can we do?”*

Gypsy said, *“I’ll tell you exactly what to do and how it will come about. You go home, lock yourself in your bedroom, take a piece of chalk, draw a circle on the floor, kneel in that circle and pray fervently and brokenly that God would start a revival in that circle.”*

Folks, revival is a personal thing! That’s always where revival starts—**with you** and the thirst God is putting into your heart! Not with your spouse or your neighbor or your co-workers—*but with you and me personally!*

Remember the famous injunction and promise the Lord gave us in 2 Chronicles 7:14—

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

This is a promise that implies revival and is conditioned on our faithfulness to do our part—

“Humble ourselves”; “pray and seek God’s face”; “turn from our wicked ways.”

THEN God will do His part—*“I will hear their prayer; forgive their sin, and heal their land.”*

America’s 250th birthday is coming up in a few weeks on July 4th—(Listen for the closing exhortation to this message).

Edmund Burke made the statement—*“All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.”*

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

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