

Turning Thirsty Hearts into Channels of Living Water

John 7:37-39

(Discussion questions on last page)

In recent years it appears that more and more people have discovered the benefits of staying hydrated. It's not unusual to see individuals at the gym or sitting at their work desks with a large container of water.

Studies have shown that drinking enough water every day is vital for many reasons: to regulate body temperature, keep joints lubricated, prevent infections, deliver nutrients to cells, and keep organs functioning properly. Staying well-hydrated also improves sleep quality, cognition, and mood (www.hsph.harvard.edu/the-importance-of-hydration).

Conversely, dehydration leads to a variety of health problems, including, headaches, cognitive impairment, fatigue and confusion, just to name a few. (<https://sprintmedical.in/blog/dehydration-and-blood-pressure-effects>).

Doctors also suggest that it's important to evaluate the kinds of fluids we consume for hydration. Walter Willett, professor of nutrition at Harvard, explained, "Americans are conditioned to expect high levels of sweetness in everything.... You might say we are malhydrated, because we drink so much soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages that harms our health."

But as important as it is to stay physically hydrated, being spiritually hydrated is even more crucial. But too often we give more attention to the physical than we do the spiritual. We walk around with a jug of water so that we can stay physically hydrated, but we do little to stay spiritually hydrated. Consequently, our souls are not only spiritually parched, but we have nothing to give to refresh the souls of others.

Main idea: When we drink deeply from the well of His love, our hearts become springs of living water for thirsty souls.

This morning we are going to consider some key factors in turning our thirsty hearts into channels of God's refreshment for parched souls.

1. Man's thirsty soul requires rivers of living water

First, man's thirsty soul requires rivers of living water. In John 7:37, we read: *"On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." John 7:37*

Before unpacking our first point, it's important to note that Jesus' words here came on the last day of a Jewish religious feast known as the feast of tabernacles. The feast was observed for eight days. During the first seven days, water from the Pool of Siloam was brought to the temple and poured out on the altar. This symbolic ritual commemorated the time when God supernaturally supplied water in the wilderness for His thirsty people.

On the eighth day, which was the day Jesus cried out, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink"* (John 7:37b), water ceased to be poured on the altar. This symbolized that God, who miraculously sustained them in the wilderness, had brought them to the promise land—a land of abundance. The fact that Jesus raised His voice on the eighth day and invited others to come to Him and drink, would have been taken as a remarkable claim.

As Leon Morris explained, Jesus cry to thirsty souls to come to Him and drink, implies that the thirsty soul will find that Jesus fills the need that cannot be supplied elsewhere."

There is a spiritual thirst in the soul of every man and woman that only Jesus can satisfy. We were created for relationship, first with God and then with others.

But although only Jesus can meet the deepest need of our hearts, many seek to fill their deepest needs through insufficient means, which leads to discontent and dissatisfaction. But as Paul testified of Christ in Philippians 4:13, we can know an inner contentment even in difficult circumstances *"through [Christ] who strengthens me."*

When Jesus came to the woman at the well, as recorded in John 4, she had been married 5 times, was presently unmarried and living in a sexually immoral relationship with another man. In other words, she was looking for love in all the wrong places.

Like someone excessively hydrating themselves on sugar saturated beverages, you might say that she was malhydrated. That is to say, she was seeking to satisfy the “God thirst” of her soul in a man, which led her to go from one bad relationship to another.

And it was in this context that Jesus shared words that were very similar to what He shared in our text. Jesus said to the spiritually thirsty woman at the well:

“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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.” John 4:13-14

What did Jesus mean by *will never be thirsty again*? At the moment of salvation, we receive the Holy Spirit—God’s indwelling presence—we enter into a relationship with God in Christ. Jesus said that, *“The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”* The spring of water that satisfies our thirst is the life of God in us. The life of God in us is a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

According to John 17:3, eternal life is more than a place, it’s a person. Its more than a destination, it’s a relationship with God that, like a well, we can continually draw from and that will always be more than enough.

Every relationship the woman at the well had before believing in Jesus, ended in dissatisfaction and disappointment. She didn’t know contentment in life. She didn’t know how to love or be loved. And apart from Christ, the same will be true of us.

But like the woman at the well, when we get Jesus, we will never long for another Savior or another redeemer, or another King, or another lover of our souls. Our only longing and thirst will be to know more of His fullness and love which is inexhaustible.

This is why the apostle Paul, who was satisfied in Jesus, wrote: *“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”* (Philippians 3:7-8). And then after expressing the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus, Paul testified of the greatest longing of His heart: *“that I may know him and the power of his resurrection...”* (Philippians 3:10).

Some may imagine that Jesus’ promise to the woman at the well of *never being thirsty again* and Paul’s desire to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, is a contradiction. The answer to this seeming contradiction is that Jesus’ promise to the woman at the well of never being thirsty again, doesn’t mean that she will never desire again, but that she would never be dissatisfied in her relationship with Christ—she would no longer be empty, but instead she would be complete in Him.

So, there is a sense that when we get Christ, we will never thirst again because He is all sufficient. But in another sense knowing Him—seeing and tasting His goodness will produce in us an insatiable desire to know Him more.

If you’re saved, you may go through some dry spells and feel distant from the Lord, but those dry seasons do not happen because Jesus doesn’t fully satisfy us. They happen because in the wilderness of our earthly journey to the promise land, we fail to daily drink from the fountain of Jesus that never runs dry.

Have you come to Jesus and drank of the living water that satisfies our thirsty souls? The evidence that you have is that you are no longer empty inside because Christ’s love has filled the void. Moreover, knowing His love, you desire to know Him more and the power of His resurrection to live for His glory. And if at this present time you feel

distant, you know that's it's not because He left you, but because you've are not living in close communion with Him.

This brings us to our second point:

2. God's transcendent Spirit refreshes our languishing hearts

After inviting the spiritually thirsty to come to Him and drink, Jesus continues: "*Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'*" ³⁹ *Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive,"* John 7:38-39a

Notice that Jesus clarifies the implications of coming to him to refresh our thirsty souls. The way that our souls are satisfied under the New Covenant is not by entering into a temple where His visible presence fills the atmosphere, but through His presence entering into us by the Spirit when we believe in Him. It's important to also emphasize here that when we receive the Holy Spirit by faith in Jesus, from that point on we don't need to seek for the Spirit to enter us again.

When the Spirit enters the believer, He comes to stay. He is not a transient Spirit. Rather, He is the transcendent God who takes up permanent residence in the believer to transform him/her from the inside out. Concerning the Holy Spirit, Jesus promised His disciples: "*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*" John 14:16-17

Remember, when Jesus said He would pray for *another helper*, speaking of the Holy Spirit, the Greek word for *another* means *another of the same kind*. In other words, the Holy Spirit works in the heart of the believer to be in us everything that Jesus was to His disciples when He walked the earth.

To put it another way, the Spirit's main ministry is to make the presence of Christ real in us and in particular to manifest His love in

us. And knowing this ministry of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said in our text: *“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”* John 7:37

Beloved, the Spirit, who makes Christ known in us and through us, is the living water flowing from our hearts. The Spirit of God works through our surrendered lives to refresh us and renew us from the inside out.

Last week, my wife and I were walking up the stairs of our house when we noticed that her Hibiscus plants on our front porch looked parched. As she observed the plants, my wife said in Spanish, “Que triste se ven las plantas,” which translated means, “look how sad my plants look.” Soon after, she filled a large pitcher with water and watered her plants. Do you know, the next day as I was coming up the stairs, I noticed that those plants looked alive again. They actually looked happy!

How many of you know, if you truly know the love and joy of Jesus in your heart, it ought to show on your face. I heard a pastor say recently that some Christians need to tell their face that their saved.

Life is hard sometimes and we will all experience sorrow. But, as we heard Dr Lutzer say in his message last Sunday, *“the distinguishing mark of a Christian ought to be joy.”* It ought to be joy because we have a treasure on the inside of us, namely the glorious love and hope of Christ made alive by the Spirit (2 Corinthians 4; Romans 5:2).

A Spirit filled Christian’s joy does not depend on external things. Joy is an inside job. Joy is produced by the Spirit as we walk in fellowship with Christ. What does it take to walk in fellowship with Christ?

To walk in fellowship with Christ through the Spirit, we must first be **cleansed of our sin**. The apostle John wrote: *“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth...⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* 1 John 1:6,9

Joy comes from walking in fellowship with Christ through the Spirit. And there's only one thing that can break that fellowship, namely unconfessed and unforsaken sin. Sin doesn't cause us to lose our salvation, but it can cause us to lose the joy of our salvation.

Moreover, to know the joy of the Lord, which is an inside work of the Spirit, not only must we be cleansed from our sin, we must have **communion with the Lord**. In Romans 5:11, Paul wrote, *"More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."*

Joy is not found in circumstances, but in our reconciled relationship with God through Jesus. And the more that we know God through the Spirit as we immerse ourselves in the word and in prayer, the more His joy will flow like a river from our hearts. In Psalm 46:4 the Psalmist wrote: *"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High"* (Psalm 46:4).

Brothers and sister, under the New Covenant, the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High is not a place but a people. Believers are the dwelling place of God (Ephesians 2:22). And the river that makes glad the holy habitation of God is the Spirit who makes His presence known in us as we commune with Him.

In this same Psalm, where the psalmist speaks of the river whose *streams make glad the city of God*, he also wrote in Psalm 46:11: *"Be still, and know that I am God."*

Before internet and cell phones, which many people today are enslaved to, the great preacher Marty Lloyd Jones wrote: "One of the most difficult things in life is to be still. There is so much noise—the noises of the world, exaggerated by television, radio, and so on. Noise! But you have to be still, you must stop, you must [have solitude], you must think. You cannot meet with the Lord in the midst of the noise and the bustle and the fury of life. You may be a very busy person, but stillness is still possible. You must be quiet in your own

room. It is only then that you are likely to meet with him. Stillness is one of the great prerequisites.”

Earlier I mentioned that my wife’s plants were looking sad because they needed water. Similarly, there are a lot of sad Christians today that although the Spirit resides in them, they are not being refreshed, renewed and made glad by His life-giving flow.

Can I tell you, many Christians today are attending church services wrongly looking for the presence of God in the atmosphere and are hearing songs asking the Holy Spirit to rain down. And although they may be moved emotionally by the entertaining music, they are not being transformed by the indwelling Spirit. I want to submit to you that praying in song for the Spirit to rain down, or to flood this place and fill the atmosphere, is bad theology.

Concerning the ministry of the Spirit, Daniel Henderson explained: “Our obligation as disciples, and our privilege under the new covenant, is to fully embrace and experience the promise of His indwelling. God’s concern is not that we would search for His elusive presence in the atmosphere or in the sea or in the desert. His purpose was that we would acknowledge His ever-present desire for an intimate relationship with His children, a relationship that ultimately ministers to and changes their hearts.”

Believers are not like one of my wife’s plants in our yard. We don’t need the Spirit to rain down. Rather, we need His living water to spring up inside of us, renewing us, refreshing us, empowering us, satisfying our spiritual thirst, and giving us life.

Many believers, who may sense the absence of joy in their lives, are asking the Spirit to rain down upon them, when what they need is to surrender their lives to the Spirit who’s already present inside of them. As David Jeremiah put it, “We will never experience the release of the Spirit until we know the restraint of the Spirit—until we have yielded our lives to the Spirit’s control.

This brings us to our final point:

3. Christ's transforming strength (in us) releases His life-giving flow

Having promised that out of the heart of believers will flow rivers of living water, Jesus clarifies: *“Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”* (John 7:39).

Notice that the commentary John gives about rivers of living water, clarifies that the promise Jesus made during His earthly ministry had not yet been realized by His disciples. The Spirit was not given when Jesus made the promise because He was not yet glorified. This glorification speaks of His sin destroying crucifixion on our behalf and subsequent resurrection. (John 14:16-17; 15:26-27; 16:7-14).

In His final discourse to His disciples before going to the cross, John 14 through 16, records that Jesus promised the Spirit of truth would continue His work in and through them. This promise was fulfilled “post resurrection” on the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts chapter two. Thousands came to saving hope in Christ on that day and are still coming to Christ today. Since that day, the Spirit abides in every believer so that rivers of living water may flow from within us to a thirsty world.

A few weeks ago, I noticed the grass on my front lawn was getting muddy and a puddle was forming although it hadn't rained. I assumed that there must have been a broken pipe underground that was leaking water. I reported it to the city and sure enough the water line into my house was busted. A week after I reported it, the city repaired the broken water line into my house.

On the day they completed the job, I arrived home to find a fairly large box on my door step. When I brought it inside and opened it up, I found a letter from the city and a brand-new water filtration pitcher, along with 7 replacement filters. The letter explained that contaminants may have entered my water line and that for the next few weeks we should not drink the tap water from our faucets. And in

the meantime, we were to use the water filtration pitcher in the box to purify our water.

Similarly, the Spirit of God works through our surrendered lives as living water to purify our hearts and satisfy our thirsty souls in Christ. But far too often we give more attention to the physical than we do the spiritual. We are so distracted by the noise of the world and so glued to our cell phones that we do very little to stay spiritually hydrated. Consequently, our souls are not only spiritually dehydrated, but we have nothing to give to refresh the souls of others.

Worse yet, rather than releasing living water that brings the hope of God's refreshment to others, what may be flowing out of our lives is the toxicity of a corrupt world which has seeped into our hearts. And when our hearts are contaminated by the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desires (2 Peter 1:4) it will come out of us and hurt the people around us.

O, but when our souls are cleansed and refreshed by the living water that is the Holy Spirit through fellowship with God and in obedience to His word, our lives become channels of God's refreshment to a thirsty and parched world.

Conclusion

What is flowing from your heart and life? Is there a river of joy flowing from your heart through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit that is refreshing your soul and the souls of others around you? We can know this life-giving flow when we know Christ as Savior and Lord and walk in fellowship with Him day by day.

As believers, how do we keep the life giving flow of the Spirit from damming up inside of us so that His living water is released in and through our lives? Don't look for the Spirit to rain down upon you. Rather, surrender to the Spirit who already lives inside of you so that rivers of life giving hope and joy spring up. Keep your heart cleansed from sin, prioritize communion with God in prayer, in His word, and

look for opportunities to release His life giving flow for the spiritual refreshment of others and to the glory of Jesus.

Discussion Questions

What does the living water that Jesus spoke of represent? (John 7:37-39)

What did Jesus mean when He told the woman at the well that whoever drinks of the water that He gives would never thirst again? (John 4:13-14)

Jesus said that the water that He gives will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life “in” a believer (John 4:14). Is it just semantics to say that a believer doesn’t need to ask for the Spirit to rain down upon him? Why or why not?

How does a believer draw from the living water to refresh their soul and to become a refreshment to others? (1 Corinthians 16:15-18)

How do we keep the life giving flow of the Spirit from damming up inside of us so that we might release His refreshment to others?