

The Thirst

by

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“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 4:14 (ESV)

Have you ever been so thirsty that all you can think about is getting a drink of water into your mouth as soon as possible? I have many times, such as when I participated in twice a day football practices at Ole Miss in August. We're talking ninety-degree and ninety percent humidity days, when the dew on the ground from the night before is so heavy it makes your shoes and socks wet to run through it. We're talking about how this dew then dries out and as it does, it rises into a stifling mixture of moist air that you try to breathe to fill hurting lungs, but for some reason they can't seem to be filled. And then there is that other thing. For some reason that I will never understand, some coaches during that era determined that football players were not to have water during those “dry-out” practices. Therefore, we had to go over two hours each morning and afternoon in those conditions without water. So you can imagine what a drip of rainwater meant to us when it rained, or when a player taped the vent holes shut in his helmet so he could sneak over and fill it with water from a hydrant and share it with us? I think we would have elected that guy president if he ran for office. We felt like we were dying. We were incredibly thirsty. But we would have to have been mighty desperate to drink from some guy's helmet like we were doing? I know it sounds nauseating, but I believe we would have fought for a mouth full of that water if we had to, for we were desperate, and besides, it helped us make it through the practices until we could get to the good stuff. Thank goodness good water came later, for if that *helmet water* had become our only source of water, then we surely would have become sick because of it. Why do I share this disgusting information with you? I do so, for similar to when I was drinking from that teammate's helmet, I think some of you men are drinking bad tasting *water* that only gets you by, but never truly satisfies your need. You can imagine that I am not talking literally of H₂O, but rather a deep *thirst* in your spirit for something fresh and nurturing and sustaining that you might not be getting. The truth is what you are longing for deep down is the *Living Water* that only Christ can give to you. If you haven't found this *water* in the quality and measure that He wants to give to you, you are missing out and you can't continue on the stuff you are taking in to just get you by, or you will become weak and eventually sick.

When I was in Israel last year, I was taught some things about the water sources in that region, which have some good parallels to what I am teaching in this devotional. Water is a big deal over there, and has always been. In fact, in Jesus day, having a good, stable water source was essential to daily life. But not all their water was good water. Like my *helmet water*, all the sources could get you by, but not taste good. There were some sources of water better than others. When it was explained to me how the different sources were caught and stored, or dug up, or came from flowing water, I understood better what Jesus meant by the term *Living Water*. As an example, one of their sources is *well water*. We all understand that *well water* comes from underground water that lies below the surface and a hole is dug deep enough to get to it. It can then be

brought up by a bucket to the surface, as was the case in the scenario with Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. *Well water* can taste good or bad. Most of the time it was just okay, for the wells were shallow, and surface materials could fall in them all the time. This would taint the water. As far as taste is concerned, it would have been of medium quality as compared to the others.

Next there was *cistern water*, which would be lowest on the taste list. What was that water like? Cisterns were hewed from solid rock, or were built of limestone and a sort of plaster to seal it. Cisterns were created to capture runoff water from rainwater, and to be a reservoir for storage. Once they were filled with water, they were covered to keep the sunlight out, or algae and other stuff would grow in them. At best, the water was chalky and stale ... kinda like helmet water, if you could imagine it. Therefore it would have been seen as the least quality water, because it had the worst taste. When I heard this about *cistern water* compared to the other sources, I thought of an Old Testament teaching on *cistern and living water* ... and I connected some dots. Here is that Old Testament teaching:

“for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” Jeremiah 2:13 (ESV)

How do these dots connect? The first thing we see is an explanation of what Jesus meant by *living water*. In the Jeremiah passage, the “*fountain of Living Water*” indicates that this is God Himself. Therefore, we do not have to have any question about what Jesus meant when He spoke of the *Living Water* and that *this water* would completely satisfy our deepest thirst forever. He was speaking of Himself. But understand this: It is not what He does for us or to us that He is referencing. Our normal self-centered interest is to want to get our apparent thirst quieted down by anything. But drinking from a *helmet or cistern* will not sustain us, for that is bad *water* that comes and goes in life, and is not permanent. Rather, it is Jesus Himself who we need, for He satisfies our deepest thirst. However, it requires a long, steady, ongoing, abiding drink of Him, and not just a sip of all He has to offer. We need this “Good Water” and He gives it to us in abundance if we will take it. But there is more to understand about the *living water* analogy.

While in Israel I heard that there was a third source of water other than *well water* and *cistern water*. It was the cool, refreshing water that came from springs that dotted the region. Can you imagine how good this water would taste compared to the “iffy” *well water* and the stale, chalky water of a *cistern*? Just think how excellent water would taste that would have come from hundreds of feet below the surface, made cool in subterranean caverns and then presented to a hot, dry surface in a desert wilderness? Got the picture? Now that would be excellent water, wouldn't you agree? If a wine connoisseur were describing his best wine, he would say words such as, “*superb, sublime, the best of the best.*” The way the people of that day described this spring water was with similar applause, but with other words. They called it ... “*living water.*” Do you understand better the metaphor Jesus was using to describe Himself? Do you understand how contrasting the cool spring water would be to a hot, dry desert? How sweet and how refreshing? Then you will understand better the contrast that Jesus makes in the life of someone who is truly thirsty for more in life, and how what He offers us refreshes a life that is lived in a desert called *the world*. What He gives us makes us alive, energized, strong and replenished as nothing else can. But there is more.

In the Jeremiah passage, we see another contrast, which is the *Living Water* of God compared to the *broken cisterns* that we build for ourselves. Not only does *cistern water* leave us with a bad taste, it doesn't sustain us. The “broken” cistern gives us this picture. This particular scripture reference about cisterns “that we

make for ourselves” rather than the *Living Water* Jesus gives to us makes me think of the man-made substitutes we seek other than an intimate, abiding relationship with Christ. It really makes me think of all the religions without Christ, and those people who name themselves as Christians but do not drink deeply of Him. They are drinking from broken cisterns, which will eventually go dry and cause them to become weak and sick. But there is more.

Jesus said that for those of us who drink of the *Living Water*, we will become a spring of *Living Water* that wells up within us. This means that we get to share this *Living Water* with others. There's plenty to go around and the source to us will not run out. Think of the impact we can make on our family and friends, and even our enemies by sharing the *Living Water* that has quenched our thirst? Think of how it will change those people as it also quenches their thirst? *Wells and cisterns* will go dry eventually, and even the helmet of a teammate will thankfully become empty (if you are lucky). But the *Living Water* never runs out, especially if you share it with others. It just keeps flowing to us. So here is my question to you, and you need to answer it honestly. ***What are you drinking?***