

The quest for satisfaction answered

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[0 : 00] Part of which we read in the Gospel according to John. The fourth chapter of the Gospel according to John at verse 14. Rather, verses 13 and 14.

Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again. But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, bringing us into everlasting life.

The dialogue between our Lord and the woman of Samaria is an outstanding example of spiritual counseling. Just think of the tact, the faithfulness, the sympathy, the compassion of our Lord throughout this interview.

I'm sure he was heart-sorry for this poor, disillusioned woman. And from this conversation there emerged some of the deepest truth.

If thou knewest, said our Lord, if thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that says to thee, give me to drink, thou dost have asked of him, and he would have given me living water.

[1 : 31] She didn't understand. But that she did. That she realized that he was speaking parables. But she didn't want to understand.

And so she kept the chalk on a material level. Thou has nothing to draw with, she said. A glimpse of the object. So when's that then a shall is living water?

If Jesus wasn't going to be sidetracked, he doesn't answer her directly. But rather does he show her that there are things infinitely more important than water, essential though that is.

He that drinketh of this water, he said, shall thirst again. Who so drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water bringing up into everlasting life.

We have here on the one hand a picture of despair and on the other hand a vision of hope. A picture of despair.

[2 : 45] He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again. How true and didn't he know it? Day after day, day after day, day after day.

day after day. Possibly indeed as the sun was building up to a blistering heat. Because it may be, it all depends on the on the way in which John was reckoning time.

There's a simple opinion about that. So it may be that his day began at six in the morning and therefore the sixth hour would be midday, twelve o'clock. However that may be, she was there trudging back and forth, back and forth, weighted down with her heavy bucket of water.

The next day the supply was done and the whole thing had to be done all over again. He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again. But I've no doubt that this woman could think of other journeys in her search for satisfaction.

Journeys which landed in an even more desolate waste. this woman no doubt was pursuing happiness as most people do. But her idea of happiness seemed to be along the lines of her central desires.

[4 : 06] when she was growing old and her mixed up life and left her guilty and lonely and undesired.

wouldn't it be good if people would learn our lesson? Wouldn't it be good for this generation if we could learn our lesson without having to experiment?

There will be fewer broken homes, fewer family anglers, fewer ruined lives. there are still multitudes who seek their pleasure along the same lines as this woman did.

Sometimes at first hand, sometimes at second hand, through newspapers, magazines, television or whatever it may be.

Others try to escape through drugs which only create an increased craving. And others talk about quenching their thirst with strong drinks.

[5 : 13] Forgetting that alcohol doesn't quench thirst, it only creates it. But yet people must try things out for themselves. They won't take a telling however strongly it may be expressed and however convincingly it may be argued.

No, we must try this out for ourselves. not all the evidence will convince people of their folly. People imagine that they are going to succeed even where everybody else has failed.

And so like lemmings they pursue one another to their destruction. There are, of course, we're glad we admit those who seek their enjoyment in pure and more exalted ways than this.

They quench their thirst in clearer waters. Joy, for example, of working for good causes, of caring for others, of the following medical or other scientific discoveries, or the joys of home and friendship, these things in themselves are noble and they're satisfying.

But even so, man craves for something more than the physical, more than the material, more even than the intellectual. Sir James Young Simpson, the great Edinburgh surgeon of last century, his name is still famous for his pioneering work and use of chloroform as an anesthetic, admitted that even at the age of over 50 years of age, he made the greatest discovery of all because it was then that he came to a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as his own Savior.

[7 : 32] Well, this woman, like many another, had discovered the vanity of earthly things. Now the frail vessel thou hast made, no hand but rhyme can fill.

The waters of the earth have failed and I am searching still. A picture of this space that now we are adorned our vision of hope.

The gift of Jesus Christ. You see, people are trying all sort of roads and finding them one last or another to be that blind alley.

Until at last they come to the conclusion that there just is no answer. They are doomed to go on seeking until they faint by the way and they never find.

But Jesus says here, no, there is an answer. There is an answer. He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again. But he that drinketh the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.

[8 : 44] But the water that I shall give him shall be in him our well of water bringing us unto everlasting life. what a wonderful process.

The desert traveler sees an impression of water with palm trees around it and he wonders and he's apprehensive.

He's been disappointed too often before. But then he's joy. He finds that it's no mirage. It is real. Well, Jesus Christ is offering something that really matters.

He's offering for one thing something that is internal. Shall be in him. You know an ancient city under seas enjoyed a great advantage if they had an adequate supply of water within its if it had an adequate supply of water within its walls.

It was a tremendous blessing we're told to ancient Jerusalem. That in spite of all the terrible diseases which it endured throughout its history one thing that was never lacking in that city was water.

[10 : 07] There were springs in the city and there were those who brought water in aqueduct into the city and the supply was there inside. Now we have nothing in ourselves that really satisfies us.

And nothing the world can offer us provides lasting satisfaction. people cry out for entertainment and more entertainment. They don't seem in these days to provide even to be able to provide that for themselves.

They've got to get it. They've got to get it fed into them. And they discover sometimes that those who are trying to entertain them are as miserable as themselves. They've got heard the story of the man who went to his doctor confessing to our deep depression.

And the doctor said to him the thing for you to do is to go and go and see a certain comedian who me named who was performing in the town at the time.

And the man's face fell. You see he said I'm the man that you're asking me to go and see. But the gift that Christ offers comes from without ourselves.

[11 : 35] But it becomes part of ourselves and will never be parted from us and will yield a satisfaction which will never fall and which will endure forever.

Now what is this gift? What is the gift that Christ gives to us? It is the gift of his Holy Spirit. In the 16th chapter of this gospel at the 7th verse we read If I go not away the Comforter will not come

unto you but if I depart I will send him.

And it's not sensible to find the Holy Spirit presented in our text under the figure of water. There's a similar passage you remember in the 7th chapter of this gospel.

Jesus cried If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink. If any man thirst let him come unto me drink and drink and Jesus went on to say that John at least went on to say this is faith of the Holy Spirit for the Spirit was not yet given for the Christ was not yet glorified.

And so water is one of the figures under which the Holy Spirit is portrayed. and I suggest now that for a little while we look at the use of this figure.

[13 : 27] First of all we would first notice that water is life-giving. Water is essential to life.

It's true water doesn't create life but the Holy Spirit creates life. The very beginning of the Bible reads the Lord God breathes into Adam the breath of his spirit of life and man became a living soul. He is called the Lord and giver of life and he creates life in a soul that's dead in sin and no one else can do it in your life or in your case or mine.

And apart from spiritual life, the life that he gives, well there's no spiritual life to develop. It is he who convicts us of sin who lets us see our need of salvation.

And as the Catechism puts it, he enlightens our minds in the knowledge of truth, he renews our wills, he persuades us and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ as he has offered to us in the gospel.

[14 : 52] We implant faith in our hearts and by that faith we are united to Jesus Christ and we become sharers in his life. Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, said Christ, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

My friend, have you experienced this new birth? There's no other way. You can attend services all your life.

You can try to cultivate Christian virtues. all human efforts are valueless. All our righteousness, says Isaiah, are healthy rags.

No, the Holy Spirit must work. He must create new life in us. He must himself come to live in us. life in life.

But water is not only life-giving, water is life-sustaining. You know, if you're looking for a site for a camp, one of the most important things to look for is the availability of water.

[16 : 06] You can survive for a week without bread, but you can't survive without water. well, the Holy Spirit who gives life sustains and develops life.

And he gives his life by revealing Christ to us, and he sustains and develops life. How? By just revealing more of Christ.

He takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us. He enables us to understand more of Christ's worth. Keeps us sheltering under his sacrifice.

Enables us to share his risen life. Gives us the joy of salvation. Gives us, as Paul says, the spirit of adoption, whereby with confidence we can see ourselves as children of God when we cry, Abba, Father.

It's he who teaches us to pray, for we know not what we would pray for as we are. It's he who teaches us to read and to understand, the word of God. Our maintenance, our growth of our spiritual life depends upon him.

[17 : 22] If we grieve the Holy Spirit, if we provoke him to silence, if we provoke him to withdraw the sense of his presence from us, where is it any wonder that we wilt?

water is beautifying and refreshing. You can picture our long drought.

We do have such things sometimes, even in this country. We know how everything gets dry and parched and how the crops in the fields are stunted.

and we long for the rain to come. But of course, there's much more evidence in countries where the rain is seasonal.

If you've not seen such countries, you've probably seen pictures of them. You've seen pictures of them in the dry season and everything is parched, everything is in one dull monochrome.

[18 : 26] then in its time the rain falls and suddenly there's a blaze of colour against a background of lush green.

The earth decayed face, we're singing, renewed is by thee. Sometimes again on the face of our barren hillside you see a patch of lovely green and you discover there's a spring there sending out a constant supply of fresh water.

And there are times in our own lives are there not when we are dry and lifeless and colourless and we long for the Spirit of God to apply the word to our needs that so our souls may become like a watered garden.

Or perhaps we're disturbed by the state of the church. But then the numbers are decreasing. The response to the gospel is so meagre. The witness of the church seems so feeble.

you know you look out at our landscape or perhaps you see a picture of our landscape and the way is very beautiful very lovely beautifully shaped mountains and hills and valleys and the colouring is magnificent but you feel there's something lacking.

[20 : 14] There's not a human being inside nor perhaps even a sheep inside not even a bird inside. There's no life to be seen.

You know life makes all the difference. Life makes all the difference. And so it is.

So it is with ourselves. Our own spiritual witness we feel is so low.

So little devotion. So little prayer. So little resemblance to Christ. We may have well-ordered lives.

Our church life may be well-ordered. Everything may be ship-shaped. Everything going according to the time on our past. And yet it may lack this one thing.

[21 : 16] One essential thing. It may lack life. Are we willing to pray and pray from the heart that thy people may rejoice in thee?

Wilt I not revive us again? And are we willing for the cost if that prayer is answered? Because there is cost. Let me remind you of the day of Pentecost.

The disciples had received new hope and carried no doubt through the resurrection from the dead. But still they felt afraid. Still they felt terribly weak.

They felt hemmed in. And Christ knew that that would be the case. And Christ forbade them to do anything until they received power from on high. He told them to wait until they received the promise.

And at Christ's commandment they did. And they didn't have to wait long. Because in God's good time the Spirit came and the whole scene was transformed.

[22 : 20] These men so timid, so shy, so backward began speaking with boldness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the city of Jerusalem was utterly amazed.

Do you remember the promise given in Isaiah chapter 44? I will pour water he says upon him that is thirsty and flood and flood upon the dry ground.

I will pour my Spirit upon thy sea and thy blessing upon mine offspring. Dr. John Duncan, that saintly professor of Hebrew in the last century in the new college in Edinburgh, quoted that text. And he remarks, why don't we see this happening? Why don't we see this happening? I will pour water upon him that is thirsty.

The reason is true can be nothing but this. We're not thirsty. We're not thirsty. God promised to him that he's thirsty. If we're not experiencing the promise, it just means that we're not thirsty.

[23 : 36] And then once again, water is purified. And the Holy Spirit gives inward purity. You know, there's many a city adorned with beautiful buildings and spacious streets and lovely gardens, which is a foam of grasp and corruption and schemy and drunkenness and sensuality.

The Apostle Paul preached the gospel in cities like that. Cities like Ephesus and Corinth with their superstitions, with their degradation. Now, I'm not saying that the whole of the cities were cleaned up, but certain new communities were formed within these cities that made a mark upon the cities, and the cities themselves were made to take notice.

There can be no doubt whatever of the cleansing made in the life of the woman of Samaria. And what Christ did for her, he can do for you and for me.

Our departure from God's law may be a different kind from hers. That's of secondary importance.

We all need this cleansing, and the Spirit of God can give it to us.

Only the Spirit can. Nothing is really pure that is not given us by God's Holy Spirit, God's love.

Everything that comes from him is absolutely pure.

[25 : 11] How does he do it? As we said already, he does it by revealing more and more of Christ to us. Now what does that mean? Well, at conversion, he shows us the blood of Christ, redeeming us from the guilt of sin.

sin. That same blood purges us from corruption and gradually destroys the power of sin. He shows us Christ suffering pain and death for our sins, and as we see it, we see the hateful thing that sin is.

He shows us Christ in his earthly life, triumphing over temptation, living the perfect life, and so sets him before us as our example.

But of course, more than that is needed. He shows us Christ risen, ascended to the right hand of God with all authority committed unto him.

He shows us Christ as our salvation, our power. He enables us to claim from him the victory, the victory that he had in his life.

[26 : 33] Likewise, says Paul, reckon yourselves to be dead unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ. It's the Holy Spirit who works.

Sanctification, justification, you know, is an instantaneous transaction, in which we are accepted of God, our sins are not just forgiven, but blotted out.

Sanctification is growth, in grace, growth, and character. And it's a lifelong process. Often we have to confess, not a continuous process.

Backsliding in the Christian life is all too common. But we dare not reconcile ourselves with such a thing. Spring may become silty dark with the muck of the earth.

But water is a powerful thing. It makes a way for itself. And if the Holy Spirit is at work, he will not fail. And at last we shall be fully cleansed and presented faultless before the throne of God's glory with great joy.

[27 : 51] And then one last thought. And that is that water flows. It's its nature.

If it can, it will not stand still. If it can, it spreads itself all around. You know, as you go from Inverness to Aberdeen, you pass a little side road and it's marked.

It's signposted. The Wells of Ice. A rather lovely name. A name that stirs the imagination. I've never been there, but up there there are springs, springs which grow up eventually into the river ice and which empties itself into the North Sea.

Why, even the great Amazon itself rises in the rivulets of the Andes of Peru. Well, let me remind you of that beautiful vision that we read in the prophecy of Ezekiel.

The city of Jerusalem never had a river such as the rivers that beautify and bring trade to so many cities. There was no such thing in Jerusalem.

[29 : 05] They had the group Kidron, which was just a seasonal ravine. But here Ezekiel sees from the temple a stream emerging.

And very quickly it grows in width and grows in depth. The waters rise to the ankles. A little further the waters rise to the knees.

A little further the waters rise to the waist. And then before you know it, the waters can't be passed over. They are waters to swim in. And so the river flows on until it comes down to the dead sea.

The dead sea so soaked up with chemicals that nothing can possibly live in it. And the amazing thing happens. The dead sea comes to life. It shall come to pass that everything that liveth, which moveth with us wherever the water shall come, shall live.

And there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither. For they shall be healed, and everything shall live whither the river cometh.

[30 : 22] Remember the words of our Lord. He that believeth on me, as the scripture has said, out of his inner man shall flow rivers of living water.

You know, normally a river grows by the influx of tributaries. Strangely, there's no word of tributaries here, in Ezekiel's vision.

No, it's a spontaneous and miraculous growth. Now, my friends, if we possess this spring of water, the water should flow from us to others.

It did, indeed, in the case of the woman of Samaria. Soon, you remember, the whole township was welcoming Jesus. It flowed in even greater measure through the work of the apostles.

With amazing rapidity, the gospel spread out, and out from Jerusalem. Out through Judea, Samaria, Syria, Asia, Minas, Greece, Rome, probably eastward.

[31 : 27] Some say in the first century, it reached India. Certainly, it reached North Africa. And that is nothing but what ought to be happening. And every Christian man and woman should see himself and herself as spreading, called to spread the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

If we know of this refreshing fountain, then the stream should flow from us to others. That's how the church is supposed to grow. Christ promised, saying, Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and at the utmost ends of the earth.

Well, why is it that we think that the present condition of apathy, and powerlessness, and cold formality, is as it meant to be?

Why do we imagine that such a condition is the normal? That's the worst possible outlook we could have. It's a spirit of utter distance. No, the spirit of God has not been withdrawn.

It's we who fail to avail ourselves of the provision that has been made for us. If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that says to thee, give me to drink, thou wouldst ask of him, and he would have given thee living water.

[33 : 00] Well, you and I, we know who's speaking, and we have heard of the gift of God. The question for us is, have we asked?

Have we asked? God is not stingy. God's provision is not strange. God is we who are strange. Ask, and ye shall receive, seek, and ye shall find.

Let us pray. O Lord, we bless thy name for the great promises of thy word, and how thy people have found them fulfilled in every generation.

And we acknowledge that if we are not seeing them fulfilled in our lives, and our community, and our fellowship, the fault is in us. We have not, because we ask not.

O gracious God, give us faith, and increase our faith, and grant that we may prove in our own lives, and see in the lives of others, thy power at work.

[34 : 14] In giving life and renewing life, and cleansing, and strengthening. Do thou now dismiss us with thy blessing, and take us in safety to our homes.

Bless each one of us according to our needs. Be with us through the rest of this day, and through the coming days of this week. Accept of it in Christ. Amen.