

## Promise of the Spirit

HN/SS 13/03/05 am

Reading: Isaiah 44:1-11, John 4

Study Text: John 7:37-39

Psalms: 118:24:29, 46:1-5, 42:1-4, 118:1-5

Have you ever been desperately thirsty – caught out in some place in a hot day without water to drink. I remember a train journey from Jabalpur to Allahabad many years ago. It was summer; the train was packed, and was running about 8 hours late. Drinking water was getting short – even the locals would not drink the water stored on the train. I had my water bottle but it was getting low. I was taking short sips, trying to make it last.

Soon after deliverance from Egypt the Israelites found themselves without water in the Desert of Sin (Exodus 17). They became desperate and complained to their leader Moses. It was tense situation but Moses cried out to the Lord. The Lord told him to strike the rock with his rod and water would flow.

This happened again some years later. In the desert they had no water. They complained bitterly to Moses. He struck the rock, this time twice because he was angry. The Lord in his mercy caused water to flow abundantly from the rock – they all drank and were satisfied (Numbers 20).

During the Feast of Tabernacles the Lord's provision of water there in the desert was remembered in a water carrying ceremony. 'Each day for seven days a priest would convey water from the pool of Siloam in a golden vessel and bring it in happy procession marked by the blowing of trumpets till they came to the temple'. At the temple the water was poured out by the altar.

This was not only a remembrance of the Lord's provision to their fathers, but also a time to pray for rain for their land. Those who did not come to the Feast of Tabernacles and worship the Lord could not expect rain (Zechariah 14:17).

Jesus had been teaching in the temple during this feast. He came up from Galilee half way through and now the end had come. The festival proper lasted seven days (Numbers 29). On the seventh day the booths were dismantled and the water carrying was done for the last time. Some think that Jesus spoke these words on this day. But on the eighth day there was a *sacred assembly*. This may have been a more strategic time for Jesus to cry out as he did. The people were all assembled and ready to leave. The joy of the water carrying ritual was over. Jesus spoke to them about thirst and about water.

It was *the last day, that great day of the feast*. Jesus had been teaching that he was sent by his Father, by the God whom they claimed to be worshipping. He came to speak the words of God, to speak truth. Some believed he was the Christ of God. He said he was going away, going to the One who sent him. With great urgency he stood up on the last

day and cried out. He abandoned the normal position of sitting to teach. He stood up and cried out so that all might hear him.

## **A Thirsting Soul**

Jesus cried out saying *if anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink*. Jesus had a message for thirsting souls. He said in his sermon on the mount – *blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*. What does it mean to have a thirsty soul? How can your soul thirst?

Firstly it is to have a soul that is dry, that is parched, because of sin. It is when you realise the depths of your sin that you feel great thirst in your soul.

Secondly it is that thirst drives you to the fountain of life, to the live giving water that is to found only in Jesus Christ. With conviction of sin comes a desire for pardon, a longing after peace of conscience. Christ alone satisfies that longing in the soul, the longing for truth and for righteousness. See Psalm 46 – *my soul thirsts for God, for the living God*. He felt like the deer panting for water.

Man cannot live long without water. Despite my suffering from thirst on the train years ago I have never really been desperately thirsty – and I suspect you have not felt the desperation of thirst either. Few around us have felt thirst such that they thought they would die.

But we must experience a thirst, desperate thirst in our souls if we are to be saved. Oh that men and women today would feel a great thirst in their souls, such that they would cry out to the living God – my soul thirsts for God the living God! There must be this thirst, this conviction of sin and longing for righteousness before people come to Jesus. If anyone thirsts said Jesus, let him come.

The people in the desert felt a desperate thirst. Moses cried out to the Lord and the Lord answered, providing water from the rock. God provided for them in a wonderful way. There is a lesson here, a lesson that Jesus was bringing to the people here in the temple. It is a lesson that he wants you to hear also. It a message for all people, a message they must hear if they are to be saved.

Jesus offered the woman at the well living water but she did not understand at first. She had no thirst in her soul. But when Jesus reminded her of her sin, her secret sin, then she became thirsty. Conviction of sin makes people thirsty. Once convicted of sin she was ready to drink of the water of life.

Many of those who heard Jesus cry out were proud, self-righteous men. They were legalists. They were ready to convict Jesus of sin but failed to see the sin in their own hearts. That is the way with sin of course. It has this effect of blinding our hearts to its very presence. Sin is very sinister. It blinds men to the truth about themselves.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.* By way of corollary we might say ‘cursed are those who do not hunger and thirst for righteousness – they shall not be filled’. Jesus said *I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance* – meaning those who think they are righteous (Luke 5:32). He said *if anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink*.

It is a great tragedy, a tragedy that leads to death, if people have no thirst for truth and no thirst for righteousness. Such people are to be greatly pitied, even though they will praise themselves all the day long. With dead souls they say ‘we have no thirst, we have no need of religion – just give me more of the worlds treasures and pleasures’.

Trying to preach the gospel without talking about sin is like pouring water on a ducks back. Without conviction of sin and a longing for peace with God, without a thirst for righteousness, people will not feel their need of a saviour.

At Pentecost the gospel was preached and people were convicted of sin. They were *cut to the heart*. A terrible thirst came upon them and they asked what shall we do? At Philippi the jailer heard Paul and Silas praying and singing the gospel. He despaired of life. He was brought under conviction of sin and cried out what must I do to be saved.

This is how it must be. There must be a thirst in the soul. That thirst will draw people to the fountain of life. Jesus promises water to quench every thirsting soul. *Let him come to me and drink*. Drink and drink till you can drink no more. He will abundantly pardon all your sin. He will wash you clean. He will give you the righteousness you long for, even his own righteousness.

## **Water and the Holy Spirit**

*He that believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.* There are some difficulties in the exegesis of this verse, but thankfully John helps us with an explanation in the following verse.

*As the Scripture has said.* What portion of Scripture was Jesus referring to, or was he referring to Scripture as a whole? There are many texts that refer to thirsting souls (Psalm 42, Isaiah 55:1, Isaiah 44:3) but none that specifically speak of rivers of water flowing from the heart.

The reference here is to the human heart. There is a sense in which Jesus is the rock from which the water of life flows. He is of course, the source of living water. But the text speaks of it flowing from the heart of the believer. In John 4:14 he said that the water he will give *will become in him a fountain of water*.

In Nehemiah 9:20 we read *you gave your good Spirit* in the context of giving manna and water for their thirst. In Isaiah 44:3 we read *I will pour water on him who is thirsty...I will pour my spirit on your descendants*. In Ezekiel 36 the Lord says *I will give you a new*

*heart and put a new spirit within you.* So there are a number of texts linking the Holy Spirit with water in the Old Testament.

Jesus was speaking about the future when the Holy Spirit will be given to all believers. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity is of course from everlasting to everlasting. Under the old covenant he was given to various men from time to time. But in the new covenant he is given to all who believe. This is what Jesus was referring to, as John tells us. After the cross and the resurrection, when Jesus had returned to his Father in heaven, he would send the Holy Spirit to live in the hearts of all who believe in him.

Through the Holy Spirit they will bring forth much fruit. They will be like rivers of living water as they show forth the fruits of the Spirit, as they worship in the Spirit, as they serve in the strength of the Spirit. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit spoke the gospel to the rulers of Israel. Stephen being full of the Holy Spirit preached the gospel. The believer becomes, by Gods sovereign grace, a channel of abundant blessing to others. Is this a picture of you, of your life as a believer, as one who has received the Holy Spirit? Do rivers of refreshing, living water flow from your heart?

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