

LIVING WATER

John 4:11-15

At one time or another you have probably seen either a cartoon or an old western movie where a cowboy is out on the desert and the heat is beating down on him. The sun is shining brightly and you just know that it is over 100°. The cowboy may be depicted as crawling along the ground, gasping, "Water . . . water!" but there is no water in sight.

Having spent a bit of time in Arizona, we have a great appreciation for the fact that you do not go out on the desert without a sufficient supply of water. If physical, literal water is so essential to human survival, then how much more essential is spiritual, living, water that nourishes our souls. Today we will hear what Christ had to say about *Living Water*.

We will pick up right where we left off last week. If you remember, Jesus was talking to a Samaritan woman at *Jacob's Well*. The conversation began in verse 7, so let us go back there for a quick review and then carry on beginning in verse 11.

John 4:7-10 ESV:

7 There came a woman of Samaria 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 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

John 4:11-15 ESV:

11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"

12 Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."

13 Jesus said to her, "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 forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to **eternal life.**"*

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

This Samaritan woman is obviously clueless at this point concerning what Jesus is talking about. How could she know at this point in their conversation that Jesus was talking

about *eternal life*? The gift that Jesus refers to in both verses 10 and 13 is *eternal life*.

In verse 10, Jesus suggests to her that there is something she needs to know but as yet does not know. In language she does not yet understand Jesus tells her that she is ignorant of two things: the gift of God (salvation) and the identity of the Savior in her presence. It is an undeserved privilege to have this gift of God offered to us and to have the opportunity of accepting it.¹ Jesus speaks of *Living Water*, the **Holy Spirit**, which is the water of life, but she thinks Jesus is referring to the regular water they draw from the well. Confusion between the physical and the spiritual was not uncommon among those Jesus spoke to. Nicodemus thought Christ was referring to physical birth when he said to Jesus: “*How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born*” (John 3:4). Even Jesus’ own disciples misinterpreted what Jesus meant by food in John 4:31–34, where we read:

31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.”
32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.”
33 So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?”
34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. (ESV)

They must have been unaccustomed to the use of **metaphors** in everyday speech. Metaphors use commonly understood phrases in a symbolic fashion in order to emphasize a point. We say such things as “*she’s as sharp as a tack*,” which means the person referred to is very smart. We also would use the expression: “*Tom is burning the candle at both ends*,” which means he is driving himself to the point of collapse. The Jews of Jesus’ day were familiar with the Old Testament scriptures that frequently used poetic language, including the use of metaphors. For instance, “*The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe*” (Proverbs 18:10 NAS). Now, the name of God is not a literal tower, but the image of being able to run into a tower gives a sense of God’s power and protection. However it seems that many of the people with whom Jesus talked took His words very literally or concretely, possibly because they did not realize His divinity. Here we see that the woman at the well shows that she is taking Christ’s words about water very literally.

Jesus is attempting to help the Samaritan woman recognize that the things of this world do not really satisfy a person’s longings. Therefore, people who do not have this gift of salvation and eternal life that Christ brings in the form of *Living Water*, the Holy Spirit, will always “*be thirsty again*.” Jesus promises that the water of life will provide a constant spring of flowing water in her heart and keep her continually satisfied. Apparently the Samaritan woman still did not have a clue as to what Jesus was talking about but whatever it was it sounded desirable, so she asked Jesus if she could have some of this water. “She imagined a constant water supply would eliminate her visits to the

¹ Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Jn 4:4.

well thus saving her a lot of work.”²

John 4:11-12 ESV:

11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?

12 Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."

She must have thought Jesus to be some kind of a nut to suggest to her that He could provide her with water from a deep well without having any method of drawing it. She could readily see that Jesus did not have a bucket. So how could He boast of being able to get any kind of water out of a deep well? She does not believe He is capable of furnishing her with any water. There are those who will trust Christ only if they can see Him, and will not believe His promise unless He makes it visible to them. They cannot believe in His ability to perform miracles and raise the dead to life unless they see it personally. They think that God is limited to the things that we know about the natural world, the things that science can explain according to the scientific method that man has established. Imagine God being limited to our methods. If that were the case, what kind of a God would He be? He would be no greater than any human being on this earth. What a scary thought that is! Can you imagine God having no more power than your neighbor or your uncle Harry or your boss? We want to know that our God is capable of all kinds of things that we cannot understand. In that way we know that Heaven will be a far better place than what we find here on earth and that God has wonders in store for us that we could not possibly even imagine.

Jesus did not need our buckets to draw water from this well or any other well. He could make water gush forth from any well, or for that matter from a rock, a tree, or a housetop. That is why He is God and we are not. The fountain of life is hidden with Christ and He has more than enough for each of us even though we cannot see it.

This woman then suggested that Jesus could not compare Himself with the Jewish patriarch, Jacob, whom she referred to as *Father*, and who had dug the well. She infers that no one is greater than Jacob and even he would have required a bucket to draw from the well. She does not think it possible that anyone could provide her with any better water than the water the patriarch Jacob provided for her. She might have been thinking, "Who does this braggart think He is?" She could not imagine that anyone could be greater or do anything that Jacob could not do. Was she in store for a surprise!

If a person, however, was familiar with the Old Testament they would know that there were a number of passages that compared the promises of God with water: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3 ESV).

Ezekiel 36:25-27 ESV:

25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your

² Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Jn 4:4.

uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

*26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.
And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart
of flesh.*

*27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my
statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

Then how about this verse from the Old Testament: “*For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants” (Isaiah 44:3 NAS). The comparison of water with the Spirit is an Old Testament concept, and the reference to *eternal life* in John 4:14 is clearly associated with the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is seen again later in John 6:63 NLT: “*The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing.*”*

So many people do not recognize this information as coming from God. They did not recognize it when Jesus walked the earth and told them directly. Many have not recognized it in every generation since the time of Christ right up to this present day. Jesus tells this woman what He would have done for her if she had only asked for it. Asking is all anyone has to do to be given salvation and eternal life through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

They simply have to ask for forgiveness of their sin and believe Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross to pay the penalty for their sin. When they do that God will by His grace give them the gift of salvation which provides eternal life in Heaven.

The gift, the *Living Water*, is the Holy Spirit of God which comes to live within them as a confirmation of their salvation and a guarantee of living forever in Heaven. The Holy Spirit also provides the recipient of this gift with all the power of God at their disposal if they ask for it and if their request is something that is within the will of God. God hears the requests (prayers) of all who have come to faith in Christ. If one prays for something that is within God’s will for the world, that prayer will be granted, but not always in the form that the person praying expects. In fact God may answer the prayer in a way that the one making the request will never know about.

Those who do not believe and accept the message brought from God by Jesus will never see Heaven. They will only see Hell and that is where they will spend their eternity. Many people who have rejected the message of Jesus and still consider themselves to be spiritual by following a religion or belief system of their own choosing, often talk about prayer and praying. They will use the same language as Christians do, telling people things such as: “*We’ll pray for you to get well,*” or “*We pray every morning for God’s guidance,*” or “*We’ll keep you in our prayers.*” I do not know whether or not they truly believe their prayers are heard and/or answered, but I can tell you that the prayers of an unbeliever simply bounce off the ceiling. The only time God will consider a prayer from one who has not accepted Christ as Savior would be if that person were asking God for something that would give them more understanding about the truth of His message. Other than that their prayers will not be heard, much less answered. How do we know

that? Because the Bible tells us so. Just listen:

James 5:16 NLT:

16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

James 1:5-8 NLT:

5 If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.

6 But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind.

7 Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

8 Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.

Matthew 6:7 NLT:

When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again.

James 4:3 NLT:

And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

Psalm 66:18 NLT:

If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

Isaiah 59:2 NLT:

It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore

John 9:31 NLT

God doesn't listen to sinners, but he is ready to hear those who worship him and do his will.

Proverbs 1: 24-28 NLT:

[God says to His people] *24 "I called you so often, but you wouldn't come. I reached out to you, but you paid no attention.*

25 You ignored my advice and rejected the correction I offered.

26 So I will laugh when you are in trouble! I will mock you when disaster overtakes you—

27 when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster engulfs you like a cyclone, and anguish and distress overwhelm you.

28 “When they cry for help, I will not answer. Though they anxiously search for me, they will not find me.

Proverbs 28:9 NLT:

God detests the prayers of a person who ignores the law.

Jeremiah 11:11-14 NLT:

11 Therefore, this is what the Lord says: I am going to bring calamity upon them, and they will not escape. Though they beg for mercy, I will not listen to their cries.

12 Then the people of Judah and Jerusalem will pray to their idols and burn incense before them. But the idols will not save them when disaster strikes!

13 Look now, people of Judah; you have as many gods as you have towns. You have as many altars of shame—altars for burning incense to your god Baal—as there are streets in Jerusalem.

14 “Pray no more for these people, Jeremiah. Do not weep or pray for them, for I will not listen to them when they cry out to me in distress.

Job 27:8-9 NLT:

8 For what hope do the godless have when God cuts them off and takes away their life?

9 Will God listen to their cry when trouble comes upon them?

Luke 18:11-14 NLT:

11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don’t cheat, I don’t sin, and I don’t commit adultery. I’m certainly not like that tax collector!

12 I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’

13 “But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’

14 I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

We hope you now have a very good understanding of the type of prayers and pray-ers that God will hear and answer. Let us now continue with John 4:13-14 ESV:

13 Jesus said to her, “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 forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Jesus now begins to explain to the woman exactly what He is talking about. This water

from Jacob's well would satisfy a person's physical thirst for a short time. But the water Jesus is referring to will provide continual satisfaction of all that a person could want or desire. In addition anyone who drinks the *Living Water* that Jesus offers will have within them a spring of life-giving water (John 7:38-39) that continually provides for them throughout eternity. This inner spring of water is far different from the water from the well, which required a great deal of hard work to get. "Jesus was speaking of the Holy Spirit who brings salvation to a person who believes and through Him (the Holy Spirit) offers salvation to others."³ Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit who accomplishes two things: He brings salvation to a person who believes in Christ and His work on the Cross, and He offers salvation to those who need to believe.

Although this woman had been somewhat sarcastic, Jesus did not give up and walk away. He was patient and gentle with her. He tells her that the *Living Water* He had to offer was far better than what she could draw from Jacob's well. He is trying to help her to understand that the things of this world are not eternal, but when one has the salvation provided by the Holy Spirit of God, one has a gift that will last forever. If one places their hope and trust in the things of this world, they may have a certain amount of enjoyment for a limited amount of time. Then they die and go Hell where they endure torment forever. If one places their trust in the water Jesus is talking about, they receive eternal life the minute they make that commitment and thus experience a joy that will last for all eternity. One would have to be a fool to trade that heavenly joy and security for hell-bent fleeting gratification, but most of the people in the world do exactly that. They reject the promise God offers through Christ for something they think will satisfy them now. But all of those people will one day die, and one second after their death they will realize the horror that they themselves have chosen for their eternity, and there is no opportunity for another chance. So if you are not saved, we would hope you give what Jesus is saying very serious consideration. You see, your decision will be your forever.

The peace and joy we all long for comes to dwell in one's heart when a person accepts Jesus as Savior. We need only pray for help in any situation and it will be provided even if we do not see the results we are specifically asking for. Consider if you will that you are single and have been asking God to bring you the right person with whom you will fall in love and who will be madly in love with you. The years go by and you date occasionally hoping that this time it will be the one you have longed for. But something always happens to end the relationship. You become discouraged. You question God, asking why He does not answer your prayer, the desire of your heart. Well, do not give up. The time may not be right for you or the other person. Perhaps God has a ministry that you can perform better as a single. Or the problem may be some form of disobedience you need to address. Perhaps you have not really taken the time to understand what it really means to be saved. Perhaps you are persisting in some form of behavior that is preventing God from answering your prayer. It would be a very good idea to take a very careful inventory of what you believe and what you are doing and then go to someone who knows and ask them to help you understand. That could be a Bible-believing pastor or a Christian counselor. Ask God to show you what you need to do and

³ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:285.

what the problem is. Instead of whining over your bad luck, get to work and find out what you need to do to place yourself within the will of God where He can answer your prayer.

Sometimes we try to satisfy our thirst with the things of this world. For many this futile search for satisfaction takes the form of the *As Soon As Disorder*. This particular disorder is very easy to diagnose. You can probably determine yourself if you have it. Here are the symptoms: When you are young you say to yourself, “*As soon as I get that bicycle I’ll be happy.*” After getting the bicycle, you think, “*As soon as I get my driver’s license I’ll be happy.*” After getting your driver’s license you think, “*As soon as I start dating I’ll be happy.*” And this pattern goes on throughout one’s life and will include such things as, “*As soon as I get married, have children, get a better job, a bigger house, get rid of the children, take those dream vacations, get an even better job, win the lottery, retire,*” and then one morning you will wake up and say to yourself, “*Even though I have had all of these things I feel an emptiness inside of me. I wonder why?*” The answer is that you do not have the Holy Spirit of God in your heart. If you want that to change, you find the change occurs as soon as you confess to God that you know you are a sinner in need of a Savior and that you believe Jesus Christ paid the penalty for your sins when He died on the cross in order to be that Savior. When you do that and you really mean it, you will begin to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit, and once He establishes residence in your heart He will never leave you (Romans 8:38, 39).

John 4:15 ESV:

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

The woman could still not understand the true meaning of what Jesus was saying, probably because she could not understand anything beyond her own material desires. Here she figures it would be a good deal to have this kind of water she did not have to work so hard to get. Maybe she thought Jesus was about to give her running water. Even though she still did not understand, Jesus continued to be patient with her.

It is true that the things of this world never completely satisfy a person. Those who sought such satisfaction from the world while they were alive are suffering in Hell today, longing for the *Living Water* that Jesus offers.

“Not long after the conversation we have been discussing, Jesus would attend the Feast of Tabernacles, the autumn harvest feast that commemorated the Israelites' sojourn in the wilderness. It was a colorful event because pilgrims came from all around the world to attend it. They came from the entire circle of the Mediterranean and from as far away as the steppes of Russia. When they arrived, they would build tiny shelters all over Jerusalem in remembrance of their wanderings for forty years. There were even construction rules for the shelters! The walls had to be constructed so as to give shelter but not shut out the sun during the day. The roofs were thatched so the stars could be seen at night. The purpose of

these rules, of course, was to remind them that they were once homeless wanderers. It was a festive event, and everyone wore his or her brightest clothes. It was considered by some to be the most festive of all the festivals. For instance, we read in Zechariah 14:16 that the prophet dreamed of a day when the whole world would come to Jerusalem and build shelters at the Feast of Tabernacles.”⁴

“The festivities featured a daily ceremony that began at the temple, where the people gathered together, then formed a processional on down to the Pool of Siloam. Alfred Edersheim, the great authority on Christ's life, tells us that as the people came, they brought palm branches and pieces of willow and cypress to make into wands that they carried in their right hands. In their left they carried a citrus fruit called a ‘paradise apple.’ The branches were meant to remind them of the desert, and the fruit was to remind them of the harvest. When all was ready, the music began, and the great throng headed down to the Pool of Siloam, shaking the branches and citrus fruit rhythmically to the music as they followed the white-clad priest carrying a golden pitcher. When they came to the Pool of Siloam, the priest dipped that pitcher with great joy and carried it back to the temple as the people continued singing and chanting Psalms. As they came to the gates of the temple, there could be heard three loud blasts from silver trumpets, and the priest would enter the temple confines to pour the water on the altar.”⁵

“It was traditionally thought at that time that to see the water poured out on the altar was the high point of a dedicated Jew's life. Some considered it the height of joy. In fact, Edersheim records that a priest by the name of Alexander Janaeus once poured the water on the floor, and there ensued such a riot that around the environs of the temple 6,000 people were killed! As they chanted the *Hallel*, the great hallelujah Psalms together, there came a pause, and at that time the water was poured out on the altar. It is at that time, according to Edersheim's calculations, that Jesus stood and cried, “If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit” (John 7:37-38). There could hardly be a more dramatic offer. It is essentially the same offer that Jesus made to the poor Samaritan woman. And it is an offer to us today — the offer of the Holy Spirit. The conditions upon which we may receive Christ's offer are twofold. First, we must thirst, then we must ask.”⁶

“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water’ (John 4:10). And the woman did ask. The woman said to him, ‘*Sir, give me this*

⁴ *Preaching the Word*, John 4:15.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water' (John 4:15). At that point a process began that would end in her salvation. How about you? Are the delights that you pursue satisfying for a short time and then gone? Or is your life a well of *Living Water*, springing up within you, streaming up to eternal life, so that you will never thirst again? If you are thirsting, why not ask for that spiritual water? Jesus always keeps his word.”⁷

Come to His fountain and drink the *Living Water* today.

⁷ Ibid.