

Living Water

Without water, we die. It is that simple. This fact is most obvious in the hotter, drier countries of the world, but it applies to each one of us. To some, it is a scarce resource, difficult to find and collected with much effort. To others, it is plentiful and may be taken for granted. But to every man, woman and child on the planet, it is vital to life.

This is why Jesus' words in John chapter 4 had such an impact, and why they still matter today. He spoke about the very source of life – not just life today, but eternal life. He was passing through Samaria, in the middle of Israel, when he met a woman by a well. This was not unusual, as one would expect to meet others at the water sources in the Middle East.

He asked the woman for a drink of water, and at first she questioned him. It was unusual that Jesus (a Jew) would talk to a Samaritan woman, as there was no love lost between the two races. However, this was typical of Jesus: his message was for everyone and he spoke to any who would listen; the same applies to his message today. In fact, he immediately lifted the level of the conversation:

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water" (John 4:10).

Practical and Spiritual Pictures

Her immediate reaction was a practical one. Jesus had nothing with which

to draw water from the well – how was he going to give water to her? She had missed the point, and we can easily do so too, especially reading the account in English.

In verses 11 and 12, the woman uses a word for 'well' which means 'a hole in the ground' in the original language of the gospels. That was all she was thinking about. On the other hand, in verse 6 and in verse 14, where Jesus refers to the well, he uses a word which means a 'gushing fountain or spring'. This distinction is even more interesting when we consider the Old Testament, where the word for 'running water' is literally 'living water'.

Perhaps now we can see the word-play being used – Jesus was talking about 'living water' both in the practical case of the spring they were visiting and in terms of eternal life. Just like the woman, we too can miss the point, and indeed miss the living water itself.

Jesus explained what he meant:

Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life (v13-14).

Accepting in Humility

Jesus was, and still is, offering eternal life – a life of unending perfection. It is unsurprising that the woman immediately asked him to give her this water. She still did not quite understand the full meaning of Jesus' words:

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw” (v15).

Jesus didn't reprimand her for this, he accepted her humble desire to take what he was offering. He showed that he was from God, by telling her all about her own marital situation. Then he gently explained that he was showing her the need to worship God in the right way.

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him (v23).

He explained to her that he is the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed of God. She took him at his word, believed, and went off to tell her friends and family from the village. They also came to listen to Jesus, and they believed him too. They said:

Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world (v42).

This is a vital lesson for us too: to listen to what Jesus has to say, in the pages of our Bibles; to believe him; to respond in humility, accepting that we need the life he offers; and to share that message with those with whom we come into contact.

Looking to the Future

This picture of living waters, and their source, is one we find first in the Old Testament. Back in Jeremiah 2:13, God describes Himself as “*the foun-*



tain of living waters”. The Creator of everything is the source and the maintainer of life, both present and eternal.

In the Book of Revelation, we read about the establishment of God's kingdom, with now familiar words:

I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts (Revelation 21:6).

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22:1).

These are marvellous promises of living for ever in a world of life, light and love, ruled by the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's accept the invitation:

Let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17).

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