

Gospel of John chapter 4, verses 4 – 42 – The Woman at the Well – Life-giving Water:-

There are a number of ‘themes’ running through the reading this week; enough for three or four sermons! In this short study we will concentrate on one where we can pick up the thread as it develops throughout scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

Remember that water is essential for life! Even more vital in the hot dry season in Israel and Palestine. The importance of water for livestock and irrigation is found throughout scripture.

Genesis chapter 2, verses 10 – 14:- When the Lord planted the garden in Eden He had already provided water “*flowing out of Eden to water the garden. . .*” (Genesis chapter 2, verse 10). At this point everything needed for life was provided by the Lord God until man was driven out of the garden of Eden. Although water from the rivers would still be available, the ‘spiritual’ water of daily communion with the Lord God was discontinued. Humankind had lost their right to eternal life with the Lord.

God given Springs:- There are a number of examples of the Lord God caring for, and providing for, peoples and individuals. For example Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis chapter 21; the Children of Israel at Meribah in the desert, Exodus chapter 17 and Samson in Judges chapter 15, verses 18 – 19.

Ezekiel chapter 47, verses 1 – 12:- As part of the vision of the future restoration of the Temple, Ezekiel speaks of the ‘River of the Water of Life’ depicted as flowing from the altar area of the Temple growing deeper and deeper as it flows out into the desert where it gives new life “*so everything will live where the river goes. . . .*” (Ezekiel chapter 47, verse 9). Even the Dead Sea becomes fresh when the water of life enters it. Note that the trees, drawing on the life giving water, provide food and healing (verse 12).

Revelation chapter 22, verses 1 – 2:- Picks up on the vision seen by Ezekiel. “*on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*”

With this background we can look at the theme of ‘life giving water’ in the Gospel of John.

Read Gospel of John chapter 4 verses 4 – 15. Sychar is an ancient site near the present town of Nablus on the West Bank. The reference to Jacob can be found in Genesis chapter 33, verses 18 – 20. The well is reputed to be some 41 meters (135 feet) deep with about 3 – 4 meters of water. Note that the well itself acts as a ‘cistern’ with water seeping in from the limestone bedrock. This is ‘dead water’ which can become stagnant: contrasts with ‘living water’ bubbling up fresh from a spring. The Lord Jesus uses a simple request “*Give me a drink.*” Again the Lord is ‘counter-cultural’, ignoring the social mores of the time and simply speaking as a needy human being. The following teaching of the Lord Jesus is spiritual, using simple earthly examples (as He did with Nicodemus last week). That the woman is still thinking on earthly lines is shown in her reply – verse 15.

Read Gospel of John chapter 7, verses 37 – 39:- This is the heart of the teaching on ‘Living Water’. Note that here, as in the fresh water bubbling up in a spring, there is a continuous infilling which is expected to overflow in outreach to others. The Holy Spirit is given for ‘mission’ not just as a ‘feel good’ factor!

As an example of the preaching of the Gospel and the out-flowing of the Holy Spirit read 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, verses 1 – 10.

Finally a word for each of us this Lent –

“God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control.” 2 Timothy 1, verse 7

Praise Him

1. *I hunger and I thirst;
Jesus, my manna be;
Ye living waters, burst
Out of the rock for me.*

2. *Thou bruised and broken Bread,
My lifelong wants supply;
As living souls are fed,
O feed me, or I die.*

3. *Thou true life-giving Vine,
Let me Thy sweetness prove;
Renew my life with Thine,
Refresh my soul with love.*

4. *For still the desert lies
My thirsting soul before;
O living waters, rise
Within me evermore.*