



*He is thirsty, dying of thirst, but
the cool oasis is a mirage; the
water he sees does not exist.*

HE WILL GIVE THE WATER OF LIFE (THE HOLY
SPIRIT) FREELY TO ANYONE WHO IS *THIRSTY*
ENOUGH TO *OVERCOME* EVERY OBSTACLE THAT
STANDS IN THE WAY OF OBEYING THE GOSPEL.

—2—

“The one who is truly
thirsty will *gladly* give up his
possessions, his career, his
social status for the sake of
the treasure he has found.”

Thirsting for the Water of Life

You've probably lived all your life in towns and never been in a desert, but there is a vivid image imprinted in your mind of a man crawling across the sand towards water. He is thirsty, dying of thirst, but the cool oasis is a mirage; the water he sees does not exist. The costly waste of precious effort — only one who was truly thirsty would risk it all again at another promise of water. Would this oasis be real or another bitter disappointment?

The Woman at the well¹

So many times she had been to the well to draw water. It was part of life. Every gallon used for cooking and washing had to be fetched in heavy clay jars. So many times a day, she, like everyone else, came to get water. So much water was needed for their

animals and for themselves, for their daily existence, and yet the well had never run dry. The people had been drinking from it for many generations. Deep beneath the dry ground the water had a source that had not failed them. Without it, they could not live, and she knew better than we how precious a source of water is.

When the man at the well offered her “living water” she could only wonder where He could get better water than was in the well. She had not yet perceived that He was speaking of the spiritual realm. Then He said that the water He gave would become a spring of water that would well up in her to eternal life. Oh, what water was this? She desired more than the humdrum life of drawing water and just living. She asked Him for this water that held the promise of

life. But was she willing to pay the price?

“Go, call your husband, and come back.”

“I have no husband.”

“You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

Ohhh! That hurt! How did He know that? It seemed like He could look right into her soul. Five marriages... five disappointments... All her life she had thirsted for a covenant relationship that would fulfill something deep in her soul, but it always eluded her. She went into each marriage with such hope that it would satisfy her, but each time hope evaporated like a mirage. Finally she had given up hope, not daring to open up her heart to another man, but

just settling for mere physical pleasure as long as it lasted. But it troubled her conscience, and this man saw right through her outward composure. She struggled to overcome the urge to just run away. But obviously this man was a prophet, a man of God. Maybe He could answer some of her nagging questions...

“How is it that we worship according to the faith of our fathers, but you Jews say that God doesn’t accept our worship or hear our prayers?”

That question had never come to rest in her. She had tried to fill up her soul with many things, but still she was empty. Nothing had satisfied her. She was still thirsty, and the offer of “living water” that would well up like a spring within her was very appealing, and she was willing to face the

shame of her sin and the futility of her life in order to receive that living water.

The Bible does not say much more about this woman’s life beyond the fact that she excitedly told everyone in her village that she had met the Messiah and how He had told her “everything she ever did.” The effect this had on them was amazing, considering two undeniable facts: 1) Small villages being what they are, everyone knew very well what this woman’s life was like, and what “everything she ever did” entailed; and 2) Most people would not want anyone to tell them everything *they* ever did. But evidently there were many thirsty people in that village, for they overcame the natural urge to keep the walls up around their hurting souls and they compelled the Master to stay there and teach them, and it

says that many believed in Him.

Living water

What is this “living water” that the Master offered to the woman at the well? Is it available to just anyone? How does one receive it? And how do you know that you have it? These are vital² questions. You may be surprised at some of the answers that are found in the Scriptures, which are not the traditional answers you may have heard in church.

The first question is answered very clearly a few chapters later in the gospel according to John:

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture

says, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7: 37-39)

So “living water” is the Holy Spirit, right? That’s not so surprising. You may have been told that you already have this *living water*, if ever you said the “sinner’s prayer” and asked Jesus into your heart. After all, the Holy Spirit, like salvation, is a free gift, right?

The Holy Spirit is given freely, but who is He given to? To understand this, you must look more

closely at the Master’s words. He said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.” So you have to be *thirsty*, truly longing for spiritual life that you don’t yet have (for the Master told the woman that whoever drinks of this water will never thirst again).

Coming to Him

And then you have to *come to Him*. Where is He? Now you may think this means you just need to “draw near to Him in your heart” or something like that, since, after all, He is literally in heaven right now so you can’t physically go to Him, right? Wrong! Another time, the Master said:



“Our Master said, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.’ So you have to be thirsty, truly longing for spiritual life that you don’t yet have.”

He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also...
(John 12:25-26)

The first sentence describes someone who is *thirsty*, not satisfied with his life in this world. Then it says that someone like that who desires to serve Him must serve *where He is*. Where is He? He is where His Body is — where His disciples are living together in unity, in community. That's where eternal life is.³ Now there is a lot written about this elsewhere in this paper,⁴ which I will not go into here. But suffice it to say that nowhere in the New Testament is there a single example of a person getting saved or receiving the Holy Spirit apart from receiving a flesh-and-blood disciple (sent from a community of disciples) who preached the good news to him.⁵ The notion that a person can pick up a tract on a park bench and say the “sinner’s prayer” and ask Jesus into his heart, all by himself, is totally foreign to the Word of God.

“Nowhere in the New Testament is there a single example of a person getting saved or receiving the Holy Spirit apart from receiving a flesh-and-blood disciple.”



What it means to drink

So in order to receive the water of life, you must be *thirsty*, and you must *come to Him*, and then you must *drink*. What then does it mean to *drink*? The thirsty man in the desert gives all his strength to get to the oasis he sees in the distance, but if it is only a mirage, his effort is wasted — he cannot drink. But what if it is real? What will he do then? With great joy he would immerse himself in that water and drink to his heart's content! He will live and not die. Can we relate this to the Master's words?

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture says, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive... (John 7:38-39)

Clearly, to *drink* is to *believe in Him*. So what does it mean to believe in Him? According to the latest statistics, approximately two billion people claim to believe in Him. Are there really two billion people on the earth who have rivers of living water flowing from their inmost being? That is about one third of the world population. But the Master said:

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. But narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

Surely those two billion "believers" are not the *few* the Master spoke of. Even if you estimated that only half of them — one billion — were really serious about their

Christian faith, could that be considered the *few*? Did you ever consider that what He meant by *believing in Him* might be fundamentally different from the popular understanding?

Believing in Him as the scripture says

Perhaps there is a hint here: "He who believes in Me *as the Scripture says*..." Most translations associate the phrase "as the Scripture says" with the words that follow it rather than the words that precede it, but remember, there was no punctuation in the original Greek manuscripts, so it is up to the translator to supply it according to the context. If the phrase "as the Scripture says" refers to what follows it, you would expect that to be a quotation or at least a paraphrase of something in the Old

Testament scriptures, but there is nothing even close. We take it as prophetic of the Master's words and the apostles' writings being recorded and preserved as the New Testament scriptures. In that light, the Master was speaking of those who *believe in Him* according to what the *Scriptures* say it means to *believe in Him*.

You see, it is entirely possible to “believe in Him” apart from salvation. For example:

Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in him. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. (John 2: 23-24)

They believed in Him, but He did not believe in them!⁶ They *believed*, but not in

the way the Scriptures say you must believe in order for Him to entrust Himself (give His Holy Spirit) to you. He only gives His Holy Spirit to those who *obey Him*.⁷

So how *do* the Scriptures say you must *believe* in Him in order to have rivers of living water flow from your inmost being? What does it mean to *drink*? The Master spoke about drinking another time, and what He said totally separated the true believers from those who only believed in their minds:

Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.

He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him... From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to leave?” But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (John 6:53-56,66-69)

What was the difference between those who left and those who stayed? Those who stayed had nowhere else to go. Oh, it's not that they couldn't have gone back to their old jobs and families. Physically they could have done that. But in their hearts they were totally identified with their Master, totally devoted to Him and dependent upon

What does it mean to drink? The thirsty man in the desert gives all his strength to get to the oasis he sees in the distance, but if it is only a mirage, his effort is wasted — he cannot drink. But what if it is real? What will he do then? With great joy he would immerse himself in that water and drink to his heart's content!



Him as their source of life. They had all left everything to follow Him⁸ — their possessions, their occupations, their causes, and even their families. They believed in Him with their whole hearts, entrusting their whole lives to Him, and even when He said things that shocked them, things they couldn't understand, they trusted Him.

Here is another one of the shocking

things He said:

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple... So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.
(Luke 14:26,33)

And also:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or

daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 10:34-39)

You can water these words down all you like, but whoever does not drink them *full strength* is not really thirsty for eternal life, and will not receive the life the Master promised those who believe in Him enough to obey Him.

He who overcomes

Notice that the Master spoke of those who were not *worthy* of Him. Most Christians are not used to thinking in terms of being “worthy” of belonging to or being identified with Christ because they have

received a false understanding about the “free gift” of salvation and have revulsion toward anything that sounds like “works salvation.” Indeed, salvation *is* a free gift, but *who is it given to?* Only those who show by their obedience to the gospel that Christ is worth more to them than their own life and possessions. It *does* require effort to obtain the gift of eternal life, as is clear from these words of the Master:

And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all this, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. (Revelation 21:6-7)

He will give the water of life (the Holy Spirit) freely to anyone who is *thirsty* enough

to *overcome* every obstacle that stands in the way of obeying the gospel. That is what it means to *drink*. The one who is truly thirsty will gladly⁹ give up his possessions, his career, his social status — all that “his life in this world”¹⁰ consists of — for the sake of the treasure he has found. He will overcome the opposition of family and friends who try to dissuade him from abandoning all for the gospel’s sake. He will overcome the tugs of his own emotional attachments to the comforts, pleasures, and security of his old life, as well as the fears of being ridiculed and ostracized by his peers.

Indeed, there is much to overcome in order to obey the true gospel of the kingdom. And those who *fail* to overcome all that must be overcome in order to obey the gospel will also *fail* to inherit eternal life.

Instead, they will inherit eternal death, for that is what the very next verse says:

But the cowardly and unbelieving, the abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (Revelation 21:8)

The attributes “cowardly and unbelieving” go together, in contrast to the *courageous* believers of the previous verse who overcame all opposition in order to drink the water of life. It is not speaking of those who never heard the true gospel and therefore had no opportunity to believe

unto eternal life, but of those who *did* hear the gospel but were too cowardly to obey it. Such ones do not consider our Master worthy of surrendering their life and all they possess, and He does not consider them worthy of receiving His life. In rejecting the living water He freely offers, they make themselves worthy of leading the pack of abominable perverts, murderers, adulterers, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars who shall have their part in the lake of fire.

We sincerely hope that you are not one of them, but are instead truly thirsty for eternal life. Just as the Master offered the woman at the well, we offer to you the same

living water that has fully satisfied us.¹¹ It is not a mirage. Please come and drink! ☪

“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.” (Revelation 22:17)



Endnotes: ¹ John 4:5-43 ² *Vital* means necessary to sustain life. ³ Psalm 133:1-3 ⁴ See articles in *It Takes a Community* on our web site ⁵ Matthew 10:40; John 13:20 ⁶ The word translated *believe* in verse 23 is the same as the word translated *entrust* in verse 24. ⁷ Acts 5:32 ⁸ Mark 10:28 ⁹ Matthew 13:44 ¹⁰ John 12:25 ¹¹ John 4:13-14