

Is your soul thirsty? Are you feeling spiritually dry and in need of God's filling you up? I know that I've gone through times recently when I felt like I was running on empty, and it's an odd feeling. I recognise that spiritual thirst and need for God to fill me with His spirit. I don't feel unwell or depressed, but life feels like a routine when preparing for services or going about my ministry becomes something I do automatically, without too much excitement or expectation. Have any of you seen the film *Groundhog Day* when the main character in the film lives the same day over and over again? When I am spiritually thirsty, it's like *Groundhog Day* when I'm living each day by going through the motions. And I know that some of you have experiences the same thing recently. So when I ask is your soul thirsty I know some of you are inwardly yelling, Yes! So this sermon is for you.

If you lived in Palestine in biblical times, thirst would be a very real concept to you because it's a desert country. It's no wonder that the hell discusses in the Bible is a hot and dry place, which heaven is described as a cool place with refreshing streams of water. The Bible was written in an era without air conditioning or refrigeration, or even the change of seasons that we experience in the northern hemisphere. The Israel or Palestine of Biblical times was a hot, dry, desolate land in places. People knew how it felt to be thirsty, and they were thirsty both physically and spiritually.

They would have known what Jesus meant when He said: *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*. That's why they were delighted when they heard Jesus say that they could take the most sordid deserts of their lives to him, and find streams of living water. The prophet Isaiah wrote that: *The burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water*, and it took Christ to bring these springs of water to life.

For instance, consider the story of the woman at the well from chapter four of John's gospel. Jesus was passing through Samaria when He came upon the small town of Sychar. This was a primitive town and there was no plumbing, no aqueducts or running water. The only source of water was the town's well and each day the women of Sychar would come to the well to draw water, and among them was one particular woman who Jesus encountered. John in recording this meeting in his gospel, doesn't give us much information about this woman, we don't know her age or what her physical attributes were. This woman came to the well one day not realizing that it would be a crucial day that would change her life forever.

When you got up this morning and got ready to come to church, brushed your teeth and got dressed, it would have been a matter of routine. Chances are you came to worship this morning with no expectations that this would be a crucial day, a day that may change your life. But you never know what you may experience if God chose today to have an encounter with you.

Jesus met this woman at the well and asked her for a drink, which was a natural request given that He had walked a great distance and he was hot, dusty and thirsty. She was suspicious of Jesus' request because He was a Jew. We're not told how she knew Jesus was Jewish but she knew and this raised her suspicions. *How is it she asked that you a Jew, ask me for a drink, me being a woman from Samaria?* People can get caught up about their religion even to the point of hating those of other religions, often for no other reason that they are different. The Jews and Samaritan hated each other to the extent that they wouldn't even speak. Is there no limit to how extreme people can become over religion or denomination? Both in biblical times and the present day!

You may have heard the story about one particularly grumpy man. His wife tried everything she could to please him.

One morning he got up and came grumbling as usual to the breakfast table. *Good morning dear, what would you like for breakfast*, his wife asked him. Two eggs he replied sourly. *And how would you like them cooked*, she asked. *One fried and the other scrambled* he replied. And she very carefully prepared one perfect fried egg and one perfect scrambled egg. *Humph* he said as she put the eggs in front of him. *As I expected, you scrambled the wrong one!*

You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink? Jesus didn't bother to point out how childish the woman's question was. He did answer profoundly, however: ***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.*** The woman was perplexed and answered; *Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself?* Jesus answered her: *Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.* The woman did not completely understand but she realised she was being made the offer of a lifetime. *Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.* This woman's encounter with Jesus brought her to a place where she was able to express the same truth as the writer of **Psalm 16: *Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup, you make my lot secure.***

Are any of us feeling a thirsting in our soul? Is suspect that there is and I can tell you that each of us can drink for these streams of living water today. Is there anything in our lives that has become a barrier to God's presence? When the woman at the well of Sychar told Jesus that she wanted living water, Jesus put her on the spot: *Go and call your husband and come back.* The woman replied; *I have no husband.* Jesus said to her:

You are right in saying you have no husband for you've had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. You have spoken the truth.

Jesus appreciated her honesty because He knew she was promiscuous. She was going to have to change her lifestyle before she could drink fully of those waters. Sin is like a stopper in the neck of a bottle preventing God's living streams from pouring in, and it may be that there is something in our lives that's keeping us from being all we could be in Christ. Through prayer, God can help us come to grips with blockages in our lives and with God's grace, conquer and overcome these issues.

We should each consider our relationship with God. The woman at the well perceived that Jesus was someone special: *Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you (referring to the Jewish Orthodox religion) say that Jerusalem is the place where we must worship*. She'd been told that there was a holy mountain where God lived, but the Jews taught that the temple in Jerusalem was the only place where God could be truly worshipped.

She didn't fully understand and so Jesus told her: *Woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. Yet a time is coming and has now come when true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth. **We don't need to visit any mountain or temple to experience God's presence because God is Spirit. God is like the air we breathe and there is nowhere that He is not!***

Some make the mistake of restricting God to a certain mountain or temple, lots of people believe that God only lives in certain buildings which they call church! Perhaps people get confused when they call the church the *house of God* and take this literally. They come to worship, sing hymns and praise songs, listen to the message and after the benediction, they leave church and leave God behind as well.

Please don't misunderstand me, it's not as if such people go out and deliberately commit sins, because they are good and decent people. But the tragedy is people like this are living in a desert, when they could be living beside streams of living water. If they would perceive God's presence at home, at work and in every area of their lives, just as they perceive Him in that hour of worship, what an amazing difference that could make to their lives. May we come to grips with the blockages in our lives, and come to grips with our relationship with God, because He wants to be our daily companion, our dependable guide and our strong right arm!

Should anyone gathered here find yourself relating to being in a spiritual desert and in need of God's living water, please allow us to pray for and with you at the end of this service. There will be people at the front after the service who will be willing to pray with you. The offer is there! And may we allow God to lead us all to find those streams of living water. *Amen.*

(1703 words)