

LESSON 287

LIVING WATER

Related Scripture: Psalm 42

KEY VERSE: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."—Revelation 22:17.

Lesson Scripture: John 4:6-19

Introduction:

Water is one of the symbols used in the Bible to represent spiritual life, especially the Holy Spirit. (Jn. 7:37-39.) Also it may represent the spiritual life-giving and cleansing message of the word of God. (Jn. 6:63; 15:3; Eph. 5:26; etc.)

This lesson is taken from the account of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, when Jesus used the everyday realities of natural thirst and natural water as an occasion for spiritual instruction.

Scripture included in the lesson can be outlined as follows:

1. Literal Water, John 4:6-9
 - a. Filling for flesh, 6-8
 - b. Figure for faith, 9
2. Living Water, John 4:10-12
 - a. Divine gift, 10
 - b. Divine greatness, 11, 12
3. Lasting Water, John 4:13-15
 - a. Earthly limitations, 13
 - b. Everlasting life, 14
 - c. Evasive levity, 15
4. Lustral Water, John 4:16-19
 - a. Conviction of sin, 16-18
 - b. Confession of sin, 19

Notes on the Printed Text:

Literal Water, John 4:6-9.

Water in the literal sense is essential to natural life in this world. Private feuds and national wars have been fought for the control of available supplies of water. Our Creator has provided an abundance of pure water in nature, but human pollution has made most of it unfit to use. For a spiritual application beyond our present lesson, see Ezekiel 34:17-31.

Filling for Flesh, 6-8.

Some 90 percent of the human body is water. Fleshly life cannot survive more than a few days without some intake of water, as compared with many weeks or even months without solid food. Now, Jesus had the same human needs as any other man, for He was perfectly human: He got tired and needed to rest; He got thirsty and needed to drink.

Figure for Faith, 9.

Yet the woman's spiritual need was far greater than Jesus' natural need, and it was her spiritual need that had brought Jesus that way, as it appears from verse 4. This was not the time, however, for either religious or racial argument: questions of divine purpose and of racial prejudice could wait. What she needed was the faith to see in the water she was handling the figure of spiritual water of everlasting life.

Living Water, John 4:10-12.

Natural water does not impart life; it has no life of its own, but is used by life already existing. The living water of which Jesus spoke is life itself, bringing life to the dead.

Divine Gift, 10.

We need to insist that life is the gift of God. Natural water may or may not be free; under conditions of civilization it may become rather expensive. But men cannot control or monopolize the water of life: it is a divine gift to be had for the asking, provided only that we ask in faith.

Divine Greatness, 11, 12.

"Art thou greater than our father Jacob?" asked the woman, proving the point Jesus had just made. She did not know Who it was that had asked her for a drink. Of course He was greater than Jacob. Of course God is greater than any of His creatures, greater than all of them put together. But she did not know God, and so she knew nothing about living water.

Lasting Water, John 4:13-15.

By some means the woman must be brought to a spiritual understanding of spiritual things. I suppose that if He had so pleased Jesus could have pointed a finger, waved a hand, or spoken a single word to give the woman a new life; but instead He kept on preaching to her. I suppose that if He wished to do so God could save any lost sinner without the preaching of His word, but there is no indication in the scripture that He ever does; rather, "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." (I Cor. 1:21.) The living water is lasting water, and it flows through the channels of His word.

Earthly Limitations, 13.

Patently explaining the unexplainable, Jesus pointed out the earthly limitations of natural life and natural water. The human body daily requires a fresh supply of water; we thirst and drink, and thirst again.

Everlasting Life, 14.

Though natural water cannot impart life to a dead body, living water can impart life to a dead soul. This life is everlasting life: the soul that receives this life can never die, and so in this sense shall never thirst as it did before. The believer has in himself a well or spring of water of everlasting life.

Evasive Levity, 15.

One way that sinners try to evade uncomfortable truth is to make light of it. By this time the woman knew that Jesus was speaking of spiritual life, something she did not have; so she resorted to a rather weak joke.

Lustral Water, John 4:16-19.

Water is a lustral, cleansing, or purifying agent. A most vital use of natural water is internal and external cleansing. So living water is lustral water, purifying the soul. The new birth is "the washing of regeneration." (Titus 3:5.)

Conviction of Sin, 16-18.

Usually when a sinner raises doctrinal objections of a frivolous sort, trying to make a joke of religion, the real difficulty is not so much in his understanding as in his conscience. He does not wish to be disturbed in his sins. So it was with this woman. But Jesus knew that the trouble with sinners is sin. She must be convicted before she could be cleansed.

Conviction by conscience is not enough, but it is a necessary part of the salvation experience. We are responsible creatures, and will not accept cleansing until we feel dirty; we will not seek forgiveness until we face the fact that we are sinners.

Confession of Sin, 19.

In effect, when the woman said "I perceive that thou art a prophet" she confessed that He had told her the truth about her sins. When she confessed herself a sinner, she proved herself to be the kind of person that Jesus came to save. She still needed further instruction; she still needed to hear that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Savior; but she was ready now for the gospel. Though our lesson scripture ends here, we have gone far enough to anticipate the result.

Key Verse:

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."—Revelation 22:17.

In the power of the Holy Spirit the bride, the New Testament church, leads in proclaiming the invitation. But anyone who hears it is commanded to join in the invitation, "Come!" And anyone who is thirsty is told to come. Anyone who is willing is told to "take the water of life freely." There is here no promise to those that are not thirsty, to those that will not.