

The River Of God

By Stephen C. Kanski

In Israel during the time of Christ, one week each year, the Jews celebrated an eight-day holiday called The Feast Of Tabernacles. Tens of thousands of Jews from all over the surrounding regions traveled to Jerusalem to attend the festivities. The seventh chapter of the gospel of John describes one such feast that Jesus, Himself, attended. On the last day of the feast, (called “the great day of the feast” (John 7:37), Jesus stood up in the midst of the crowd and cried out:

If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. John 7:37-38.

The following verse, verse 39, explains what Jesus was referring to:

But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive

In this passage Jesus described the Holy Spirit as “rivers of living water” that would flow out of the belly (i.e. the innermost being) of those who believed on Him. This passage is reminiscent of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman as described in John, chapter four:

5 Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.

6 Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.

7 There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.

8 (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)

9 Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

11 The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?

12 Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?

13 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst

again:

14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

Both scriptural passages we just read refer to the same experience, that of the presence of the indwelling Spirit of God in the heart of the believer. In both passages, the Spirit is likened to living water. We see that this water is able to quench spiritual thirst so that the partaker thereof would never thirst again. This is more than a wonderful metaphor, but a tangible spiritual reality that Christian believers have available to them.

As believers in Christ, we are provided with access to the crystal-clear river of God, which is none other than the Spirit of the living God. There is nothing in all the universe that is as valuable as this, and nothing in all God's creation can be compared to it. As physical water provides our earthly bodies with essential hydration and nourishment, drinking of this spiritual water provides our spirits with spiritual nourishment that quenches the innermost desires of our soul and imparts to us eternal life.

This gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit is offered to all who will believe on Christ. We see God's offer described in Revelation 22:17:

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.

The revelation of the nature of the Holy Spirit is not exclusive to the New Testament. In Psalm 46:4, we see this passage:

There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.

Again, in the book of the prophet Isaiah we see:

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Isaiah 55:1.

In this passage, the concept of obtaining water from God to quench one's spiritual thirst is, once again, described. The terms "without money" and "without price" show that the gift of the indwelling Spirit of God is freely given by God and cannot be purchased with earthly things such as money, gold, or good works. Only the blood of Christ can, and indeed, has already, purchased this precious gift for us. The promise of the indwelling Spirit is given to all as described by the apostle Peter in Acts 2:38-39:

*38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.
39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*

We said it earlier, but it bears repeating: this concept of the Holy Spirit as living water is not simply a nice metaphor, but a very real and tangible reality of what takes place in the life of the Christian believer. The Holy Spirit takes up residence in the believer's spirit and provides streams of life-giving water that is essential to spiritual health and imparts eternal life.

We saw earlier that this gift cannot be purchased with perishable things such as money. Neither can we earn it by doing good works or obeying a set of rules or commandments. This is illustrated throughout the New Testament, where Jesus and His apostles frequently repeat that works cannot earn us God's goodness. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ, I refer to the very familiar passage in Ephesians 2, 8-10:

*8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:
9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.
10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus*

Same with the gift of the indwelling Spirit. It is a major insult to God that we would think that we should be able to obtain this gift by any other means than faith in the shed blood of Christ.

So, having obtained the Spirit, we should obey the admonitions of scripture:

*Galatians 5:16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.
Galatians 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.
Ephesians 5:18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;*

We are told to "walk in the Spirit" and "be filled with the Spirit". So, from these passages, it appears that we have a part to play in obtaining this goodness the Spirit has to offer. If we are exhorted to "walk in the Spirit" and "be filled with the Spirit", then it follows that it must be possible to fail to do so. (If not, then there would be no need for the admonishments.)

We need to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, daily, to the rivers of God. It is not automatic. We have a part to play. I urge you to read the first seven verses of the fifteenth chapter of John's gospel (John 15:1-7). Jesus here admonishes us to "abide" in Him. Failure to do so results in a withering away, just as a plant withers away when deprived of moisture.