

All You Who Are Thirsty, Come and Drink

Mark Hamilton

“All You Who Are Thirsty, Come and Drink”

Isaiah 55

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Water

My dear brothers and sisters. In Scripture, the precious word of God is often likened to water, especially living or running water. If you think about it when water's still it tends to be stagnant, it tends to breed creatures and fungi, and things like that, it's not as healthy as running water. Running water is active. Just as the living word of God is active too. Of course the background to these sort of references to water as a parallel to the word of God, particularly in the Scriptures is that Israel is basically a country that's very short of water, especially as you travel further south into the wilderness of Judah. Having been to Israel and stayed at Jerusalem, this really brought home to us just how dry the places is as compared with our beautiful green country with generally speaking abundant waters.

Jerusalem has historically been noted for its perennial water supply, which seems to come out of the rock, and no one really knows where it comes from, although obviously it's accumulated water, that's rainfall that's dropped down on the mountains, and it's percolated through the stone, and it comes out of that particular point, but appears to come out of nowhere - that's the point - and if you remember back to the original time of David when he took the city, Jebus as it was called then, and turned it into his capital city, Joab actually clambered up, it was probably pretty much a vertical face that they dropped buckets down into to get to the water supply from the spring of Gihon just outside what was then the city of Jebus, but David himself later incorporated that into the city and later still in the time of Hezekiah, which was actually contemporary with Isaiah, to a large extent, Hezekiah built that tunnel through the solid rock, and he brought all the water supplies into the city and ended them in the pool of Siloam, which, of course, is mentioned in New Testament times. But you could see how vital it was that they had that perennial spring feeding water into that pool and feeding water into the springs, that they got their water from because they don't get much rain fall as I've said, just maybe twice in the year they would get an inundation of rain, but in between times they relied upon these natural springs that seemed, as I said, to come from nowhere, they seemed to be supplied by God as it were to get their water. And we have more than one reference to this in Scripture as we know, more than one reference in Isaiah.

In fact, we go back to chapter eight of Isaiah. We have another one of these references. A very well known one. This is in the time of Ahaz, I believe, speaking of here. Isaiah chapter eight and we pick it up at verse six, where Isaiah, as it were reprimands the people under inspiration,

“inasmuch as these people refuse the waters of Shiloah [or Siloam] that flow softly,”

talking about Jerusalem’s water supply again

“Now therefore, behold, the Lord brings up over them the waters of the River, strong and mighty — the king of Assyria and all his glory; he will go up over all his channels and go over all his banks. He will pass through Judah, he will overflow and pass over, he will reach up to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings will fill the breadth of Your land, O Immanuel.”

this is obviously a prophecy of Assyrians coming against Israel in the days of Hezekiah, taking all the fortified cities with the one exception of Jerusalem, reaching up to the neck, the head is Jerusalem. But God of course, delivered them from that invasion when he sent his angel to kill a hundred and eighty-six thousand soldiers in the camp of the Assyrians. But we see how the waters of Jerusalem are likened to the message that God was providing, which if they listened to, they could be delivered from these disasters that were to come upon them.

Well, just as they had free will in the days of Isaiah to *listen* to the message or to *ignore* the message of God. So too today we have free will to respond to the knowledge of the gospel, the message of the gospel, or we could ignore it, it’s entirely up to us, isn’t it? And sadly, we live in a society that largely rejects, even scorns the call of the gospel. And this reminds me of some words in Proverbs Chapter one, where we have wisdom personified as a woman speaking. It’s Proverbs chapter one and picking up at verse twenty

“Wisdom calls aloud outside; she raises her voice in the open squares.”

A bit like the call in Isaiah 55.

“She cries out in the chief concourses, at the openings of the gates in the city she speaks her words: “How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge. Turn at my rebuke; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.”

like those waters being poured out in that pool of Siloam

“Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, when your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. “Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. Because they hated knowledge”

Call to Our Society

That could be spoken against our society, couldn't it? It's really willfully ignorant of the fact that God has spoken, that he is the Creator, that he has a purpose and He's working out and He *is* going to bring his judgments on this world in the near future. And then they're gonna want to seek him aren't they, and then it might be too late, sadly. But God is still appealing to us, and He was still appealing to Israel, in the later chapters of Isaiah, as we have just read, fifty-five, of course it's much later on than chapter eight, but God is still appealing there to Israel to respond to His calling, to the message that He's given through his prophets. Let's just re-read the first three verses of Isaiah fifty-five

"Ho. Everyone who thirsts come to the waters, and you have no money, come buy and eat. Yes, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why did you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me and eat what is good and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to me hear and your soul live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you. The sure mercies of David."

What an offer God made to Israel. What an offer He continues to hold out to us. But of course we have responded, haven't we? To the call of the Gospel, we have desired the living waters of God's word to take them in and to transform our thinking. Water, of course, on the natural plane is absolutely essential to life. And a hot day like yesterday just reminds us of that, we have to keep drinking, don't we, keep the fluids going? Actually, our bodies are eighty percent water, so you can see why it's so important for us to keep our liquid levels up. But just as water on the natural plane is essential, so it's equally vital if we're going to develop spiritually, for us to take in the living waters of God's word. And that, of course, today only comes to us through the Scriptures. And then, of course, there's something for everyone is this chapter points out. There's milk for the babe in Christ, and there's wine for the more mature. The hope of the gospel is absolutely priceless. And yet God has offered it without money and without price, how can we price something that speaks of eternity, that involves eternal salvation, a place in the eternal purpose of God? How can you put a price on that? And yet it seems to me, dear brother and sisters, that although we desire the word of God, we desire to spend our time doing the things of God, the works of God in our lives, yet so much of our lives seem to be just the humdrum day-to-day demands of our day-to-day living, don't they? And we're often distracted, we might think, by those demands of the daily round, and we even can find it hard to find time to read the word of God, I must admit, other than the daily readings and reading for addresses, I do find it hard to find time to read some of the things I'd like to read. I take certain magazines, and I never seem to get time to read them thoroughly.

But actually, when you think about it, it's through the day-to-day demands of our lives: the tests and trials, trials of our patience and endurance and so on, that come from the demands of our lives, it's that experience that actually teaches us how to put into practise the knowledge that we get from the word of God. Because true wisdom isn't just knowledge. It's not just head-knowledge, not just a knowledge of the fundamentals of the truth. True wisdom is learning to put into practise those things that we learn. True wisdom is actually the ability to rightly apply knowledge it's not just knowledge itself. And you can't learn

that, can you can't just teach that to somebody through rote learning, it's something have to learn through the experience of life, sometimes you have to learn by your mistakes.

There's also a truth that human nature is such that it's often when we're deprived of something, that we desire it most. And in this connection we can bring in one of the Psalms, (Psalms sixty-three), where we have David meditating really, upon his situation, he's in the wilderness of Judah. He's fleeing from Saul, he's cut off from the opportunity to engage in formal worship at the Tabernacle, he can't offer sacrifices like he might have done regularly otherwise, he can't go and worship at the place where all Israel were worshipping, and David is feeling it. So Psalm sixty-three, you see the heading there, a Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

"Oh, God, you are my God. Early will I seek you, my soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for you in the Sanctuary to see your power and your glory."

Yes, he's feeling the thirst, and the deprivation of the wildness of Judah, but David as we know, had a spiritual mind, and he looks to put things on a spiritual plane, and he's *actually* thirsting for the things of God and the things he was missing in relation to God in his Sanctuary.

"Because your loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise you. Thus I will bless you while I live. I will lift up my hands in your name. My soul shall be satisfied. As with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise you with joyful lips. When I remember you on my bed, I meditate on you in the night-watches, because you have been my help, therefore, in the shadow of your wings, I will rejoice."

David Meditated on God

Yes. David was able to comfort himself through meditation on the things that he learned in the past, at God's Sanctuary, where God's word was recited and read out, and now he was able to use that knowledge and meditate on it when deprived of that opportunity to make direct contact with the word of God, and he comforts himself with the knowledge of the things of God.

I suppose it is to true, dear brothers and sisters that we all at times feel alienated from God because of our sins, if we're really honest about it, and David again can give us some guidance on how to deal with that problem. This is Psalm forty-two, reading from verse one

"as the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for you oh God! My soul thirsts for God, for the living god. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night While they continually say to me 'where is your god?' When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me for I used to go with the multitude. I went with him to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast. Why are you cast down in my soul? And why you disquieted within me? Hope in God for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance."

verse eight:

“The Lord will command his loving kindness in the daytime and in the night his song shall be with me. A prayer to the God of my life. I will say to God my rock: Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go morning because of the oppression of the enemy. As with a breaking of my bones my enemies reproach me, while they say to me all day long: ‘where is your god?’ Why are you cost down oh my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God for I shall praise him, the help of my countenance and my God”

So we see David comforting himself as he turns his mind to the great hope that God has given him and he prays to God against the feeling I suppose, of depression, the feeling that he was being persecuted, perhaps even that he’d sinned in some way. So David says the answer is prayer and trust in God. If others criticise us, misunderstand us, even persecute us and falsely accuse us. It doesn’t matter. God is our judge, and He will vindicate and deliver us.

Going back to Isaiah fifty-five, we’re exhorted in verse three to

“incline our ear and come to God, hear and your soul shall live”

If we truly desire the milk of the word as Peter puts it in his epistle, to grow thereby in wisdom and spiritual strength, God says your soul “shall live”, and even “delight itself in abundance” end of verse two, it says in the AV “delight itself in fatness”, we can even get reserves of spiritual strength of supporter us when trials and tests and challenges in our lives come along by recourse to the word of God and to prayer.

Listening to God’s word develops faith as it’s written in the scriptures.

“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God”

and Christ himself pronounces a special blessing upon those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, after *God’s* righteousness. I’m thinking now, Matthew chapter five and the Beatitudes, he says:

“Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled.”

How shall they be filled? Because, as it goes on to explain in Isaiah fifty-five, verse three,

“I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the sure mercies of David.”

That’s God’s promise to those who truly seek him. Because God has made an everlasting covenant with us, we have been offered the sure mercies of David. If you think about David’s life, David wasn’t perfect, David was a man who sometimes did make mistakes and even commit sin, he sinned when he numbered the people, and he certainly sinned, we might say criminally, when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then killed her husband. And yet David was forgiven even those gross sins, because of his extreme penitence, and because of his otherwise strong faith and his life of good character. Perhaps we can see ourselves like him, but not committing crimes quite as bad as that, but we were sinners too aren’t we, so we can see ourselves in a similar light to David like that.

We could certainly contrast David with his predecessor Saul, who also committed crimes, committed crimes of disobedience against the commands of God, but was not forgiven. And we might ask, Why not? Why was David forgiven and his sure mercies were given out to him, but Saul was condemned. Why was that? Well, it seems to me it was because Saul did not really live the life of the faith. He was not one who meditated on the word of God as David did, and we can see that coming out in the Psalms again and again. Saul's character was not generally faithful to God, but rather he allowed power to corrupt him, he allowed his jealousy of David to turn into hatred and even to attempted murder, didn't he? And things like that. He didn't really have strong enough faith, he didn't have a life of good character with the *occasional* slip like David, but rather his life went downhill as time went on.

The Sure Mercies of David

David was promised a place in God's eternal kingdom, when he would see his greater son ruling on his throne forever. God knew David's heart and that he truly desired to know and to do God's will, so God kept his mercy for David forever. If our heart likewise is truly right before God, if we seek the knowledge of God and his righteousness on an ongoing basis, and try to develop spiritually and not go downhill like Saul. If we believe the promises of God then the sure mercies of David are ours too. It's interesting you know, this passage in Isaiah fifty-five is only quoted once in the New Testament. It's in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter thirteen and it is there applied to Christ. It's Chapter thirteen picking it up at verse thirty-two. Here is Paul preaching at Antioch in Presidia, in Asia Minor, and he says, verse thirty-two of Acts thirteen:

"we declare to you glad tidings [or the gospel] that promise which was made to the Fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children in that he raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, you are my son, today I have begotten you, and that he raised him from the dead no more to return to corruption. He's spoken this..."

and this is the quotation from Isaiah fifty-five:

"I will give you the sure mercies of David. Therefore, he says in another Psalm, Psalm sixteen, you will not allow your Holy one to see corruption. For David, after he'd served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers and saw corruption. But he whom God raised up saw no corruption. Therefore, let it be known to you brethren that through this man is preached to you..."

to us today just as much

"...to you the forgiveness of sins and by him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the Law of Moses."

Just as our Lord received the change to immortality through the sure mercies of David, we too have this hope today. Just as certain dear brothers and sisters.

Let's return to Isaiah fifty-five for one last time. There's a lot more in the chapter actually,

we'll pick it up again at verse three. Isaiah fifty-five verse three. (I know we've read these words, but let's read them again and read on in the chapter)

“incline your ear and come to me hear and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the sure mercies of David. Indeed I have given him...”

now is talking about Christ

“...as a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the people. Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, and nations who do not know you shall run to you because of the Lord your God and the Holy one of Israel, for He has glorified you.”

The Call to Us Now

Yes this is talking about the call of the Gentiles, ourselves by the grace of God included, dear brothers and sisters. We've had the opportunity to be joined to the hope of Israel as a result of the resurrection of Christ, the leader and commander of the people. He's got the kingdom to come, hasn't he when he's going to be the king of Israel, indeed the king of the world? While in the meantime, the nations, ourselves included, have been called to receive the same hope. And it's all through the sure mercies that God promised to David, and it's truly a great blessing, isn't it, that we have received. Now indeed in Christ we can seek the Lord, verse six, and call upon him, and verse seven, He will have mercy upon us and abundantly pardon.

Finally, we believe in the word of God, don't, we believe the promises of God? Let's have a look at verses ten to thirteen of this chapter:

“for as the rain comes down on the snow from heaven and do not return there, but water the earth and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth. It shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

What has God spoken? What is he said that's not going to return to him void, verse twelve:

“for you shall go out with joy and be led out with peace. The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands, instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree, and it shall be to the Lord for a Name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

Mark Hamilton