

The Springing Fountain and the Spreading Rivers

W. H. Westcott.

In John 4, the Lord spoke of supplying the one who asked of Him with living water, which should be in him a fountain (N.Tr.) of water springing up into everlasting life. I believe that all will understand this to refer to the Holy Spirit, especially when we come to read John 7: 38, 39. But it is evident that the Lord presents a new phase of the Holy Spirit's service different from the new birth spoken of in John 3. Birth lies at the commencement of life; but this is the living itself.

(1) It is descriptive of a joy based upon the knowledge of God as a Giver of blessing, not a demander of righteousness as under the law. It speaks thus of God as known in Christ, not as at Sinai; of the gospel in its great essential of grace (John 4: 10).

(2) It offers the satisfaction of every want, and the charging of the soul with such a pressure of blessing that, far from casting the soul downward, depressed and defeated and miserable, it urges it upward to boundless enjoyment, in freedom from every earthly drag, satisfied and happy in the knowledge of God (verse 14). It is the "whosoever" that drinks for whom it is all available.

(3) It fits the renewed soul, blessed in its relations with God, and with Christ, and with the Holy Spirit, to become a worshipper. Not indeed "in this mountain", nor yet "at Jerusalem", for the whole order of material things was to give place to worship "in spirit and in truth".

But the new kind of blessing puts the renewed soul in such a position that it would hear the Father's Name; and learn the mode of the Father's grace, God revealed now as Father, and seeking such to worship Him (verse 23). The Holy Ghost leads to this worship, not according to the rubrics of man, nor even according to the ritual imposed so wisely and graciously in the Old Testament as typical of what was to come (but destined to disappear in Christ); but according to the holy liberty designed for all "true worshippers". It is a new kind in which the externals of religion are eclipsed and displaced by what is deeply inwrought by the Spirit, and is produced by the enjoyment and realisation of the truth (verse 24). It puts the worshipper, moreover, into present touch with the Christ of God as God's new Centre, through whom the whole of God's wondrous revelation of Himself is made, and in whom all the perplexities as well as the needs of the awakened soul are for ever resolved (verses 25, 26). Compare 2 Chronicles 9: 1-12.

The Spreading Rivers

Finally, in John 7: 37-39, the Lord makes a statement which seems designed to arrest people by its magnificence. The occasion of its utterance enhances its grandeur. It was not spoken at a time when everyone was reminded of conspicuous failure, or convinced of the weariness of a hollow show. It was the Feast of Tabernacles (verses 2, 14), the period above all periods in the Jewish Calendar when the nation was called upon to rejoice. It was the great Harvest Thanksgiving, when every heart was supposed to be brimful of joy and of gratitude to the great Giver of earthly good. It was the time when the fruits of the land had been gathered in, and when all Israel dwelt at Jerusalem in booths, in the national confession of God's great favour to them; of the deliverance from Egypt effected for them; and of the bounties His hand had lavished on them in the Holy Land (Leviticus 23: 33-43). It was earth's most favoured nation in earth's most favoured day; and the hour when, for once, had they but known Him, Jehovah Himself was there in their midst, healing, teaching, blessing. Where every day was great this was the greatest, when man might be presumed to have reached the acme of human happiness.

Was it possible that there, and at that time, one could have an unsatisfied heart, and long for a deeper communion than that best of festivals could afford?

The murmurs among the Jews, their marvel at the words of Jesus, their cavil over His works, their speculations as to who He was, the presence of officers from the Pharisees and chief priests sent to arrest Him, the strange and awful language used of the Lord as to His disappearance from their midst, and their hopeless search for Him subsequently when it would be impossible to find Him — all of which are referred to in the chapter — had made this mysterious Visitor the centre of the vast throng, the theme of every tongue.

It was when thus in their midst that Jesus looked over the people whom the best of earthly blessings had left ignorant of the Blessor who was amongst them; and knowing how unsatisfying it is to have the grandest religious celebration without a heart-knowledge of Himself, said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."

Oh, how many there are amid cathedral splendours and gorgeous religious festivals, weary and sick at heart, to whom one moment's contact with the Holy Son of God would mean ten thousand times more than all the song and vestments, the ornate building and the fragrant incense, and the crowd of so-called worshippers.

But Jesus offers the most wonderful thing to crown any and every personal blessing. We can truly say that in coming to Him our thirst is quenched, or personal need met. This He pledges indeed (verse 37). But He does more. He propounds a fulness of blessing from Himself of such sort that, instead of depending on plentiful harvests, and congenial circumstances, and one hundred wondrous earthly providences, the believer, indwelt by the Holy Ghost, would be a perpetual marvel of happiness and blessing; a man with every personal craving at rest, every affection satisfied in Christ, and perennial contributor to the scene around him; not indeed of drops of blessing few and far between, but of rivers, yea, rivers of living water. Not of mere philanthropic good, to benefit merely the bodies or the circumstances of men; but of spiritual good, living water, good for this life and for that which is to come. Rivers too which — however much may be taken from them — flow on generously for all sorts and conditions of men, night and day, in summer warmth and winter cold; the supply kept up in untiring fulness because its source is Jesus glorified. Blessing for saint, blessing for sinner, blessing for the widow, blessing for the fatherless, blessing for the poor, blessing for the needy. Always accessible, always flowing, no effort to supply the living water; for the Holy Ghost is the power that never wearies in filling the heart to overflowing with the love and glory of Christ, and in reproducing His character in us; teaching us to do good because God is good; and because we have learnt this goodness in Jesus.

They are living waters which get deeper as you go further, as in Ezekiel 47; that avail for the blossoming of a desert, or for the healing of a Dead Sea, that bring life where they go, and yield food and drink and medicine for all.

This is not for some special class, or some advanced Christian but "he that believeth on Me" is the subject of this wondrous grace.

Does the reader take it in that God intends his life — our lives — to be thus under the control of the Holy Ghost that He may fill us to infinite and abiding satisfaction of heart, overflowing upwards in worship to the Father, and outwards to the need around?

Is it not lawful for us, nay, incumbent upon us, to search out what hinders?