

Last Sunday, Brother Carl took us through John chapter three, where we read that Jesus told Nicodemus that you must be born again. Jesus explained that everyone born in the flesh must also be born of the Spirit. He told Nicodemus that God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

The clear message is that we are saved, by God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. We believe in His sacrifice on the cross, and His resurrection from the grave. But Jesus warns that salvation does not come to those who reject Him, and choose instead to live in darkness. The question then arises, "What about those who profess Jesus, but choose to live in darkness?"

I am not the judge of someone else's salvation. But as a pastor, God has placed the concern in my heart that perhaps not everyone who professes Jesus Christ as Lord, but chooses to live in darkness, has been born again. Jesus warned that not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, would enter the kingdom of heaven. Even people who prophesy, cast out demons, and do miracles in Jesus' name will hear Him say, "Depart from me, I never knew you." The bottom line is, you must be born again.

Because salvation and eternal life is the most important experience of anyone's life, I want it to be real in my life, and I want it to be real in your life. If you are a born again believer, this message should be an encouragement to you. If you have not been born again I pray the Holy Spirit will touch your heart so that you can be saved.

So that we can know, that we know, that we know we are saved, let us explore further what it means to be born again, by considering John 4:7-14.

In order to understand scripture, context is everything. If you have been a student of God's word for very long, you are probably pretty familiar with the account of the woman at the well. Most of the time sermons and bible studies deal with this passage in isolation, but what I want you to see is that the close proximity of chapters 3 and 4, tie them together contextually. In fact, these are the very next words that John records Jesus speaking, after His encounter with Nicodemus. John's gospel is a continuous story that builds with each event. Remember that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John wrote to give an account of Jesus' life and ministry. The great challenge of chapter 3 is having an adequate understanding of what it means to be born again. Jesus answered the question in chapter 3, but in chapter 4, He expounds on the concept, and it is tied directly to the idea of living water.

Living water is an analogy to help us understand the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the effects the spirit has on those who believe. Jesus says it wells up in us, and brings life. We need water to survive physically, and we need living water to survive spiritually.

My grandmother on my mother's side was dirt poor. As they say, she was so poor that she couldn't pay attention. She was so poor that when burglars broke into her home, they left her money. My grandmother was so poor that if she were alive today, she would get a g-mail account just so she could eat the spam. When we would go to the fishing hole, the ducks would throw breadcrumbs at her. She was so poor that her front door and her back door hung on the same hinge.

As a child I did not have a concept for how poor she was. I thought that this is how everybody lived, who lived in the country. I always enjoyed time spent with her. She lived on five acres of land, and grew almost all of her food. She lived in a modest shack, down in the hollow, with no air conditioning, and a pot bellied stove in the living room for heat. She had no indoor plumbing, and used an outhouse about fifty yards from the house. It was a two holer, and

we used last year's Sears Roebuck catalogue for toilet paper. Her only source of water was a hand pump just outside the kitchen door. When I got big enough to pump the water, I would bring it into the house in buckets for drinking, cooking, or filling up a number 3 washtub for baths.

When I was very young, pre-school, while on a visit, I was playing in my father's car. I could not reach the pedals, but somehow I knocked the car out of gear and the car began to roll down the hill. I had left the door open, so I jumped out, and was not hurt, but the car advanced down the incline, accelerating until it slammed into the well, lifted the concrete foundation, and broke the pipe that went down into the water.

I was relieved that I was not hurt, that the car was not badly damaged, and especially that I did not get a spanking. We left soon after, and all was right with the world as far as I was concerned. What I did not realize was the burden this placed on my grandmother, because she needed water to survive, and she had to go up a long steep hill to her nearest neighbor's house, and haul water back to her home, every day, until the well was repaired.

Like my grandmother, the Samaritan woman did what she had to do in order to survive. Every day she journeyed to the well and carried buckets of water back to her home. We are spoiled. If we want water we just turn the tap, or we will grab a bottle of water that we bought at the store to quench our thirst. But if we did not have it so easy, we would do whatever we have to do to survive. Spiritually speaking, we cannot survive without Jesus, and the living water that He provides.

Perhaps in our culture, and in our churches, we make it too easy. There are no shortages of churches from which to choose. If you don't like what you hear in one, you can always go to another. If Christian faith does not appeal to you, there are plenty of other religions and philosophies of the world. In our zeal to share the gospel, maybe we make it too simple, too easy to just walk an isle and get baptized, without there being any real change or commitment.

Before Jesus offered her living water, he asked her for a drink. In her response we see the prejudice that had developed between Jews and Samaritans over many generations. Why would you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink? Before she could receive what Jesus offered, she had to overcome her prejudice. She had to deal honestly with her life of sin.

There is darkness in everyone's life. It is the product of sin. In order to be born again that darkness has to be overcome. That is why Jesus said in chapter three that light has come into the world, but people love the darkness rather than light, because the light exposes their evil deeds. In order to embrace the light, our hearts have to be such that we are willing to let the light expose all the darkness in our souls, so that we see ourselves as we really are. Only when we are honest with God, and broken over our sin, are we ready, or able to drink the living water.

Just as physical water is necessary to sustain physical life, so is living water necessary to sustain spiritual life. Only when the soul's thirst is quenched with living water can there be eternal life. But too often a person becomes so trapped in the darkness, that they fear the light. As miserable and uncertain as their life may be, there is a certain comfort in the status quo. Even if they are just barely hanging on, they are afraid to let go in order to find relief.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." The Psalmist said, "As the deer pants for water, so my soul pants for you Lord." In order to receive what Jesus promises, a person must desire it as much as their next breath of air. He or she realizes they must drink from the living water, in order for their soul to survive.

Jesus promises that once you have this living water, that your soul will never thirst again. The living water is the Holy Spirit. God seals us with His Holy Spirit when we first come to

Christ in faith. Once the Holy Spirit has possession of your soul, you need never live in darkness again, because all of your sins have been forgiven, and covered by the sacrificed blood of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was God in the flesh, who came for the purpose of taking our sin upon His flesh. When we deal honestly with God about our sin, and seek His forgiveness, as if our lives depended on it, when we believe in Jesus, His sacrifice and resurrection from the dead, God forgives us, sets His Holy Spirit in us, and we are able to drink from living water, in this life, and the life to come. We need never thirst again.

Sometimes, people who get a taste of the living water, choose to return to the darkness. This is a real struggle for us to understand, because this living water is supposed to well up from within us, and sustain us. In some cases these are people who truly believe, but Satan traps them and tempts them to try to take away their victory and joy. Satan is relentless, and I think he gets to all of us from time to time. Others just went through the motions, but never truly drank from the living water. Whatever category you are in, the Holy Spirit can reveal it to you right now, if you are open, and willing to respond to whatever the Spirit says.

The Holy Spirit is real in my life. I want the Holy Spirit to be real in your life as well. I don't want anyone to live in doubt, or to second-guess his or her relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. I want everyone here to know, that you know, that you belong to the Lord, and you are going to live with Him in paradise, forever. If that is your desire, you can leave here this morning with confidence, and assurance.

I am one of those people with an obsessive-compulsive personality. That can be bad in some circumstances, or it can be good when channeled towards worthwhile pursuits. My changing interests have characterized my life. I tend to become obsessed with whatever captures my attention, at whatever stage of life I'm in. Some years ago, I decided to learn how to paint. After some experimentation, I read up on oil painting, purchased the tubes of oils, brushes, and other tools that I needed, read books, watched Bob Ross videos, and in the end I painted just like every other student of Bob Ross.

Debby critiqued my efforts and tried to explain that while I had reproduced a product of the techniques I had learned, I had not created any real art, because I had not produced anything that truly expressed what was in me. My current obsession is playing the blues on the electric guitar. I am in the process of learning the technique. I study timing, the cords and how to tie them together, the scales and how they fit together, and the licks and riffs that other people play, that sound cool.

While it is important to learn the technique, my goal is to be able to naturally produce what I am feeling inside. I want to be able to sing through my fingers as they manipulate the strings. I want to be able to sit in a jam session, or play along with a tape, and produce something that is original, and a reflection of me, expressed in my music. This is art, and the creative process that separates a musician from a guitar player, but it requires effort, practice, discipline and commitment.

Now let's apply this principle to the Christian life. It is important for us to learn as much about Jesus, the bible, and the Christian life as possible. I am still learning, and desire to grow in my knowledge, all the days of my life. But there is a difference in learning about Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and satisfying our thirst with living water. This too requires effort, practice, discipline, and commitment.

The living water that Jesus provides is to well up like streams that flow from deep within us. If it wells up in us, it must also find release, and flow out of us. A person, who does not have

the Spirit, cannot experience the creative work of God in being born again. Even a person who has the Spirit can choke the flow of the living water if they allow themselves to be distracted by the cares of the world, or if they fall to the temptations of the devil. But being born again is all about allowing God to do His creative work in us.

God has a will for all of our lives. He has a plan and a purpose for one each of us. Through His Holy Spirit, He shapes and molds us, blesses and gifts us, teaches us, and uses us for His glory. If you want to have victory in your life, let the living water flow. The art of being a Christian is to allow the creative process of being born again to influence and permeate every area of our lives. We allow the living water to saturate our hearts and our minds, and to feed our souls. Our goal is to let what you see be what you get, and what you get is Christ living in me, out in the open, for the entire world to see. I am not the perfect example, but if Christ lives in my, I am an example to the world.

When Christians let the living water flow, we no longer live in doubt. We have the discernment of the Holy Spirit. We have confidence in this life, and in the life to come. While the world crumbles, we live in hope, joy, and peace. Allowing the Spirit to speak through us, we have the words of life that the lost world needs to hear. Don't live in doubt. Let the living water flow.

The end of the message is the time of decision. Is that living water welling up in you? Is it looking to find expression? Is there something in your life that is choking the flow? Or perhaps there is someone here this morning who realizes now what is missing in your life. Come to Jesus won't you. It is as if He is right here with His arms open wide, calling you to come to Him, to lay all your burdens down at His feet, and receive His forgiveness, His Holy Spirit, and eternal life. This is your time. Satisfy your soul with living water.