

Thirst Relieved

by J.C. Ryle

Jesus Christ is the Fountain of living water who offers relief from spiritual thirst through simple faith.

Scripture: Psalm 17:15, Jeremiah 2:13, Luke 16:24, John 3:15-16, John 4:13-14, John 7:37-38, Acts 2:37, Acts 16:30, Romans 4:5, Hebrews 6:18

Topics: "Spiritual Thirst", "Christ as the Living Water"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the profound invitation of Jesus to those who are spiritually thirsty, urging them to come to Him for relief and satisfaction. He highlights the deep pain of spiritual thirst, which surpasses physical suffering, and the necessity of recognizing one's need for forgiveness and peace with God. Ryle explains that Christ is the source of living water, offering abundant grace and mercy to all who believe, and encourages believers to not only seek their own spiritual fulfillment but also to become vessels of blessing to others. He concludes with a call to action, urging those who feel the weight of their sins to come to Christ without delay, assuring them of His readiness to provide relief and eternal satisfaction.

Transcript

Thirst Relieved

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." John 7:37-38

The text which heads this message contains one of those mighty sayings of Christ which deserve to be printed in letters of gold. All the stars in heaven are bright and beautiful; yet even a child can see that one star excels another in glory. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God; but that heart must indeed be cold and dull which does not feel that some verses are peculiarly rich and full. Of such verses, this text is one.

In order to see the whole force and beauty of the text, we must remember the place, the time and the occasion when it comes in.

The place, then, was Jerusalem, the metropolis of Judaism, and the stronghold of priests and scribes, of Pharisees and Sadducees. The occasion was the Feast of Tabernacles, one of those great annual feasts when every Jew, if he could, went up to the temple, according to the law. The time was 'the last day of the feast', when all the ceremonies were drawing to a close, when the water drawn from the fountain of

Siloam, according to traditional custom, had been solemnly poured on the altar, and nothing remained for worshipers but to return home.

At this critical moment our Lord Jesus Christ 'stood' forward on a prominent place and spoke to the assembled crowds. I doubt not He read their hearts. He saw them going away with aching consciences and unsatisfied minds, having got nothing from their blind teachers the Pharisees and Sadducees, and carrying away nothing but a barren recollection of pompous forms. He saw and pitied them and cried aloud, like a herald, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink.' That this was all our Lord said on this memorable occasion I take leave to doubt. I suspect it is only the keynote of His address. But this, I imagine, was the first sentence that fell from His lips: 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me. If any one wants living, satisfying water, let him come unto Me.'

Let me remind my readers, in passing, that no prophet or apostle ever took on himself to use such language as this. 'Come with us,' said Moses to Hobab (Num. 10:29); 'Come to the waters,' says Isaiah (Isa. 55:1); 'Behold the Lamb,' says John the Baptist (John 1:29); 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,' says St. Paul (Acts 16:31). But no one except Jesus of Nazareth ever said, 'Come to me.' That fact is very significant. He that said, 'Come to Me,' knew and felt when He said it that He was the eternal Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world.

This great saying of our Lord's brings out three main points:

1. A case supposed. Our Lord says, 'If any man thirst.' Bodily thirst is notoriously the most painful sensation to which the frame of mortal man is liable. Read the story of the miserable sufferer in the black hole at Calcutta. Ask anyone who has traveled over desert plains under a tropical sun. Hear what any old soldier will tell you is the chief want of the wounded on a battlefield. Remember what the crews of ships lost in mid-ocean, tossed for days in boats without water, go through. Mark the dreadful words of the rich man in the parable 'Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue for I am tormented in this flame' (Luke 16:24). The testimony is unvarying. There is nothing so terrible and hard to bear as thirst.

But if bodily thirst is so painful, how much more painful is thirst of soul? Physical suffering is not the worst part of eternal punishment. It is a light thing, even in this world, compared to the suffering of the mind and inward man. To see the value of our souls and find out they are in danger of eternal ruin; to feel the burden of unforgiven sin and not to know where to turn for relief; to have a conscience sick and ill at ease and to be ignorant of the remedy; to discover that we are dying, dying daily, and yet unprepared to meet God; to have some clear view of our own guilt and wickedness, and yet to be in utter darkness about absolution; this is the highest degree of pain--the pain which drinks up soul and spirit and pierces joints and marrow! And this no doubt is the thirst of which our Lord is speaking. It is thirst after pardon, forgiveness, absolution and peace with God. It is the craving of a really awakened conscience, wanting satisfaction and not knowing where to find it, walking through dry places, and unable to get rest.

This is the thirst which the Jews felt, when Peter preached to them on the day of Pentecost. It is written that they were "pierced in their heart, and said, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37).

This is the thirst which the Philippian jailer felt, when he awoke to consciousness of his spiritual danger, and felt the earthquake making the prison reel under his feet. It is written that he 'came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"' (Acts 16:30).

This is the thirst which many of the greatest servants of God seem to have felt, when light first broke in on their minds. Augustine seeking rest among the Manichean heretics and finding none, Luther groping after truth among monks in Erfurt Monastery, John Bunyan agonizing amid doubts and conflicts in his Elstow cottage, George Whitefield groaning under self-imposed austerities, for want of clear teaching, when an undergraduate at Oxford--all have left on record their experience. I believe they all knew what our Lord meant when He spoke of 'thirst'.

And surely it is not too much to say that all of us ought to know something of this thirst, if not as much as Augustine, Luther, Bunyan or Whitefield. Living as we do in a dying world; knowing, as we must do, if we will confess it, that there is a world beyond the grave, and that after death comes the judgment; feeling, as we must do in our better moments, what poor, weak, unstable, defective creatures we all are, and how unfit to meet God; conscious as we must be in our inmost heart of hearts, that on our use of time depends our place in eternity, we ought to feel and to realize something like 'thirst', for a sense of peace with the living God. But alas, nothing proves so conclusively the fallen nature of man as the general, common want of spiritual appetite! For money, for power, for pleasure, for rank, for honor, for distinction--for all these the vast majority are now intensely thirsting. To lead forlorn hopes, to dig for gold, to storm a breach, to try to hew a way through thick-ribbed ice to the North Pole, for all these objects there is no lack of adventurers and volunteers. Fierce and unceasing is the competition for these corruptible crowns! But few indeed, by comparison, are those who thirst after eternal life. No wonder that the natural man is called in Scripture 'dead', and 'sleeping', and 'blind', and 'deaf'. No wonder that he is said to need a second birth and a new creation. There is no surer symptom of mortification in the body than the loss of all feeling. There is no more painful sign of an unhealthy state of soul than an utter absence of spiritual thirst. Woe to that man of whom the Savior can say, 'You know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked' (Rev. 3:17).

But who is there among the readers of this message that feels the burden of sin, and longs for peace with God? Who is there that really feels the words of our Prayer Book confession 'I have erred and strayed like a lost sheep, there is no health in me, I am a miserable offender'? Who is there that enters into the fullness of our communion service, and can say with truth, 'The remembrance of my sins is grievous, and the burden of them is intolerable'? You are the man that ought to thank God. A sense of sin, guilt and poverty of soul is the first stone laid by the Holy Spirit, when He builds a spiritual temple. He convinces of sin. Light was the first thing called into being in the material creation (Gen. 1:3). Light about our own state is the first work in the new creation. Thirsting soul, I say again, you are the person that ought to thank God. The kingdom of God is near you. It is not when we begin to feel good, but when we feel bad, that we take the first step towards heaven. Who taught you that you were naked? Whence came this inward light? Who opened your eyes and made you see and feel? Know this day that flesh and blood has not revealed these things unto you, but our Father which is in heaven. Universities may confer degrees, and schools may impart knowledge of all mysteries, but they cannot make men feel sin. To realize our spiritual need, and feel true spiritual thirst, is the ABC in saving Christianity.

It is a great saying of Elihu, in the book of Job 'God looks upon men, and if any say, "I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not," he will deliver his soul from death, and his life shall see the light' (Job 33:28). Let him that knows anything of spiritual 'thirst' not be ashamed. Rather let him lift up his head and begin to hope. Let him pray that God would carry on the work He has begun, and make him feel more.

2. A remedy proposed. 'If any man thirst,' says our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, 'let him come unto Me, and drink.'

There is a grand simplicity about this little sentence which cannot be too much admired. There is not a word in it of which the literal meaning is not plain to a child. Yet, simple as it appears, it is rich in spiritual meaning. Like the Koh-i-noor diamond, which you may carry between finger and thumb, it is of unspeakable value. It solves that mighty problem which all the philosophers of Greece and Rome could never solve 'How can man have peace with God?' Place it in your memory side by side with six other golden sayings of your Lord; 'I am the bread of life: he that comes to Me shall never hunger; and he that believes on Me shall never thirst.' 'I am the light of the world he that follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' 'I am the door, by Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved.' 'I am the way, the truth, and the life no man comes unto the Father but by Me.' 'Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' 'Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.' Add to these six texts the one before you today. Get the whole seven by heart. Rivet them down in your mind, and never let them go. When your feet touch the cold river, on the bed of sickness and in the hour of death, you will find these seven texts above all price (John 6:35; 8:12; 10:9; 14:6; Matt. 11:28; John 6:37).

For what is the sum and substance of these simple words? It is this. Christ is that Fountain of living water which God has graciously provided for thirsting souls. From Him, as out of the rock smitten by Moses, there flows an abundant stream for all who travel through the wilderness of this world. In Him, as our Redeemer and Substitute, crucified for our sins and raised again for our justification, there is an endless supply of all that men can need pardon, absolution, mercy, grace, peace, rest, relief, comfort and hope.

This rich provision Christ has bought for us at the price of His own precious blood. To open this wondrous fountain He suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, and bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; 2 Cor. 5:21). And now He is sealed and appointed to be the Reliever of all who are laboring and heavy laden, and the Giver of living water to all who thirst. It is His office to receive sinners. It is His pleasure to give them pardon, life and peace. And the words of the text are a proclamation He makes to all mankind 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.'

The efficacy of a medicine depends in great measure on the manner in which it is used. The best prescription of the best physician is useless if we refuse to follow the directions which accompany it. Suffer the word of exhortation, while I offer some caution and advice about the Fountain of living water.

a. He that thirsts and wants relief must come to Christ Himself. He must not be content with coming to His church and His ordinances, or to the assemblies of His people for prayer and praise. He must not stop short even at His holy table, or rest satisfied with privately opening his heart to His ordained ministers. Oh, no! He that is content with only drinking these waters 'shall thirst again' (John 4:13). He must go higher, further, much further than this. He must have personal dealings with Christ Himself all else in religion is worthless without Him. The King's palace, the attendant servants, the richly furnished house, the very banquet itself--all are nothing unless we speak with the King. His hand alone can take the burden off our backs and make us feel free. The hand of man may take the stone from the grave and show the dead; but none but Jesus can say to the dead, 'Come forth and live' (John 11:41-43). We must deal directly with Christ.

b. He that thirsts and wants relief from Christ must actually come to Him. It is not enough to wish and talk and mean and intend and resolve and hope. Hell, that dreadful reality, is truly said to be paved with good intentions. Thousands are yearly lost in this fashion, and perish miserably just outside the harbor. Meaning and intending they live; meaning and intending they die. Oh, no! We must 'arise and come!' If the prodigal son had been content with saying, 'How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I hope some day to return home,' he might have remained forever among the swine. It was when he arose and came to his father that his father ran to meet him, and said, 'Bring forth the best robe and put it on him.... Let us eat and be merry' (Luke 15:20-23). Like him, we must not only 'come to ourselves' and think, but we must actually come to the High Priest, to Christ. We must come to the Physician.

c. He that thirsts and wants to come to Christ must remember that simple faith is the one thing required. By all means let him come with a penitent, broken and contrite heart; but let him not dream of resting on that for acceptance. Faith is the only hand that can carry the living water to our lips. Faith is the hinge on which all turns in the matter of our justification. It is written again and again that 'whoever believes shall not perish, but have eternal life' (John 3:15, 16). 'To him that works not, but believes on Him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness' (Rom. 4:5). Happy is he that can lay hold on the principle laid down in that matchless hymn:

"Just as I am, without one plea,

Save that Your blood was shed for me,

And that You bid'st me come to You,

O Lamb of God, I come!"

How simple this remedy for thirst appears! But oh, how hard it is to persuade some people to receive it! Tell them to do some great thing, to mortify their bodies, to go on pilgrimage, to give all their goods to feed the poor and so to merit salvation, and they will try to do as they are bid. Tell them to throw overboard all idea of merit, working or doing, and to come to Christ as empty sinners, with nothing in their hands and, like Naaman, they are ready to turn away in disdain (2 Kings 5:12). Human nature is always the same in every age. There are still some people just like the Jews, and some like the Greeks. To the Jews, Christ crucified is still a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. Their succession, at any rate, has never ceased! Never did our Lord say a truer word than that which He spoke to the proud scribes in the Sanhedrin 'You will not come unto Me that you might have life' (John 5:40).

But, simple as this remedy for thirst appears, it is the only cure for man's spiritual disease, and the only bridge from earth to heaven. Kings and their subjects, preachers and hearers, masters and servants, high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, all must alike drink of this water of life, and drink in the same way. For eighteen centuries men have labored to find some other medicine for weary consciences, but they have labored in vain. Thousands, after blistering their hands, and growing gray in hewing out 'broken cisterns which can hold no water' (Jer. 2:13), have been obliged to come back at last to the old Fountain, and have confessed in their latest moments that here, in Christ alone, is true peace.

And simple as the old remedy for thirst may appear, it is the root of the inward life of all God's greatest servants in all ages. What have the saints and martyrs been in every era of church history, but men who came to Christ daily by faith and found 'His flesh meat indeed, and His blood drink indeed'? (John 6:55).

What have they all been but men who lived the life of faith in the Son of God, and drank daily out of the fullness there is in Him? (Gal. 2:20). Here, at all events, the truest and best Christians, who have made a mark on the world, have been of one mind. Holy fathers and Reformers, holy Anglican divines and Puritans, holy Episcopalians and Nonconformists, have all in their best moments borne uniform testimony to the value of the Fountain of life. Separated and contentious as they may sometimes have been in their lives, in their deaths they have not been divided. In their last struggle with the king of terrors they have simply clung to the cross of Christ, and gloried in nothing but the 'precious blood,' and the Fountain open for all sin and uncleanness.

How thankful we ought to be that we live in a land where the great remedy for spiritual thirst is known, in a land of open Bibles, preached gospel, and abundant means of grace, in a land where the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice is still proclaimed, with more or less fullness, in twenty thousand pulpits every Sunday! We do not realize the value of our privileges. The very familiarity of the manna makes us think little of it, just as Israel loathed 'the light bread' in the wilderness (Num. 21:5). But turn to the pages of a heathen philosopher like the incomparable Plato, and see how he groped after light like one blindfolded, and wearied himself to find the door. The humblest peasant who grasps the four comfortable words, of our beautiful communion service, in the Prayer Book, knows more of the way of peace with God than the Athenian sage. Turn to the accounts which trustworthy travelers and missionaries give of the state of the heathen who have never heard the gospel. Read of the human sacrifices in Africa, and the ghastly self-imposed tortures of the devotees of Hindostan, and remember they are all the result of an unquenched thirst and a blind and unsatisfied desire to get near to God. And then learn to be thankful that your lot is cast in a land like your own. Alas, I fear God has a controversy with us for our unthankfulness!

3. A promise held out. 'He that believes on Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.'

The subject of Scripture promises is a vast and most interesting one. I doubt whether it receives the attention which it deserves in the present day. Clarke's Scripture Promises is an old book which is far less studied now, I suspect, than it was in the days of our fathers. Few Christians realize the number and length and breadth and depth and height and variety of the precious 'shalls' and 'wills' laid up in the Bible for the special benefit and encouragement of all who will use them.

Yet promise lies at the bottom of nearly all the transactions of man with man in the affairs of this life. The vast majority of Adam's children in every civilized country are acting every day on the faith of promises. The laborer on the land works hard from Monday morning to Saturday night, because he believes that at the end of the week he shall receive his promised wages. The soldier enlists in the army, and the sailor enters his name on the ship's books in the navy, in the full confidence that those under whom they serve will at some future time give them their promised pay. The humblest maidservant in a family works on from day to day at her appointed duties, in the belief that her mistress will give her the promised wages. In the business of great cities, among merchants and bankers and tradesmen, nothing could be done without incessant faith in promises. Every man of sense knows that cheques and bills and promissory notes are the only means by which the immense majority of mercantile affairs can possibly be carried on. Men of business are compelled to act by faith and not by sight. They believe promises, and expect to be believed themselves. In fact, promises, and faith in promises, and actions springing from faith in promises, are the backbone of nine-tenths of all the dealings of man with his fellow men throughout Christendom.

Now promises, in like manner, in the religion of the Bible, are one grand means by which God is pleased to approach the soul of man. The careful student of Scripture cannot fail to observe that God is continually holding out inducements to man to listen to Him, obey Him and serve Him; and undertaking to do great things, if man will only attend and believe. In short, as Peter says, 'There are given to us exceeding great and precious promises' (2 Peter 1:4). He, who has mercifully caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, has shown His perfect knowledge of human nature by spreading over the book a perfect wealth of promises, suitable to every kind of experience and every condition of life. He seems to say, 'Would you know what I undertake to do for you? Do you want to hear My terms? Take up the Bible and read.'

But there is one grand difference between the promises of Adam's children and the promises of God, which ought never to be forgotten. The promises of man are not sure to be fulfilled. With the best wishes and intentions, he cannot always keep his word. Disease and death may step in like an armed man, and take away from this world him that promises. War or pestilence or famine or failure of crops or hurricanes may strip him of his property, and make it impossible for him to fulfill his engagements. The promises of God, on the contrary, are certain to be kept. He is almighty; nothing can prevent His doing what He has said. He never changes; He is always 'of one mind,' and with Him there is 'no variableness or shadow of turning' (Job 23:13; James 1:17). He will always keep His word. There is one thing which, as a little girl once told her teacher, to her surprise, God cannot do 'It is impossible for God to lie' (Heb. 6:18). The most unlikely and improbable things, when God has once said He will do them, have always come to pass. The destruction of the old world by a flood, and the preservation of Noah in the ark, the birth of Isaac, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the raising of David to the throne of Saul, the miraculous birth of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the scattering of the Jews all over the earth, and their continued preservation as a distinct people--who could imagine events more unlikely and improbable than these? Yet God said they should be, and in due time they all came to pass. In truth, with God it is just as easy to do a thing as to say it. Whatever He promises, He is certain to perform.

Concerning the variety and riches of Scripture promises, far more might be said than it is possible to say in a short message like this. Their name is legion. The subject is almost inexhaustible. There is hardly a step in man's life, from childhood to old age, hardly any position in which man can be placed, for which the Bible has not held out encouragement to everyone who desires to do right in the sight of God. There are 'shalls' and 'wills' in God's treasury for every condition.

There are an abundance of promises supplied by God in the Word, revealing of His character, especially His infinite mercy and compassion. There are promises regarding His willingness to forgive, pardon and absolve the chief of sinners; there are encouragements to pray and hear the gospel and draw near to the throne of grace; there are promises that he will give strength for duty, comfort in trouble, guidance in perplexity, help in sickness, consolation in death, support under bereavement, happiness beyond the grave, reward in glory. His promises are so abundant that we fail to even conceive of them.

The promise of our Lord Jesus Christ, which heads this message, is somewhat peculiar. It is singularly rich in encouragement to all who feel spiritual thirst and come to Him for relief, and therefore it deserves peculiar attention. Most of our Lord's promises refer specially to the benefit of the person to whom they are addressed. The promise before us takes a far wider range: it seems to refer to many others beside those to whom He spoke. For what says He? 'He that believes on Me, as the Scripture has said' (and everywhere teaches), 'out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.' But this spoke He of the Spirit, which those who believe on Him should receive. Figurative undoubtedly are these words, figurative, like the earlier words of the sentence, figurative, like 'thirst' and 'drinking'. But all the figures of Scripture contain

great truth; and what the figure before us was meant to convey I will now try to show.

1. I believe our Lord meant that he who comes to Him by faith shall receive an abundant supply of everything that he can desire for the relief of his own soul's wants. The Spirit shall convey to him such an abiding sense of pardon, peace and hope, that it shall be in his inward man like a well-spring, never dry. He shall feel so satisfied with 'the things of Christ,' which the Spirit shall show Him (John 16:15), that he shall rest from spiritual anxiety about death, judgment and eternity. He may have his seasons of darkness and doubt, through his own infirmities or the temptations of the devil. But, speaking generally, when he has once come to Christ by faith, he shall find in his heart of hearts an unfailing fountain of consolation. This, let us understand, is the first thing which the promise before us contains. 'Only come to Me, poor anxious soul,' our Lord seems to say, 'only come to Me, and your spiritual anxiety shall be relieved. I will place in your heart, by the power of the Holy Spirit, such a sense of pardon and peace, through My atonement and intercession, that you shall never completely thirst again. You may have your doubts and fears and conflicts while you are in the body. But once having come to Me, and taken Me for your Savior, you shall never feel yourself entirely hopeless. The condition of your inward man shall be so thoroughly changed, that you shall feel as if there was within you an ever-flowing spring of water.'

What shall we say to these things? I declare my own belief, that whenever a man or woman really comes to Christ by faith, he finds this promise fulfilled. He may possibly be weak in grace, and have many misgivings about his own condition. He may possibly not dare to say that he is converted, justified, sanctified and meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. But, for all that, I am bold to say, the humblest and feeblest believer in Christ has got something within him which he would not part with, though he may not yet fully understand it. And what is that 'something'? It is just that 'river of living water,' which begins to run in the heart of every child of Adam as soon as he comes to Christ and drinks. In this sense I believe this wonderful promise of Christ is always fulfilled.

2. But is this all that is contained in the promise which heads this message? By no means. There yet remains much behind. There is more to follow. I believe our Lord meant us to understand that he who comes to Him by faith shall not only have an abundant supply of everything which he needs for his own soul, but shall also become a source of blessing to the souls of others. The Spirit who dwells in him shall make him a fountain of good to his fellow men, so that at the last day there shall be found to have flowed from him 'rivers of living water.'

This is a most important part of our Lord's promise, and opens up a subject which is seldom realized and grasped by many Christians. But it is one of deep interest, and deserves far more attention than it receives. I believe it to be a truth of God. I believe that just as 'no man lives unto himself' (Rom. 14:7), so also no man is converted only for himself and that the conversion of one man or woman always leads on, in God's wonderful providence, to the conversion of others. I do not say for a moment that all believers know it. I think it far more likely that many live and die in the faith, who are not aware that they have done good to any soul. But I believe the resurrection morning and the judgment day, when the secret history of all Christians is revealed, will prove that the full meaning of the promise before us has never failed. I doubt if there will be a believer who will not have been to someone or other a 'river of living water,' a channel through whom the Spirit has conveyed saving grace. Even the penitent thief, short as his time was after he repented, has been a source of blessing to thousands of souls!

a. Some believers are rivers of living water while they live. Their words, their conversation, their preaching, their teaching, are all means by which the water of life has flowed into the hearts of their fellow men. Such,

for example, were the apostles, who wrote no Epistles, and only preached the Word. Such were Luther and Whitefield and Wesley and Berridge and Rowlands and thousands of others, of whom I cannot now speak particularly.

b. Some believers are rivers of living water when they die. Their courage in facing the king of terrors, their boldness in the most painful sufferings, their unswerving faithfulness to Christ's truth even at the stake, their manifest peace on the edge of the grave--all this has set thousands thinking, and led hundreds to repent and believe. Such, for example, were the primitive martyrs, whom the Roman Emperors persecuted. Such were John Huss and Jerome of Prague. Such were Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, Hooper and the noble army of Marian martyrs. The work that they did at their deaths, like Samson, was far greater than the work done in their lives.

c. Some believers are rivers of living water long after they die. They do good by their books and writings in every part of the world, long after the hands which held the pen are mouldering in the dust. Such men were Bunyan and Baxter and Owen and George Herbert and Robert MCCHEYNE. These blessed servants of God do more good probably by their books at this moment than they did by their tongues when they were alive. Being dead they yet speak (Heb. 11:4).

d. Finally, there are some believers who are rivers of living water by the beauty of their daily conduct and behavior. There are many quiet, gentle, consistent Christians, who make no show and no noise in the world, and yet insensibly exercise a deep influence for good on all around them. They 'win without the Word' (1 Peter 3:1). Their love, their kindness, their sweet temper, their patience, their unselfishness, tell silently on a wide circle, and sow seeds of thought and self-inquiry in many minds. It was a fine testimony of an old lady who died in great peace, saying that under God she owed her salvation to Mr. Whitefield

'It was not any sermon that he preached; it was not anything that he ever said to me. It was the beautiful consistency and kindness of his daily life, in the house where he was staying, when I was a little girl. I said to myself, "If I ever have any religion, Mr. Whitefield's God shall be my God."'

Let us all lay hold on this view of our Lord's promise, and never forget it. Do not think for a moment that your own soul is the only soul that will be saved, if you come to Christ by faith and follow Him. Think of the blessedness of being a river of living water to others. Who can tell that you may not be the means of bringing many others to Christ? Live and act and speak and pray and work keeping this continually in view. I knew a family, consisting of a father, mother and ten children, in which true religion began with one of the daughters, and when it began she stood alone, and all the rest of the family were in the world. And yet, before she died, she saw both her parents and all her brothers and sisters converted to God, and all this, humanly speaking, began from her influence! Surely, in the face of this, we need not doubt that a believer may be to others a river of living water. Conversions may not be in your time, and you may die without seeing them. But never doubt that conversion generally leads to conversions, and that few go to heaven alone. When Grimshaw of Haworth, the apostle of the north, died, he left his son graceless and godless. Afterwards the son was converted, never having forgotten his father's advice and example. And his last words were, 'What will my old father say when he sees me in heaven?' Let us take courage and hope on, believing Christ's promise.

1. And now, before I close this message, let me ask you a plain question. Do you know anything of spiritual thirst? Have you ever felt anything of genuine deep concern about your soul? I fear that many know nothing about it. I have learned, by the painful experience of the third of a century, that people may

go on for years attending God's house, and yet never feel their sins, or desire to be saved. The cares of this world, the love of pleasure, the 'lust of other things' choke the good seed every Sunday, and make it unfruitful. They come to church with hearts as cold as the stone pavement on which they walk. They go away as thoughtless and unmoved as the old marble busts which look down on them from the monuments on the walls. Well, it may be so; but I do not yet despair of anyone, so long as he is alive. That grand old bell in Paul's Cathedral, London, which has struck the hours for so many years, is seldom heard by many during the business hours of the day. The roar and din of traffic in the streets have a strange power to deaden its sound, and prevent men hearing it. But when the daily work is over, and desks are locked, and doors are closed, and books are put away, and quiet reigns in the great city, the case is altered. As the old bell at night strikes eleven and twelve and one and two and three, thousands hear it who never heard it during the day. And so I hope it will be with many a one in the matter of his soul. Now, in the plenitude of health and strength, in the hurry and whirl of business, I fear the voice of your conscience is often stifled, and you cannot hear it. But the day may come when the great bell of conscience will make itself heard, whether you like it or not. The time may come when, laid aside in quietness, and obliged by illness to sit still, you may be forced to look within, and consider your soul's concerns. And then, when the great bell of awakened conscience is sounding in your ears, I trust that many a man who reads this message may hear the voice of God and repent, may learn to thirst, and learn to come to Christ for relief. Yes, I pray God you may yet be taught to feed before it be too late!

2. But do you feel anything at this very moment? Is your conscience awake and working? Are you sensible of spiritual thirst, and longing for relief? Then hear the invitation which I bring you in my Master's name this day: 'If any man,' no matter who he may be, if any man, high or low, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, 'if any man thirst, let him come to Christ and drink.' Hear and accept that invitation without delay. Wait for nothing. Wait for nobody. Who can tell that you may not wait for 'a convenient season' until it be too late? The hand of a living Redeemer is now held out from heaven; but it may be withdrawn. The fountain is open now; but it may soon be closed forever. 'If any man thirst, let him come and drink' without delay. Though you have been a great sinner, and have resisted warnings, counsel and sermons yet come. Though you have sinned against light and knowledge, against a father's advice and a mother's tears, though you have lived for years without a Sabbath and without prayer, yet come. Say not that you know not how to come, that you do not understand what it is to believe, that you must wait for more light. Will a tired man say that he is too tired to lie down, or a drowning man, that he knows not how to lay hold on the hand stretched out to help him, or the shipwrecked sailor, with a lifeboat alongside the stranded hulk, that he knows not how to jump in? Oh, cast away these vain excuses! Arise, and come! The door is not shut. The fountain is not yet closed. The Lord Jesus invites you. It is enough that you feel thirsting, and desire to be saved Come: come to Christ without delay. Who ever came to the fountain for sin and found it dry? Who ever went unsatisfied away?

3. But have you come to Christ already, and found relief? Then come nearer, nearer still. The closer your communion with Christ, the more comfort you will feel. The more you daily live by the side of the fountain the more you shall feel in yourself 'a well of water springing up into everlasting life' (John 4:14). You shall not only be blessed yourself, but be a source of blessing to others.

In this evil world you may not perhaps feel all the sensible comfort you could desire. But remember you cannot have two heavens. Perfect happiness is yet to come. The devil is not yet bound. There is a good time coming for all who feel their sins and come to Christ, and commit their thirsting souls to His keeping. When He comes again they will be completely satisfied. They will remember all the way by which they

were led, and see the need-be of everything that befell them. Above all, they will wonder that they could ever live so long without Christ, and hesitate about coming to Him.

There is a pass in Scotland called Glencroe, which supplies a beautiful illustration of what heaven will be to the souls who come to Christ. The road through Glencroe carries the traveler up a long and steep ascent, with many a little turn and winding in its course. But when the top of the pass is reached, a stone is seen by the wayside with these simple words inscribed upon it: 'Rest, and be thankful.' Those words describe the feelings with which every thirsting one who comes to Christ will enter heaven. The summit of the narrow way will at length be ours. We shall cease from our weary journeyings, and sit in the kingdom of God. We shall look back on all the way of our lives with thankfulness, and see the perfect wisdom of every step in the steep ascent by which we were led. We shall forget the toil of the upward journey in the glorious rest. Here, in this world, our sense of rest in Christ at best is feeble and partial: we hardly seem at times to taste fully the living water. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is imperfect shall be done away. When we awake up after His likeness we shall be satisfied (Ps. 17:15). We shall drink out of the river of His pleasures and thirst no more!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-ryle/thirst-relieved/>

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