

The Well of Water John 4

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon on John 4 emphasizes the necessity of being born again and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life, illustrated through the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well.

Scripture: John 3:5, John 4:14, Romans 8:9

Topics: "Grace", "Indwelling of the Holy Spirit"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life, as illustrated in the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. He explains that being 'born again' is essential for a relationship with God, highlighting that this rebirth is a work of grace rather than human effort. The indwelling of the Spirit not only grants a new nature but also empowers believers to live in holiness and love, enabling them to share the gift of grace with others. Darby illustrates how Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman exemplifies God's grace reaching beyond cultural boundaries, offering eternal life to all who believe. Ultimately, he encourages believers to recognize the well of living water within them, which sustains and empowers their spiritual journey.

Transcript

In John 3 we had the quickening power of the Spirit, the contrast of the old and the new creation. Here we have another thing, the dwelling of the Spirit in the believer. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."

A man must be born again - born of water and of the Spirit, if he has to say to God. This is what has to be presented to the sinner: "Ye must be born again"; while at the same time we know it must be God's work. Not that it is said in a legal sense, "Ye must," etc., because we know a man cannot accomplish it of himself. But there is a moral necessity for it, because, until born again, the sinner cannot have one desire or anything in him suited to God. It is the requisite flowing from what God is, and what the sinner is. But there is no such necessity for the indwelling of the Spirit in the believer. Instead of being requirement, it is the expression of pure grace; not so much necessary to man, as it is given by God.

Therefore not only the Jews, but the Gentiles might have it. "If thou [the poor Samaritan] knewest the gift of God," etc. For the Jew even it was necessary to be "born again," and that was the instruction in chapter 3. In chapter 4 it is a pure gift of which He speaks, and He would shew that the worst of Gentiles might have it, as well as an Israelite.

The Holy Ghost that is given brings in power, as well as a new nature. The new nature has certain characteristics - love, holiness, etc. "He that is born of God sinneth not," but there is another thing - power, and without this the very desire for holiness will occasion distress of soul and sense of condemnation, and there will be neither peace, joy, liberty, nor consciousness of relationship, all of which are founded on the indwelling of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit produces these effects in the soul in which He dwells, bringing forth in us what is like God. Thus we see the difference between the Holy Ghost quickening, or giving a new nature, and the Holy Ghost dwelling in us and giving us power.

The woman, as we know, comes to draw; the Lord requests to drink. She is surprised at His asking her for water. Before, we have seen Him talking to a Jew, a Pharisee, an honoured Rabbi; but here was a despised Samaritan. She was astonished at His having overleapt all bounds and come in perfect freedom to speak to her; but here was the gift of grace come down to her as well as the Jew. Passing over the details of her conversion which are most interesting, we will notice the lowliness of Jesus in His actings towards her. His position here is founded on His entire rejection as coming in the way of promise. He is on His way, as rejected, to Galilee, the place where God visits His remnant. "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light." He left Judea, and God leads Him through this wretched apostate race - just a picture of the Lord's actings now in sovereign grace, gathering out Gentiles, before He comes to the remnant.

132 That which lays hold of a sinner is sovereign grace. He is rejected by man, and man is rejected by God. There is mutual and complete rejection. Promise is gone, because Christ, coming with the promises, was rejected. "My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me." It is now a rejected humbled Christ, bestowed as the sovereign gift of God. "If thou knewest the gift," etc. God was giving freely, and He who gave was there. He who could create another heaven and earth, if He pleased, came to ask drink of her! What confidence in His grace it inspires! He does not expect her to ask of Him until He has asked of her. Our pride would say, If I accept favours of God, He will accept favours of me. Here is God Himself coming, and saying, "If thou knewest the gift of God," etc. He would be dependent for a drink of the brook by the way. Such was the position He took. When He could put Himself in such a place as to ask favour of her, all the sluices of her confidence are opened. "He must needs go through Samaria." The path led through. That was the road in which His love, in coming down here, put Him.

There is nothing so hard for our vile hearts to understand as grace; but there is nothing so simple in God's presence. If you knew the Person of Him who asks you, you would believe the perfectness of grace coming down to the wretchedness of man to bestow. It is not how you must be this or that; but here is God come down to you.

He is at perfect ease with her, though she had been up to this going on in her sins; she a Samaritan, and yet there is God conversing with her! The revelation of God in this way gives the consciousness that we can get what He has to give. The moment a soul apprehends what there is in Christ, it has the blessing. "Sir, give me this water," etc.

133 Verse 16. There is a thought added now. The sins have to be made known. There is no understanding of what He has to give until the conscience is reached, and she has the conviction of sin. If the things of God could be received by the understanding (natural), man would in a sense be a match for God. Clearly man is not in that position with God. But when the conscience is opened, it brings the sense of need. Then the sinner sees nothing but sin, and that nothing but God's grace can meet it. A man never gets spiritual understanding until God has dealt with his conscience. Until the flesh is in a measure judged,

the Christian has no power to understand God.

When I know the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, I know that I have everything I can need, because everything is in Him - love, power, holiness in Him. "He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." A detected sinner is in a different case from being in possession of the well; and yet the detection was on the way to it. To bring this well into the heart He must convict of sin. She must consciously stand in the presence of God. Do we think of that - that we are in the presence of God? We should never sin if we did.

The woman follows the natural course of her own thoughts in talking about the water from the well (v. 11, 12). But Christ says, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water," etc. In using what sin gives in this world, it is soon spent; its strength is gone in the spending: the spring becomes dry. But with spiritual things it is just the reverse. The more I spend, the more I have got. "To him that hath shall more be given." And it leaves no desire for anything else - no hankering after what I have not got. "He shall never thirst" - never thirst after anything else, while there will be the increasing sense of need of the living water continually. I cannot say this practically of one whose soul is hankering after earthly things. When there is this hard crust over the soul, there is need of humbling; but the natural state of a Christian is to go on and have more given. A Christian sunk down into the flesh is thirsting. If one went down to the bottom of his soul, one might find the well; but there ought to be rather the sense of possession than of need in the soul.

134 Here is rest and power. We have not only everlasting life in Him from whom we shall never be separated; but the man has a well of water in himself. "It shall be in him a well of water," etc. This is power coming down from God - heaven is brought down into my heart. It is the power of divine life bringing me into fellowship with the Father and the Son. It is nothing short of all that is in God dwelling in me. I have got something that lays hold of that life - the gift of God. Mark, it is here the well of water in the individual. There is an eternal spring in my own soul. There is a power in the person associating him with all that is in God; the man drinks it in - receives it as a thirsty person - and then it becomes in him a well which makes him partaker of what is in God. It brings into intercourse with, and feeding in spiritual apprehension on, the things of God.

This has not reference to outward gift, but to the living power in the soul, embracing all that the Father and the Son have, and it has the character and stamp in the person of the eternal life to which it springs. These everlasting things belong to the person who enjoys them; the water "springs up to everlasting life." In Romans 8 the Spirit is brought out as life and power. As the breath of life was given to the first Adam, and he became a living soul, so we have the "Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." After life there is power also. This is the consequence of the sentence passed upon sin in its whole nature - not on sins only. Christ on the cross condemned sin in the flesh. God has dealt with it and judged it on the Person of Christ. They are distinct and connected in a moment. As soon as I am quickened, there is the inquiry, How am I to get rid of this sense of sin in the flesh? It is already condemned: not only are the sins condemned but the principle of sin is, root and branch. "They that are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh; they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." There is not only desire but power; "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." The Spirit is not only the source of the nature, but the power that puts this new nature into living connection with its object. It is not only the flesh on one side and the new nature on the other, but I have the Holy Ghost in the new nature. God has condemned sin in the flesh by the death and resurrection of Christ. There is the revelation of the Father and the Son, received by the soul in which the Holy Ghost dwells. The Holy Ghost now works in power on

the new nature, because Christ has dealt with the old. This is not like the Spirit as given to Balaam, but it is shewing how the believer receives the Spirit after he is quickened. "Not in the flesh but in the Spirit," which puts me on the ground of what God is to me, and not what I am to God. As to our standing, this is our position - the Father loves me as He loves Jesus. I own no life but what the Spirit gives, and because of the Spirit dwelling thus in me as the grand link with the Father and the Son, there is not a bit of the believer belongs to sin or to the devil, but spirit, soul, and body we belong to God. "The Spirit is life because of righteousness." Another thing is, that He will "quicken these mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in us." In the burial of a Christian we commit his body, not to the earth, but to Him who redeemed it.

135 Verse 14. There is also relationship - "sons of God." If led of the Spirit, I am a son, and have the "Spirit of adoption." I am thrown into entire association with Christ; I am a child of God and have the consciousness of the Spirit of adoption. "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit," etc. We are set there by sovereign grace. It is not what we think about it, but what we are - "the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus." The Holy Ghost cannot lead us to say, 'I do not know whether I am saved'; 'I doubt'; 'I hope to be saved.' The Holy Ghost brings it into the heart, and gives the blessed sense of the relationship.

When the High Priest went into the presence of God, the light shone upon all the names engraven on the breastplate, etc. That was an inferior relationship, but it is true that the same delight which the Father finds in Jesus He finds in us. There is the shedding abroad in the heart of divine love by the Spirit, just as a candle sheds abroad its light in the place where it is. So, if the Holy Ghost really dwells in my heart, God's love is there, for God the Holy Ghost is there. Though it is my heart, it is God's love that is there. The Spirit sheds it abroad by being there, just as Christ, being in the heart, draws down His own love into it.

Again, if the Spirit thus dwells in us, there will be the consciousness of groaning with the creation around. If we walk through the world with Christ's love filling the heart, there is not a single thing but what will awaken sorrow - the sorrow not of irritability but of love. Christ did ever the work of love, but with what a sense of the way in which death had come in! He was always sorrowing, because He was all love.

136 The Son of man was "acquainted with grief" - not only trouble, but grief. It went to His heart. We hear Jesus groaning at the grave of Lazarus, though He knew what deliverance He could effect. If we had been going to do it, we should have gone gaily in, because going to bring comfort to the family; but Jesus had such a sense of the groaning of creation that He "groaned."

"The Spirit also maketh intercession for us" by putting us in communion with God's love. The Spirit, by dwelling in me, makes me to realise love in the midst of sorrow. Instead of selfishness, it produces prostration of spirit in the sense of what is around. The Spirit takes up the sorrow which nature sinks under, but helps my infirmities by putting me into connection with the perfect love of God shewn in Christ's humiliation. The Holy Spirit being given to us in Christ - God's having come down to us in all our necessities, we are carried back into the midst of the sorrow and the sin in the sense of that in which believers groan.

This woman at the well (John 4) was conscious of the creation she belonged to. She had no power to overcome sin; but perhaps well wearied out with it - coming in the heat of the day to draw water, not at the hour that others came, for shame. She did not know what she was coming for now; and when she had got the living water, she went back to the city to tell the Samaritans. Thus should we carry the love which has delivered us, back into the world from which we have been delivered.

"The Spirit helpeth our infirmities." Our understandings are not fully informed of what we want; but the "Spirit himself," etc. - and "He that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit." If God searches our hearts, what does He see there? A quantity of sin, to be sure; but He sees desires there. "The Spirit maketh intercession according to God," and yet from poor creatures who do not know what to ask for. The use the Holy Ghost makes of it is to take up all the groaning. Every groan I utter is the positive witness of blessing in the midst of sorrow, because of the intercession of the Spirit according to God. What a well of water! It is not crying out for self; but so realising the blessedness of God's presence in the midst of a world and a body not yet set free by His power, selfishness gone, and a means opened, while in the body, of being the vessel of the intercession of the whole creation. All our own sufferings are lost in the thought of its being the path to glory. Christ's heart was moved when He saw sorrow. He would not have us cold and indifferent to it, nor yet, on the other hand, selfishly affected by it, but full of tenderness and compassion towards those who are suffering. "He hath set us an example, that we should follow his steps."

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