

IMAGES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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THIS IS THE FINAL SESSION OF A THREE-PART BIBLE STUDY ON IMAGES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Within both the Old Testament and the New Testament God's Spirit is occasionally symbolised by water, or by something to do with water.

- Where in the Bible is God's Spirit symbolised by water?

Within the Bible water sometimes symbolises cleansing, such as with baptism, and at other times refreshing, and it's the refreshing water of the Holy Spirit that this study is about. A key Old Testament scripture is Isaiah 44:3, where refreshing the land with water is used as an illustration of God pouring out his Spirit. A key New Testament scripture is John 4:1-42, Jesus meeting a woman at a well near Sychar, in Samaria.

- Read John 4:1-42

Jacob's well was a place from where God's people had been drawing water for over 2000 years. It would have been unusual for women to draw water in the middle of the day; water would usually have been drawn during the cooler parts of the day. Could going to draw water in the middle of the day mean that the woman was avoiding the other women? Although we don't have a name for her, the Lord knowing her is much more important than us knowing her name.

Jesus asked her to give him a drink, which is also unusual. Jews were prejudiced against the people of Samaria, and considered them to be 'unclean', so would not have shared a drinking vessel with them. Many Jews would even take a long detour to avoid travelling through Samaria. It's no wonder the woman queried how Jesus could ask her for a drink. Jesus' willingness to speak with her, and to drink from her vessel,

broke through racial and sexual prejudices, and showed that everyone is equal in the sight of God.

Jesus mentioned that if she knew the gift of God, and who was asking for a drink, she would have asked for living water. The penny had not yet dropped; she was still thinking of physical water, and wondered how Jesus could collect it from such a deep well without a suitable vessel. And by 'living water', she may have been thinking about running water, rather than the still water in the well.

In v. 13-15 Jesus takes the conversation further: 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' Jesus offered her something attractive, living water. With her not being named, it can make it easier for us to identify with her, and to recognise that Jesus is also offering us living water.

According to John 7:37-39, (which we will explore further on in this Bible study), we know that Jesus is referring to the living water of the Holy Spirit. Yet here the Spirit of God doesn't get mentioned until v. 24.

- Why do you think Jesus doesn't mention God's Spirit until later in his conversation with the woman?

Perhaps Jesus needed to build a stronger relationship with her before going on to more spiritual matters. In v. 15 she responded, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.' She liked the idea of 'living water', probably thinking she would not have to keep traipsing out to the well every day. Jesus continued, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed,

the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

- How realistic is it never to be spiritually thirsty?

Perhaps this is less about never being thirsty, and more about knowing that our thirst can always be quenched by God's living water. Speaking about living water welling up to eternal life should have helped her to realise that this was about something spiritual. Jesus then took the conversation in a completely different direction, about her husband (or more accurately currently living with a man who wasn't her husband, and having been married 5 times). What this stranger knew about her life caused her to realise that he was a prophet, and she brought up the issue about whether God could be worshipped only in Jerusalem, or out on the mountain as well. It is during this conversation about worship that Jesus said, 'God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.'

- How could the worship in your church become more 'in spirit and in truth'?

For the woman the cogs were beginning to click into place, she mentioned the coming Messiah, and Jesus declared 'I who speak to you am he.' In this brief conversation, she was given revelation of each person of the Trinity. I wonder where the conversation would have gone if the disciples had not turned up with lunch?

Jesus had made such an impression on her that she left her water jar at the well, and went back to Sychar as the first female evangelist.

- Looking at v. 29-30, what can we learn from her evangelism? (Consider its content and invitation.)

She didn't go back to her town with a well-polished evangelistic message, but simply shared something of her personal experience of Jesus, her tentative belief, and invited the townsfolk to meet Jesus for themselves. Over the next two days, several of them believed that Jesus really was the Saviour of the world.

- Why do you think her evangelism was so fruitful?

The fruitfulness of her evangelism leaves me wondering; how much living water had she drunk? Her fruitfulness seems disproportionate to her message and this indicates that God's Spirit was powerfully at work in her and in those to whom she witnessed.

- In what ways can you invite others to come to Jesus and drink the living water of God's Spirit?

The theme of living water comes again just a few chapters later during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. It was one

of those occasions when thousands of Jews flocked to Jerusalem to celebrate together. On the last day of the Feast, a Priest went to the Pool of Siloam, fetched some water and brought it back to the Temple. The priest then poured the water out onto the pavement of the Temple Courtyard, symbolising their thankfulness to God for providing his people with water whilst their ancestors spent 40 years in the wilderness and onward from then. On the day that water featured prominently within the festival, Jesus went into the Temple, and this is what happened:

- Read John 7:37-39

When water was an important part of the Jewish Festival, Jesus said, 'If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink.' This has similarities to his words to the woman in Samaria. And like the woman at the well, these people in the Temple probably didn't know what he was meaning. Verse 39 explains: 'By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.' Jesus still invites us to come to him and drink the living water of the Holy Spirit.

- In this 21st century, how do people try to satisfy their spiritual thirst? Which of these ways are helpful, and which are unhelpful?

The One who made us, invites us to come to him to be spiritually refreshed. As Psalm 42 indicates, physical water refreshes our bodies, and spiritual water refreshes our souls. Through Jesus we can drink the refreshing presence of the Holy Spirit; we can keep being spiritually refreshed.

- In John 7:37-39, what four instructions did Jesus give for drinking living water?

Firstly, Jesus said: 'If anyone is thirsty'. The starting point is recognising that we are thirsty. Secondly Jesus said, 'let them come to me'. Through coming to God the Son, we can be refreshed by God the Spirit. Thirdly, Jesus said, 'and drink'. Fourthly, Jesus said 'Whoever believes in me.' Within the New Testament 'believing' is often coupled with 'repenting'. In Mark 1:15 Jesus proclaimed, 'Repent and believe the Good News.' On the Day of Pentecost, when the people asked, 'What shall we do?' Peter responded 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:37-39). If we are not repentant of sin, we are not believing in Jesus for our salvation, and we are not likely to be drinking the living water of God's Spirit.

- In what different ways do you come to Jesus to drink the living water of God's Spirit?

For the health of our physical bodies we need to drink everyday, and in a similar way, for the health of our spiritual lives we need to drink living water everyday. The following are some of the ways that we can do this: prayer, reading

scriptures such as Luke 4:18-19, singing songs such as 'Holy Spirit we welcome you', participating in corporate worship, receiving Holy Communion, asking other Christians to pray over us and/or to anoint us with oil. Having a drink of water, looking at streams or waterfalls, or even rain, can be a helpful visual aids when praying for spiritual refreshment. We can do these things individually and/or also within a house group, during corporate worship, and by attending other Christian events, such as MET-Local events, where attendees can receive prayer to be refreshed by the Holy Spirit. Visit methodistevangelicals.org.uk/MET-local for a list of venues. Reading books about God's Spirit can also be a great help, e.g. *Spiritual Renewal - Releasing Rivers of Living Water*, a MET book written by Paul Wilson, available at methodistevangelicals.org.uk/shop. I also have a Bible study series called REFRESH: Drinking the Spirit's Living Water, which I am willing to lead on Zoom for house groups.

- In what ways can you invite others to come to Jesus and drink the living water of God's Spirit?

I was brought up on a dairy farm in Cornwall (so I put the jam on the scones before the cream). The farm had its own water supply from a spring in one of the fields. Even during the drought of 1976, that spring flowed with sufficient water so that we, and all the animals, had sufficient to drink. In a similar way, God's Spirit flows with sufficient living water to refresh us and our churches, and he always has more for us. The last chapter of the Bible ends with the refreshing River of Life, which indicates that in heaven we will have ample refreshment for the whole of eternity.

Before you turn to the next page, I invite you to spend a few minutes drinking the living water of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said 'If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink. 'Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within them.'

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