



SERMON OUTLINE

LIFE-GIVING WATER!

SUGGESTED SONGS AND BIBLE READINGS:

- ◆ 'As the deer pants for the water' (Songs of Fellowship 27)
- ◆ Psalm 42
- ◆ 'When shall I come unto the healing waters' (SASB 647)
- ◆ 'Living in the fountain' (SASB 352)

BASED ON ISAIAH 41:17-20 (QUOTATIONS FROM NIV)

Everything in God's word is grounded in our earthly experience – in what we know and understand. The Old Testament is set on the stage of the journeys, struggles and triumphs of the Israelites. God comes incarnate in Jesus to the down-to-earth, hand-to-mouth existence of a poor family. He imbeds himself in and identifies himself with the harsh realities of people's lives – in fact, some of the harshest realities that the world has ever seen. Jesus' stories and parables are all about life as he saw it going on around him, experiences that people could relate to.

When we read the Bible we don't always relate so easily to the worlds of the Old and New Testaments. We live in a society which is not primarily made up of farmers and fishermen; the seasons and the yield of the crops are not such fragile issues for our livelihoods. We are in a part of the world where we are comparatively rich. So we read the Bible and tend to 'spiritualise' the message, and in that way find its relevance. So when Jesus says 'Blessed are the poor', we relate to that by assuming that Jesus meant the spiritually poor, and we recognise our spiritual poverty. In one sense there is nothing wrong with that because this word addresses every part of our beings, and of course we learn spiritual lessons from the Lord through it. But we must never forget that the context in which these words were originally spoken was one of real physical poverty, of hunger and of thirst and of injustice.

So when we read Isaiah 41 we see that God, through Isaiah, is talking to people who knew what it was to be poor and in search of water. There are still so many places all round the world where people know what it is to be poor and needy and in search for water. They find there is none, and their tongues are parched with thirst.

We can only really drink deeply and know refreshment and fulfilment if we are thirsty. That is true on a physical level – but is it not also true on a spiritual level?

As Psalm 42 says: 'As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?'

Are you thirsty?

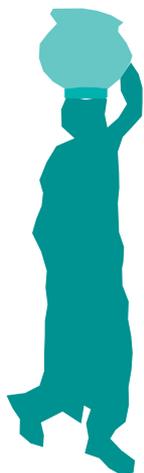
We have to be. God wants us to be spiritually thirsty. It's about recognising our need of him. And we all need him, don't we? But isn't it true that we often don't really feel thirsty? We're actually quite comfortable; we just get on with our lives. And if we were to ask ourselves if we are growing spiritually, we would say 'I don't really know – maybe.' Do we love the Lord? Well, yes, I suppose so. O God, help us not to become the Church that is lukewarm and has lost its thirst for justice, for God's love to break through into our broken world!

You know, sometimes God needs to show us that we are thirsty. He needs to take us out of our place of comfort to help us recognise our need of him, to recognise that we are nothing without him, to recognise that what we have gathered around us to make us comfortable has actually dulled our spirits and our senses, and that what we need is for God to fan that spark into a flame again!

Jesus needed to show the Samaritan woman at the well that she needed him. She listened and responded and received that living water and couldn't help but share it with others.

Sometimes it takes a bit more persuasion. When the Israelites crossed the wilderness, they could have taken a short-cut and got to the Promised Land a lot quicker, but God decided that they needed to be thirsty for 40 years.

Abraham had to wait until he was a hundred years old before he received the promise of a son. Moses had to wait until he was an old man before he could free the Israelites from Egypt.





When Lazarus died, Jesus waited a couple of days before he went to the family. God is in no hurry, and if it means that we become more focused on him and thirsty for him, then he will wait.

**The poor and needy search for water, but there is none.
But I the Lord will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.**

(ISAIAH 41:17)

You see, if God has taken you to a place of wilderness, a place of waiting, where it seems so dry, then allow him to use it to stir up the thirst in your soul. Because the Lord will answer you, the God of Israel will not forsake you.

In the same way God will not forsake the hundreds of millions who are still physically thirsty – and neither must we. To paraphrase a quote by Gandhi, sometimes a man is so thirsty that God can only appear to him in a cup of water. We need to be that cup of water, that clean source of water, so that God can appear to them.

God is longing to pour out his blessing on his Church, on his world. He is waiting to make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. He is longing to turn the desert of our hearts into pools of water, and the parched ground of our spiritual lives into springs.

God's heart for this world is that it would be reconciled to him. 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16). He longs for his world back. When people see that the rivers flow on barren heights, the deserts turn into pools of water, that the cedar and acacia grow in the desert, then they will see the hand of the Lord and they will believe.

As you respond to God and live and give sacrificially, God will see your heart and will not only bless you but will cause others to 'see and know, consider and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this' (Isaiah 41:20) and they will respond to him.

