

Thirsty Bible Study Series Introduction

Objective - We are going to learn what it is to be filled, directed, and empowered by the Spirit. We are going to learn how to drink and satisfy our thirst the way God intended.

Have you ever felt that this can't be all there is—that somehow there must be something deeper, something more to the Christian life? Something you don't need to act out but a palpable source of energy and life flowing from the heart? Not behavior modification by your own effort and discipline but life transformation through God's power? Jesus clearly taught that there was when he said, "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 goes on to tell us, "By this he meant the Spirit" (John 7:37-39). According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the source of that "something more," the source of what's missing.

The phrase Jesus used, "living water," was meant to evoke, among other Scriptures, Jeremiah 2:13: "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."

But even if we didn't know Jeremiah 2:13, we could have understood Jesus' implication by his use of the phrase "living water." Sounds poetic, even mystical, doesn't it? But Jesus didn't use the term "living water" poetically or mystically. Living water was another term for freshwater, the stuff you use to water plants and animals, grow crops, clean dishes—the stuff you drink to live. And, importantly, it stands in opposition, not to stagnant (dead) water, but to saltwater.

Saltwater looks and feels like fresh, or living, water, but if you drink it for any length of time, it kills you. A person could be stranded in the middle of the ocean floating atop a gazillion gallons of it and die of thirst. The more you drink saltwater, the thirstier you get. If there's a better picture for sin, please stop me at any point.

And so here we are again, back at the basic meaning of Jeremiah 2:13. It's not just that our souls need living water or we'll die of spiritual thirst; it's that we're dying of thirst because we drink from alternative wells, chugging down saltwater instead of fresh. What our souls thirst for is Christ, whom we experience by the Spirit.

Like the body, the soul can't go very long without water. And so everyone, most every day, gets thirsty, as experienced in innumerable forms: insecurity, unforgiveness, meaninglessness, loneliness, hopelessness, emptiness, boredom, dissatisfaction, worry, anxiety, and so on. Our souls are constantly crying out for something to drink. So we drink.

But all temporal forms of refreshment (sex, drugs, success, fame, busyness, entertainment, travel, materialism) are, in the end, saltwater. In the moment, they taste

and feel like water to the lips but they only succeed in making us thirstier. If we persist in drinking them, they are spiritually terminal.

But this isn't the worst tragedy. The greater tragedy by far is that those of us who have come to know Christ continue to drink the same saltwater that unbelievers drink, though perhaps in more socially acceptable forms. When we feel the thirst of insecurity, for example, do we turn to the Lord or do we buy clothes, lift weights, clamor for attention, flirt, judge others or put others down, or get jealous? When we feel the thirst of loneliness or dissatisfaction, do we turn to the Lord or do we eat, watch TV, play on the computer, fantasize, sleep?

When we need confidence, do we rely upon God or jack ourselves up with music, coffee, nicotine, Red Bull, new clothes, self-talk, cool speech? To what are we turning to satisfy those thirsts?

Though we have living water (the Holy Spirit) within us, we satisfy our thirst in much the same ways unbelievers do. Maybe we've stopped having premarital sex or taking illicit drugs—maybe—but that doesn't mean we're not turning to saltwater. In truth, we're often consuming it daily . . . by the gallon.

And this, when you clear everything else away, is at the core of our dissatisfaction and thirst: we are not filled and do not walk with, or drink from, the Spirit in the way we could or should.

Now, it could be that we just don't know any better. Maybe we never even knew the source of living water was within us. Or maybe we thought we were supposed to gut out a godly life in our own strength through discipline and abstinence. Maybe this is all we've ever seen modeled. Whatever the reason, it doesn't matter, because we are going to change all that.

For the next two weeks, we are going to learn what it is to be filled, directed, and empowered by the Spirit. We are going to learn how to drink and satisfy our thirst the way God intended.