

Rivers of Living Water

August 19, 2018

John 7:38 and Matthew 5:3-12

As a Christian I do not remember another time when I have felt so challenged in my faith walk. I have found myself challenged in my own understanding of what it means to be a Christ follower. Am I an instrument of grace or am I an agent of the enemy of our souls?

I have spoken before about the power of the red letters, the words of Christ in the Bible. Jesus tells us “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:38)

That means you and I should be people who can give others living water. We can, if we so choose, be instruments of grace. We are to be sources of mercy and justice and love to others who are hurting, frustrated and fearful. The challenge I have been facing is that I find myself so easily being an agent of our enemy: being judgmental, condemning and angry, even hateful.

How easy it is to slip into this demonstrates to me how easy it is for me to be distracted from mercy, justice and my walk with God and belief in Jesus.

‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.’ (John 3:17-21)

Christianity is so very clear. Jesus came to save, not condemn. Satan’s goal is not to save, but to destroy.

We must be ready with an answer for anyone who asks us about the hope that is in us. (1 Peter 3:15) How we answer is our subject this morning. Do rivers of living water flow out from us?

People searching for answers often think Christianity is a mystery. Paul wrote an amazing encouragement for us. “God has chosen to make known to us how great are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, Christ in me, the hope of glory.” Our hope of glory, yes, but if rivers of living water flow out of us we share this hope of glory with every man, women, and child we come in contact with. (Colossians 1:27)

We are not left up to our own devices to accomplish this great commission. By faith and believing we have received power when the Holy Spirit comes upon each of us. Jesus tells us we will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

We are new creations (not just the old me reshaped). We can choose to live like new creations or we can choose to live like our old selves and the world around us.

What is it that should be reflected in our every prayer, thought, word and action?

We are to lift up Jesus. That is our purpose. It is to be our testimony, our witness. If all who call themselves Christians focused on this purpose then Jesus’ prayer that we would be one would be what the world sees. We would be instruments of grace: not agents of Satan spreading judgment, and hate, and condemnation, and division.

We can’t turn a blind eye to wrong behavior even if we think the ends justify the means. We don’t have to ferret out wrong, destructive, behavior but when exposed we must speak. Silence today is interpreted to mean agreement or acceptance of the behavior. We are becoming the silent minority, agents of the enemy.

Being a new creation the Lord’s goal for us is that we may be one and walk without fear. If we determine to follow Jesus at every opportunity, in every prayer and in every decision no matter how small or how big God’s promise for us is that he has begun a good work in us and his desire is to bring it to completion. We squander this promise when we decide to do it our own way.

So why is there no living water? Have we forgotten our Lord’s guidance: the Sermon on the Mount? (Matthew 5:3-12)

Is there no living water because we are not poor in spirit?

We are being spiritually challenged. Do we respond as an agent of the enemy or as an instrument of grace?

I am sure Paul never meant his words in black to be used as an excuse to ignore or not follow Jesus' words in red

If we call ourselves Christians then we are ambassadors of Christ and everything we say or do reflects on Him. Are we allowing ourselves to be instruments of grace: loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind generous, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled? There is no law against such things. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Is there no living water because we do not mourn?

We are to be light. We are not to snuff it out. We cannot allow ourselves to think there is gray. We are either light, an instrument of grace, or dark, an agent of the enemy. In God's eyes and the words of our Lord Jesus there is no gray, there is no rationalizing or excusing sin.

Have we somehow been made to think we cannot condemn sinful behavior because we do not want to be seen as against a person? If we turn a blind eye and not speak up about sinful behavior the sinner will die in his or her sin thinking that the Christian community said it is OK. What do our children think? Where is the living water?

Is there no living water because we are not meek?

Have we forsaken meekness out of some wrong thinking that we must appear strong, demanding, and powerful? Our strength is in the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Therefore we can be humble and merciful and just.

Is there no living water because we no longer thirst after righteousness

Have we reached a point where we feel if my opinions go counter to God's will I am OK because I am forgiven. We can find ourselves comfortable being anti-Christ.

It has been a hard last month or so. Two, no, three parts of the Christian community in America have been exposed as less than Christian examples: the pastor of a 20,000 member church: Catholic priests: and the leadership of a large

denomination. In each instance other Christians turned a blind eye, covered it up – they became agents of the enemy.

As Christians we are not free to choose to participate in any evil, whether it is the lesser of two evils or not. Power seeking and self-righteousness describe agents of our enemy who is like a roaring lion seeking who he can destroy.

Is there no living water because we are not merciful?

We are missing our God-given opportunity to be a source of living water for children, women and strangers.

Jesus still says give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty and welcome the stranger. (Matthew 25)

Where is our outpouring of mercy to children and women, orphans and widows?

How can Christians be anti-abortion for the unborn but turn a blind eye to the way living children are treated? There is Christian energy and commitment to pass laws but does our silence mean we are OK with infants and children incarcerated, separated from their parents. Where is the living water?

People were bringing little children to Jesus in order that he might touch them and pray; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.’ (Matthew 19:13-14, Mark 10:13-15)

How important was mercy to Jesus’ brother James? James wrote “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. (James 1:27)

Being merciful is not just a New Testament challenge. God has always called his people to be merciful. “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry; my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans.” (Exodus 22:21-24)

The LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:17-19)

The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. (Psalms 146:9)

Is there no living water because we are not pure in heart?

Each one of us knows our own heart. Every word we speak comes from the heart. Are our words living water?"

Is there no living water because we are not peacemakers; children of God.

The opposite of peace is strife and division. "In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you. If anyone stirs up strife, it is not from me; whoever stirs up strife with you shall fall because of you. See, it is I who have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and produces a weapon fit for its purpose; I have also created the ravager to destroy. No weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgement. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me, says the LORD." (Isaiah 54:14-17)

People are seeking; peace. Are we instruments of grace touching those who are frustrated, hurt and fearful?

If we are angry (particularly when we join with others who share our anger) we are unable to be merciful, just, and humble because grace, mercy and love are not part of anger.

If Satan can make us angry we become his agent. We are not to be angry; it separates us from people who are looking for peace, mercy and love.

The last part of the Sermon on the Mount is about persecution. Where is the living water?

I do not sense that we are being persecuted because living water is flowing out of us. We must not confuse what Christians see today (others do not think the way we do) with being persecuted for righteousness' sake.

If living water flows from us then "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you

Jesus said we would be his witnesses: how are we doing?

Living water should be flowing out of us. Be ready with an answer for those who ask you or the hope that you have.

Isaiah declared God's word "Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

Surely he has borne our infirmities; and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:1, 4-6)

What does living water sound like?

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. (Psalm 100)

They will know we are Christians by our love (not by our legalism, judgment or condemnation)

Jesus is the light of the world and the world loves darkness. We are to be the reflected light of Jesus. The world (darkness) cannot overcome it so we should not fear reflecting it

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16)

‘Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. I tell you, on the day of judgement you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.’ (Matthew 12:33-37)

Jesus judges no one. Our words judge us. (John 8:15)

We know the source of living water. Our prayers, our thoughts, our words, and our acts they all come out of our hearts. So hide God’s word in our hearts. The Psalmist wrote “I treasure your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11)

Be an instrument of grace so that living water will flow out from you.

PRAYER: O God you call us to be sources of living water. We confess how easily we condemn and judge and seek worldly answers. Lord, fill our hearts with your mercy, justice and grace so rivers of living water do flow out from us in our every prayer, thought, word and act. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus, Amen