

Series:	Reference:	Title:	Date:
Ruin to Renovation	John 4:14	Living Waters	01.07.18
Website Writeup:			
<p>Jesus said, "...Let anyone who is thirsty come to me & drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." Is this a reality for you? Let's explore this statement & what it means in our first sermon of Ruin to Renovation - A Journey in Spiritual Formation.</p>			

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-SLIDE PERSON: PLEASE RECORD THE SERMON-

Today we begin a new series titled, *Ruin to Renovation*. Continuing our spiritual formation & discipleship discussion which we began in the fall. Dallas Willards book, *Renovation of the Heart*, has been influential in developing this series.

I'd encourage you to read the book as we go along. Repetition & learning from various avenues helps for comprehension & assimilation. My goal isn't just to preach to you, but also to give you tools for further growth & study. **Therefore, you'll have these sermons, the book, which also has a separate study guide available (*Renovation of the Heart in Daily Practice*, by Dallas Willard & Jan Johnson), and your community group discussions as well, all to engage with throughout this series. We also have this guide we've put together for you (explain how to use). I will be praying for you as we go deeper into the life of Christ together. Today we want to simply familiarize ourselves with what we'll pursue in this series. Let's begin with prayer...**

In John 4 Jesus is speaking to the Woman at the well. Remembering she's a Samaritan, and a woman, two things which would've created a social/cultural barrier between her & a Jewish Rabbi. Any other Rabbi wouldn't have acknowledged, let alone talked with her, nor been in her vicinity. Instead Jesus engages directly with her, disregarding these social mores - which says very clearly, Jesus is available to all, and puts himself directly in our path - what he promises her, he promises us as well.

Their discussion centers around the water she's come to draw at the well. Using physical thirst & our need for water as an imaginative tool Jesus says to her in vv13-14, *"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."*

Again later in the Temple Courts to a large crowd he proclaims the same, coming in the midst of them wondering if he's the Messiah who's come to save them. He says, *"...Let anyone who is thirsty come to me & drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."* (John 7:37-38)

I've asked Katie Boghal to lead us in an exercise to prepare our hearts today...

"For the next few moments I'm going to lead you in an imaginative prayer exercise. Let's close our eyes for a minute & go quiet in the presence of the Holy Spirit....use your imagination to get a picture of this living water within you; what does this look like in your minds eye."

Imagine you're parched. Thirsty. You've drunk little in days, it's hot outside. You've been walking in a desert which is representative of your life. You've looked for water. Finding only tepid pools here & there - warm, unsatisfying, dirty & impure - you've drunk from them anyway, but they didn't quench your thirst.

Suddenly Jesus is standing in front of you. You drop to the ground, unable to stand any longer. He kneels cradling your head holding a canteen to your lips. You drink deeply. This is his Spirit. His Life. He's pouring it into you. As it hits your stomach, a tingling floods your veins from finger tip to toe, throughout your limbs. It's cool & refreshing. Sit with that image for a moment...drinking in the water as your eyes drink in his visage.

Now imagine he takes the empty canteen away. Fear overtakes you, afraid he'll leave & you won't get more, you still have a long way to go. But as he looks at you, you realize your thirst is gone. You have no need any longer & he's not going anywhere.

All your desires satisfied in him. Life is surging within you, overflowing out of you, coming out of your pours & flowing down your limbs. Your dripping wet, totally satisfied as the water flows down & away from your feet, out & away from you. Wherever it flows in the dry ground life blooms, greenery appears, flowers grow & fresh pools form.

And Jesus just laughs at seeing your joy as he lifts you to your feet. Suddenly all strength is back - you walk with ease, the pain in your head's gone - heat stroke avoided. Despite the sun, you're cool & refreshed holding his hand walking now through a verdant colorful valley... Enjoy that image for a moment..."

Now open your eyes....feel good? That's the life we're pursuing in this series. The Kingdom of God welling up inside us & pouring out to the world around.

As we read His words, they speak of a divine life beckoning & calling to us. A life free from oppression of need. Free from unsatisfied desires. A full life, overflowing & gushing with more & more life. A reproductive life, which flows out of us into the lives of others; not keeping life to itself, but feeding the thirst of everything around it.

That's a large order, to say the least...but it's life with Jesus; available, obtainable, that which we can have, and dare say, should. Offered freely & to which we're called to pursue. Remember the spiritual life takes effort & the Gospel isn't opposed to our effort, it just can't be earned (explain). You can't earn something you already have. You can't earn a gift which God's grace is, but you can strive to understand it more.

But...that image Katie gave us is different than the spiritual life we typically imagine. The life we envision is one of walking in a dry valley, occasionally getting a drink just long enough to sustain us. A life where we trip & fall constantly, our heads spinning in stress & despair, with only Jesus showing up at the absolute worst of times to get us over the hump. A life of skinned knees, sprained ankles, and sweat dripping in our eyes, stinging & clouding our vision to no end.

We had an open mic sharing time back in November. Suicidal thoughts were a theme shared by a few people who spoke. Sadly, these thoughts are more the norm for folks than we'd like to admit. Maybe some don't feel comfortable sharing that openly. They say America is one of the most depressed countries in the world, despite our affluence. I

quoted Bill Malonee of the *Vigilantes of Love*, in a recent sermon where he said in his song *Double Cure*, “So tired of all my toys. They never last for long. They keep beaming dreams & wishes to a big dish on my front lawn.”

We’ve all thrown our coinage down the wishing well. Bought the lottery ticket. The new car. The house. Got married. Had the kids. Answered the ad. Bought the toys. Pursued the American Dream in hopes it would all fill the void. Maybe your in the middle of that American Dream, or at the end & have already figured out deep life isn’t fully found there. Maybe you’re at the beginning of that journey, in college, or just out, ready to begin building it. Listen to the wisdom of Scripture & those who’ve gone before, everything falls short & fails after a time. Our toys never last for long, they don’t have the power to satiate our real thirst for a deeper life. A life connected to our Creator. As St. Augustine said, “Our souls are restless, until they rest in you.”

Toys, cars, kids, houses, spouses, money & the like, aren’t bad things, but when pursued to bring total security, happiness & fulfillment, they can’t deliver for the long haul. It’s even unfair & unhealthy to put that kind of pressure on others. These things weren’t meant to satisfy at that level, although they do serve their purposes, and are to be enjoyed - they’re blessings after all.

In that open mic sharing time Senah spoke of how she used her imagination to connect with Jesus. There seemed to be so little hindering her pursuit. So innocent. Pure. At 17 she made her daddy proud. Maybe we were like that, or should’ve been. It reminds me of Supertramp’s, *The Logical Song*, which speaks of being formed & shaped up & away from the beauty of life...

When I was young, it seemed that life was so wonderful,
A miracle, oh it was beautiful, magical
And all the birds in the trees, well they'd be singing so happily,
Oh joyfully, playfully watching me

But then they sent me away to teach me how to be sensible,
Logical, oh responsible, practical
And they showed me a world where I could be so dependable,
Oh clinical, oh intellectual, cynical

There are times when all the world's asleep,
The questions run too deep
For such a simple man

Won't you please, please tell me what we've learned
I know it sounds absurd
Please tell me who I am

I said, watch what you say or they'll be calling you a radical,
Liberal, oh fanatical, criminal
Won't you sign up your name, we'd like to feel you're Acceptable
Respectable, oh presentable, a vegetable!

Don't we sometimes feel like respectable vegetables? Yes, we have to grow up & become responsible, but we don't have to lose our wonder. Our childlike attachment to Jesus. After all in John 12 he says, "*Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.*" And in Mt 18 he says, "*Truly I tell you, unless you change & become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*" Childlike reliance, living in his light.

"...Let anyone who is thirsty come to me & drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." (John 7:37-38) Believe means to be assured someone, or something's, capable of satisfying a particular need. Meaning, to believe in Jesus we come to the point of assurance he's capable of satiating our deep longing & desire for true purposeful life. Until we do so, our souls remain restless. We become the cynical acceptable vegetable blown & tossed about by every new wave of teaching or cultural philosophy (which are just recycled philosophies).

Sadly, many Christians never find their way into the life Jesus calls us into, or if they do, only very slowly & with great difficulty over time. Just because we are AT peace with God (salvation) doesn't mean we're living IN peace with him (transformation/sanctification) We can be justified in Christ, and still not live as true children of God in both blessing & suffering.

Possibly the reason is an issue of our imagination...maybe the life we see portrayed in the Scriptures seems far off & unattainable? It's so unlike our own experience we can't imagine experiencing this deeper life in Christ ourselves. If that's the case, the very words of Jesus, which were intended to bring life, end up being words which discourage, or bring hopelessness instead. But if Jesus said it, it must be available & attainable.

Therefore, logic tells us that the problem isn't in the offer, or the One extending the offer, rather in us. Possibly, we've gone about it wrongly - we don't approach & receive this divine life in the way it was intended.

When we read we're new creations in Christ, the old has gone, the new has come (2 Co 5:17), we don't fully believe it to be true (the dilemma of true belief). Where there's a will we don't always automatically know the way...sometimes there's a need to understand what exactly should be done, or how something can be accomplished. It's possible we need to understand the tools with which to realize that divine life & the order of their use as tools to attain it.

Most of the time we feel like a mess. We believe God can work in our chaos, but we must understand, spiritual formation's an orderly process. God can work in the mess & disorder of our lives for sure, but, he's set forth a process by which we're participatory - we can orderly walk through building our spiritual formation in partnership with God. Making good choices. Refusing to do so will actually limit God since he's not one to coerce & force himself upon us (*My Heart, Christ's Home* booklet).

It's of little use pontificating what God *can do, or is capable of*, in the chaos of our lives, it's much more useful to humbly accept *how he wants & has chosen to work* in us. These means, or tools, are laid out in Scripture - portrayed clearly in the life & words of Jesus showing us we can participate strongly & orderly in our spiritual formation.

So, from the beginning of this series, let's endeavor to throw off the burdensome slow or ineffectual ways in which we've tried to obtain spiritual vitality in the past. Let's forget all we've learned, or at the least, set it to the side for the time being, since some of it may be useful if dusted off & approached freshly. And if we've not considered our spiritual formation at all & just let life *happen to us*, let's begin to think, how we can participate with God more fully in our formation into the likeness of Christ.

Kind of like when you were a kid & you climbed up to the top of the back of your couch to look down at your living room from a different perspective. Or, lay on your back in an open field to get a fresh view of the sky appreciating the shape of the clouds - like there's a whole other world going on above your head, at which you've never really stopped & looked up. Let's look at our spiritual formation in a different way. Let's stop, lay in the grass of life, breath deeply of the smells around us, soak in the peacefulness of a time with our Creator & look up to what Jesus wants to say & do in us.

I say this because the spiritual life for many seems such a burdensome struggle & doesn't need to be. Jesus himself said it's a light & restful way of life, "*Come to me, all you who are weary & burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you & learn from me, for I am gentle & humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy & my burden is light.*" (Mt 11:28-30) That's not often reflective of our spiritual journey - typically our spiritual lives are teeth-clenched white-knuckled journeys. Outwardly religious. Inwardly full of tension & confusion.

We're too impatient & unbelieving of the small steps which quietly & certainly lead to inner transformation; that they can & will lead to an overflow of life in Jesus. But that's the crux of the matter. This is a journey of a thousand steps which begins with one & all old hindrances which derail us in the putting off of the old self & putting on the new in Christ can be removed from our path & even mastered.

God challenged Cain in this when Cain brought gifts from his garden which were apparently not the cream of his crops. While Abel brought the most choice gifts from his flocks to the Lord. God looked with favor on Abel, but not on Cain...Cain got angry. **And God asked (Genesis 4:6-7), "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."** Cain invited his own misfortune by holding back on the Lord. Did God need veggies? No, he needed Cains full attention. Cain wasn't fully reliant on God, but on self, controlled by desire.

So often our gifts we bring aren't the choicest, but the leftover. Leftover time. Leftover money. Leftover resources. Leftover emotion. Jesus, the afterthought, not the first. It's no use getting angry at God when we don't truly wish to be in relationship with him. Jesus offers life unreservedly, we can't transfer anger to him when we refuse to give him our best. We bring destruction upon ourselves. Most pain incurred is self-inflicted.

Here's a hopeful life-saving thought, an insight to which we should listen well - we can increasingly live in wholeness, holiness & kingdom power. There's no reason we should walk in despair, fear, or defeat. Rather, a life overflowing with Christ is attainable, with victory over sin & circumstance available to us who follow Jesus with a whole heart. Believing with full assurance he's the source of life & living water welling up within us.

Here's the thing, not facility, program, talent, speaker, these sermons, or budget can create this in, or for you. As a matter of fact the life Jesus offers is totally free, not dependent on any of those things - although they're all tools helpful in that journey. In the end, it's not even dependent on this church, or how well I preach to you - although we do know if we're unified in our pursuit of Christ, we can aide each other along in this journey of faith - *as Hebrews 10:24 tells us, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love & good deeds."* Iron does sharpen iron.

But at the core, only *your* response to Jesus can produce this satisfying life. In unity we can follow him together becoming the true Ecclesia of God, an image of heaven on earth illustrated in, and to which we're called to experience & participate in, as seen in the Lord's Prayer. In it, Jesus instructs us in how to pray, but also in how to live, listen...

"This, then, is how you should pray:

*"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,*

10 your kingdom come,

your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Mt 6:9-15)

In praying this, we naturally tend to think it's all God's doing - he does all the action other than our just requesting it all to be done in prayer. But notice how interactive & participatory this prayer is...someone's got to hallow (honor) his name. His kingdom has to work through somebody. For his will to be done on earth, someone on earth must decide to do it & follow through with those actions in reliance on Him. We must forgive others, and if we don't...what does that do to our spiritual formation? Verses 14 & 15 seem to communicate a breakdown in relationship. Assuming at the very least, we're hindered in our intimacy with God if we don't act in a godly fashion towards others. *"Forgive as the Lord forgave you"* (Colossians 3:13b). Maybe our sins are not forgiven because we have not fully given ourselves to Jesus yet, and in doing so taken on his heart for others in extending forgiveness to them?

In conclusion, it's possible to have what Titus chapter 2:11-14 speaks of when it says, *"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness & worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright & godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God & Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness & to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."*

We're the Ecclesia, the Body of Christ, the Called-Out Ones; it's possible to be living the life of Christ to it's fullness, individually & corporately, and in so doing, we're...



transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Co 3:18). In the coming months we will explore this together - but I urge you to make 2018 the year you seriously begin to grow in discipleship with Christ & others. Seek Jesus, walk together well; encourage, challenge, and above all love each other towards Jesus.