

Sermon for Sunday, February 5, 1978, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor
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"CATCHING WATER WITH A SIEVE"
St. John 7:37-52

Text: "He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" St. John 7:38

Two Sundays ago I preached a sermon entitled, "Born Again." In that sermon I explained as simply as I know how what the good news is--I told how we can be forgiven of our sins and born again. Last Sunday the supply of that sermon ran out before many of you had a chance to get a copy, so the secretaries have reprinted it and there are copies available for those who want them this morning.

In that sermon I talked about how--because of sin--we suffer brokenness in every area of our lives. We experience brokenness in our social relationships, brokenness in our physical lives, brokenness in our emotional/mental lives, and brokenness in our spiritual lives. But the Bible tells us the wonderful news that Jesus comes and dies for our sins. He pays the price for our rebellion and disobedience to God. And God forgives us. Not because we have earned it, for we haven't. Not because we are worthy of it, for we aren't. No, God forgives our sins because of Jesus. The price of our sin has been paid, the penalty has been met. Suppose you violated a traffic law and you are brought to trial. The judge is your friend and he loves you, but you have broken the law and he has no alternative but to sentence you. But after he passes sentence, you have no money. You cannot pay the fine. So, you must go to jail. You must bear the consequence of breaking the law. However, just as the judge is about to send you off to prison, someone suddenly steps forward and says, "Wait!" And while you watch in amazement, this person takes out his wallet and begins to count out the money to pay for your fine. And as you watch, you suddenly realize that it is the judge's son who is doing this for you. Well, in a far grander sense, that is what happened to us. We broke God's command, we violated his holy law, and he has no alternative but to sentence us, to condemn us, and the penalty is eternal death. But even as he passes sentence--a sentence of doom--Jesus comes forward and takes our place, he dies our death, he suffers our punishment. So our debt is paid and we are free. That is a wonderful thing, is it not? How incredible it is that Jesus would do that for you and me. If we will accept his gift, our debt is paid, our punishment is fulfilled. Not because we deserve it; not because we earned it; not because we are worthy of it, but simply because God loves us. The Bible calls that wonderful forgiveness "grace." The Bible says, "By grace are you saved..." Yes, wonderful grace, freely given. You can't earn or deserve it, you can only accept it as a gift!

So to be saved is to accept God's grace, God's wonderful gift for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes on him should not perish but have eternal life. But in that sermon on being born again, I went on to say that once we are forgiven, God wants us to live a new life. He wants us to live a holy life. He wants us to live a life of loving obedience.

But that's hard isn't it? Are you born again? Have you accepted the wonderful grace of God and been forgiven, been redeemed? If you have, praise God for that! But are you living that new life--that born again life--that holy life? Ask yourself that question this morning--am I living as God wants me to live? Most of us would have to answer, "no", wouldn't we?

Now, in that sermon two weeks ago, I went on to say that God gives us two gifts. First, he gives us Jesus--he gives us through Jesus the gift of forgiveness. But second, to help us live a new life, to help us live a life of obedience, God also gives us the Holy Spirit. God puts his very own Spirit in our hearts to give us

power to live new lives. Do you remember how Jesus put it? He said, "And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth...for he dwells with you and will be in you." (John 14:15) And then, in our scripture for this morning you will remember that when Jesus talked about those rivers of living water flowing out of our hearts, the Bible says, "Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believe in him were to receive..."

Well, are you living for Jesus? Are you the kind of person God really wants you to be? You see, you can't be without the Holy Spirit in your heart to give you power. If you are not living as you know the Bible tells you to live; if you are not doing the things you know God wants you to do, it means that you don't have the Holy Spirit.

You know, it is an interesting thing; but in Ephesians 5:18 the Bible tells us to be filled with the Spirit. And the Greek word translated "be filled" means literally to be filled and keep on being filled. Do you know why that is? Do you know why it is we need not only to be filled, but to keep on being filled? It is because our hearts are like sieves. Our hearts leak. In our scripture this morning Jesus says that the Spirit will be like a river flowing in our hearts. But did you ever try to catch water in a sieve?

Is that your problem in living your Christian life? I know it is mine. God's Spirit flows in my heart like a river of living water, but I'm always coming up dry, I'm always coming up short of spiritual power to live for Jesus. And the reason in my heart leaks--my heart is a sieve. Do you have that problem, too?

Well, let me give you three simple rules for catching water in a sieve. They are three rules what will help you stay filled with the spirit even when your heart leaks. Here is rule one; and it is from Ephesians 5:18. "Be filled (and keep on being filled) with the Spirit..." Maybe you were filled with the Holy Spirit when you believed, but are you filled right now? Maybe you were filled with the Spirit last month or last week or even yesterday, but are you filled this morning? So the first rule is to keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit. Now, how do you do that? Well, the answer is simple. You keep on resurrendering your life to Jesus and you keep on asking God to fill you with the Spirit. The Bible says to ask and it will be given to us, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. So, keep on asking God to fill you with His Spirit and to take control of your life.

Do you do that every day? Is there some time every day when you say something like this, "Lord I resurrender my heart and my life to you. Take control of my will and fill me with your Spirit that I might have power to live for you?" Do you do that?

Try that in your life and see if it won't work for you. Pick some regular time or relate that act of resurrender to something that you do every day. I think I may have told you once how I do that. There is a red light where I must turn every day to get up on Highway 40 to come to work. When I reach that light I am almost awake and I make it a point to consciously and deliberately resurrender my life to Jesus, I ask him to take control of my will, and to fill me with the Holy Spirit. Now, nothing spectacular happens. Yet, day by day as I do that, I can see God at work in my life.

So, rule one is to keep on being filled with the Spirit. Pick some regular time or some daily event and use that as a key to remind you. Maybe it is when you are shaving, or plugging in the coffee pot, or tying your shoes, or whatever. But pick something that you do every day and let that be your reminder to pour those rivers of living water into your sieve for the day.

Here is rule two: Don't grieve the Holy Spirit. Do you grieve the Holy Spirit? Well, let's see what the Bible says. In Ephesians 4:30 St. Paul writes, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God..." And then he goes on to tell us how not to grieve the Spirit. He writes, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another..." So, we grieve the Holy Spirit when we act badly towards others. Do you get bitter at people? Do you get mad and angry with people? Do you slander and gossip about others? Do you have malice toward someone who has done you badly? Are you always kind and tenderhearted? You see, those things grieve the Holy Spirit. That's taking a nail and making one of those holes in your sieve even bigger so that the water of the Spirit runs out even faster! How big are the holes in your sieve this morning? Are you making them bigger day by day in how you relate to others?

Let me tell you a little secret for dealing with those sins. You see, I know how hard it is not to get angry or bitter; I know how hard it is not to gossip and not to have malice towards someone who has treated me unfairly. But the Bible gives us a little secret for dealing with those bad sinful feelings.

Here is the secret: do what I John 1:9 says! And that says, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So when you catch yourself punching a larger hole in your sieve, confess that feeling, that attitude, that bad spirit to God. He will forgive you and help you get rid of it. You try that in your life and see if it doesn't help you stop grieving the spirit.

Now, here is rule three for catching water in a sieve. Don't quench the Holy Spirit. St. Paul writes, "Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit." Now, that says that no matter what is happening in your life, you rejoice and pray and give thanks because you trust God. And if you don't, you quench the Spirit. Do you do that? Do you keep on rejoicing, no matter what happens? Do you keep on praying no matter how things are turning out? Do you keep on thanking God no matter how badly things are going? Well, that is awfully hard to do, isn't it?

How much do you trust God when you stand by the casket of a loved one to say a last, fond farewell? How much could you rejoice if you saw your business going bankrupt, or your savings draining away? How long can you keep on praying for a child who goes from bad to worse year after year? It is hard, isn't it?

Yet, look at the other side. If things aren't going as you want them to go and if life isn't working out as you hoped, suppose you stop praying and stop rejoicing and stop giving thanks to God. Are you not saying to God something like this: "Lord, I don't like what is happening in my life. I can't trust you any more. I can't count on you any more." And that's quenching the Spirit. That's making those holes in your sieve bigger and bigger.

You see, when I can rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks in all things it means I am trusting God; it means I am claiming his promise that everything--no matter how bad it is--is working out for good in my life. The Bible says we can trust God. He loves us. He is working things out for our good. We may not understand it right now, but someday, looking back, we will be able to see how his hand was on us. And when we are trusting him no matter what, we are learning how to catch water in a sieve.

So that's how it works. God gives us his Spirit to help us live a life of loving obedience to him, but our hearts leak, we are trying to catch those rivers of living water in a sieve. The trick to keep from coming up dry is to be filled and keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit, to avoid grieving the Holy Spirit in our relationship to others, and not to quench the Holy Spirit by keeping on trusting that God is working in our lives.

There's just this last little question: how are the holes in your sieve this morning?

Let me tell you a little secret for dealing with these sins. You see, I know the hard it is not to get angry or bitter; I know how hard it is not to gossip and not to have malice towards someone who has sinned against me. But the Bible gives us a little secret for dealing with those bad sinful feelings.

How here is your lines for catching water in a sieve. Don't quench the Holy Spirit. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Now that says that no matter what is happening in your life, you rejoice and pray and give thanks because you trust God. And if you don't, you quench the Spirit. Do you see that? Do you keep on rejoicing, no matter what happens? Do you keep on praying no matter how things are turning out? Do you keep on thanking God no matter how badly things are going? Well, that is what is said to do, isn't it?

How much do you trust God when you stand by the bank of a leaky one to say a little word? How much could you rejoice? How long can you keep on praying for a child who goes from bad to worse year after year? Is it hard, isn't it?

Yes, look at the other side. If things aren't going as you want them to go and if I'm not working out as you hoped, suppose you stop praying and stop rejoicing and stop giving thanks to God. And you stop saying to God something like this: "Lord, I won't like what is happening in my life. I can't trust you any more. I can't count on you any more." And God's quenching the Spirit. That's what happens in your slave's heart and mind.