

RIVERS OF WATER IN A DRY PLACE

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A SERMON
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“As rivers of water in a dry place.”
Isaiah 32:2

I SUPPOSE it must be conceded that the surface sense of this passage refers to Hezekiah, and to other good kings who were the means of great blessings to the declining kingdom of Judah. We can scarcely be thankful enough for a righteous government. If for a few years we could feel the yoke of despotism, we should better appreciate the joys of freedom.

In the prophecy before us, very much is said in praise of a king who shall reign in righteousness, and princes who shall rule in judgment. Such men are the protectors of the state, enriching it by commerce and blessing it with peace. They deserve honor, and the Word of God renders it to them.

But I cannot bring my mind to believe that these expressions were intended by the Holy Spirit to have no other and higher reference. They appear to me to be far too full of meaning to be primarily or solely intended for Hezekiah or any other mere man.

When the Holy Spirit declared, by the mouth of the prophet, “A man shall be as a hiding place from the wind and a cover from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of great rock in a weary land,” it can scarcely be conceived that he referred only to Hezekiah and his princes. It cannot be that the church of God has erred these many years in applying such a passage as this to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Surely the words are not only applicable to Him, but can never be fully understood until they are applied to His ever blessed and adorable person. At any rate, this much is sure, that if a king who rules in righteousness brings so much blessing on his people, then Jesus, who is peculiarly the King of righteousness, “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords,” must bring these blessings in the highest conceivable degree, and therefore these expressions are, beyond all possibility of exaggeration, applicable in their widest sense to Him, whom this day we delight to hail as Lord of all.

Applying the language of the whole verse to the Lord Jesus Christ, the King in Zion, we are struck with the number of the metaphors. He is not merely a hiding place, and a covert, and a river, but He is a shadow of a great rock.

Yes, my brethren, if we attempt to set forth our Lord's glories by earthly analogies, we shall need a host of them, for no one can set Him forth to perfection. Each one has some deficiency, and even all together they are insufficient to display His loveliness. We need a thousand types and images to depict the varied beauties of His character, the manifold excellencies of His offices, the merit of His sufferings, the glory of His triumphs, and the innumerable blessings which He bestows on the sons of men.

Should you focus all the rays of nature's sun, you could not equal a solitary beam of His splendor—

*“Nor earth, nor sea, nor sun, nor stars,
 Nor heaven His full resemblance bears;
 His beauties you can never trace
 Till you behold Him face to face.”*

It is very pleasant to see that our Beloved is such a many-sided Christ, that from all points of view He is admirable, and that He is supremely precious in so many different ways—for we have so many

and so varied needs, and our circumstances are so continually changing, and the incessant cravings of our spirit are so constantly taking fresh turns. Blessed be His name, these changes of ours, and wants of ours, and cravings of ours, shall only put us in fresh positions in which to see yet more fully His surpassing excellencies, His superabounding fullness, and how completely He is adapted to meet the wants of our nature in every conceivable condition.

Blessed be the name of the Lord Jesus that while He is one, He is many. While He is altogether lovely, He is also lovelinesses combined. While He is perfect under one aspect, He is equally complete under every other.

The point to note in the text, applying it to Christ is this, that it is *a man* who is to be as rivers of water in a dry place. Note that—*a man!* We glory in the Godhead of Jesus Christ—about that we entertain no question. This is not the place wherein to attempt to prove it, for we are all persuaded of it, and we know Him to be divine by personal dealings with Him. We have found Him to be the Son of the Highest, and He ever must be so to us—“very God of very God.”

Yet none the less, but all the more, do we tenaciously hold to the truth of the true and proper manhood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is as God in human flesh that He is to us as rivers of water in a dry place. Think of it for a minute. If God loves us so much as to become man, then the blessings which He intends to bestow must be incalculable. The Incarnation is in itself a promise big with untold blessing.

Gaze upon the Son of God in Bethlehem’s manger, and you feel sure that if the Infinite has assumed the form of an infant, His incarnation betokens infinite love, foreshadows intimate communion, and foretells unbounded blessedness for the sons of Adam. If JEHOVAH Himself in human flesh walks toilsomely over the acres of Judea, if He bears human sicknesses and sorrows, if He in human form gives His hands to the nails, and His heart to the spear, there must be boundless affection in His heart towards the seed chosen from among men.

What rivers of blessings must come to us if God Himself comes to us, and comes in such a fashion and in such a spirit? What means the union of Godhead with humanity but this, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor? And what can His purpose be but “that we through his poverty, might be made rich”? rich with riches as vast as those which He renounced in order to espouse our nature in all its poverty and degradation.

Let us at this time joy and rejoice in the Son of Mary, the Son of Man, who is also the Son of God. Let us exult today as we believe that Jesus is as truly man as He is truly God.

*“Oh joy! There sitteth in our flesh,
Upon a throne of light,
One of a human mother born,
In perfect Godhead bright!”*

This is the source, the channel, and the stream, bringing to us and containing within itself all the blessings with which God has enriched us. This is that river of God which is full of water.

Come we, then, with this as our guide, to *study the metaphor of our text*. When we have done so for a little, we shall *remark upon a special excellence which is indicated*. And having so done, we shall *close by gathering up the practical lessons of the whole*.

I. As setting forth the benedictions which come to us through the incarnate God, LET US STUDY THE METAPHOR of rivers of water in a dry place.

This means, first, *great excellence* of blessing. A river is the fit emblem of very great benefits, for it is of the utmost value to the land through which it flows. A river, in its own way, creates life wherever it flows—grass, and reeds, and rushes are sure to spring up—and willows fringe the water courses. The water of the river fosters and nourishes the vegetation along its banks, and sustains an infinite number of fish and creeping things.

The silver stream lights up the landscape with its brightness. “The joyous and abounding river” is the theme of song, and a song in itself. It is a glad sight to trace the winding line of silver light among green fields. Who can refuse to render thanks to the God who thus visits the earth and waters it?

Now, what the river is to the land, that the Lord Jesus Christ is to us. He is the spring and source of spiritual life, and where He comes divine life springs up, and flourishes like a tree by the rivers of water, whose leaf never withers. The life which He bestows, He also nourishes, watering it every moment, nourishing it, He makes it fruitful. Making it fruitful, He causes it to be fair to look upon, and brings it to perfection.

Vegetation owes much to the river which waters it. What were the meads without the streams? What were the saints without the Savior? What were the villages without their springs and water-brooks? That were believers without the covenant blessings which are given us in Christ Jesus.

The analogy is so very obvious that I need not pursue it. The place of broad rivers and streams is the place where plentiful good things are looked for, and not in vain shall we look for good things in our Lord Jesus. He is that river the streams whereof make glad the city of God. Of Him it may be truly said that, “Everything that liveth which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live.”

Because the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, therefore do rivers of mercy flow to many, and we who believe shall be made to drink of the river of His pleasures. Here, O my heart, is reason for adoration. I need not see any difficulty in it. Having believed the testimony of the Lord, all difficulty has vanished.

“The Word was God,” and the Word was also “made flesh and dwelt among us,” and through being made flesh and dwelling among us, He has opened rivers in high places and fountains in the midst of the valleys. God has come down to man that man may go up to God. God has veiled Himself in an infant’s form that babes may learn His love. The Christ has grown in stature from childhood to manhood that we also may grow up into Him in all things.

He has been perfect man that we also may come unto the fullness of the stature of men in Christ Jesus. Christ the man, the God, connects man with God—the river flows directly from the throne of God to the hearts of mortals, and brings God Himself to us to fill us with all fullness. Observe the excellence of the Lord Jesus, and meditate upon it.

The metaphor chiefly implies, in the second place, *abundance*. Jesus is as rivers of water, because He is full of grace and truth. It would be a very difficult thing to calculate the body of water to be found in the Thames, but in rivers such as our American friends are favored with, it must be almost beyond the power of mind to conceive the mass of water that must come rolling down into the sea. Gallons and hogsheads seem quite ridiculous by the side of the Mississippi and the St. Lawrence.

I always feel very fidgety when theologians begin making calculations about the Lord Jesus. There used to be a very strong contention about particular redemption and general redemption, and though I confess myself to be to the very backbone a believer in Calvinistic doctrine, I never felt at home in such discussions.

It is one thing to believe in the doctrines of grace, but quite another thing to accept all the encrustations which have formed upon those doctrines, and also a very different matter to agree with the spirit which is apparent in some who profess to propagate the pure truth. I can have nothing to do with calculating the value of the atonement of Christ. I see clearly the specialty of the purpose and intent of Christ in presenting His expiatory sacrifice, but I cannot see a limit to its preciousness, and I dare not enter into computations as to its value or possible efficacy. Appraisals and valuers are out of place here.

Sirs, I would like to see you, with your slates and pencils, calculating the cubical contents of the Amazon. I would be pleased to see you sitting down and estimating the quantity of fluid in the Ganges, the Indus, and the Orinoco. But when you have done so, and summed up all the rivers of this earth, I will tell you that your task was only fit for school boys, and that you are not at the beginning of that arithmetic which can sum up the fullness of Christ—for in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

His merit, His power, His love, His grace surpass all knowledge, and consequently all estimate. Limits are not to be found, neither shore nor bottom are discoverable. Instead of coldly calculating, with a view to systematize our doctrines, let us joyfully sing with the poet of the sanctuary—

*“Rivers of love and mercy here
In a rich ocean join;
Salvation in abundance flows,
Like floods of milk and wine.”*

All idea of stint or insufficiency is out of place in reference to the Lord Jesus. When any man inquires, “Is there enough merit in the Savior’s death to make atonement for my sin?” The answer is, “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” When any say, “Perhaps I may not taste His love and believe on His name,” the reply is, “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.”

Oh, sirs, would you measure the air? Could you calculate the contents of the atmosphere which surrounds the globe? Yes, that might be done. Would you measure space? I suppose that also might be accomplished. Will you measure eternity? Will you calculate infinity? You must begin by problems like these before you can discover a bound to that abundant grace which comes to sinners through God in human flesh, who bore human sin, and gave up His life, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God.

Anything approaching to a narrow spirit is unseemly in connection with the merits of our Redeemer. Niggardliness at an imperial banquet is not more out of place than an ungenerous spirit in a Christian. Our Lord does things upon such a royal scale that we ought to be of a kingly spirit also. Saint and bigot are a strange mixture—saint and miser cannot agree.

I remember hearing of a man who used to go out preaching, and happened to have a well upon his premises, to which his neighbors came more frequently than he liked. And he, therefore, put up a notice that trespassers would be prosecuted. It was not at all surprising that a witty friend soon adorned the preacher’s residence with a bill in prominent capitals, bearing these words, “*Come to Jesus, but you must not take water out of my well.*”

In a great many other ways, the same remark might be applied. Come to Jesus, but do not crowd me up in my pew! Come to Jesus, but do not ask me for a shilling. Certain people are very free with the Gospel, for it costs them nothing—very free indeed with the tracts which are given them to distribute, but they hang back when the hungry want feeding, or the naked need clothing. Are such churls any credit to the Gospel, think you?

Yea, and are there not preachers who appear to be half afraid that some poor non-elect sinner may get into heaven by accident? Hear how they define, and distinguish, and denounce. I confess I have no sympathy with those who would drive men back. Far rather would I draw them forward. When one once gets to know that Jesus is as rivers of water, a large-hearted loving spirit seems to spring up in the soul as a matter of course.

The Holy Ghost enlarges the heart by revealing to us the glorious fullness of our Lord. I pray, my brethren, you may be all enlarged, and that none of you may ever slander the Lord Jesus Christ by bearing a narrow, contracted testimony concerning Him. Never may you help to straiten other people’s apprehensions of what the Gospel is by depicting your Lord as if He were some cramped up straight-lined canal, with locks, and pumps, and measured wharfs—for He is as rivers of water.

There is in Christ Jesus such an abundance that if you come, O great sinner, there is enough mercy in Christ for you. Yea, if the teeming myriads of the human race should all come rushing to this river to drink, they could not drain it dry—nay, it should seem all the fuller, and the lands should be made all the gladder as the undiminished stream flowed on.

In a river, we see not only excellence and abundance, but *freshness*. A pool is the same thing over again, and gradually it becomes a stagnant pond, breeding corrupt life and pestilential gases. A river is

always the same, yet never the same. It is ever in its place, yet always moving on. Filled to the brim with living water, even as in ages long gone by, and yet flowing fresh from the spring, it is an ancient novelty.

We call our own beautiful river, “Father Thames,” yet he wears no furrows on his brows, but leaps in all the freshness of youth. You shall live by the banks of a river for years, and yet each morning its stream shall be as fresh as though its fountain had been unsealed but an hour ago when the birds began to awake the morning, and the sun to sip the dews.

Is it not so with our Lord Jesus Christ? Is He not evermore as bright and fresh as when first you met with Him? I remember when first I knew Him, and my soul was married to Him. I had a blessed honeymoon in dearest fellowship. That sweet communion is not over yet, nay, it is deeper, nearer, more constant than ever. He is as good a Christ to me now as at first—I may not say that He is better, but I must confess that I know Him better. I love Him more fervently and prize Him more highly.

If you serve a master twenty years, I should not wonder but what you find him out by that time. Some of you have served the Lord Jesus these forty years, and what do you think of Him? You have found Him out by this time, and you may without fear tell all that you have discovered. Do not words fail you to express His excellence? All others become stale, but Jesus has the dew of His youth.

These fine ribbons and bits of color, which are attracting the people to certain Episcopal churches for a time, will soon fade. They tell us that such and such a church is quite full, because they have a surpliced choir, and pretty processions, and tasteful banners, and many other childish toys, which turn their churches into dolls’ houses. But let them not dream that these prettinesses will long draw the people.

Go into the Popish churches on the continent, and you will see in some cases fine marble and gems, and in others twopenny-halfpenny artificial flowers and daubs of paint—but where are the people? Rarely enough do you see a crowd. In general, you only spy out a few women, dupes of the priests. The manhood of the nation is not to be entrapped by such transparent tomfooleries. These things grow old and effete, but the Gospel does not.

Centuries ago, Wickliffe preached the Gospel of Christ beneath an oak in Surrey, and crowds assembled. Not long ago, I preached beneath the same old tree, the selfsame Gospel, and its attractive power was none the less. Even so, in the ages yet to come, others will arise with the same message on their tongues, and the people will gather to hear them, and own the Gospel’s power.

Some will come to find fault, and will gnash their teeth with rage, but they *must* come and hear it. It is impossible for them to do otherwise, for the novelty of the Gospel will always attract. Is it not always new? And is not news a thing ever sought after? Does a man want something new? Tell him “the old, old story.”

Our naked fathers crossed the Thames in their coracles, and we sail upon it in our steam-vessels, but it is the same glad river, and yet when it first flowed, it was not more fresh and sparkling than it is today. It is ever changing, ever fresh, ever new, yet ever the same. And so is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Again, Jesus Christ may well be compared to a river, from His *freeness*. We cannot say this of all the rivers on earth, for men generally manage to claim the banks and shores, the fisheries and water powers. I sometimes wonder why our great men do not map out the stars. Will no duke claim the Pole star, and no earl monopolize Castor and Pollex? Could we not have an Enclosure Act for the Zodiac, or at least for some of the brighter constellations? Well is it written, “The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD’S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men.”

Yet rivers can scarcely be parceled out—they refuse to become private property. See how freely the creatures approach the banks. I took pleasure the other day in seeing the cattle come to the river to drink. The cows sought out a sloping place, and then stood knee deep in the stream and drank and drank again! I thought of Behemoth, who trusted he could snuff up Jordan at a draught, they drank so heartily, and no one said them nay, or measured out the draught.

The dog as he ran along lapped eagerly, and no tax was demanded of him. The swan was free to plunge her long neck into the flood, and the swallow to touch the surface with its wing. To ox and fly, and bird, and fish, and man, the river was alike free.

So you, ox of a sinner, with your great thirst, come and drink. And you, dog of a sinner, who thinks yourself unworthy even of a drop of grace, yet come and drink.

I read near one of our public ponds a notice, “Nobody is allowed to wash dogs here.” That is right enough, for a pond, but it would be quite needless for a river. In a river, the foulest may bathe to his heart’s content. The fact of its fullness creates a freeness which none may restrict.

How I delight to talk about this, for I remember when I thought that the Lord Jesus was not free to me. I dreamed that I wanted Him and He would not have me, whereas it was all the other way—He was willing enough, but I was unwilling.

Oh, poor sinner, there is nothing so free in all the world as Christ is. To all who pant after Him, desire Him, and need Him, He is free as the air you breathe.

Christ is like a river for *constancy*, too. Pools and cisterns dry up, but the river’s song is—

*“Men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever.”*

So is it with Jesus. The grace to pardon and the power to heal are not a spasmodic force in Him—they abide in Him evermore. He saved a thousand years ago, He saves still. He saves all day long, and all night long. Whether we sleep or wake, the river still flows on, sounding no trumpet, but steadily pursuing its course. And so the pardoning grace of God is flowing all day and all night long, all the year round, quietly blessing thousands.

Blessed be God for this! Today is the Sabbath, and to me it seems as if the river widened out and poured its bounty over a greater area. Oh, that you would drink of it, poor sinner, today. It flows still, whether you refuse it or accept it. Oh, suffer it not to flow in vain for you.

The text speaks of rivers, which implies both *variety and unity*—upon this we cannot enlarge, but must dwell upon the idea of *force*. Nothing is stronger than a river. It cuts its own way, and will not be hindered in its course. Who shall dam up the Mississippi? Who shall enchain the Amazon? They roll whither they will, following the course which infinite sovereignty marked out for them.

If the rock be in the river’s way, it will wear it down. If the cliff intrude, it must fall—being undermined by the current, and falling it must disappear. The river waits not for man, neither tarries for the sons of men, but follows its predestined course.

Glory be to God, Christ Jesus will accomplish the divine purposes, the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. None can stay His course—winding this way and that, He must needs go to this sinner and the other—He cleanses a dying thief, and waters some of “Caesar’s household.” Between the high hills of proud opposition, He speeds His way, and makes glad the lowly valleys of the contrite in heart.

Neither death nor hell can stay His course. He sweeps away all opponents even as that mighty river, the river Kishon, swept away the armies of Jabin. And when it seems as if there were no longer a channel for the Gospel, the truth leaps adown the precipice in some great reformation or revival like a glorious Niagara—and the wonders of divine power are still more clearly seen—the Lord making bare His arm in the eyes of all the people. Flow on, O river of God, for evermore.

II. Secondly, WE WILL CONSIDER A SPECIAL EXCELLENCE which the text mentions. “Rivers of water *in a dry place*.”

I cannot tell you how I leaped at that word on my own account. In this country, we do not value rivers so much because we have springs and wells in all our villages and hamlets. But in the country where Isaiah lived, the land is parched and burnt up without rivers. You can trace the Jordan and the

other streams by the fringe of vegetation skirting their banks, and consequently a river is greatly prized in a dry place.

Ah, my brethren, when the Man Jesus Christ came hither with blessings from God, He brought rivers into the dry place of our humanity. When He came down among Abraham's race, He brought rivers of water into the dry old stock of Jesse. When Judah had lost her king, He came to renew the royalty of the house of David.

And today, we Gentiles, who had been cut off from all covenant blessings, and left like the desert, while Israel was like a garden—we have Jesus Christ coming among us as rivers of water in a dry place. Jesus has come to you, my brother, and what a dry place your heart was by nature. Ah, think how dry it was before Christ came, and caused springs of life to water your soul.

As I think of my own state by nature, I can only compare it to a waste howling wilderness, "a salt land, and not inhabited," in which there was great drought—a dry and thirsty land where no water is. The Sahara is not more destitute of water brooks than is human nature of anything that is good, and yet Jesus Christ has come into your human nature and into mine, and made the dry land springs of water.

O brethren, what a dry place our nature would still be at this very moment if it were not for the presence of Jesus as the river of the water of life. We have grown older, but our nature has not improved. Years have gone over us, but not even a cloud the size of a man's hand has come to us by nature's energy. Our only watering has been through our interceding Savior.

So far as the flesh is concerned, I see myself more prone to sin than ever, weaker than ever for all good things, more consciously dead and withered apart from Christ. If you have found springs in the waste places of your nature, I confess I have not—my nature is, indeed, still a dry place. Emptiness!—oh, that is hardly the word for it—one feels worse than empty. Dead, oh how dead!

Even those of us who try to live near to God have cold seasons. I suppose the perfect people have no such confessions to make, but I am not one of them. I mourn over seasons in which I cannot pray as I would, and rise groaning from my knees. I suffer from temptations without and fightings within, and I cannot always alike rejoice in God, although I know He is always worthy of all my joy. I lament that it is so, but so it is with me.

There may be persons who can always glide along like a tram-car on the rails without a solitary jerk, but I find that I have a vile nature to contend with, and spiritual life is a struggle with me. I have to fight from day to day with inbred corruption, coldness, deadness, barrenness. And if it were not for my Lord Jesus Christ, my heart would be as dry as the heart of the damned, and have no more life, or light, or goodness in it than hell itself.

This, however, I can say, I value His fullness all the more because I am so empty, and I prize His power the more because I am so weak. I find I cannot speak or think well-enough of my Lord, nor ill-enough of myself. Nothingness and emptiness, vanity and sin are my sole and only heritage by nature. And all my fullness lies in Christ, and every excellence I can ever claim must come from Him, and Him alone.

Do not many of you find your outward circumstances very dry places? Are you rich? Ah, my brethren, wealthy society is generally as dry a place as the granite hills. "Gold and the Gospel seldom agree." Are you poor? Poverty is a dry place to those who are not rich in faith. Are you engaged in business from day to day? How often do its cares parch the soul, like the heat of the desert! To rise up early and to toil late amid losses and crosses is to dwell in a dry place.

Oh, to feel the love of Christ flowing then! This is to have rivers of water. To have Christ near when you are losing your money, when bills are being dishonored, and commercial houses falling—this is true religion. To rejoice in Christ when you are out of work, poor man—to have Christ when the wife is sick, Christ when the darling child has to be buried, Christ when the head is aching, Christ when the poor body is half starved—this is sweetness.

Ah, you will never know the sweetness of Christ till you know the bitterness of trial. You cannot know His fullness till you see your emptiness. I pray that it may be our experience to always feel

ourselves going down and Christ going up, ourselves getting poorer and poorer apart from Him, while we know more and more of the priceless riches which are ours in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The point then, of the whole, seems to me to be this—that Christ is a river of abounding grace, but He is most so to those who are most dry. Alms are only sought by the poor, the physician is only esteemed by the sick, the lifeboat is only valued by the man that is drowning. So, my brethren, Christ will be dearer and dearer to you just in proportion as you have less and less esteem of yourself. “Rivers of water in a dry place.”

III. Now, WE CLOSE WITH THE PRACTICAL LESSON from it all.

First, *see the goings out of God’s heart to man, and man’s way of communing with God.* Other rivers rise in small springs, and many tributaries combine to swell them, but the river I have been preaching about rises in full force from the throne of God. It is as great a river at its source as in its after course. Oh, my brother, whenever you stoop down to drink of the mercy which comes to you by Jesus Christ you are having fellowship with God, for what you drink comes direct from God Himself.

Do think of this, now. You desire to have a communication established between you and God, and the Lord says, “Here am I coming to you, coming in a great river of blessedness. Take of Me. Accept what comes to you through Jesus Christ. Every drop of it has come from My throne, and is full of the love which is My essence.”

Oh, poor sinner, do you see this? What a simple, what a safe, what a suitable way God has prepared to bring you into communion with Himself! You are to be the receiver, and He the giver—He the everlasting source of all your supplies, and you simply the partaker of His benefits. Ask what God is, and the answer is, God is a river of goodness streaming down to men through the person of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, *see what a misery it is that men should be perishing and dying of soul-thirst when there is this river so near.* That men should die of thirst would be horrible, but that such deaths should happen all along the banks of a river is shocking indeed. What ails them? Have they never heard of it?

Dear brethren, let the thought press heavily on you, that millions of our race have never heard of Jesus. In China, in parts of India, in Africa, in large tracts of country, myriads live and die without having heard the sweet name of Jesus. Are we doing all we can for missions, do you think? Are we all sure that we give as much as we should, and pray as we should, and work as we should for missions? It is a sad thing that Christ has come into the world and yet men perish by millions.

Ah, yet there is a sadder thought still, for millions of men know all about this river and yet do not drink. Many of our own fellow citizens know the plan of salvation by Jesus Christ, but they are struck with a strange insanity—they would sooner die of thirst than drink of God’s own river. O God, we sometimes say, “Have pity,” but You have had pity, and therefore we had better to pray, “Teach men to have pity upon themselves.”

Another lesson is, *let us learn if we have any straitness, where it must lie.* It cannot be in Christ, because He is as rivers of water. So the next time we feel that we are straitened, that we have little grace, little power, little joy, let us know where the fault lies. Our cup is small, but the river is not. If you have not, brethren, it is not because God does not give—it is because you are not open to receive. “Ye have not because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss.”

O church of God, if you are weak, it is not because God is weak. If you cannot get at sinners, it is not because God cannot reach them. You are not straitened in Him, you are straitened in your own heart.

Is Christ a river, then, last of all, *drink of Him*, all of you. To be carried along on the surface of Christianity, like a man in a boat, is not enough—you must drink or die. Many are influenced by the externals of religion, but Christ is not *in* them. They are on the water, but the water is not in them. And if they continue as they are, they will be lost.

A man may be in a boat on a river, and yet die of thirst if he refuses to drink. And so may you be carried along and excited by a revival, but unless you receive the Lord Jesus into your soul by faith, you will perish after all. Faith is as simple a thing as drinking, but you must have it—you must believe or die.

If a man were set up to his neck in water like Tantalus, and if all the rivers in the world flowed by him, he would expire in the pangs of thirst if he did not drink. Some of you have been up to your neck in the river for years. As I look at those pews, I cannot but remember that rivers of love and mercy have been flowing right up to your lips—and yet you have not drunk.

He who dies so deserves to die. He who perishes of thirst in such a condition must perish with a sevenfold emphasis. God help you. I know not what more I can ask Him to do for you. Has He not done enough in giving rivers of mercy to you in Christ?

And if you have drunk of this stream, the next thing I say is, *live near it*. We read of Isaac that he dwelt by the well. It is good to live hard by an inexhaustible spring. Commune with Christ, and get nearer to Him each day. Wade into this river, as you have done, till the water is up to your ankles. Go on till it is up to your knees. Go on till it washes your heart and loins—yes, go on till you find it a river to swim in.

I should like to say, last of all, if Christ be like a river, let us be like the fishes that *live in it*. The fish is an ancient Christian emblem for Jesus and His people. I sat under a beech tree some months ago in the New Forest. I gazed up into it, measured it, and marked the architecture of its branches, but suddenly I saw a little squirrel leap from bough to bough, and I thought, “After all, this beech tree is far more to you than to me, for you live in it. It delights me, it instructs me, and it affords me shade, but you live in it and upon it.”

So we know something about rivers, and they are very useful to us, but to the fish the river is its element, its life, its all. So, my brethren, let us not merely read about Christ, and think of Him, and speak of Him—but let us live on Him, and in Him, as the squirrel in the tree and the fish in the river. Live *by* Him, and live *for* Him—you will do both if you live *in* Him.

*“Roll over me, thou heavenly stream,
I find my element in Thee.
This my true life and bliss I deem,
In Christ, my Lord, absorb’d to be.*

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 32

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—170, 541, 488

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.