

Have you ever drawn water from a well? I don't mean with an electric pump. I'm talking about taking your bucket to the well, lowering it down, letting it fill, pulling it up. Today, we just turn a handle and water comes out. Back in the day, there was some work involved, getting your water and taking it home.

That gives us a tiny bit of background on Isaiah's beautiful statement: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." It's a great image, made greater by the circumstances into which it was first spoken.

These words were expressed early in the career of Isaiah, at a time when Judah, the southern kingdom of God's People, had been conquered by the Assyrian Empire. In the first eleven chapters of the book, Isaiah had prophesied against his people and the nation's leaders, condemning their failure to follow God's Law, confronting their failure to take care of the widows, the orphans, the poor, the immigrants. Isaiah prophesied of desolation and loss, and those prophecies came true. The prophet's call to repentance was ignored, and so judgment had come in the form of invasion, occupation, and humiliation. Yet, directly into those circumstances, Isaiah offers this glimpse of future hope: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: 'Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted.'"

Those who were the first to hear these words would have known all about drawing water from wells. But the way this is stated by Isaiah would have also stirred memories of an annual ritual. An important part of the celebration called the Feast of Tabernacles was the "Festival of Water-drawing." In this ritual, every morning for a week, a young priest would take a golden pitcher to the Pool of Siloam and fill it with water. He would then carry the water in a procession with lighted torches up to the Temple where the water was poured upon the altar, and the people broke out into jubilant song and dance.

The ritual of water-drawing was a reminder that God's Presence is as fundamental to human life as the water that falls from the sky or springs up from the earth. And Isaiah says this water-drawing leads directly to the proclamation of good news *everywhere*. The good news of God's salvation cannot be contained; it flows out to the whole earth and it's an occasion for joy.

So, to review, God's prophet Isaiah shares a message of hope with people in a humbling, horrible situation. He could've shown up to say, "I told you so." Instead, he delivers God's Word of a coming joy; news so good that it's going to encircle the globe. God is going to act—specifically and decisively for the good of His people. Yet again, He will deliver. He will rescue. He will save.

When He does, He invites His people to help themselves to His goodness, to joyfully draw water from the wells of salvation. And there's something about that well I need to mention.

The word used by the Prophet Isaiah, the word translated as “salvation,” also works as a Name. The word is *hay-su-ah*. Do you hear it? It’s a form of *Ye-shu-ah*: a name that means ‘the Lord saves.’ A name that goes from Hebrew to English as Joshua. A name that goes from Hebrew to Greek to English as Jesus. “With joy you will draw water from the wells of *hay-su-ah*.”

Amazing, isn’t it? This prophetic message of hope looks forward to a time when people will draw life-giving power from the rescuing work of Jesus. To connect the dots, let’s fast forward approximately six hundred years, to a town in Samaria called Sychar. There we find Jesus, sitting by a well, talking to a Samaritan woman, and He’s telling her about a water He can give, and this is what He says: “...whoever drinks the water I give will never be thirsty. The water I give will become a spring of water gushing up inside that person, giving eternal life.” With joy you will draw water from the wells of *hay-su-ah*.

So here are the questions of the day. Are you—joyfully—drawing water from the well of Jesus’ salvation? Do you know how to do that?

This idea of drawing water from the well is of course a metaphor; a poetic way of talking about accessing what Jesus has provided. And what Jesus has provided is a life source. What Jesus provides is the ultimate validation; it’s perfect affirmation. To summarize: the God who created the wonders of the universe thinks of you as priceless, beautiful, and worthy of love. If you ever doubt that, look at what Jesus did. He took the test of life according to God’s Law; aced it; and with His death on the cross, transferred His A+ to your record so that it counts for you. He knows that you were failing. That’s why He did it. And not only that, He rose from the dead to remove the world’s greatest fear from your heart. Jesus’ resurrection transforms our understanding of death, creating the expectation of a life that lasts forever, in which we are loved perfectly. This is the “spring of water gushing up inside a person” that Jesus was talking about.

So again, I ask: Are you—joyfully—drawing water from the well of Jesus’ salvation? Do you know how to do that?

Using the language of the metaphor, here are some simple ways to draw water.

You send your bucket down into the water every time you read or listen to God’s Word.

You send your bucket down every time you think about what you read or listened to in God’s Word.

You send your bucket down when you think your way through the Gospel, which is the good news of what Jesus did for you by dying and rising.

You send your bucket down when you pray that Gospel into your heart, remembering, on purpose, every day, that Jesus did what He did because He treasures you more than anything.

You send your bucket down when you come to worship, like you are right now, because your bucket gets filled with the gifts of God.

You send your bucket down when you pray to God just to talk to Him, not so much to ask Him for things, but just to spend some time with Him in a refreshing way.

These are just a few suggestions. You'll be able to think of many more. But the point is, practice sending your bucket down, so that these things become habits. Help yourself to the water Jesus gives—the water that turns into a gushing spring inside you. You need this. You have to have this, because, at some point, life is going to hit you hard.

It's not going to be the Assyrian army, like in Isaiah's day, but some enemy will invade your life, whether it's the loss of a loved one, or the end of a relationship, the termination of a career, a disease that invades your body, or someone is just determined to make your life miserable. Even when nation rises against nation; even when the world seems to be in that proverbial hand-basket; even in times of personal tragedy and longstanding grief, there is a well, filled with life-giving water, that never runs out. If you've been sending your bucket down, then you know what to do. When times get tough you don't stop. You take more trips to well. You send more buckets down. You want more Jesus, not less. Nothing else satisfies.

All of which leads to sustainable joy. Remember, the verse says, "*With joy* you will draw water from the wells of salvation." Joy is what you feel when you realize, "The God who made all this love me as much as He loves His Son." Joy is knowing that there is nothing that the world can do to you that God cannot undo. Don't you want that as a source for living?

Then send your bucket down.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, you promised that you would give to any who asked living water gushing up to eternal life: Make us thirsty for that living water that we may love God with our whole heart and soul and mind, that we may rejoice in your victory and salvation with dancing and singing and laughter, that we may fill our buckets with your abundant prosperity and may pour out your good news for all the world, that we may love our neighbor as ourselves; in your Holy Name we pray. Amen.