

The King's Highway.

An Advocate of Scriptural Holiness.

And an Highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of Holiness.—Isa. 35-8

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SOUL SATISFACTION IN CHRIST.

By Rev. W. Edmund Smith

John VII:37. In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried saying, If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink.

The Jews had been celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles in which they commemorated the time when the Israelites dwelt in tents and booths in the Wilderness, as they journeyed from place to place. The last day of the great feast had come. While the morning sacrifice was being prepared, a priest, accompanied by a joyous procession with music, went down to the pool of Siloam, where he filled a golden pitcher with water. At the same time that the procession went to Siloam, another went into the Kedron valley a place called Motza, whence they brought willow branches which amid the blasts of the priest's trumpets they struck on either side of the altar of burnt offering, bending them over towards one another so as to form a leafy canopy. Then the ordinary sacrifice proceeded; the priest who had gone to Siloam so timing it that he arrived just at the time his brethren carried up the pieces to lay them upon the altar. He then entered by the water gate, which obtained its name from this ceremony, and was received by a three-fold blast from the priest's trumpets. The priest then went up to the rise of the altar and turned to the left where there were two silver basins with narrow holes—the eastern a little wider for the wine, and the western a little narrower for the water. Into one, the wine of the drink-offering was poured, and into the other the water from Siloam, the people shouting to the priest, "Raise thy hand!" to show that he had really poured the water into the basin which led to the base of the altar. As soon as this was done the Temple music began; the Hallel was sung. Now probably few that participated in these exercises had much appreciation of their spiritual significance, but carried them out as a sort of religious pageant, for they had been taught to do their part with grace and precision, and the eyes of priests and people were on the technique of the affair. But there was one standing in their midst who knew that the pouring out of the water was symbolical of the grace and salvation that he had come to provide, and would pour upon the people when the Holy Ghost should be given on the day of Pentecost.

He knew that this ceremony was but re-echoing the declaration of the prophet, "I will pour water on him that is thirsty, and I will pour floods upon the dry ground."

When the priest had poured out the water, the unusual took place. Jesus who had been teaching before this in the Temple with great power and authority, stepped forward, and with a loud voice cried out the words of our text, "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink". We may well imagine that it was some surprise to priests and people to have this sort of interruption, by one who was not on the programme.

"Who is this upstart?" the priests would ask. "He has no priestly credentials nor has he any prestige with the ecclesiastical authorities, but he is a sort of a free-lance going here and there to stir up the people and disturb the status quo. Had Jesus stepped forward and spoken congratulatory words in regard to the feast; had he praised the singers and the trumpeters for their splendid music, the priests for the dignity and precision with which they had carried out the ritual; had he concluded by saying that he had attended many such feasts and never had he seen the performance observed in a more worthy manner, he might have pleased the leaders. But Jesus was not given to flattery. He seemed to ignore completely all that had gone before. He diverts the attention of the people from everything else to himself. That was what Jesus ever did in all his teaching; made himself the centre of it all. If Jesus were only a good man and did this, then where was that spirit of humility which is the essence of all moral goodness? He taught without reserve or apology that the significance of all feast days and fast days, all the forms and ceremonies of the Old Dispensation pointed to Him. To Him, who had come but recently from the carpenter's shop and the callouses still on his hands.

When Jesus fed the thousands by a great miracle, he took occasion to say to the people, "I am the Bread of Life, that came down from Heaven." When he raised the dead, he took occasion to declare, "I am the resurrection and the life". When the Jews were boasting of their liberty that had always been theirs, Jesus punctured their pride by letting them know that he thought them strangers to all freedom and said, "If I the Son of Man make you free then shall you be free indeed.

But what explanation can you give to all these bold declarations of Jesus, you who would reduce him to the level of a good man? The conclusion must be that these expressions and many more, are but the mouthings of a wild enthusiast, almost insane with his egotistical presumption, or they are upwelling of the divine consciousness of Jesus, who felt that he had within him an answer for every question of the human heart, a balm for every human ill; that he was the Lord of all history, all creation; Lord of the Temple itself; the judge and the Saviour of men who had come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly.

We will notice that Jesus here as elsewhere used words with a well-understood physical meaning to teach deep spiritual truth. We need no dictionary to tell us the meaning of the terms hunger and thirst. The Orientals knew the meaning of those words far better than we. None of us have been far from the well supplied larder, nor have we been far from the Spring, the well or the faucet that is fairly bursting under the

pressure to slake our thirst. And I pity the person who with a real thirst for water, can take and drink down with eagerness that beverage so satisfying and exhilarating and not say "Praise the good Lord who gave us water to drink; Only a good God could give us such a gift."

Water is the thing that really meets the physical need. Ask a person who has just slaked his thirst with water, what is the supreme use of water and what will the answer be? Will he say the highest use of water is to the sea to float our argosies and our navies? Will he say the highest use of water is to make the rivers to drain our land and to make it fruitful? No he will not answer thus. These uses are only incidental to the higher use, of satisfying the thirst of man. And the time often comes when everything else looks small in its value in comparison with that which alone can meet the need of an insatiable thirst.

Here is an Arab merchant on his camels crossing the burning sands. He has on board his ships of the desert, costly diamonds and merchandise of great value. But a sand-storm comes on and the camels lose their way. Soon the water supply becomes exhausted, and there is no oasis in sight. The lips of that company become parched and their throats burning with desire. What can they do? They might take out the beautiful diamonds and let them glisten in the sun; they might take the beautiful tapestry and lay it out for admiration. With a raging thirst within, those things could only mock them. "Water! Water!" is the cry. "O for water to drink!" And many a merchant company would gladly have given all their wealth for one draught of water that would appease their thirst.

But the physical leads to the spiritual meaning. Jesus always did that. He knew what was in man. All the sin and wilfulness and passion; and he knew too all the desire that filled the human heart for God. He knew that man had a thirst; a longing that He alone could satisfy. Had not the psalmist cried "My soul thirsteth for God for the living God when shall I come and appear before God?" Well did Augustine say, (he who had tried to slake his thirst at the fountain of self-gratification, but in vain). "Our souls O God were made for Thee, and they never can be satisfied till they find rest in Thee."

I am well aware that man's enthusiasm for knowledge, his desire for adventure, his ambition for power, his eagerness for gold, his passion for amusement and entertainment seem to indicate that his religious impulse is less dominant and compelling than these lower things. But such is not the case. Man is so perverted and blinded in his condition of natural sinfulness that he does not know himself or the meaning of the course he pursues. He may leave the fountain of living water but he must have a fountain somewhere.