

Jesus Refreshes



Gary Wilkerson August 1, 2016

We all have distractions in life, but let's face it—men are the worst when it comes to sports. I don't mean playing sports, which would actually be good for a lot of couch potatoes, but keeping up with sports. Smart phones and the ESPN app have turned once-attentive husbands into screen-gazers. All a guy has to do is silently press the "refresh" button and dozens of scores are instantly updated. Every date night is at risk from constant under-the-table glances.

Now let me sing the praises of the refresh button in God's kingdom. With one touch of his amazing grace, everything old is wiped away—and life is renewed completely. There are times in all our lives when this needs to happen. Of course, the only one who can bring it about is Jesus. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17, ESV).

Just like a screen app, nothing in our life changes—everything remains frozen, stuck—until the refresh button is pushed. Are you stuck in patterns of old ways of living, ways that keep you from tasting the freshness of life in Christ? With one touch from Jesus—like the woman who was healed by touching his garment—he has the power to change everything.

Early in his ministry, Jesus announced this about himself: "On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds" (John 7:37, NLT, my emphasis). Jesus didn't just issue a statement—he shouted. And he waited until the biggest day of the festival to stand up and make his announcement: "(He) shouted to the crowds, 'Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart'" (7:37-38).

This was more than a theological statement. It was an act of compassion. Dead religion had beaten down God's people. It should have refreshed them, but it left them with no life whatsoever. Now Jesus announced, "I am your cup of cold water, the refreshing spring that never stops flowing. You can drink from me to find your life renewed continually." There are no qualifications needed to drink from this amazing wellspring. Christ assures us, "Anyone who believes in me may come and drink!" (7:38).

Friend, life in Christ is a refresh button like no other. When it gets pushed, the most stunted, despairing, dreary soul is renewed with the power of heaven. When Jesus says, "Rivers of living water will flow from his heart," he's showing us what our lives will look like with a simple touch from him. His Spirit so fills us that we overflow with abundant life, grace, mercy and love. His flow of life transforms everything. As I've said many times, God never gives us a message without backing it up with his power. If he has called us to a life of abundant refreshment, then he'll supply everything to make that happen. So what are the barriers to this refreshing life?

The first barrier to God's refreshing in our lives is an unbelieving heart.

Jesus' own brothers were skeptical about his claims to be the Messiah. "For even his brothers didn't believe in him" (John 7:5). Sarcasically, they urged him to go on tour to reveal himself: "Jesus' brothers said to him, 'Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles! You can't become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show yourself to the world!'" (7:3-4).

Maybe Jesus' brothers were cynical from growing up with him. Or maybe they were like Joseph's brothers, jealous in a way only siblings can be. What's important in both cases is that they didn't believe. They didn't expect God to change things, to move through their brother. And so their lives were stuck on an old screen of unbelief. That's the first barrier to having our lives refreshed: an unbelieving heart.

"Jesus replied, 'Now is not the right time for me to go, but you can go anytime. The world can't hate you, but it does hate me because I accuse it of doing evil. You go on. I'm not going to this festival, because my time has not yet come.' After saying these things, Jesus remained in Galilee" (7:6-9). He was saying, essentially, "If you don't believe God is at work in your life, then you live according to your own plans. You come and go as you please and make your own choices. But I go only when I hear the Father. I can't go just to promote myself or say or do what I want. My life is not my own, but his."

This is also true for every professing Christian: We are not our own, but his. That began when Jesus first hit the refresh button in our lives. We were born again, a new creation in Christ, and to live for him meant no longer living for ourselves. Our testimony became, "I once was lost but now I'm found. Back then I was a slave to unrighteousness. But now I'm a willing and eager slave to the Righteous One. I submit my life to him continually."

Something curious happens in this scene from Jesus' life. The very next verse says, "After his brothers left for the festival, Jesus also went, though secretly, staying out of public view" (7:10). Why did Jesus say he wasn't going—and then decide to go? Obviously, he heard from the Father. One minute he told his brothers, "It's not my time." Then, within a day or an hour or maybe just an instant, the Father told him, "This is the right time, the right season, the right setting. Go."

I often want to make my own decisions in life instead of submitting to God's ways. We're called to be dependent on him, to seek his direction, to await his leading for our major decisions in life. But doing this can make us feel like our lives are bottlenecked. At times over the years I've told my wife, "Sometimes I think it would be easier not to be a Christian. I wish I didn't have to check in with God about this." I've envied those who apply for jobs if they want them, who don't have to tithe from their income, who pick up and move when they want to live somewhere else.

I don't think I'm alone in having these thoughts. Submitting our lives to God's will and direction is a sacrifice. But the benefits are countless. It keeps us out of a whole lot of trouble, pain and heartache. Besides that, sometimes waiting on God means being moved into something new and refreshing when we never would have moved on our own. Listening to God is not just wise, it's life-giving. Having our heart aligned with his empowers us for everything. Not only that, but we see his kingdom purposes accomplished in us. And nothing refreshes a life more than that!

A second barrier to a refreshed life is a bitter, grumbling heart.

Some of the festivalgoers in Jerusalem cut themselves off from Jesus' promise because of their bitterness. "There was a lot of grumbling about him among the crowds. Some argued, 'He's a good man,' but others said, 'He's nothing but a fraud who deceives the people'" (John 7:12). What was Christ's response to this?

It was the same response God had to Israel when they grumbled in the wilderness. That generation also was thirsty, literally parched for refreshing water to drink. And they began to grumble bitterly: "Tormented by thirst, they continued to argue with Moses. 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?' Then Moses cried out to the Lord, 'What should I do with these people? They are ready to stone me!' The Lord said to Moses, 'Walk out in front of the people. Take your staff, the one you used when you struck the water of the Nile, and call some of the elders of Israel to join you. I will stand before you on the rock at Mount Sinai. Strike the rock, and water will come gushing out. Then the people will be able to drink.' So Moses struck the rock as he was told, and water gushed out as the elders looked on" (Exodus 17:3-6).

The details of this scene—and of God's compassion for the people—is replayed through Jesus' sacrifice. Christ is the rock that was struck for our transgressions when we were lost and wandering. And he is the Living Water that sustains us. Paul tells us, "I don't want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters, about our ancestors in the wilderness long ago.... For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:1, 4).

The scene in the wilderness demonstrates what Jesus does for grumbling people: He takes on their punishment. He declares, "I'll stand condemned for them, I'll be scourged, I'll take their sins upon my back, I'll be nailed to

the cross in their place—all so they might receive abundant life.”

Still some Christians forfeit this awesome gift by holding onto bitterness. Paul says in the very next verse, “Yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. These things happened as a warning to us” (10:5-7). Our lives can wither away in bitterness, or they can be revived by the beautiful grace God offers us—it’s our choice. But his promise of life remains available to us either way. Whenever we allow him to push the refresh button for us, all bitterness and grumbling pass away—and he replaces them with newness of life.

Saddest of all to me is a third barrier that blocks people from God’s refresh button: fear.

Even though the festivalgoers believed in Jesus, they were afraid to say so. “No one had the courage to speak favorably about him in public, for they were afraid of getting in trouble with the Jewish leaders” (John 7:13). When you’re bound up by fear, you resist stepping out in faith. You begin to think you’re not worthy to be refreshed. But Jesus has a remedy for your fear. When everyone else at the festival was hiding their belief, he stood up and declared, “This river of Living Water will not be stopped. It will flow wherever my Father determines. And if anyone believes in me, this water will nourish him with life. It will flow out of him like a river, demonstrating the goodness of the heavenly Father.”

When our fearful heart is refreshed, one thing that flows into us is boldness: “For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13). Multitudes of Christians know this verse as a precious promise. But it is more than that—it is a reality. We don’t have to muster up boldness to testify about Jesus; he supplies it. In fact, he causes it to overflow in us. When we’ve been refreshed by his Spirit, we don’t have to wonder whether we have power to speak for him. His Spirit will bubble up in us so that we can’t help but speak!

How does God’s refreshing practically affect our lives?

This happens in two ways: (1) circumstantial refreshing and (2) core refreshing. When God refreshes our circumstances, he changes old patterns that may involve our marriage, our finances, our work. Let’s say we’ve fallen into financial trouble and spiraling debt. He may refresh us by exposing our unhealthy spending patterns and convicting us to change them. He may lead us to seek financial counseling that can help us replace those patterns and teach us to be wise stewards.

Or he may want to disrupt old patterns in our marriage, patterns that keep us stuck in hardened, unloving ways. How many couples say to each other, “You’re always like this,” or, “You did this five years ago,” or, “You’ll never change.” The important question for any couple is, “How can I believe the best about my spouse and yet still deal realistically with our issues?” It starts with the refresh button. Very few relationship problems are solved overnight; most require diligent grace every day. Jesus is ready to refresh us with abundant grace every time we need it.

These kinds of refreshing deal with our circumstances. So what is core refreshing? It goes beyond our circumstances to refresh and renew our souls, our lives, our inner being. This kind of refreshing flows not just into us but out of us. It fills us with joy for our marriage, for tithing and giving freely, for facing difficult relationships with hope and courage and energy.

In short, core refreshing causes us to anticipate every moment of life with Jesus. It stirs in us a heart that says, “I’m fully alive, not dreading the day. I’m thrilled to follow Jesus. He’s made me bold, not fearful. Lord, let me use this vast overflow of life for you! Lead me where you want me to go today.”

What is flowing out of you right now? Unbelief, grumbling and fear? Or faith, hope and love? Just as he did at the festival in Jerusalem, Jesus shouts to you to bring him your unbelief, bitterness and fear. He wants to replace it all with contentment and contagiousness, to move you from emptiness to fullness. He has promised, “Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, ‘Rivers of living water will flow from his heart’” (John 7:37-38). Amen! ?

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