

Like A Muddied Spring *Proverbs 25:26; Mark 14:66-72*

Suppose I were to place before you two glasses of water. The water in one glass is sparkling and pure, and the light dances as it moves through it. The water in the other glass is muddy and cloudy, and you wonder if it did not come straight from a sewer. Which one would you choose to drink?

That wasn't hard to decide, was it?

But let's suppose that now our two classes of water—one muddy, the other clear—represent the lives and characters of two people—one a Christian, and one who is not a Christian. Which of the two glasses would you say is the follower of Christ?

Well, if you are familiar with the Scriptures, you should know that many times the life we have in Christ is compared to water, to a spring or fountain bubbling up out of the ground, or to a crystal-clear, flowing river.

For instance, when Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, He spoke to her of the living water of life. This is what He said about the person who yields his or her life to Christ: *"But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life"* (John 4:14).

Later, Jesus stood up in a crowd and said, *"If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture says, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive"* (John 7:37-39).

The same terminology is used to refer to the joy we have in Christ. Isaiah 12:3 reads, *"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."*

And the idea of a Spirit-filled Christian being compared to a rushing, flowing river or to a cleansing, bubbling spring is a beautiful one. It speaks of the freshness and vitality one who is a Christian should have in his life. But in the book of Proverbs we have a tragic picture of a man who once allowed the Spirit of God to fill his life to the extent that his life was like a sparkling spring or fountain.

But now, his life is not like that anymore. Instead, he is like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain.

But what does that verse mean? This muddied spring is one that has been trampled in by men or animals so that the water becomes undrinkable. Natural sources of water, such as springs or fountains, are very important in Palestine because of the uncertainty of rainfall. So when the writer of Proverbs wanted to symbolized the corruption of something good, he chose the picture of a spring which had been defiled by mud or by having some unclean matter thrown into it. That which could have been a very valuable asset in dry Palestine had become useless.

I'm afraid there are quite a few Christians who are like muddied springs or polluted fountains, who once were leaders in their churches and well-respected in their communities, who once enjoyed a close fellowship with their Lord, and rejoiced to lead someone else to a saving faith in Christ.

But now, all that has changed. What has happened?

This particular Scripture in Proverbs doesn't give us much of a clue, but there is an example in the New Testament of a follower of Christ whose life became like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain. Let us look at what happened to Peter for some clues as to what happens in the lives of Christians today who become like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain.

1 We become like a muddied spring when our lives are inconsistent.

There was a time when Jesus said to His disciples, *"You will all fall away from me tonight."* Peter immediately declared, "Not me, Lord! Even though all the others fall away, I won't!" And then, in a little while, his life was like a muddied spring. He was inconsistent. He said one thing, and he did another.

Just a few hours later, he sat in the courtyard of the high priest, where a young maiden insisted that Peter had been with Jesus. Three times Peter declared loudly that he did not even know the man.

I knew a man who was a deacon, active in his church; he was there nearly every Sunday. But on his job, he cursed and ranted and raved as though he had never heard the name of Christ. His life was inconsistent.

I've heard a lot of people through the course of ministry say, "Preacher, there's one thing I'm not—and that's a hypocrite!" as if that was the most noble reason they could think of as to why they didn't fellowship and worship with a local church.

But what these people don't realize is that when they claim to be Christians, they are in effect saying that there is supposed to be something different about their lives.

But there's not.

People talk a lot about "being Christians," about how much they love the Lord. We like to emphasize to our friends that we try to help people whenever we can, as though that will cover up our spiritual poverty. We like to sing songs about how great God is—but something doesn't match. Something is inconsistent. What we say doesn't match what we do. We sing about Him but we don't want to serve Him or honor Him in our daily lives.

And people notice that. Don't think that they do not. And when they see you and me professing to love Christ, but then a day or a week or a year later acting and talking as though we don't belong to Christ, then our witness for Christ has become like a muddied spring—a polluted fountain. It's no good. It's useless.

Hundreds of years ago, before paper money was used, it was not uncommon for counterfeiters to make coins out of some other material than precious metal. But they were easily tested by bouncing them on a hard surface. Genuine coins had a different sound than forgeries, hence the term "ring true."

A real person for Christ always rings true; a phony will not. The real person for Christ is consistent in his witness and in his daily living for Christ. The phony is the one whose life doesn't ring true.

Jesus had some pretty strong words for those who make a big show out of going to church, but don't follow through with a commitment of their lives, whose lives do not ring true: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity"* (Matthew 23:27-28).

Friend, don't kid yourself! If your life is inconsistent with your talk, then you are the kind of person to whom Jesus was speaking. Your witness for Christ to the lost is worthless. You've become a muddied spring, a polluted fountain. In fact, everyone of us has sin in our hearts that pollutes our fountains, that muddies our springs. Everyone of us has some pattern of inconsistency that dishonors the Name of Christ.

2 We become like a muddied spring when we imitate the world
Again, look at Peter, because that's what he did. We've already said that when he was accused of having been with Jesus that he denied it three times. But look closer. The Bible says that the third time this happened, Peter began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear. You see, he acted just like everyone else did when he got into trouble. He imitated the world's actions, and he became like a muddied spring.

Now you and I don't have trouble with our speech, do we? Of course we do! We may not curse or swear, but we have trouble with gossiping, backbiting, saying things that we know are going to hurt other people. And we do it just like non-believers would!

And there are other ways that we imitate the world. We imitate the world in some of the things we do, some of the places we go, some of the people we hang out with. Christians should be standard-bearers, but instead many times we just meekly follow the crowd, wherever it leads. And when we do that, we have become like a muddied spring. Our witness for Christ has become useless and worthless.

No longer can we stand as a beacon, calling the world to life in Christ. No longer can we point the way in the Kingdom of Heaven, because we're not following it ourselves.

Think about 1 Samuel 8. We see there that the people of Israel came to Samuel and said, "You're getting old, and your sons do not live the kind of life that you do. Appoint for us a king, to govern us like the nations." Well, Samuel knew that was not God's will for Israel, but when the people persisted in their request, Samuel gave in. They had their king, and they were "like the nations."

It was God's plan that they should look to *Him* as the ruler of their nation and of their individual lives. But they wanted to imitate the rest of the world, and when they mimicked them in this respect, they soon began to imitate the world in other things as well, until they had completely turned their backs on God. Their springs became muddied with personal sins, and their fountains became polluted with willful rebellion.

But the call of God to His people then, and echoing down through the ages to this very moment, was and is, "*Come out from among them, and be separate.*" When Jesus prayed in John 17, which is the *real* Lord's Prayer, He prayed not that God

would remove His disciples from the world, but that God would keep them from the evil one, from his influence.

There is a tremendous need today for Christians who will stand up for their convictions, for the things that they know are the will of God. There is a need today for committed Christians who will completely sell out to Jesus Christ as the Lord of their lives. We need Christians today who will stop imitating the world, and start following Christ!

And in Romans 12, Paul writes, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”* (v. 2).

The church of today is filled up with Christians whose lives have become like muddied springs, and polluted fountains, because they have insisted on doing things the world’s way. They have allowed too many other things to take the place of worship and service and devotion to God. Some Christians spend their Sundays just like non-Christians, and that is not the way of Christ!

Listen very carefully to these words by Charles Colson: “If we really understand what being Christian means—that this Christ, the living God, actually comes in to rule one’s life—then everything must change: Values, goals, desires, habits. If Christ’s Lordship does not disrupt our own lordship, then we must question the reality of our conversion.”

Folks, this is that serious! So what is the solution? The solution, my friends, is that you and I recommit ourselves to following Christ, completely, wholeheartedly, surrendering to the Holy Spirit of God. Let me illustrate.

I have a friend who is a retired civil engineer in Clarksdale, Mississippi. He told me once that it is possible for water lines to become contaminated, especially the water at the end of the line. If the water stands in the lines long enough, with no movement, it can become contaminated. That’s why fire hydrants need to be flushed out from time to time. The water needs to be moving.

So the key word here is *flowing*. And the water in our lives needs to be moving, constantly, flowing and refreshing and bubbling out of the depths of your experience with God. That’s one solution: a daily walk with Jesus.

But the solution has a second part to it. My engineer friend also told me that if there is a break in a water line, that it is possible for the gravel and sand and mud to get into the line and muddy up the water. He said that to cleanse the line, the line must be flushed out with clean water until all the impurities are out of it.

But while that is happening, the line at the break must be plugged, stopped up, to keep more sand and gravel and mud from getting into the system. These were his words: “We’ve got to keep the clean water *separate* from the dirty water.”

That is the key word: *separate*. Flowing and separate from the influence of the world. That is the key to being a fit instrument in your walk with Christ. Listen—this is not just my opinion; it’s what the Bible teaches. 2 Timothy 2:21 tells us, “*If you keep yourself pure, you will be a utensil God can use for his purpose. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work*” (NLT).

Now you may be thinking: “This is a strange sermon for New Year’s Day.” You may have come today thinking that the message was going to be one on starting over, with a fresh year and new opportunities. But pay attention to this: If you and I go into the New Year with the same habits and lackadaisical attitudes about following Christ we had last year, then January 1 is nothing more than turning a page on the calendar. Simply because it is January 1 does not mean that there is magically going to be a fresh start for us.

The New Year has come, but did you bring with you the same old sins and false understanding of Christ and His claim over you? Our relationship with Christ will be just what it was last year—if not worse—unless we determine that we are going to do things differently.

Take a look at your heart and life: if you were to use the analogy that Scripture uses, and your heart and life could be compared to water in a glass, or a fountain, as far as your life and witness for Christ is concerned—are you a muddied spring and a polluted fountain?

If yes, then determine in your heart that this year will be different. This year, you will accept Jesus into your heart and become a devoted follower. This year, you will surrender yourself more completely to Him. This year, you will fall in love with Christ all over again. This year, you will cast aside the things that keep you from being the kind of Christ-follower you know you need to be—and want to be.

Come to Jesus today! Give Him your heart and life and surrender all those things and excuses that have kept you from Him so far. He waits for you.