

**THE SERMONS, LECTURES, AND SONGS OF
SIDNEY EDWARD COX**

CD# 109 contains two sermons
II Peter 2:17 – Wells Without Water (Tracks 1-7)
John 4 – The Woman at the Well (Tracks 8-13)

Wells Without Water
II Peter 2:17

Editorial Note: Sidney Cox delivered this message during a revival at the Grace Bible Church in Detroit, Michigan in 1967/1968, shortly after the death of his beloved wife, Violet. He was 80 years of age at the time. Sidney and Violet Cox resided in retirement at The Eventide residence in Detroit, Michigan from 1962 through 1972.

During this period of his life, Sidney was in great demand as a preacher and Bible teacher both within The Salvation Army and churches of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. He had a close relationship with The Salvation Army early in life and with The Christian and Missionary Alliance late in life.

Here we find Sidney Cox, the preacher; not Sidney Cox, the Bible teacher or Sidney Cox the musician and composer. This was pure pulpiterring, preaching and evangelism. It represents one of the most powerful messages that he ever delivered.

J. Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. July 30, 2010.

This morning, just a brief word from II Peter 2:17, three words: Wells without water. Wells without water.

You know, some of the words of scripture have the uncanny faculty, if that's the way to describe it, of bringing pictures before your mind. You mention the word, and immediately a picture flashes before your mind. For instance, if I say those words slowly again, and you're thinking, I hope you are, but if you are, what picture will come before your mind? What well are you thinking about, either in the scripture or out of it? When I say them slowly like this: Wells without water. What well are you thinking about?

You mind if I tell you the well that's in my mind right now? Quite some time ago, I visited the lovely mansion in Kentucky where Steven Foster wrote his song, "My Old Kentucky Home," and I remember a good deal about that. It was a lovely thing. The lovely old mansion, the long avenue of trees from the road that leads up to it, the little colored boy playing his harmonica. I remember that. I'd like to meet that little colored boy in heaven again someday. And if I do, I'm going to ask him to play, "My Old Kentucky Home" for me on his harmonica. And don't look at me like that, and say they won't have harmonicas in heaven. You got another think coming there, brother. That is going to surprise you. They're going to have harmonicas in heaven, especially that boy. He sure will. And I'd like to hear him play it again.

But the thing that impressed me most about that visit there, was not the mansion or even the trees or even the melody. It was the old well that was at the end there by the end of the building. And I stood and looked at it. There's a big stone slab over the top of it now. And I stood and looked at this well and thought, I wonder how many times Steven Foster refreshed himself from the water of that well, the well there.

Wells are very interesting things, you know. You buy a property in the city and it's attached to the city water supply and it's not very important. But you buy a property out in the country and it's another matter all together. You'll want to know about that well, you sure do. And you take good care of it. It becomes suddenly, a very important thing.

You know, I think God is interested in wells, and I'll tell you why. So much of the scripture is written by the side of a well. Have you ever noticed that? Now, that may give you a suggestion, because if you're worthwhile as a Christian, you will be eager to study the Word of God. If you're just a nominal Christian, you won't. But if you're the real thing, you'll be wanting to study the Word of God. And, we look around for help - something or other that will carry us through the pathways of the Word of God.

And sometimes we study it by the cities of scripture, and sometimes by the mountains of scripture, and sometimes by the rivers of scripture, and sometimes by the gardens of scripture, and so on. Have you ever tried studying your Bible along the pathway of the wells of scripture? You want something interesting, now you try it. You try it. Don't forget that suggestion. I'm going to read my Bible, keeping my eye open for the wells of scripture, and see what happened beside them. And you will find yourself on a very interesting pathway, my brother. You certainly will.

Supposing we do a little of it this morning. I want us to go back and stop by the side of one or two of these scripture wells, the wells that God obviously enjoys. God is interested in them because he has left His mark by the side of them.

When Abram was called from Ur of the Chaldees to go to a land that God would show him, and he didn't know where he was going, he went by faith. And finally he arrived there and he crossed over the River Jordan and went into the land that we call the land of Palestine, the land that God had promised.

And by the way, when he did cross over that River Jordan, something happened. A word suddenly became important. And a people not yet in existence at all, suddenly became possible. The word is the word, "Hebrew". For the meaning of the word Hebrew is, 'the man who crossed over.' And the first Hebrew crossed over into the Promised Land, into the land of Canaan. And in the loins of Abraham, the Hebrew people were there too.

He went over, and whenever he stopped he always did three things. He pitched a tent, he dug a well, and he built an altar. Did you see the pattern of something there? We do the same thing, don't we? We do the same thing, or we ought to. We do the same thing. A young man and a young woman take a good long look at each other and finally establish a home together. And the tent is very important, the dwelling place, it's very important. And the well is very important, that source of supply is very important. But alas, sometimes the altar that ought to be more important than either of them is

neglected.

It isn't my business to say what's wrong with the United States or with the world. I think we all have our thoughts about that. Of course, we do. But I think one of the things that's wrong is that we have more housing, more tents; we have more wells, sources of supply, and fewer altars than ever before. And it might be worth thinking about, particularly if you have a home.

The wells of scripture.

Five hundred years after Abram was there, his descendants, now a considerable nation, had left Egypt and were on the way to the Promised Land, and the water bottles were running out and the supply was very limited. And there was distress there. Somebody looked on ahead on that dry and dusty road and saw what looked like a grove of palm trees. And they said, "Look there's palm trees. There's the palm trees. Maybe if there's palm trees, maybe there's water there." And somebody said - of course, there's always this somebody, he's always around somebody, "Oh, you're just seeing things. That's a mirage." But it wasn't. And presently they arrived and seventy beautiful palm trees, and underneath, twelve wells of beautiful sparkling water. And the children of Israel refreshed themselves at the Wells of Elim.¹

And five hundred years after that, the same people, now a nation again in their own land with a king on the throne and the enemies, of course, and at the close of one of those battle-filled days, David, tired, stood in the doorway of his tent and looked over yonder onto a hillside and saw a little settlement over there. And something clicked within his heart. And he said, "Why that's Bethlehem. That's my home town." And then there came out of his heart something that was almost a prayer, and he said, "Oh, for a drink of water from the well by Bethlehem's gate."² And after he'd gone back into his tent again, he didn't think anybody heard that, but three of his mighty men, his bodyguards, they heard it. And they loved him. And when he wished for something that was their command. And these men buckled on their armor and went down the hill and circled the camp of the Philistines and went to the little gate and there to the well and brought back to David a drink of water from the well by Bethlehem's gate. And you know what he did with it, or what he didn't do with it.

There are gifts that you receive from God, so precious that the only thing you can do with them is to offer them back in thanksgiving to the one who gave them to you. And David took it and poured it out as an offering unto the Lord. The well by Bethlehem's gate.

And a thousand years afterward, a greater than David must needs go through Samaria and sat by the wellside that bore the name of Abram's grandson and there talked to a woman about living water.

Wells.

But you know, we took a text, didn't we? And if we did, we'd better stay somewhere near it. A text isn't something that's sort of a peg for us to hang our thoughts on. We'd better stay somewhere near it. And we heard Peter saying, talking about, wells without water. And that's startling, isn't it? Because the

1 Exodus 15:27

2 I Chronicles 11:17

wells we've been talking about are all wells full of water. Supposing any one of them had been a well without water? Supposing they had arrived in Elim and found the wells dry, what then? Supposing our Lord had sat on the curb stone of a well in Samaria and found it a well without water? What a different story it would have been. These are wells without water. And Peter startles us with the very thought of them – wells without water?

Have you ever stopped to think, my dear, what a dark and dismal and dangerous thing a well without water can be? A well full of water, that's one thing. A well without water, that's something else.

Supposing you'd bought an old, abandoned farmhouse, and you were going to make it into a summer place or a retirement place. And you were going to put your labor and your money into it, and that sort of thing. And one of the things that would have to be done was to fix that old well there. A hundred feet or one hundred and twenty feet down into the ground, and it had been abandoned. And somebody came and said, well you've got to get down into that well and reactivate that again. I know what you'd say. You'd say, "Not me. I'm not going down there, no sir. I'm not..." You might take a light on the end of a cord and lower it down into the well and if the light flickered out halfway down there, you wouldn't go down it for all the money in Detroit. Because you would know that, gathered there in the bottom of it, there might be gases that were so poisonous that they would snuff your life out. A well without water?

You don't have to go outside of the Word of God to find out what a menacing, miserable thing a well without water is. If you have any doubt about that, when you get to heaven, ask Joseph what it feels like to be down in the bottom of a well without water. That's where his nice brethren sold him to the Midianites and they put him down there, into a well without water. It says, "into a pit," but that's what it was. It was an old, abandoned well. And they put him down there.

And if that doesn't convince you, ask Jeremiah and he'll tell you too, what it's like to be down in the bottom of a well without water, with mud in the bottom, so dark and dismal and dangerous that they had to put cords under his arms to lift him out again. Sure.

And if that doesn't convince you, hunt up one of those three mighty men, his name is Benaiah. You'll find him there. There's a lot in the scripture about Benaiah. There sure is. One day, Benaiah was going across the terrain in the wintertime, and he was following the pathway, the trail there, and the little settlement over there had been bothered by a lion from the desert or the mountains or something. And they had taken an old, abandoned well and made it into a lion trap and had covered it there. And then the snow came and covered it up. And Benaiah, walking across the terrain and following the pathway didn't see this thing and stepped onto it and went down into the bottom of it and went he got there he found he wasn't alone. The lion was there ahead of him. And the Word of God says, "He slew a lion in a pit on a snowy day."³ Or, if you wanted to be exact with the King James version, "He slew a lion in a pit in a time of snow."

There's a sermon for some of you there, right there - lions and pits and snowy days. It seems to me that life is made up of those things. You ever notice that? Did you ever notice that? That life is made up of lions that you face, and pits into which you get and snowy days. Sure it is. Sure it is.

3 I Chronicles 11:22

Oh, yes, wells without water. They can be a menacing this. I watched a home burning up. I was driving over the prairies one time, a little while ago, not too long ago, and it was a hot summer. And as I was going along in a rather lonely stretch of road I saw a house over there and it was on fire. And standing by the side of it was a man and woman and three or four children, and they'd brought out what they could of their furniture. And there they were, watching their home burn up. I found out from the town where I was going what had happened. The wells had been running dry. A little bit of a fire started in the kitchen. A bucket or two of water would have done it, but they went to the well for the last time and the well was empty. And the man and the woman watched their home burning up, because of a well without water.

And then we'd better get back to the text again, don't you think? Because we've been saying a well without water is a dark and dangerous and menacing thing. But when Peter talks about wells without water, he isn't talking about some 'thing' at all, he's talking about someone, somebody. That's another thing all together, isn't it? Not some thing, somebody. Sure. Somebody whose life is like a well without water. See? Oh, you say, "I know where they are. They used to live down on Michigan Avenue. They all moved up now into Cass or some other place there."⁴

I was down at the Salvation Army Harbor Light Corp about three weeks ago preaching for them on Sunday night. And there were 300 hundred men in that audience - a heartbreaking thing and I've been there time and time and time again. But it breaks my heart every time I see them - wasted humanity in that crowd. There were college graduates. In that crowd was a man who'd been a preacher for 17 years, and yet here he was, a poor helpless drunken sot. And you say, "Oh sure, we know. That's where the folks are whose lives are like wells without water."

Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Peter isn't talking about skid row at all. When he talks about wells without water, where are these people who are like wells without water? Where are they? Where do you find them? Michigan Avenue? Oh no, not at all. Not at all. They're in church. And not only in church, they are somebody in the church. And they think they are apostles and they're not. In the church? Wells without water?

Oh, I know what some of you are thinking, if you're thinking at all. I know what some of you are thinking. "Now, that's the place where the preacher gets the stick out now and starts in to lambast church members," but you couldn't be further from the truth than that. I'm not going to do that, you see. If I wanted to do that, and I don't, and I do not, but if I did, I'd have to start on this one.

You see, I happen to be a church member. And the church member that gives me the most trouble is this fellow. I have more trouble with him than anybody else. I don't have trouble with other church members at all. I have lots of trouble with this one, I sure do. I have lots of trouble. The Lord and I have been working on him for 80 years, and there's a lot of work left to be done yet, I'm telling you.⁵

4 This provides insight into the location and time frame at which he delivered this message. Sidney and Violet Cox lived in Detroit, Michigan from 1962 – 1972. They resided at The Eventide, a Salvation Army retirement home located in the vicinity of Michigan Avenue in downtown Detroit. Cass was a neighborhood in downtown Detroit, just north of Michigan Avenue.

5 This would date the delivery of this sermon as 1967/1968.

So I'm not going to do that, no, no. I wouldn't do that. I never get through dealing with this one. That's my big problem. Now, I suppose it's yours too, isn't it? It's yours too. The biggest problem you have is the person wearing your shoes right now. So I'm not going to do that.

Supposing we go down another line all together and suggest that God is still interested in wells, and He still has His own wells here, dotted here and there. And He puts folks just like you and me in charge of them. And says, "Now this is my well, you look after it. And I'm going to reckon on you to do it. You look after it." Let me make this suggestion. The Word of God is a well full of water. But He expects folks like you and me to look after it. Somebody who is thirsty is coming to it someday and you're going to be the only one around.

I had an office sometime ago, believe it or not, and I sat in that office one day and the door opened and a man walked in. I hadn't seen him before or since. And he sat down on the other side of the desk, and he said this to me. "I want you to show me from your Bible how to be saved." And he meant it. He meant it. And he saw that I was a bit startled. What would you say if somebody came suddenly into wherever you were and asked you that question? What would you do? What would you do? He saw I was a little bit startled, and he said, "Wait a minute now. I don't want you to talk to me about religion." He said, "I've seen all the religion I want. I don't want anymore of it. But if you can tell a man who is a sinner like me how to be saved and you can tell me from your Bible, I sure would like to know that." Don't you see what had happened here? God had put a man as unworthy as this one in charge of the well of the Word of God. Do you see what I mean? Do you see what I mean?

And did you notice what I said about that? This man didn't say, "Do you have your Bible?" He presumed I did. And he didn't ask me if I knew what to do with it. He presumed I did. Supposing somebody stops you on the way home or tomorrow morning or some other time, anytime, and stops you there unexpectedly and says, "I want you to show me from your Bible how to be saved." What would you do? What would you do? Would you have your Bible, to start with? Would you have enough of it in your heart to answer his question? Would you know where to turn? Would you know what to give him? What kind of a drink of water would you be giving him if you were in charge of God's well? What?

Your Christian life and experience, my dear, is a well of water, and somebody's coming expecting to get a drink from it - your own children, or somebody else's children, or somebody in your Sunday School class, or somebody. Somebody's coming!! Expecting to get a drink of water from the well that is your life. That's God's plan. That's God's plan. And they'll come whether you like it or not and sometimes all we've got to offer them is a decorated something or other, without any water in it. A well? - your Christian experience, my dear.

Some time ago I had to visit, or I did visit, a young woman in a hospital who had had a serious operation. And I walked down the hospital corridor to the room. The door was just slightly ajar so that I could open it a little bit without making a noise. And I opened the door a little bit and looked in, and this is what I saw. On the bed over there by the window was the girl who had had the operation. And kneeling beside her was a woman. And I saw this girl with her arms around this woman's neck and I listened in the doorway for a moment or two. And heard her sob out her thanks to that woman for all that her life had meant, for all that her teaching had meant, for the fact that two days before they

wheeled her out of that same room and she went to the operating room not knowing if she'd ever come back. But she went out with the sound of that woman's prayer in her ears. And there she was, pouring out her thanks. Don't you see? She had come to the well of a beautiful, sparkling, lovely Christian experience and had not been disappointed.

And I knew better than anybody else how right that sick girl was when she came to that Christian experience to drink of the well of it. You see, the woman was that girl's Sunday School teacher. And I married her. And I lived with her for 53 years. And I came to the well of that Christian experience time and time and time again. I was her most frequent customer. Never once disappointed.⁶

Oh my dear, don't you see? Don't you see what God expects of us? Don't you see? Your life – a well full of water. Somebody's coming. Somebody you don't know. Somebody who's longing for the refreshment that God has wrapped up in the well of your life. Sometimes they're disappointed, aren't they? And sometimes, alas, He is disappointed too.

But I want to remind you of just one other well. And this is the obvious one. You would expect me to finish here and I would have finished here whether you would expect it or not. But Grace Bible Church, a well full of water. Is it? Is it? Is it? Because don't forget, my dear, when we mention Grace Bible Church we're talking about you. We're not talking about bricks and mortar. Not at all. We're talking about you. You, you, you. You're Grace Bible Church. It has no existence apart from that. Not at all. Not at all. Somebody comes to your life and they'll come. They'll come to the well of Grace Bible Church. And there are some of us in this church whose hearts are just longing and crying out to God every day, that some manifestation of His blessing may rest upon us.

Revival may come! But let me remind you again, my dear, revival doesn't come to a church, it comes to folks like us. That's revival - when something starts within our hearts, that's revival. Revival doesn't come to a church. Revival comes to people! People whose lives were empty, and now filled with God's power and with the blessing of the Holy Ghost upon you. That's what God's looking for. That's what God's looking for. And if any of us are lacking in this matter of a well full of water, remember, it isn't God's fault. It's your fault and mine. If there's some area of your life that is dry and arid, it isn't His fault. There's a well of living water for us and God's expecting it. And where revivals begin when folks are honest enough to recognize the need within their own hearts and then bring the sin that causes the dryness in repentance and faith to God, and let him deal with it. That's the way revival starts. And they don't start any other way.

And that, my dear, is the way revivals continue. They continue when folks like us bring the dry areas of our lives and ask God to fill them with living water. You can have revival in Grace Bible Church any time we want to. There's lots of it in store up there. Anytime we want to. Anytime we bring the dryness of our lives to God and allow him to clean it up and fill it with rivers of living water. God can do that, and He will.

By the way, are you a Christian? Have you received Christ as your Savior and Lord? If you haven't, will you do it now? God can make your life a well full of water. It's a dry, miserable thing now. If you

⁶ This story provides final confirmation of the date of the delivery of this sermon as post August, 1967, the month in which his beloved wife, Violet died.

haven't Christ, it is, no matter what you are. It's dry and barren if you're not a Christian. Won't you let Him do the thing you cannot do? If you've been a Christian some time and in the intervening years, four or five years, your life hasn't amounted to anything. And you've disgraced Him by your nothingness in spite of the fact that He saved you. Wouldn't it be wonderful if you came and, I almost said apologized to your church, but that wouldn't be the word. Wouldn't it be wonderful if you came and publicly told the Lord, I'm ashamed of myself. But from now on, you can have all there is of me.