

RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

John 7:1-52

THE SITUATION

1 After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. 2 Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand.

John tells us that the opposition to Jesus is mounting. So for a while he avoids going to Judea where the religious leaders and the establishment are plotting to kill him. Don't let that misguide you. Jesus predicts his death many times in the Gospel — which means He's aware that it's coming. And — He isn't the helpless victim who happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

John 10:18

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

Jesus will lay down his life and be lifted up on the cross at the right time — but that hour — has not come yet.

John also tells us that the Feast of Booths which was also called the Feast of Tabernacles was approaching. This was one of the three pilgrim feasts — which meant Jews from all over the region would make the pilgrimage to come to Jerusalem to observe the week long feast.

The Three Pilgrim Feasts are:

- 1. The Passover Feast** — which commemorated the deliverance out of bondage and slavery in Egypt.
- 2. Feast of Pentecost** — which commemorated the giving of the law and the covenant that made them the people of God.
- 3. Feast of Booths** — which commemorated the provision and sustenance of God in the wilderness to bring them to the promised land.

The feasts weren't arbitrary rituals — they were dramatic reenactments to remember God's mighty deliverance out of slavery and his gracious invitation for them to become the people of God. The Feast of Booths happened after in the fall harvest of olives and grapes and the mood of this feast is one of celebration and thanksgiving.

And during this festival — Jews living outside of Jerusalem would travel into the city and set up these make-shift tents out of branches and big leaves to live in for the week. Jews living in Jerusalem would build the same structures on their flat roof tops. This is essentially sacred camping. Ancient Jewish historian — Josephus — tells us that this was the most popular of the feasts.

During their time in the wilderness — they were a nomadic people living in a barren land with few natural provisions. This sacred reenactment of the wilderness years reminded them of God's protection and provision.

Now one ceremony during the Feast of Booths is particularly relevant. Each day the High Priest would go down to the Pool of Siloam with a golden pitcher and fill it with water. Then the priest and a procession of people would walk the 6 blocks back to the Temple and the people would sing Isaiah 12:3...

Isaiah 12:3

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

As they arrived back at the Temple — the people would take their place inside as the priests would enter in through the Water Gate into the inner court of the Temple. The Shofar — which was a trumpet made from a ram's horn — would blast three times. While the pilgrims watched, the priests walked around the altar with the golden pitcher while the Temple Choir sang the Hallel Psalms — Psalms 113-118.

Look at a portion of Psalm 116...

I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!"

Meanwhile — the men in the crowd provide the percussion by shaking a bouquet of branches and three times cry out - Give Thanks to the Lord! Then the water is offered to God along with the daily wine offering. The wine and the water are poured into their respective silver bowls and poured out on the altar before the Lord.

This ceremony commemorated two things —

First — it reminded the Israelites how God had miraculously provided water for them in the desert. In Numbers 20, we see the Israelites in a precarious situation. They're in the desert with no water and the people fear for their lives. But God told Moses —

Numbers 20:8

"Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle."

Second — this ceremony looked forward to the day when God would pour out his Spirit on all of God's people in the Messianic age. In the Old Testament — God's spirit is given to prophets, priests, and kings to do the Lord's work — But God promised that one day — He would pour out his Spirit in a new way for all to experience.

This ceremony — rich with history and symbolism — would happen each morning of the festival.

Now — John tells us that Jesus arrives in Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths and midway through the feast — Jesus goes into the Temple courts and begins teaching. This of course stirs up the crowd. Some marvel his teaching and even put their faith in him. Some question his authority to even be teaching. Some suggest he's demon possessed. Some tried to have him arrested. But nothing comes of it at this point. That's the situation as we enter the last day of the Feast.

THE INVITATION

37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

It's the last day of the feast — and day after day — the people have gone down to the Pool of Siloam. They've watched the High Priest draw the water with the golden pitcher and bring it back to the altar. They sung the Hallel Psalms — songs that rejoice in the salvation and redemption that comes from God. They've sang about the joy of drawing from the well of salvation. They've given thanks to the Lord for his provision and sustenance and they've prayed for God to continue to provide rain for the harvest and water to drink. They've prayed for God to send the Messiah and bring lasting provision and salvation.

And now on this final day — at the height of the festival — in the midst of the crowd — you can imagine as the volume songs diminish — as the ritual comes to an end — Jesus stands up and cries out at the top of his voice —

If anyone thirsts — let him come to be and drink.

The moment is powerful and profound. Given the symbolism and significance of the ceremony Jesus is saying —

We are right to be thankful for God's provision of water in the wilderness. God provided water that satisfied their thirst in the desert. Now — come to me for water that will satisfy the thirst in your soul. In his dramatic invitation — Jesus uses three verbs — Thirst. Come. Drink. Each word provides a powerful word picture of the necessary elements for salvation.

Let's look at each one.

The first word is Thirst

Thirst is an acknowledgment and recognition of our need. True thirst is dire and can't wait. What's the thirstiest you've been been? The thirsty recognize their deprivation and go looking for water. It's a conscious craving for water that won't go away until it is satiated by water.

Jesus's invitation is universal — If anyone is thirsty. It's open ended. The only qualification and prerequisite to coming to Christ is Thirst.

What causes our thirst?

Well first the Bible teaches that because of sin — everyone is spiritually thirsty. And so we go looking for something to quench our thirst. And as we continue to live in sin — we exacerbate the problem. Instead of drinking from the fountain that God provides — we continue to try and find water on our own.

Jeremiah 2:13

for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

And in addition to that — we live in a sin soaked world — which is to say — the burdens and disappointments of life itself can make you more and more parched.

Friends...Are you thirsty? Is your soul parched? Are you longing for peace, forgiveness, salvation — if you are — it begins with a recognition of your thirst. To come to Jesus...the only thing you need is need.

The second word is Come.

This word signifies a movement toward Christ. The thirsty soul reaches out for something to drink. It's not a question of if the thirsty soul will move toward something — it's a matter of where will he or she go. Jesus is saying — look to me as the only source of soul satisfying water. Come to me and me alone. In our pursuit to quench our thirst — we come to Jesus with our head, heart, and hands.

This means turning away from other options. Jesus is not one brand of water among many brands of water that are all basically the same. Every other option will only make you thirstier.

This means turning away from self-reliance. Imagine an oasis in the desert but in the pride of self-reliance — you try to dig a well. That's what the all-set, prideful heart does. It says — I'll dig my own well thanks but no thanks.

The third word is Drink.

When you drink something — you appropriate it. You take it in. You consume it. You can give a thirsty person a cup of water but it does no good until it is consumed. Drinking means to receive and embrace Jesus.

Each word — Thirst. Come. Drink — represents the progression of genuine faith. A recognition of need. A turning to Christ as our only provision and source for life. And a trust that he will bring satisfaction.

Listen to how Ligioner Ministries describes faith...

Saving faith is not a cold, empty rationalism that simply gives intellectual assent to facts. At the same time, it is not a blind entrusting of ourselves into the hands of someone else. Instead, it is a warm, intellectually vital embrace of the Savior and His promises, believing that He can and will do all that He has pledged.

Faith means believing that Jesus is the only source of water for your thirsty soul — and then making decisions and commitments that align with that belief. Faith involves our head — our heart — and our hands. So what happens when we put our faith in Jesus? Jesus says — ***Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.***

And John adds a note of further explanation —

39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

In Christ — we aren't simply given a meager cup of water only to become thirsty again. The metaphor is one of abundance because of a new water source that never runs dry. And if you remember — this isn't the first time the metaphor of living water has been used. In John 4, in his conversation with the woman at the well — Jesus said that he had water to give that would become a well-spring of water in our hearts.

John 4:14

but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

So — an eternal spring of living water starts to come forth from within and it flows into a river of living water.

John will discuss the Holy Spirit in much more detail in chapters 14-16 — so we'll go into much more detail then, but for now, John tell us that it's God the Holy Spirit who produces this spiritual awakening in us and causes us to live for Christ. We saw this last week in ***John 6:63 — It is the Spirit who gives life...the flesh is no help at all.*** The Spirit gives life and here in John that life is pictured as rivers of living water flowing from within a person.

Again — think about the significance of the Feast of Booths. It's a festival to commemorate God's provision in the desert wilderness. Without God's intervention — they would have died for lack of food and water. Likewise — Without the Spirit — we are in a dry and parched land without food and water. But God the Father in his love for us gives us Christ as our bread and the Spirit as our water.

And John tells us that all of this will take place after Jesus is glorified. John tells us that the Spirit will come after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Again — this is a glimpse of what Jesus will explain later in John 14-16.

What's important to take in right now is that Jesus is standing up at the end of this feast and boldly declaring —

— all the longing and anticipation for God to provide joy in salvation, life in the Spirit, and satisfaction in your soul — it's happening now because of me.

If you're thirsty — come and be satisfied. And here's what's really cool. When we believe in Jesus, not only does our soul have access to living water from within so that we will never become thirsty — we are also overflowing with it so that from our abundance — we might offer it to those who are thirsty around us.

We are blessed to be a blessing. The parched are satisfied — the thirsty are renewed — and in our strength and joy — we are able to invite the thirsty to come and drink. Jesus invites us to drink of his living water so that we would be refreshed and renewed and we are further invited to join him on his mission to invite others to come and drink.

We should pause and think — who am I in relationship with right now that is thirsty? Who needs to come and drink? Write their name down and start praying for them. Pray for opportunities to share Christ with them.

THE DELIBERATION

43 So there was a division among the people over him.

You can't make a dramatic statement like the one Jesus just made and expect people to simply shrug their shoulders and walk away. And that's exactly what Jesus wants. He extends an invitation to eternal life found in Him — and he wants people to consider it and make a decision. There are basically three ways people respond to Jesus's Invitation.

1. Accept

40 When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet." 41 Others said, "This is the Christ."

Some hear Jesus's invitation and say — this is the one we've been waiting for. This is the capital Prophet we've been waiting for. Moses promises that one day God would send another deliverer to lead us out of the ultimate Exodus — and this is him. Others said — This is the Christ — the Messiah — the savior to come and inaugurate the New Covenant. They are thirsty — they see that Jesus has water to quench their thirst and they accept the invitation. We might hear the immediacy of their acceptance and be skeptical of their belief.

But you have to remember the Israelites are steeped in the Scriptures and they've waited for the Messiah to come for so long. The Spirit has primed them and made them ready to hear the words of Jesus and respond by faith and accept the invitation.

2. Reject

But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee? 42 Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" 44 Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

Here we see others reject the invitation and the claims of Jesus outright. These are hardened skeptics and cynics. They think they have the all of the details and the information necessary to make the right call. But they only have part of the information.

They say — The Christ is not supposed to come from Galilee — He's supposed to come from the line of David and from the village of Bethlehem — And on that point — they're correct. And it's also true that Jesus grew up in Nazareth of Galilee — so they conclude — Jesus doesn't qualify to be the Messiah because he isn't from the town of Bethlehem.

But they don't have all the facts because Jesus was in fact born in Bethlehem and He is a son of David by way of adoption from his step-father Joseph. So technically — Jesus meets the criteria and if they bothered to learn more — they could have inquired and investigated to get more information. Their surface level understanding didn't add up. And that's exactly the point. Cynics rarely go beyond the superficial and surface level because in actuality — they don't really want to believe. So they build their case on sloppy evidence and make hasty conclusions.

In addition to those who reject him on intellectual grounds — John also tells us that some are more antagonistic and their animosity towards Jesus has escalated to the point of seeking to have him arrested. If you've rejected Jesus — on what grounds? Have you carefully considered the claims of Jesus for yourself? Or have you adopted your rejection from someone else — instead of reading the Bible for yourself and genuinely considering the invitation that Jesus offers?

You can accept or reject the invitation — but John also shows us third response...

3. Deliberate

45 The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" 46 The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" 47 The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? 48 Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? 49 But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." 50 Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, 51 "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" 52 They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."

John tells us that the Chief priests and Pharisees send a group of officers to arrest Jesus and they are unable to do their job. They are torn — they say — No one has ever spoke like this man!

They aren't ready to commit to believing in him — but they also aren't ready to arrest him. They're in process and deliberating. To deliberate means to thoughtfully process and weigh options. And not only are the officers deliberating — we run into our friend Nicodemus again. He is a Pharisee and yet his conversation with Jesus back in John 3 has left him considering if Jesus is the Messiah.

Here he sticks up for Jesus and says — no matter what you think of him — he deserves a fair trial. Again, he hasn't made an explicit confession of faith — but he does advocate for hearing and learning more about Jesus.

Think about receiving an invitation for a party. You can accept the invitation or reject the invitation and send your notification with your response. Or you can hang on to it and deliberate. You can look at the calendar. You can consider your options for that weekend.

But ultimately — you have to make a decision. If the time comes and passes for the party and you never decide — then ultimately the decision is made. To endlessly deliberate — to endlessly speculate is to ultimately reject the invitation.

Friends — there is an invitation from Jesus on the table — If anyone thirsts, let him come and drink. Do you long like those who sang Isaiah 12:3 to draw water with joy from the well of salvation? Jesus says — I am the well of salvation where you can drink freely and experience ever increasing joy. Do you long to come and feast from the table of grace promised in 55:1?

Isaiah 55:1

"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Jesus says — I am the one who sets the table of grace where you can freely eat and drink and be satisfied.

Did you know this same invitation in John is repeated at the very end of the Bible?

Revelation 22:17

The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

At the very end of the Bible in Revelation 22 — The Apostle John picks up on this metaphor he learned from Jesus and says — let the thirsty come and take the water of life without price.

At the end of the day — those who come to Jesus aren't the moral and the well-put-together...it's not the self-sufficient. Those who ultimately come to Jesus are the Thirsty.

Seven Mile — let's come to Jesus this morning with nothing but our thirst and drink living water.

Prayer from Pastor Scotty Smith...

Jesus — No matter the generation of our thirst, you promise copious amounts of the healing waters of the gospel, the heart-liberating draught of grace, the artesian springs of the Spirit. We are fools, indeed, to ignore your invitation. For you aren't merely a great Prophet; you are the Messiah—God incarnate—our righteousness-fulfilling substitute and our sin-bearing Savior; Creator of all things and Redeemer of all broken things; the Lamb of God and the Lord of Life. Jesus, we come—thirsty, expectant, and grateful. Amen.