

If any man thirst

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Would you turn with me now to John's Gospel, to chapter 7, and reading there verses 37 to 39. John chapter 7, at verse 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. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe in him should receive. For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.

Now the words of these verses form part of our Lord's ministry at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Tabernacles was the last feast in the annual cycle of religious festivals for the Jews.

It came at the point in the year when the harvest was finally gathered in, and it was a happy, a joyful time. Indeed, it was probably the nearest that the people of those days ever got to what we now think of as a holiday.

Because tabernacles referred to the leafy shelters that the people lived in for the duration of the festival, as a reminder of how their forefathers had lived in the wilderness when the Lord brought them out of Egypt.

[1 : 51] And you can easily imagine, for instance, how excited the children became as they went to live for a week, in effect camping out in these leafy huts that they built.

It was a time of relaxation. It was a time of happiness. It was a time of rejoicing. Now, over the centuries, the Jews had developed a number of traditions regarding what took place at the Feast of Tabernacles.

And one of these traditions was that every day throughout the week of the festival, a priest would leave the temple and go down to the Pool of Siloam.

And at the pool he would fill a golden jug with water. And then he would go back up to the city, to the temple, amid great rejoicing, blowing of trumpets.

And he'd bring the water into the temple, to the side of the altar, and the water would be poured down through a funnel to the very base of the altar of burnt offering.

[3 : 05] And the ceremony seems to have originated as a way of remembering how often the Lord had provided water for their forefathers in the wilderness.

Just as we were singing at the end of Psalm 114, that he brought forth water from the rock so that the people might drink. But it wasn't just a memorial of the past.

This ceremony also incorporated a prayer for the Lord's continued blessing. Blessing at one level, so that the land would not suffer from drought.

An ever-present problem in the East. But it went beyond mere physical blessing from the Lord. The Feast of Tabernacles culminated with the people shouting out what they called the Great Hosanna.

The words of Psalm 118. And the prosperity they were looking for went beyond lack of drought.

[4 : 26] Went beyond mere outward and material blessing. Because so often in Scripture, water had signified the blessing that the Lord would bring in the coming age, when all would enjoy his bounty.

As the water was poured out, the congregation would be thinking of the realization of scriptural passages, such as that found in Isaiah 12.

They were looking for more. They were seeking more than just the Lord's blessing on the agricultural prosperity of their land.

They were looking for the Lord's spiritual blessing, which had so long been denied them. And there, against that background, Jesus stepped forward and said, Look, here I am.

I am the one in whom all these hopes and prayers are fulfilled. I am the one who fulfills your greatest longing.

[5 : 41] Now there is ongoing discussion as to precisely when Jesus said this.

We know it was on the last day of the feast, and you would have thought that was a fairly simple thing to work out. But the question actually is, when was the last day of the feast?

If you look back at the Old Testament to Deuteronomy 16, you'll find that the Feast of Tabernacles is talked about as a seven-day celebration. And there are some people who argue that Jesus was speaking on the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles, just at the very moment that the water was being poured out at the base of the altar.

And so Jesus was saying, Look, there's the ceremony, but I am the reality. However, there's another description of the Feast of Tabernacles in Scripture, and you find it in Leviticus chapter 23. And in that chapter, after the seven days, there's an eighth day mentioned, an extra day. It was also thought of as a special day.

[6 : 58] And we know that by Jesus' time, the Jews, many of them, were thinking of it as part of the Feast of Tabernacles. Indeed, some writers of our Lord's Day refer to Tabernacles as an eight-day festival.

And on the eighth day, there were none of the ceremonies of the previous week. It was still a very important day, but it didn't have this ceremony of pouring out of the water.

And if it was on that day that Jesus was speaking, he wasn't just saying, I am the fulfillment of the prayers incorporated in this ceremony.

He was also saying, I am the permanent fulfillment. He was saying to the people, Look, these are over. Your seven-day festival is over.

Look, all the sacred feasts of the year have finished. They've gone. But I'm here. And I'm the permanent fulfillment.

[8 : 02] What I can give you does not come to an end. There you are on the eighth day, busy taking down these booths, these leafy huts you've been living in for the past week.

You're packing up and going back to your life again. You're left with one more memory of a time of celebration. One more memory of a time of blessing.

A time of blessing that has come to an end. But Luke, you should have more than memories. You should have more than hopes for the future.

You can have me now. I am the fulfillment. And that's what John, I think, was really pointing to when he went out of his way to describe the time that Jesus said this as being on the last day, the great day of the feast.

He was echoing in those words the thought of the true last day, the day of eschatological fulfillment, the great day when God comes in power and delivers on his promise.

[9 : 16] And he was saying, look, it's all there in Jesus. That was what he was claiming. He was claiming that into the flow of human history, there had already come the fulfillment of the age to come.

And just think for a moment about how Jesus presented this message. It's said here, he stood and cried.

Perhaps that doesn't quite, the significance doesn't quite reach us. He didn't say this in the course of a sermon. He didn't say this in the course of an academic discussion.

In the ancient world, when the rabbis and teachers taught, they didn't do so standing, but sitting.

That was the custom of the time. Remember how in the Nazareth synagogue, Jesus is described as standing up to read the word of God.

That was done because of reverence for scripture. And then he sat down to address the people with the sermon on the text that he'd just read. And that was a custom, in fact, that continued into the early Christian church.

[10 : 30] It was typically the preacher who was sitting and everybody else was standing. A great recipe for long sermons and weary congregations. But here we've got Jesus and he's not sitting.

He's standing. The crowds are still thronging the temple. He's making an announcement. He's standing up and he's crying out loud and clear.

He wants to attract attention. He is saying, this is important. You have to realize all these things are destined to pass away.

But I am the fulfillment of them all. And I am here. And we're called on still to live in the realization of Jesus as the one who is fulfilled.

Jesus as the one who is still truly here offering to us himself as the fulfillment. Now there's a message he delivered.

[11 : 43] And it was a message in two parts. One part was an invitation. If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. And the other part was a promise.

He that believeth on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters. Now the invitation was addressed to those who did not acknowledge Jesus as Savior.

The invitation was a plea to them that if they wanted to enjoy these spiritual blessings their forefathers had enjoyed, they had to recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

They had to forget the ceremonies, forget the rituals. They had to come to Jesus and experience the reality. He was calling on them as he calls still to each one of us, commit your life to me because I am the one and only source.

I am the true and unique source of divine blessing. In the heat of the East, one is made acutely aware of how important water is to sustain life.

[13 : 12] Physical life requires constant water. and scripture uses water as a symbol spiritually of our need for salvation, of what is needed to sustain spiritual life.

Water is a fitting symbol of what we need within to satisfy the longings and the cravings of the soul not merely hungry for physical food, but the soul that is hungry for fulfillment and inner satisfaction. The soul that is looking for peace and for rest. And so Jesus comes and he says, do you want to have true life?

Do you want to have life to the full? Do you want to know what it is to be at peace with God and to enjoy his blessing? Then come unto me and drink.

Come unto me and find that spiritual satisfaction which I as the true Messiah alone can provide. Jesus had already used this same picture.

[14 : 24] Remember when he was talking to the woman at the well in Sacher and he said to the woman, whoever drinks of this water, the water from the well, they'll thirst again. But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.

but the water that I shall give him shall be in him, a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. If there are, if there is anyone here tonight who still does not know Jesus as Savior, who still has not drunk of this water that he provides, then don't go away without responding to the invitation, the invitation he issues and will continue to issue.

But the invitation he comes with tonight to you, drink of the water I provide. Let your life be informed and suffused by the provision that I can give.

For only in that way will you find everlasting life, peace of heart, and peace with God. But Jesus moves on.

He doesn't just issue an invitation to the unconverted. He also gives a promise to those who have committed themselves to him.

[15 : 53] He that believeth in me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. Now that's more than he'd said to the woman at the well in Sire.

There he'd spoken of an inner well that would bring life to the individual soul. To the woman at the well he'd pointed to the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, making available to the believer the life and the resources of heaven.

But here he goes further. Doesn't deny what he said before. Builds on it and says there's more than that. He reveals more of what the Spirit's work involves.

It's not just a well of water within. It's rivers of living water flowing out. And as he spoke Jesus said this is in fulfillment of the scripture promise.

Now it's not totally clear which passage of scripture Jesus was referring to. But I think it was Ezekiel 47 which is why I read it earlier.

[17 : 10] At tabernacles remember the water was poured out as a symbol of divine blessing at the side of the altar. And in Ezekiel's vision the water flowed out of the temple and passed the altar and spread its life-giving power far and wide.

And the prophet was being instructed according to the measure of light that the church had in those days. those days when the temple was the focus of the divine presence amongst God's people.

The prophet was being shown and instructed that from the temple itself there was going to go forth reinvigorating power as streams of water that grew and grew and grew the further they went.

Where is the temple now? It's no longer a building of stone. It's no longer something you have to go to Jerusalem to find.

What made the temple the temple? It was the indwelling of God. It was the Shekinah glory. It was the fact that God was pleased to make it the focus of his presence upon earth.

[18 : 28] What corresponds to the temple now? Ye are the temple of the living God. Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you.

The Spirit has now been given. And what does that mean? It means that if we have drunk from the water Christ provides, we have received the Holy Spirit.

It means that we have already got the deep inner satisfaction that salvation and the Spirit's presence brings to the heart.

It comes to the individual believer, transforms the heart, and gives renewed life within, so that we have resources, spiritual resources that we never envisaged before.

Here Jesus says it goes further than that. He who has drunk this water has received life in such a fullness that it flows out to the benefit of others.

[19 : 42] Don't take the phrase out of his belly in a wrong way. It's a Jewish form of expression. I suppose nowadays we would say out of his heart or out of his inner life.

It's pointing to the fact that there has been a transformed inner being in the individual who's drunk of the water, of the spiritual life that Jesus gives.

At the very core of that individual, in the heart, there has been a change. And the change affects all the individual's life, yes, but it goes out, it flows out as rivers of living water.

And that's the challenge I bring before you and I bring before myself this evening. Here we are giving thanks for the remembrance of all that God has done for us in Christ.

Here we are and do we match up to this description. Is this true of us, that out of our inner being there flows rivers of living water?

[21 : 00] Do we know what that means? You see, we're all here, we're saying we have received good things from the hand of the Lord, that's why we're giving thanks.

us. But are we giving him the thanks he wants by letting the rivers of living water flow through us, bringing blessing to all whom they reach?

Salvation is not just a matter of God working in us, it is also a matter of God working through us.

And if we stop to examine the situation, we may well say these rivers are not flowing as they ought.

Can we think about that for a moment? What stops a river flowing? Well, there may be a blockage.

A dam is the best way of stopping the waters of a river from flowing.

Is it perhaps the case that we've erected a dam, a weir, something to stop the rivers of living water flowing out?

[22 : 20] Is it perhaps that we're so fearful that the supply the Spirit gives will run out, will no longer be effective, that we have to keep to ourselves what we've already got?

Do we say of the water what others said of the oil? We cannot give you, lest there be not enough for us and you. Perhaps the reason why the waters, the rivers of living water are not flowing as they ought, is the smallness, the feebleness of our faith.

If we have to analyze our situation, the church has to confess how ineffective we are. And the solution is one of letting the rivers of living water flow, because we are assured they will be copiously replenished.

That's the picture that Ezekiel got. Oh yes, it doesn't begin in a big way. It really began as a trickle, trickle flowing out of the temple.

But as it flowed, its volume grew. It was divinely augmented. It built up and up, first to the ankles, then to the knees, and then eventually he couldn't get across it at all.

[23 : 47] And our problem is that we're looking for grand things, but we're stopping up. We're putting a plug in the way of the initial trickle.

Getting it started is the problem. Once it's moving, the blessing will ensue and multiply. There's a challenge before each one of us.

As we look to Jesus to provide for us the living water, he's looking to us to let the rivers of living water flow through our lives to the great blessing of many others.

But there's another danger. There's another danger that may prevent the rivers of living water flowing and bringing life.

Not the absence of the waters, but the fact that the waters have become polluted. They are no longer life-giving waters.

[24 : 55] They are now tainted. They are turned from waters of life into waters of death. life. And I think we can develop that thought two ways.

The water of life can be turned into the water of death because of toxic pollution. you know how there's many rivers in our land and other lands where life has been stifled because there is so much pollution in the water.

To call them a river sometimes is a travesty because they bear not life but death to the life that would live in it. And that's spiritually true also.

It's what's really happened in our nation this past century. There's the professing church. The church that should be bearing witness to the truth of scripture.

And so often the church itself has been the seedbed of doubt. So often the professing church has poisoned the stream of living water by denying the faith, by undermining the faith, by turning from the truth of scripture.

[26 : 15] If we look around our land, if we look around our land at the professing churches of Jesus Christ, there is a spiritual miasma beclouding the land because the fountain of truth has been polluted.

To change the metaphor, the church is to be light in darkness. darkness. And if the church has lost the light, the darkness is what we see around us.

We must constantly take care that we are coming back to scripture and the truth of scripture. Not just parts of the truth of scripture, but the whole of the truth.

So that the rivers of living water will not be polluted with poison, but will be free and life giving to those around.

But you know, there is another form of pollution. Not the pollution that is toxic, but the pollution that is foul.

[27 : 31] There are times when rivers can become so filled with sediment and mud that they can no longer support life.

They rather smother it. And I think that is closer to the church. Not living so much untrue to the word of scripture, but conducting itself, both the individual and the church corporate, conducting itself in a way that is contrary to what the Lord requires.

I often fear that we come under the condemnation that's mentioned in Ezekiel chapter 34, where the Lord speaks to the shepherds of Israel and says to them, seemeth it a small thing to you to have eaten up the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the residue of the pasture, and to have drunk of the living of the deep waters, but you must foul the residue with your feet.

What's it saying? Saying there were those who'd enjoyed good pasture, there were those who'd drunk of the deep waters, their interests had been satisfied, they were ones who enjoyed blessing good things, but they were so focused on self, they were so consumed with self interest, that they didn't care what harm their actions had for anyone else.

There's the challenge, there's the picture we have to respond to, we're coming giving thanks for the good things we've received, oh yes, let's do that, but what are we doing with respect to the others?

[29 : 39] How are we behaving? We who have drunk of the deep waters, are we making sure that we're not fouling the residue thereof with our feet?

It's a challenge, it's the basic challenge not to live a life just focused on self. Or you say yes, but I'm a Christian, yes indeed, but the problem in the Christian life is the same very often, we receive from the Lord, we give thanks in word, but we still act with that old spirit of self interest that fails when it comes to considering the great needs of others.

so tonight I'm coming with this word that Christ had, this word that was a promise, a promise to his people, that those who have put their trust in him will have rivers of living water flowing out of them.

And I'm asking myself and I'm asking you, are we going in the days that lie ahead to be busy claiming the fulfilment of that promise for ourselves as individuals and for ourselves collectively?

Because that is what the Lord wants. He stood up and cried this out, this is important, this isn't some optional extra in the message I bring, this is important, this is vital, this is how blessing will come.

[31 : 26] God, the Holy Spirit, comes into our hearts but he comes to the temple, the temple of God, the temple that is now the believer and the church and he wants to see the rivers of living

water flowing out.

and the challenge is to us to let those waters flow, to flow as waters of life true to scripture and unpolluted by our folly and there's a great deal to be getting on with.

Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.