

LIVING WATER

John 7:37-52

One of the religious festivals which had been instituted by God and which was regularly observed by the Jews was the Feast of Tabernacles. It was known by a variety of names.

- The Feast of Tabernacles.
- The Feast of Booths.

It was a time of joyous celebration. The harvest was in. The year's work was done. And the people would come together for a time of remembrance and thanksgiving. Indeed, there may be some similarities seen in this Feast to the American observance of Thanksgiving.

It was known as the Feast of Booths because, for the entire week, people did not sleep in their homes, but instead "camped out" in small, temporary booths or tents. They would be all over Jerusalem. Those who lived in the city would set up a booth on their rooftop. Pilgrims to the city would camp out in the surrounding hills.

This was a time of remembrance. They were remembering that there was a time when they had come out of Egypt and were yet without a land or a permanent home. They were remembering that "in between" time -- the time after Egypt but before the Promised Land. They were remembering the time when they were nomads living in tents in the desert.

- On the first day of the Feast, there would be a procession of all of the people to the Temple. Each would carry in his hand a tree branch and a fruit of some sort. As flutes were playing and people were dancing, these branches would be used to make a leafy canopy over the altar.
- On each of the seven days of the Feast a priest would draw water from the pool of Siloam in a golden pitcher and then bring it in procession up to the Temple. As the Trumpet was sounded, the water was poured onto the altar. At the same time, wine would be poured from a second golden pitcher.

Water and wine. Poured out on the altar for the people of God. We in the United States tend to take water for granted - you turn on the tap and out it comes. I have been to parts of the world where one would turn on the tap and hope that it would come out. But there were not water spickets in the ancient world. Water was often scarce. The people had to depend upon God each day for the rain to water their crops. This drawing of the water

commemorated two things.

1. It commemorated the water that God provided in the wilderness. Remember that the people were living this entire week in booths. This was to remind them of the time when Israel had lived in the desert. The thing that makes the desert so “desertly” is that there is no water.

Do you remember how God had provided water in the desert? It was through a rock. Moses had been commanded to strike the rock and out came water. It was a striking scene. The Israelites complained to God that they had been brought out to die in the wilderness. As public opinion turned against Moses, the Lord instructed him to go out in the presence of the people and to take with him the staff.

The staff was a sign of judgment. It was the same staff that had been used in bringing judgment to Egypt. Moses was to take the staff and the Lord would come and stand on the rock before the presence of Moses and Israel. Moses would strike the rock.

Do you see the symbolism? Moses comes to strike God, but God cannot be stricken, so Moses is to strike the rock on which the Lord’s presence stands. God is going to be judged symbolically by Moses. Moses is going to hit God. The Creator is judged by the creature. The innocent will be stricken so that the guilty can receive water.

That is what Jesus did. He is the rock who was stricken in our place. He is the One who was punished so that we could receive life-giving water. Lest you think that this is too much of a stretch, Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 10.

*For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³ and all ate the same spiritual food; ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and **the rock was Christ.** (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).*

Have you come to the rock who was stricken on your behalf? Have you come to see the place where the Judge of all the earth was judged in your place? If so, then you will find a river of living water. It is a place that will quench the thirst of your soul.

2. The Jerusalem Talmud also connects these ceremonies and this scripture with the giving of the Holy Spirit: “Why is the name of it called, ‘The drawing out of

water?’ Because of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, according to what is said: *‘With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation (Isaiah 12:3).’*”

God had promised Ezekiel, *“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean...²⁶ Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you...”* (Ezekiel 36:25-26). They understood that there would come a day when God would do something special; when He would cleanse His people with a spiritual cleansing of which any water ceremony was only a symbol.

Jesus is going to make the same connection in the following verses when He speaks of the water of the Spirit that flows through those who believe in Him.

AN OFFER OF LIVING WATER

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.

“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”

But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37-39).

As we have seen, the water ceremony was an integral part of the Feast of Tabernacles. God had miraculously provided water in the desert. But Jesus calls people to come to Himself. He is the One who provides true water.

When Jesus met with the Samaritan woman, He told her of a well of water that springs up to eternal life. This chapter is an expansion of that teaching. There is a source of water which is meant to last and last and last.

The Feast of Tabernacles was held for seven days, followed by an eighth day of spiritual observance, including an offering to God. The feast had been established as a memorial to the wandering in the wilderness where water and food were scarce. When the people emerged from the desert into the land of Canaan, they enjoyed regular rainfall and plentiful crops. The celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles included a daily procession of priests from the temple to the Pool of Siloam, from which they drew water that was poured out as a libation at the altar. As they poured, they would recite Isaiah 12:3.

*Therefore you will joyously draw water
From the springs of salvation.*

It is on the event of this ceremonial observation that Jesus stands up and makes a striking proclamation that points to Himself.

1. The Source of the Living Water: *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink” (7:37).*

In the final scene of the movie *A River Runs Through It*, Norman MacLean is casting for trout on his beloved Big Blackfoot River, but if you read between the lines, you'll see that he's casting for something else as well. He comments:

*Now nearly all those I loved and did not understand in my youth are dead... But I still reach out to them... When I am alone in the half-light of the canyon, all existence seems to fade to a being with my soul and memories and the sounds of the Big Blackfoot River and a four-count rhythm and the hope that fish will rise... I am haunted by waters. (*A River Runs Through It*, produced and directed by Robert Redford. © 1993 Columbia Pictures, Burbank, Ca).*

At the end of his life, he continues to be haunted. He is still reaching out for something, even though he doesn't know what it is. He still wants. He is still thirsty.

When Jesus says that people are to come to Him for their thirst, remember what they were there to remember - The Feast of Tabernacles; Israelites tenting in the wilderness. What do you need in the desert? Water! He provides the one indispensable thing!

Where did they get water in the desert? It was from the rock. Moses struck the rock and out came water. Jesus is going to be struck down. And out will come the Spirit.

In chapter 6 we see Jesus as the bread of life - the fulfillment of the wilderness manna. In chapter 7 we see Jesus as the provider of the water of life - the fulfillment of the wilderness rock.

This is an invitation. If you are thirsty, then you are invited to come and drink. God gives us a thirst that cannot be quenched by anything but Himself. Augustine said it this way: “Thou hast created us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”

I believe that there are times when we should not present the gospel. There are times when we meet people who are not thirsty. We offer them water and it is

clear, cool water. But they aren't thirsty.

Are you thirsty? Are you looking for more than what you have? Are you tired of the guilt that keeps you up at night? Are you so lonely that you ache with the emptiness? Come to Jesus. He is the thirst-quencher.

Jesus does not limit this thirst to anything specific. It does not matter for what you are searching. He is the answer to your thirst.

When we read in Revelation 21:8 that the unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and liars are excluded from heaven, our natural question is to ask, "Who does enter in?" We would expect to read that only those who are nice are able to enter. This passage does not say that. Instead, we read several verses earlier that there is only one requirement. You must be thirsty. Jesus says in verse 6, "I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost."

No cost, just need. All you need is need. All you need is nothing. Most of us do not have it.

2. The Movement of Living Water: *"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water'" (7:38).*

There is a large body of water some seventeen miles to the east of Jerusalem called the Dead Sea. It is perhaps one of the most barren places on the face of the earth. It is also the lowest point of land on the face of the earth. The high salt content of the Sea has killed off all of the fish and much of the plant life. Why? While fresh water from three different rivers flow into it, no water flows out. The water just sits there and becomes stagnant.

Do you know some Christians like that? They have become stale and stagnant. They take in doctrine but they never give anything back. Here is the principle. When God gives it, you have to share it, or else it will go stale.

3. The Promise of Living Water: *As the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water' (7:38).*

Notice the appeal of Jesus to the Scriptures. He is indicating that this promise of living water was first given in the Old Testament Scriptures. Such a promise was seen in a number of Old Testament passages:

*For I will pour out water on the thirsty land
And streams on the dry ground;*

*I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring,
And My blessing on your descendants (Isaiah 44:3).*

*And the LORD will continually guide you,
And satisfy your desire in scorched places,
And give strength to your bones;
And you will be like a watered garden,
And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. (Isaiah 58:11).*

In a graphic presentation of the blessings of God's kingdom extending to the land and to the nations, the prophet Zechariah gives this promise:

*And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half
of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western
sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter. (Zechariah 14:8).*

While some might be inclined to interpret this prophecy with a wooden literalness, it is striking that it makes reference, not merely to water, but to "living water."

4. The Channel of Living Water: "*From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water*" (7:38).

The water is Jesus and it flows through clay pipes to the world. We are the clay pipes. We cannot add anything to the water. We cannot make it any wetter than it already is. The best we can do is not to stop it up.

We aren't even necessarily good pipes. Some of us are cracked and broken. But the water can still flow through us to those who are thirsty.

You see, we tend to think that Jesus is just there to meet our needs. But He is much more than that. He empowers us so that we can be a channel to others. Are you a fountain for people around you or are you a drain on the people around you? Do those around you feel sucked dry or do they feel refreshed by your presence?

5. The Pump of Living Water: *But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive (7:39).*

The Spirit of God was already working in the world. He is evident in many Old Testament passages. But there was something new that Jesus promised with regard to the Holy Spirit. He was going to be poured out in a way that had not previously happened.

6. The Prerequisite of Living Water: *For the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (7:39).*

When we read that the Holy Spirit had not yet been given, we can understand that this is not speaking in absolute terms. Certainly the Holy Spirit was active in the Old Testament. He would come on people and fill them and do mighty things in their lives. But compared to the way in which He would be given in the New Testament, it is as if He had not been given at all. Compared to what would come in the future, it was as though the Holy Spirit had been absent.

We use this kind of speech on a regular basis. If your favorite sports team loses with a score of 35-0, the sportscaster might say, "They never showed up." He does not mean that the team stayed home, but that the performance of the other team by comparison was so great that their opposition might as well have been absent.

That is what the author is saying here. The greatness of the Spirit would not take place until Jesus was glorified. What does this mean? Whenever Jesus in the book of John talks about being glorified, He is referring to the cross. How do we know that?

These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee." (John 17:1).

This was a reference to the cross. He was thirsty so that you never need be thirsty again. He died for your sins, but that is not the only thing He accomplished upon the cross. He also died to give you the power to live the life for which He calls you.

Do you see the point? The Holy Spirit of whom is spoken here has been given since the cross. Jesus didn't just die to give you something in the future. He also died to give you an abundant life right now.

Remember the example of the searcher in "A River Runs Through it"? Always searching, never finding. By contrast, listen to how this stream of life flowed from a young pastor in Zimbabwe who was killed for his faith in Christ. This note was found in his office:

I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have the Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made-I'm a disciple of his. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure. I'm finished and done with low living, sight walking, smooth knees,

colorless dreams, tamed visions, worldly talking, cheap giving, and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean in his presence, walk by patience, am uplifted by prayer, and I labor with power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way rough, my companions are few, my Guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the enemy, pander at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till he comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till he stops me. And, when he comes for his own, he will have no problem recognizing me...my banner will be clear! (The Signature of Jesus, © 1992 by Brennan Manning).

Here is a man who drank deeply from the Spirit of Jesus. That Spirit became a river of life flowing out from him. Does His river flow through you?

THE QUESTION OF THE CHRIST

Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet."

Others were saying, "This is the Christ." Still others were saying, "Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? ⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?"

So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him. (John 7:40-44).

Notice how easily people make decisions with inadequate data. They had read their Old Testament and they knew some prophecies about the Messiah, and based upon the data that they had, they formed a syllogism.

- Premise #1: The Messiah is to come from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
- Premise #2: Jesus is from Nazareth.
- Conclusion: Therefore, Jesus cannot be the Messiah.

The syllogism was correct, but the premise was faulty. If they had taken the time to check, they would have found out that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem.

In 1815 when Wellington led the British and the Prussians against Napoleon's French troops, the world held its breath to hear what would be the outcome of the Battle of Waterloo. There were no telephones in those days, but messages could be sent by signal flags. The story is told of a ship approaching England which signaled to the coast, "Wellington defeated..." but then the fog closed in and the rest of the message was lost. The news began to spread all over England that Wellington had lost to Napoleon at Waterloo. But when the fog lifted, the rest of the message was read, "Wellington defeated the enemy."

Christians do the same thing all the time. They judge their brothers and their sisters with inadequate data. Notice the division caused by Jesus. There is still division caused by Jesus.

"Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; 52 for from now on five members in one household will be divided; three against two, and two against three.

"They will be divided, father against son; and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."
(Luke 12:51-53).

Truth is always divisive. It is always separate and apart from error. It causes divisions in the lives of those who hold to it. You cannot hold to the truth and expect to go unchallenged by a world who holds to error.

At the same time, we should note that the question they asked as to the birthplace of Jesus is not a subject with which John had dealt in his gospel account. Matthew and Luke had each presented an extensive birth narrative, but John is silent about this. Instead, he makes the point that Jesus ultimately came from heaven.

QUESTIONS IN THE COURT

The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they

said to them, “Why did you not bring Him?”

The officers answered, “Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks.”

The Pharisees then answered them, “You have not also been led astray, have you? ⁴⁸ No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? ⁴⁹ But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed.”

Nicodemus (he who came to Him before, being one of them) said to them, ⁵¹ “Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?”

They answered him, “You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee.” (John 7:45-52).

This is a rather humorous behind the scenes account of what was going on within the inner workings of the Temple. Jesus had been preaching without a license. The Jewish authorities sent out their Temple Guard with a warrant for the arrest of Jesus.

A few hours later they come back. But there is no Jesus. It is not that He is in hiding. He is still preaching in the Temple. And the guards are before their superiors looking a bit sheepish.

“Where is your prisoner?”

“He is preaching in the Temple.”

“I thought that you were going to arrest Him.”

“We were going to.”

“What happened?”

“We came to where He was preaching and as we were getting ready to read Him His Miranda Rights, we heard a bit of what He was saying. And we stopped. And we listened some more. And we could not stop listening to Him. We have never heard such preaching.”

“Where are the rest of your men?”

“They are still in the Temple listening to Him.”

The Temple hierarchy is in an uproar. They look throughout their own ranks to see if there are any believers. All remain quiet. Even a fellow named Nicodemus who once had a midnight meeting with the Messiah.

But finally, Nicodemus can remain silent no longer. Although he does not confess to being a Christian, he makes something of an attempt to blunt the court’s obvious intention to plot the death of Jesus. “Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?” The very question points out the fact that they had prejudged Jesus without ever examining Him.

The world does the same thing today. A great many people have rejected Jesus without ever examining the Scriptures to see what He says about Himself.

Who is Jesus? It is a question that was asked that day in Jerusalem. People have been asking it ever since. He is the One who provides living water. He is the One who became flesh and tabernacled with us.

The Jews had come to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. They were residing in tents. God came to celebrate the feast, too. He had His own tent. His name was Jesus. And because He has come, we need never be thirsty again.