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John 7:25-52

Twenty-second Message

John Hanneman

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## SPRINGS OF SALVATION

In chapter 7 of the gospel of John we will see that relations between Jesus and the religious authorities are escalating toward the boiling point. Jesus had gone to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, one of the three great annual Jewish feasts. Tabernacles celebrated what God had done for his people during the Exodus, and it also marked the completion of the harvest. The festival was filled with eschatological significance – the anticipation of last day events connected with the coming of the Messiah, foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures.

This chapter is made up of two cycles, each of which has three elements. First, Jesus teaches; second, his teaching is followed by speculation and debate among the people; and third, the authorities look for an occasion to arrest him.

A	14-24	Jesus teaches – middle of the feast
B	25-31	Debate and speculation among the people
C	32-36	Leaders seek to arrest Jesus
A	37-39	Jesus teaches – last day of the feast
B	40-44	Debate and speculation among the people
C	45-52	Leaders seek to arrest Jesus

Jesus' first teaching (vv. 14-24) comes in the middle of the feast. The second teaching will come on the last day of the celebrations. We have already looked at the initial teaching in which Jesus addressed two issues: the authority of his teaching and the authority of Moses. Today I want to begin with his second teaching and then look at the reaction from both the crowd and the authorities.

**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 NASB)**

On the last day of the feast, which was either the seventh or the eighth day, Jesus "cried out" in dramatic fashion. This word is always used in John's gospel to introduce a public pronouncement (1:15; 7:28; 12:44). Once more, Jesus is probably in the temple area. The huge crowd listening to him is filled with excitement. He cries out, "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.'"

Based on the punctuation, the text could mean one of two things. Jesus was either promising that the life giving waters of the Spirit would flow from him, or that the same life giving Spirit would flow from believers. The "his" in verse 38 could be referring to either himself or the believer. Maybe both meanings are intended. The traditional view is that the Spirit would flow from believers. This would make this word here consistent with what Jesus told the woman at the well in chapter 4. Not only is Jesus offering water that quenches

thirst, he is also announcing the inauguration of the age of the Spirit, which will begin when he is glorified. The one who believes will receive the Holy Spirit, and that same Spirit will become a constantly flowing stream of refreshment and life, having its source in the inner man; literally, "out of his belly" will come living water.

During the Feast of Tabernacles there was a dramatic water ritual which heightened the meaning of Jesus' words. The priests drew water from the pool of Siloam and began a procession to the temple. Their arrival at the Water Gate was greeted by three blasts of the shofar, accompanied by the temple choir singing the Hallel, Psalms 113-118. When the choir reached Psalm 118, every male took willow and myrtle twigs in his right hand, while his left hand held aloft a piece of citrus (a sign of ingathering). At this point everyone cried, "Give thanks to the Lord!" three times. The water was then poured out on the altar, which was a reminder to the Jews of God's provision of water during the Exodus and his pouring out of the Spirit in the last days.

Under the altar lay a rock which some believed was the "navel" of the earth. From this rock flowed water which would restore the land of Israel and bring life to the whole earth (Ezek 47:1-9; Zech 13:1; 14:8; Neh 9:15-20). Here, Jesus is connecting himself with this water ritual, saying that he can offer this water of life – that he is the living water.

I want to amplify what is happening at this Feast of Tabernacles by sharing some thoughts and promises from the Old Testament. The story begins in Genesis, in the garden: "Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers" (Gen 2:10). The garden is the first image of the temple in the Bible, and from it flows life-giving water.

During their wilderness journey the Israelites had problems finding water, but God supplied. The first time this happened is recorded in Exodus 15:

**"When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet. (Exod 15:23-25)**

In Exodus 17, God provided water a second time for his people.

**Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the**

**rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” (Exod 17:2-6)**

God instructed Moses to strike the rock with a rod, a symbol of authority which would inflict judgment. That is what happened when the waters of the Nile were turned to blood. Moses’ smiting the rock is a picture of what would happen at the cross. In his death, Jesus would face the rod of judgment that we all deserve, but he would release life-giving water.

The Feast of Tabernacles also played an important role in eschatology. One of the many prophetic passages which speaks of water and Spirit is Isaiah 12:3, a passage which was chanted during the drawing of water out of the pool during Tabernacles:

**Therefore you will joyously draw water  
From the springs of salvation. (Isa 12:3)**

We also see the Exodus metaphor in Isaiah 44 and the connection between water in the wilderness and the arrival of the Spirit:

**“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;  
And they will spring up among the grass  
Like poplars by streams of water.” (Isa 44:3-4)**

Isaiah 55 invites us to come to the waters and drink:

**“Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;  
And you who have no money come, buy and eat.  
Come, buy wine and milk  
Without money and without cost.” (Isa 55:1)**

Zechariah 14 is one of the great eschatological chapters in the O.T. It predicts a day when life-giving water would flow from Jerusalem:

**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. And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one. (Zech 14:8-9)**

Tabernacles is also called the Feast of Ingathering, which looks forward to the day when water will flow out from both sides of the mountain, anticipating the final harvest when all the nations will be gathered together.

Here in John 7, Jesus quotes Scripture, without giving a source. Was he referring to what we just read, or perhaps to Nehemiah 9, which reflects the same themes of exodus, water and Spirit?

**“You provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger,  
You brought forth water from a rock for them for their thirst,  
And You told them to enter in order to possess  
The land which You swore to give them.” (Neh 9:15)**

**“You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them,  
Your manna You did not withhold from their mouth,  
And You gave them water for their thirst.” (Neh 9:20)**

Notice the references here to bread and manna and water and Spirit. Bread was associated with Torah, and water with Spirit. The Messiah would bring the Spirit.

Tabernacles was also associated with adequate rainfall. The water rite symbolized fertility and fruitfulness that only rain could bring. God provides spiritual “rain” in the messianic age, and Jesus fulfills this expectation. Recall what he said to Nicodemus in chapter 3:5:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Jesus was saying that he was the water and Spirit that are linked together in the O.T. Nicodemus must enter into this water and Spirit to be reborn. He must enter into Jesus’ death so that he can enter into Jesus’ life. Speaking to the woman in Samaria, Jesus said: “but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

The story of the Bible ends in the book of Revelation, and here we see water flowing from the temple in the new Jerusalem: “Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev 22:1).

During the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus is proclaiming at the very place where the water was poured out that he is the fulfillment of all these O.T. promises. The day that Israel had been reading about, the day of the Messiah, had finally dawned. Jesus is the rock in the wilderness, he is the new temple, and from him come springs of salvation. Then the church became the temple in Christ. Ever since Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out, the church is the source of the water of life that blesses the nations.

The Bible is filled with references to water and Spirit, and both of these elements are central to John’s gospel. The concept that water quenches thirst is a great metaphor, but Jesus is saying much more than that. In order to understand him we must study the O.T. In a sense we have to become Jewish in order to fully embrace what it means to be the people of God.

Listen to these words from Brennan Manning: “Rome is burning, Jesus says. Drop your fiddle, change your life, and come to me. Let go of nostalgia and mourning for the good old days that never were anyway. A Sunday school in which you never participated, traditional virtues you never practiced, legalistic obedience you never honored, and a sterile orthodoxy you never accepted. The old era is done. The decisive inbreak of God has happened.”<sup>1</sup>

As one can imagine, both the crowd and the authorities have quite a reaction to the teaching of Jesus. The debate centers on whether he was the Christ, as both groups understood the implications of what he was saying. Let us look at how the crowd reacted after the first teaching in the middle of the week.

**So some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill? Look, He is speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they?” (7:25-26)**

The crowd knows that Jesus is a wanted man. They wonder why the authorities are silent, and conclude that perhaps they have decided that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.

**“However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from.” Then Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, “You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me.” (7:27-29)**

The Jews thought the Messiah would be hidden and completely unknown until he appeared to effect Israel’s redemption. This is one of three tests for the Messiah that we see in John 7. But this is not found in Scripture. The irony is that the crowd thinks they know

where Jesus comes from (they think it was Nazareth), but they don't really know.

The Jews were missing the point. Jesus' physical roots are not important; what is important is that he comes from his Father. The Jews prided themselves in knowing God, but if they knew him, they would not have rejected Jesus.

**So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, "When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?" (7:30-31)**

The crowd is divided. Some of the Jerusalemites try to seize Jesus. This was a spontaneous effort, not a formal arrest. They fail, because Jesus' hour, the hour of his death, has not yet come. But some in the crowd believe, although we don't know whether they merely believed in the sign or they understood the significance of the signs. There was an expectation that the Messiah would accomplish miracles, and Jesus fulfilled this in the minds of some. This is the second of three popular tests for the Messiah that is raised in this chapter.

The crowd was similarly confused following Jesus' second teaching.

**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? 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. Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him. (7:40-44)**

Some people ask whether Jesus is the prophet like Moses, mentioned in Deut 18. Others question whether he is the Christ. The Jews thought of the prophet and the Messiah as two different people. Others discounted the possibility that Jesus could be the Christ, because he was a Galilean. They knew that the Messiah must come from David's family (2 Sam 7:12-16; Ps 89:3-4; Isa 9:7; 55:3), and be from Bethlehem (Mic 5:2).

This is the third test for the Messiah in this chapter. The crowd supposes that the question of Jesus' identity can be answered by his place of birth. They think they know his birthplace, but they don't. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. We find the same division occurring on the last day as in the middle of the feast, when there was an unsuccessful attempt to seize him.

A great deal of confusion surrounded Jesus, all of it centered on his identity. Things are not much different today. The world is still confused as to who Jesus is. There is a lot of debate and speculation about him. Scholars look for the Jesus of history. Others look for the Jesus of signs and wonders. Still others seek the Jesus of prosperity. And there is much speculation about the end times. A new television miniseries called "Revelations" has just begun. An Internet site gives the latest "Rapture index," gauging prophetic activity. We even hear a lot of confusing things about Jesus amongst God's people. Sometimes I wonder if the church really understands who he is.

Who is Jesus? In John's gospel Jesus never allows people to box him in. He is always saying things that make people think and ask questions. This is a great model for us. The world wants to put believers in a box, and many Christians accommodate them by labeling themselves. But people have so many preconceptions about the

label they don't investigate further. Take for example the label "born again." That is a biblical phrase, but people have many negative preconceptions about it. Jesus came to give living water, not to tell you how to vote. It is important to talk about the truth you believe in and for people to see Jesus in your life, not your political leanings.

The Jewish authorities have quite a different reaction than that of the crowd. Here is their response in the middle of the week:

**The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to seize Him. Therefore Jesus said, "For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me. "You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come." The Jews then said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find Him? He is not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks, is He? What is this statement that He said, 'You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come?'" (7:32-36)**

Hearing the crowd muttering things about Jesus, the authorities send assistants to arrest him. This is a formal arrest warrant. Normally the Pharisees and the priests did not get along, but common enemies make strange bedfellows. The assistants are temple guards, Levites, who were responsible for maintaining order in the temple area.

Jesus says that he is here for only a limited time. If people will seek him, they will not find him. He is speaking of his death and ascension, warning the Jews and the crowd that they had better respond while they have time. The end is coming in 70 AD. Each of us is given moments to respond, but these will not last forever.

The Jews do not understand what Jesus is talking about (vv. 35-36). They wonder if he intends to go to the Diaspora and teach the Greeks, i.e. either Greek-speaking Jews or Gentiles. The irony is that the Jews will go to the Diaspora and the gospel will go to the gentiles. The Jews speak better than they know.

This brings us to the response at the end of the feast. Not only are the leaders antagonistic, there is tension in their own ranks.

**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? No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? "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, "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." (7:45-52)**

The officers must have been in the background during Jesus' teaching and the public debate that followed. As Levites, they knew theology and law. They were in awe listening to Jesus so they didn't arrest him. Upon their return to the priests and Pharisees, the leaders wonder why they didn't bring Jesus with them.

The Pharisees and priests treat the officers with contempt, accusing them of being deceived. They say that no thinking person would be deceived, claiming that no one in a position of leadership believed in Jesus. Perhaps they were unaware of the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus. The Jewish leaders also treat the crowd with contempt. The crowd does not know the law, and therefore is under a

curse. In the eyes of the authorities, the people of the land are ignorant and untaught. Nicodemus, now a changed man following his meeting with Jesus, seeks to bring up a point of order, making reference to the law. He says that they must first hear from the accused before sentencing. There is no explicit O.T. text for this viewpoint; it was regarded as tradition (Acts 25:16).

The religious leaders also treat Nicodemus with contempt. They question his origins, claiming he might also be from Galilee, an accusation of inferiority, since Galilean Jews were considered inferior by Judean Jews. The leaders claim that no prophet has come from Galilee, but both Jonah and Hosea came from that area. They are ignorant of Jesus' true origins.

The word "muttering" in verse 32 describes the attitude of both the crowd and the religious authorities. It means hostile, complaining, using strong words of discontentment, the angry rejection or verbal attacks of a dissatisfied people. This is what the Israelites did in the wilderness with Moses. The authorities are all worked up by now. They don't want Jesus as their Messiah. Their minds are made up. Their anger will lead to murder, and yet they will not be able to succeed until God's timing is right.

The world hates Jesus. It wants to strike the name of God from every forum and eliminate every hint of prayer from the public arena. It seeks to eradicate any public display of the nativity scene or the cross. Even religious leaders hate Jesus. They compromise his teaching and bring the attitudes of the world into the church.

The world hates Jesus and it should hate us. We should expect the same kind of division and hostility in our families, at our workplace and from friends we had before we came to faith. If the world likes us too much that may be an indication that we are compromising, or that the world means too much to us.

When I met my wife's family for the first time, they were hostile toward my faith. On one occasion my brother lashed out at me because I was talking about God to one his sons. The first time I spoke to a large group of single people, a woman spat at me and then walked out. Years ago when I was an engineer, I placed some of our printed sermons in my cubicle with a sign inviting people to take them. The sermons disappeared one day and the personnel department told me that someone had complained about the display. This is what we should expect. Our life and witness will cause division. Some will hate us and some will believe. We will be an aroma from life to life and death to death (2 Cor 2:16).

In the Exodus the Jews wanted to go back to Egypt; in the second exodus they wanted to go back to Torah. The age of the Spirit had arrived and they rejected it. What happened in Samaria couldn't happen in Jerusalem. At times the church has the same problem. The idea is not that we accept Jesus and life goes smoothly. It is that the day has come when all of the promises of the Spirit to his people are fulfilled. This is the reality in which the church is designed to live.

Believers are the temple of God. Out from us flows an unending river of life. If we don't want what Jesus has to offer, then we will return to Torah and live with rules and regulations which never touch the heart. It's easier to live under Torah, but we will never have Spirit and life. We will wander in the wilderness and grumble: Why did God bring us out into the wilderness to die? The answer is that he brought us out to take us to the Rock that gives living water. Spirit is what we need. We need the Spirit to work in our marriages, to help us raise our families and allow us to be a witness to the world. It is the Spirit who gives us joy, freedom, forgiveness and life in an unending supply. I am not talking about miracles or tongues or dramatic healings, but about transcendent life.

If we really understood what Jesus is talking about in John 7, we would want to shout and clap our hands and throw our hats in the air. We would hear the sound of the shofar and shout with all of Jerusalem, "Give thanks to the Lord!" just like the crowd did at the Feast of Tabernacles that day.

1. Brennan Manning, *A Glimpse of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper-San Francisco, 2004), 72.

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