

Come and Drink

John 7:25-52

Call: Isa 44:2-3 (NIV)

Scripture: Titus 3:4-8 (NIV)

I. Intro

I moved out here from Pennsylvania in the fall of 1996. And, in the winter of 1997, I discovered the phrase “atmospheric rivers.” We don’t have those things in Pennsylvania. And in 1997, I had never seen rain from atmospheric rivers like I saw that winter. As you know, “atmospheric rivers” are long, narrow regions of water vapor above us in the atmosphere. In fact, these narrow regions carry an amount of water equivalent to the average flow of water in the Mississippi River! There are rivers of water flowing above us in our atmosphere! Remarkable.

And, just as remarkable, Jesus speaks in our text today of rivers of living water flowing out from inside him, and flowing out from inside those who come and drink from him.

Let’s pray. Father We want to drink today. We invite your Spirit here to help us drink from you and your Word and to quench our thirst. In Jesus name, amen.

Review

We jump back into John 7 today in the middle of the rising conflict during the Feast of Tabernacles. Last week, in verses 1-24, we saw Jesus travel from Galilee to Jerusalem in the middle of the feast to begin teaching. His teaching created great division amongst his hearers, primarily regarding his identity. Some call him a good man. Some say he’s an imposter. Some even say he has a demon.

In this week’s text, the division continues as Jesus debates with the crowd. We are not going to read all of our text today. What I’m going to do is focus on verses 37-39, words which John Stott says “should be printed in gold everywhere” (Stott, 68).

So, a summary of the verses leading up to verse 37 would be that dissension reigns over who Jesus is. In this text, some refer to him as the Messiah, the Christ, the first time this title has been used in Jerusalem. But, the authorities obviously do not agree. Remember they are trying to kill Jesus. So, after much dispute and grumbling, the authorities send officers to arrest Jesus. This brings us to the last day of the feast, the great day, verse 37.

II. The Last Day (37a)

[37](#) *On the last day of the feast, the great day...*

A. Intro

Here is the intro for Jesus’ “golden” words. It’s the last day of the feast, so what has the crowd experienced for the past week? I want to share about the Feast of Tabernacles to set the

context for these golden words.

B. The Feast of Tabernacles

As I said last week, this feast was one of the three great feasts celebrated throughout the year. It was celebrated in the fall, 6 months after Passover, around October for us. Because it was a fall feast, it was also a harvest festival, a chance to remember God's provision over the last year.

But, autumn was also the drought season. Spring rains were long gone, cisterns were at their lowest point, underground springs were not flowing anymore, and the hills were parched. Therefore, the feast was also a feast of intercession for rain for the coming year.

The instructions for the feast are initially found in Leviticus (23:33-34, 40-42). It lasted for 7 or 8 days. By the time of Jesus, it was the greatest of all the Feasts. It was easily the most sacred, most joyous and most glorious! Even though it was compulsory for all males within 15 miles of Jerusalem to attend, everyone went because it was the greatest party of all! No one would miss Tabernacles. You could miss the other feasts – not Tabernacles. It is said that Jerusalem would be overrun by hundreds of thousands of pilgrims. Entire villages would be left empty as everyone traveled to Jerusalem.

So, for the next four weeks, we are going to party on Sunday mornings.

C. The Huts

Now, as I have said, these feasts were times to remember what God had done in the past and renew hope for what he would do in the future. In Tabernacles, the Jews were remembering the wilderness wanderings of their ancestors after God had delivered them out of slavery in Egypt. They remember how their ancestors lived in huts or booths as they wandered. And, they remember that God chose to travel with them also in a hut, called the Tabernacle. Therefore, in remembrance of this, everyone attending this feast would build for themselves a temporary hut or booth, and live in that structure for the entire feast, which continues to this day.

D. The Rituals

Now this feast is extremely rich in symbolism, ritual and theology. And, the reason I want us to hear about this feast is because Jesus' golden words connect to all the symbolism and theology behind the feast. If we understand these details, we'll understand better Jesus' words.

There were 3 distinct components to the feast:

- A water ceremony
- A light ceremony
- An affirmation of the presence of God

The water ceremony was a morning ceremony performed each day of the feast, and the light ceremony was an evening ceremony performed each day of the feast. And, throughout the

feast, there was a continual affirmation of the presence of God. God was present with the Israelites in their wanderings, so of course, in this feast, the presence of God is affirmed regularly. We will talk about the light ceremony and the affirmation of God's presence in subsequent weeks. Today I want to focus on the water ceremony.

III. The Water Ritual

A. The Rock at Horeb

Let's begin by going back to the wilderness wanderings. God had delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, and they begin wandering through the desert. Because they are in the desert, they are without water. And, what happened? The people panic and grumble. And God responds by telling Moses to go to a place called Horeb, and there you will find a rock. God tells Moses to whack the rock, and water will flow from it and the people will drink, Ex. 17:6. What? Whack the rock! Ok God. Moses did what God commanded, and sure enough, water flowed abundantly, like an atmospheric river, out of a rock, in the desert! Remarkable! And, from that time forward, that rock at Horeb became a sign of God's gracious provision. (There is much more symbolism behind the rock which we don't have time to go into this morning.) And some of the texts that were read every year at this feast included the Exodus 17 text but also:

- Isaiah 48: *They did not thirst when God led them through the deserts; God made water flow for them from the rock; God split the rock and the water gushed out (Isa 48:21).*

B. The New Hope

Now, over time, this physical experience became a symbol of a new promise, a new hope. As God had graciously quenched the thirst of the people's dry throats in the past, the Israelites began looking forward to the future when he would quench the thirst of people's dry souls. And not only that, just as the water washed away the dirt and dust from their faces and mouths, one day God would give some kind of water that would wash away and cleanse their dirty hearts from the dirt and dust of sin and evil. They looked forward to a water that would refresh them and clean their hearts.

Now this hope is found in many, many Old Testament texts, texts which are also read during this feast. Texts like:

- Is 44:3: *For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.*
- Or texts from Zechariah: *"On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness." ... On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem... (Zech 13:1; 14:8)*
- Or Isa 12:3: *3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*

All those texts are being read at one time or another during this feast. So, of course, all of those images of water and salvation and the Spirit and cleansing are moving through the minds of all the participants at this feast.

C. The Water Ritual

And, all of these images were gathered together in the water ceremony which happened each

morning of the feast.

1. The Lulavs and Cintrons

- Every morning, the people came to the Temple carrying what are called “lulavs” in their right hands. Lulavs were palm, willow and leafy branches wrapped together.
- In their left hand, they carried citrons. Citrons are a citrus fruit, symbolizing the abundance of the promised land.
- As the people, every morning, made their way to the temple, the priest recited important Psalms, such as Psalm 78:15-16:

*[15](#) He split the rocks in the wilderness
and gave them water as abundant as the seas;*

- *[16](#) he brought streams out of a rocky crag
and made water flow down like rivers.*

And, when the priest would come to previously designated verses in the Psalms, the people would go crazy, shaking their lulavs and citrons!!

It was a very noisy and extremely joyous moment every morning as the people rejoiced in God’s previous salvation, but also as they looked forward in hope to God’s quenching of their spiritual thirst.

2. The Canopy Over the Altar

Now, while this was going on, a group of people would go out to the woods and cut down willow branches, and bring them back and build a canopy over the altar. This group would then march around the altar, shaking their lulavs and citrons. As they shook their lulavs and citrons, they chanted Psalm 118:25: *[25](#) Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us prosperity!*

And, they would continue to sing this as they walked around the altar. This part of the ceremony was an enacted prayer for rain for the coming season. In fact, if it would rain during this feast, it was taken as assurance of a good crop to come.

Gary Burge writes that even today, the Jordanian Arabs, who hate the Jews, still watch carefully to see if rain comes during Tabernacles (Burge, 74). If it does, it will be a good crop to come.

3. The Golden Pitcher

While that was going on, a priest followed by another group of people went down to the pool of Siloam and filled a pitcher with water. And, in an impressive procession, he and the worshippers would return to the altar with the filled pitcher. On the altar was a special bowl. The priest poured the water into the bowl while the people sang songs of praise.

Then the people would chant Isa 12:3 over and over again:

[3](#) With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

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[3](#) *With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*

This verse in particular was later connected by the Rabbis to God's promise to pour out the Holy Spirit on all people. One Jewish text says this, "Why is the name of this ceremony called the drawing out of water? Because of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit according to what is said, "[With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.](#)"

4. The Hillel Psalms

Now, when all of that was done, a choir would sing the Hillel Psalms, Psalm 113-118. And, when this would happen, the people again would shake their Lulavs and citrons with great joy.

This entire ceremony was the emotional peak every day of the feast. For many, they considered this a foretaste of the joy to come when God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh. The Rabbis even said, "He who has not seen the rejoicing of the water drawing has never seen joy in his life."

That's the water ceremony for the feast of Tabernacles. Every morning, this water ceremony would take place, providing the emotional pinnacle for each day.

And, now we come to "[the last and great day of the feast,](#)" after a week of high emotions with tremendous joy -

- when all the people are remembering the water from the rock and
- when all the people are renewing their hope for the future salvation and the giving of the Spirit and
- when the priest stood with an empty pitcher and
- when the noise has reached a crescendo –

IV. The Great Claim (37-39)

[37](#) ... *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.'*"

A. The Timing

What timing? Isn't Jesus' sense of timing amazing? And, what boldness? This indeed is a dramatic action. First of all, teachers usually sat down to teach in the temple, but not Jesus here. And, secondly, the word John uses for "crying out" is a very strong emotional verb. It might better be rendered, "Screaming in a passionate voice." Here is the man from Galilee screaming at the top of his lungs, louder than all the noise of the lulavs.

And, what is he screaming? Here's what he is saying, "I have good news for you! Your prayers have been answered and I'm the answer! All your hopes for salvation and the gift of the Spirit

have been fulfilled in me! Come to me and drink and your spiritual thirst will be satisfied, your dirty hearts will be cleansed.”

V. The Response (40-52)

As you can imagine, Jesus’ words present quite a debate. The confusion and division only intensify as the crowd reacts to these words. Some do call him a prophet. Some call him the Messiah again. Some say that he can’t be the Messiah.

And remember the officers who were sent to arrest Jesus? John records that they return... without Jesus! And why? In their words, *“Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks” (NASB)*. Indeed, no one in history has ever spoken the way this man speaks. Just wait until you hear the other things Jesus says at Tabernacles!

VI. The Water (39)

So, what is Jesus talking about when he speaks of water? John tells us in verse 39. *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.*

A. The Spirit

The water is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The water is the very life of God. And, Jesus is inviting us to come and drink this water!

Back in chapter 1, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. It was then that the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove and remained on him. The Holy Spirit filled, animated and empowered him. And John the Baptist promised that Jesus himself would baptize others, not with physical water, but with the Holy Spirit, with living water. This is Jesus’ invitation. Come and believe in him and receive the same water that filled, animated and empowered him. Come and believe, and receive the life of God!

B. The Glorification

At the end of verse 39, John makes an important theological point about Jesus claim. From a post-Pentecost perspective, John says that the Spirit hadn’t been given yet because Jesus hadn’t been glorified yet.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus is glorified in the crucifixion. And, the Spirit couldn’t be poured out until Jesus died on the cross for our sins, which of course sets in motion the resurrection and ascension, and then Pentecost.

At Jesus’ baptism, he had committed himself to go to the cross, to take upon himself the sin of the world. That’s exactly what John the Baptist said. He pointed at Jesus and said, “The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29). And, once Jesus takes away the sin of the world through the cross, the pathway was open for the release of the life-giving water, the Holy Spirit.

John understands this well because at the end of his Gospel, he notes it in his description of the crucifixion: John 19:34: *34 But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.* This symbolizes the fact that the sin of the world had been dealt with, and now the refreshing water, the Holy Spirit, could flow. The rock of ages had been struck, and now streams of living water could flow. Yes, this is a different kind of God. Whack him and what happens? He bleeds the water of life for you!

VII. Jesus' Claims

So, what is Jesus ultimately claiming here in these verses? He is claiming two things.

1. First, he's claiming to be the provision, the well of living water, similar to his statement to the woman at the well. He's claiming to be the inexhaustible source of living water. In his words, rivers of living water, water that cleanses and brings life, flows from within him and out from him. That prophecy of Zechariah that *"living waters shall flow out of Jerusalem"* is fulfilled in him (Zech 14:8)! He is *"the well of salvation"* (Isa 12:3). He is the rock, smitten on the cross, that brings forth refreshing, cleansing living water.
2. Secondly, he is also claiming to be the provider of the water. He is claiming that he can cause this same life-giving water to flow in us, and to flow out of us. And he says "rivers," not just trickles. Rivers, like atmospheric rivers, flow within him, and when we come and drink of him, they'll flow in us and out of us as well.

VIII. The Implications

A. Come and Drink

If only we would come and drink! And, when we do, when we open our lives to him, he baptizes us in and with the Spirit, and promises that in our innermost being, there will flow "rivers of living water." Remarkable! Rivers of living water flowing inside of me and you and everyone else who attaches themselves to Jesus!

B. Keep coming and Keep drinking

In chapter 6, Jesus called himself the bread of life. Here, he calls the Holy Spirit the living water. Bread and water, two necessities for physical life. Jesus is saying he and the Spirit, the trinity, along with the Father, the living God, are necessary for life. If only we will come and drink.

And, as in chapter 6 with the bread, here, the verbs are in the present, meaning "come and keep coming; drink and keep drinking."

Ben Patterson, who spoke for our men's retreat years ago, tells of growing up on a farm in New Hampshire where they had an old well which gave refreshing, pure and cold water "no matter how hot the summer or how severe the drought." The well was always dependable and was a source of joy for the family.

Years later, after the farm had been modernized, he visited it only to find out the well had been sealed shut. But, he wanted some of that refreshing water, so he opened the well and dropped

a bucket. And, he was shocked to discover that the well was bone dry. After asking around to locals who knew about wells, he discovered that wells were fed by hundreds of tiny underground streams which seep a steady flow of water. As long as the water is drawn from the well, in other words, as long as the well is being used, these tiny streams will continue to seep. However, the water stops flowing if water is no longer drawn from the well. The well dries up not because of overuse, but because it isn't used enough.

In the same way, our hearts will dry up without regular and frequent visits to the well. We must continue to drink from Jesus, the well, the provision, for spiritual health. We must keep coming everyday... keep drinking everyday ... keep believing everyday. It's a lifestyle, not a single action. We must make the practices of drinking a part of each day, making time and space for him. Are you in the habit of drinking from the well of Jesus everyday?

C. Rivers Flow Out of Me

If so, then these practices, this continual coming and drinking, forms us to live life well in the world. The practices are not just about me. As David Fitch says, these practices are actually "intensely social acts" (Fitch, 36). How? Because as we continue to drink, our life becomes a trickle, then a stream, then a gushing river of life flowing out of me. As we continue to drink, we find that we cannot contain the Spirit of God. As we continue to drink, the Spirit keeps flowing into larger and larger rivers of life, Atmospheric rivers, bursting out to others. So that when people "whack" us, while we go about our days, what comes out? Not anger or antagonism or outrage. What spills out? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. What spills out? The fruits of the Spirit of course! The fruits of the Spirit spill out as we keep drinking. And, doesn't a world full of those characteristics sound inviting and life-giving? If we are coming and drinking and believing, out of our innermost being, rivers of living water will flow, rivers of the fruits of the Spirit.

So, are the fruits of the Spirit emerging in your life? Are you becoming more others-oriented? Are you growing in love? Are you becoming more gentle? Are you radiating joy toward others? Not that we'll be perfect, but are the fruits of the Spirit growing in you? That's the question for all of us.

Amen.

Benediction

Go now and drink freely and deeply from his inexhaustible well,
The water of life.

Be refreshed and renewed and cleansed in his water.

And, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,

and the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you as you go. —2 Corinthians 13:14.

Amen. Go in Joy!

Resources

Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*

Burge, Gary, *Jesus and the Jewish Feasts*

Fitch, David, *Faithful Presence*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching the Gospel According to John* (Regent College Course)

Klink, Edward, *John* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)

Patterson, Ben, *God's Prayer Book*