

Rivers of Living Water

John 7:1-52

Key Verses: 7:37-38

“On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.’”

Hello! It’s a great blessing to be here today! The last time I shared the message, it was the beginning of the school year and I was a little depressed. But this time, summer is around the corner and I can’t wait! This summer marks the 4th year since we moved into our house. Although four different house churches live on Fitch, most of our neighbors are orthodox Jews. One day, the first year we were there, one of my neighbors marched into his backyard with a sense of mission. He pulled out a bunch of poles, some canvas, and some lights out of his shed. Then he laid everything out in his yard and proceeded to build something. I thought it was a tent, but it wasn’t. It was a Sukkah, or a booth. I had read about the Festival of the Booths, but I didn’t know the Jews still observed it. About a week later, all his family and guests came and they celebrated a joyful dinner under the stars.

Today, we learn about how Jesus went to the same festival in his day. It was the final feast in the Jewish calendar and it celebrated the harvest. It also commemorated God’s provision for the Israelites as they wandered in the desert for 40 years. During the feast, our Lord gave a wonderful invitation, saying “Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink.” It was followed by a wonderful promise. Jesus says, “Anyone who believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” All of history has pointed to this moment. I pray that this morning we may come to Jesus and be blessed by his word.

1. Division and Unbelief (vs 1-36)

In these verses, we see how Jesus was surrounded by all kinds of confusion and division. Each group of people that he met had their own flavor of unbelief. First, there were Jesus’ brothers. Verse 1 says, “After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him.” So, what is the first thing his brothers suggest? Go there anyway! They said, “No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.” That’s what they thought Jesus was all about – becoming rich and famous. But Jesus came to save the world, not to win its approval. Jesus says, “My time is not yet here; for you any time will do.” Jesus makes a distinction between “my time” and “your time”. It was because he was following God’s plan, not the world’s. His brothers presumed to tell him what to do, but God’s wisdom is far superior to the world’s. God says, “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Jesus went on to say, “The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil.” The world could not hate his brothers because they were part of the world and engrained in the world, but the world hated Jesus and still hates him because his life and his words reveal how sinful we are. The unbelief of his brothers is an unbelief that tries to make Jesus conform to the world, but that is

impossible because the world is evil. After his brothers were gone, Jesus went to the festival in secret.

Next, we find the Jews. Verse 11 says, “Now at the festival the Jewish leaders were watching for Jesus and asking, ‘Where is he?’” They posted lookouts on all the corners. Jesus was a threat to them. He threatened their position, their authority, and their status. Verse 14 says that “not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach.” When he did, even the Jews were amazed by him, saying “How did this man get such learning without having been taught?” In other words, how could someone speak the way he did without ever going to college? Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me.” In fact, there is a simple way to know whether or not his teaching comes from God. Jesus says, “Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” The unbelief of the Jews was rooted in their pride. They were too proud to seek God’s will and listen to Jesus. Their pride and their hypocrisy kept them from judging all these events correctly.

In verse 25, we are introduced to the people of Jerusalem. Their unbelief is seen in their unwillingness to seek the truth. They said, “But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.” They were wrong on both accounts! First of all, scriptures said that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem, the town of David. They also failed to recognize Jesus as the Son of God who was sent from Heaven. Look at Jesus’ response: “I am not here on my own authority, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me.” If they had searched the scriptures and believed them, they would have known that Jesus was the Messiah, sent from the Father.

Finally, there were the people in the crowd. Verse 31 says that “Still, many in the crowd believed in him.” They weighed the evidence of his works and concluded that no one could perform more miracles than him. But they lacked conviction. They could only whisper about Jesus. When the Pharisees heard their whispering, they sent the temple guards to arrest Jesus. To them, Jesus said, “I am with you for only a short time, and then I am going to the one who sent me.” Then he says, “You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.” This is why it is so important to rid ourselves of any unbelief. This is why we must have a clear conviction of who Jesus is and what he means to us. Because of their unbelief, they could not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

We need to pause and feel the heaviness of these verses in our hearts. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Look at all the insults and pain our Lord bore on our behalf. He bore the abuse of his brothers and the murderous threats of the Jewish leaders. He put up with the crowd’s misgivings and confusion. Even when they accused him of being demon-possessed, he didn’t respond. Our Lord bore it all, and in spite of everything, his marvelous love continued to flow. Every wrong turn they took, Jesus gave them words from above in order to turn their hearts back to God. When I read this passage, I cried. How many times have I suffered from unbelief? How many

times have I insulted and doubted my Savior? Will you join me on my knees and pray, “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!”

2. Rivers of Living Water (vs 37-38)

Verse 37 says, “On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.’” It is not only what Jesus said, but when he said it. Once a day during for the first seven days of the festival, a priest would go down to the pool of Siloam and draw some water. As he returned to the temple, the crowds would follow him, shouting praises to God. Then the priest would circle the altar and pour the water onto the ground. They did this to remember God’s provision of water for the Israelites when they were wandering in the dessert. At that time, the Israelites had no water and were dying of thirst. The people grumbled and complained to Moses, saying “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?” So God told Moses to take his staff and strike the rock. When he did, water gushed out and all the people drank and were satisfied. Later on, when they were thirsty again, God instructed Moses to simply speak to the rock and water would be provided. This wonderful history points to Jesus. 1 Corinthians 10:4 says that Jesus is that rock. God was pleased to strike his son on the cross for the sins of the world. And now, just as in the dessert, streams of salvation are pouring from him.

As the priest walked back to the altar and circled it, the crowds would shout from Isaiah 12:3: “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation”. They would also shout “Hosanna, Hosanna”, which means “Save us now”. On the 7th day of the feast, the priest would circle the altar 7 times, and the crowd would shout their praise louder and louder each time he went around. It was intense! The pouring of the water on the ground had a special meaning. It represented God’s promise to pour out his spirit upon his people. Isaiah 58:11 says, “The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.” Jesus was standing there watching all of this. Imagine what he was thinking at that moment. He is the fulfillment of all God’s wonderful promises. He is the salvation of the world. Isaiah 55:1 says, “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” This is what Jesus was offering to them right then and there.

Jesus says, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.” Thirsty for what? Thirsty for something only God can provide. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we read, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” The thirsty are those who see the old creation for what it is – broken and helpless. They long for something new, something different, and something that will last. They long to be a new creation in Christ. Millions upon millions of people are thirsting in the world today, but they are seeking to fill their thirst in ways that cannot satisfy. An ad for Sprite says, “Obey your thirst” and that is exactly what we try to do. We obey our thirst by seeking sinful relationships. We obey our thirst by drinking and doing drugs. We obey our thirst by seeking promotions and better homes. We obey our thirsts in all the wrong ways. Jeremiah 2:13 says, “My people have committed two

sins; They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” That’s what all these pursuits are. They are just broken cisterns that can’t hold anything.

Jesus invites all those who are thirsty to come to him. In order to come, we must leave. When you came to church this morning, what was the first thing you did? You left your house! When we come to Jesus we must leave everything else behind. Isaiah 55:7 says, “Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.” Jesus stands alone. Jesus is not part of a package. Jesus is not just one aspect of a well-balanced life. Jesus is everything! The only way to come to Jesus is to leave your old life behind.

Jesus says, “Come and drink.” It is possible to come to Jesus and not drink. That was the tragedy of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus. He was thirsty, but he did not drink the salvation Jesus offered. To come to Jesus and drink means to believe in him. It means that we make Christ our very own. When we come to Jesus and drink, we drink from the wells of salvation Isaiah wrote about. We drink from the wells of forgiveness. We drink from the wells of healing, of peace, and of hope. All of this is but a taste of what is to come when we are with our Lord in heaven. Revelation 7:17 says, “For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’” Have you accepted Jesus’ invitation to come and drink? Jesus says, “I am the bread of life.” Is he the nourishment for your soul? Jesus says, “I am the light of the world.” Are his words guiding you? “I am the door of the sheep.” Have you went through? “I am the good shepherd.” Is he leading you and caring for you? “I am the resurrection and the life.” Is he the basis of your hope? “I am the way and the truth and the life.” Are you following him? “I am the vine and you are the branches.” Are you remaining in him? Brothers and sisters, we must come to Jesus and drink deeply from him.

Jesus goes on to say, “Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” John adds, “By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.” So what are these rivers? If the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness, then the first river that flows from us is the river of love. When we come to Jesus and drink deeply from Him, His love becomes our love. His joy becomes our joy. Rivers of peace, rivers of kindness, and rivers of all the fruits of the spirit will flow from our lives. The Holy Spirit is also known as the Spirit of Truth. That means that rivers of truth will flow from us. And when rivers flow, they flow with great power. Ephesians 1:19-21 say, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.” This is the power that flows from our souls when we come to Jesus and drink.

Have you seen these rivers? Have you seen rivers of living water flowing from the lives of others? Apostle Peter was one of the first examples of what Jesus promised. On the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit came down from heaven on the church, Peter stood and boldly proclaimed the gospel. Acts 2:41 says that “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” Streams of living water were flowing from all the believers. In our generation, Joni Eareckson Tada is such a person. She became a quadriplegic after a horrible diving accident in 1967. Since then, she has established a ministry for the disabled, founded the Friends International Disability Center, and hosted a radio program that has encouraged millions. Through her support, the organization Wheels to the World has provided over 52,000 wheel chairs to disabled people in 102 countries. Francis Chan writes about her, saying “You can’t spend ten minutes with Joni before she breaks out in song, quotes Scripture, or shares a touching and timely word of encouragement. I have never seen the fruit of the Spirit more obviously displayed in a person’s life as when I am with Joni.” Joni is one of many through whom the spirit has flowed.

3. Our Response to Jesus (vs. 40-52)

John writes in verse 43 that the people were divided because of Jesus. There were some positives and some negatives. The temple guards went back to the chief priests empty handed, saying “No one ever spoke the way this man does.” If nothing else, at least they were honest about the power and authority of Jesus’ words. In verses 50-51, we see how Nicodemus even took a stand for Jesus. “Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?” The Jewish leaders, on the other hand remained entrenched in their unbelief. It reminds us of the day when Jesus asked his disciples “Who do people say the Son of Man is? They replied, ‘some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ ‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’” This is the most important decisions we will ever make. Jesus says that whoever believes in him has crossed over from death into life. Whoever believes in Him has the right to be called children of God and whoever believes in him, rivers of living water will flow.

Thank God for so many in our ministry who come to Jesus every day and drink from him. But it is time to enlarge our vision. Acts 2:17 says, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.” Whichever group we are in, let’s have a vision and dream a dream. What would it be like if rivers of living water flowed from all our members? Is there any doubt that a revival would happen? Is there any doubt that our ministry would thrive like the early church? When the early church prayed, “the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” That can be us, if we come to Jesus and drink as they did. There is no reason we can’t be used by God in the same way he used the Cambridge Seven in the late 1800’s. These young man came to Jesus and drank with all their hearts. God blessed them and rivers of living water flowed from them. Because of them, thousands of others entered the mission field. Their story can be ours as well. Will you accept the Lord’s invitation? Will you come to him and drink?