

Rivers of Living Water

John 7:37-39

By [Wiley Lowry](#)

If you would turn with me tonight, we'll look at John chapter 7. It's found on page 893 in your pew Bibles. As you turn there, I'll begin mentioning the Colorado River. It's been called the American Nile. It's been called the life and soul of the West. It begins in northern Colorado; it weaves its way through the western United States, passes through the Grand Canyon, until finally it crosses over the border into Mexico to its end point at the Sea of Cortez. All along the way, the river provides water to dozens of cities, irrigates the farmlands and golf courses that appear on the landscape, and as the population has grown over the past decades and the need for water has become more demanding, the water level of the Colorado River has actually decreased. It's dropped by several feet in the last few decades so that now the river no longer reaches the Sea of Cortez. About a hundred miles to go to its endpoint it becomes dry. It runs out of water leaving a cracked and desolate and uninhabitable landscape, riverbed, a wasteland. What was once a great river has now become a dead and empty riverbed. It's run out of resources.

Our passage tonight tells us about a river which never runs dry. It's a river whose source is Jesus. We turn and look to that in John chapter 7 this evening. Before we do so, let's pray.

Our Father, we come to You to hear Christ's invitation and Christ's promise to us tonight. We give You thanks that You have called us to be Your people, that You have given us Your Word and You've made such great promises to us. Would You help us as we hear Your Word to apply it to our lives that we would live lives which glorify and honor You in all that we do? We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

John chapter 7 verse 37 says this:

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. And whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" 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.

The grass withers and the flowers fall but the Word of our God endures forever.

I want to look at this passage and really just focus on Jesus' words in this passage and think about a few phrases that He says. The three points will be from those three phrases. He says, "If anyone thirsts." Secondly He says, "Come to me and drink." And then thirdly He says, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." So rivers of living water.

"If Anyone Thirsts"

The first thing He says is, "If anyone thirsts." John tells us that Jesus stands up on the last and the great day of the feast and He cries out to anyone in the crowd who is thirsty, "Come to me and drink." The feast here is the Feast of Tabernacles. It's also known as the Feast of Booths. It was a favorite occasion on the Jewish calendar each year, so much so that it became known simply as The Feast or The Festival. I think to grasp the significance of Jesus' invitation and promise here it would be helpful for us to understand a little bit of the background of this festival, of the Feast of Booths. It was instituted by God in the law, in Leviticus chapter 23. It was an annual reminder on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the year. It lasted for eight days. It was a reminder of God's gracious provision to His people and His protection of His people as He delivered them out of bondage in Egypt. He kept them through the wilderness and delivered them into the Promised Land. Each year the people would come out and they would build makeshift shelters or booths. They would gather palm branches and limbs and the foliage they could find and they would establish these huts. One thing I couldn't help but think of recently is, I hope, based on my experiences; I hope they looked out for poison ivy! But as they put these things together they would live in these booths for seven days and they did that because the people had lived in these similar structures on their way to the Promised Land. This was a way to stop. It was a Sabbath week, a time to rejoice, to rejoice in God's salvation that God had delivered them from bondage in Egypt. They were to rejoice in God's blessing that even as He brought them and planted them in the Promised Land that He continued to provide for them and to feed them and to nourish them. He also reminded them that even as they were in the Promised Land they continued to be pilgrims and sojourners, seeking the promise that was to come.

Several weeks ago in our morning reading through the book of Nehemiah we read one of those passages - it was the passage between the lists of difficult names. It was a passage about this feast, this festival. The people were reinstating the Feast of Booths after the exile. It was in a time of revival. It was a time of obedience to God's Word. And some time after that, the priests - this was in the time before Jesus' birth - the priests actually added a new element to this festival. And what it was, was on each of the seven days the priests would go out

and they'd go to the Pool of Siloam, they'd gather some water into a golden vessel, and they would proceed into the temple singing songs of praise into the temple courts and they would pour out this vessel of water on the foot of the altar as a drink offering to the Lord. It was a symbolism, again, to the exodus. It was a symbolism that God had provided water for His people out of the rock. And it also pointed forward to what the prophets foretold as a river that made fruitful a dry land. So here it is on the last day of the feast when there was no water. So for seven days they would do this water ceremony. On the eighth day there would be no water ceremony. It is on this day when there's no water ceremony that Jesus stands up and He cries out and He says, "If anyone thirsts."

You see what Jesus is doing here? He's associating Himself with this water ceremony at the Feast of Tabernacles and in the absence of water He boldly and passionately calls out to the people and invites them to come and to drink. Now from our context of this passage I think it's quite clear that Jesus is not speaking of physical thirst but He's using the characteristics of physical thirst to refer to deeper needs and desires, to refer to spiritual thirst. Think back about some of the characteristics of thirst. Think back to the wandering in the wilderness, the peoples' pleas, their desperate pleas for water. They were craving and longing and yearning and calling out to Moses for water. It led even to dissatisfaction and grumbling. In that arid environment the need for refreshment would have been ever present on their mind.

We Thirst

It's a sensation for us that we have to confess that we're not all that familiar with. We've become accustomed to the luxuries of running tap water; we have 32 oz. cups and free refills. About a year ago, our family kind of officially embraced our stage of life and we became a minivan family. Well one of the features in our minivan that was promoted was that it has fifteen cup holders. Fifteen! That's almost if, if it was to full capacity, everyone could have almost two cups or two drinks themselves! Under normal conditions we're not familiar with this type of thirst. We're not familiar with these kinds of conditions, with being thirsty like this. And yet, every one of us at one time or another has experienced a great need - an aching desire, a sense of emptiness. We've experienced a feeling that something is missing - we thirst. We thirst of peace and for joy and for significance. We thirst for relationship. We want a good marriage and close friendships, a harmony within our families. We know the pain that comes with the loss of a loved one. We want to love and to be loved. We thirst for fulfillment in our work, that we would make the best use of our gifts and our talents, that we would be able to make a difference or to do something worthwhile and that as we do that we would be appreciated for it. We also want to meet our own needs and to provide for our family. We thirst for a sense of purpose. We also yearn for health and for vitality. We want to have a sound body and a sound mind. We want healing from certain sicknesses and diseases. We want protection from

violence and from crime. We thirst for life, for life itself. We pray for wisdom. We pray for guidance and for growth in grace and in obedience. We pray that for ourselves, for our family, for our children, for our church. So we thirst. And Jesus calls out to those who thirst in this passage.

The prophet Isaiah made a similar appeal to the thirsty in Isaiah chapter 55. And after that he says this, he asked this question, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" That's the challenge for us, isn't it? That just as we have seemingly unlimited resources to meet our physical thirst, we're also confronted with countless competitors that appear to address our spiritual and emotional needs. They seem to offer satisfaction, whether it's a new neighborhood, a bigger paycheck, a changed spouse, a cosmetic procedure, the next social event or exciting diversion. All these things appear to meet our needs, to offer satisfaction. We can do it in the church too, can't we? We fill up and we over-schedule our time with small groups and seminars and luncheons and listening to podcasts and yet we don't sense any sort of satisfaction from it. Ralph Davis puts his finger on this sort of lifestyle. He says that often times the thought of a night without a church activity causes acid indigestion. We find that we're still not satisfied. We still thirst. Those things that we seek for satisfaction have instead become idols to us. They're like what Jeremiah says. They're broken cisterns that can hold no water. It's like we go to the water cooler and we're getting something to drink out of those little tiny paper cones. You know, they just don't quench our thirst. They just leave us wanting more. We experience the law of diminishing returns - that what once brought enjoyment now we need more of it and now we need bigger and better of it because our palates have been numbed, our emotions desensitized. We thirst.

There was an AP headline several years ago and it said this. It said, "Hiker dies of thirst with water all around." It's a story about a man named Dave Buschow and he was a part of the Boulder Outdoor Survival School. They went hiking in Utah in 100 degree temperatures. And part of this school, this survival school, on their website they made this claim on it. It says, "Somewhere along the many miles of sagebrush flats, red rock canyons, and mesa tops of southern Utah, somewhere between the thirst, the hunger, and the sweat you'll discover the real destination - yourself." And so as Buschow goes through this outdoor adventure experience, suffering from dehydration, he becomes pale and cramping, slurred speech, hallucinations, and he's not offered any of the water that the leaders had brought along as the emergency resources and so he collapsed and he died in that wilderness. Jesus withholds no such offer in this passage. He offers an abundant supply and the destination is Himself; it's Jesus.

"Come to Me and Drink"

That's what He says in this passage. If we look back at it He says in verse 37, "If anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink." Notice it's an invitation to anyone

who thirsts. It's an invitation to those who were seeking to kill Him. It's an invitation to His enemies. That those people who had set themselves in opposition to Christ, who wanted nothing to do with Him or His ways, they were stiff-necked and they had resolutely determined to follow their own way and to seek their own will and Jesus says, "Come to me and drink." It's an invitation to the crowd. This was a religious gathering, remember? So there would have been those that knew the Scriptures; they knew their Bibles. And maybe they had come to this, they had come and heard Jesus and they had a sense of curiosity about who Jesus really was. And maybe there were those in the crowd who were there just out of habit. They were there just because of tradition. They were not in outright opposition to the kingdom of God but they had not committed themselves to Him and experienced the blessings of knowing God. Jesus invites them, "Come to me and drink." It's an invitation to His followers, to His disciples. His disciples would have been there with Him. They had responded to His call. They had been amazed and in awe of who He was and what He had done. They believed in Him and yet they still struggle with doubt and disappointments. They were tempted and tried and sometimes failing. Jesus says to them, "Come to me and drink." Jesus' call is to all who would hear, to all who recognize their thirst, their emptiness, their need, to turn to Him and to find satisfaction and relief.

Drink of Jesus

If you've never come to Jesus before and you've tried everything you can think of to find fulfillment and happiness and it's all been to no avail, look to Jesus, hear His invitation, trust in Him, come to Him, and drink. Feed from His resources. If you've been following Jesus and been a Christian for any time at all and yet you've felt dissatisfied because of a particular trial or just because of the general challenges of life, turn again to Jesus. Rely on His resources. Find refreshment from Him. Find refreshment for your soul. He is able to provide that refreshment because you see, you see what John is doing for us here in this gospel and what Jesus is doing at He makes this invitation, is he's proclaiming, he's demonstrating that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament feasts and sacrifices. That He is the one in whom the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Booths finds its meaning. He is the true deliverer. He is the one through whom God's people experience God's blessings. He is the one who has come in the fullness of time and because of His death and resurrection and ascension makes way for the Holy Spirit to be poured out in fullness on those who believe.

And not only is Jesus the fulfillment of the Old Testament's prophecies, sacrifices and festivals, but He's also the fulfillment of the people's hopes for a life-giving and thirst-quenching river, that river that appears throughout the Scripture, throughout God's Word. It's the river that the psalmist talks about in Psalm chapter 46. He says, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God." Zechariah prophecies about living waters that shall flow out from Jerusalem. Ezekiel in Ezekiel chapter 47 he talks about a stream that's coming out of the

temple and in his vision he follows this stream and it becomes deeper and deeper and deeper. First it's ankle deep and then it's knee deep and then it's waist deep and then it becomes a river that you can swim in and it flows down into the Dead Sea and this dead and salty sea becomes fresh, full of fresh water and full of life and it's banks are full of trees with all sorts of fruits and leaves for healing. That's the kind of river that the people looked forward to. You know Jerusalem was somewhat unique in the significant cities, in the world's noteworthy cities in that it did not have a river. There was no river in Jerusalem. That's why the people looked forward to a river so much.

F.W. Boreham, writing several years ago in Australia, he says, "All rivers are liquid history." He says, "If you were to study the history of rivers, it would tell you a lot about the people who lived around them and about the places where those rivers flowed through." And yet he asked the question, "What would the history of Jerusalem had been like if it had had a river?" That's what the psalmists and the prophets foretold. That's what they hoped for. And here is Jesus in Jerusalem, in the temple, and He's saying, "I am the living water. I am the stream that makes glad the city of God. I am the one who can provide life and abundant blessing and satisfaction. Come to me. Come to me and drink." It's an astounding claim. It's an astonishing invitation.

But what does it mean? What does it mean to go to Jesus and to drink? I think quite simply it means to go to Jesus in repentance and faith. Jesus is calling us to turn away from those futile attempts at self-fulfillment and we might call it today self-actualization. He's saying, to go away from those things, to turn from the things which cannot satisfy, to turn away from our pride and our sin and to go to Him in faith and obedience. He's inviting us to believe in Him, to believe that He is who He says He is and that He is who He demonstrates Himself to be. He is the Christ, He's the Messiah. He is our Savior. He alone can forgive and He alone can satisfy our deepest desires. He alone can quench our deepest thirsts. He alone can give us peace and hope and joy so we're to believe in Him, we're to commit to Him, we're to study His Word and to study the Word about Him, study the Scripture, believe the promises, meditate on His promises, pray in His name, follow His ways, obey His Word. That's what Jesus is telling us to do when He's inviting us to come to Him and drink - to repent and to trust in Him.

Here's the thing. What He's telling us to do though, what He's calling us to do, is not just the beginning of the Christian life but it's the way from the beginning to the end of the Christian life. The way from the beginning to the end of the Christian life is faith and repentance, repentance and faith. When He says here in this passage, "Drink," we could translate that word, "Keep on drinking." Keep on going to Christ. Keep on drinking from Him. Keep on going and finding satisfaction from Him. When we doubt and when we look to something else other than Jesus to satisfy us, we're to be like that man who's son Jesus healed when he said, "I believe. Help my unbelief." Take up Jesus' invitation to come and drink because He will abundantly satisfy. That's what He means when He says there in

the next verse, verse 38, “Whoever believes in me as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” Jesus is promising us that He will abundantly satisfy our every need. He will satisfy us so much so that His blessings will flow out of us and into others. If we go to Jesus and drink, if we repent and trust in Christ, it will be like what David says in Psalm 23, our cups will overflow, that rivers of living water will flow out from us.

The Extravagant Promise

You see how extravagant that promise is? There’s no chance of His resources running dry. We will never go to Him and find Him lacking. We will never find Him stingy. We will never find Him unwilling to give to us His grace. He alone can meet our deepest desires and He will do so beyond our wildest hopes, our greatest hopes and wildest imaginations. William Guthrie put it this way in speaking of trusting in Christ. He says, “Less would not satisfy and more is not desired.” Less than Christ will not satisfy us and there’s nothing more that we could desire besides Him. But here’s the thing. As we receive His blessing, as we go to Him and drink and receive His blessing, it’s not something that’s meant to be stored up or to be stockpiled. It’s meant to be dispersed. It’s meant to flow out to others. There’s an unselfishness about receiving Christ’s blessing. It’s the principle of self-denial that we meet over and over throughout the gospels. As we recognize our thirst and we trust in Jesus and we’re filled, then Jesus completely reorients us. He completely reorients us so that His love and His goodness, they fill us with a gratitude, with an awe for Him so that our attention, it goes away from ourselves so that we want to please Him. We want to spread His glory.

And we do that by loving and serving other people. We want to be a part of the church. We want to support its work. We want to commit to love God’s people. We want to spread Christ’s invitation to all that we meet, all that we have opportunity to invite, “Come, and drink.” We can only do those things first as we come to Jesus ourselves and drink. We can only do those things as we continue to go to Him and to drink from His resources. You know we all tend to be spread pretty thin. We find ourselves with so many different responsibilities and obligations. We thank God for those things. But if we rely on our own resources or if we think that an hour or two on Sundays will give us enough to get us through the week, we’re going to be like the Colorado River. Some of our resources are going to go to our family, to our friends, to work, to the community, they’ll go to our church and to our schools, and we’ll run dry. The places that we should be the most fruitful, we’ll find that we have nothing left to give. And so instead we must consistently look to Jesus and seek His sustaining and His sufficient grace.

“Out of His Heart will Flow Rivers of Living Water”

You know I've heard it said before that we serve others out of our saucer. Y'all know what a saucer is? It's the little tiny plate that goes under the teacup. I don't know what it's there for. It seems kind of awkward and cumbersome, but the point is that as the cup overflows it goes into that saucer. Well that's what we have to give to others, to pour out to others. It's out of the abundance of what Christ gives to us that we can go and in turn pour out to others as we lead in a small group, as we teach Sunday School, as we raise our children, as we witness at work and serve and love our neighbor. It's out of our saucer, it's out of the overflow of what Christ has poured into us that we go and pour out and give to others and love others. We can't be the blessing we're intended to be unless we are abiding in Christ and being nourished by Him. So the invitation again is to go to Him. Go to Him in faith and repentance and He promises to bless others through us.

Rely on the Spirit

I think that causes us to ask the question, doesn't it, are we living the sort of lives that bless others around us? That's a challenge. It means that our conversations matter. Our words matter. Our marital fidelity matters. Our integrity in the workplace and our generosity with our finances - those things matter. It matters that we are loving people who are difficult to love that we may not naturally be drawn to. These things matter because Christ abundantly blesses us so that we can go out and spread those blessings to other people. It's a great challenge. We can't do it on our own. We'll fall flat. We'll be disappointed if we try to rely on our own resources. And that's why John tells us here in this passage - look at verse 39. He says, "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." John's telling us that this work that we do of receiving Christ's blessing, of going and taking it out to others, is the work of the Holy Spirit. You see, when Jesus was glorified, after His death on the cross, His resurrection and His ascension, then the Spirit was poured out in greater measure so that we are now united to Christ, that the Christian life is the life in Christ and Christ is in us. We are constantly connected to that resource that He gives to us. And so the Spirit now carries out this ministry, the ministry of comfort, the ministry of encouragement, the ministry of guidance. The Spirit produces fruit in our lives - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control. He is the Spirit of adoption so that we cry out to God, "Abba, Father." God is our Father and Jesus is our Brother. That's the ministry of the Spirit.

And all those things, all those thirsts that I mentioned at the very beginning - life, love, purpose, sanctification - those are carried out through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and through us so that out of our heart will flow rivers of living water. Again, go to Christ. Be filled. Be filled with the Spirit. Find satisfaction. And then go and spread that blessing to other people and in all the avenues of our lives that we go. That's what Jesus is inviting us to. That's what Jesus is

promising us in this passage. What an invitation! What a promise! Let's go to Him in prayer.

Father, we are astounded that You would bless us in the ways You bless us and use us in the ways You use us. We thank You for reminders of where to come with our thirst and to be filled. We ask that You would fill us both now tonight but tomorrow morning and the next day, that we would continually go to You and cling to You and stay close to You, relying on Your grace, looking to Your Word, and that we would be filled and that we would be a blessing to other folks. We pray these things in Christ's name, amen.

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