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TITLE: The Source of Living Waters

TEXT: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.” (John 7:37 NKJV, read John 7:37-43 NKJV)

INTRODUCTION: Thirst is one of the most basic longings a person can have. I am sure that most of us here have been very thirsty at one time or another. Some here may have experienced desperate thirst for water. As we think of our world, I applaud every legitimate effort to provide clean water to the thirsty parts of our globe. In our Scripture today, Jesus uses the language of thirst and the quenching of thirst to speak of Himself as the source of abundant life-giving waters. This great invitation on the part of our Lord is unique to John’s gospel as he presents his account in order that the reader “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing the reader may have life in His name” (John 20:31 NKJV). As we consider these words of Jesus in context, notice first of all:

1. **The Time of Interruption by Jesus** (“On the first day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying,.....” John 7:37a).

The Feast of Tabernacles was in its final day. This was a significant time of religious ceremony for the Jews as they recognized God’s care for them throughout their wilderness wanderings. Merrill Tenney, a wonderful scholar who wrote a commentary and a book on John’s gospel, references Isaiah 12:3 as a key Old Testament Scripture associated with the priestly ritual of drawing water that was part of the celebration (p. 86, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Vol. 9)*; General Editor: Frank E. Gaebelin [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981]). Jesus stands up and cries out on this the last and great day of the feast. Regardless of the exact relationship of Jesus’ words to the ceremony, His words were a loud interruption and intrusion into what was taking place. He wanted to be heard, and His words were an invitation like no other. The very fact that He calls people to Himself near the climax of this feast indicates that these are words of great significance.

Our lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has broken into our world to bring revelation and redemption. It is sad that so many have not heard His voice, either because the gospel has not come to them, or because in the busyness of life they could not hear Him. Whether involved in religious activity or daily busyness, it is possible for people not to hear the Lord, unless He interrupts their lives. The words of Jesus in our text were not expected. Jesus felt compelled to speak, even though He was interrupting the proceedings of the day.

Maybe we need a divine interruption in our lives! Sometimes the Lord has to get our attention in an unusual way in order for us to understand the importance of what He wants to say.

(ILLUSTRATION of Dr. Stephen Olford’s motorcycle accident, which led to illness, which led to total his surrender to the Lord.)

But note that this interruption was really an amazing invitation.

2. **The Words of Invitation from Jesus** (“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” John 7:37-38).

What an invitation! Jesus is speaking of a spiritual thirst that He can satisfy abundantly and perpetually. (ILL. I live in the mid-south part of the United States in a town called Memphis, TN. And I have found out that Memphis has an enormous and unusual water supply. No, it is not the Mississippi river that forms the west border of the town. The Mississippi is a commercial river. No, it is not the Mississippi river. Deep underground is a large Aquifer of water that provides an abundant clean source of water. But, you have to drill down, you have to go deep underground to reach this fresh supply of good clean water.)

Jesus is claiming to be an abundant source of living waters. He is a source that is authentic and will not run dry. But, we have to come to Him to receive this supply of water.

Note that the invitation is open-ended – it is to “anyone,” but it implies a specific type of person, one who senses their true spiritual thirst. Jesus invites such people to Himself. Jesus drew and called for those who sensed their need of Him. Yes, there are many who do not have a spiritual thirst, or they don’t recognize their thirst. But, many try to quench their thirst in other ways.

(ILL. The prophet Jeremiah in presenting his case against Israel presents God’s Word in this way, “For my people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn for themselves cisterns – broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13 NJKV). What a picture! God is and wants to be the source of life for His people. But, instead of relying upon God and depending upon His life-giving resources, God’s ancient people not only rejected the Lord, but tried to depend on a substitute. Cisterns could only collect the rain water that fell down into the cisterns. That was not a consistent source of water. But, worse than that, the picture is of broken cisterns that can’t hold water. So, the very thing that God’s people wanted to rely upon would not supply the living water that they needed.

Is that not a picture of many people today? They are trying to quench their thirst for life, for eternal life, through various means that ultimately will fail. Some people are trying to quench their thirst through religious practices. Some are trying to quench their thirst through pleasures, and excitement. Some are trying to quench their thirst through busyness and pre-occupation, and never admit that they are empty and thirsty inside. Some are trying to quench their thirst through relationship after relationship, but they find that the people they are relying upon have the same thirst.

Jesus is claiming to be the source of water; He is the source of life. This means that people will find their spiritual thirst quenched by Him. But, they must come to Him and they must drink. In other words, people need to believe on Him and receive Him into their lives. (John has already said that those who receive Jesus will become children of God – John 1:12-13).

As Jesus ties His invitation to the ceremony underway, He also ties His invitation to the Scriptures. Old Testament Scriptures pointed to the expectation of God’s future blessing of His people. The emphasis on the “heart” or the inner person indicates that Jesus is speaking of a personal spiritual

satisfaction. The picture is not of having just enough to drink, but of an abundance of life-giving waters flowing.

What an invitation! But, this invitation could only be given honestly by One Person, indeed the Messiah of Israel, the very Son of God, the Sent-One from God the Father. He came to fulfill the promises and expectations of the Old Testament scriptures and to establish the new covenant.

John's gospel helps us to understand the pre-eminence and the sufficiency of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the very Son of God and the Word of God that has come to reveal God to man (John 1:1-18). He is the One who invites the weary to Him to find rest (Matt. 11:28-30).

He offers spiritual food as the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35)

He is the light of the world to dispel darkness (John 8:12)

He is the good shepherd who cares for and lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11)

He is the resurrection and the life, conquering death and offering life eternal (John 11:25)

He is the way to God the Father, indeed He is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6)

Jesus is the vine and His disciples are the branches. His life flows through His people and He enables them to be fruitful (John 15:1-17).

And Jesus explained to a needy woman that he had water that would quench thirst continuously and would become a "fountain of water springing up into eternal life" (John 4:14). And that brings us back to John 7 and Jesus invitation on that last great day of the feast.

But, we need to go deeper, and in fact that is what the Gospel writer does. Even though the invitation was given by Jesus on that special day, John indicates that people did not fully understand what Jesus said at that time. So, we need to consider:

3. **The Need for an Explanation of Jesus' Words** ("But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" John 7:39).

The gospel writer adds this word of explanation right here in the flow of the narrative. This shows a concern for correct understanding. The correct interpretation of Jesus' words needs the broader Biblical context rather than just the immediate original setting. The full implication of this invitation of Jesus would not be known until He was glorified in heaven and the Holy Spirit was given. Jesus was actually speaking about the Holy Spirit who would fulfill the Old Testament prophecy of the blessing of God's Spirit, and the Spirit's inner working in the life of the people of God. The Spirit's presence and work in the heart is likened to an abundance of life-giving waters flowing outward.

This happened historically on the Day of Pentecost. It was explained by Peter in that great sermon found in Acts 2. You see Jesus had to go to the cross and be crucified; Jesus had to be raised from the dead; Jesus had to be seen by witnesses; Jesus had to ascend on high; and Jesus being exalted

to the right hand of the Father “received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit,” and the Spirit was poured out upon God’s people. And as Peter finished his message and people were convicted, they not only were told to repent and be baptized, they were told to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And this Holy Spirit who enters the life of those who repent and believe in Jesus, this Holy Spirit becomes the inner source of living waters for the believing Christian. Praise God for the gift of His Holy Spirit!

What needs to be stressed today is that Jesus is the one who is to be believed in, and it is through belief in Him that the Spirit is received and experienced in the life of the believer. Jesus is still the source of living waters. It is as we come to Jesus and drink, that we are quenched and we receive the Spirit of life within.

(ILL. “God with us” is a doctrine we emphasize at Christmas; “God for us” is the climax of that glorious chapter in Romans, chapter 8. But, here in John 7 we get a picture of the truth that Jesus spells out in the upper room with His disciples, and that is that God will be in us – John 14:17).

And it is the Spirit of God in us that bears spiritual fruit of character and conduct. It is the Spirit of God that leads us into lives of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). The Spirit of God empowers us to witness to the wonderful Lord Jesus Himself. The Spirit of God works within us to shape us and make us to be more like Jesus. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth who helps us to understand the great truths of our Lord Jesus, and strengthens us to obey.

And Jesus is the source of these blessings, which lead to our spiritual thirst being quenched, and then being a source of spiritual refreshment to others.

Are you spiritually dry today? Are you able to be a source of spiritual help and refreshment to others?? This is the abundant life that the Lord wants you to have, to be filled with Himself and to be a blessing to others (at home, with family and relatives, with neighbors, with colleagues at work, with friends).

And one of the great truths of this passage of Scripture is that this quenching of thirst and this source for living waters is not temporary. It is not like a ceremony that takes place once a year and then it is over. No, Jesus offers a never ending supply, and the Holy Spirit does a continuous work within us so that we can be “life-giving” people to others.

Is that not wonderful??

What glorious truths about what God has done to give us life and life abundant. But, note how this text of Scripture ends.

4. The Result of Division because of Jesus (“..... So there was a division among the people because of Him” John 7:43 see 40-44)

John’s gospel makes it very clear that many did not believe on Jesus, despite His claims, His words, His miracles, and His invitations. Division seemed to be the normal response to the person and claims of Christ. It would have been a wonderful conclusion to this account if John had emphasized those who came to Jesus and found in Him what they truly needed. But, the reality is that

confusion, division and rejection were real parts of the gospel account as we see exemplified in this text and the following verses (John 7:45-52). Yes, some believed and received life, and would be recipients of the Spirit when He was given. But, for many, that was not the case.

So, we should expect the same to happen today. There are those who respond to Jesus for who He is, and experience the life that He promised with the indwelling Spirit filling their lives. Sadly, there are those who reject or stay uncommitted to the claims of Jesus and do not enter into the life that he desires for them.

Today, as we are here together, there may be another group of people. They are people who have believed on Jesus as the Son of God and their Savior. They have received the Spirit of God, but they have grieved or quenched the Spirit of God through sin and self and are not walking in the Spirit. They are not experiencing life-giving waters, spiritual rivers in their lives because the gift of the Spirit is not being experienced in fullness.

The place of recovery is to acknowledge afresh the Deity and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ. We need to acknowledge Jesus Christ for who he is and in a renewed sense answer His invitation afresh: "Come to Him and drink." Then, we should open our hearts to the Lord and admit or confess anything and everything that could hinder the Spirit's work in our lives. Then, we should just let Him know of our desire to have the Spirit of God fill and flood our lives afresh.

(ILL. I am not very good at taking care of plants. I have a plant in my office that I forget to give water to on occasions. I apologize for that. You can actually see the plant wilt and the leaves droop over the sides of the bowl. But, when I go and get even a cup of water and pour the water into the soil that holds the plant, you will soon see the difference. It is almost as if the plant drinks in the water, and you see strength come into its drooping leaves, and it looks more alive. It looks like a plant should look!)

As Christians, we should look alive in the Lord, because we are filled with His Spirit that empowers and enables us to live this life consistently and abundantly.

CONCLUSION:

The invitation of Jesus still needs to be heard today above the noise of religious distractions and other sounds that might get in the way of hearing our Lord. He is still the source of true spiritual life, and that life is experienced through Him and as His life-giving Spirit not only resides within us, but actively flows and controls our lives. How about us today? Can we affirm Jesus as our thirst-quencher?

First of all, have we received Him into our lives as Savior and Lord? (John 1:12)

Is He still our sufficient source of life daily as we depend upon Him?

Then, do we need to seek the Holy Spirit's fullness and power, having lost our spiritual vitality??

As sad as it is, we should expect division in terms of response. But, for those who respond in faith to Jesus "the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31), theirs is the blessed life of spiritual abundance through the inner working of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is still the source of living water and life abundant today.