

## Sermon- Thirst for Him and be Quenched to Overflowing

Scripture: John7: 37-39

Sunday, July 1, 2018

Today we jump back into the narrative in the Gospel of John as we follow Jesus making his way through the festival of the Tabernacles, in the heart of the Jewish world, the temple in Jerusalem. As we saw over the last few sermons, Jesus appears to the Jewish people suddenly, in the middle of the festival of Tabernacles and preached from the temple and the temple courtyards. We also saw that Jesus was beginning to open eyes in the crowds and when the authorities saw that they sent the temple guards to arrest Jesus. At this point in the narrative, the text does not say what happened to those guards. So the guards are a non-factor at the moment. But what we do see next is that suddenly on the last day of the festival, which is when the festival is at its climax, Jesus appears once again to the crowds and makes this staggering claim, “Anyone who is thirsty come to me”. The impact of these words can only be appreciated, if we look at the setting these words were uttered in. So let’s dive right in.

First, I want us to look at what Jesus actually said. Reading in verse 37, it says, “On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, “Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! <sup>38</sup>Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, ‘Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.’”.

Ok so let’s look at the setting Jesus is speaking in. Now the opening words of this quote say, “on the last day, the climax of the festival”. Now we know that the Festival of Tabernacles as prescribed in Leviticus 23 was originally a 7 day ceremony. As time passed, an additional day was added to the festival, a day of prayer and reflection, so it is not clear if Jesus was speaking on the 7<sup>th</sup> day or the 8<sup>th</sup> day, since both days were

considered the climax of the festival. Anyway, we know from the Mishna, a collection of oral traditions of the rabbis, that one of the main traditions at this festival was the “water parade”. So the previous night, the priests would collect a jug of water from the pool of Siloam. Remember the pool where Jesus healed the lame man who was waiting there for 40 years? Yes, this is that same pool. And the next morning they would go in a procession up to the temple after the daily sacrifices were completed and the chief priest would take the jug of water up a bronze ramp leading up to the altar in the courtyard of the temple and pour the water into a bowl that drained onto the altar. They did this once each day for the first 6 days of the festival and on the 7<sup>th</sup> day which was the climax, they did this 7 times. The 8<sup>th</sup> day was considered a day dedicated to reflection and prayer. Now this festival was prescribed by God as a celebration and thanksgiving. In the book of Lev 23:40 it says “for 7 days you shall rejoice before the Lord your God”. In fact, the Mishna states that, “he who has never seen the joy of the water parade has never seen joy in his life”. The way it was practiced, the celebration would continue through the night and respected men from the community would dance and sing and even the rabbis would do acrobatics and juggle flaming torches! I don’t think you need an analogy to imagine the spectacle this festival produced. Now another tradition that got added to this festival along with the water parade was prayer for rain. Actually this did not fit with the original purpose of thanksgiving for what God had already done but nevertheless the Pharisees managed to prevail on this and make this prayer part of the tradition.

So, now imagine yourself in this festival. The healing water has been poured on the altar for 6 days in a great parade by the high priest. Then on the 7<sup>th</sup> day at the climax, the water from the pool of Siloam has been poured 7 times on the altar, and all the while they are fervently praying for rain. Then suddenly Jesus appears again and declares “Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! <sup>38</sup> Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, ‘Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.’” You

can imagine the impact of that message. The very center of the celebration was the healing water that was being poured into the altar. In that setting, Jesus enters and declares that anyone who is thirsty should come to him. Anyone who believes in Him should come and drink. In other words' Jesus is saying, it is not the water from the pool of Siloam that you want, it is him. You think that got people's attention? It absolutely did.

And what did Jesus say you will get by going to him? "A river of living water". Jesus says it like this, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water".

Now Jesus is here referencing scripture. So which scriptures are he referring to? Now, because Jesus is not literally quoting scripture here, it is hard to pinpoint, but there are about 7 scriptures in the OT, from the book of Exodus to the Prophets, to the Psalms that refer to the "rock from which a stream of water flowed" that provided drinking water for the Israelites in the desert. Then there is a vision in Ezekiel 47 of "a stream of water" that flowed from the entrance of the temple to the right of the altar in the courtyard and on out. And there is also this vision in Rev 22 of "the river of the water of life" flowing from the throne of God and of the lamb, into the center of the main street. Of course, when Jesus was speaking, the Rev 22 scripture was not available but all the others were. Also this idea that Jesus was the source of living water was something he personally presented to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well.

What he told the Samaritan woman, now he tells everyone at the climax of the Festival of Tabernacles, "anyone who is thirsty come to me." But the question is, what does this really look like at the human level? I want to share the story of someone I met at the International Students Conference I attended this past week. This was the testimony of a former Muslim from Bangladesh. His name was Abraham Sarkar. As a young boy, Abraham was raised in a devout Muslim family. His father was a Muslim cleric and

religious leader. He was trained from the age of 9 in the Koran and when he was 15 he was given the task to make the prayer calls from the minarets 5 times a day starting at 4:30 in the morning, waking up the neighborhood with chants of “God is great” and “prayer is better than sleep” in urdu. I have myself been woken up by these prayer calls when I lived in India so this resonates in a very special way for me personally. Anyway one day he got a dream. In that dream he had died and was put in a lake of fire. That dream troubled him very much, but he had no idea what it meant. Then he got the same dream again. And he got the dream a third time. When he got this extremely troubling dream three times, he was desperate to know what it meant. So he went to the imam at the mosque but the imam dismissed the dream by telling him that it was not from God. But he was still desperate to find the meaning of the dream. One day as he was praying desperately seeking an answer from God in the mosque he suddenly felt something fall on him. He opened his eyes and saw that something like drops of oil had fallen in his hands and on his body. It had a really sweet fragrance that filled the mosque. Yet he heard nothing from God. But later, a clear audible voice telling him to go read the Bible. Now as a devout Muslim he would never touch the Bible. But this voice directly told him to read the Bible and so he had no choice but to look for a Bible. Yet for 4 years he was not able to find a Bible where he lived in Bangladesh. I tell you this story because I want you to see what thirsting for God really looks like. We get too comfortable in our lives and routines. And we lose our hunger and thirst for God. And when we do, Christ’s call to us to come to him also does not resonant as it should in our inner most being. But this young devout teenage Muslim cleric was desperate and thirsty for God to speak to him and reveal to him the meaning of his dream. Jesus says, “if anyone is thirsty, come to me! If you believe in me, come and drink”. The more thirsty you are, the sweeter Jesus’ invitation will be to you.

And Jesus does not say, if you are thirsty, then coming to him will quench your thirst. That is not what he says. Jesus invitation declares that those who come to him, out of

their heart will flow “rivers of living water”. Now the next verse explains that the “living water” Jesus is referring to is the Holy Spirit that would be given to believers. So the way it works is this, the person who thirsts for Jesus, comes to Him, Jesus then not only satisfies them for a moment but connects them to a “river of living water”. And the river of living water is not going to be contained by any one individual. The river will just keep flowing, from one individual to the next. That is what rivers do right? So Jesus’s invitation is to receive this bubbling, exuberantly life giving and contagious filling of His Holy Spirit. All you have to do is thirst for God.

Now, if all of this sounds kind of out of this world, that is because Jesus Christ is from out of this world. But, his message is for our world. The world that you and I live in. And to show you what Jesus’ words look like in our world, I want to take you back to the story of our Muslim convert, Abraham Sarkar. I told you that because of his dream and the audible voice he was looking for a Bible for 4 years right? Guess what? When he was 19, his parents decide to send him to America as an Islamic missionary to the US. Our God my friends has a sense of humor and loves irony. You will see why soon. He lands in Florida, gets connected to an International student ministry and in a library at some ministry center sees a Bible in his native language. He immediately begins to read. Now one of the things that he was told in his training about Christians was that they believed in 3 gods and he knew in his heart that there was only one God. But as he read the Bible he came across Jesus’ words in Mark 12:29 saying “Hear oh Israel, the Lord your God is one”. This was a shock to him. What he was told about what Christians believed was all wrong. So he started reading some more. He found out that Jesus did many miracles. His prophet Mohamad did not do any miracles. He realized that Jesus resurrected from the grave and ascended to heaven. His prophet Mohamad died and went to his grave. So he said, Jesus must be greater than Prophet Mohamad. And if Jesus is greater than he has to listen to Jesus. But what about all this good works he was doing to please Allah? But why the lake of fire dream. Which book was right? Could he get to Allah

through the Koran or through the Bible? Again he became very thirsty for answers. As he prayed, a person by the name of Peter shared with him how on the cross Jesus assured the thief crucified next to him, that today he would be with him in paradise. Even though the thief had no opportunity to pray 5 times a day or go on a pilgrimage, Jesus was able to look into the thief's thirsty soul and assure him salvation. That message reached his soul and that day Abraham Sarkar decided, Jesus was it. And he became a follower.

Now remember what Jesus promised. He did not say you will get momentary satisfaction of your thirst. Jesus said, when you come to him, you will be connected to a "river of living water that will flow not just into you but continue flowing as rivers do out from your heart, right? Did it happen to Abraham Sarkar? Let's take a look. So when his family came to know that he accepted Christ, he was disowned and even threatened to be killed. Yet, in time God gave him the opportunity to share the Gospel with his family. All of whom in time came to Christ. This is what his father who disowned him said to him when he saw him. He said Abraham, I see that you love God more now as a Christ follower than when you were a Muslim cleric calling people to pray. He asked his son to please forgive him and gave his life to Christ. Is that the power of living water or what? In time he started a ministry to help the poor of his country. He pioneered micro-loans in his country, started a hospital and elementary schools for poor kids, he helped set-up fish farms, provided clean drinking water and all this has helped transform 215 villages reaching 215,000 people. Of those 215,000 people his work has blessed, over 66,000 people are disciples of Christ now. Is that a river of living water or what? Just because one person received the over abundant, ever flowing, life giving living water of the Holy Spirit, today over 66,000 Muslims are also connected to the river of living water. And the next chapter is just being written in Abraham Sarkar's life.

So what does that mean for us. If we are a community of people who have thirsted for Jesus Christ, and received his river of life giving Holy Spirit anointing, then what should

the impact on our community be? Well, I think the impact on our community should be pretty incredible. I think just because we are here, the school across the street from us should flourish. I think the community garden we are planning should bear much fruit and bless many people. I think many kids in the neighborhood should feel the love through what we do Wednesday evenings. I heard we had 17 kids at Venture Club last week. That's what I am talking about. Last week I was approached by Pastor Bruce from the Methodist church asking if we could provide people who could help run their food pantry, that serves 40-50 people a week. I told him we will pray that God brings us the people. I was asked if we could provide people to help with a Medical clinic across the street. I told him we will pray for God to provide the people. I was asked if we would provide people to help with identifying and dealing with injustices in this neighborhood. I told him we would pray for God to bring the people. But you know what? I do dream that God's living water would flow in and through us, so that we can go out and bless the children, bless the hungry, bless the sick and bless those who might be thirsty for the truth. Thirsty for God. Thirsty for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So that we can show them the way to living water. That they may drink and be satisfied and be filled with new life from above.

May our community be known for its anointing power and impact. May we one day flood this neighborhood with living water, that flows out of our big red doors and floods this neighborhood more than the floods of 1951. Are you willing to pray for that level of anointing with living water? Are you that thirsty for Jesus? Let us pray.