

John, Part 29: And the Rock was Christ

John 7:37 ESV 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."

- I. Going through the seventh chapter of John, we've talked about how the setting is the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, a time when Jews commemorated their exodus from Egypt, and 40-year wanderings in the desert some 1500 years previous.
 - A. The festival included many sacrifices and joyful celebrations. The centerpiece was that the Jews would dwell in temporary shelters made of branches to remind themselves of the way their ancestors lived on their journey.
 - B. The Festival culminated on the eighth day with a grand procession. White-robed priests would emerge from the temple carrying a large golden vase. Together they would march in a solemn parade from the Temple (in the northeast of Jerusalem) to the Pool of Siloam, (in the south end of the city) while the packed city watched (it was like Lubbock on Homecoming weekend).
 1. Once there, they would dip the jar in the pool, filling it with fresh water. Then they would make their way back inside the Temple gates, where they would pour the pure water out as an offering before the Lord.
 - a) This was done to symbolize one of the great miracles of the Exodus.
 - b) **Exodus 17:1 ESV** All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, but **there was no water for the people to drink.** **2** Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you **test the Lord?**" **3** But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" **4** So Moses cried to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." **5** And the Lord said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. **6** Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and **you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.**" And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. **7** And he called the name of the place Massah (testing) and Meribah (quarreling), because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, "**Is the Lord among us or not?**"
 2. So the Jews would conclude their festival by reminding themselves that God is a God who can quench our deepest thirst, even in a place where we are parched, and there is no water! He demonstrates that he is for us, and among us by an **outpouring** that **refreshes** our souls to the deepest place.
- II. So imagine if you will, the streets of Jerusalem packed to capacity on the final, greatest day of the festival, with people who have been reliving the greatest miracle of their history; the time when God rescued them from Egypt, provided for them for forty years in a place that should have killed them all in days, and made them his favored nation.

- A. They have just seen a reenactment of one of the the greatest moments in the story, and their minds are filled with visions of enough water gushing out of a rock to quench the thirst of over three million people and all their livestock.
1. It was in this most solemn and holy moment, with the majestic architecture of the Temple complex as the stage, that a single voice suddenly rings out loudly, ***“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink!”***
 2. As he often did, Jesus disrupts the religious show and ceremony, in order to shine a blinding light on the shadows of their limited understanding of God.
- B. Paul said this about all of the mystery and majesty of the Old Testament stories, laws and prophecies. **Colossians 2:17 ESV** These are a ***shadow*** of the things to come, but the ***substance*** belongs to Christ. The point of it all was ***always*** Jesus!
- C. Think of how this has been demonstrated just in the book of John so far!
1. In chapter one he essentially tells Nathanael that HE is the ladder or stairway that Jacob saw, with ascending and descending angels in Genesis 28:12!
 2. Speaking of the Exodus, in chapter 3, he told Nicodemus that HE is the point behind the bronze serpent Moses raised in Numbers 21:9! In chapter 6, he told the crowd that HE is the true manna (not the miraculous bread from Exodus 16) having come from heaven to satisfy the hunger of mankind.
- D. Now for the third time, he claims to be the central figure of the Exodus! He says that HE is the rock from which anyone can drink! And not just a ***ration!*** Not a ***little!*** But enough to satisfy the thirst of every man, woman, boy and girl from every nation, tribe, and language FOREVER!
1. The Apostle Paul, in recounting this miracle from Exodus, asserts this truth. **1 Corinthians 10:4 ESV** and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and ***the Rock was Christ.***
 - a) Although the Bible never states this in the Old Testament, according to a couple of commentators I consulted, a Jewish legend existed at time of Christ, that a piece of the Rock that Moses had struck broke off and miraculously followed the Israelites throughout their wanderings, continuing to provide life-giving water.
 - b) By referring to this legend, Paul is pointing out that Christ never intended to be a “one and done” kind of Savior! Rather, his presence, like the rock in the desert, will follow us every day as we wander through the barrenness of this life, providing everything we need! His presence is meant to be a constant source of sustaining life to you and I!
 2. Paul however is not nearly as concerned with this legend as he is with the identity of the Rock! Note that he calls the the Rock a “spiritual Rock”, and the water the people drank from it in the desert “spiritual drink”.
 - a) The water was “spiritual”, not because of something inherent in it’s essence (it wasn’t “magic water!”); it was spiritual because of something inherent in it’s ***source***: it came from a Spiritual Rock - “and the Rock was Christ”! Consider the chief similarity between Christ and this rock:
 - b) How did that Rock in the desert provide refreshment and life for the nation of Israel?
 - (1) It had to be struck! It had to be broken so that it’s supernatural contents could be poured out for the people.

- (2) Can I impress you with my scientific mind? Rocks are not a great natural source of water! Therefore, a miracle was required!
- c) Likewise, Christ too was struck. He was broken on the cross so that he might pour out upon the nations God's love and forgiveness, and bring everlasting satisfaction and salvation to our souls.
- (1) Now can I impress you with my theological mind? A dead man makes a lousy source of eternal salvation! Therefore, a miracle was required!
- (2) **1 Corinthians 15:17 ESV** And if Christ has not been raised, your **faith is futile** and you are **still in your sins**.
- d) As much as you and I revere the crucified Christ, may I suggest to you, with no intended blasphemy, that a **merely** dead Jesus, is a pretty useless thing? That is what Paul is saying here. However, a risen Christ, now that's something different! And I've got good news! He is risen!
3. The rock in the wilderness was a dead thing. God commanded that it be struck and broken, and life flowed from it, and the thirst of the Israelites was quenched. But that rock moved! It came to life! It followed the people! And as it did, it sustained them!
- a) A crucified Christ might refresh you, but a risen Christ will sustain you!
- b) **Hebrews 7:25 ESV** Consequently, he is able to **save to the uttermost** those who draw near to God through him, since he **always lives** to make **intercession** for them.
- c) He saves us to the uttermost, not because he once died, but because he "always lives"!
- E. What we are learning here is one of the key elements of proper Biblical interpretation, which is this: **everything** you read in scripture, no matter the historical timeline or context of the event or statement, has the mission and glory of Jesus Christ as it's underlying point.
1. We say it all time (and will never stop saying it!), the Bible is not **primarily** a book to show you how to be a better you, make or save more money, do a better job of raising your kids, or unlock the secrets of the end times!
2. The Bible is the story of how God purposed, by his sovereign will, to rescue the hopelessly fallen and sinful human race by the sacrifice of his own Son. It is the story of how he raised, exalted and glorified his Son, and made him both Lord and Judge over every human being that will ever have lived on this planet. The story is about him, and only incidentally about us!
- F. Therefore, never make the mistake of thinking that Jesus "kinda" metaphorically symbolizes a stairway to heaven, a bronze serpent, manna, or a water-gushing rock! You're looking from the wrong direction! On the contrary, these things symbolize HIM! They point to him and not the other way around.
- III. With that in mind, consider those weary travelers from 1500 years before the time of Christ for a little longer. Do you think they recognized who the Rock **was** that was following them? We have no indication from scripture that they did.
- A. They may have thought it was a miraculous rock, or even understood it to be part of God's blessing; but Paul says the Rock was **Christ!** It was a sign of the divine presence and the abundant, miraculous provision which that divine presence insured. Almost certainly this never entered their minds!

- B. Now fast forward to their temple 1500 years later. The Rock is still following them, this time having taken on the likeness of a man, proclaiming to their hardened hearts and minds that he **still** represents the divine, abundantly providing presence! **“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink!”**
1. He was not just a rock that would cool their natural tongues and slake their physical thirst, but one that could quench the deep pantings of their souls!
 2. But do you think any of these understood who was in their midst any better than the Israelites walking to Canaan? No! You see it all through chapter 7. Over and over Christ’s identity is debated and the people are left scratching their heads in confusion about just who he is!
- C. When he made his proclamation at the feast, some probably thought that it was a sacrilege, disrupting the holy proceedings like that!
1. Some probably thought he was mentally ill. Only crazy people make public outbursts like that, right? And you better believe that his brazen audacity really got under the skin of the legalists, traditionalists, and Pharisees!
 2. But no one saw things as they really were; that the source of life was in the midst of the dry, punishing desert of broken humanity once again!
- D. The same presence that followed the children of Israel in the desert; the same presence that shouted aloud in the crowded temple; that same presence is here right now this morning. And he is not at all restricted to a church service or a religious moment! He wants to follow you and sustain you **wherever you go!**
1. Did you recognize him? Did you find in him a source of unending abundant life, or are you still trying to be refreshed by the stagnant cesspools of worldliness, sexual indulgence, materialism, unforgiveness and unbelief?
 - a) Quite frankly, many of us are way too full of these other things to even **feel** any sense of thirst. We are like men that are stranded at sea, whose unbearable thirstiness causes us to gulp down mouthful after mouthful of the abundant salt water, never realizing that what we are consuming to quench our thirst is actually killing us.
 - b) This world has a lot to offer you to drink! Like the ocean, the supply is endless! But if we ever come to our senses, we will see that the briny depths, no matter how bountiful and accessible, offers us no hope!
 2. Good news! You do not have to continue swallowing what this world has set out for you! You have an opportunity to make a choice this morning! Christ begins his proclamation with the word “if”. Don’t worry! You will not be coerced! **“If anyone thirsts...”** Do you prefer to drink from the fountain of Christ, or is there still another cup in your hand?
 - a) Are you thirsty this morning? Do you want to be refreshed and satisfied? Can you lay down everything else, without categorizing things as “good” or “bad”, but rather as simply “Christ” and “not Christ”.
 - b) This is not a **moral** decision; it’s a **Lordship** decision. Drinking deeply is not first about cleaning up your act, so that you can be able to drink. It’s about accepting the invitation to drink, knowing that the Rock will teach you progressively to thirst only for the springs that well up in him.

- E. If you can just acknowledge your thirst, you are given unrestricted access to the waters that flow from Jesus. An open invitation has been issued. "...let him come to me and drink."
- IV. Look again at the end of the Exodus 17 passage. Do you remember the Israelites sinful complaint?
- A. **Exodus 17:7 ESV** And (Moses) called the name of the place Massah (testing) and Meribah (quarelling), because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, "***Is the Lord among us or not?***"
1. The people challenged and tested God, saying, "Is He among us or not?" on the basis of their thirst. In other words, because they were thirsty, they accused God of hanging them out to dry.
 2. Many of you are doing the exact same thing! Because you are in a desert, and you can find nothing to quench your thirst on your own, you think that God is absent. Your lips are cracked and your throat is dry and you wonder if you have been brought out here and left all alone to die.
- B. But can I postulate that our thirst should never be the measuring stick to determine the reality of the presence of God?
1. Thirst is the common experience of every living soul. We all experience it. Once again, the reason is because in sin, we are corrupt, broken, fallen, undine, polluted, immoral and rebellious. And worse yet, the world around us is not a safe haven! It reflects the turmoil inside of us!
 2. But even all of those things, while true, do not determine whether God is willing to be near to us or not. Our thirst is merely an indicator of where and what we have and have not been willing to drink.
- C. In fact, your inner thirst can be a real blessing; a gift from God in fact!
1. **Psalm 107:4 ESV** Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in; **5** hungry and **thirsty**, their soul fainted within them. **6 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. 7** He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in. **8** Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! **9** For **he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.**
 - a) This passage describes those who are both hungry and thirsty, wandering aimlessly. But what did their hunger and thirst produce in them? It triggered in them an impulse to cry out to God!
 - b) And what happened when they did? "**he delivered them from their distress**".
 2. So if you find yourself thirsty this morning, and your thirst drives you to cry out to the God who loves you, then your thirst is a blessing, because he will not ignore you or deny you! The rock that was struck and broken for you will pour out upon you cool, refreshing, satisfying water for your soul!
- D. Therefore, if our thirst does not determine whether God is among us or not, what does? Simple. The outpouring! I don't mean some objective experience, I mean the always flowing, always available, abundant river of grace and mercy that flows from the cross of Jesus.
1. You don't need a sign from God or a reward for your hard work. You just need to acknowledge what has always been and always will be true: that Jesus is

always enough. That he is always available. And that if you are thirsty, you may come freely to him and drink!

2. **Isaiah 12:2 ESV** “Behold, God is **my salvation**; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become **my salvation.**” **3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.**

- a) Two times this verse proclaims that God is our salvation. It is not speaking of something he does something he does, but who he is!
- b) Next it says that our heritage shall be out to draw water from the wells of salvation. If God is my salvation, and I am drawing water from wells of salvation, what is this deep well where I find water for my thirsty soul?
- c) It is God himself! Not some religious act on my part. Not some doctrine that I cling to dogmatically, but by simply trusting in, clinging to, and relying on my relationship of trust to the Father through Jesus, I am saved!

V. Would you allow me to share one more passage to drive home my point? In the most hopeful portion of the Old Testament book of Isaiah, where so much is promised about the coming deliverance that Jesus will bring about, we read these words...

A. **Isaiah 41:17 ESV** When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, **I the Lord will answer them**; I the God of Israel **will not forsake them.** **18** I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

B. May we be found daily, bucket in hand, drawing water from the wells of salvation, that have been made freely available to us in Christ!