

John, Part 30: 5 Observations from the River's Edge

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. **38** Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" **39** 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.

- I. We have been studying the 7th chapter of John, where Jesus has been attending the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. While there, he has been completely misidentified and misunderstood for an entire week by the Jews.
 - A. While a handful of them have accepted and embraced his teaching and claims, the vast majority of the others have simply argued about his true identity.
 1. He has been both secretly and openly accused of leading the people astray from their traditions and customs. He has been accused of not being educated enough. During the festival, the Jewish leaders denied that they have been devising a nefarious plan to murder him, though the people knew.
 2. People have wondered aloud if He could truly be the Messiah; and yet worried about his pedigree and birthplace. The leaders determined to arrest him, yet they were restrained by the timing of God. On top of all of that, he confused them all by stating that, "**You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.**" - They had no idea what he meant by that!
 - B. As you can see, this was a very busy week for Christ, and one that set the stage for the strained relationship that he would have with Jerusalem, as well as its leaders until his eventual arrest and crucifixion.
- II. Last week, we looked at the climax of this Festival week, where Jesus stands up on the last day, known as the "great day" of the feast, and cries out loudly, "**If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.**"
 - A. In doing this, he was pointing back to the story of how Moses struck a rock with his staff and water miraculously poured out, quenching the thirst of over 3 million Israelites and all their livestock in the middle of a blazing, arid desert.
 - B. His point was that the rock was pointing forward to **HIM**; that truly **he** is the rock from which living water flows, refreshing the parched souls of every redeemed man, woman, boy and girl for all eternity.
 1. This is similar to what he told the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4...
 - a) **John 4:13 ESV** Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this (natural) water will be thirsty again, **14a** but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again."
 - b) He said something like this to those who followed him for a "free lunch" in John 6. **John 6:35 ESV** Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."
 2. He is proclaiming that those who would risk putting their trust in him alone; not their own efforts, good works, vows, promises, morality, religious prowess, intellect, wealth, strength, beauty, or sophistication, will experience full, eternal, unalterable, soul-deep satisfaction!

- a) It would no longer matter what you have or don't have, who is for you and who is against you, the Lord will satisfy you!
 - b) **Hebrews 13:5 ESV** Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, **for he has said**, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." **6** So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"
- III. But after Jesus makes an open invitation for whoever thirsts to come to him and drink, he takes this teaching a step further. He had begun by proclaiming what he had come to do for lost humanity, but he finishes by explaining what effect his work will naturally have on our lives. "**Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'**" Notice a few things here...
- A. First, notice that Christ's followers would live under an expectation that they would one day, by the power of the Holy Spirit, "re-present" him to the waiting, lost and needy world.
 - 1. As he has come to quench their thirst, now they would be conduits of his living water to the rest of humanity.
 - 2. Christ would always be the source, but they would be the channel; Christ would be the municipal reservoir, but they would be individual faucets.
 - 3. This is often counter to how we think about Christianity. We see it more as an individual benefit that has been bestowed upon us by God instead of an empowering transaction that prepares us to fulfill the Father's mission to reconcile the world to himself.
 - B. Secondly, the last verse of our passage today states that these "rivers of living water" represent in descriptive language the outworking of the coming Holy Spirit, whom all believers were to receive because of Christ's work.
 - 1. **John 7:39 ESV** 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.
 - 2. Also notice that it doesn't say that after we partake of Christ, our main concern will be rivers continuing to flow from Christ toward us, but from us toward others. There are two things to consider:
 - a) This does not imply by any means that the life giving flow from Christ ever dries up; that it's kind of a "one and done" affair, but just the opposite! It means Christ is always unceasingly enough, once and for all; meaning that one real encounter with Jesus is enough to establish a continuous flow of living water that will progressively quench our thirst forever.
 - b) Isn't that what he meant when he said, "Whoever drinks will **never** thirst again"? He has already been poured out once and for all on the cross. He will not be poured out again. But that pouring out makes us able to always say with David, "My cup runs over"!
 - 3. So now we take that never ending supply that has been bestowed upon us and we turn and pour it out (like Jesus) on the world!
 - C. Third, notice that this talk of "rivers of living water" is similar to what Jesus said to the Woman at the well in **John 4:14b ESV** "**The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**"

1. In John 4, a connection is made between the water that Christ gives and salvation (eternal life). In John 7, the connection is made between the water Christ gives and the gift of the Holy Spirit? Is this contradictory?
 - a) What if the connection between living water and both salvation and the ministry of the Holy Spirit wasn't contradictory, accidental or an error, but rather strategically intentional on the part of Christ?
 - b) I think that many (if not most) believers either misdirect their focus, or place far too little emphasis on the Holy Spirit's role in the redeemed life.
 - (1) If you were raised in a Pentecostal or Charismatic tradition, you may tend to overemphasize the Spirit's work subsequent to salvation; focusing on experiences, seasons and events, rather than daily reality.
 - (2) If you were raised in a non (or anti) Pentecostal or Charismatic church, you may only be willing to go so far as to say that believers receive the Holy Spirit at salvation, but hesitate to expect any meaningful or miraculous impact that he makes in your day to day experience.
 - (3) If you weren't raised in church you're probably just saying, "huh?"!
 2. But the New Testament seems to teach something entirely different from these first two perspectives; namely, that the Spirit's presence is to be the common, daily, empowering source in every stage of every believer's life. In fact, Paul states **Romans 8:9 ESV** *Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*
 - a) Jesus always intended that the presence and power of the Holy Spirit would be infused into every facet of the believer's life, from the new birth and throughout all eternity. All aspects of our life would be affected no matter how seemingly sacred, or mundanely secular - our friend the Holy Spirit would make no distinction as to which parts of our lives to indwell.
 - b) This is why Christ said **John 16:7 ESV** *Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.*
 3. The Holy Spirit is the gift and promise of God as our everlasting advantage! Our daily benefit!
- D. Fourth, see also in John 7 that coming to Christ thirsty, and drinking deeply of him is synonymous with **believing** in him ("...let him come to me and drink...Whoever believes in me...").
1. Remember that in 1903 Orville and Wilbur Wright were beginning to understand the practical applications of the principles of aerodynamics, they were raising capital for their new flying machine, and even built an aircraft in their bicycle shop according to all that they had learned.
 2. Yet, what if, when it came time to go out to the beach for flying day, they refused to get in their airplane because it simply looked "too rickety"?
 - a) This is vitally important because many people want to experience the Spirit's power apart from obedience to Christ, but believing in Christ **necessarily** carries with it the idea of submission and even risk; an "all in" commitment.

- b) Biblical believing means more than merely acknowledging the truth about something; rather it insists on fully trusting in, clinging to, and relying on Christ, as though our very lives depended on him, because they do!
- E. Fifth, I will call your attention to the phrase “will flow”. He does not say “might flow” or “perhaps for **some** might flow”. No; Christ has said, “**Whoever** believes in me...’Out of his heart **will flow** rivers of living water.’”
1. Far too many people live under the false belief that the outflow of spiritual power is limited to special “favored people”, (the big shots, the giants of the faith, and the pillars of the church); yet Christ says, “Whoever believes”.
 2. Other people believe that the river will flow only when we get the atmosphere right through our formulas for outpourings and revivals, or that we’ll only know that it’s really flowing when we see gold dust falling from the ceiling, people falling down in prayer, or we experience angelic visitations. But the promise here is that “**whoever** believes...out of his heart **will flow** rivers of living water”!
 - a) We must consider the fact that if belief and outflow truly do go hand in hand, that there is an evidential element to all of this. Could one of the ways that we assess ourselves as to whether we are true believers or not, be the sense of whether rivers of living water are flowing from us? If they are not, shouldn’t we be seeking to discover why they are not?
 - b) But let me caution you! This is a matter in which we judge **ourselves** according to the scriptures and the leading of the Holy Spirit.
 - (1) You are not authorized to be anyone else’s “living water” inspector!
 - (2) None of us are observant enough to always notice what is truly flowing out of another.
 - (3) None of us are smart enough to always know what a “river of living water” even looks like.
 - (4) None of us are discerning enough to always recognize when our own flowing rivers are reduced to a trickle!
- IV. In the book of Ezekiel, chapters 40 through 48, the prophet, who is living with his people in Babylonian exile, because of the unbridled idolatry of God’s people, receives from God a vision of a coming renewed temple.
- A. It is an extremely detailed account of the most intricate features of this place where God’s glory will reside. It encompasses the decor and furnishings, the area surrounding the temple, ceremonies, etc.
1. In a lot of ways the vision is a more grandiose replica of King Solomon’s temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians.
 2. But in chapter 47, the next to the last chapter in the book, Ezekiel describes in great detail a feature that was not found in the original or any subsequent version of the temple.
- B. **Ezekiel 47:1 HCSB** Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple and there was water flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the temple faced east. The water was coming down from under the south side of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. **2** Next he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate that faced east; there the water was trickling from the south side. **3** As the man went out east with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a third of a mile and led me through

the water. It came up to my ankles. **4** Then he measured off a third of a mile and led me through the water. It came up to my knees. He measured off another third of a mile and led me through the water. It came up to my waist. **5** Again he measured off a third of a mile, and it was a river that I could not cross on foot. For the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be crossed on foot. **6** He asked me, "Do you see this, son of man?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river. **7** When I had returned, I saw a very large number of trees along both sides of the riverbank. **8** He said to me, "This water flows out to the eastern region and goes down to the Arabah. When it enters the sea, the sea of foul water, the water of the sea becomes fresh. **9** Every kind of living creature that swarms will live wherever the river flows, and there will be a huge number of fish because this water goes there. Since the water will become fresh, there will be life everywhere the river goes. **10** Fishermen will stand beside it from En-ge-di to En-eglaim. These will become places where nets are spread out to dry. Their fish will consist of many different kinds, like the fish of the Mediterranean Sea. **11** Yet its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be left for salt. **12** All kinds of trees providing food will grow along both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. Each month they will bear fresh fruit because the water comes from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be used for food and their leaves for medicine."

1. Out of the temple flowed a babbling brook. That brook became a creek. That creek became a stream. That stream became a mighty, rapidly flowing, impassable river.
 2. The water that flowed from it made the salty places fresh, and the dead places team with life. The river provided sustenance and healing for the whole world. Get the picture yet?
- C. Did you notice that Ezekiel said the water was coming from under the threshold of the Temple? That means that the Temple was not the source of the water, but something inside it was!
1. **1 Corinthians 3:16 ESV** Do you not know that ***you are God's temple*** and that ***God's Spirit dwells in you?***
 2. You are the Temple of God, but you are not the source of the river! The one that dwells inside of you is! So what's your job? Just let him flow!
 - a) Plead with him that what seems to be trickling out of the Temple now would become a flood! Ankle deep! Waist deep! Neck deep! Eventually too deep to control; a raging mighty river flowing with the power of God!
 - b) Plead that your life would have long lasting effects - long after you're gone! Families that once were bitter would be become sweet! Business and neighborhoods that are corrupt would become renewed and life-giving as the Spirit flows forth.
- D. Let's make our prayer this morning that he would unleash the flood!