

Sermon Series: *The Person & Work of the Holy Spirit*

The Source of Living Water

John 7:37-39 (ESV)

37 *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.*

On the Last Day of the Feast

Have you ever attended a conference which is rather solemn or formal and suddenly someone jumps up out of his seat and starts shouting? Have you ever attended a large public gathering where a speech is given and suddenly in the middle of the speech someone jumps up and begins yelling right in the middle of the festivities? Have you ever been at a play or a concert and right in the middle of the most intense scene, some strange person in the audience suddenly jumps up and begins his own soliloquy?

What goes through your mind at that moment? Aren't you a bit embarrassed on their behalf? Don't you think, 'O.K. someone needs a little help at understanding public protocol's here. This is not proper social custom. This person is at least rude and more than a little off the smooth rails of polite, public decorum. Perhaps he's out of his mind!' Those are perhaps some of the examples of the thoughts we think in those moments. But no matter what we think, we all know that it is not right and proper to jump up in the middle of a worship service and start shouting and drawing attention to one's self.

This is not the way it is supposed to be, yet this is *exactly* what Jesus did. Surely he knew better. Jesus had been properly taught. He knew appropriate social etiquette. He was not unlearned in this sense and He was not without social graces. So two questions come to mind. First, why does He do this? Second, what does He say?

The Feast of Booths

John tells us that these events took place **on the last day of the feast**. What's the feast? John tells us at the beginning of the chapter (7:2) that this was the Feast of Booths which is also called the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:39-43). Modern Jews refer to this festival as *Sukkot* or The Time of Our Joy. This took place in the autumn “on the fifteenth day of the seventh month” (Lev 23:34), which would compare roughly be late September to early October on our calendar.¹ It began with a solemn

¹ Frank E. Gaebelien, Merrill C. Tenney and Richard N. Longenecker, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 9: John and Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 81.

assembly on the first day of the week, Sunday, and ended eight days later on the following Sunday, concluding also with a solemn assembly (Lev 22:33-36).

The feast was for “all native born Israelites.” They were to make “booths” or a temporary shelters made out of tree branches and were to live in it for the seven days of the feast. According to Josephus,² this was the most popular of the three pilgrim feasts³ (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles). Even today, one Jewish website claims, “None of the festivals is as rich... as the Festival of Sukkot.”⁴ Jews from every quarter would have come to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast. The city would have been packed.

Remember & Rejoice

The feast had a dual purpose: to commemorate the time the nation of Israel dwelled in similar “booths” throughout the forty years in the wilderness and to give joyful thanks to God at the end of the grape, olive, and fruit harvest.⁵ God commanded that they rejoice throughout this feast.

Deut 16:13-15 (ESV)

13 “You shall keep the Feast of Booths seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your winepress. **14** You shall *rejoice* in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns. **15** For seven days you shall keep the feast to the Lord your God at the place that the Lord will choose, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether *joyful*.”

Leviticus 23:39-40 (ESV)

39 “On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest.
40 And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall *rejoice* before the LORD your God seven days.”

This was to be an incredibly joyful celebration! Everyone was to rejoice in the Lord and in all that He had provided—young and old, male and female, servant and master, citizens and foreigners, tourists, widows, and orphans—**everyone was to rejoice**.

The festival was celebrated with such joy because it pointed the minds of the Jews back to the time of complete deliverance. They were to dwell in booths to recall the time when they had no land of their own. Yet they were simultaneously to celebrate with joy at the time of the harvest because that pointed their minds to the bounty of a land that indeed was their own which God had long ago promised and now delivered into their possession.

² Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus : Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996).

³ These were the three feasts for which male Israelites were required to journey back to Jerusalem to participate in the nationwide celebration (see Dt 16:16).

⁴ Source http://www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template_cdo/aid/4477/jewish/The-Mitzvot-of-the-Festival.htm accessed 7 May 2011.

⁵ Colin Kruse, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentary, Volume 4: John* ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 181.

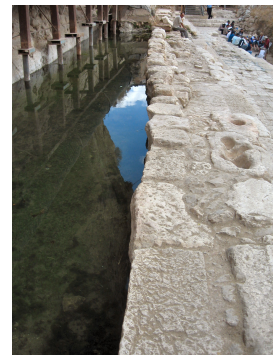
The celebration pointed to a completed Exodus out of Egypt and into their own land. However it also “looked forward to a new exodus, the time when the kingdom of God would be brought in with all its attendant blessings.”⁶

A Party Every Evening All Night Long

A jubilant celebration took place **every day** of the festival. The celebration would begin as the evening sacrifice was offered and would then last all evening until the next morning. They would rejoice together through music, song, and praise for fifteen and a half consecutive hours!⁷ The fifteen Psalms of ascent would be recited, which correspond to the fifteen steps that separated the men’s and women’s courtyard. As the Psalms were recited the Levites would stand on those steps, singing and playing their instruments. They did this everyday for six days.

The Drawing of the Water

An elaborate and beautiful candle lighting ritual was observed however, the pinnacle of the daily festivities was the Drawing of the Water celebration. It is referred to as *simchat bet ha-sho’evah* - “the celebration of the place of the drawing of water.”⁸ [That particular wording is not insignificant.] A priest would fill a golden flagon, or a pitcher with water from the **Pool of Siloam** and carry it back to the temple.



“When they reached the Water Gate, three blasts on the shofar (ram’s horn trumpet) were sounded. When they arrived at the temple, they processed around the alter and sang the *Hallel* (Ps. 113-118), the people shaking their *lulabs* (bundles of myrtle, palm, and willow bound up with a citron⁹), the priests shaking theirs (made from willow [poplar] branches). The flagon was taken to the priest on duty at the altar who had two silver bowls, one for the water and the other for wine. These bowls were filled and then the contents poured over the alter.”¹⁰

The Waters of Salvation: Past, Present, & Future

The priests poured out the water as a libation, a drink offering, to the Lord. These waters were referred to as “the waters of salvation.” The symbolism of the water reminded them of God’s provision of salvation, past, present, and future.

God provided salvation to them in the past by giving them water from the rock in abundance while they lived in booths and wandered in the hot dessert wilderness (Ex 17:6; Num 20:11; 1 Cor 10:4). God provided salvation to them in the present by giving them abundant rain for a plentiful harvest. And God would provide salvation to them in the future by sending Messiah who, just like Moses, would

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Source http://www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template_cdo/aid/4490/jewish/The-Water-Libation.htm accessed 7 May 2011.

⁸ Source www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template_cdo/aid/4604/jewish/The-Water-Drawing.htm accessed 7 May 2011.

⁹ A shrubby Asian tree that bears large fruits similar to lemons, but with flesh that is less acid and peels that are thicker and more fragrant.

¹⁰ Kruse, 191.

also give them bread and water. Jewish tradition holds that the kings of the House of David were anointed at the springs of Siloam and it was to be a son of David who would bring salvation to Israel.

As the former redeemer [i.e. Moses] made a well to rise, so will the latter Redeemer bring up water, as it is stated, “*And a fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim*” (Joel 3:18). (Qohelet Rabbah 1:9.1)¹¹

The Great Day: The Great Salvation

The joy of the celebrations grew in intensity every day and reached its zenith on the last day of the festival. John calls this “the great day.” Jews call it *Hoshanah Rabbah* or the day of “Great Salvation.” On the seventh day the priest processed around the alter seven times (Sukkah 3:9; 4:4-10; 5:1-4) and then poured out the water on the alter.¹² As the water was poured out, they would recite **Isaiah 12:3**.

Isaiah 12:3 (ESV)

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

This was the highest and most joyful moment of the entire festival—the culmination of the entire week-long celebration. The Talmud said, “Whoever witnessed the joy which accompanied the pouring of the water, drew happiness for his soul and salvation from the travails of life.”¹³ The Talmud goes on to say that the joy of this moment was so great that “One who has not witnessed the celebration of the *bet ha-sho’evah* [the place of drawing] has never seen real joy.”¹⁴

He Stood & Cried Out

And it was at **this** moment that Jesus chose to interrupt the whole joyful ceremony by standing up in the middle of it all and shouting. He “cried out in a loud voice” and said,

John 7:37b (ESV)

“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.”

Stunned silence then falls over the people. Imagine it. What was He doing? He’s making a scene, here and now? Right in the middle of **THE** most sacred moment?

Imagine for a moment what the disciples were thinking, eyebrows raised, eyes wide, and probably afraid to even turn to look at Jesus because it might be better to pretend that you didn’t even hear that? Or maybe they looked around in the opposite direction to hopefully draw attention away and toward someone else.

All eyes and ears turned to see who said this and who it was that was so ignorant that he did not understand that they were in the middle of a worship service! There is a time and a place for everything and this was not the time for childish tricks to draw attention to oneself. And when everyone’s attention is fixed on Him, He keeps on talking. He doesn’t get it! He continues to shout!

¹¹ Kruse, 191.

¹² Frank E. Gaebelien, Merrill C. Tenney and Richard N. Longenecker, 86.

¹³ Source www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template_cdo/aid/4491/jewish/The-Drawing-of-the-Water.htm accessed 7 May 2011.

¹⁴ Ibid. The Talmud Yerusalmi, Sukkah 51 a.

John 7:38 (ESV)

“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

Then everyone discovers that it’s Jesus! Imagine the conversation among the people. Verses 40-44 tell us what the people were saying.

Guy 1: What is He talking about?

Guy 2: He’s wants us to go to him for a drink.

Guy 1: Well that’s really nice because boy, am I thirsty. I could use a cold drink of water, but why is He offering everyone a drink right now, in the middle of the festival? And where’s the water? I don’t see that He has any water?

Guy 2: No, no. He’s not talking about water-water, you know, liquid water. He’s talking about something else. He said, “Whoever believes in him, as the Scriptures said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

Guy 1: Oh, come on! He’s nuts. I’ve read the Torah and nothing in it says anything about going to Jesus of Nazareth to get a drink of water? [Mockingly] Maybe it’s in First Mishna one, “Thou shalt go to Jesus of Nazareth, the son of the carpenter, and he will give you a cool drink!” This guy gives me the creeps! Let’s go.

Guy 2: No. I’m not going anywhere. I don’t think he’s crazy.

Jesus has been participating in and watching all that had been happening over the past week. He has been observing all the symbolism and typology, all the ceremony and ritual, and all of the spiritual truths to which those external observances pointed. And He simply could remain silent. He stood up and faced all the crowds and shouted out.

The Greek word is *krazo* (κράζω) which means “to shout or cry out; to scream.”¹⁵ He shouted this out because He wanted everyone to hear Him. What He had to say was extremely important—important enough for Him to break decorum and shout out in the middle of the worship service.

“Come to Me if you are thirsty and I will give you drink! And out of you will flow rivers of living water!”

No One Ever Spoke Like This Man

This is amazing talk. No one has ever talked like this. No one.

There were some officers standing there with the intent of arresting Jesus but yet they didn’t. They turned around and went back to the Pharisees and chief priests who sent them and said, “No one ever spoke like this man!” (Jn 7:46)

This is not the first time Jesus had talked like this. Remember what He had said the woman at the well?

¹⁵ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).

John 4:13 (ESV)

Jesus answered the woman, “Everyone who drinks this water will soon be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I will give, will have his thirst satisfied forever. The water that I will give will become in him like a spring of water that wells up inside him to eternal life.” (My translation.)
After feeding the 5,000 Jesus said,

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.

This is strange talk. No one has ever talked like this.

What Was Jesus Talking About?

But why did Jesus choose that particular moment on the last day of the feast, the Great Day, to say what He did? And what was He talking about?

It is obvious that Jesus is not talking about H₂O, liquid, physical water. The Jews of Jesus’ day knew that there was more to the Water Drawing Ceremony than simply the dynamic symbolism of remembering the physical water that God gave them in the desert. There is more here than simply looking back. There is also looking forward. They knew there was something deeply spiritual about this ceremony. There is a connection with the coming of the Spirit of God. In the Talmud¹⁶ the Rabbis taught the connection.

“Why is the celebration called *bet ha-sho'evah* (the place of drawing)? [Because] from there one draws the spirit of holiness. Yonah ben Amitai was one of the pilgrims [who ascended to Jerusalem on the Festival]. He went to the *simchat bet ha-sho'evah* and the spirit of holiness rested upon him [and he became a prophet]. This teaches us that the spirit of holiness rests upon a person only when his heart is filled with joy.¹⁷

The Jews understood that the pouring out of water pointed to the pouring out of His Spirit. And Jesus stands up in the middle of this event and shouts, “Come to Me. I will be the One who will pour out God’s Spirit. Come to Me and I will pour out the Holy Spirit within your heart!”

The real testy question was whether or not they would accept the instrument through whom God would choose to pour out His Holy Spirit, namely Jesus? Would they accept Jesus? Some of the people standing there that day clearly understood what Jesus was claiming and believed in Him.¹⁸

John makes it very clear in verse 39, exactly what Jesus was talking about.

¹⁶ The basic compendium of Jewish law and thought; its tractates mainly comprise the discussions collectively known as the Gemara, which elucidate the germinal statements of law (*Mishnayot*) collectively known as the Mishnah; when unspecified refers to the Talmud Bavli, the edition developed in Babylonia, and edited at the end of the fifth century A.D.; the Talmud Yerushalmi is the edition compiled in the Land of Israel at the end of the fourth century A.D.

¹⁷ *The Talmud Yerushalmi* (Sukkah 5:1), source http://www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template_cdo/aid/4491/jewish/The-Drawing-of-the-Water.htm accessed 7 May 2011.

¹⁸ Some responded to Jesus’ invitation by saying, “This really is the Prophet” (John 7:40) and others by saying, “This is the Christ” (John 7:41).

John 7:39 (ESV)

Now He said this 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 living water Jesus was talking about is the Holy Spirit and the source of the Holy Spirit is Jesus.

The reason I chose this passage is because of what this says about the Holy Spirit.

Five Observations About the Holy Spirit

1) The Spirit is given to those who are thirsty.

The invitation of Jesus in this passage is, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me, and drink.” The people whom Jesus is calling to Himself are those who are thirsty, but the question is “Thirsty for what?” One answer to that question is joy, true joy. The entire focus of the Feast of Booths is joy. We were created to find the satisfaction of our souls in God Himself.

Blaise Pascal noted humanity’s inability to find true and lasting joy in any created thing. He concluded that there was a thirst in the human spirit that only God supply.

What is it then that this desire and this inability [to satisfy ourselves] proclaim to us, but that there was once in man a true happiness of which there now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present? But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss [within the soul] can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.¹⁹

Our deepest joy and true happiness of soul can only be found by union with God Himself through Jesus. The only solution to the thirst of the human spirit is to be filled with the Spirit of God. This thirst, that yearning within us for true joy, true satisfaction, can only be filled by the Holy Spirit of God. And Jesus offers to fill it by placing within us His own Holy Spirit. Every thirst of your soul will be abundantly supplied by the river of living water that will come from Jesus through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

2) The Holy Spirit is given to those who go to Jesus.

Jesus says “Come to **Me** and I will give you drink.” There is no other person through whom the Holy Spirit is given other than Jesus. The *only* place to receive the Holy Spirit is through Jesus Himself. The reason for this is because the Spirit He gives is His own Spirit (Acts 16:7; Phil 1:19; Gal 4:6). The Holy Spirit of God can only be **by** Jesus because He gives us His own Spirit to dwell within us.

When Jesus gave this offer, He had not yet been crucified and resurrected from the dead. However, we now live on this side of His resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost. Jesus poured out His Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Therefore, this promise can be given **today** to all who will go to Jesus.

Acts 2:32-33

¹⁹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, Section VII, Morality and Doctrine, #425. Source accessed <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18269/18269-h/18269-h.htm> 7 May 2011.

32 *This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.*

3) The Spirit is given through faith in Jesus.

Jesus said, “Come to me and drink.” How? The answer is in verse 38, “Whoever believes in Me...” This means that whoever comes to Jesus, believing by faith the Jesus will keep His promise to give His Spirit, will receive His Spirit.

Galatians 3:14 (ESV)

so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

4) The Spirit is given in fulfillment of Scripture.

The fourth observation is that the Holy Spirit is given in fulfillment of Scripture, which simply means that God told us beforehand that this would be the way He would pour out His Spirit.

Isaiah 44:3-4 (ESV)

*3 For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring,
and my blessing on your descendants.
4 They shall spring up among the grass
like willows by flowing streams.*

God long ago foretold what He would do when Messiah came and Jesus is the fulfillment of all that God spoke beforehand. When Jesus ascended into heaven, He then poured out God’s Spirit upon all who would believe in Jesus.

Isaiah 55:1 (ESV)

*Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.*

See also Proverbs 4:23; Isaiah 12:3; Joel 2:28-29; Lk 24:49; Gal 3:14.

5) The Spirit within is an overflowing river. (v.38)

Jesus says that the person who comes to Him and believes in Him will receive the Holy Spirit and then the Holy Spirit dwelling within, will produce “rivers of living water.” There will not be just a little trickle of living water flowing out of God’s people, but “rivers [plural, more than one, many!] of living water! The Spirit within you will be a spring bubbling up and overflowing. He will be a fountain of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, self-control overflowing thorough your life and blessing all around who come near you. God’s Spirit will work in His people to be an

overflowing, outpouring abundance to all who are thirsty. Not only will you have the thirst of your soul quenched, but out of you will flow living water that will quench the thirst of other thirsty souls.

Isaiah 58:11 (ESV)

*And the LORD will guide you continually
and satisfy your desire in scorched places
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters do not fail.*

God's people themselves will be satisfied by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and they will be used by God to bring that same satisfaction to other thirsty people.

Revelation 22:17 (ESV)

The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let the one who hears say, Come. And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

Are you thirsty? Come to Jesus. Is there a thirst in your soul that nothing yet has quenched? Then believe in Jesus. Trust Him. Ask Him to give you drink. Ask Him right now to satisfy your thirsty soul.