

The Great Invitation
John 7:37-39

We have been going through this chapter that has all revolved around the Feast of Tabernacles, and as we come to verse 37 we read the timing of what Jesus says next, **“On the last day of the feast, the great day.”** Now if you do not understand these words, you cannot see the full impact and why Jesus said what he said. The Feast of Tabernacles was a seven day feast, with a special Sabbath day on the eighth day. It was called many times the great day. It would have taken place not on Saturday but on Sunday, the first day of the week.

This was the pinnacle of the Jewish festival season. And it was a joyous feast. And it celebrated the bringing in of the harvest, and God’s goodness to the nation. They would carry various branches to signify the harvest taken in through the streets of Jerusalem with oral prayers while reciting of various portions of Psalms. And there was also what was know as the water drawing ceremony every day that led this procession. Water was drawn from the Pool of Siloam and carried to the Temple and poured out. It signified the rain that God had given in order that they might have a productive harvest, and also a prayer for the next year’s harvest. One Rabbi writing in the second century explains this ritual, **“Why has the Torah commanded: Pour out water on the Feast of Tabernacles? The Holy One, blessed be He, has commanded: Pour out water before me on the Feast of Tabernacles, in order that rain (of the coming year) may bless you.”** And again, this was the most joyous of all feasts. In fact one rabbinic saying goes, **“He that never has seen the joy of the water-drawing has never in his life seen joy.”** They would enthusiastically and joyously march through the streets.

And it is this setting that Jesus gets up and speaks. Look how our text continues, **“Jesus stood up and cried out.”** And we have seen four different times that Jesus has spoken in this chapter all revolving around this feast, and this time it is different, because all the other time Jesus is responding to others. Here he stands and speaks not prompted by any questions or accusations. And notice his posture, that he stands and speaks. The normal posture of speaking is sitting but he is standing. It speaks of the seriousness of this time. And then we also read that he cries out, in other words, raises his voice that the maximum amount of people might hear the message. And the incredible thing is that he talks about water. The water ceremony was not continued on the eighth day. But here Jesus talks about the greater need in their lives and gives a glorious and grand and necessary invitation to come to him. Again, remember that Jesus know that his time is growing short and his desire is for any and all to come to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

And this text is so necessary in our lives because of two reasons. One is that it teaches us who we have become and also teaches what or who we have been given. And one of the greatest problems in Christianity is that we do not recognize who we are, and therefore we do not recognize how we are to function. We view salvation as all about us, and if it as if Jesus exists for us. And God has saved us from his wrath, but saved in the here and now for a reason. And so often we have a good grasp on salvation - Jesus came and gave his life as that perfect offering for our sin. And we have a good grasp on what is to come. We will one day be with Jesus. But what is the

whole point of this time frame in the here and now - between our coming to Christ and going home to glory? Is it just to bide our time, and just suffer through or is there some other reason for this time period? And for so many believers, they can give a few general purposes but they cannot think of why God left them here or put them in the circumstances, situation, and difficult relationships that they are in. Tonight, I want us those purposes. I want us to see the words of Christ, and the explanation that John gives us of the words of Christ.

1. We see the glorious invitation of Christ. Vv. 37-38.

In this invitation there is so much hope for any and all who come to Christ. The hope is eternal in nature. And it also indicates how that person will change which is absolutely fundamental. We look at our Christianity basically from the viewpoint of what God has done for us, in other words, salvation is past tense. But when God creates that God-centred love and trust in Christ, he also creates a love for others, a desire for others well-being. He creates an other-centred attitude in us for the spiritual well-being of others. And let me ask you if that is your Christianity? If that is how you function in the here and now? Is life all about you, or is the driving force in your life is the spiritual and eternal well-being of others? When was the last time you really put yourself out or sacrificed for other individuals? So often our relationship with Christ, the church, and even our friends exist for me. And when they don't any longer it is time to discard them. Biblical Christianity always creates an other-centredness in the believer in the here and now. It never creates a life of isolation or where it is all about me.

Look first of all at the invitation in verse 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.”** For seven days they have marched through the streets in the water drawing ceremony and celebrated God’s goodness and also their need for water in the coming year. It is vivid in their lives. And on the last day of the feast when that ceremony is not enacted, but fresh in their minds, he turns their attention to a greater need that he alone can satisfy. And by now in the teaching of Jesus they must have been familiar with what he is saying, and that is life is found in him alone. Isaiah 12:3 says, **“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”** Jesus is that well. Thirst speaks of a need that every person has. Here is that need of salvation in Christ alone, and look at the one who provides it, “come to me.” It is found in Jesus alone.

And it is an amazing invitation because he offers it to anyone who thirsts. What does the word “anyone” mean? And it is all inclusive. It includes any and all who come to Christ. And again, this is a precursor of the gospel going out to all the world. Many Gentiles would have been found in Jerusalem at this time just to see the sounds and sights of this festival, some Jewish proselytes. And then there were Jews from all over the Roman Empire that would have come just like we see on the Day of Pentecost, another annual feast. Listen to Acts 2:9-11 of those gathered, **“Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”** The same mix is gathered together - and the call goes out, the invitation. God has made a way of

salvation not just for some who measure up, because none of us measure up, not for just one category of people but for all, whoever may come. It means you and me. And sometimes even as believers in Christ we just have to sit back and revel in the amazing grace of God.

Then we come to verse 38, **"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"** Now as many of you know there is no punctuation in the Greek manuscripts, and that usually does not present many challenges but it does in this passage. Many put the period not at the end of the last verse but after "Whoever believes in me." And they would translate it something like this, "If anyone is thirsty let him come to me, and whoever believes in me come." Now it might not seem like that big of a deal, but it is because it changes the next statement, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." It makes this mean that the living water is flowing from Jesus, and Jesus is not saying these words but we have the commentary from John. He is the source. If you leave the verses the way they are translated in the ESV then it makes the believer as the source of living waters. Now I believe the ESV translators have gotten this correctly mainly because John talks about the ministry of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer in the next verse. We all agree that Jesus is the source of living water, but as the source he creates us as the living water to give life to others who are around us.

Now the other challenge is where do we find this quote in the Old Testament? There is no text that uses these words. You could say that it is Jesus and the allusion to the Rock in the wilderness that gave people life. You could say that it is talking about believers in passages like Isaiah 58:11, **"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."** What I think we have here is not a direct quote but a summary statement of what Jesus will do in the life of the believer when he gives him new life. This is the believer's life. This is the gift of God. He takes self-centred individuals and makes them a blessing to others.

Isn't it true? Have you ever been around believers like that? You have been down and out, depressed and discouraged and in their presence is like the well that gives life. You are encouraged and you persevere in following Christ. It is not a dead pool of stagnant water but one that is flowing and refreshes us. And we are thankful for those who refresh us, those who even extend that gospel through others. But the promise here is extended to "whoever believes in me," In other words, this promise is not given just to the super Christian, or to the elite saints, but all believers are this river of living water. Your Christian life is not given that everyone might minister to you, and you might reap all these benefits, but your life might be a spiritual benefit to others. Others might love Christ and desire Christ through Jesus Christ using you. This is the purpose of the here and now. And not just some of us but all of us.

The question becomes: am I this spring? Am I looking at what others are not doing for me, or am I seeking to be a blessing in the lives of others? Am I seeking to give and apply the gospel to others? Are others exhausted at being in my presence or refreshed. Certainly there are times that we all need to be refreshed by others, and need to receive ministry, but the gift is what Christ created us to be and that is rivers of

living water. Be intentional. You can be this kind of believer and testimony because this is who Jesus created us to be.

2. We need to see John's interpretation. V. 39

It is amazing how important the eighth day, or the first day of the week is through Scripture. Here we have the eighth day of the Festival or the first day of the week, and we have the promise of the coming of the Spirit on believers. Then at the end of the gospel we will have the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week, the day after the Sabbath. And then in Acts 2 we will have the coming of the Spirit and the beginning of the church on the Day of Pentecost on the first day of the week. That is why as believers we celebrate, not on the Sabbath, but the first day of the week. This is the day of new life - of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it is amazing to look at this offer of Christ and all that it entails as far as making believers into rivers of living water. The first day of the week is so significant.

And look at what John says here, **"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."** And Jesus is going to say so much more of the coming of Another Comforter, one like Jesus Christ. And here he says the Spirit will be given after Jesus has been glorified. And the Spirit would be received but has not yet been given. And when John says the timing is when Jesus is glorified, he is not talking about the exact moment of his glorification, but this needs to take place first. And his glorification in this gospel is not the resurrection or the ascension, although Jesus is glorified in both instances. But what it is talking about is Jesus giving his life as the perfect sacrifice for sin. This is how Jesus talked about his death in 12:23, **"And Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'** Also in 13:31, **"When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.'** We would never think of crucifixion as glorification, but it is at the cross he leaves all honour and ease, and suffers in the most painful and humiliating way to pay the debt of sin we owe. We understand God's justice and love, his wrath and mercy at the cross.

Now let me just give this caution here, because it is not like the Spirit of God has not been active in the lives of believers at this point. Jesus explains how anyone comes to a saving knowledge of Christ whether in the Old Testament or New is in John 3:3-8, **"Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.'**" But the New Testament makes it clear that the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is going to be different in this day and age than in other ages. We see the coming of the Spirit of God on the day of Pentecost in the Book of Acts. Acts has been called "The Acts of the Apostles," but it could be called "The Acts of the Spirit." And if we put this all together we realize that the Spirit did not come in his fullness until after the work of Jesus is completed. Individuals would come to Christ through the message of Jesus crucified through the

power of the Spirit, and they would be transformed through the power of the Spirit into the image of Jesus Christ. He would change us so much that we would actually become benefits and blessings to others because he flows out of us. We believe, are justified, and then we are changed - that is sanctification.

And we need to see who this promise of the Spirit is given to, look at verse 39 again, **“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.”** Notice that middle phrase, “whom those who believed in him were to receive.” Now this was an extraordinary truth and a glorious truth that was lived out in the first century and throughout this Christian Era. One of the signs that we have believed on Christ and that we are his is the Spirit of God in the life of the believer. Paul says in Romans 8:9, **“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”** 8:14 says, **“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”** And 8:16, **“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”** One of the signs of salvation is having the Spirit of God.

And this Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity of God is given to whoever believes on Jesus Christ for salvation. Back in that ancient culture the spirit of a certain deity would indwell or control or inhabit a certain person, but it was not all people, but only important and significant people. And there would be evidence of that deity taking residence in that person. Many times they would be taken off into trances or they would start to make unintelligible sounds. Much like you hear in the modern Charismatic Movement. But how do we know that we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us? And the way we know is by what he produces through a love of Jesus Christ that did not exist before. Galatians 5:22-23 says, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”** None of these characteristics can be established or cultivated in self-loving and self-centred individuals. All all of these characteristics makes us profitable to others, streams of living water.

Listen to what William Farley writes, in his book *Gospel Powered Humility*, **“This is the best way to measure God’s presence. It is not ‘barking in the Spirit,’ ‘laughing in the Spirit,’ being ‘slain in the Spirit,’ or even mighty miracles. We want miracles, but they can occur without God’s being present in a saving way (see Matt. 7:21–23). All of these the devil can counterfeit. But the things that neither the devil nor the flesh will ever attempt to counterfeit are genuine convictions of sin, the fear of God, and the subsequent peace with God that is a fruit of faith in the gospel.”**

We asked what God is doing in our lives in the here and now, in between the time we trusted in Christ until our home going. And this is what he is doing - changing us to look more like Jesus Christ. Remember, we are made in the image of God but that image has been marred by the fall, but it is being recreated in us in such a way that we are a blessing to others around us. We not only speak forth that gospel but live in light of that gospel in the power of the Spirit. We are living waters.