“Rivers of Living Water”
March 16, 2004
Text: John 7:37-39

Water has played a major role in the history of Israel.

* E.g. when Lot separated from Abraham, because of disputes between their herdsmen, Lot chose the valley of the Jordan because it was “well watered” (Gen 13:10).

* Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain, because of the lack of rain in Israel, resulting in famine. As a result, his family spent the next 400 years there, then re-emerged in the Exodus, as a nation.

* Ruth became the daughter-in-law of Naomi because a lack of rain had forced Naomi & her husband Elimelech to leave Israel & go to the land of Moab—where her son met Ruth. Ruth went on to produce some very eminent descendants, including David—and Jesus.

* In the NT, the church at Antioch sent a large contribution to the church in Jerusalem, because of a prophecy that they were about to suffer from famine, again due to a lack of rain.

The land of Israel is virtually always on the brink of famine. The vast majority of their rain comes in 5 months (Dec to Mar), & most of it falls in a relatively small area on the western slopes of the central mountains—very little falls east of the Jordan River.
In the northern Jordan valley the average annual rainfall is 16 inches, 81% of which evaporates, 9% flows into the Salt Sea becoming unusable, & only 10% infiltrates the soil & only part of that enters the underground water supply (the aquifer).

God chose this land for Israel, knowing that its lack of water would always force them to depend on Him, for their survival.

In Lev 26, He told them=> “If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out, / then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear their fruit” (26:3-4).

But then God added that, if they would not obey Him=> “I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze” (26:19).

The sky would produce no rain, & the parched earth would produce nothing for them to eat.

Unfortunately, Israel had repeatedly disobeyed the Lord, and He had sent them drought after draught, just as He had warned.

But God had also promised that someday a Messiah would come, set up His kingdom, and send God’s blessings (including water) showering down upon it in abundance.

E.g. Isa 35 [Isaiah]=> “Then the lame will leap like a deer, & the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness & streams in the Arabah [a
Man needs water even more than he needs food.

W/o water, the balance between the fluid levels w/i a person’s cells. & of those outside his cells, is disrupted.

The cells start sending his brain signals to fix this problem, which the person experiences as a sensation of thirst. Then his cells start grabbing water, taking it in from their surroundings, until they ultimately swell/burst.

This, in turn, leads to seizures & finally even death.

The Jewish prophets used this phenomenon of thirst as an analogy for the desperate spiritual needs of man’s soul, such as its need for salvation, & spiritual life.

E.g. Isaiah wrote (12:2-3)=> “Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust & not be afraid; For the LORD GOD is my strength & song, And He has become my salvation. / Therefore you will joyously draw water From the springs of salvation.”

In Isaiah 55, God had prophesied=> “Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy & eat. / Incline your ear & come to Me. Listen, that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant w/ you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David”

(Isa 55:1, 3).

God wasn’t talking about literal water or literal thirst here, but the thirst of the soul, which could be assuaged by the coming Messiah.
He would be the suffering Servant of chapters 53 & 54 (just before this).
I.e., Isaiah was calling on the people of Israel to believe in Jesus X, 7 centuries before He was even born.

**In today’s text, Jesus Himself became the fulfillment of Isa 55, calling Jewish people at the Feast of Booths to come to Him for relief of their spiritual thirst, by receiving the water of salvation…**

We’ll discover in this text, 4 great disclosures about such water:

* The great procession=> * The great prompting,

* The great promise—and=> * The great prospect.

* **The Great Procession**

[John 7:37a]=> “Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out…,”

**As we have seen in the past, the “feast” being observed was the joyous Feast of Booths/Tabernacles.**

It took place in the autumn, as God’s people celebrated the fact that He had once again given them a plentiful harvest.

It also commemorated His faithfulness 15 centuries earlier, when He had brought their ancestors, living in tents, safely through their wilderness wanderings in the Sinai Desert.

That being the central theme of this feast, God had directed them to construct tent-like booths out of tree branches, to live in during the 7 days of this warm autumn festival.
A large number of animal sacrifices were offered every day as part of this celebration.

**One unique facet of the Feast of Booths was a water ceremony.**

Each day, during the morning sacrifice, a priest would walk from the Temple, carrying a golden pitcher, and he would lead a procession of people to the Pool of Siloam. There he would fill the pitcher w/ water and walk in procession back to the Temple.

As he re-entered it, a number of rams-horn trumpets would begin to blow, signaling that this was to be a joyous occasion.

The Temple choir began to sing the Hallel (Psa 113-118) as this priest passed through the outer court & entered the innermost court, where he circled the Altar of Sacrifice, still carrying the water.

When the choir sang Psa 118, everyone in the Temple shook a *lulab* in his right hand, and held up a piece of citron fruit w/ his left hand as an act of thanks/praise to God.

A *lulab* was made up of a branch from a fragrant myrtle tree, a willow twig, and a palm branch, all tied together.

God had directed (Lev 23:40) that these branches be used, adding, “& you shall *rejoice* before the
So as they did this, they all shouted 3 times=>
“Give thanks to the Lord.”
The priest carrying the water, poured it out before the Lord at the altar, which was a sacrifice of praise to God, but also served to remind the Lord’s people of several other truths/promises=>
1) Of how God had miraculously provided water from a rock during Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness.
2) Of God’s promise to provide water in abundance during the future days of His messianic Kingdom, if the people would obey His commands.
3) Of God’s promise to pour out the blessing of salvation & spiritual cleansing on His people in the last days.

As you can see, water was the main theme throughout this part of the Feast of Booths.

And it was in this context, that Jesus now stood up in the Temple and prompted the people to come to Him, for relief from spiritual thirst.

* The Great Prompting

[Verse 37b]=> [Jesus was] “...saying, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.’”
John has told us that X had come to the feast in the middle of the week, & now this was the last day of that feast. John says that at this point, Jesus stood up & cried out.

Like most teachers, He usually sat & quietly dialogued/reasoned w/ His listeners, but now He stood up & cried aloud.

His pleading took on an urgent tone of earnestness because the people to whom He was speaking would be leaving to go back to their homes in the next day or so.

This would undoubtedly be the last time He’d ever have, to impress the truth on many of their hearts.

If they didn’t believe Him now, they could very easily die in their sins—so He now stood up, & cried out.

Jesus—deeply moved w/ tender concern for their souls—earnestly prompted them to come/believe in Him, crying=> “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.”

In Nov, 1885, Charles Spurgeon was so sick, he had to leave London’s cold/damp climate for a time to recover.

The Sunday before he left, he preached on this very verse & said:

I have deep fellowship in that spirit this morning [the urgency of X’s preaching on the last day of the feast]. I shall not have another morning’s discourse w/ you for some time, & perhaps, I may never have another. I go from you for a season, & my voice will be silent among you. Therefore I said within my heart that I would preach this morning upon the one subject, of coming to Christ.”
Every preacher should preach w/ the urgency of X that day, assuming it will be his last chance to give his people the truth about our Lord, that could save their souls.

**The subject of Jesus’ teaching, was Himself=> He said,**

* “Come to Me.”

He is the only One who can rid a person of spiritual thirst, and give that person the water of eternal life.

* Notice how broad His invitation was=> “**anyone who is thirsty.**”

These people were visiting Jerusalem from all over the Roman Empire, but anyone there was invited to come.

The only prerequisite=> that he be thirsty, spiritually.

When X said “*anyone,*” He was really saying “everyone.”

Still today Jesus invites anyone/everyone who so desires, to come unto Him, & find salvation for his soul.

Do you desire to have a relationship w/ God, to escape the wrath to come, & to be made pure from sin?

Do you want a higher/holier/loftier kind of life?

Then Jesus says to you too=> “*Come to Me and drink.*”

* But in spite of the wideness of X’s invitation, there is a narrowness about mankind’s acceptance of it, reflected in the word “*If.*”

*“If anyone is thirsty”—most people feel no spiritual thirst at all.*
In Mt 22:14, X Himself said=> “Many are called, but few are chosen,” and until a person receives the H.S.’s regenerating call, he will not sense his own spiritual thirst.

Most people are content w/ themselves, & w/ their little world. They do not acknowledge that they are wasting away inwardly, their souls being desiccated w/ spiritual thirst.

* You can talk to them about their sin, God’s judgment, & the terrors of hell, until your out of breath.
* You can describe the glories/joys of heaven.
* You can speak eloquently about the peaceful fruit of righteousness, & God’s amazing grace;

But their eyes will just glaze over w/ boredom, because these eternal realities are meaningless to them.

However, if you are one of the rare exceptions to the rule—
one of the few who aren’t totally dead to spiritual feeling;
If your soul is profoundly discontent/unsatisfied w/ worldly pleasure;
Then you are one of those for whom X’s words have soul-saving meaning—“\textit{Come to Me & drink.}’’

You are one of the fortunate few to whom the H.S. has given true spiritual thirst.
It is to such rare exceptions as you, that Jesus’ promptings in our text are directed.
Someone: What exactly did Jesus mean by “thirst”?

It’s a spiritual sense of emptiness that cries out to be filled.
It’s an awareness of lacking something essential to real life.
If you feel a vague sense of despondency, heaviness, & a desire for something better/holier—you are thirsty.
So come to Jesus, & drink Him in, till your hearts is full.
If you, to any degree, long for mercy, spiritual renewal, and a closer, more loving relationship w/ God, you thirst.
Say w/i your own heart, “I may not be as thirsty as I should be, but still I do have such desires, & I’m not going to rest easy until Jesus satisfies them, w/ His own goodness.”

* The Great Promise

[Verse 38] (Jesus) => “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”

In order to understand this as those Jews at the Feast of Booths would have, when X said it, remember 3 facts=>

1) This was a celebration of God’s taking Israel safely through the waterless Sinai desert, & bringing them into their own Promised Land.
The ever-present threat that they, their children, & their cattle would die of thirst had hung over their ancient ancestors’ heads for 40 years.
But God had preserved them by giving them a Rock from which water had burst/gushed forth saving their lives.

In Ex 17:6, God had told Moses=> “‘Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; And you shall strike the rock & water will come out of it, that the people may drink.’ And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.”

Moses struck the rock, water came forth, and the people were saved.

It must have been an enormous amount of water to meet the needs of 2,000,000 people, and all their cattle.

But in I Cor 10:4, Paul gives us a wonderful insight into the nature of that Rock=> “All drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.”

The Jews had a legend that the rock had followed their forefathers throughout their wanderings.

Paul was telling them this rock was the pre-incarnate X, who was following/sustaining His people.

The same X who still protects/sustains His people even today.

Jesus prob. stood/shouted, just as the priest poured out the pitcher of water at the altar at the Feast of Booths on the last day, commemorating that great event in Israel’s history.

He cried out=> “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to
Me and drink.”

He was the Rock who had satisfied Israel w/ literal water, & He was the only One who could satisfy His people’s souls w/ the water of salvation and eternal life.

2) One aspect of the water-pouring ceremony at the Feast of Booths was a celebration of the hope that when Messiah brought in the Kingdom, He would fill the land w/ life-giving water.

Zech 14:7-8 (Zechariah)—“In that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea & the other half toward the western sea.”

Ezek 47:9—“There will be very many fish, for these waters go there and the others become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes.”

Much of Israel itself is hot/arid, so the Jews anticipated an abundance of fresh water in the Messianic Kingdom.

In Isa 41:18, God had promised=> “I will open rivers on the bare heights & springs in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water And the dry land fountains of water.”

In Israel, where famine could always eliminate the water of life there could be no joy w/o the hope of plentiful water someday.

The people at the feast would have heard Jesus promising to forever provide them w/ the water they needed.
3) As we saw earlier, the prophets had turned this fixation on water into a reminder, that spiritual life flows from the Spirit, just as God had provided literal water for physical life, from a Rock.

And God had promised in Isa 44:3=> “I will pour out water on the thirsty land And streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring And My blessing on your descendants.”

In Isa 12, He had said=> “Therefore you will joyously draw water From the springs of salvation.”

All of this was the background of the water ceremony during the Feast of Booths.

Then Jesus stood up & cried, “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water,’” meaning that He was the Messiah, & He would someday fulfill all these hopes/dreams for Israel as a nation.

But for those individuals who believed in Him right then, the joy of eternal life was already about to be fulfilled, through the H.S.

* **The Great Prospect** (of the H.S.)

[Verse 39]=> “But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

The great/joyous prospect of all the spiritual blessings of the Kingdom was about to be realized through the H.S.
Jesus was about to be glorified through His death, His resurrection, and His ascension into the glory of Heaven. And from heaven, He would send the Spirit back to earth, as He promised in Jn 15:26 & Jn 16:7. The Spirit was not going to come until Jesus returned to His glory in Heaven, & sent the Spirit back. That would happen on the Day of Pentecost, as the H.S. was poured forth, to indwell believers, forming a permanent relationship w/ them unlike anything OT believers had ever experienced prior to that day. And it would be through the H.S. w/i them that X would fulfill Jn 4:14, where He’d said to the woman at the well=> “the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”

This doesn’t mean the H.S. wasn’t on earth before Pentecost.

* Gen 1:2 says that, even at the time of the creation, the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

* Peter wrote that the OT prophets had spoken from God as they were “moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21).

* Even in the OT, eternal life was imparted to people by God’s Spirit.
But on Pentecost, the Spirit began establishing a new kind of relationship w/ believers, permanently indwelling them, gifting/empowering them, & baptizing them into X’s Body, the Church.

Jesus described this new change of relationship to the Apostles by saying—“You know Him [the H.S.] because He abides with you, & will be in you” (Jn 14:17).

They went from a “with Him” relationship w/ the Spirit, to an “in Him” relationship.

After Pentecost, the HS became so closely identified w/ Xns that not only was He in them, Paul said they/we are now “in the Spirit” (Rom 8:9).

Not only are we “in X Jesus,” we’re also “in the Spirit.”

He also wrote that God saves us=> “according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, / whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Tit 3:5-6).

In verse 38 of our own text, Jesus promised this, regarding the believer=> “From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.”

Not only is that a promise of full spiritual satisfaction for believers themselves;

It’s also a promise of spiritual overflow/outflow, as the H.S. manifests Himself through the believer’s ministry to others.
Jesus told the Apostles—“He who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father” (14:12).

So a Xn does those “greater works” thru the H.S., as the springs of living water w/i him spill over onto others.

Our spiritual giftedness is a “manifestation of the Spirit” (I Cor 12:7).

But none of that would happen until Jesus returned to His Father in heaven, & sent the H.S. back at Pentecost, to be poured out in fullness on/into the hearts/minds of believers.

Before then, the disciples were like children, but afterward, they spoke/acted like bold/grown men of the faith.

And through them the Spirit has changed the world.

If you say, “That sounds good to me. How do I get in on it?”

Ans: Jesus, who gives the water which quenches spiritual thirst, directs you too, to come to Him and drink Him in, by faith. Believe that He is the Son of God who was crucified, buried and raised back to life to pay the penalty, for your sins.

And that He then ascended into Heaven, where He intercedes for us w/ the Father, & saves our souls.

If you are feeling a spiritual thirst w/i, come to X by faith.

His spiritual water will cleanse you of sin, & fill your soul to complete satisfaction.

He calls to you, saying=> “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, & I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28).
He’s not far from you—just a whispered prayer away.
You don’t need to prove yourself to Him, or exercise any sort of resolute willpower, in order to come to Him.
Just submit yourself to Him, entrust yourself to Him, & yield your will to Him, trusting Him to quench your spiritual thirst, & give rest to your weary soul.

Then, having come to Jesus in faith, drink Him in by faith.
Drinking isn’t difficult—it only requires that you trust whatever you take in, to be good (not harmful) for you.
Babies do it best, because they don’t hesitate for a moment to put in their mouths in whatever is offered to them, knowing it will take away the gnawing hunger/thirst they feel.
Almost any living creature can drink—a wounded deer, a baby chick, even the earth as it drinks in the rain, that God sends down on it from heaven.
So take Jesus into your heart by faith, w/o hesitation, allowing His love/goodness to flood/fill/satisfy your soul.
Just as Jesus did that last day at the Feast, earnestly pleading w/thirsty people to come to Him for the water of life, He stands up before you today, calling you to believe in Him. Amazingly, we should be pleading w/Him, for permission to come, but there He stands entreat us to come.
Only gross hardness of heart would decline such a wonderful opportunity to find relief of spiritual thirst, being offered an abundance, of the water of eternal life.

Having received such a gracious invitation, would it not be crass of me/you to decline Jesus’ offer, & not come to Him?
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Text: John 7:37-39

1. Water has played a major role in the [16 history] of Israel.  
   Gen 13:10; Lev 26:3-4, 19

2. God promised that someday a Messiah would come, set up His kingdom, and send God’s blessings (including [12 water]) showering down in abundance.  
   Isa 35:6-7; 12:2-3; 55:1, 3

3. In today’s text Jesus became the fulfillment of Isaiah 55 calling Jewish people to come to Him for relief of their [20 spiritual] thirst with the water of salvation…  
   * The Great Procession  
   [John 7:37a]

   4. One aspect of the Feast of Booths was a [12 water] ceremony; a priest would lead a procession of people to the Pool of Siloam.  
      Psa 113-118; Lev 23:40; Zech 13:1

   * The Great Prompting  
   [Verse 37b]

   5. Jesus, deeply moved with tender concern for their souls, prompted them to come and [16 believe] in Him.  
   
   6. Still today Jesus invites anyone and everyone who so desires to come unto Him and find [20 salvation] for his soul.  
      Mt 22:14

   7. What did Jesus mean by “thirsty”? It’s a spiritual sense of emptiness that cries out to be [14 filled].  

   * The Great Promise  
   [Verse 38]

To understand this as those at the Feast of Booths would have, remember three facts…  
* 8. This was a celebration of God’s taking Israel safely through the [20 waterless] Sinai desert.  
   Ex 17:6; I Cor 10:4
*9. One aspect of the water-pouring ceremony was a celebration of the hope that when Messiah brought in the Kingdom, He would fill the land with [10] life-giving water. 

Zech 14:7-8; Ezek 47:9; Isa 41:18

*10. The prophets had turned this fixation on water into a reminder that spiritual life flows from the [14] Spirit just as God had provided water.

Isa 44:3; 12:3

* The Great Prospect [Verse 39]


Jn 4:17; Rom 8:9; Titus 3:5-6; Jn 14:12

12. But none of that would happen until Jesus returned to His Father in heaven and sent the Holy Spirit, to be poured out in [20] fullness on and into the hearts of believers.

Mt 11:28

13. Jesus stands before you today, calling you; only gross hardness of heart would decline such an opportunity to find relief from spiritual thirst, being offered the water of eternal life.