

Come All You Thirsty

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[0 : 00] So, John chapter 7, and we left off last Sunday in about verse 32.

I'm just going to... So, we made it down to verse 32, and as we got there, we saw that things were starting to really heat up between Jesus and the crowd that was gathered.

Jesus is in the temple courts, and he's teaching the many who have come to gather for the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles, and we saw last Sunday how there was quite a combination of responses within the crowd to Jesus.

Verse 30, at this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. Still many in the crowd believed in him.

They said, when the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man? The implied answer, I don't think so. He must be the one.

[1 : 20] So, some are looking to get Jesus arrested, while others are expressing confidence and faith that he's the Messiah. Verse 32, the Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him.

Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him. So, the Pharisees, some of them are here in the crowd, listening to all that Jesus is saying.

They're hearing all the whisperings of the people in the crowd. They're hearing some of those people who are saying, look, here he is, and the religious leaders aren't saying a word to him. Maybe they've concluded that he is the Messiah. And the Pharisees who are here listening to this, they go back to the chief priests, the leaders of the Pharisees.

And in turn, the temple guards are sent out to arrest Jesus. The word for guards, in the original language, it's kind of like our word for attendance.

[2 : 23] From what we know, these men were descended from Levi, just like the priests and everyone else who served in and around the temple were supposed to be. So, when you hear guards or temple police, as some translations say, it's probably best not to think of them as thugs with shields and spears or as rent-a-cops or as, you know, the British royal guard with those big black fair-fur caps just standing motionless at the entrance all day long.

Exactly what these guards did, we don't know all the details. But they seem to take direction from the chief priests and religious leaders, and they seem to be mainly employed in matters related to the Jewish law, enforcing that, and keeping order at the temple.

So, the religious leaders, they're thinking, all right, this has gone far enough, this is getting out of hand. Jesus is beginning to sway some of the people here. We've got to put a stop to this.

We've got to bring Jesus in. So, they send the temple guards out to arrest Jesus. So, what happens next? Well, John, the one who is telling the story here, decides to hold us in suspense for just a little bit.

Instead of telling us right away, he flips back to what's, back to Jesus and what's going on in the temple courts, I think probably while all this is happening. Jesus said, It's kind of a mysterious thing to say, isn't it?

[4 : 04] Almost like something out of a movie that gets said before the main character goes into hiding. Jesus says, My time with you is short, and then I'm going to the one who sent me.

Of course, because we've been listening closely and following along with the story, we know what Jesus means. We know he means, I'm going to my Father, to God. He says, You will look for me, but you will not find me.

Where I am going, you cannot come. And of course, the big question on everyone's mind is, well, where is that? Where are you talking about?

Verse 35, So the crowd is perplexed by this.

They can't seem to imagine that there's anywhere Jesus could go or hide where somebody wouldn't be able to find him or follow him. Some of them are speculating that maybe he even has plans to get out of the country, go traveling abroad, though even this idea seems unlikely.

[5 : 26] I mean, surely he wouldn't go and teach the Greeks, would he? What else could he possibly mean? Where I am, you cannot come.

You will not find me. So Jesus tells him that he's soon to leave, to go away, and the crowd is kind of baffled by his words. Verse 37, On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, Now before I read it, let's just notice that there does seem to be a shift in the narrative here.

And we're kind of left to wonder, is this a different day than the day that the guards were sent to arrest Jesus? Or is this the same day? Is it that they went and Jesus was already gone for the day and they came back the next day, the last day of the festival?

Or is this all happening on the same day and John's kind of shuffling things around, trying to bring it all together, things that are all in motion at once and help us see how this all came to a head on the last day?

Again, is Jesus in the temple courts still? Or has he moved to another spot? It's not clearly spelled out in detail. But whatever the case, the guards are still there.

[6 : 44] They're on their mission to arrest Jesus, to bring him to the religious leaders. And John wants us to know that this is happening on the final day of the festival.

So on the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. Can you feel this moment?

Can you feel the impact of these words on the crowd that has gathered? These are quite the words. They remind us of his conversation with the woman at the well.

He talks about being thirsty, about getting a drink from him, about living water. And of course, if we've been listening carefully, we know Jesus is not just talking about physical, tangible water.

[7 : 46] His words obviously have a deeper meaning. Rivers of living water will flow from within the person who believes in me, he says.

What does Jesus mean by that? Thankfully, John, the one who has written all this down for us, the one telling the story, he knows that there's some of us reading who probably need a little help here to understand what Jesus is talking about.

So he explains it in verse 39. By this, he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

Up to that time, the Spirit had not yet been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. So Jesus is talking in metaphor, maybe about something that none of us would have really guessed, unless we had John's help or had been there to ask Jesus about it.

So what's all this about? Well, D.A. Carson, a Bible commentator, had some helpful thoughts here for me this week.

[8 : 58] He reminded me in his commentary that this was the festival of tabernacles, the festival of booths. Now, there's lots that we could dig into about the festival, but one of the things that Carson pointed out to me is that it was a time in which they remembered their journeys through the wilderness.

During that festival, they were actually supposed to set up tents, little tabernacles, and live in them for several days. It was kind of a way for them to reflect back on how God had led their forefathers through the desert from Egypt into the Promised Land.

And so part of the focus of the festival was on how God provided for the Israelites long ago in the wilderness. He provided manna for them to eat when they were hungry, and he provided water for them to drink when they were thirsty.

Water was scarce in the desert, and thirst was felt pretty intensely by the people at many of the places they camped, because some of the places had very little water or even no water.

I just read this past week how God led them to a place where there was no water at all, and then miraculously provided a flow of water to quench the thirst of the whole nation from a rock.

[10 : 21] And not only this, but apparently there were also some traditions, I didn't know about this before, that the Jewish people had at this festival pertaining to water.

According to Carson, on the last day of the festival, they would fill a golden flagon, like a golden jug, with water from the Pool of Siloam, and then they would have this procession up to the temple with the high priest kind of leading them.

And when they entered in through the water gate, there would be a sound of three blasts from the shofar, the trumpet. And then while everybody who was gathered there watched, the priests would kind of do a little procession with this water around the altar, and the temple choir would be there, they'd be singing the Hallel Psalms, the last psalms of the Book of Psalms, and then at the end everybody would shout out, give thanks to the Lord, and the water would be offered along with the morning sacrifice.

Now this whole water in the jar thing was not prescribed in the Old Testament law, but it was apparently something that they did to commemorate and to celebrate, to give thanks for God's provision of water long ago in the wilderness.

We could add to that understanding that there are also many places in the Old Testament scriptures where God uses the language of water as a symbol of cleansing, of giving renewal and life to his people, and even of the coming of the Spirit.

[11 : 54] The prophet Joel spoke of the day when the Spirit would be poured out in the last days upon the people. And so taking all these things together, suddenly we can get a bit of a sense as to why Jesus is suddenly talking about water.

Why might he have said what he did? This is a time in which traditionally thirst and water is very much on the minds of the people. Many of them have traveled from far ways.

They're not currently enjoying the convenience of their own well back home. The festival marks a time in which their ancestors experienced thirst and had their thirst quenched by God's gracious provision.

And for those faithful few, there is a longing for God to fulfill that promise and to pour out his Spirit as he said he would long ago.

Whether Jesus had already said some of these things or taught about these things, we don't know. But this loud cry that he makes to the people didn't just come out of nowhere.

[12 : 58] It's not totally without context. Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.

Jesus is calling anyone who feels that deep thirst within them, anyone who has that longing for God to meet their deepest needs, he's calling them to come to him and drink.

To take his words into themselves to the deepest levels, to believe them, to trust him. Whoever believes in me, says Jesus, rivers of living water will flow from within them.

I love this. Not just a river, but rivers, plural. Not just any water, but living water. The water which gives life.

Not that stagnant stuff in the puddle over there. But the clear, cool, refreshing, revitalizing water that comes from the mountains in the river.

[14 : 17] And not just that these waters in the river will flow to them, but that they will flow forth from within them.

Just as God's provision of water burst forth from the rock to quench the thirst of the whole nation, in the same way, rivers of living water will burst forth from inside you, from the depths, and flow forth. This is a pretty extravagant promise that Jesus is making. Perhaps you remember the words of David long ago in Psalm 23.

He said, you anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. The cup is full, and yet you continue to pour more blessing in until it runs over.

Jesus kind of blows that metaphor out of the water. River, rivers will flow forth from within you. How is this possible?

[15 : 19] What does this mean? We're not the only ones wondering. John tells us that by this, Jesus means the Spirit.

The Spirit of God. God will give His Spirit to dwell in you. And it's God's own Spirit in us who will be the source of these rivers of living water, which are flowing forth from the depths of our beings.

But John tells us that the giving of this gift of the Spirit to those who thirst and come to believe in Him did not happen until later when Jesus was glorified.

And we'll hear more about that later when we get to that in John. But now, John tells us about what the crowd is thinking as they hear these words. Verse 40.

On hearing His words, some of the people said, surely this man is the prophet. Others said, he is the Messiah. Still others asked, how can the Messiah come from Galilee?

[16:30] Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived? Thus the people were divided because of Jesus.

Some wanted to seize Him, but no one laid a hand on Him. So again, we see further division within the crowd. Jesus cries out with these wonderful words of invitation, these wonderful words of life, come to me, all you who are thirsty and drink.

Believe in me. And the response is quite mixed. Some who hear this seem convinced that He is the prophet, like the ultimate prophet promised long ago through Moses.

They're thinking, He does speak the very words of God, just like the prophets of old did. Others seem convinced that He's the Messiah.

They're thinking more in terms of the ultimate king that God promised long ago. But then still others are disagreeing with that. He can't be the Messiah.

[17:41] The scriptures say clearly that the Messiah will be descended from David, will come from the village of Bethlehem, but this man is from Galilee. And I can't help but think, what the irony of this objection.

Again, it just goes to show that this crowd does not know Jesus as well as they think they do. As the other gospel writers make very clear, He is in fact a blood descendant of David.

His whole genealogy is listed out in other gospels. And He was in fact born in Bethlehem, a true history which can be corroborated by a whole bunch of different witnesses.

Even though He now resides in the north, in Galilee, the scripture will be fulfilled. The scepter will not depart from Judah because Jesus is of the line of Judah, the tribe of Judah.

He is a son of David, the son of David, just as the angel said to Mary. So it was a mixed response from the crowd. And again, Jesus tells us, John tells us, that they wanted to seize Jesus, but no one laid a hand on Him.

[18:55] Well finally, let's find out what happened with the temple guards who were also there that day. Verse 45, finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees who asked them, why didn't you bring Him in?

No one ever spoke the way this man does, the guards replied. I love that. These guards also heard what Jesus said that day when He cried out.

I got thinking, you know, they could have given a different reason here. They could have said, well, we didn't arrest Him because we thought it might start a riot and it looked like many in the crowd were believing Him.

They could have said that. But no, instead they chose to say, we didn't arrest Him because no man has ever spoken the way this man does.

They chose not to arrest Jesus that day because they were listening to what He was saying. And maybe, just maybe, they had come to believe in Him too or were on their way.

[20:06] I don't want to speculate too much, but they seemed to regard Jesus well enough that they chose to defy the orders of the ones who sent them. Perhaps even knowing that there could be consequences.

The response of the leaders to this is very telling. Verse 47, You mean He has deceived you also? The Pharisees retorted.

You can just hear the frustration leaking through. Blast you good for nothing temple guards. You're useless. So you've been brainwashed by this guy's teaching too, haven't you?

It's almost like they're trying to shame them. They go on. Have any of the rulers of the Pharisees believed in Him?

No. But this mob that knows nothing of the law, there's a curse on them. You can just feel the animosity, the frustration oozing out of them.

[21:13] You can hear the pride swelling. We're the rulers. We're the Pharisees. We're the religious leaders, the experts in the law. None of us has believed in Him.

You're just like all those idiots in the crowd who are completely ignorant of the law. they're accursed. But perhaps unbeknownst to them, there is one ruler who might be getting close or perhaps already believe in Jesus.

And at just the right moment he steps forward just to show actually there might be somebody here among us who does believe Him. verse 50.

Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?

Very wise reply. Not only does he let the guards know that, yeah, there actually might be someone from among the leaders who is not sure that Jesus is the bad guy, but he also calls the Pharisees out on their scheming here.

[22 : 32] I mean, you guys are thinking here and acting and treating him as if he's already been condemned, as if the trial's already been taking place, the verdict is already decided.

When are we going to have a proper trial here? And it's here that the Pharisees show their true colors because the crowd's not here, this is just an internal meeting here, the leaders and the guards, if they only intended to bring Jesus in for a fair trial, this was their opportunity to say so. They could have just said, Nicodemus, that's the very reason we sent the guards to arrest him. We wanted to bring him in so that we could have a proper hearing and get to the bottom of this. But that's not how they respond or what they say. Instead, they bark back at Nicodemus and shut him down. Verse 52, Are you from Galilee too?

Look into it and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee. We've got a little bit of regional tension going on here. Like, what?

[23 : 45] Are you a Galilean too? Another one of those inferior Galileans, second-class northerners, do your homework, bub. Get your scriptures out and read them.

You'll see there's no prophet coming out of Galilee, spoken of there. Just shut down. It happens today.

We hear about it in the news and it happened back then too. Nicodemus was just stereotyped, insulted, and cancelled. Why?

Why? I think because his comment hit a little too close to home. He knew that what they were planning was not a proper hearing or trial for Jesus.

In their minds, Jesus was already on death row. So the plot thickens. Just like in the days long before, the corrupt and wicked rulers sent in the enforcers to go after God's man.

[24 : 50] And again, just like in the days before, God delivers his anointed, his chosen one, by turning the very hearts of the men sent to arrest him.

As hard as the religious leaders try, they so far are unsuccessful in keeping Jesus from speaking the words which God has sent him to speak.

And the message of God is ringing out. And while there's opposition to it, and some do not believe it, some are angry and want Jesus arrested, some are truly hearing and they are coming to believe that Jesus truly is who he says he is.

Well, what's here in all of this for us this morning? I want to point us back to these words moments as Jesus stood and cried out.

I want you to imagine yourself there in the crowd that moment as he stood up and cried out, let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

[26 : 00] Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. what kind of response is Jesus looking for from them in this moment?

It's the same response that he's looking for from you and me. Are you thirsty? Does your soul thirst?

The truth is that we all thirst. We all have deep longings in our souls. we were made to thirst and be quenched, both in the outward physical way and also in the inward way.

And so in some ways the question is not so much do you thirst, but how do you quench your thirst?

What do you thirst for? Long ago through the prophet Jeremiah, God said this, he said, this is Jeremiah 2.13, my people have committed two sins, they have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

This is what the wilderness wanderings were meant to teach them long ago. God led them on purpose into places where there was no water, so that they would come to see that he is the one who can quench our thirst, and not just our bodily thirst, but the thirst of our souls, the deeper thirst, that deep longing and need that we have for life in here.

[27 : 49] water. God himself is the spring of living water, but we have this bent called sin where we tend to turn away from him and seek our own alternative sources which cannot even compare to him.

which would you rather drink? The fresh clear flow of a spring near the base of a mountain or that water that's been sitting there in a cistern in the ground, that broken cistern that's cracked where the water leaks out and the dirt seeps in?

What do you thirst for? What have you been trying to quench the thirst of your soul with? the pleasures of this world?

Stuff? Money? Netflix? Facebook? Food?

We were made to thirst for God himself just as our bodies were made to thirst for water. We were made to cry out like David did in the desert O God, you are my God.

[29 : 08] Earnestly I seek you. I thirst for you. My whole being longs for you in a dry and parched land where there is no water.

The good news of Jesus is not just something for our heads to believe in. It's not just a ticket to hold on to for a later time. The good news of Jesus is this.

God wants to quench the thirst of your soul. He wants to provide you with that drink that will truly satisfy and refresh you and give life to you.

And not just a drop or two or a little cup that will leave you longing for more. No, he wants to put the fountain of all life itself inside you.

He wants to put his own spirit, the source of life, in you and cause his rivers of living water to flow forth from inside you.

[30 : 11] Are you thirsty for that? Do you want that? Then leave your broken cisterns behind and come to Jesus and drink what he is holding out to you.

Believe in him. Listen to his words. Take them into your heart. Follow him. Surrender to him. And this extravagant gift of life is yours.

This is the good news of Jesus. I pray that we'll believe it. Father in heaven, we thank you that you sent Jesus into our world to quench our thirsts, to give us the ultimate gift, the ultimate drink.

I pray that our hearts would embrace that. Lord, I know in my own heart this week, I've found myself distracted and looking at all kinds of different things going on around me, longing, looking for relief and refreshment in these trying times, but it's you.

You're the one that we need. You're the one who quenches our thirst so that we never thirst again. Help us to see that. Help us to cling to that truth in these days ahead and to share it with others.

[31 : 45] In Jesus' name, amen.