

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

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[0 : 00] So we're going to be in that passage from John chapter 7 this morning, verses 37 to 39. But it's Pentecost Day, as has been said a number of times already, so maybe you might have expected a talk from that passage in Acts chapter 2, the coming of the Spirit.

But instead we're in John 7 because it's here that Jesus speaks about that first day of Pentecost and explains some of its significance. And although there are just three words here, I have to say they are utterly glorious.

J.C. Ryle, the former Bishop of Liverpool, begins his commentary on these passages, or this passage with these words. He says this, It has been said that there are some passages in Scripture which deserve to be printed in letters of gold.

Maybe you've got a red letter Bible. Ryle is saying these are better. These are the top words of Jesus. Of such passages the verses before us is one, for they contain one of those full, wide, free invitations to mankind which makes the gospel of Christ so eminently the good news of God. And he's right, isn't he? The invitation Jesus gives here is for anyone who thirsts without exception. It's to come to Christ himself without tests or qualification. It's to receive nothing less than the Spirit of God without measure or limit.

[1 : 28] And I hope that over these next few minutes we might increase our thirst for more of what Jesus has to give. Now John tells us that Jesus made this announcement on the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

You can read about that in Leviticus chapter 23. At that festival the Jews were told to live in booths for seven days. It was a reminder of those 40 years of desert wanderings where they didn't have a home.

And if you've read that account in the book of Exodus and beyond, you'll know that throughout that time they faced physical hunger, which God provided through manna and quail, but also they faced physical thirst as well.

And on occasions God provided a miraculous solution, bringing water from the rock on at least two occasions. Maybe that's why over the centuries a tradition had grown up around the Feast of Tabernacles, that on each of those seven days a large gold pitcher was taken to the pool of Siloam, filled up with water from the pool, and then processed with great solemnity through the streets, into the temple where it was poured out all over the altar.

A reminder of their previous thirst and God's gracious provision for them. But it's on the eighth day, when the festival is over, and the people are celebrating with a sacred assembly, that Jesus stands up.

[2 : 54] And he stands up in a notable place, and he stands up with a loud, commanding voice that makes his invitation. Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.

It's as if he's saying that the water that we've had in the festival, well that's done.

It's gone. There's no more water being poured out. If you want real water, living water, you come to me. Come to me. I've got water that will never run out.

Now just looking through these verses, I think there are four questions that come out. They're all fairly straightforward, I think. Who is the water for? How do we receive this water? What effect does this water have?

And the last one, a personal one. Will we come to Jesus and drink? Keep that in mind as we go through. Firstly though, who is the water for? Well, it's obvious.

[3 : 51] We've had that already. It's for everyone. Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. The invitation Jesus gives is not just for a particular race or particular gender.

It's not just for those who are old or young. Peter announces that, doesn't he, in Acts chapter 2. Neither is it just for those with particular qualifications. For those who might be considered good or morally upright citizens.

This water isn't a special water for those who are ordained in some kind of priestly role. No, this invitation is for anyone. Meaning everyone.

At all people, at all times of history. Whoever they are. That's who is invited to drink. The only stipulation Jesus gives is this water is for anyone who is thirsty.

Got to be thirsty to drink from this water. Thirsty for what? Well, people thirst for all kinds of things, don't they? They strive for all kinds of things.

[4 : 53] Good health, success, recognition, happiness, riches, experience, possessions, comfort, relationships, whatever. That's not what Jesus has in mind.

Not that they're necessarily bad things. But Jesus has got something far greater in mind here. I think he's thinking on to the Sermon of the Mount. Remember what Jesus says there?

He says that all those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. That is, it's those who recognise their spiritual poverty before God.

Who mourn over their sin. Who recognise that in themselves there is nothing they can do to make themselves right with God. These are the ones who are thirsty.

The ones who know their need of God's forgiveness. Who long for God's presence. The ones who come to God with empty hands. These are the thirsty ones.

[5 : 49] If I might mix the metaphors a bit. Mary sings something similar in the Magnificat, doesn't she? She says it's the hungry who are filled. And the rich, those who think they've got enough already who go away empty.

It's the self-sufficient who are sent away. The ones who think that, well, we don't need God. We don't need Jesus. Because God cannot pour out his living water on those whose hands are full with other things.

If our hands are full of our own good works. Or religious devotion. Or by living a moral life that I will please God. Or if we're holding on to some sin that we will not release.

But God cannot pour out his spirit on us as he wants. It doesn't matter our level of religious devotion or moral living. There is no way we can impress God.

And put him in our debt so that he will give us the spirit. The religious leaders of the day were like that. They felt that they were so spiritually healthy that they didn't need a doctor for their souls.

[6 : 53] That's why Jesus said elsewhere that he came for the sick. Not for those who in their own eyes at least were completely healthy. Got to be thirsty to receive from Jesus this living water.

So are you thirsty this morning? Are you thirsty? Do you recognise your own spiritual poverty? Do you long to know that your sins have been forgiven?

And if you know that has been done in the past. Do you have a thirst for a closer communion with God? To know a greater victory in that daily battle with the pull of the flesh. That you might grow in holiness.

And in the character and lifestyle of Jesus. If so then the water of life is for you. Like real physical thirst. True spiritual thirst is an acute and tormenting thing sometimes.

A desire that cannot be satisfied until the water of life is drunk. It was there if we'd read on to the end of Acts chapter 2. It would have been there in the cry of the crowds.

[7 : 54] Peter what must we do? It was there in the cry of the question for the Philippian jailer. The same kind of question as well.

Both had their hearts pierced with the conviction of sin. Stirred by the good news of the gospel. They cried out what must I do to be saved? Where can I get this water? Where can I find relief from this anguish?

If that's how you're feeling this morning. Then there is good news. This water is for you. Are you thirsty today? If we are. Secondly how do we receive this living water?

Well again Jesus instructions are pretty clear aren't they? We're to come to him. Come to me if you are thirsty. And I will give you this drink. He says the same thing in a different way in verse 38.

Whoever believes in me. As the scriptures have said. Rivers of living water will flow from within.

See having recognised our thirst. Our need of God's righteousness.

[8 : 57] We must come to Jesus. And of course we'll only come if we believe that he has the water to give us. That he is the divine son of God. The Messiah. The Christ.

The one who died for our sins and rose again for our justification. That's why Peter before he promises this gift of the spirit to all who come. Focuses his Pentecost sermon on Jesus. The first part of his sermon that we heard read to us. Peter talks about the signs that the crowd are seeing. The tongues. The flames of fire. And he says this is evidence of what the prophet Joel had said.

That this is the last stage of history now. The gates for heaven are open wide. The last days are here because the Messiah has come. And then he goes on to say well that Messiah that we know has come.

Well that's Jesus. You've seen his miracles. Verse 22. That shows who he is. And the last chunk of the sermon. Verses 23 to 36. Peter says it's in Jesus' death and resurrection.

[10:04] That show that he is both Lord and Christ. God come to earth to save people from their sins. And bring them home. See it is the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

The way he is glorified. To use the language of John 7. That opens up the way for the spirit to come. That had to happen before the spirit would be poured out. So if we're to come to Jesus. We've got to have some understanding. That he is able to meet our needs and quench our thirst. That he is God. That his grace is sufficient to us. That he will welcome all who come.

It's a head and a heart thing isn't it? Got to believe certain things in our head. And feel in our hearts. Have that desire to come. We believe some truths about Jesus.

And have enough faith that we come to him. But notice that we don't come to Christ's church for the water. Just as we don't come to Christ's ministers for the water.

[11:03] Or to Christ's sacraments. They're all important means of grace. Of growing in our knowledge and fellowship with the Lord. But on their own they cannot save.

Because they are not the ones that has the living water. Churches and ministers and sacraments are wonderful. They point people to Jesus. But he alone is the source. He alone is the spring. The giver of water. The water that wells up to eternal life in us. So we need to come to him. So can I ask you very humbly this morning.

Have you come to Jesus? Or is it more the case that for more years that you can count. You have simply been coming to church. See having a religious life that speaks about Jesus.

But that doesn't have a living encounter with or experience of Jesus. Is not the same thing. It's not the same thing. Jesus is the giver of this water.

[12:03] We must come to know him. And if we come what effect does it have? I have to say there is a whole sermon series just in this one answer.

But I will be brief. Don't worry. I'm not going to preach you 15 sermons in one hit. But think of the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter 4. What does Jesus tell her? This woman with such immense guilt over her shameful past.

Jesus said the water he would give would be living water welling up to eternal life. He was offering her a new start. Think of Jesus coming to or meeting with Nicodemus in the darkness of night. Nicodemus says what must I do to have eternal life? Jesus says you must be born again. You must be born of water and the spirits. Well here is the spirit being given.

Being spoken of as a fount of new life welling up from within. The Holy Spirit is the sign, the means as well of that eternal life coming.

[13:06] And of course the water Jesus speaks of is God's power and presence to all those who believe in Christ. As we come and repent of our sin and put our faith in Jesus so we receive Jesus.

We're born again. We receive his spirit. At that point our old life is over and a new life begins. It's a life lived in with God and for God.

In the power of God. For the glory of God. With the expectation that when this life is over we will see him face to face and enjoy him forever.

That life starts now. And it is the Holy Spirit in us who brings that life to us. The Holy Spirit is the one who assures us that our forgiveness is possible.

We mentioned that already. The Holy Spirit in us reminds us that we are now adopted into God's family. Able to call God our Abba Father. The Holy Spirit in us means that we can experience the peace that Jesus speaks of.

[14:12] A peace that the world cannot give. The presence of God in us allows us to rejoice always. To be content in all circumstances. However trying they might be. The Spirit in us helps us persevere through trials.

To forgive deep hurts. To keep walking in step with Christ. Over the many years we may have until we arrive in glory. But this change in us is not just for our own pleasure. It will bring us joy. Absolutely. But it's not just for our own pleasure. All these elements of the Spirit's work are wonderful and glorious. They should cause us to be joyful, peaceful, content, hopeful people.

But it's not just about us. See when the Holy Spirit falls on the disciples. They don't sit around in a room holding hands. Singing Kumbaya until the end of the day. Do they? What do they do? They go out into the streets and proclaim Jesus. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not just to give us a warm feeling.

[15 : 14] But that we might live for Christ and witnessed to Christ. That's what happens on the day of Pentecost. And despite the increasing and frequent persecution that comes.

The early church could not stop speaking of Jesus. That's why Paul prays in his letters that both he and all believers would know the Spirit of boldness in proclaiming God's words and be given the right words to say.

But there's more because the Spirit in us is more than about a feeling. It's more than about our words. It's about our actions and our character. So as you read through the book of Acts you find that the Holy Spirit made the early church generous and hospitable.

As the Spirit worked in them the believers grew in the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, faithfulness and the rest. And as the church spread out into more pagan areas.

So the lives of love and compassion that Christians had towards those of the outside their Christian community became a powerful witness to the truth of the gospel. The Bible commentator Matthew Henry puts it this way.

[16 : 22] Good affections. Those wonderful spiritual feelings that we have inside. Will produce good actions. A holy heart will be seen in a holy life.

And did you notice as well the Spirit's work in us is described as a fountain that flows from within. One that flows out of us. That flows from within us and then out of us.

Out into the world. So that the life changing power of the gospel can be seen and experienced by others who are thirsty. And wonderfully there's no limit to this water.

We're not given a couple of water bottles to take along on the ride as we follow Christ that might run out from time to time. Nor are we given a source that's linked to one location as if unless I get to that church week by week well there'll be no water for me.

No. No. Jesus offers us rivers of living water. An unending, vast, unquenchable, unstoppable flow that rises up from within as the Spirit comes to make his home with us.

[17 : 33] And lives with us all the days of our lives. It is provision in perpetuity forever. It's provision in abundance without limit. It's provision in the full variety of graces that God knows we will need as we live as disciples of Jesus in this life.

In the last chapter of his book Ezekiel pictures the glory of the coming of the Spirit and its impact on the world as Christians are transformed. And the Spirit flows out through them.

The image he uses is God's temple with water welling up from within and flowing out over the thresholds. Wonderful change that happens as God comes to dwell in his people and moves out. That's a picture of what the church should be like. We meet with God. We're drawn into relationship with him. And then as we go out into the world, that good news, that living water is spread abroad. Bringing real change and great joy wherever the gospel is received. What if the work of the Spirit, Jesus' offer for you today excites you?

[18 : 48] Whether it's made you more thirsty for Christ, to see him at work in your life, to know more of his presence. Or maybe you're a little reticent to come and drink and live.

Because the water of life is available for all who come. We've seen that. Which means the only thing that will stop us is ourselves. Our reticence to ask and receive.

It may be that you're not sure that Jesus can deliver on his promise. Maybe you're worried that a life lived wholeheartedly for Jesus won't bring the joy, peace, satisfaction and contentment that he promises.

Maybe you're so content in your life now with just a little bit of religion on the side that you think, well, there's more of God. I can't see how that can change things.

Well, look to the resurrection of Jesus. That will tell us something different. See, Jesus' resurrection serves not just as a guarantee for his rule in return, but also as a sign of the new life that he brings.

[19 : 57] For all who are in Christ have received his life-giving water, and they are raised to life, a life that starts now and goes on for eternity. The resurrection shows us the power that Jesus has at his disposal.

Maybe you're unwilling to kneel quite that far down, because it is a humbling thing to recognise our own weakness and sinfulness, that we can't reach God by our own efforts.

If that's you, can I just point you again to Jesus? Look to him. See the pattern of his life, how he humbles himself. Not counting equality with God, something to be grasped, but making himself nothing.

Taking on the nature of a servant. Servant who died even the death of the cross. See, Jesus doesn't ask us to do anything that he doesn't do for us himself.

And just as his self-humbling was the path to his ultimate glorification, so coming before him, humbly kneeling before him, receiving from him is the means to our rising to new and glorious life.

[21 : 07] Don't be fearful about being humble. But maybe you're not sure that God loves you enough to give you this gift. Maybe you're thinking of other people in the church today and say, yeah, well, it's all right for them.

I know they're a far better Christian than me. They've been at this much longer. They're a much nicer person. If God really knew what I was like, then he would hold off on this gift.

I don't deserve it. Well, friends, don't think that way. As Jesus dies on the cross, he dies for you.

As he thirsts on the cross, he thirsts for you so that you might be satisfied and drink. We're going to have a reminder of that, aren't we, shortly, in bread and wine.

We ever doubt God's love for us. The cross is the place to go. Jesus thirsted so that we might drink, so that you might drink. Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink, says the Lord.

[22 : 14] Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. By this he meant the Spirit. If you're truly thirsty for more of God, then come to Jesus and ask for that living water.

As you come this morning and kneel at the communion rail, yes, focus your eyes on the Lord and his death in your place, but as you receive, why not make that extra prayer there this morning?

Lord, give me this living water. Maybe that fountain in you has seemed to have run a bit dry. Ask for his refreshing.

Maybe, if you're honest, you've never really come to Jesus. But come to him today and ask. Today, trust his promise. Trust his sacrifice.

Trust his love. And let God start or perhaps restart that river of living water, cascading through your dry and thirsty soul, so that it might flow from you, from us, out into our thirsty world.

[23 : 27] Just a few moments of quiet. And then I'll pray. Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the Lord Jesus, for his life and death, for his grace and mercy, for his offer of the Spirit to all who come.

Father, would you refresh us as your people this morning? Renew those rivers of life in us, that we might know more of you, more of your joy and peace, that we might be transformed more into the likeness of Christ and witness more boldly to him in this thirsty world.

Lord, do your work in us, we pray. Amen. Amen.