

Jesus' Invitation to the Thirsty

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[0 : 00] We're in John chapter 7, and we're going to read from verse 32 to 52. Those of you who were here last week, you'll have heard the first part of chapter 7.

It's a state in the obvious, but these two passages hold very much together. They're not separate incidents, they're one incident. So this is kind of really one sermon in two halves.

One incident in two halves. But the reading will come on the screen, and the title of today's sermon is Jesus' Invitation to the Thirsty. And it's worth saying that as we met on Monday morning as elders, we talked about how important it is that we simply are not maintaining church, but that we're always seeking to encounter God as we gather in worship.

And it is the Holy Spirit that makes a difference, but we want to be in a place of worship where people are thirsty, where they're hungry for the living God.

And I think this morning has already reflected that in terms of the worship and the way in which we have already encountered God, and I pray that this will be so through the sermon as well.

[1 : 23] Okay, verse 32 of John chapter 7. The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.

And this is because some people are speculating as to whether Jesus is the Messiah. Some were already concluding that he must be because of the miraculous signs, but then others weren't so sure, and there was a division of opinion, and that's going to carry on.

Verse 33. Jesus said, I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me, and where I am you cannot come.

The Jews said to one another, Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live, scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? What did he mean when he said, You will look for me, but you will not find me, and where I am you cannot come?

On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

[2 : 41] Whoever believes in me, as the Scriptures has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. On hearing his words, some of the people said, Surely this man is the prophet.

Others said, He is the Christ. Still others asked, How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family, and from Bethlehem?

Now, just a note there. Do you notice the contradiction in the crowd? Earlier on in chapter 7, they said, Oh, well, we know when the Christ comes, nobody will know where he's come from.

And then they say, Oh, it says he will come from Bethlehem. Well done. At last, they're consulting the Scriptures. But you can see how confused people are here. Thus the people were divided, verse 43, because of Jesus.

[3 : 45] Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him. Finally, the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, Why didn't you bring him in?

No one ever spoke the way this man does, the guards declared. That's an amazing verse, you know. Now, that is showing the power of the words of Jesus.

And it's showing that the fear, and the respect and reverence, and the awesome nature of Jesus, and the respect and reverence that people had for him, that they couldn't arrest him, for his words were too powerful.

You mean he has deceived you also? Verse 47. The Pharisees retorted, Has any of the rulers of the Pharisees believed in him?

No. And you're going to see that they're wrong. But this mob that knows nothing of the law, and you can see the contempt in which the religious leaders express themselves toward the crowd, this mob that knows nothing of the law, these ignorant, illiterate people.

[5 : 03] There is a curse on them. Wouldn't you like religious leaders like that? They think you're cursed. You're just fodder to be used. Verse 50.

Nicodemus. Who was he? A ruler of Israel. They claimed that nobody believed among the Pharisees, but they're wrong. Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier, and who was one of their own number, asked, Does our law condemn anyone without the first hearing him to find out what he is doing?

They replied, Are you from Galilee too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee. An amazing passage of Scripture, and the Lord will bless to us the reading of his word.

So we're in the Feast of Tabernacles. This is in the autumn, so it's six months after the events of chapter 6. And at the Feast of Tabernacles, also known as Sukkot or the Feast of Booths, the people built temporary shelters to commemorate the time that they were in the wilderness.

And in the wilderness, they struggled for food, so God provided them manna from heaven. We saw that last week. And they struggled for water. So Moses broke the rock, remember, at the behest of God, and the water flowed.

[6 : 28] And in that feast, Jesus stands up and says, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. More of that a little bit later.

But this pilgrimage, this requirement for all Jewish males to attend Jerusalem to celebrate at least one of the pilgrimages in the year, this reminds them of the Exodus.

It reminds them of dependence upon God. It reminds them that without God, they would starve and they would thirst. And there is something deeply significant about the idea of people hungering and thirsting in a religious context.

For religion should satisfy the hunger and thirst, but it clearly is not doing so. You've already seen the quality of the leadership. If that's the kind of religious leaders you have, then God help us quite literally.

For they cared nothing for the people. They only cared for themselves, for their status, for their power. And that was why they were rejecting Jesus. It was nothing really to do with the Scriptures.

[7 : 47] They were clearly muddled about the Scriptures. It was nothing to do about whether or not his claims were true and whether they were going to investigate. They had no intention of believing in him, for he came to that which was his own, his own place, but his own people would not receive him.

They are deeply culpable and guilty of prejudging Jesus of Nazareth on the basis that because he did not fit with their idea of what Messiah should be, he was to be rejected.

A Messiah, after all, who is going to be king but not going to have the religious leadership as his chief lieutenants is not one they could afford to believe in. It was going to cost them too much.

They are not honest brokers. And crucially, they are not hungry spiritually or thirsty spiritually for God.

And that's how, next slide please, that's how religion can let us down. Oh yes, worth just saying this. John Piper, a wonderful man of God in America, said the hardest thing is not to satisfy thirst but to make people feel thirst for God.

[9 : 09] All men thirst but not all thirst for God. And it's worth asking ourselves that question, isn't it? How thirsty are we today?

How hungry are we today? For Jesus promises as the bread of life to satisfy our spiritual hunger and as the living water to satisfy our spiritual thirst.

And if we are not satisfied in Him, it is because we are not hungry or thirsty enough. Jesus is making a big claim here.

He is saying to religious people who are tired of religion, who have tried the rituals, who are turning up on this day to see water being taken from the pool of Siloam and being taken to the altar and poured over that inner tradition to show how God satisfies thirst.

And he said, look, the ritual will not satisfy you. This religion will not satisfy you. I alone will satisfy you.

[10 : 20] Religion will always let you down. Always. Because religion tends to be about our effort, what we put in.

So, oh, I've got to pray more. I've got to read the Scriptures more. I've got to sing with great gusto, et cetera, et cetera. I've got to perform the ritual. But Jesus says, I am the water of life.

And I have living waters that you have to dig a big well for, dig really deeply, wear really hard, and then you'll get it maybe at the end.

No, he doesn't say that, did he? He said, I am and I have for you living waters that will flow through you and flow out of you and all you've got to do is let it happen.

are you thirsty? Not will you work hard, but is there a longing in your heart for God that Jesus says only he can satisfy?

[11 : 26] Now none but Christ can satisfy nor the name for me. There's love and life and lasting joy Lord Jesus found in thee a great hymn.

The religious leaders, as we said, they're preoccupied with power and control and fear and there's a bit of a dialogue in verses 32 to 36 about this where Jesus speaks to them rather enigmatically effectively to say to them, look, if you're going to take me, if you're going to arrest me, if you're going to take control, you're going to have to do it soon because one day you're going to come and look for me and you'll not find me.

Your opportunity is now, but you're going to have to take it. But we've already seen, haven't we, that Jesus earlier on in the chapter says, or John comments, that they did try to take him, but Jesus says, my time has not yet come.

My time has not yet come. You're not really in control of events, though you would like to think you are. God is in control of events and you'll not be able to have any power over me because God is in control.

And Pilate had to learn that too, didn't he? He says, I could, do you not know, I could put you to death? Jesus said, you would have no power over me unless it was given to you from my Father in heaven.

[12 : 49] God is in control. He is in charge of the events of our lives. We need not fear, for we are in the hands of God who loves us and cares for us and wants the best for us and wants the best for us, just as he did for Jesus and just as he would have been for the religious leaders had they surrendered to him.

But they were not going to do that because they thirsted for power and control, but not for God. We should not worship God for what we can get from him.

We should worship God because he created us to worship him. Because our hearts are restless until we find our rest in God for whom we were made.

Religious knowledge and religious activity and religious status does not remove spiritual thirst. Only Jesus does.

Now, how many glasses of water do you drink a day? Think about it. Apparently, tea and coffee count. I keep reading this because I know I don't drink enough water.

[14 : 00] I'm told I should drink eight glasses of, large glasses of water a day. I don't think I do that. I drink lots of tea and coffee, though. So there you go. Not the same thing. Now, we all know the health benefits of water, don't we?

But water is only good for you if you drink it, isn't it? The fact that you've got a tap in the house, if you never switch the tap on and never take that glass and never pour the glass of water and never drink the glass of water, it's not going to do you any good.

The fact that there is water present, it's not going to necessarily do you good unless you drink of it. People come to church and think, well, I'm in church. It must be good enough. But that's like just having a tap in the house.

If you don't actually receive the benefits of worship and encounter with Almighty God, it's not just going through the religious ritual, you see.

Or think about the fact that you're thirsty. We like to take Maggie, our dog, that is, not our child. We like to take Maggie, although she's like a child. We like to take her on the beach. And she loves it on the beach.

[15 : 06] She runs around. She gets sand in her and she chases the ball and the ball's always full of slava. That's a Geordie word for slava. Don't know what's a Geordie word for.

She gets a lot of slava on it and then she drops it in the sand and then she puts it in her mouth again and I think, goodness me, she must be thirsty. Well, she's got a whole sea there. So she dives in the sea but she doesn't drink at the sea because that's salt water.

And that water will not satisfy her thirst. That will dehydrate her and if she drank too much of it, it would send her mad and kill her. It's not just about having water, it's about having the right water to drink.

And in religion, people are often looking for the wrong thing in the wrong place at the wrong time and trusting in the wrong person. Jesus says, I alone can satisfy.

Now, if he were not the son of God, that would be a very arrogant statement. But he's going to demonstrate that he is from God in dying and rising again for his people.

[16:19] He alone will satisfy. Next slide. Jesus alone will satisfy. He invites us not to a religious system, not to a sacred festival or a beloved ritual.

Now, we might like these things. You know, you might have gone off to Lourdes and kind of bathed in the water there. You might have gone to on pilgrimage somewhere or had some time away in retreat.

I love to do that kind of thing. I'm into symbol. Symbol is important. It's a picture of something. I wear a cross. That's a symbol. But it's a piece of metal.

The reason I love the symbol is because I love the Savior. And it lies near to my heart because he is my first love. It's just a symbol.

In the message, Jesus says, and I love the way it's said in Matthew 11, 28 to 30, he says this to religious people. Are you tired, worn out, burned out on religion?

[17:23] Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me. Watch how I do it.

Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

I love that. Walk with me. Keep in step with me. I know you'll mess up. You'll get it wrong. You do it all the time. I'm only talking about me.

You're probably better than me. You get it wrong all of the time. Sometimes you get it wrong for right reasons. Like you run off your feet and you're trying to do too much and you're getting flustered and frustrated and you stop trusting in God.

That's just what I do. And then every so often I hear a voice within that says, stop. Take a rest. Remember your calling is to be with Jesus.

[18:26] so that you might become like Jesus and you might do what Jesus did. Being is more important, John, than doing. Doing will just exhaust you if you don't spend time with me.

That's not ritual or religion. That's relationship. And Jesus calls us into relationship. Him having not seen you love and even now, even though now you do not see him, yet you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

I don't know how many times as I've prayed in the morning I've been led to that old hymn that says, I see thee not, I hear thee not, but thou art off with me.

And earth hath ne'er so sweet a spot as where I meet with thee. I could no more deny the reality of Jesus in my life than I could deny my wife or my children.

He is as real as that. I don't need to see him to know him. That's relationship, you see.

[19:39] And he alone in the end satisfies. And then he stands up and he gives this great invitation. I just love it. Verse 37, On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, If anyone is thirsty, I'm trying to do a loud voice.

It's hurting my voice. If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.

And then John very helpfully tells us, By this he meant the Spirit whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

So as I've said, they're bringing water and they're going to pour it over the altar. And when they do that, when the priest does that, they begin to chant from Isaiah chapter 12, With joy you will draw waters from the well of salvation.

And so Jesus at that moment, when he sees this water being poured out, he cries out in a loud voice, I know you're going to sing now about the waters of salvation. I know you're going to repeat

for me Isaiah chapter 12.

[20 : 54] Well, let me tell you, if you want to draw waters from the wells of salvation, you need to come to me and drink. Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah chapter 12, which says, Surely God is my salvation.

I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

In that day you will say, Give thanks to the Lord. Call upon His name. Make known among the nations what He's done. And proclaim that His name is exalted. And Isaiah is saying, The Lord is going to come and you're going to rejoice in Him.

And Jesus says, I have come. Now it is time to rejoice. You see, some people say sometimes that Jesus never claimed to be God.

Well, He never overtly said, I am God. He never did do that. For that would be a very confusing statement to make for the incarnate Son of God.

[22 : 04] For what you see in the incarnation is not all that is true of God. How can an incarnate being show the omnipresence of God, that God is everywhere present?

He couldn't because He is located in space and time. So there are theological reasons why He never made that overt statement. But you would be a fool to miss it. For all of the I am statements of John's Gospel are pointing us back to the Old Testament.

And all of the signs of Jesus are pointing us back to Yahweh of the Old Testament. And Yahweh comes from the verb to be, which means I am who I am.

And Jesus knew exactly what He was saying. I am the living water. I am the fulfillment of Isaiah chapter 12. When you sing that every year, you're singing of me.

Come to me and I will satisfy your thirst. So that timing of the invitation is important. The nature of the invitation is important.

[23 : 03] Notice it. If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Who can come? Anyone. What is the condition? That you're thirsty.

So the invitation is universal. Anyone can come. It is personal. You can come. But it is conditional. You can come if you're thirsty.

If you're not thirsty, don't bother. Don't pretend, please. I'm not interested in crowds, Jesus said. I'm interested in worshipers. For He said, there is a time coming when those who worship me will worship in spirit and in truth.

And they are the type of worshipers that God is seeking. Are you thirsty? Come to Jesus. And you know, the thing about thirst is, unlike hunger, even though, you know, sometimes we might have, I did this when I was a teenager, I'd run in one day and say, Mom, I'm starving.

There's anything to eat. I'm starving. I'm going to die. You're not going to die. It's only been a few hours since you last ate. And in fact, you can go quite a few days without eating food.

[24 : 19] But if you're thirsty, you have to drink. Because if you're thirsty and you don't drink, you are going to dehydrate. And if you don't dehydrate, you're quickly going to be ill.

And if you get ill and you go too long without water, you will die. And this is the point of this, you see. You are desperately in need.

The problem is, so many people are desperately in need spiritually, but they don't go to the source of their satisfaction. Jesus will satisfy your spiritual thirst.

Drugs won't. Alcohol won't. Sex and rock and roll won't. Materialism won't. Nothing will satisfy other than Jesus.

And without Him, you will die. Eternally die. That's the reality of the gospel. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish, will not die, but will have eternal life.

[25 : 26] And notice, the promise of this invitation is that there will be rivers of living water. And this is also the impact of the invitation.

The promise is the promise of the Holy Spirit. And the impact is just amazing. Amazing. He's going to fully satisfy you.

Living water. He's going to satisfy your thirst. But more than that, He's going to make sure that it overflows out of you to satisfy others.

And that's the amazing thing about receiving Jesus. It's not just for you. It's so that your life might touch other people's lives and influence other people's lives.

That the water that flows through you might flow through others because of you. that not only you find Jesus, but people find Jesus because you found Him. And all of these years of being a Christian, that is my greatest joy.

[26 : 37] That God has chosen to use me to bless others. That He doesn't give us His Holy Spirit so that we can sit in a corner and have a jolly good time.

Or just be in a place of worship and praise the Lord. As wonderful as that is, He gives us it so that we might go into all the world and preach the gospel. And that our light might shine and the water might flow and the well might spring up to the blessing of others.

What an impact. What an impact. And you know, this is what encourages me about about being a Christian. all of these years on, that there's still more and more water to have.

There's still more of Jesus that I yet do not know. And there is still more of Him, Holy Spirit, that I want to know. Spring up, oh well, within my soul.

Spring up, oh well, we used to sing and make me whole. I wish I remember it all. Peter speaks of a joy inexpressible and full of glory.

[27 : 55] Well, I've had joy that sometimes has been inexpressible. It felt great and I couldn't explain it. Full of glory, I've a bit to let, I've still a bit more to get.

For it is infinite. But oh Lord, more, more, more of that living water. John Ortberg in his book, *The Me That I Want To Be*, he talks about how every Christian has a desire to really be the best that God wants them to be, to be the person that God wants them to be.

And then he says, the problem is we have a gap. So if you've ever been on the London Underground, I don't like London and I don't like the Underground. But the one thing I remember, sorry Londoners, sorry, it's just too big for me and too busy.

But every time I've been on that Underground, I've got up, I've heard this voice say, mind the gap. Mind the gap. And it does it in that kind of whiny, robotic way, mind the gap.

They might have done it a little bit cooler now, like, mind the gap or whatever, I don't know. But, minding the gap is what I, what John Ortberg says we need to do.

[29 : 07] Between the me I am and the me I want to be. The me I am is dissatisfied. The me I want to be is to be like Jesus. And the means of making up that gap is the Holy Spirit.

The living water that can flow through me to make me the person that He wants me to be. And you might say, well, oh, well, I'll wait till I get to heaven for that. That's not enough, my friend.

It's not about whether or not we'll wait till we get to heaven. For the Scripture says, do not quench the Spirit of God. Do not put a blockage in the pipes that prevent the living water from flowing.

Mind the gap. Mind the gap. You see, Jesus is not offering us some temporary relief. Some, oh, you're a little bit thirsty, here's a bit of water.

He's not putting a limit on how much water. And He's not telling you to go and put your bucket in the well and get it. He's simply saying, it's here for you if you'll just let it flow.

[30 : 20] It doesn't have to be hard work. You just have to surrender. Let the Holy Spirit flow in your life.

You shall be like a watered garden, Isaiah says, like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. But of course, it's down to us.

It's up to you. Not top. It's up top. It's good, though, but it's up to you to accept or reject the invitation.

It's up to you. I can tell you that your soul has need of Jesus and I can tell you that He alone can satisfy. You might even tell me you're thirsty, but unless you drink, it'll do you no good.

And there were people in this crowd who said, nah, don't want that water. And there were others in this crowd that said, let me have it as much as you can give me. And it's all down to us about whether or not we will accept the invitation.

[31 : 34] Jesus is here. Last slide, Josh. when religion lets you down, Jesus alone satisfies.

But it's up to you to accept or reject the invitation. Let us pray. Let us pray.

Thank you.