

# John 7:37-39

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[0:00] Please join us there as we turn our attention to the study of God's word. John chapter 7, verses 37 through 39. 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.'

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were yet to receive. For as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. Our text this afternoon, you have to forgive me if I say this warning, records one of the many times that Jesus made invitations to any who would hear him.

J.C. Ryle, in his introduction to a sermon on these verses, stated, quote, 'If we are to understand well the richness and fullness of the invitation of Jesus in this text, we are first going to need a bit of background.'

As we have been preaching a bit differently, we've taken a break from going verse by verse by verse through a book of the Bible, and we're kind of skipping through the text and encouraging you all to join us in reading the Bible plan.

[1:50] And one of the goals of that is to help you see how beautifully tied together the scripture is. And this is one of those texts that helps us with that, helps us to see how significant Jesus' words were in light of what the Old Testament had to say about him.

So for us to really get that, there's a couple of things we need to know, some background information. His original hearers would have fully understood, and we need a little time to catch up. So first, concerning the timing of Jesus' invitation. The setting of John chapter 7, verse 37 through 39, is in Jerusalem at the time of the Feast of Booths, also called the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Feast of Booths occurred in late September to early October, and was one of the three great feasts that all males, if they were able, were required to celebrate.

You can see Deuteronomy 16, 16. Josephus, the Jewish historian, referred to the Feast of Booths as the holiest and the greatest of the feasts.

[2:55] J.C. Ryle adds that Jerusalem was the metropolis of Judaism and the strongholds of priests and scribes of Pharisees and Sadducees. So the religious elites are all gathered in Jerusalem for this feast.

They would not have missed it. The Jewish historian, Alfred Eidersheim, writes that the Feast of Tabernacles was the most joyous of all festive seasons in Israel, was that of the Feast of Tabernacles.

It fell on a time of year when the hearts of the people would naturally be full of thankfulness, gladness, and expectancy. All the crops had been long stored, and now all fruits were also gathered.

The vintage passed, and the land only awaited the softening and refreshment of the latter rain to prepare it for a new crop. It was appropriate that, when the commencement of the harvest had been consecrated by offering the first ripe sheaf of barley, and the full ingathering of the corn by the two wave loaves, there should now be a harvest feast of thankfulness and of gladness unto the Lord." End quote.

The observance of the Feast of Booths combined the ingathering of the labor of the field, the fruit of the earth, the ingathering of the threshing floor and wine press, and the dwelling in booths or tabernacles, think tents, temporary shelters, all of which was to be a joyful celebration for Israel.

[4:26] The booth in Scripture is not an image of privation and misery, but of protection, preservation, and shelter from heat and storm. The rejoicing community included family, servants, widows, orphans, Levites, and sojourners.

To summarize, the Feast of Booths was a time of thanksgiving for the harvest. It was a happy time. Devout Jews lived outdoors in booths made of tree branches for seven days as a reminder of God's provision in the desert during the wilderness wanderings.

Now, there were two practices that were not mentioned in Scripture, but were included in the oral tradition passed on from Moses. This is what historians inform us of this.

One was the special commandment of the willow, in which branches were cut and brought to the temple and laid around and over the altar to make a sort of booth for the altar.

Again, think of their sojourning in the wilderness and the tabernacle. The other was the water libation. Each morning there was a solemn procession from the temple mount to the pool of Siloam for a pitcher of water.

[5:36] A priest would fill a gold pitcher with water as the people sang together Isaiah 12 and verse 3. So picture the people going into the temple, laying these branches around, and then going out, gathering this water from the pool of Siloam, and they would sing Isaiah 12, 3, which says this, With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

And they would go each of these seven days through this process in the morning. The procession would return to the temple mount with trumpets blasting and great fanfare.

There the priest would pour the water into a silver basin by the altar of burnt offering each day for the first six days. On the seventh day, this is the, mentioned in verse 37, the last day of the feast called the great day, which is referenced in our text, the water would be poured and the people would march around the altar seven times.

They would move as a crowd around the altar seven times. Why? To remember the end of Israel's sojourning in the wilderness, which was concluded with the battle at Jericho.

That marked the ending, their first conquest in the new land, right? So all of this is aimed at helping them both to remember and to look forward, this entire feast.

[7:03] So there's three directions the participants should have been pondering when they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. Those directions were first backwards. The feast looked back and reminded the people of God, how God had provided water from the rock during their wilderness wanderings.

Exodus 17, 6, numbers 20, verse 8 and on. They were to look down. The feast looked at the present and praised God for the provision of the harvest and most likely acted as a prayer for the coming year.

See Psalm 118 and verse 25, part of the halal. These were songs that were sung at the Feast of Booths. It was also meant to look forward.

The feast also looked toward the future and spoke prophetically of the coming days of the Messiah when God's blessing would be poured out on the nation. And we'll mention a little bit more about that here in just a bit, right?

So extremely significant what's happening in Jerusalem where Jesus is when he makes this invitation. Try not to forget some of those details that I've mentioned.

[8:15] The second bit of background information concerns Jesus' reference material for his invitation, right? Again, remember, Jesus will say things in the New Testament that don't always strike a chord with us because we're less familiar with the Old Testament than we really ought to be.

But there's a significant knowledge background for his original audience that we need to catch up to. His invitation is a direct reference to the book of Isaiah, chapter 55.

He gathers some other bits of scripture together as well. We'll see soon. But specifically, Isaiah, chapter 55. But before I show you the reference, let's consider together the book of Isaiah to grasp the significance of that reference.

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah are primarily about judgment due to the wickedness of the nations, right? God's judgment is coming. It's coming because of wickedness to this nation, to this nation, to this nation, to this nation.

Though there are many glimpses of hope in these first chapters, the book takes a very hopeful and significant turn in chapter 40. The final 26 chapters are full of promises of salvation, which are centered on someone called the servant.

[9:33] In chapter 52 of Isaiah, we found out that the servant is God. He's described as, quote, raised and lifted up, Isaiah 52 and verse 13.

And this is the very same phrase in Hebrew that Isaiah uses to describe God in chapter 6 and verse 1. In chapter 53, we find out that the servant will bring salvation by hanging on a tree, suffering and dying in the place of sinners.

In chapter 54, we find out that the death and resurrection of the servant allows God to offer us an eternal covenant of peace, and we can live free from fear of judgment.

With all of this in mind, when you come to chapter 55 of Isaiah, it should be understood that God will send his servant, who is God, to save his people from the judgment of God.

We are saved by God, from God. Isaiah 55 and verse 1, the beginning part of it.

[10:41] Isaiah 55 and verse 1 says, this is Jesus' reference. Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. This would have rang out for all of Jesus' hearers, right, in this presence at the Feast of Tabernacles, right?

It's a feast that's about celebrating this water, this provision, and looking forward to the coming Messiah. Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.

In our text, Jesus says, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Now, remember all that I've said about the Feast of Booths.

Jesus makes this invitation on the last day of the Feast, the great day, and he cried out this invitation. The Greek word here translated cried means yelled.

This is loud. This is forceful speech, right? He wants anyone who can hear him to hear him. This is not meek speech. This is loud, proclaiming this invitation.

[11:54] And if you continue to read on in chapter 7, you will find this invitation causes controversy amongst the people. I would like to suggest to you something a bit beyond our text, right?

So this is a little theological imagination for you. But that Jesus cried out this invitation in the temple, perhaps as the crowd was silent, as the priest was pouring the water into a silver basin by the altar of burnt offering.

That it happened in this moment, right? They're getting ready to march seven times around the altar, and there's a silence that comes over this crowd.

And it's during this that he yells out this invitation, right? This is extremely striking. Now, this is not the first time that Jesus has used water to speak of having life in him.

In John chapter 4, as Jesus meets at the well with the Samaritan woman, he speaks of living water. And he later says in John 4, verse 13 and 14, And in John chapter 6, verse 35, Jesus says, So this is not the first time that Jesus used water to speak of having life in him, but it certainly seems to be the most striking, the most dramatic use of this type of language.

[13:42] I hope that you will see the beauty of this invitation that he makes this afternoon. The cry of Jesus is an invitation to the thirsty to come to him and to drink.

I would like to make just two observations about this invitation for our consideration this afternoon. Number one, our soul's thirst.

Our soul's thirst. Thirst is a craving, and it is a conscious craving. I don't know how often we really thirst in an age where you could turn on a tap and get limitless, purified water.

But consider the thirst of people who lived in a place where water was a scarce commodity. It was rare in a desert place, right? There were wells dug, but it was work to go and get water.

And remember at this feast, they're remembering a time where they had no water, and God miraculously on a number of occasions provided water for them. This is such a fitting analogy for Jesus's original audience.

[14:54] Can you remember a time that you were particularly thirsty? Maybe on a very hot day or after some hard workout or work out in the yard.

However, thirst is something that we know about. We're aware when we're thirsty. It's something we're fully aware of. It's very difficult to ignore.

We feel it, and the more thirst increases, the more we seek out satisfaction for our thirst. Now, of course, Jesus is not talking about physical thirst.

What is it that he's talking about? He's talking about a thirsty soul, right? Our inner being. We are embodied souls.

So it's our very selves, right, crying out for something, right? We're longing for something beyond ourselves and beyond what this world has to offer.

[15:53] A longing for deliverance. A longing for hope. A longing for peace. A longing for forgiveness. For salvation. For liberation from the power of sin.

If you are thirsting, anyone who is thirsting, anyone whose soul is parched, that's where it all starts. The salvation of our souls starts with this recognition, this craving for something else, something more.

People come to Christ because their souls are thirsty, and they recognize that they are thirsty, and they hear the invitation, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Are you thirsty this morning? Excuse me, there it was, this afternoon. Are you aware that you were made by God and for him, and that you will have no soul satisfaction apart from Christ?

[16:59] Go to him and drink. Charles Spurgeon wrote this of this text. Drink. That is not a difficult action.

Any fool can drink. In fact, many are great fools because they drink too much of poisonous liquors. Drink. Thou can't surely do that. Thou hast only to be as a sponge that sucks up all that comes near it.

Put thy mouth down and suck up that which flows to thee in the river of Christ's love. Open wide thy soul and drink in Christ. As the great northern whirlpool sucks in the sea, if any man thirsts, let him receive Christ.

So there's this wonderful offer of the gospel, this invitation that Jesus cries out to this crowd, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Second observation. Jesus himself satisfies the thirst of our souls, and he does so abundantly. He does so abundantly.

[18:06] Recall that Jesus is referencing Isaiah 55 and verse 1. Let's compare the invitation of Isaiah 55 1 with Jesus' invitation in John 7 verse 37.

Again, read this to you previously. Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. Isaiah 55, the first part of verse 1. And then what does Jesus say as he references this?

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Jesus declares that he is the water of Isaiah 55 1, and that he will satisfy the thirsty soul.

And the satisfaction that he is talking about is not a fleeting, not a temporary satisfaction, but rather a deep satisfaction, an abundant satisfaction.

Jesus goes on in our text, whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. First, let's understand that to drink of Christ is to believe in him.

[19:13] He's using these phrases synonymously. Let me show you this from John 6 35, which I read to you previously. Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

He's using this language interchangeably. So we drink of Christ by believing in Christ, believing in his person, and believing in his work.

Believing that he is the servant of Isaiah, sent by God who is God, to save his people from the judgment of God. Jesus says that if we believe in him, as the scripture has said, out of our hearts will flow rivers of living water.

Now know that Jesus' citation of the scripture here is a composite statement from texts in Isaiah, but also from Zechariah chapter 14, and Ezekiel 47.

And both were texts that were read on the last day of the Feast of Booths. Maybe it had already been read before Jesus stood and made this declarative invitation.

[20:27] They were read out at this time. And the Israelites believed that at one of these times, that it would happen on this last day of this feast, when the Messiah had come, that the foundation of the temple would split open and water would come pouring forth from it.

They believed that this would literally happen from a reading of Zechariah 14 and Ezekiel 47. So let's read those. This context is extremely important.

So you can turn there if you'd like. Otherwise, you can just follow along as I read. Ezekiel chapter 47. This is verses one through six. Remember here, the idea is that we come to Christ when we thirst, and he abundantly satisfies our souls.

Abundantly satisfies us. Beginning of verse one, Ezekiel 47. Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the temple faced east.

The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple south of the altar. Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east.

[21:42] And behold, the water was trickling out on the south side. Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits and then led me through the water, and it was ankle deep.

Again, he measured a thousand and led me through the water, and it was knee deep. Again, he measured a thousand and led me through the water, and it was waist deep. Again, he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through for the water had risen.

It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. And he said to me, Son of man, have you seen this? Then he led me back to the bank of the river.

And if you go on, you see that this river flows, and it nourishes, and trees come up, and it makes salt water into fresh water, and then fish at its side. It provides, and it provides abundantly for the land.

So that's the passage from Ezekiel. One verse in Zechariah, chapter 14 and verse 8. On that day, living water shall flow out of Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea, and half of them to the western sea.

[22:50] It shall continue in summer as in winter. So a people who, you know, water was life. Water itself was life. It brought life.

The ability to grow food and have their living came from water. And it's not an abundant source. And there's these Old Testament passages that talk about the abundance of water, right?

Water that becomes so great flowing that you can't pass through it. What is Jesus communicating? What is it that he's trying to get across to them?

He is the foundation of the temple of God, and he is the rivers that will flow from it. This is so striking a thing to be said at this time.

He is the foundation of the temple of God, and he is the rivers that will flow from it. You recall, only in John's gospel is the record of Jesus being pierced in the side and flowing from his side is water.

[23:54] Now, this likely happened. There's some physiology that goes on with that, but it's not recorded in any of the other gospel accounts, but it is recorded in John's gospel.

Why? As he records this invitation of Jesus, I think he means for us to see the foundation of the temple being split open and water pouring forth from it.

In a dry place, rivers bring abundant water. The water does not have to be drawn up out of a well. Sunk down, find the ground water, drawn up out of a well with great labor.

Rivers bring to you water, and all you have to do is drink. And Jesus is saying there will not be one river, but there will be rivers, right?

Abundant water will flow. All of this speaking metaphorically of our spiritual lives in him. Jesus himself satisfies the thirst of our souls, and he does so abundantly.

[25:05] How is it that he accomplishes this? John tells us in verse 39, 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. He accomplishes this by the Spirit of Christ.

We live beyond Jesus' earthly ministry. He has now been glorified, and Jesus gives to us his Spirit that we would have abundant life in him.

He awakens our souls to our great need that we would go to Christ, that we would believe in Christ, and then he gives us himself that we would have abundant life in him.

Romans 8, which Gary read for us previously, tells us that the Spirit of Christ frees us from condemnation, grants us righteousness, gives us life and peace, and enables us to please God.

[26:12] So in summary, our souls thirst. Every soul is longing to be satisfied.

And I hope that it's true of all of us this morning that we have found our satisfaction in Christ because he is the only thing that will satisfy this unquenchable thirst apart from him.

Secondly, Jesus himself satisfies the thirst of our souls, and he does so abundantly. Now, if you have not found the satisfaction of your soul, you may be tempted to think, I cannot go to Jesus and drink because I am not worthy.

Praise God that Jesus' invitation is not conditioned on your worthiness, but on his ability to satisfy your soul.

Listen to the rest of Isaiah chapter 55 and verse 1. We read the first part a couple of times. Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.

[27:19] We reread on in verse 1. And he who has no money, come, buy, and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

When we come to Christ, we have nothing to offer him but our spiritual poverty, but our thirst. And he promises in verse 37 and 38, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. So I hope this is true of you. I hope that you will give some careful consideration to this striking invitation of Christ this afternoon.

You'll take some time with those application questions to think about what this may mean for you today. But let's conclude with a prayer of application and a benediction.