

John 7:37-39

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Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0:00] Well, good morning, take a copy of God's Word and join me briefly in James chapter 5. It has been our habit as a church, and for many good reasons, to preach verse by verse through a text of Scripture, and we've been in the book of James.

The plan for this week was to preach James chapter 5, verses 1 through 6. And you'll note just in glancing at these first six verses that this is another one of James' indictments on those who are claiming to be followers of Jesus Christ and are living in opposition to that profession.

In this text, James indicts people for hoarding, for fraud, for self-indulgence, and for murder. And for a number of reasons that I won't go into this morning, it just didn't seem like the right text for today. Reasons besides it being Palm Sunday. So, I'm glad that I can, even after we've had the bulletins printed, call an audible and preach a different text.

And so, that's what's going to happen this morning, and I'll combine James 5, 1 through 6, into next week's text. And yes, even on Easter, we're going to preach out of the book of James.

[1:31] So, now that you've seen it, and you can at least in some measure go, oh yeah, okay, for whatever reasons, this text maybe isn't the one for this morning.

Let's go to John chapter 7 together. Let's take some time together this morning to consider John chapter 7, verses 37 through 39.

Before I read this text, I want to remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and our good. And so, we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands.

John 7, beginning in verse 37. 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.

[2:56] Our text this morning records one of the many times that Jesus made invitations to any who would hear him. J.C. Ryle, in his introduction to his sermon on these verses, stated, Quote, The text which heads this message contains one of those mighty sayings of Christ, which deserve to be printed in letters of gold.

All the stars in heaven are bright and beautiful. Yet even a child can see that one star excels another in glory. All scripture is given by inspiration of God.

But that heart must indeed be cold and dull, which does not feel that some verses are peculiarly rich and full. Of such verses, this text is one.

End quote. If we are to understand well, and I hope we will, the richness and fullness of the invitation of Jesus in this text, we are first going to need a bit of background.

So first, a bit of background is concerning the timing of Jesus' invitation. The setting of John chapter 7, verse 37 to 39, is in Jerusalem at the time of the Feast of Booths, also called the Feast of Tabernacles.

[4:20] The Feast of Booths occurred in late September, early October. And one was one of the three great feasts that all males, if they were able, were required to celebrate.

Deuteronomy 16, 16. Josephus, the Jewish historian, referred to the Feast of Booths as the holiest and greatest of the feasts. J.C. Ryle adds that Jerusalem was, quote, the metropolis of Judaism

and the stronghold of priests and scribes of Pharisees and Sadducees.

End quote. So the religious elites are all gathered in Jerusalem for this feast. It was a massive deal. The Jewish historian, Alfred Edersheim, writes that 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 range. 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 and gathering of the corn by the two wave loaves.

[5:45] 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, Exodus 23, 16, the fruit of the earth, Leviticus 23, 39, the ingathering of the threshing floor and wine press, Deuteronomy 16, 13, and the dwelling in booths or tabernacles, all of which was to be a joyful celebration for Israel.

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. 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 or tabernacle for the altar.

[7:18] The other was called the water libation. Each morning, there was a solemn procession from the temple mount to the pool of Salome for a pitcher of water.

A priest would fill a gold pitcher with water as the people sang together. Isaiah 12, three, which says with joy, you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

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, and this is the last day of the feast, the great day here in John chapter seven, verse 37. The water would be poured and the people would march around the altar seven times.

Right. So picture that there's this huge procession, a parade, right? The city gathered, they travel, they get a basin of water, they take it, they put it in the silver basin. It's a big deal.

[8:23] But on the last day, they then march around the altar seven times. And they did this to remember the end of Israel sojourning in the wilderness, which was concluded with the battle at Jericho.

So them coming into the promised land. The participants, as they did this, were meant to be pondering three directions. They were meant to think backward.

The feast looked back and reminded the people of God how he had provided water from the rock in their wilderness wanderings. 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. And they were 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.

[9:26] Right. So it is incredibly significant. This feast of booths and this last day. Now, the second bit of background information concerns Jesus's reference material for his invitation.

His invitation is a direct reference to the book of Isaiah, chapter 55. But before I show you the reference, let's consider the book of Isaiah as a whole to grasp its significance.

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah are primarily about judgment due to the wickedness of the nations. Though there are glimpses of hope in these first chapters, the book takes a very hopeful turn in chapter 40.

There's a definite shift in its voice in chapter 40. The final 26 chapters are full of promises of salvation, which are centered on someone called the servant.

We see this again and again and again in those last 26 chapters. In chapter 52, we find out that the servant is God. He's described as, quote, raised and lifted up in verse 13 of chapter 52.

[10:42] The 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.

So with all of this in mind, when you come to chapter 55 of Isaiah, this is where all of these Jewish listeners would have been in their mind as they're doing this procession and marching around.

It should be understood. God will send his servant, who is God, to save his people from the judgment of God. And the first half of Isaiah 55 and verse 1 says this.

Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.

[11:53] So in the middle of all of this that's going on, this is where Jesus stands up and he cries out. If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

So remembering 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 cries out. And the Greek for this word means literally yelled. He got everyone. He interrupted what was going on and yells out this invitation.

And if you continue to read on in chapter 7, you will find that his invitation causes controversy amongst the people. Right. They heard him. He yelled it out.

And I would like to suggest to you something beyond our text. I think it's reasonable, though, that it's happening in the temple. Perhaps as the crowd was silent and the priest was pouring the water into a silver basin by the altar of burnt offering.

[13:03] This is where certainly the one who had a right to interrupt what was going on likely interrupted. And this is extremely striking.

Everything that's going on, the imagery that's happening, where these people's minds would have been. And 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, he speaks of living water. And later in verse 13 and 14, he says to her, everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again.

Speaking of the well. But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

And in John chapter 6, verse 35, Jesus says to them, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. And whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

[14:05] So he's spoken of salvation, life in him in terms of water before. But this is the most striking. I hope that you will see, that you will hear the beauty of this invitation this morning.

Perhaps Jesus' cry in the temple is a cry to you as well. It's an invitation to the thirsty to come to him and to drink, to be satisfied in him.

I'd like to make just two observations further about this text. Number one, our souls thirst.

Thirst. Whether we recognize it or not, our souls are thirsty. Thirst is a craving. It's a conscious craving.

It's not subconscious. You know when you're thirsty. And I don't know how often we really thirst in an age where you can turn on a tap and get limitless, purified water.

[15:15] But consider the thirst of people who lived in a place where water was a scarce commodity. Very difficult to come about.

This is such a fitting analogy for Jesus' audience. Can you remember a time that you were particularly thirsty? I'm particularly thirsty right now.

Waiting for a good break to take a drink of water. Maybe on a very hot day or after a particularly difficult workout. Thirst is something we know about.

It's something we're fully aware of. It is difficult to ignore. It's a conscious craving. 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. He's talking about a thirsty soul. A longing for deliverance. A longing for hope.

[16:17] A longing for peace. A longing for forgiveness. For salvation. For liberation from the power of sin. He's talking about the satisfaction of our souls.

If you are thirsting. Anyone who is thirsting. Anyone whose soul is parched. That's where it all starts.

Life. In Christ. The salvation of our souls starts with that craving. People come to Christ because their souls are thirsty.

And they recognize they are thirsty. And they hear the invitation. If anyone thirsts. Let him come to me. And drink.

So. Are you thirsty? This morning. Are you aware that you were made by God and for him? And that you will have no soul satisfaction apart from Christ.

[17:18] The cry to you is to go to him and to drink. Charles Spurgeon once wrote. 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 all 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.

I don't know what that is. But I guess where they were, they were aware. The whirlpool. If any man thirsts, let him receive Christ. End quote.

Secondly. Jesus himself satisfies the thirst of our souls and does so abundantly. Not only are we satisfied, we are satisfied abundantly in Christ.

[18:28] Recall that Jesus is referencing Isaiah 55 and verse 1. Let's compare the invitation of Isaiah 55 and verse 1 with Jesus' invitation in John 7, 37.

Isaiah 55, 1. The first half of it says, Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. And John 7, 37. And John 7, 37.

The last half says, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Jesus declares that he is the water that will satisfy the thirsty soul.

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

Jesus goes on in our text. Jesus goes on in our text. Verse 38. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

[19:30] First, let's understand that the drink of Christ is to believe in him. Let me show you this from John chapter 6 and verse 35, which I read previously.

There Jesus says, I'm the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. And whoever believes in me shall never thirst. Right? To place saving faith in Jesus' person and his work.

So we drink of Christ by believing in Christ. And believing in him ongoingly. Believing in his person and his work again and again and again.

Going to him over and over and over. 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, that out of our hearts will flow rivers of living water.

[20:36] Know that Jesus' citation of the scripture here is a composite statement from texts in Isaiah. But also from Zechariah 14 and Ezekiel 47.

The one who wrote the book is allowed to take such liberties with it. Both texts were read on the last day of the feast of Booths. Zechariah 14 and Ezekiel 47.

Right? Jesus is doing something very clever here. Very rich as he makes this invitation. These texts were read on the last day. And the Israelites believed that at one of these times.

They thought it would actually happen on this last day. When the Messiah had come. The foundation of the temple would split open. And water would come pouring forth from it.

Let me show you why they may have thought this would happen in actuality. Ezekiel 47 beginning in verse 1. This is Ezekiel's vision. He writes, Then he brought me back to the door of the temple.

[21:40] 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. 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.

[22:44] And then we can read in Zechariah chapter 14 and verse 8. On that day, living water shall flow out from Jerusalem. Half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea.

It shall continue in summer as in winter. So what is Jesus communicating as he brings all of this together in this invitation? What is he meaning for them and for us to see?

It's this. He is the foundation of the temple of God. And he is the rivers that will flow from it. That is incredible.

In a dry place, rivers bring abundant water. The trouble for the Israelites was always about finding water.

You read the Old Testament. There's a constant thing going on with wells and battles over wells. And where is the water at? Rivers just bring water to you. It goes by.

[23:48] Gallons per minute flowing past. This water from a river doesn't have to be drawn out of a well. It is brought to you. And all you have to do is drink.

And Jesus is saying that there will not be one river, but there will be rivers. Jesus himself satisfies the thirst of our souls.

And he does so abundantly. How is it that he accomplishes this? John tells us. He gives us some inspired commentary on the text.

Verse 39. Now, this he said about the spirit whom those who believe in him were to receive. For as yet the spirit had not been given because Jesus was not yet glorified.

So if we have understood the thirst of our souls and have drunk deeply of Christ, it is because we have the spirit of Christ.

[24:50] And he continues this great work in us. Abundantly satisfies us in him. We live beyond Jesus' earthly ministry.

He has now been glorified. And Jesus gives to us his spirit that we would have this life in him.

Romans 8, which I commend to you to read at some point this week.

And I won't read for the sake of time. Tells us that the spirit of Christ frees us from condemnation. It grants us righteousness. Righteousness, it gives us life and peace and enables us to please God. Regardless of the circumstances of this life. We are able to maintain because God is for us. He has set his love on us.

If we have a spirit and have believed in Jesus. So in summary, our soul's thirst and Jesus himself is the satisfier of the thirst of our souls.

[25:58] He does this to great measure. It's possible this morning you'll be tempted to think I cannot go to Jesus and drink because I am not worthy.

And I just want you to hear that Jesus' invitation is not conditioned on your worthiness. He would have never made the invitation to begin with if it was based on anybody's worthiness. His invitation is based in his ability to satisfy your soul. Listen to the rest of Isaiah 55 verse 1. We've been reading the first half of it. The rest of it. Come everyone who thirsts. Come to the waters. And he who has no money. Come buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money. And without price. How is one who has no money to come and buy? Why? It's because we're granted grace.

[27:00] We're given the ability to come and to drink. So come. Jesus cries out. Come. 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 in closing, let me ask you, have you recognized the thirst of your soul?

Your soul is thirsty. If so, have you gone to Christ and believed in him for the satisfaction of that thirst? This is not just something for unbelievers to hear, although it is certainly that.

But for those of us who have believed, if we've gone to Christ for the satisfaction of our souls, our hearts should be overflowing with rivers of living water.

This should be a reality in our lives. And if it's not, we need to return to Christ. We need to repent and believe afresh in him.

[28:07] Can you give some examples of evidence of rivers of living water in your life? Do you find that you're satisfied like that? It flows out of you.

Do you ever neglect to find your soul satisfaction in Christ? What types of things do you turn to to satisfy your soul other than Christ?

What temporal things might you attempt? Because you will not find the satisfaction of your soul in anything other than Christ. But what might you need to put aside that you would have rivers of living water in your life?

Let's pray together.