

Living Water for the Thirsty

Livin' the Life

John 7:37-52

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We are looking at the life of Jesus and the life he promises in our series on the Gospel of John, Livin' the Life. Today's message, Living Water for the Thirsty is from 7:37-52. Please turn to John 7:37-52 and read along or listen as we read God's word.

Jesus is preaching at the Feast of Tabernacles. The feast remembered the great things God did for Israel when he delivered them from Egypt, showing his power and presence so they would trust him to provide for them on their way to the promised land. God provided them with bread and water in the wilderness. God continues to provide for Israel by revealing himself and redeeming his people in Jesus. Jesus is the true bread from heaven and the one who provides living water. The claims Jesus makes are audacious if it were not for the fact that he is the Word incarnate, the Son of God, and God the Son. His teaching is divisive, some want to arrest him and others think he is the Christ (40-44). Even the guards sent to arrest him don't seize him because no one ever spoke like this man (45-46)!

So Jesus is speaking to a divided crowd. He has just told the Jews, God's covenantal people, that they do not know God (28)! At this time, the Jews are the most religious, privileged people, well versed in Scripture, yet when God visits them in Jesus, they reject him and therefore reject God (1:18). No matter what they think their relationship with God is like, Jesus says they do not know God! Jesus cries out, as if what he has to say cannot be contained, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Then he interprets what he means, whoever believes in me as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water (37- 38). Notice that the invitation is given to anyone who thirsts. This tells us a few things. First, the offer is for anyone who recognizes their need for Jesus. When you are thirsty, you look for something to quench your thirst because you recognize a need, you're thirsty. This also tells us that the human soul thirsts. Jesus is not talking literally but spiritually. In the same way that God made the body to live on water, the soul is made to live on God. The most important truth you need to understand today is that your soul, that immaterial part within each of us, is created to live on, connect with, and relate to a personal God, not an impersonal force. But our search for God is often twisted by sin so that we make God in our own image, which is really making ourselves our own God. One that will never disagree with you and never disapprove of you or your actions. Tim Keller argues that if your God never disagrees with you, you might be worshipping an idealized version of yourself. Lastly, the language of thirst tells us that what Jesus offers is satisfaction. Jesus is the only one who will satisfy your soul forever. CS Lewis said, "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." All teaching and preaching should have the goal that you find your satisfaction in God.

Then Jesus instructs those who recognize their thirst, to come and drink. Coming shows that we are looking to Jesus quench/satisfy our thirst while drinking shows that we are engaging Jesus. There are three points I want to make about this coming and drinking. First, coming to Jesus implies that we recognize that those things we have been looking to, to quench our thirst, are coming up short so we are leaving those behind and looking to Jesus to quench/satisfy our thirst. Second, Jesus is what we drink. Listen carefully, Jesus does not just have what we thirst for, Jesus is what we thirst for. There is a difference. Next, the soul can drink and swallow spiritually. That, is, you and I were made to come to Jesus. Fourth, the words, coming and drinking, are present tense verbs, describing ongoing activities. Jesus is describing a lifestyle where we recognize our ongoing need so we keep coming to and keep drinking Jesus. And last, come and drink are metaphors describing belief in Jesus (6:35) and point to finding our satisfaction in Jesus. Faith is not just a choice, a decision, believing in facts, but a desire, a longing to be satisfied with Jesus.

Jesus backs up his claim with Scripture, pointing to the Old Testament and showing us once again that he is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. 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 to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (38-39). Jesus does not refer to one particular Scripture but alludes to many Old Testament texts¹ that promise the coming of the Spirit in a new way that will transform, cleanse, and empower his people. The Old Testament looked to the New Covenant as one which promised Spirit birthed and Spirit sustained life. Believing in Jesus is humanity fully alive, the way God designed us to be living. Jesus is describing in a different way what he already described in 3:5-8 or 4:10-11,13-15. It is living water, so it produces life within us that overflows in blessing toward others. When you come to Jesus and drink, He does not just quench your thirsty soul or satisfy you but the Spirit produces life within you that is so full, that it overflows to bless others like a spring or a fountain that never goes dry.

Then John gives his commentary, the giving of the Spirit is contingent upon Jesus being glorified, speaking of his death on the cross and his ascension to the right hand of the Father. The promise of Spirit given and Spirit sustained new life, livin' the life, is because Jesus went to the cross on our behalf. To look elsewhere for life or to think that life is available outside of Jesus' death and resurrection is to belittle the depth of human sin and the glory of Jesus.

Questions for Life Groups:

1. Why is Jesus' teaching so divisive?
2. Why is his teaching so amazing and unique?
3. How can someone think they are a Christian not be one?
4. Why does Jesus use the language of coming and drinking for believing in him?
5. How is Jesus satisfying?
6. What is the difference between Jesus having what satisfies us and Jesus being our satisfaction?
7. If Jesus is so satisfying, why do we look elsewhere for satisfaction?
8. How do we combat this tendency?

¹ The clearest one that touches on the bread, water, and Spirit is Neh 9:15, 19-20.

