

RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
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Let's Begin

As I am writing this lesson, I am sitting in a very cool place after suffering from the hot sun for several hours of work outside. During those moments, there is no image more refreshing than thinking of a cool glass of sparkling spring water. I have such a glass sitting beside me now.

I think the pictures of the Holy Spirit as gushes of living water were purposely chosen because of the refreshing, satisfying image it gives of the Holy Spirit: "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters" (v. 38). This verse is the centerpiece of the entire chapter. The occasion is the Feast of Tabernacles. As we consider John 7, we will follow the outline below but particularly focus on 7:37-39.

- I. **The Doubt Expressed by the Brothers Before the Feast (vv. 1-13)**
- II. **The Debate Exchanged by the Religious Leaders During the Feast (vv. 14-36; 40-53)**
- III. **The Dispensing of the Spirit Expected After the Feast (vv. 37-39)**

I. The Doubt Expressed by the Brothers Before the Feast (vv. 1-13)

The Feast of Tabernacles was similar to the conventions we have in the Southern Baptist Convention. Then, every male Jew was required to attend for eight days; they lived in temporary booths to remind them that their people lived in tents during the wilderness journey.

God often brings to our attention many memories—sometimes not so pleasant memories—for us to learn a grateful spirit.

An interesting ceremony was added to this feast in the later years. Each day the priest would go to the Pool of Siloam with golden pitchers, fill them with water, and return in procession to the Temple. As they entered the gate called "water," the people would recite Isaiah the prophet: "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3). Then the water would be poured out at the altar in the presence of the people.

John tells us this feast was the occasion which spawned some doubt from Jesus' brethren (v. 2). Not concerned about the feast nor celebration, the disciples urged Jesus to hurry up and attend so that "thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest" (v. 3). Often, we find ourselves desiring God to perform a miracle not for His glory but for our curiosity or thrill-seeking. Perhaps that may be part of the reason God does not answer our requests more than He does.

John then records one of the most disheartening statements in Scripture: "Neither did His brethren believe in him" (v. 5). Those closest to Him doubted Him. Think for a moment what disparaging feelings you would experience if the one closest to you on this earth—perhaps a wife or husband of many years—were to say "I don't believe in you."

Reflection Connection

What do you think drove Jesus' brothers' disbelief in Him? Recall how Joseph's brothers were obsessed in their jealousy of him (Genesis 37:4). Do you see any parallels between Joseph's family doubting him and Jesus' family doubting Him? Explain.

Reflection Connection

Reflect upon a time when someone close to you refused to accept you and affirm you. Be prepared to share some of the feelings you experienced as a result.



Yet even as discouraging as those words were, nothing could stop the Son of God from fulfilling His God-given task. When Jesus was ready—and only in His own timing—He traveled to the feast (vv. 8-10).

II. The Debate Exchanged by the Religious Leaders During the Feast (vv. 14-36; 40-53)

Upon the religious leaders hearing about Jesus' arrival, they began a search for Him (v. 11). Their posse stirred the people up as they inquired about Him: *"And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him; for some said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people"* (v. 12). In doing so, they attempted to keep a low profile with their opinions (v. 13). That was all in vain, however. It is simply impossible to have a low profile view of Jesus! Those who love Him cannot keep quiet and those who hate Him will not keep quiet!

An opportunity presented itself for the Lord to teach in the temple; so He took it (v. 14). No opportunity we are given to show the world who God is should be dismissed. Jesus took such an opportunity and did so knowing full well the hostile environment awaiting Him. Should we do any less?

As Jesus taught, He insisted the words He spoke were not His but His Father's (v. 16). Furthermore, Jesus concluded that the only words to which people should adhere are those words which are spoken by one who seeks the glory of God (v. 18).

The kicker, however, was Jesus' question toward those who evidently had searched for Him and now, after they had found Him, were sitting in the congregation: *"Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?"* (v. 19)

Of course, the religious leaders denied this, even accusing Jesus of demonically influenced paranoia (v. 20). The crowds knew otherwise, however: *"Is not this he, whom they seek to kill?"* (v. 25) Even unbelievers can see through the convinced skeptical criticisms and denials! Jesus kept right on teaching more passionately than ever (v. 29). We learn a valuable lesson from the Lord Jesus in facing our critics. No matter how much pressure we face, we must continue. Jesus did not back down but preached with even more force than His scoffers showed! While we are not required to be louder than our critics every time, we certainly are required to outlast our critics.

The debate caused a division in the house: *"Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, this is the Christ. But some said, shall Christ come out of Galilee?"* (vv. 40-41) Thus, the division ensued (v. 43).

An interesting cameo appearance of a man we met in chapter 3 turns up here—Nicodemus. *"Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night being one of them.)"* (v. 50) Though subtle, Nicodemus was actually defending the Lord who saved Him earlier. In fact, his clever question (v. 51) broke up the mob, which went reeling toward their homes in search for an answer no one seemed to have (vv. 52-53).

Reflection Connection

Is it possible to believe in Jesus but not be vocal about Him? Why or why not? Do you think the believers in the underground church in China are justified in their secrecy? Talk openly about this but be sensitive to the situations in such closed societies where many of our missionaries minister.



III. The Dispensing of the Spirit Expected After the Feast (vv. 37-39)

Reflection Connection

If the Holy Spirit was not yet given, how did the Spirit relate to saints in the Old Testament? Do you think there will be any difference in the way the Holy Spirit relates to us when Jesus returns and sets up His earthly reign? Explain.

We now come to the central thrust of the entire passage. This text is almost like the Apostle John's description of Pentecost: "(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)" (v. 39).

As we noted earlier, each day of the feast was honored by a procession of the priests from the Pool of Siloam to the Temple via the Water Gate, pouring out the golden pitchers of water from the Pool of Siloam on the altar in the presence of all the people. This happened every day except the last day. The omission is just as meaningful as the action. Why would they omit the last day of the feast? Because God had not yet poured out the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28).

That Jesus spoke the words about the outpouring of God's Spirit on the last day of the feast was definitely no coincidence: "*In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink*" (v.37). In this authoritative statement, Jesus extends an invitation and makes a tremendous claim in the process.

First, there is the *invitation of the Savior*. Note that the invitation is not offered to the satisfied. To the contrary, it is offered to the thirsty. Have you ever been thirsty? I mean really thirsty! It is a terrible feeling. Your throat is dry; your lips are parched; you would give your last dollar for a drink. Some folks swear on sweet tea! "*It is the best drink to quench your thirst*" they say. Others say an ice cold Coca Cola is best. However, God made our bodies and He knew what would best quench our thirst. As much as I like iced tea, water is the perfect drink and the only one that can quench our thirst.

It is not by chance that the picture for the Holy Spirit here is water. He is the One who quenches our spiritual thirst. Make no mistake: we live in a thirsty world. We are made with thirsts for many things.

We all possess a thirst for activity when we need something to do. We are bored—thirsty—and activity will quench that thirst. We are also thirsty for pleasure. Thus, we remain thirsty if that pleasure remains unsatisfied.

Additionally, we are thirsty for acceptance. We long for someone to care about us. By and large, however, the basic thirst we have is spiritual. There is a deep longing in the heart of every human being for more (cp. Psalm 42:1-2).

Every religion on the face of the earth is an expression of that spiritual longing. It cannot be erased. For a century, evolution, which for the most part is indicative of atheistic philosophy, has been spoon-fed to our children but to no avail—the overwhelming majority of people living in America still believe in God. This proves this deeply embedded longing which cannot be erased.

*The Holy Spirit
is the One who
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Reflection Connection

What do other peoples of the world use to satisfy their deep thirst for God? Do you think their thirst is satisfied? If so, why? If not, please explain.

Granted, more people than not are confused and attempt to satisfy that spiritual hunger with innumerable substitutes. Whether it is religion, materialism, wealth, pleasure or fame, people inevitably attempt to quench that thirst.

The good thing is Jesus always invites the thirsty! He longs to satisfy those who come to the well and drink. It does not matter who you are, what you have done or not done. Jesus invites you to come. He is the Savior and the Savior issues you an invitation.

Observe as well that you are invited to come to a Person. That is, Jesus invited you to Himself! You are never invited to embrace a religion or join a particular church. Instead, you are invited to Jesus. Christianity is Christ. Salvation is a relationship with a Person: *“He that hath the Son hath life.”*

Second, we have here the *indwelling of the Spirit*: *“If any man thirst let him come unto me, and drink”* (v. 37). The Lord is obviously referring to the incoming of the Holy Spirit. The promise is rivers of living waters that will be ours for the taking (cp. Joel 2:28). Unlike the Old Testament when the Spirit would descend at various times for various purposes, God promised a day when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all believers (cp. John 16:8; Acts 1:8). In essence, we all as His people would *“drink”* of His Spirit (v. 37).

Thus, Jesus is not only referring to the incoming of the Holy Spirit but also the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He would not just rest upon men, He would reside within men (cp. 14:17).

Jesus mentioned that *“out of his belly”* should flow this spiritual water (v. 38). The word *“belly”* means *“innermost being.”* The Holy Spirit comes to the seat of our thought, our feelings, and our choices. He comes to the center of our personality. Thus, He works in us.

By way of warning, we should note that because the Holy Spirit is a Person and not a *“thing”*, it is possible to hinder His activity in us. One way the Bible describes this hindrance is *“grieving”* His work (Ephesians 4:30). How do we *“grieve”* the work of the Spirit? We can *“grieve”* Him by harming His temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). Another way is to behave outside of His influence (Ephesians 4:25-29). Still another way to hinder Him is to nurture attitudes in our hearts that are unholy (Ephesians 4:31).

The Spirit has another important work in our lives. There is the incoming of the Spirit, the indwelling of the Spirit, and finally there is infilling of the Spirit. John refers to the *“rivers”* of water (v. 38). This clearly is indicative of His abundance.

The Bible commands us to seek the Spirit’s abundance; that is to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). This simply means He controls and permeates every area of our lives. He has control of our lives.

Last, we note in John’s words the influence of the saint. When the Holy Spirit comes in there will be an outflow from our lives. To say it another way, if there is a flowing in, there will be a flooding out (cp. Joshua 3:15). God does not make us sponges to soak Him up. Rather He makes us pipes to serve as a channel to flow through. Our lips serve as a channel—what we say. Our labor serves as a channel—what we do. In fact, our entire lives serve as a channel—everything we are. If there is no outflow from your life, something is wrong. Your life cannot please God if it is only a clogged pipe.

Reflection Connection

Is there a difference between the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and being born of the Holy Spirit? Is being filled with the Spirit the same as being indwelt by the Spirit?



Golden Greek Nugget

John says in an interpretative statement that “the Holy Spirit was not yet given” (v. 39). There is no word for “given” in the original Greek. The translators supplied the word to give John’s sense clarity, else it would indicate that the Holy Spirit was “not yet.” That is not what John means, of course. He was not suggesting that the Holy Spirit did not yet exist, which is what could be inferred. Instead, John was speaking of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit which was “not yet.” This is John’s way of looking back at what happened on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

Wrap Up

The dispensing of the Holy Spirit marked a new era in the disciples’ lives. It is no less with us. He comes to us to dwell in us. He dwells in us to serve for us as our daily companion. No believer can please God who does not seek to please the Spirit. Are you given over to the Spirit today? Does your life overflow with the Spirit of God?

