

Come to Him and Drink (John 7:32-52)

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Have you ever been so thirsty that finding a drink was all you could think about? It's par for the course in some of the classic survival stories. Think of Louis Zamporini drifting in a life raft in Laura Hillenbrand's *Unbroken* or Ernest Shackleton trudging across snow fields in Alfred Lansing's *Endurance*.

I once experienced the smallest taste of what those men suffered for months toward the end of a long summer backpacking trip when we completely ran out of water. Your mouth turns to cotton. Your lips begin to crack. Your leg muscles stop cooperating. I don't think I've ever been happier to round a bend in the trail and see my car than I was on that trip. Your body will not survive unless your thirst is quenched with water.

It's not the only kind of thirst we experience in this life. Have you known what it is to thirst in your soul, to sense in the depth of your heart your desperate need for peace with God? Have you felt the shame of your guilt in his sight? Have you longed for the joy of forgiveness and cleansing from sin? Maybe you've roamed this world aching for a satisfaction that forever eludes your grasp, where even your "successes" slip like sand between your fingers, leaving you just as empty on the inside?

To thirst for spiritual life in your soul is not a pleasant feeling in and of itself, but it is exceedingly good on account of the action it compels us to take. In the words of J.C. Ryle, "Happy are those who know something by experience of spiritual 'thirst.' The beginning of all true Christianity is to discover that we are guilty, empty, needy sinners. Until we know that we are lost, we are not in the way to be saved. The very first step toward heaven is to be thoroughly convinced that we deserve hell. That sense of sin which sometimes alarms a man and makes him think his own case desperate, is a good sign. It is in fact a symptom of spiritual life – 'Blessed indeed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled' (Matt 5:6)."

As the gift of water is necessary to satisfy your physical thirst, so too is the gift of the Holy Spirit necessary to satisfy your spiritual thirst. Your body cannot live without the former. Your soul cannot live without the latter. The invitation Jesus extends in Jn 7:37 echoes across the corridor of time to every people, language, and nation. So it comes to you, friend. "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.'"

If your soul is thirsty, come to Jesus, for only the Son who grants the Spirit can give you life. But choosing to come to Jesus requires knowing why he's worth coming to in the first place. Thankfully, that's where Jesus himself begins in vv. 33.

1) JESUS ASSERTS AN IDENTITY ONLY THE SON OF GOD CAN CLAIM (vv. 32-36)

The tentative faith some of the Jewish people expressed in Jesus in v. 31 didn't sit well with the religious authorities. Groups like the Pharisees didn't want anyone worshipping him as if he were the Son of God because they were convinced he was not! Widespread whisperings about him proved the tipping point and in v. 32 they sent members of the temple police force to arrest him.

Jesus responds by asserting his divine identity in a way that reveals his perfect knowledge and absolute control over not just the present situation, but every aspect of his life – past, present, and future. V. 33, "Jesus then said, 'I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.'"

Those are not the words of one who is being blown about by the whims of men. That's sovereignty speaking. I will do this. Then I will do that. Then you will do this. And you will not be able to do that. Unlike us, he knew the measure of his days on earth. He was fully aware of his impending crucifixion and resurrection. He knew he had come from heaven and would soon ascend to the Father's side in glory. None of it was hidden. None of it was reactionary.

Jesus doesn't leave us any room to categorize him as a good person or an inspiring teacher. Jesus identifies himself in no uncertain terms as the all-knowing, all-power Son of God. You can deny it, but to pull that off, you have to deny the overwhelming majority of what he vehemently asserted about himself. You have to decide you know Jesus better than Jesus knew himself.

In a historical sense, the announcement that he would soon be sought but not found proved completely true. After his death and resurrection, Luke records his physical ascension to heaven in Acts 1, leaving his bewildered disciples staring skyward in amazement. Jesus' words in v. 34, "Where I am you cannot come," remain true today.

There are realms of spiritual existence finite, physical creatures like us cannot explore, limits we cannot overcome. The borders of heaven are not open to the living. Until the hour of our death, we cannot go to where Jesus is. National Geographic cannot fund an



exploratory trip to find Jesus any more than NASA can launch a deep-space rocket and get to heaven. Why not? Because Jesus has ordained in the perfection of his will that in this age his glory will be seen through the eyes of faith.

He does not reveal himself to those who demand he pass muster in the courtroom of human reason, natural observation, or scientific inquiry. To those he continues to say, "You will seek me and you will not find me." He will only be sought and found by those who embrace an attitude of obedient trust and humble submission. Heb 11:6, "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."

In the Jews' eyes, there were two realms of living human existence. Either you're among the Jews or among the Gentiles. If you're not in either place, then you're not alive. You're dead. In that regard, they were like the fish that decides, "Because I've never lived in anything but water, there is no such thing as living on dry land." They kept trying to fit Jesus into the narrow confines of life in this physical world because it was all they had ever known and, in their eyes, he was a man like them.

He was a man like them, friends, but he wasn't just a man. He was the Eternal Son of God who came from the Father. He was not of this world (in a creaturely sense) and would soon leave his followers in this world on account of his departure out of this world. It's his identity as the God-man that establishes his authority and primes our spiritually thirsty souls to listen carefully to everything he has to say.

Jesus' words, including all he's about to say in vv. 37-39 make absolutely no sense apart from the truth of his divine identity. The first thing he does is assert a divine identity only the Son of God can claim.

2) JESUS OFFERS A LIFE ONLY THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN PROVIDE

The historical context of Jn 7 is the Jewish feast of tabernacle or booths. It was a week-long festival the Lord instructed Israel to keep every fall to give thanks for his salvation in the form of deliverance from Egypt in the past and rain to water the earth in the present. Every day of the feast, the priests would fill a jar with water at the pool of Siloam in Jerusalem and march to the temple to pour it out at the base of the altar as both an expression of worship and prayer for further provision from the Creator and Sustainer of life.

The water rite on the last day of the feast was especially important. And it was on that day, "the great day," when Jesus stood up and cried out (presumably in the court of the temple), "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." He gathered up all the symbolism of the feast and identified himself as the divine provision, the long-awaited fulfillment, it had been anticipating and pointing to all along.

For Jesus knew God's people had a greater need than water from a rock in the wilderness or rain on their fields before harvest. They needed the water of spiritual life, the water of forgiveness and cleansing from sin, the water of restored relationship with God, and the renewal of everything their disobedience had made wrong.

It was a provision the Lord promised centuries beforehand in Isa 12:3, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation," and urged his people to trust him to provide in Isa 55:1-3, "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat...Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live..."

For Jews who knew their Bibles and had ears to hear, Jesus was announcing the dawn of the messianic age, the time when God himself would begin making all things new, satisfying the hearts of his thirsty and tired people with his redeeming power and glory. And if you want in on it, here's what you have to do. Come to me and drink.

The invitation to come to Jesus and drink at the end of v. 37 is a vivid way of describing the invitation to believe or place your faith in Jesus at the beginning of v. 38. And if you're willing to do that, if you cling to Jesus as the only one who can satisfy the deepest thirsts in your soul, what can you expect? Look at v. 38. "...as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" And then John adds in v. 39, "Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believe in him were to receive..."

What Jesus promises here is stunning, friends. He says, "I'm not going to satisfy your thirst by handing you cups of spiritual life at a couple mile markers in the race of life. No, from eternity past the Father has planned something far better, something your forefathers could have scarcely believed, and yet something the prophets have long foretold. I'm going to make you a fountain of spiritual life. I'm going to give you a never ending, never running out, fire hydrant of spiritual life that fills you to the top and overflows into everyone around you.

How would Jesus do that? The same way he does it today. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Joel 2:28, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all

flesh..." From the Day of Pentecost onward, all who turn to Jesus in repentance and faith become temples of the living God through the indwelling presence of the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor 12:13, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit." 1 Cor 6:19, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?"

The Israelites wandering in the wilderness longed for the day God would bring them into his place, into the Promised land. Little did they know God had something far better in store. One day, through the outpouring of the Spirit, he would make them into his place. Isa 58:11, "And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail."

From the rivers flowing out of the Garden of Eden in Gen 2 to the river flowing through the heavenly city in Rev 22, the water of life represents the dwelling place of the Author of Life and the salvation, healing, and joy that is only found in him. To live with the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of you is to experience a taste of heaven on earth. All the benefits of salvation Jesus has won for you, Christian, are applied and brought to fruition in your life through the ceaseless activity of the Holy Spirit.

It's the Spirit who draws us. It's the Spirit who convicts us. It's the Spirit who cleanses us. It's the Spirit who changes us. It's the Spirit who empowers us. It's the Spirit who unites us. It's the Spirit who sustains us. It's the Spirit who comforts us. It's the Spirit who equips us to take all the blessings God has given us and use them to serve others such that through our love, our care, our provision, they experience something of the abundant love, care, and provision of God himself.

The Holy Spirit mediates the presence of Jesus to us as his people such that we get to experience his nearness and enjoy his presence even as we wait to see him face to face. He is the best gift we could ever receive, brothers and sisters, for through the Spirit God has given us the gift of himself.

Are you thirsty, my friend? Are the people around you thirsty? Don't try to create spiritual life for yourself or others. Come to Jesus and drink. Trust the life-giving work of the Spirit he freely gives. Cry out to God to fill you with more of the Spirit. Remember Jesus words. "If *anyone* thirsts, let him come." There is no requirement other than feeling the weight of your need for him. The thirst in your soul is intended by God to lead you back to him.

And if you're in a situation where it feels like everyone around you is sucking the life out of you and putting little to nothing back in, remember, through the indwelling Spirit, King Jesus has placed an unending fountain of living water within you. You are not alone. You are not impoverished. The infinite and almighty God dwells in you and is with you! Do not lose heart in doing good, not because you think you're sufficient but because you know he is.

3) JESUS CREATES A DIVISION THAT EXPOSES THE HEARTS OF MEN (vv. 40-52)

The free invitation of the gospel – turn away from your sins and come to Jesus, for only the Son who sends the Spirit can give you life – is divisive by nature. It puts all men into one of two categories: those who believe in Jesus and those who do not.

When Jesus spoke during the feast of tabernacles, some decided he must be the prophet like Moses promised in Deut 18. Others decided he must be the Christ, God's anointed Savior. A third group objected to the second group correctly, arguing from Mic 5 that the Messiah must be born in the city of David, in Bethlehem. Since Jesus was from Nazareth in Galilee, he can't be the Christ! Apparently, they were ignorant of the true circumstances of his birth. Bottom line, v. 43, "there was a division among the people over them."

Friends, if people had divergent responses to Jesus when he was physical speaking to them, should we expect anything different today? Why do you assume, parents, that if you just get the messaging right, all your children will follow Jesus and if they don't, you must have failed in some way? Why do we assume if someone isn't persuaded by the gospel that there must have been something wrong with the way we presented it?

If the Son of God himself wasn't believed when he walked the earth, do you really think the responses you get will be any different? Don't be surprised by division or rejection. Rest in the sovereign power of God. V. 44, "Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him." Why not? Because the officers sent to arrest Jesus found themselves arrested by the power of his words. He claimed things and said things about himself that only God could say, and yet did so with the most natural authority.

The Pharisees who sent them were incensed and their response to both the temple officers and one of their own number, Nicodemus, reveals the perennial obstacle to faith in Jesus – intellectual pride. The Pharisees looked to human wisdom, human reason, wielded by the educated elite, as the final standard of credibility. V. 48, "Have any of the

authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.”

The great irony of their words was completely lost on them. In reality, if they had really known the law, they would have recognized and believed Jesus for he was the fulfilment of the law, the One to whom the entire law pointed. The fact the Pharisees completely missed as much proved that if anyone was “accursed” or condemned on account of their words, it was them! When Nicodemus tactfully challenged their self-confidence, urging his fellow religious leaders to practice biblical justice, they refused. They don’t even answer Nicodemus’ actual objection in v. 51. They simply retort, “Are you from Galilee too?”

On one level, it’s a classic example of the spiritually blinding effect of self-righteousness. Thank God we’re wiser than all those uneducated Galileans from the backwoods! On another level, it’s a classic example of just how far we are willing to go in denying what is actually true in order to maintain whatever we want to be true. The prophet Jonah was from Galilee. But that known fact didn’t support their argument, so it was conveniently ignored.

The Pharisees were supremely confident in themselves and looked down on other people accordingly. They weren’t humble. They were proud. And their pride kept them from seeing Jesus for who he really was. They thought they were among the spiritually informed. In reality, they were completely ignorant. We do the exact same thing today, friends, when we style ourselves as the sophisticated seeker, always searching, but never arriving at the knowledge of the truth.

You will never know Jesus if you require him to first pass muster in the courtroom of human reason. But if you humbly come to Jesus and listen to him on his own terms, when you knock, the door will be opened to you. 1 Cor 1:20–21, “...Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.”

CONCLUSION

If you are spiritually thirsty, praise God! Recognizing as much is a gift. If you’re not, ask the Spirit to open your eyes to see the depth of your need for Jesus. Lord, increase my thirst for you. Lord, satisfy me with the life that comes from your Spirit. Those are two prayers Jesus delights to answer, friends.



He is worthy of your trust because he's the Son of God. He is worthy of your trust because he's the Son who sends the Spirit. And even when responses to him in this life and in your world are divided, he is still worthy of your trust because that divergence exposes the pride of men, not the uncertainty or unreliability of God.

Only the Son who sends the Spirit can give you life. So what are you waiting for? Why are you hesitating? Come to Jesus and keep on clinging to Jesus till the day he brings you home.