

Rivers of Living Water

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John 7:37–39 (NKJV) “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” ³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

Jesus was in Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles, the last of three yearly Jewish festivals. It is held in the Jewish month of Tishri (September or October). The event in John 7:37-39 took place on the last great or seventh day of the feast (Tishri 21), which is also called “The Great Hosanna”. The feast coincides with the fall harvest and symbolizes the ingathering of the Gentile nations. The feast commemorates Israel's forty year journey in the wilderness and is a reminder of God's faithfulness, provision, and protection. During this week Israelite families built and dwelled in temporary shelters made out of branches to remember the way their ancestors lived in the wilderness. This event took place approximately six months before Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

How did Jesus' words fit into the context of the feast, or did they? Alfred Edersheim (1825-1889), a Jewish convert to Christianity, says that on this last day of the Feast a group of worshipers following a Priest with a golden pitcher would go in musical procession from the Temple to the Pool of Siloam which was fed by a living spring. Here the Priest filled the golden pitcher and together with the worshipers returned to the Temple as the Morning Sacrifice was being laid upon the great Altar. A threefold Priestly trumpet blast welcomed the Priest with the golden pitcher containing living water as he entered the Water Gate and proceeded into the Court of the Priests. He was then joined by another Priest who carried wine for the drink offering. Ascending the rise of the Altar they turned to the left where there were two silver funnels that went to the base of the Altar. The wine was poured into the one that went to the east side of the Altar while the water was poured in the other that led to the west side of the Altar. “The ceremony of the outpouring of water, which was considered of such vital importance as to give to the whole festival the name of ‘House of Outpouring,’ was symbolical of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”¹ It was in the context that Jesus said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.”

Jesus is speaking of soul thirst—a thirst deep within the heart of man for love, acceptance, meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. People have a soul thirst because they have forsaken the LORD for a substitute that cannot satisfy. The LORD said through the prophet Jeremiah, “For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.”² Again He says, “O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake You shall be ashamed. “Those who depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters.”³ Cistern are holding tanks that soon become stagnant cesspools filled with bacteria and disease. These cisterns are broken so that they can hold no water. People need living water!

Jesus says to those who have a soul thirst: “Let him come to Me and drink.” The water poured out at this festival was a reminder of how God satisfied the thirst of their forefathers in the wilderness. God brought forth water from a rock. Jesus is the Rock from which the supernatural living water flows: “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ² all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”⁴

Jesus offered living water to a woman of Samaria to satisfy her soul thirst. This woman kept coming back to the same well day after day but it could never satisfy her soul thirst. Jesus offered her “living water”: “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”⁵ Living water speaks of a flowing fountain or river of water of life: “but whoever drinks of the water

¹ Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Book 4, Chapter 17: “In the Last, the Great Day of the Feast”

² Jeremiah 2:13 (NKJV)

³ Jeremiah 17:13 (NKJV)

⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 (NKJV)

⁵ John 4:10 (NKJV)

that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”⁶ Are you thirsty? Are you tired of going to those old wells that never satisfy? Do you want something to satisfy the deep thirst of your soul?

Jesus said to the thirsty: *“Let Him come to Me and drink.”* Jesus alone has the living water of life and gives it to those who come to Him as the only Source of living water. A person “drinks” of this water by placing their faith in Him: *“He who believes in Me.”* Those who place saving faith in Jesus will not only have their soul thirst satisfied, but they will become a channel through which His water can flow to others: *“as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”*⁷ In the same way, Jesus said to the woman of Samaria: *“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.’”*⁸

What are the “rivers of living water”? They speak of the Holy Spirit: *“But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”*⁹ Jesus was speaking of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that would take place on the Day of Pentecost. (Acts 2) Isaiah the prophet foretold of this outpouring: *“For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring;”*¹⁰ and again, *“Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is counted as a forest.”*¹¹

In a vision, the prophet Ezekiel saw a river flowing from the temple. Christians are called the temple of God. (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19) Ezekiel says in his vision: *“Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar.² He brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water, running out on the right side³ And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles.⁴ Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist.⁵ Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed.⁶ He said to me, ‘Son of man, have you seen this?’ Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river.⁷ When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, were very many trees on one side and the other.⁸ Then he said to me: ‘This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed.’”*¹²

The river of the Holy Spirit is to flow out of His temple into the dry and weary land where there is no water. There are hurting and thirsty people who are looking for living water that only Jesus can give. We must let the Spirit flow through our lives so that others will follow it back to the Rock, Jesus Christ, who is the Source.

⁶ John 4:14 (NKJV)

⁷ John 7:38 (NKJV)

⁸ John 4:13–14 (NKJV)

⁹ John 7:39 (NKJV)

¹⁰ Isaiah 44:3 (NKJV)

¹¹ Isaiah 32:15 (NKJV)

¹² Ezekiel 47:1-8 (NKJV)