

14. All Who Are Thirsty

John 7

The Gospel According to John

John sets the scene for us in chapter seven by sharing that, leading up to the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus ministered in the area of the Galilee. This festival falls in our Western calendar during September or October. As mentioned in another study, all adult males were commanded by God to attend the three main feasts of Passover (also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread), Pentecost (also called the Feast of Weeks), and the Feast of Tabernacles (also called the Feast of Booths, Deuteronomy 16). Aside from being a harvest celebration, The Feast of Tabernacles also commemorated God's provision to Israel when for forty years God led and kept them during their time of wandering when they lived in tents and makeshift dwellings.

The celebration lasted for a week (Deuteronomy 16:13-15), and it was a joyful time, with families making makeshift dwellings to live in during the feast. It was ended by the eighth day, which was a "holy day," when no work was to be done (Numbers 29:35). John tells us something significant that Jesus did on the eighth day (John 7:37). Before we get to that significant revelation of Jesus, let's listen in to the conversation that led up to it.

¹After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. ²But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, ³Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. ⁴No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵For even his own brothers did not believe in him. ⁶Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. ⁷The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. ⁸You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me **the right time has not yet come.**" ⁹Having said this, he stayed in Galilee. ¹⁰However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret (John 7:1-10 Emphasis mine).

It was now just six months before Jesus would be crucified, and the Jewish ruling elite had put the word out that the Lord was to be put to death (v. 1). The Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Jewish religious leaders were not just antagonistic toward Jesus; they were intent on killing Him! No one will ever be able to say to God on Judgment Day, "You don't know what it was like," for God has entered into human suffering in every way, even to the point of being rejected by His people. Jesus was aware that there were plans to kill Him, but He also understood that His time was coming and that He would be the Passover sacrificial lamb to deliver all those who would put their faith in Him. □

The *Kairos* Time

The Scriptures say that Jesus had four brothers and at least two sisters (Matthew 12:55-56, Mark 3:31), and His brothers were urging Him to go to Jerusalem for the feast.

Question 1) Why were His brothers urging Jesus to go to Jerusalem and be a public figure? (verses 3-4). Why did Jesus respond by talking about the timing not being right? (v. 6). □

Perhaps, they thought that laboring among the ordinary people in Galilee, healing and teaching them, was not getting Him anywhere. If He sought to be a teacher in Israel, Jerusalem was the place to be to prove Himself to the world where He could get public recognition and acclaim. The world's way is to push oneself forward to become a public figure and gain notoriety. Jesus did not seek after these things. **“Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not” (Jeremiah 45:5)**. The man or woman of God is happy to serve and pour out his or her life in service to others as unto the Lord; this attitude is pure joy. His brothers did not believe in Him (v. 5). Of course, after the resurrection, it was a different story. In fact, we know that at least two of Christ's brothers became leaders in the early church, James, and Jude, and they wrote the two New Testament books that were so named.

When Jesus was urged to go to Jerusalem for the Feast, His response was **“The right time for me has not yet come” (v. 8)**. In every instance except this one, the term Christ used to describe the time of His crucifixion was the Greek word *hora*, a word that means “hour.” But in verse eight, John, the writer of this Gospel, used the word *Kairos* to describe the right time. This Greek word means a decisive or strategic moment in time to express what God wanted to do at the Feast of Tabernacles. The Father wanted to reveal something new to the Jewish people about His Son. For now, though, Jesus had to wait for the *kairos* time, i.e., the opportune time, the defining moment, to arrive. It is possible that, instead of going up to this celebration with thousands of people traveling the three or four-day journey together, Jesus did not want the public acclaim as He entered Jerusalem. That time would come as Jesus rode in on a donkey in six months' time on Palm Sunday, a few days before being crucified as the Passover Lamb. For this feast, He would go to Jerusalem secretly (v. 10). □

Question 2) Jesus said that the right time has not yet come. Has there been a decisive or defining moment that was a turning point in your life that, by God's grace, changed you forever?

By this time, a great deal of antagonism had grown toward Jesus by the Jewish ruling leadership, partly because of the healing of the invalid person at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath (John 5:16), but also because Christ was claiming equality with God (John 5:19). He was also a threat to the authority of the priesthood because He had cleared out the moneychangers from the Temple. In doing so, He denied the Jewish leaders a lot of money when they charged exorbitant exchange fees for the people to pay the Temple tax (John 2:13-17). The word had gone out among those who had leadership authority that Jesus should be put to death as soon as they could find the right opportunity. □

Everything that Jesus did was to model to us how we are to live a Christ-centered life, i.e., waiting for the Lord's timing. Christ lived His life in dependence on the Father. Sometimes, it is hard to wait for God's timing. We can be so eager to go and do God's work that we can go without God. Moses acted outside of God's timing to help the Israelites in Egypt before he was ready, and he had to spend forty years as a shepherd in the Desert of Midian before the Lord called him to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt (Act 7:23-30). There are things that God

wants to do in us before He can use us. A.W. Tozer said, "It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply."

It is so for nations, too. The Chinese people have had to go through many trials and persecutions until their *kairos* time. The defining moment has arrived for them now to be sending many missionaries to other nations. Sometimes, just waiting on God's timing can be painful. The worst thing that can happen to people of God is to venture forth in ministry before they are ready. Many have shipwrecked their faith because of going before they were fully prepared. Jesus had to wait for the right time, the strategic time before God directed Him to go to the Feast. □

Question 3) How does a person know that the right time for something has come? Is it intuition or a person's circumstances lining up? Is there a time to go in faith despite the odds?

For a strategic work of the Lord to be completed by His servants, there is a preparation time beforehand. We have a picture of the preparation of a servant of God in Isaiah 49:

Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name. ²He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. ³He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor" (Isaiah 49:1-3).

Notice the work of God in shaping the man or woman of God. First of all, there is a calling on his life. From the womb God has been at work, calling him by name. One of the most important things that have to be shaped by God is what issues from his lips. A man's tongue is to become a sharp sword that is Spirit-led and empowered. There is no room for coarse language or deceitful lips (James 3:10-11). The picture given is that of the making of an arrow. It has to be made pliable in the hands of the arrow maker before being straightened on a rack. The process then requires being polished, which speaks of being rubbed the wrong way and heat applied to the character before a servant can be used in a significant way. □

The last and most challenging part of the transformative work of God is to be placed in the quiver (a leather bag used for carrying arrows on the back of the archer), waiting for the Master to put you into His bow to be fired at the time of His choosing. Many of you have been prepared and remaining in the quiver to be used of the Lord. This is speaking of those who are being trained for a specific task. We never have to wait to obey the revealed word of God.

While you are waiting in the quiver experience, you should be sharpening your character by walking in obedience to the Lord, i.e., polishing your life, so to speak, so that, when you are sent from His bow, you will fly right to the target for which He has equipped you. Part of the quiver experience is to be patient and learn to listen to His voice. God is often speaking to us; the problem is usually on our end. We are just not listening or perceiving His voice: □

For God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it (Job 33:14).

Patience is something that the Spirit has to work in us while we are in the quiver. While we are being prepared, we can appreciate this time as God is working in us to reveal His character in our lives.

The Courage of Christ

¹¹Now at the Feast the Jews were watching for him and asking, "Where is that man?" ¹²Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." ¹³But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews. ¹⁴Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. ¹⁵The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" ¹⁶Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. ¹⁷If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. ¹⁸He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. ¹⁹Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?" ²⁰"You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?" ²¹Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed. ²²Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath. ²³Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath? ²⁴Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly." ²⁵At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? ²⁶Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Messiah? ²⁷But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from" (John 7:11-27).

Question 4) When Jesus spoke of the *world* hating him (Verse 7), so what do you think He is referring to His use of the word "world?" Why would people want to kill Him (verses 1 and 25)?

Halfway through the Feast, Jesus arrived and began to teach in the temple courts. The people were divided about Him. Some said He was a good man, while others accused Him of being a deceiver (v. 12). The Lord Jesus polarizes men: either you are for Him or against Him. It is so today, too. When Scripture speaks of the *world's* hating Christ and us as His disciples, it means that the world system is in direct opposition to Christ and His kingdom purposes. We are at war, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. There are spiritual forces at work in this world that want to stamp out anything that has to do with the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and biblical Christianity. That is so for the nation of Israel, too, because God has not fulfilled all His promises yet to the Jewish people. Even though there will be opposition for us as Christians, people are never our enemies. There are spiritual forces that manipulate people to seek to bring about the growth of evil in this world. Paul the Apostle said:

¹¹Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:11-12).

Let me ask you a question. If you knew that people were waiting for an opportune time to kill you, would you go to where those desiring to take such action were waiting for you? That would either be madness or sheer courage or trust in God to do such a thing. However, that is what our Lord Jesus did. Verse 11 tells us that the Jews, meaning those Jews who were in opposition to Jesus, were watching for Him and asking, “**Where is that man?**” (v. 11). They knew He would be there because every Jew that was anywhere near to Jerusalem and the Temple were to present themselves to the Lord at the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23). Perhaps, they had been waiting for Him at every gate into the city of Jerusalem (v. 25). However, He did not go to Jerusalem with great crowds of people accompanying Him as they thought. He went up in secret (v. 10) at the midpoint of the Feast (Verse 14).

Here we see the courage of Christ. As He walked through the crowds of people, He could hear widespread whispering about Him, “**He is a good man,**” while others replied, “**No, He deceives the people**” (v. 12). It is still the same today. There is general thinking that our Savior is a deceiver as to His divine nature while others have come to place their trust in Him as the Savior of the world.

Bravely entering the Temple precincts, He stood boldly and began to teach in Solomon’s Colonnade, teaching all who would hear Him (v. 14). How the Jewish leaders must have been outraged when He suddenly appeared in the Temple Courts, quickly gathering a crowd as He taught about His Father. His courage should inspire all of us.

Thirsting for God (John 7:37-43)

The Jewish people had been waiting for centuries for a man that Moses said God would send them. He would be a prophet similar to Moses. They were to listen very carefully to him:

¹⁵The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him... ¹⁸I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. ¹⁹I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19).

The people of Israel understood that the Messiah when He came, would do similar miracles as Moses did. They expected bread from heaven just as in the time of Moses, but Christ said that the true bread from Heaven was Himself. He said, “**Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world**” (John 6:32-33). In John’s writing of his Gospel, he tells us of another proof that Jesus was the prophet for whom that Moses told them to look. Just as Moses had brought them water out of a rock when the rock was hit by his staff (Exodus 17:5-6), Paul the Apostle told us that the Rock being struck to bring forth water was an analogy or picture language of Christ being the giver of the water of life, the Spirit of God poured out upon them. Paul wrote: **²They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was**

Christ (1 Corinthians 10:3-4). What Moses did was just a picture of what Jesus would do at the cross. Typified by water, the Spirit would be poured out on the Day of Pentecost just as various prophets had foretold (Joel 2:28, Isaiah 44:3, Ezekiel 36:26-27).

John now writes of a further revelation of the Son that the Father had prepared for His people. It happened on the eighth day, the most significant day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

³⁷On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” ³⁹By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. ⁴⁰On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.” ⁴¹Others said, “He is the Messiah.” Still others asked, “How can the Messiah come from Galilee? ⁴²Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David’s descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?” ⁴³Thus the people were divided because of Jesus (John 7:37-43).

The feast lasted seven days with a further day being the most noteworthy (John 7:37). Here is what the Lord commanded for the eighth day: “For seven days present food offerings to the LORD, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present a food offering to the LORD. It is the special closing assembly; do no regular work” (Leviticus 23:36). On the eighth day, with thousands of people looking on, the High Priest went down to the Pool of Siloam and filled up a two-pint golden pitcher and carried it back into the center of the crowd that stood before the altar of the Temple. The crowd would circle the altar seven times in remembrance of the walls of Jericho being brought down, and then, with the whole event accompanied by the singing of various Psalms, the Chief Priest would pour the water before the altar as a prophetic sign that the Jewish people were ready for the water of life to be poured out.

The prophet Ezekiel had told of a time when out from under the threshold of the Temple, a river of life would flow toward the east that would start ankle deep, become knee deep, and would eventually become so deep it would lift people off their feet and carry them along in its path (Ezekiel 47:1-9). Wherever this river flowed, it would bring life, fruit, and healing. This river would descend to the Dead Sea, and its effect would be to bring forth fish in the Dead Sea (Ezekiel 47:8-9). The pouring out of the water spoke of their expectation that, perhaps in their day, the river of life would begin to flow as the pitcher was poured out.

To the Jewish people, the center of the world was Israel. The center of Israel was Jerusalem, and the center of Jerusalem was the Temple. It seems that, at that very moment of the pitcher’s being poured out, Jesus stood and raised His voice so that all could hear His words:

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them” ³⁹By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified. ⁴⁰On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.” ⁴¹Others said, “He is the Messiah.” Still others asked, “How can the Messiah come from Galilee? ⁴²Does not Scripture say that the

Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?"⁴³ Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. ⁴⁴Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him (John 7:37-43).

What Jesus was saying was that out of the temple of His life would flow the refreshing, life-giving, healing power of the Spirit about which the water and the prophecy spoke. When Christ lives in us and has been given full ownership to rule and reign over us, this river or spring will flow from the very center of our being, just as Jesus told us. When Christ is enthroned in the temple of our hearts, His Spirit will flow out to those around us, bringing us new life. John the Apostle clarifies that the Spirit at that time had not yet been given due to Jesus not yet being glorified (v. 39). The Spirit had only come upon certain individuals for specific purposes. What God promised was that His Spirit would come into the lives of all people: □

²⁸And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days (Joel 2:28-29).

Question 5) According to John 7:37-39, what did Jesus say are the conditions that must be met for the Spirit of God to flow in and through us?

There are four conditions in this passage to drinking deeply of the Spirit of God:

- 1) You have to have a thirst for more of God. Are you satisfied with life as it is? Our Lord loves to be pursued by hungry and thirsty people. Do not let Christ go until your thirst has been quenched. Receive all that God has for you. Persevere in prayer for the Spirit to come and fill you.
- 2) You have to come to the person of Christ. He said, "Let him come to me." This is not about church or devotion to religious acts; this is about coming to Christ Himself. Do you have a love for the person of Christ? When Jesus restored Peter after saying three times that he didn't know Him, Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him (John 21:15-17), a question that each of us should answer. Ask the Spirit to reveal to you afresh all that Christ has done for you so that you may fall head-over-heels in love with the person of Christ. □
- 3) You will need to drink. This speaks of the act of receiving the Spirit by an open, transparent heart. Vulnerability and honesty are some of the hallmarks of a heart that is ready to be filled with the Spirit. There is a conscious decision of the will to go God's way instead of our way. It speaks of submission to follow the Shepherd wherever He leads. □
- 4) Whoever believes in Christ (v. 38) will receive. This is not an intellectual assent to the facts of the Gospel. It is a sincere, settled, inner belief that allows a different set of moral values to affect one's character. Jesus calls it being born-again (John 3:3). What does it mean to believe? If this is one of the conditions that God requires, we need to scrutinize it. Intellectual agreement to the facts of Christianity means to acknowledge that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, but just an intellectual agreement is not what it means to believe in the biblical sense of the word. So then, what does it mean to believe? □

Years ago, the great acrobat Karl Wallenda, otherwise known as Blondin, stretched a wire across Niagara Falls, a distance of around 1,000 feet and offered to carry anyone across in a wheelbarrow. Many believed that he could do it, but there were no takers. To get in the wheelbarrow and be taken across the chasm—that is the difference between intellectual agreements of what God has done in Christ and personal trust. Intellectual assessment recognizes that the wheelbarrow will get a person over the Niagara Falls, but the person doesn't get in and trust someone to take him over the Falls. Personal trust, or belief in Christ, is releasing the will to be led by God and to live for Him by obeying His voice.

These four are the most important conditions to living out a life of faith, being guided and empowered by the Spirit. Every one of us who believe in Christ has the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9), but the question is, "Does the Holy Spirit have us?" The most attractive people in the world are those who are full and led by God's Spirit. To be filled with God's Spirit, you need to displace self from the seat of authority in your life. The most significant example to us of one filled with the Spirit is the Lord Jesus Christ. □

William Booth, the founder, and pioneer of the Salvation Army was once ill and could not attend their leadership conference one year. He was asked if there was anything significant that he would like to communicate to his leaders. He had just one word written on a piece of paper for them, and the word was "others." His leaders were to be devoted to others. Such is the heart of a man filled with the Spirit of Christ. □

Even when the Jewish leaders sent the temple guards to arrest Jesus (v. 32), they came back without Him. They reported back to the chief priests and Pharisees, **"No one ever spoke the way this man does"** (John 7:46). The dynamic presence and boldness of Christ, plus the gracious words that came from His lips, made the temple soldiers disobey the rulers of the Jewish people. The response of the people to His message at the high point of the Feast was, **"Surely this man is the Prophet."** Others said, **"He is the Christ"** (v. 40). What do you think? Have you concluded yet that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world and your soul? If so, why don't you open your life to Him and ask Him to come into your life by His Spirit and fill you to overflowing? □

Father, will You come into my life? I want to be born-again and full of Your Spirit. Lord, make me thirsty for You. I want to drink deeply of the water of life. I no longer want to come ankle deep into this river, nor even knee deep. I want to be controlled and led by You in every avenue of my being. Amen!

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