

# RIVERS OF LIVING WATER WILL FLOW

John 7:1-52

Key Verses: 7:37-38

**“On 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. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.’”**

While the setting of chapter 6 was Galilee, when the Passover Festival was near, the setting of chapter 7 is Jerusalem during the Festival of Tabernacles. This festival was significant both historically and seasonally. Historically, it reminded the Israelites of God’s provision and protection while they lived in the wilderness. To remember that time, they made booths and lived in them during the festival. Seasonally, it celebrated the harvest, and was similar to Thanksgiving. So it was also called the Festival of Ingathering. It was a happy time in which they enjoyed choice food and drink. The festival in today’s passage was special because Jesus was there. People were talking about who Jesus was. To prevent them from believing in Jesus, the authorities oppressed the crowds and wanted to kill Jesus. It seemed impossible to proclaim the gospel. But Jesus never shrank back. Rather he challenged people with wisdom and courage to believe in him. It was because Jesus had a great shepherd’s heart for them. Especially, on the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus invited thirsty souls with a loud voice, **“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.”** As we know, God blessed our summer Bible conference abundantly. Yet after coming back, we faced the reality of daily life, which could drain our strength and rob our joy. What shall we do? Go back to the conference? We cannot do that. Let’s come to Jesus who makes rivers of living water flow within us.

**First, Jesus and his brothers (1-10).** About six months had passed since Jesus fed the five thousand. Jesus spent that time in Galilee. The last time he had been in Jerusalem, in chapter 5, Jesus had an intense conflict with the Jewish leaders. It was because he said, **“My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working”** (Jn 5:17). They thought Jesus was blaspheming and wanted to kill him. This is why Jesus had not gone to Judea (1), but remained in Galilee. Then the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles approached, and all men had to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem. Jesus’

## RIVERS OF LIVING WATER WILL FLOW

brothers were excited. But Jesus gave no indication that he would attend the festival. They felt something was wrong with him and gave him a piece of advice: **“Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world”** (3-4). They wanted Jesus to become a famous public figure, so they would enjoy many benefits. In order to do so, he should go to Jerusalem instead of staying in Galilee, a despised Gentile area. They were ambitious for his political success. They pushed him to use his power to show himself to the world. From a human perspective they were right. But the author comments that **“even his own brothers did not believe in him”** (5). They had a great privilege of knowing Jesus intimately and the opportunity to learn from him. But when their hearts were full of worldly desire they were spiritually blind. In order to open our spiritual eyes, we need to crucify our worldly desires. St. Paul said, **“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”** (Gal 5:24).

Jesus was not angry at his brothers for their unspiritual attitudes. Nor did he try to make them believe in him. Jesus was very patient with them and explained why he would not do as they suggested: **“My time is not yet here; for you any time will do”** (6). “Jesus’ time” is a theme of John’s gospel. It refers ultimately to his death on the cross, which would reveal the full extent of God’s love to the world. The word “time” is translated from the Greek word *“kairos.”* It means “suitable,” “right,” or “opportune.” To Jesus’ brothers it was the right time to become famous. But to Jesus, it was the time to reveal God’s glory. Jesus wanted to please God first, not people. So Jesus testified that the works of the world are evil. Because of that Jesus was hated by the world and persecuted (7). The brothers did not have this problem because they were following the trend of the world. Whatever they did, the world did not hate them. However, anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Ti 3:12). We cannot please both God and the world at the same time. The author John knew this and said, **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them”** (1 Jn 2:15). Jesus realized that his brothers had not yet come out of the world. Later, they would, and they even became influential leaders of the Christian church. At this moment, however, Jesus

# RIVERS OF LIVING WATER WILL FLOW

was patient with them and said, **“You go to the festival. I am not going up to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come”** (8).

After saying this, Jesus stayed in Galilee (9). However, when his brothers had left for the festival, he went also, not publicly, but in secret (10). Here we learn from Jesus his wisdom and divine character. In order to do the work of God we need wisdom from above. Jesus told his disciples to be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves (Mt 10:16). Jesus was full of wisdom (1 Cor 1:30). Isaiah 11:2 says, **“The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord....”** Jesus’ wisdom came from the Spirit of God. With this wisdom, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. But he went in secret, under the radar of the Pharisees. Jesus would use a “shock and awe” strategy, a surprise attack, in order to proclaim the word of God effectively in a hostile environment. We need this kind of wisdom in order to do God’s work. We also see here Jesus’ divine character. Isaiah 42 describes the character of the Messiah’s ministry. It says, **“He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the street.”** God’s work is not reactionary and political; it is done prayerfully, wisely and quietly, to please God.

**Second, Jesus is the Messiah sent by God (11-36; 40-52).** The festival began and the Jewish leaders were watching for Jesus, asking, **“Where is he?”** (11) They were not in a festive mood; they were agitated by fear and insecurity. All they could think was, **“Where is Jesus?”** The crowds were divided about Jesus. Some said, **“He is a good man,”** and others said, **“No, he deceives the people”** (12). But no one dared say anything publicly because they were afraid of the leaders (13). Look at verse 14: **“Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach.”** Just when the Jewish leaders thought he would not appear, he appeared publicly and began to teach the word of God boldly. Jesus used a time-delay, frontal attack. Even the Jews became a captive audience and could not but listen to Jesus’ teaching. They really wanted to find something to criticize. But Jesus’ teaching was so truthful and heart-moving that they were amazed. They could not but ask, **“How did this man get such learning without having been taught?”** (15) Though they were on the verge of

# RIVERS OF LIVING WATER WILL FLOW

discrediting him for not having a degree, for a brief moment, Jesus had their attention.

Jesus answered, **“My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own”** (16-17). Jesus’ word is not just another human idea, like those of Plato, Karl Marx, or Rene Descartes; it is the very word of God which gives life and transforms. How can we know this? We cannot figure it out by studying with our reason. It is only possible when we choose to do the will of God, that is, to obey his word in our practical life. D.L. Moody said, “Obedience is the best way to learn the word of God.” We cannot fully understand the word of God until we obey. But when we obey, though we do not have serious academic training, we can really understand the deep truth of God’s word. Then we can be convinced that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life (14:6).

To help them accept his word, in verse 18 Jesus taught how to discern between a man of truth and a liar. Jesus said, **“Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.”** A man who seeks his own glory speaks on his own. Everything he says and does is self-centered and self-serving. He starts with himself and ends with himself. In the middle he talks only about himself. He will say anything to advance his own cause, even lie. Though he may appear noble, basically he is selfish. Such people are not trustworthy. On the other hand, if a man seeks to honor God, he starts with God and ends with God like Joseph in the Old Testament. Whether he eats or drinks or whatever he does, he does it all for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Jesus made himself nothing to obey the will of God. He became obedient to death, even death on a cross (Php 2:7-8). Jesus was a man of truth. To glorify God, our sinful selves must be crucified with Christ. Then we, too, can be men and women of truth.

In verses 19-24, Jesus tried to help the Jewish leaders recognize their sin as lawbreakers so they could repent and open their hearts to his words. According to Moses’ law, they circumcised boys on the eighth day, even when this broke the Sabbath law as they interpreted it. However, when Jesus

# RIVERS OF LIVING WATER WILL FLOW

healed a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years on the Sabbath, they were furious, accusing him of breaking the Sabbath law. They were not consistent in their application of the law. They did not understand the meaning of the Sabbath. They did not practice the law with God's mind. Rather, they used it for their own evil purpose to justify killing Jesus. Jesus did his best to help them make a right judgment about him. This is most important, for to know Jesus is a matter of life and death. How can we make a right judgment about Jesus? First of all, we must decide to obey the word of God. Secondly, we have to seek God's glory. This gives us spiritual discernment. Thirdly, we need to be objective (51), not subjective and prejudiced. Then we can make a right judgment.

We can see how the Jewish leaders responded to Jesus' teaching in verses 25-36 and 40-52. Many in the crowd believed in Jesus based on the signs that he had performed (31). They thought he was the Prophet or the Messiah (40-41). But some could not accept him because they assumed he was born in Galilee, not Bethlehem, according to Scripture (27). Jesus did not argue about geography. Jesus taught them where he really came from: he came from God (28-29). Upon hearing this, they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him because his hour had not yet come (30). The religious leaders then sent the temple guards to arrest him (32). But when the guards heard Jesus speak they were overwhelmed, and came back saying, "**No one ever spoke the way this man does**" (46). Though they had heard Jesus' wonderful message, most of the Jewish leaders clung to their subjective legalism and condemned Jesus (47-48). They despised the crowd as cursed for their ignorance of the law (49). Yet among them, Nicodemus, who was objective and had a right view of the law, tried to protect Jesus (50-51). For this he was insulted as a Galilean (52).

In this part we see that not everyone made a right judgment about Jesus. Those who saw him based on the facts of what he had done and taught could realize that he was the Messiah who came from God. But those who saw him subjectively, on the basis of their selfish interest and prejudice, failed to make a right judgment about him. The consequence of this is indeed serious. Only those who make a right judgment: that Jesus is the Messiah sent by God, are saved. Josh McDowell was an agnostic in college. He decided to write a paper that examined the historical evidence of the Christian faith in

# RIVERS OF LIVING WATER WILL FLOW

order to disprove it. However, the evidence convinced him that Christ came from God as the Savior of the world. He accepted Jesus as his personal Savior and became an influential Christian. Among his books are “More than a Carpenter,” and “Evidence that Demands a Verdict.” Let’s learn how to make a right judgment about Jesus.

**Third, Jesus’ invitation and promise (37-39).** It was now the last and greatest day of the festival. On that day people circled the altar seven times and sang many psalms. A priest went to the Pool of Siloam, drew water, filled a golden pitcher, and returned to the altar. In the meantime, people sang from Isaiah 12:3, **“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”** Then the priest poured out the water before the Lord. It was to thank God for the gift of water for harvest; it was a prayer for rain in the coming year, and it helped them remember water from the rock in the desert. Figuratively speaking, the rock refers to Jesus and the water refers to the Holy Spirit (39; 1 Cor 10:4).

It might have been while the water was being poured. Jesus stood up and said in a loud voice, **“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”** Jesus saw that people’s souls were thirsty, even though they had enjoyed plenty of choice food and drink. Even if we live in a mansion, wear fine clothes, eat gourmet food and drink choice wine, without Jesus no one can be truly satisfied. It is because we are not only physical, but also spiritual—created in the image of God. Jesus had great compassion on the spiritually hungry and thirsty. So he invited them with a loud voice: **“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.”**

People suffer from various kinds of thirsts--thirst for love, thirst for recognition, thirst for freedom, thirst for knowledge, etc. How can we quench these thirsts? Come to Jesus! Jesus promises that whoever believes in him, rivers of living water will flow from within them. By this he meant the Holy Spirit (39). Whoever believes in Jesus receives the gift of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. He gives us access to our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father God, who give us everything we need. When we need courage, the Holy Spirit gives us such power and strength that we know nothing is impossible; we become unstoppable. When we need comfort, the Holy Spirit touches our

# RIVERS OF LIVING WATER WILL FLOW

souls in such personal and meaningful ways that we feel completely safe and secure. When we need love, the Holy Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts. Not only are we fully satisfied, we have abundant love to embrace and serve others as well. The Holy Spirit enables us to serve the world with God's love.

One woman went into an environment that was hostile toward Christianity. She endured many pains and difficult trials spanning three decades. Yet she was used to introduce Jesus to many people in a deeply loving way. A fellow Christian asked what her secret was. She said, "Sabbaths," meaning time with Jesus. She spends quality time in fellowship with Jesus regularly, as a priority, putting everything else aside. She takes only her Bible, a devotional book, and a hymn book, and goes to a quiet place to be with the Lord. The Holy Spirit so refreshes her soul that she overflows with love and strength to serve others. When the Holy Spirit dwells in us, he is not like a few drops of water, but like rivers of living water. About ten years ago, when I visited Sudan, I saw the amazing effect of the Nile River flowing through the desert. On both sides of the Nile, as far as the eye can see, there was only parched land which was almost completely barren. But where the Nile River is, there is abundant vegetation of all kinds and many animals and fish. It is teeming with life. Though the world around us is like a desert, we can enjoy abundant and overflowing life in Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit. Everything is abundant and overflowing. Love is abundant. Joy is overflowing and peace is like a river. The Holy Spirit enables us to live an abundant life. Living in this world is like being in a desert. We feel dry, tired and weary. We become grumpy and irritable and even more dry. But when we come to Jesus, rivers of living water stream out from our souls so that we may live a rich and abundant life. Let's come to Jesus.