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## **The Gospel of John (49) Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles (4)**

### **Introduction:**

We had considered departing from our study of John to present a message that would clearly address the subject of Resurrection Sunday. But when reading the passage in John's Gospel before us, it seemed that we could do little better for today than to give our attention to what is before us in this seventh chapter of John. Here our Lord Jesus spoke prophetically of the events of His passion even as He gives a promise to those hearing Him of God's great blessing, if they embraced Him in faith as their Lord and Savior.

Let us read **John 7:32-39**.

<sup>32</sup>The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him. <sup>33</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. <sup>34</sup>You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come."

<sup>35</sup>Then the Jews said among themselves, "Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? <sup>36</sup>What is this thing that He said, 'You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come'?"

<sup>37</sup>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. <sup>38</sup>He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." <sup>39</sup>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.

The words of grace of our Lord Jesus contained in verses 37 and 38 are particularly precious in their richness and in their potential to bring blessing to the one that believes on Him. It is one of those golden expressions of our Lord Jesus that tend to be remembered well, the words of which can almost be recited when in the hearing of someone reading them. **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) wrote of these words of our Lord, on which he had based a chapter in his classic work entitled "Holiness":

The text which heads this paper contains one of those mighty sayings of Christ which deserve to be printed in letters of gold. All the stars of heaven are bright and beautiful; yet even a child can see that one star excelleth another in glory. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God; but that heart must indeed be cold and dull which does not feel that some verses are peculiarly rich and full. Of such verses this text is one.<sup>1</sup>

Let us continue to consider the context of our chapter which then culminates in these words of promise from the Lord Jesus. Then we will attempt to understand their meaning and their implications for us.

Our Lord Jesus had been teaching the people in the environs of the Jewish temple of Jerusalem through several days of the annual Feast of the Tabernacles, which was held every autumn. Jewish pilgrims from all over the world were there to celebrate this feast. These "foreign" Jews that had been scattered through the nations due to the judgment of God upon the Jewish people in centuries past. They were known as the Jews of the dispersion, of the Diaspora. This festival was as a great celebration that these Jews of the

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (Charles Nolan Publishers, 2001, first published in 1877, revised and enlarged in 1879), p. 312.

Diaspora would have viewed as anticipating the future gathering of Israel, when the Messiah would arrive to deliver His people and reestablish their nation.

Jesus had come to the feast, but He had not made Himself known until about midway through the week. The people in Jerusalem were divided in their assessment of the identity of Jesus. We read last Lord's Day verses 25 through 31 of the response of the people to Jesus as He manifested Himself to them.

<sup>25</sup>Now some of them from Jerusalem said, "Is this not He whom they seek to kill? <sup>26</sup>But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ? <sup>27</sup>However, we know where this Man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from."

<sup>28</sup>Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying, "You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. <sup>29</sup>But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me."

<sup>30</sup>Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. <sup>31</sup>And many of the people believed in Him, and said, "When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?"

## I. The meaning of the details of our passage – John 7:32-39

We then read of the concern and reaction of the Jewish leaders to the attitude and assessment of the people. Verse 32 reads, "*The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him.*" We read here of the "Pharisees" and their interaction with the "chief priests." These two groups did not normally work very well together. The Pharisees were leading religious men that lived and served just about everywhere there was a Jewish community. They were close to the people. They lived and were involved in the same synagogues of the other Jewish people of the community. The "chief priests", however, were residents of Jerusalem, who were rather isolated and insulated from the people at large. They would probably have been aligned with the Sadducees who were largely represented by the priestly community living and serving within the temple at Jerusalem. Yes, there were some Pharisees living in Jerusalem, but probably not many. And there were a few Pharisees who would have been on the ruling board of Jews, the seventy-member Sanhedrin. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, and he was a Pharisee (John 3:1). But again, these two groups did not normally get along with one another. Later in the book of Acts we see this illustrated when the Apostle Paul was brought before a hostile gathering that contained both Pharisees and Sadducees. We read of this in Acts 23:1ff:

Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." <sup>2</sup>And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. <sup>3</sup>Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"

<sup>4</sup>And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

<sup>5</sup>Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

<sup>6</sup>But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!"

<sup>7</sup>And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. <sup>8</sup>For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. <sup>9</sup>Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God."

<sup>10</sup>Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks. (Acts 23:1-10)

But here in John 7:32 we read that the Pharisees and the chief priests “sent officers to take Him.” They were cooperating with one another when they perceived they had a common threat to their power and prestige.

The people in the streets had not been speaking forthrightly about Jesus, for they feared the Jewish leadership. The leaders, nevertheless, had heard their “murmuring.” Here the word, “whispering”, would have been a better English translation, which was used in the New International Version (NIV).

The action taken by these men in verse 32 was the official action taken against Jesus. Actually this is the third group that John describes in their reaction to Jesus. The first was in verse 30, which reads, “Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.” This seemed to be a spontaneous effort on the part of some who were standing there listening to Jesus teach the people. The second group is described in verse 31, “And many of the people believed in Him, and said, ‘When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?’” Some think that this description by John is not flattering, but rather ironic.

According to the narrator, many people from among “the crowd” were beginning to believe in Him. This belief, however, was anything but the type of belief heralded by the Fourth Gospel. Comparing the number of “signs” performed by Jesus with the presumed number of signs expected to be performed by “the Christ” when He comes, the crowd suggests by their question that the true Messiah will do more signs than “this man,” clearly a derogatory term in this pericope. The irony is thick. The person and work of Jesus are eclipsed by a messianic delusion; it is a similar kind of confusion about God and the Gospel portrayed earlier (cf. 5:1-18).<sup>2</sup>

But I do not think that these ones who “believed” on Him in verse 31 are being portrayed by John as being skeptical. It would seem that they are truly believing, but that their faith is of a weak nature. They seem to be favorable toward Jesus, not hostile to Him.

And so, we have three different groups of people described by John with three different reactions. The first group were clearly hostile to Him but were unable to capture Jesus (v. 30). The second group, “Some of the Jews”, were quite persuaded that He was the Messiah, but were speaking with one another not knowing what to do about the matter. And the third group are these Pharisees who went to the chief priests who together sent “the officers” to take Him.

Who were these “officers” sent to arrest Jesus? They were not Roman soldiers, but a kind of Jewish policemen, whose responsibility was to keep order among the Jews, principally with respect to the temple grounds. They were like a Jewish security police who would have been supervised by the Sanhedrin, under the watchful permission of the Roman authorities of the city. These “officers” were overseen by the chief priests, which was actually a small enclave of very influential priestly families who seemed to control everything that took place in Jerusalem and the temple. **F. F. Bruce** (1910-1990) wrote of them:

The chief priests (Greek: *archiereis*) were the members of the most of the most wealthy and powerful priestly families, from whose ranks the high priest was regularly selected. They were the dominant figures in the party of the Sadducees, the majority party in the Sanhedrin. The temple police were responsible for the maintenance of law and order within the temple precincts. They were a picked body of Levites, and their commander (the ‘captain of the temple’) was an official wielding high authority, next only to the high priest, and he too was usually drawn from one or another of the leading chief-priestly families.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 371.

<sup>3</sup> F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 179.

We read of Jesus' reacting to the ones sent to arrest Him. We read in **verses 33 and 34**, ***“Then Jesus said to them, ‘I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. <sup>34</sup>You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come.’*** The Jewish leaders were seeking to arrest Jesus in order to have Him prosecuted and killed. But in this statement the Lord indicated that He would not be among them much longer, that He was to return soon to God (the Father) who had sent Him. Here, then, He was once again speaking of His incarnation – “Him who sent Me” – as well as His death – “I go to Him.” The point is that what would transpire regarding Him was ultimately being determined by Him and God His Father, not by them. They were seeking to take His life, but actually He was preparing to depart to return to His Father.

But what did Jesus mean when He said to them, ***“You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come”*** (v. 34)? He was speaking of the time after His resurrection from the dead having returned to the Father. It would then occur that they would seek Him but not find Him. What this intimates is that after these Jewish unbelievers hear of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, they would make effort to find Him, perhaps to see for themselves if the rumor true, but still with the intention to discredit or destroy Him. They would later attempt to kill Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead (John 12:10f), and after they learned that Jesus may have been raised from the dead, perhaps they sought for Him with the intention to kill Him again. But Jesus told them that they would be unable to find Him after His resurrection. And we know of course, that although the risen Lord Jesus showed Himself to a few unbelievers, such as the guards at His tomb (Matt. 28:4), all of His post-resurrection appearances were to His disciples, both men and women (1 Cor. 15:3-8).

Jesus also declared to them, ***“and where I am you cannot come.”*** In these words He was telling these Jewish men that they would not be allowed or welcomed into heaven, where He would be dwelling and reigning after His resurrection in His glorified body. As one aptly wrote:

These words plainly refer to the fact that Jesus had but a short time left before the completion of His earthly mission and His return to His Father. But they are (as so often) misunderstood by His hearers. We, of course, understand them better because we know the sequel, as the people in the temple court naturally could not. If those who looked for Him before He arrived halfway through the festival week had such difficulty finding Him, and if His opponents had such difficulty in arresting Him before His “hour” had come, they would have even less chance of finding Him when once He had returned to the Father.<sup>4</sup>

These men hearing Jesus were clueless as to what He meant. We read in **verses 35 and 36**.

***<sup>35</sup>Then the Jews said among themselves, ‘Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? <sup>36</sup>What is this thing that He said, ‘You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come?’”***

They thought that Jesus was intimating that he would leave Judea and go into the Gentile world to teach “the Greeks.” Now to us, “the Greeks” might seem to be a rather narrow term that refers only to those from the nation of Greece. But the entire Roman world had been formerly ruled over by the Greeks having been conquered through the leadership of Alexander the Great (d. 322 BC). When Greece ruled the known world its culture became predominant. This is why the Roman world was often referred to as the Hellenized (i.e. Greek) world. Although Latin was the official and legal language of the Roman world, Greek was the common language of the people and the popular culture had been largely shaped by the Greeks. And so, here, when these Jews referred to Jesus going among the “Greeks” they were referring to the Gentile occupants of the Roman world.

Here the Jews who had sought to arrest Jesus referred to Him going to the “Dispersion.” This was a reference to Jewish people who dwelled throughout the Roman Empire. They had been relocated by the Assyrians and the Babylonians after they had conquered Judea in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. There were

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 180.

Jewish communities everywhere throughout the Roman Empire. And so what these Jewish men were asking, “Was Jesus going to go to the Jews of the Dispersion and there to teach the Gentiles (Greeks) also?”

In asking this question, these men were not simply inquiring what Jesus meant by His words. They were being derogatory and sarcastic toward Jesus. The idea or thought of going to teach the Greeks was viewed by them as a very worthless and silly endeavor that no self-respecting Jew would undertake.

Thus, the Jews mockingly suggest that Jesus will *also* be teaching gentiles – an abhorrent idea for the Jews. This comment serves as a further rebuke and rejection of the ministry and message of Jesus. If this final statement was intended to suggest Jesus would work with the gentiles, it serves less as a judgment and more of a prophecy. What they deem to be too fantastic a possibility, that any Jew – and surely not the Messiah – would intend to go and teach the gentiles (i.e. the world) is exactly what Jesus and His disciples, the church, intend to do.

Interestingly, we will read later in John’s Gospel of certain Greeks who approached Andrew because they wanted to see Jesus. We read this in **John 12:20ff**:

<sup>20</sup>Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. <sup>21</sup>Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

<sup>22</sup>Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

<sup>23</sup>But Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.

<sup>24</sup>Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”

It was then that Jesus would say, according to John,

<sup>31</sup>“Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. <sup>32</sup>And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all peoples* to Myself.” <sup>33</sup>This He said, signifying by what death He would die. (John 12:31f)

Jesus was indicating that His death on the cross would open up the Gospel to the people of the world, not just Jewish people, but “Greeks”, too, could freely come and be fully welcomed as citizens of His kingdom.

Since this would be what Jesus would actually do, to send His disciples into the world to proclaim and teach the Gospel to the Gentile world, we see that these Jewish leaders, who were bent only on capturing and destroying Jesus and His influence, who mockingly proposed that He would go teach the Gentiles in the Dispersion, were actually unwittingly portending the purpose and plan of God. These verses before us in John 12:35 and 36 are, therefore, another example of what we spoke of last week—“Johannine irony.” **Leon Morris** (1914-2006) wrote of this:

Notice that they speak of going to the Dispersion, but of teaching not the Dispersion (i.e. Jews) but the Greeks. This would seem to mean going to the Jewish synagogues and making them the springboard for a mission outward to the Greeks. It is, of course, the method that according to Acts the first Christian preachers actually employed. These Jews, however, dismiss the method as too fantastic to be considered a proper activity of the Messiah. This is another example of John’s irony. It is not without interest that John has recorded a misunderstanding as to the origin of the Messiah on the part of some (vs. 26f.). Now he matches it with a misunderstanding as to His departure.<sup>5</sup>

It is then that John recorded the great event on the last day of the feast, when the Lord Jesus stood forward and gave forth this gracious and glorious invitation. **Verses 37** through **39** record His words along with an explanation of meaning provided by John, the Gospel writer:

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<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 418.

*<sup>37</sup>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. <sup>38</sup>He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." <sup>39</sup>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.*

These few verses are the climax of the entire episode on John 7 which sets forth Jesus in Jerusalem at the annual Feast of the Tabernacles (Booths). We had mentioned earlier that this festival was seven days in length, which in a technical sense is true, in that the same ceremony was repeated each day of a priest collecting water in a pitcher at the Pool of Siloam and carrying it in procession to the temple where it would be poured out before the Lord and His people. But there was an eighth, final day of the festival, which is set forth here in verse 37. There is some confusion about this. As **Leon Morris** wrote:

From Deuteronomy 16:13 it would appear that the feast at one time went for seven days, but Leviticus 23:36 makes it plain that there was an eighth day (even though it is mentioned separately from the seven). It is not quite clear whether it was the seventh or this eighth day which was the climax of the whole celebration, and of which John speaks as "the great day of the feast".

Here is a rather lengthy, but more detailed description of the annual feast, which was also set forth by **Leon Morris**:

Tabernacles was a festival rich in symbolism and popular appeal, and the symbolism forms the background to our Lord's saying. The principal features of the observance, in addition to the setting up of the leafy bowers in which the people camped out and the offering of the sacrifices, appear to have been these. The people carried with them bunches of leaves, called *lulabs*. There was apparently a disagreement between the Sadducees and the Pharisees over the correct interpretation of Leviticus 23:40, "And ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook...." The former took the words to refer to the material out of which the booths for the observance of the feast were to be constructed, while the latter held them to mean that the worshippers were actually to carry branches of the trees named as they entered the temple. The Pharisaic interpretation prevailed among the people, and accordingly each worshipper, as he marched in procession, would carry the *lulab* in his right hand and a citron<sup>6</sup> in his left. The *lulab* symbolized the stages of the wilderness journey (marked by different kinds of vegetation), and the fruit the fruit of the goodly land that God had given to His people. As certain Psalms were recited the worshippers shook their *lulabs*. The rejoicing was marked further by the flute-playing and dancing that went on for most of the feast and by bringing in young willow branches and arranging them around the altar. The tops were thus bent over the altar forming a leafy canopy for it. The reciting of the words, "Save now, we beseech Thee, O Jehovah: O Jehovah, we beseech Thee, send now prosperity" (Psa. 118:25), is probably to be understood as a prayer for rain and fruitful season. On each of the seven days of the feast the priest drew water from the pool of Siloam in a golden flagon and brought it in procession to the temple with the joyful sounding of the trumpet. There the water was poured into a bowl beside the altar from which a tube took it to the base of the altar. Simultaneously wine was poured through a similar bowl on the other side of the altar. These symbolic ceremonies were acted thanksgivings for God's mercies in giving water in past days (probably looking right back to the smiting of the rock in the wilderness and then on to the giving of rain in recent years). They were also an acted prayer for rain for the coming year. It is also significant that the words of Isaiah are associated with these ceremonies, "with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isa. 12:3). The Jerusalem Talmud connects ceremonies and this scripture with the Holy Spirit: "Why is the name of it called, the drawing out of water? Because the pouring out

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<sup>6</sup> Citron: a shrubby Asian tree that bears large fruits similar to lemons, but with flesh that is less acid and peels that are thicker and more fragrant.

of the Holy Spirit, according to what was said: ‘With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.’”<sup>7</sup>

And so, with this bit of background information, we may now consider better our Lord’s words recorded in **verse 37**. “*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.”*” Water had been ceremonially drawn and carried to the temple on each of the previous 7 days, but on this eighth and final day, this was not done. This makes Jesus standing forward and making this bold claim all the more remarkable. He took the entire feast and gave forth its true meaning as portraying Him and His ability and willingness to satisfy the soul longing for salvation, who desired to experience true life lived out before God. This was an amazing event.

To impress upon the reader this significance, the narrator describes not only the potent words of Jesus but even His intentional action: “Jesus stood up and cried out.” In a moment hard to fathom in the presence of such a sacred feast and ceremony, God Himself stood to address His people. Such a statement is not mere speech but can only be described in the language used of the prophets of God. For the first time a prophet did not preface His address with, “Thus says the Lord,” for this prophet was the Prophet, the Word-of-God-become-flesh. And “this Feast” and water-drawing ceremony belonged in their entirety to Him.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus said, “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.*” This invitation is quite similar to what Jesus had told the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well back in **John 4:10-14**. There we read these words:

<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered and said to her, “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.”

<sup>11</sup>The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? <sup>12</sup>Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?”

<sup>13</sup>Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, <sup>14</sup>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.”

But here in John 7 Jesus presents Himself as not only the provision for the “thirsty” soul, but He is also the Provider. And here also, He identifies the “water” with the life-imparting, life-transforming, and life-enhancing of the Holy Spirit that He would give the one who came to Him in faith. This offer of spiritual life-giving water was a prominent theme of the prophet **Isaiah**:

*“Ho! Everyone who thirsts,  
Come to the waters;  
And you who have no money,  
Come, buy and eat.  
Yes, come, buy wine and milk  
Without money and without price.  
<sup>2</sup>Why do you spend money for what is not bread,  
And your wages for what does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,  
And let your soul delight itself in abundance.  
<sup>3</sup>Incline your ear, and come to Me.  
Hear, and your soul shall live;  
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—*

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pp. 420f.

<sup>8</sup> Klink, p. 374.

The sure mercies of David. (Isa. 55:1-3)

But whereas Isaiah penned God's words, "Come to the waters", the Lord Jesus gave a personal invitation to Himself: "***If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.***"

And in a development to what Jesus had said to the Samaritan woman that she would never thirst again, if she came unto Him in faith, here Jesus declared that the one who believes in Him will himself become a source for satisfying the spiritual thirst of others. Jesus said in **verse 38**, "***He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.***" The one who comes to Jesus in faith becomes one who can bring the soul-satisfying, soul-enriching message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to others.

The idea of water bringing forth life to the world is set forth in numerous places in the Scriptures. So often, however, these passages are interpreted "literally" rather than "Christologically." Here are few examples: In the Old Testament book of **Zechariah** we read of the life-giving properties of the Messiah when He reigns:

<sup>8</sup>And in that day it shall be  
***That living waters shall flow from Jerusalem,***  
Half of them toward the eastern sea  
And half of them toward the western sea;  
In both summer and winter it shall occur.  
<sup>9</sup>And the LORD shall be King over all the earth.  
In that day it shall be—  
"The LORD is one,"  
And His name one. (Zech. 14:8f)

**Ezekiel** wrote of life-giving waters, which should be understood as God giving spiritual life through the coming of Messiah:

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. <sup>2</sup>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 side.

<sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river.

<sup>7</sup>When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, were very many trees on one side and the other. <sup>8</sup>When 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. <sup>9</sup>And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. (Ezek. 47:1-9)

And to show you that I am not being too creative and fanciful in saying this applies to Christ and life through Him, consider the words of **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) on Ezekiel's vision of chapter 47:

Most interpreters agree that these waters signify the gospel of Christ, which went forth from Jerusalem, and spread itself into the countries about, and the gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost which accompanied it, and by virtue of which it spread far and produced strange and blessed effects. Ezekiel had walked



round the house again and again, and yet did not till now take notice of those waters; for God makes known His mind and will to His people, not all at once, but by degrees.<sup>9</sup>

And here are the comments on Ezekiel 47 of the Methodist commentator, **Adam Clark** (1760-1832). After having described the setting of the passage, he wrote these words:

Taken in this view, I shall proceed to apply the whole of this vision to the effusion of light and salvation by the outpouring of the Spirit of God under the gospel dispensation, by which the knowledge of the true God was multiplied in the earth; and have only one previous remark to make, that the farther the waters flowed from the Temple, the deeper they grew. With respect to the phraseology of this chapter, it may be said that St. John had it particularly in view while he wrote of his celebrated description of the paradise of God, Revelation 22. The prophet may therefore be referring to the same thing which the apostle describes, viz., the grace of the gospel, and its effect on the world.<sup>10</sup>

We next read in **verse 39** of the Apostle John's explanation of the manner in which He will give spiritual life to those who believe on Him. "***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.***" The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Blessed Holy trinity who imparts spiritual life to the ones that God saves through Jesus Christ. Here, however, the Lord is not speaking so much of the grace of regeneration, when the Holy Spirit causes a sinner to be born again, but ***He is speaking of the gift of the Holy Spirit that sanctifies all those who come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.*** The reason we can say this is because all people whoever have been saved through history, both Old Testament and New Testament believers, were brought to salvation by the new birth, by the Holy Spirit causing the sinner who is spiritually dead to come to spiritual life. But here the Scriptures say that the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. This is a clear reference to the Day of Pentecost when the risen and enthroned Lord (King) Jesus would pour out the Holy Spirit upon every one of His disciples. This gift of the Holy Spirit, which empowers His people for witness of the Gospel and enables them to increasingly live holy lives, is unique to this Gospel age.

This gift of the Holy Spirit was prophesied in the Old Testament to take place in the days of the Messiah, and here in John 7 Jesus is foretelling of this life-changing and life-transforming gift and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. To every true Christian, who has repented of sin and has placed faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus has given the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable him/her to live the life of a Christian, which is a holy life in obedience to the law of God under King Jesus.

Jesus was announcing that those who came to faith in Him would receive this transforming, life-changing power of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to live as His disciples in this fallen world. Again, it was promised through the prophets of the Old Testament. Consider these few passages:

**Ezekiel 11:19-20.** "Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, <sup>20</sup>that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God."

**Ezekiel 36:24ff.** "For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup>Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup>I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>***I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.***"

## II. Considering the present relevance of our passage – John 7:32-39

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 4 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 1008.

<sup>10</sup> Adam Clarke, **Commentary on the Holy Bible** (Baker Book House, 1967), p. 691.

The Lord's words of promise are as true today as they were when He spoke them to the Jewish people in the temple at Jerusalem. He says to you and me today,

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. <sup>38</sup>He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

This invitation is in a sense presented to all without distinction. Jesus said, "***If anyone*** thirsts..." But in another sense, the invitation is qualified; it is quite limited. Jesus said, "If anyone ***thirsts***..." And here to thirst is to desire and long after truly knowing God and to experience the life that He gives through faith in Jesus Christ. Our Lord's invitation is not one that only offers the forgiveness of sins, although He certainly does that in the Gospel. Here spiritual "thirst" is the desire to experience new life in Christ, to know God and to walk with God, to know and believe on Jesus Christ, and to be one of His followers, one of His disciples.

To "thirst" spiritually is to sense one's own need and to have the desire to know and live before God. To spiritually thirst is the desire to part from one's life of sin and loneliness, a life characterized by defeat and disappointment, regret and remorse. To thirst spiritually is characteristic of the one who desires to be freed from the bondage of sin and to have one's conscience cleansed of guilt and condemnation before God. In short, to thirst spiritually is to see one's own desperate need for what only Jesus Christ can give, which He has promised to everyone that comes to Him in repentance from sin and faith in Him as the Lord and Savior.

Have you known or do you know what it is to spiritually thirst? It is sad that relatively few can say that they have truly felt and know this deprivation of soul. One of the surest evidences of the sinfulness of man is his inability and unwillingness to see his spiritual need that can only be satisfied by Jesus Christ.

All ought to feel it, and all would feel it if they were wise. Sinful, mortal, dying creatures as we all are, with souls that will one day be judged and spend eternity in heaven or hell. There lives not the man or woman on earth who ought not to "thirst" after salvation. And yet many thirst after everything almost except salvation. Money, pleasure, honour, rank, self-indulgence,--these are the things they desire. There is no clearer proof of the fall of man, and the utter corruption of human nature, than the careless indifference of most people about their souls. No wonder the Bible calls natural man "blind" and "asleep" and "dead," when so few can be found who are awake, alive, and athirst about salvation.<sup>11</sup>

Oh yes, some have known this thirst, but everyone who ever has, has also had that thirst satisfied through faith in Jesus Christ. Every true Christian had spiritual thirst, granted, in varying degrees. But the result of this keen awareness led to and resulted in them coming to Jesus Christ who alone could satisfy their thirst. Here again are 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. Till 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 do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6).

We have before us a very simple remedy for this desperate spiritual condition that every human being has, but that only some have been made aware. The Lord Jesus says to that thirsty one: "If any man thirst, let Him come unto Me and drink." And what He meant to "drink" is to believe on Him fully and only for the new life that only He can impart to fallen people. He is the true Fountain of all life. Christ is suitable to the need of sinners as drink is suitable to the one who is thirsty. As one wrote:

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<sup>11</sup> J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 44f.

There is in Him a suitable remedy for every disorder. Here the dead soul may have life; the blind, light; the naked, a garment; the poor, riches; the scorched soul, refreshment; the pained, ease; the weak, strength. Whatever be their case in life, death, time, eternity, prosperity, or adversity, there is everything suitable in Him. . . .

He is able to supply all your wants, however great they can be. Sometimes people meet with a loss that they think will never be made up again. But Christ “is able to save the uttermost, all that come to God by Him.” Are you all over filthy? There is water here to wash you; streams, Isaiah 35:6; a fountain, Zechariah 13:1; rivers, Isaiah 41:18; a sea, and depths of the sea, Micah 7:18. Is there misery with you? Mercy is with Him; a multitude of mercies (Psa. 51:1). If one mercy will not do, “mercy shall be built up,” “so great is His mercy towards us, that He delivers our souls from the lowest hell.” Are your sins as high as heaven? “The Lord’s mercy is in the heavens.” Christ is a fountain that shall never run dry. Christ is a fountain that will serve you at all times, in all cases, through time and eternity.<sup>12</sup>

And then in conclusion, let us say a word about our Lord making everyone who truly comes to Him useful to others. The one who is spiritually thirsty who comes to Him has his thirst satisfied. But then he in turn becomes a source of this same water to others. Jesus said, “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” The one who has had his thirst satisfied becomes the source of satisfying others who are now thirsty as he once was thirsty. One who comes to Christ will tend to influence others to come to Christ. I would like to think that I and our church are this day being used of God to cause “living water” to flow forth through our witness and our personal testimony.

Consider this: With regard to the testimony of every true Christian, have you ever found a true Christian who was truly disappointed in the Lord Jesus?

They would say, if their evidence could be collected, that when they came to Christ by faith, they found in Him more than they expected. They have tasted peace, and hope, and comfort, since they first believed, which, with all their doubts and fears, they would not exchange for anything in this world. They have found grace according to their need, and strength according to their days. In themselves and their own hearts they have often been disappointed; but they have never been disappointed in Christ.

Find one if you can, a true, blood-bought, Holy Spirit indwelt Christian, and there you will find one at rest in Jesus Christ, regardless of what trials and troubles that soul is enduring in this fallen world. He has hope fixed on a future day when he will leave this world and depart to be with Christ. He will dwell eternally with those of like faith but most importantly, he will dwell with His Savior in a far better world, even a new heavens and earth, eternal in nature, perfect in every way. May that day come soon.

May each of us go forth from this place having come to Jesus Christ in faith. He was the crucified Savior to atone for our sins. He is the risen Lord who applies the benefits of His death and life to us through faith in Him. He is the one who bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit on everyone who believes on Him. And with the Holy Spirit comes the wonderful desire and power to live for Him in faith, peace, and joy.

May You come soon, Lord Jesus.

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Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God,  
be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:17)

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Boston, **Complete Works of Thomas Boston**, vol. 4 (Richard Owen Roberts, 1980), pp. 461f.