

John 7:31-52
Nehemiah 8
Psalm 72

“The River of Living Water”

June 14, 2020

Nehemiah 7:73b-8:18

This was the 7th month.

They gather on the 1st day of the seventh month.

And we hear Ezra and Nehemiah saying “do not weep” – this day is holy!

But then they hear of the requirement in the law to observe the Feast of Booths.

And so they gather for the feast of Booths – “according to the rule.”

It was a seven-day feast – with sacred assemblies on the first and eighth day.

On the 15th day and the 23rd day of the 7th month.

Remember what we have seen about the Feast of Booths.

It was a feast that focused on remembering God’s provision in the wilderness.

So it is perhaps appropriate that they gather at the “Water Gate”!

Indeed, if you look forward into chapter 9,

you hear their prayer of confession –

where they recite the mighty deeds of God in the Exodus –

remembering the wilderness wanderings –

and God’s provision of manna – and of water from the rock.

Look at chapter 9, verse 15 – “You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger
and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst...”

and again in verse 20 – “You gave your good Spirit to instruct them
and did not withhold your manna from their mouth
and gave them water for their thirst.”

The bread from heaven and the water from the rock was so important
that Nehemiah feels the need to refer to it twice in five verses.

Paul will point out in 1 Corinthians 10 that the people of Israel
“drank from that spiritual rock that followed them –
and that rock was Christ.”

How can Paul say “that rock was Christ”?

Well, think back to the Exodus.

Moses has just led Israel out of Egypt.

They are in the wilderness.

They have no water.

The people complain (they are not grumbling yet – just complaining!).
And God says that Moses should take the staff with which he struck the Nile –
the staff of judgment with which God had struck Egypt with the plagues –
God says,

“take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.

⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb,
and you shall strike the rock,
and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” (Ex 17:5-6)

I will stand on the rock.

You strike the rock and water will come out.

Why did Paul say “that rock was Christ”?

Strike me – and living water will flow to my people!

Our Psalm of response gives us another window into this.

It speaks of the Son of David – the Messianic King –
and says, “May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.”

In a dry climate, water is precious.

And so a good king – a faithful king – causes his people to flourish.
He brings life and refreshment!

And that’s what Jesus has done!

(So let’s sing Psalm 72 to Jesus!)

Sing Psalm 72

Read John 7:32-52

Have you ever been really thirsty?

I spent a summer in Eritrea in East Africa.

It’s a very dry, hot climate.

I had never really thought about how *green* America is
until I was coming back from a summer in Eritrea –
and I saw New Jersey and New York from the air.

We have such abundant water in this country – we just don’t think about it much!

But what if you don’t have such ready access to water?

Introduction: Water from the Rock and the Feast of Booths (v1-36)

³² *The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him.* ³³ *Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little longer, and*

then I am going to him who sent me. ³⁴ You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.” ³⁵ The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? ³⁶ What does he mean by saying, ‘You will seek me and you will not find me,’ and, ‘Where I am you cannot come?’”

The Feast of Tabernacles was near.
If you want to understand what Jesus is saying and doing in this chapter,
then you need to understand the Feast of Tabernacles.

This feast was commanded in Deut. 16.
The feast lasted for seven days--during which time the people would live in tents--
as a reminder of the days that they spent wandering in the wilderness.
This feast was the harvest festival.
And so every year as you rejoiced in God's provision in the harvest,
you would also remember the time
when God provided for his people in the wilderness.
You would remember the manna that God gave,
and the water that came from the rock.

Jesus has just finished teaching that he is the true bread from heaven.
He is the one who feeds his people with true spiritual food.
He taught this at the Passover in John 6.
Then he spends several months in Galilee waiting for the proper time.

Now, at the Feast of Tabernacles--
Jesus is ready to teach his people once again.

He goes up to the feast in secret, and doesn't start to teach until the middle of the feast.
When the people marvel at his learning,
they ask “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?”
In other words,
Jesus has never studied with a Rabbi--
how can he have learned this great wisdom?
But Jesus says (v16-18)
“My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.”
Jesus was sent to glorify the Father;
therefore he speaks what he has learned from the Father.

At this a dispute breaks out among the Jews.
Some say that this is Christ.
Others reject him outright.

And Jesus responds by saying,

“I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me.
You will seek me and you will not find me.
Where I am going you cannot come.”

This is very enigmatic.

Jesus will only explain this to his disciples several chapters later!

And not surprisingly, the crowd cannot make heads nor tails of it!

Then we come to our text: v37-39

1. The River of Living Water (v37-39)

a. Are You Thirsty? (v37)

³⁷ On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles,
the priests would hold a special ceremony in which they would draw water,
as a reminder of how Moses drew water from the rock
when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness.

The people would gather 'round.

Many would have drunk nothing all day in anticipation of this special moment.

Imagine all these thirsty people gathered there--

waiting for the moment when they could drink from this special water.

And Jesus upstages them.

Is it any wonder why the priests didn't like Jesus?

He was constantly taking all of their rituals and teachings
and applying them to himself!

But Jesus stands up during this last day of the Feast,
and he cries out for all to hear:

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to ME and drink!"

What does Jesus mean?

But let's look more closely at what Jesus says:

Jesus is using two themes that are very familiar in the gospel of John:

1--coming to Jesus and believing in him

2--the living water, which is tied to the Holy Spirit

First we need to understand what Jesus is saying:

v38--"He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said,
out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

b. “Out of His Heart” – the Source of the River (v38)

³⁸ *Whoever believes in me, as^[1] the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”*

What is the river of living water?

John explains that the river of living water is the Holy Spirit.

Those who believe in Jesus will receive the Holy Spirit once Jesus is glorified.

Think back to John 4 – when Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well.

He said to her, "whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,
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." (Jn 4:13)

Here John explains that the living water is the Holy Spirit.

If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,
then the Holy Spirit comes to you as a fountain of water
springing up into everlasting life.

Now Jesus says this at the Feast of Tabernacles.

This is a ceremony where they are remembering
how God provided water in the wilderness.

Paul speaks of this in 1 Cor 10.

Paul says that the Israelites were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

That they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them,
And that rock was Christ.

Why does Paul say this?

Because Jesus had already said it here.

Jesus is claiming to *be* that rock from which the living water flows.

Where does the river of living water come from?

Are you familiar with the song,

"I've got a river of life flowing out of me...?"

Well, that song is VERY misleading.

Because Jesus does not say that the river of living water will flow out of YOU.

The river of living water flows from the heart of JESUS.

Whose heart is referred to in v38?

Grammatically, it could go either way.

"his heart" could refer back to "he who believes in me" OR it could refer to Jesus.

So the only way to resolve the question is to look at what Scripture Jesus is referring to.

But Jesus does not give us a direct quote.

He is paraphrasing several passages from the OT.

There is Isaiah 44:3

Speaking to his Servant, God says,
"For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants,
and my blessing on your offspring."

God is speaking to his Servant--and his Servant in Isaiah
is ultimately our Lord Jesus Christ.

God promises the Spirit to those who are descended from Jesus.

Isaiah 58:11 says this:

"And the Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your desire in scorched places,
and make your bones strong;
You shall be like a watered garden,
and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail."

Who is the "you" in this passage?

The next verse says that "You shall be called 'the Repairer of the Breach'"
And is referring again to the Servant of the LORD.
HE is the one whose waters NEVER fail!

And since the context is the Feast of Tabernacles,
and the way in which God provided water in the wilderness,
then Ezekiel 47 is another passage that connects here.

Ezekiel 40-48 describes the new temple – the eschatological temple.
But the dimensions of this temple are too big to fit in the earthly Jerusalem.
And in Ezekiel 47, a river starts to flow from the altar.

It starts off as a little creek--but gradually grows and grows
until it is a mighty river.

And this river brings healing to all that it touches – as Ezek 47:12 says:
"their water flows from the sanctuary"

Is there a fountain of life welling up in your heart?

Yes.

But where does that fountain come from?

It comes from a river that flows from the temple.

Okay.

So let's put the pieces together.

Jesus is the temple.

That was the very first thing that Jesus did in Jerusalem back in ch 2:

he proclaims himself to be the true temple.

From the temple--which is Jesus himself--flows the river of living water
(who is the Holy Spirit)

As we have seen before,

water is a picture of the Spirit.

The Spirit hovered over the waters at the creation.

The Spirit descended upon Christ at his baptism (John 1).

Jesus said that we must be born of water and the Spirit (John 3).

Jesus offered living water to the woman at the well (John 4).

Now Jesus declares that HE is the source of the river of living water
that will flow into the hearts of his people.

And John says this explicitly in verse 39: (read)

c. The Spirit and the River (v39)

³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

So those who would partake of the living water,
those who would receive the Holy Spirit,
must come to Jesus and believe in him.

John adds the note that the Spirit had not yet been given,
because Jesus was not yet glorified.

The Spirit can only be poured out after the glorification of Jesus,
because Jesus has come to baptize with the Spirit and with fire –
and if Jesus pours out the Spirit and fire too soon,
then he will burn everyone to a crisp!

Jesus came in order to bear the fire of God's wrath.

He must endure the fiery judgment of God
in order that he might pour out his Spirit on us –
in order that he might become the Savior of the World.

2. Where Does the Living Water (the Christ) Come From? (v40-52)

a. Galilee or Bethlehem? (v40-44)

⁴⁰ When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet." ⁴¹ Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee? ⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the

village where David was?”⁴³ So there was a division among the people over him.⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

Notice what happens. (Verses 40-44)

Some people think that this is the Prophet.

Others say This is the Christ!

But others say, no, the Christ has to come from Bethlehem – but Jesus is from Galilee.

Where does the Christ come from?!

Notice that Jesus doesn't weigh in.

Yes, he was born in Bethlehem.

But broadcasting his birthplace would only pander to the mob mentality.

And Jesus did not come to raise an army against Rome.

He did come to establish his kingdom!

But not through might, nor by power, but by my Spirit
as the LORD had said.

Even those sent to arrest Jesus are overwhelmed by his answer (45-46)

b. No One Ever Spoke Like This Man! (v45-49)

⁴⁵ The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why did you not bring him?”⁴⁶ The officers answered, “No one ever spoke like this man!”

The Word who became flesh has a way with *words!*

His words are full of sweetness and life – to those who have ears to hear!

But they are incomprehensible and meaningless to those who refuse him.

⁴⁷ The Pharisees answered them, “Have you also been deceived?”⁴⁸ Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him?⁴⁹ But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.”

But notice that when the Pharisees berate them for their weakness,

Nicodemus stands up for Jesus.

c. Nicodemus Questions His Own (v50-52)

⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them,⁵¹ “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?”⁵² They replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.”

Nicodemus had gone to Jesus before (back in chapter 3).

And he is one of them – he is a Pharisee – and a ruler of the Jews.

And Nicodemus is troubled by the hypocrisy of his friends.

“Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?”

Apparently Nicodemus had been impressed by Jesus.

At the very least Nicodemus realizes that his friends are acting contrary to their principles

Quietly at first—timidly, perhaps—but we are beginning to see
the power of the Word who became flesh!

John shows us that Jesus’ Word
has such power as to sway even the rulers of the Jews.

3. Where Does the River Flow Next?

Where does the living water go from here?

Now that Jesus has declared himself to be the source of living water,
watch what happens:

In John 9--Jesus heals the man born blind.
How does he do it?

He spits on the ground, and makes clay with the saliva,
anoints the man's eyes,
and then sends him to wash in the pool of Siloam.

In other cases, Jesus merely speaks,
and the person receives his sight.
Why does he use the complicated procedure?

Jesus, who is the living water,
uses saliva and the pool of Siloam to open this man's eyes.

He is using pictures to show his disciples that he is indeed the living water.

In John 13, Jesus washes his disciples feet.

The living water is not to be used selfishly.
As Jesus explained earlier in John 7,
"The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory;
but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true,
and in him there is no falsehood."

If you have received the gift of the Holy Spirit,
then use that gift to serve Christ and others.

Peter doesn't like the idea of Jesus washing his feet.
After all, foot-washing was a task for slaves!

But Jesus says to him:

"If I do not wash you, you have no part with me."

Remember, Jesus is trying to teach them that he is the Living Water.
He is the source of that River of Life.
If he does not wash you, then you do not belong to him.
The River of Life must flow from Jesus to you.

Then we come to the passion of Christ.
We come to his crucifixion.

And there on the cross, in John 18:28, it says,
"After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished,
that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst!"

Wait a second!

What is this referring to?

What Scripture says that Jesus must thirst?

Psalm 22:15 says this:

"My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue clings to my jaws;
you have brought me to the dust of death."

The Living Water has dried up.
Jesus, who had offered Living Water to others,
has none left for himself!
The fire of God's wrath has dried up the fountain of Life.

"I thirst"

Ah, but John's gospel doesn't stop there!

John 19:34 says "But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear,
and at once there came out blood and water."

And John immediately adds:

"He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true,
and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe."

Why did blood and water come out?

Commentaries have wrestled with this one for centuries.

The early Fathers understood the answer:
they saw this connection!

The Living Water was flowing again!

From that pierced side flowed the blood and water that would wash you clean.

After all, Jesus had said, "unless I wash you, you have no part with me"
Jesus had said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink"

There, at the cross, the prophecy of Ezekiel 47 began to be fulfilled.
The river of life began to trickle down the body of Christ--the true temple.
And when he ascended to the right hand of the Father,
and as he poured out the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost,
that River of Life grew and GREW until it became a mighty river,
flowing from the heart of Jesus Christ,
to the hearts of his people.

And because that Living Water now flows in you,
you, as one body, have become the Temple of the Holy Spirit.
Jesus Christ is THE Temple, who is the source of the River of Life.
And since you are in Christ, you now have that same River of Life,
welling up in your hearts,
bringing life and peace to your weary soul.

You need to drink deeply of this Living Water.
You will never run out!

How do you drink?
By faith.

1--as you worship together as a body--hearing the Word of God, praising Him with
Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, and partaking in the Lord's Supper

2--as you worship together in your families--reading, and praying, and singing together
with joy for what Christ has done for you

3--as you worship God in all that you do--keeping your heart and mind focused upon
Christ in reading the Word, constant prayer, and fellowship with one another.